

**A Revolutionary Role or a Remnant of the Past?  
The Future of the Egyptian Journalist Syndicate after the January 25th Revolution**

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*When the January 25th revolution swept through the streets of Cairo, the Egyptian Journalist Syndicate (EJS) remained silent. The EJS—the only journalist union permitted under the constitution—released no condemnations calling for the protection of journalists in the field, and provided no services to media workers attacked in the streets. Recalled in Egyptian journalistic lore as a fighting force for independence, the syndicate had become by Mubarak’s fall, in the words of one prominent journalist, “hijacked”—a mere vehicle for political handouts—and isolated from real developments in the journalism field.*

*In the two years since the revolution, syndicate activists have rallied around calls for changes in the body’s membership, financial and legal structures; however, as in many Egyptian institutions, entrenched political and economic interests have largely prevented any substantial reforms.*

*In this article I chronicle the EJS’s major problems and prospects since the revolution, covering the influential events and individuals who have played a role during the SCAF and Muslim Brotherhood rule. I begin with the March 2013 mid-term syndicate elections in which, in a highly charged vote, a notable Muslim Brotherhood critic, Daa Rashwan, was elected to replace a Muslim Brotherhood supporter, Mamdouh Waly. Although conveyed in the local press as a positive step towards the syndicate’s de-politicization, I will show how these elections were still symptomatic of the syndicate’s fundamental dysfunctions. I then discuss the political, economic, and professional crises facing the syndicate, chronicle the historical development of these limitations, and assess the syndicate’s prospects for meaningful reform. Overall I report that while there is a generally open discussion about the need for change, the political and economic climate in Egypt—and in the syndicate more specifically—remains unfavorable to the fundamental reforms needed to turn the syndicate’s rhetoric of being an independent force for freedom of the press into a reality.*

**March 2013: Syndicate elections interrupted**

A buzz swept through the crowd when Mamdouh Waly, then head of the Egyptian Journalist Syndicate and CEO of the state-run Al Ahram Corporation, tried to enter the syndicate headquarters in Cairo. It was Friday March 1, 2013 and since eleven that

morning members of the EJS had been slowly trickling in to participate in the mid-term general assembly that would elect a new head and six of twelve board members.

When Waly arrived at around 1:30 p.m., he tried to make his way through the brightly colored registration tent set up outside the white syndicate headquarter walls covered with election posters. Journalists with cameras and notepads pursued him, vying for a quote from the disgruntled Al Ahram leader.

In less than two years, Waly had made himself one of the most polarizing syndicate leaders in collective memory. Elected in October 2011 in the whirl of the syndicate's first post-revolution election, by February 2013 Waly announced that he would not seek reelection, citing differences between himself and the board. In reality, under his rule the syndicate had become a virtually failed body. Close to bankruptcy and politically compromised, the syndicate was effectively a futile source of legal or professional support for journalists, despite its revolutionary slogans claiming otherwise.

Waly, allegedly a confidant of the Muslim Brotherhood (though not an official Freedom and Justice party member) spent much of his reign sparring with the largely left-leaning syndicate board. Key syndicate concerns, such as more inclusive membership criteria and ending the syndicate's financial dependence on the state, became impossible to address under his leadership. Most notoriously, on November 20, 2012 Waly sat in the syndicate's allotted seat in the National Constitutional Assembly and voted "yes" for the new Muslim Brotherhood-sponsored constitution. Journalists were shocked. Several months earlier, in April 2012, the syndicate general assembly had voted for Waly to withdraw from the Constitutional Assembly and boycott the vote, citing the constitution's restrictive press provisions. Now, the first post-revolution leader seemed to be acting just like the autocratic syndicate heads of the past, an all too common pitfall.<sup>1</sup>

There was also another kind of crowd waiting for Waly that day. The family, friends, and colleagues of journalist El Hussein Abu Deif stationed themselves beside the tent and news cameras, holding a large white poster with Abu Deif's face on it. Abu Deif was a photojournalist for the opposition *Al Fajr* newspaper, and one of two Egyptian journalists killed since the January 25th revolution. He was fatally shot in the head by a sniper the night of December 5, 2012 while covering clashes at the Presidential Palace. He collapsed into a coma and died a week later. Abu Deif's supporters allege that the sniper fire came from the direction of the Muslim Brotherhood side. He was targeted, they say, because he was a journalist carrying a camera—and the Brotherhood did not like this.<sup>2</sup>

By the time of the syndicate elections four months after his death, Abu Deif's face had been memorialized in the iconic Mohamed Mahmoud Street murals, his name a symbol of the fate that can befall Egypt's increasingly defenseless journalists in the Brotherhood era. For under Waly's watch, Abu Deif's legal case had been virtually stalled—despite

the fact that by law it is the syndicate's responsibility to pursue these cases. Countless other files alleging assaults, press violations, and corruption implicating the police or former National Democratic Party (NDP) members also remained untouched.

The chanting began when Waly tried to enter the syndicate. *Barra, barra!* (Outside, outside!) Abu Deif's supporters shouted, as they swarmed to surround the syndicate head and keep him from entering. Suddenly a female journalist from *Al Fajr* approached and threw an item, reportedly a water bottle, which hit Waly. The situation escalated. "Dictator, dictator!" they chanted. Abu Deif supporters closed in as Waly supporters tried to hold them back. The journalists who had been interviewing Waly moments before stationed themselves somewhere in the middle, their cameras thrust forward in the incessant attempt to record everything.

The tension abruptly broke about fifteen minutes later when Waly's supporters were able to move the mass through the syndicate's front doors, from where Waly was taken to safety. In a moment, the mood outside shifted from paralysis to business as usual. The registration tent returned to its previous carnival-like state, with a "who's who" of the Cairo press, many with their children, parading through. Candidates once again handed out pamphlets, calling out names, smiling widely, and shaking the hands of all who passed by. The loudspeaker reminded attendees to register before the mandated 3 p.m. deadline that was fast approaching. For this cadre of journalists, reared in the revolution, the commotion caused by Waly's entry was nothing unusual.

But by 3 p.m. the syndicate general assembly had not yet reached the necessary quorum of 50 percent plus one of its 6,000 members. In an unforeseen twist, in a profession and country that thrive on the unexpected, the elections were postponed until March 15. According to internal regulations, the second round of elections would require a quorum of only 25 percent plus one of its members.

Two weeks later, syndicate members gathered again at the same spot. This time Waly notably did not attend. Moments before 3 p.m., the necessary quorum was reached.

In an election framed by the Egyptian media as a measure of the Muslim Brotherhood's declining popularity, union members elected a noted critic of the Brotherhood, Diah Rashwan, head of the Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, as the new syndicate president. Rashwan, a Nasserist and early signatory of the anti-Mubarak Kifaya manifesto, won with 1,280 votes over five opponents. His main challenger, Al Ahram Managing Director Abdel Mohsen Salama (who was not a Brotherhood member but was considered the government's candidate) received 1,015 votes. The first Coptic Christian woman was also elected to the board. There remained now only one Freedom and Justice Party card carrier on the board, Mohamed Abdel Quddous, whose spot was not under contestation for another two years.

Rashwan, in statements to the press after his win, promised to “restore the union from the hands of the ruling regime” and to address key syndicate concerns.<sup>3</sup> Immediately following the elections the local Arabic press printed articles republishing statements from prominent journalists and politicians expressing their confidence in Rashwan as an independent reformer. Images of Rashwan, with his iconic thick moustache, smiling and raising his fist in the air in victory, filled the news wires. “Journalist Elections: An Opposition Leader and the Board without the Brotherhood,” read a headline below the fold on the front page of the private newspaper *Al Masry Al Youm*.

### **“To be or not to be:” A co-opted syndicate at a crossroads**

The commotion attending the syndicate elections is by no means unusual for Cairo’s current political climate. But in the aftermath of the election attention, deep doubts lingered among journalists over the syndicate’s future prospects: Is the Egyptian Journalist Syndicate—after decades of regime interventions in the press’ professional norms, internal regulations, and financial services—already too broken to be fixed? And are Egyptian journalists—in particular key syndicate members—truly prepared for the sacrifices that meaningful media independence might entail?

“In reality the [election] results were nothing more than a message of anger, a political message against the Muslim Brotherhood. And unfortunately the real issues of the syndicate and the profession were absent,” argues journalist Karim Yehia, one of the leaders for reform at *Al Ahram* after the revolution. “I’m not optimistic that there is a real conversation in the syndicate around how we can rid ourselves of this past path of dictatorship and corruption.”<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, in interviews conducted in spring 2013 with journalists, syndicate leaders, and Egyptian media commentators, there seemed a general consensus that something needed to be done to address the syndicate’s failure to fulfill its basic tasks of accrediting journalists, defending their rights and freedoms, and promoting professional standards.<sup>5</sup>

“The Egyptian Journalist Syndicate has turned into a syndicate just of services,” lamented Amira Wedeh, a journalist at the *Al Ahram* Arabic portal. “It does not support freedom of expression. I think it has a negative role. I want the syndicate to be truly independent from the state, to support freedom of the press and the rights of journalists to express their opinions.”<sup>6</sup>

Beyond this seeming consensus, however, the steps toward reform so far have had a tepid impact, impeded by the nearly insurmountable political and economic barriers to a free press still in place in Egypt.

“Although the syndicate has started to reposition itself in practical terms in light of the new environment in Egypt, the legal framework under which it operates hasn’t really changed,” explained Toby Mendel, a media law expert. “One of the most insidious aspects of Mubarak’s packages of policies on media control was these sort of subtle dependencies that were a very useful way of controlling the profession. That’s the system Mubarak set up, and even with him long gone, they can’t really do much about it.”<sup>7</sup> Mendel added, “I don’t think that the syndicate has resolved basic existential issues about itself and how it should continue to operate.”

Khaled Al Balshy sat in a cushiony chair in his syndicate office and candidly addressed some of these issues. A prominent leftist writer and activist, Balshy was one of six new syndicate board members elected in March.<sup>8</sup> He chose to run, he explained, because he believed he could help develop the syndicate further. Now he sat without pausing for breath and rattled off the syndicate’s persisting list of ailments.

“The syndicate has a very big financial problem,” Balshy said. “There are a large number of newspapers that have closed, and more than 600 journalists in the syndicate are unemployed. The syndicate has a crisis of very old laws that don’t belong to this time, as they were made in the 1970s during an entirely different period.”<sup>9</sup>

The list went on. Balshy criticized the politicized and outdated way that journalists gain membership in the syndicate, a system that provides editors-in-chief significant say over who gets in, and leaves thousands without their right to association. He deplored “the level of the syndicate’s culture,” citing a high tolerance for self-censorship and corruption among poorly paid journalists with limited training. He criticized the “mixing of editing and advertisement,” and journalists who work on commission for advertisers, compromising their professionalism. He rattled off the laws on the book that limit freedom of expression, such as defamation laws and censorship, and the laws that are still notably absent, like a freedom of information law. He deplored the assaults and arrests—and deaths—of journalists at the hands of political and security forces. He sympathized with journalists who, left unrepresented by the syndicate, had tried to create their own unions, only to be thwarted by political figures and laws opposed to this diversity of association.

Above all, he harped on how the syndicate still remained only nominally independent from the state. Since the 1980s, the syndicate had relied on government funding to meet the rising costs of pensions (now at 800 EGP) and monthly stipends (now around 570 EGP) that syndicate members receive. These stipends had become an indirect way for the government to buy off journalists, as well as an incentive inside the syndicate to preserve the status quo and keep membership—and its financial rewards—to a selective group.

“It is necessary that the syndicate support those who work in the press,” Balshy said. “In reality, the restrictions for the syndicate are for an entirely different reason. It’s for appointing *muwazzafeen*, not those who work in the press.”

Balshy used the Arabic word *muwazzafeen*, which translates as “employees,” to convey a negative sense of a state employee mindlessly pushing papers and copying press releases into news articles. He believed it should be different.

State-run Middle East News Agency (MENA) Editor Ragaei al-Merghany echoed many of Balshy’s concerns. From his office window, Merghany has a bird’s eye view of the MENA editing desk below. On the one hand, he might seem an unlikely syndicate critic and freedom of the press advocate given his perch on high at a state-run news agency. But despite this seeming contradiction he is one of a cadre of journalists from state-run publications, including the big three *Al Ahrām*, *Al Akhbar*, and *Al Gomhoriya*, who for decades have taken the lead against many of the same journalists with whom they work and serve. He also currently serves as the general coordinator of the National Coalition for Freedom of the Media, an alliance of human rights groups and journalists.

“The syndicate is before a fateful test,” Merghany concluded in an interview in April 2013. “‘To be or not to be,’ in that sense. Because if it is not able to bring in new blood to address the problems and challenges that journalists in Egypt face, then I fear that this great syndicate—which has supported a lot on freedom of expression and press, and went to battle against many different governments from the time of the monarchy—is at risk of dissolving and disintegrating. And this would be a catastrophic thing for the journalists.”<sup>10</sup>

### **“Co-censorship:” An overview of syndicate regulation**

Located in downtown Cairo minutes from many of Egypt’s major newspapers, the syndicate’s entrance hall is enlivened by the chatter of journalists and the slogans of political posters hanging in the background. As in the 27 other official syndicates across Cairo, membership comes with a host of benefits unrelated to the profession itself, such as reduced prices at the syndicate’s cafeteria and deals on properties and other commodities available only to card carriers.

In Arabic, the word *nīqaaba*, or syndicate, is used to denote a professional body, while *gamaa’a*, or union, is generally used for trade associations. According to the constitution, the EJS is the only body statutorily recognized to represent Egyptian journalists: one profession, one syndicate, and one vote in important bodies like Egypt’s Constituent Assembly.

But the syndicate is not set up to represent all journalists. Internal regulations put in place by the 1970 Egyptian Syndicate Law and 1960 Press Law limit membership to journalists who are employed full-time in the *sihaafa*, or print press; it excludes members of the broadcast and online media, the *'i'laam*.

As a January 2013 UNESCO report, “Assessment of Media Developments in Egypt,” concluded, “Membership in the syndicate effectively, and through operation of the law, creates a two-tier status within the profession of journalism.” The report continued, “These rules are in clear breach of international guarantees of freedom of expression, as well as of association, which prohibit conditions being placed on who may work as a journalist, mandatory membership in a particular association, or measures which effectively ban individuals from working as journalists. This problem is significantly exacerbated by the involvement of government actors in the process of applying for membership.”<sup>11</sup>

So it is that of the 15,000 or so journalists working in Egypt, only 6,000 have membership in their profession’s official governing body. This situation leaves an array media professionals from the increasingly multimedia field without an independent or collective voice to lobby on their behalf. Since membership in the EJS is the sole source for professional accreditation, thousands of broadcast, online, part-time, and freelancing journalists are left without an official press card or access to professional resources. And despite an increasing diversity of private and alternative media, the syndicate body and representatives remain largely dominated by the state-owned presses. In a country where 50 percent of the population is under 25, the journalist syndicate, like most other formal institutions, remains dominated by a generation of men steeped in pre-revolution thinking.<sup>12</sup>

Several articles in the constitution (both the 2012 and 1971 versions) purport to provide freedom of the press, freedom of expression and freedom to access information. The practical application of these and other clauses, however, has had a generally restricting rather than liberating effect. For example, the Supreme Press Council, whose members are appointed by the government based on political calculations, regulates the press. Other laws on the books—such as defamation and libel codes—were commonly used to silence journalists under Hosni Mubarak. They have also become a particular favorite of the new ruling class: under President Mohamed Morsi, suits brought against journalists alleging defamation of the president and religion have reached new heights.

“Historically, the rules were often not applied in their strict form, but were there to be relied upon should anyone step too far out of line,” assesses the UNESCO report. “Thus, in practice the system relied largely on what might be termed ‘co-censorship’: self-censorship backed up by the possibility of direct (i.e. legal) censorship.”<sup>13</sup>

Within this hazardous web of silencing laws and stifling practices, the syndicate's often politicized membership criteria are a common source of strife for journalists. Some claim, for example, that other members are not really journalists, but rather are well connected politically. More verifiable is the fact that all employees of the state-owned publishing houses, such as those that publish the state organs *Al Ahram*, *Al Akhbar*, and *Al Gomhoriya*, qualify for automatic membership. Though many do not actually practice the craft of journalism, these members help to keep the voting bloc in favor of the government.

Journalists tell numerous stories about themselves or colleagues being denied membership because of their politics, or because of the particular persuasions of the editor at the top, or the committee reading their application. "The rules give any journalist wishing to obtain a contract of employment in order to qualify for Syndicate membership an incentive to prioritize an editor's whims over the demands of professionalism," writes Arab media scholar Naomi Sakr in her latest book *Transformations in Egyptian Journalism*.<sup>14</sup>

Another common practice is for newspaper editors to hire journalists on a part-time basis for years on end, thereby skirting the responsibility of paying journalists their full benefits and helping them to achieve membership. As the Egypt Independent reported, "The average salaries of full-time journalists in daily newspapers range from LE 400 to LE 2,000 per month. For internships and training, beginner journalists are typically not paid at all. Moreover, the widespread practice of employing full-time journalists on part-time contracts serves to deny these employees their right to bonuses, promotions, insurance coverage, profit sharing (when applicable), job stability and the right to join the Journalists Syndicate."<sup>15</sup>

At times, journalists have taken drastic steps to protest these conditions. In October 2008, ten journalists held a hunger strike at the syndicate's headquarters, objecting to their being blocked from syndicate membership. One of the strikers, socialist journalist Omar Saeed, described the ordeal of being denied membership: "The membership committee asked me totally irrelevant questions, like 'What are your political tendencies?' and 'Do you belong to a workers' platform or organization?' They asked me few professional questions relating to journalism." He was ultimately admitted to the syndicate.<sup>16</sup>

The poor salaries of journalists are further reflective of the increasing financial burdens facing Egypt's mismanaged media institutions. According to the law, newspapers have to disclose ownership structures and publish their budgets. In practice, this is never done, as news organizations loathe transparency in a media environment in which corruption and politicized subsidies have long concealed the true cost of producing the news.



“The problem is there are wide ethical violations in the national Egyptian press,” journalist Karim Yehia lamented. “The syndicate has not opened one corruption file. And the truth is that in the Egyptian press corruption was widespread under Mubarak and it has continued.”<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, journalists are quite open about the rampant ethical violations that plague the profession. Employees of the advertising divisions of newspapers, for example, qualify for syndicate membership. But it is also widely known that many of these 700 or so employees are corrupt, and take ‘bonuses’ from advertisers that sometimes equal their own initial salary. Among journalists, claims of corruption and illicit gains go largely unchecked, with business and government buy-offs, big and small, a commonly overlooked norm.<sup>18</sup>

The situation is further complicated by the pension and monthly stipend that the syndicate provides to members—via direct deposit by the government. The government taxes one percent of newspaper advertisements and then allots this to the syndicate fund for stipends and other benefits. However, the total taxable amount is capped at LE 20,000 (approximately USD 3,300) for national newspapers and LE 10,000 (approximately USD 1,650) for private newspapers, leading to lower revenues in practice. Small amounts of additional revenue come from the syndicate’s ownership of about 500 newspaper kiosks, membership fees, and rental of its facilities.<sup>19</sup>

The fund serves two main purposes: the first is as a pension for retired journalists (currently at about LE 800 a month) and the second is for what in Egyptian Arabic is called a *badal*, or a monthly stipend (currently LE 570 though said to be closer to LE 700) for all active members. The *badal* system began in 1981 as a means of providing journalists with an extra source of revenue for training and technological development. However, for many it has become either a primary or a vital secondary source of monthly cash. Each election year, candidates campaign on promises to raise the *badal* or pension rate, thereby completing the cycle of dependency among journalists, syndicate leaders, and the government and thus prolonging the corrupted status quo.

Waly reportedly won the syndicate presidency in 2011 in part because of his pledge to raise the *badal*, as well as for his other economic connections.<sup>20</sup>

Ministries, when so inclined, will step in to fill the syndicate’s inevitable funding shortfall in the face of the continual rise of the *badal* and pension. For example, one of Waly’s last moves as syndicate head was to raise the monthly pension from LE 400 to LE 800. Before doing so, the Ministry of Finance pledged to make up the difference for the first few months. But several syndicate members allege that Waly raised the pension for purely political reasons: he knew that the burden would fall on the next syndicate head—

whom he presumed would be from the opposition—to appeal to the government to help cover the unsustainable increase.<sup>21</sup>

Another state tactic for controlling the syndicate has been to ensure that the elected leader is also employed as the editor-in-chief or CEO of one of the state-owned newspapers. In this way, the state can ensure that the syndicate head is more likely to adhere to its rules—those of the President and his government. It hence came as little surprise to journalists when in September 2012, almost a year after Waly's election as syndicate head, the Muslim Brotherhood-controlled Supreme Press Council appointed him CEO of the Al Ahram Corporation. At the time of his election, Waly had been a financial journalist with no previous managerial experience at *Al Ahram*.

“I see this as against the ABC's of the syndicate's work. It won't work if you are in such a high position, and at the same time, are supposed to support the rights of journalists who work under you,” Yehia complained.<sup>22</sup>

Many journalists and syndicate members also cited the lack of self-regulation and effective ethics codes as confounding factors that reduce the press' authority as a reliable and respectable source for news and analysis.<sup>23</sup> In the profession, ethics codes are generally considered vital because of the stability and clarity they provide journalists in outlining their jurisdiction and expectations. On the other hand, co-opted ethics codes can also be used to the detriment of a free press, in practice restricting the development of the press within a politicized framework rather than fostering the institutionalization of professional norms. According to the Press Law, the syndicate is charged with developing a code of ethics. The last Press Code of Ethics was issued by decree in 1988. However, it is generally considered a mere formality on paper.

“It is not clear how it was developed, and what degree of input into it journalists had,” the UNESCO report concludes. “But it goes beyond what are considered appropriate matters for inclusion in media codes of conduct. In practice, the Code is rarely applied and does not appear to be relied upon by the journalistic profession for guidance.”<sup>24</sup>

No journalist interviewed at a newspaper for this article could provide the code at the time.

In a profession commonly criticized for its lack of balance, credibility, and transparency—other key fundamentals of the profession—the syndicate in theory has the power to help reshape Egyptian journalistic practices and professional norms. And there are those who in good faith do seek to effect these changes. But far too many—from the political figures at the top to the general assembly members pocketing their *badal* each month—prefer the old rules of the game in practice.

### **“The Hijacked Syndicate:” A history of stalled reform**

In Egyptian journalist lore, the syndicate is described with a nostalgic pride as a longtime force for freedom against repressive regimes. “The cries for the fall of the rule of the [Muslim Brotherhood’s Supreme] Guide at the union building renews memories of the journalists’ resistance to the policies of Sadat and Mubarak,” ran the headline of a story on the syndicate’s history as an independent institution in the privately owned *Al Youm Al Saba’a* newspaper three days after Rashwan’s election.

Egypt’s particular brand of associational life—largely replicated across the Middle East—began during colonial times as an alternative means for Egyptian professionals to secure resources and organize politically. Under subsequent regimes Egyptian syndicates were shaped by a hodgepodge of socialist, nationalist, and then liberal ideals into a complicated network of labor-state relations.

Many journalists nostalgically recall the Anwar Sadat era of the seventies and eighties as the syndicate’s heyday of activism against attempts to curtail journalists. When Sadat came to power in 1970 he initiated a restructuring of the press that led to the imprisonment and marginalization of hundreds of journalists and political thinkers. Over the next decade, further shake-ups ensued, with the establishment of new laws and institutions, such as the Supreme Press Council, which reinforced red lines around the press.<sup>25</sup> In 1980, when Sadat tried to downgrade the syndicate into a union, journalists objected in powerful masses. Sadat ultimately retreated, and the EJS remained, according to the constitution, the single syndicate available to journalists.<sup>26</sup> The tensions between Sadat and the syndicate were also reflective of labor and class changes in Egypt at this time, with largely middle-class journalists struggling to adjust to Sadat’s policy of opening up Egypt’s economy (*infitah*).

Under Mubarak’s rule, press regulation wavered between periods of liberalization and repression. Unlike Nasser and Sadat, however, Mubarak and his circle faced the unprecedented challenge of rapidly developing new media technologies domestically and abroad—from the establishment of the first satellite television station in the 1990s to the rise of the Internet and blogging in the 2000s. As seen, these latter digital trends proved nearly impossible to contain.<sup>27</sup>

Amidst these media changes Mubarak instigated several confrontations with the syndicate. In 1995 he raised the syndicate’s ire with a new set of press regulations that, amongst many measures, increased fines against journalists and lowered the threshold for criticism of political figures. Protests and an angry syndicate assembly ensued and the regime ultimately backed down. In 1996, however, a new press package was passed, which included many of the 1995 provisions.<sup>28</sup>

In the book *Hurriya 'ala al-Hamish* ("Freedom on the Margins"), journalist Karim Yehia chronicles how corruption trickles down from the state to the ordinary syndicate member, undermining the syndicate and the journalism ideal. In one of the book's notable chapters, entitled "The Hijacked Syndicate: On the bureaucracy and isolated leaders" Yehia details the deterioration of the syndicate's leadership from "leaders of bridges" between the state and people in the seventies to the corrupt "nationalistic leaders" and "isolated leaders" in the eighties and through the Mubarak era. With insider deals and bribery rampant in so many other sectors, it became politically expedient for party players and regular journalists to buy into the game too. "The work of the syndicate came to resemble [that of] a *simsaar*, or small time broker, selling the authorities to the people, and selling the journalists to the ruling powers," Yehia writes.<sup>29</sup>

While Yehia places great blame on Sadat, Mubarak, the NDP, and those surrounding the center of power, he also implicates many of his fellow journalists. Criticizing their "unconditional obedience," he describes how journalists learned to accept whatever those above said, whether it was right or wrong. By whitewashing fraudulent realities and violations of the rights of citizens, journalism became a profession trading in special services and guarantees—prized possessions in a country where it was increasingly hard to get by for the average worker.

"Thus, the competition between individual journalists for goods and services was entrenched, taking the place of collective solidarity and its sense of responsibility and mission. At the same time, journalists became convinced that they were a 'special group'... And it was this delusion that ensured that walls of isolation went up between journalists and society," Yehia writes.<sup>30</sup>

In these circumstances, syndicate activists became even less inclined to push for meaningful legislative reform: they feared both that the government and NDP would seize the chance to further restrict the syndicate, and that their key constituents would oppose the removal of this special kind of treatment under the law.<sup>31</sup>

Given this persistent control over the syndicate by the NDP, when the January 25th revolution broke out then-syndicate head Makram Mohamed Ahmed, the NDP pick, stayed silent. For 18 days the syndicate did not release one statement on the revolution or about the press violations facing journalists in the streets. Ahmed's disregard mirrored the presidency's official stance: during the first four days of the uprising *Al Ahram's* top news on the front page concerned itself with fighting in Lebanon.

At Ahmed's behest, police blocked the syndicate entrance at the start of the uprising. No one could enter without his permission. Journalist Yehia Qallash and other syndicate activists reportedly tussled with police when denied entrance to their own building. Ahmed, fearing for his safety, moved syndicate meetings to the Arab Union of Journalists

building in Talat Harb Street. No one entered the syndicate building until February 8, when in a tension-filled meeting, Ahmed pretended to pay lip service to the memory of Ahmed Mohamed Mahmoud, the first journalist killed in the uprising.<sup>32</sup>

In the days that followed, syndicate journalists tried to mobilize around the momentum for change felt throughout the country. In Tahrir Square they raised banners in support of freedom of the press. Karim Yehia and several colleagues prepared drafts of a new press ethics code and other demands. On February 12, *Al Ahrām* printed its now infamous edition, the front page of which completely reversed its past coverage of the events, declaring: “The People Have Toppled the Regime.”

By February 22, ten days after Mubarak’s fall, Ahmed had submitted his resignation, citing poor health. The syndicate had been preparing a vote of no confidence should he fail to step down. In a revolution forged in labor unrest, Ahmed’s defeat was a sign of changing times.

Hopes were hence high that the revolution’s ideals would reach inside the syndicate. But concrete change was slow, and by March several key syndicate board members resigned in protest over the lack of progress. The revolution had been interrupted. “There was a moment [for change] during the days of the revolution,” Yehia recalled. “But [afterwards] the biggest problem is that the people who tried to make things better were not united. And secondly their ability to influence change was limited.”<sup>33</sup>

The first post-revolution syndicate elections, held in October 2011, reflected this stagnation. In a tight race, Qallash lost to Waly, reportedly because of Waly’s closer ties to the hand that fed. It was feared Qallash, not from the *Al Ahrām* ranks, would be less likely to ensure the continuation of the syndicate benefits.

### **“A starving syndicate:” Problems under SCAF and Muslim Brotherhood rule**

Immediately following Waly’s confrontation with the crowds at the syndicate entrance on March 1, private Egyptians newspaper posted a series of photos and shaky video clips of the event online, making the harassment of the CEO of *Al Ahrām* available for all to see. But the *Al Ahrām* Arabic portal (*Bawaba*) did not put up any visuals to accompany its coverage—despite the fact that there was a heavy presence of *Al Ahrām* online and print journalists on hand that day to document developments. The following day the print edition of *Al Ahrām* summed up the event in only one paragraph. Presumably the editors at *Al Ahrām* still felt that there was some news that was best left unreported.

This discrepancy in coverage between the private and state-owned press is emblematic of the ways in which the syndicate’s media environment has been fundamentally altered

since the revolution—and in other ways has remained constrained by the same laws and individual proclivities.<sup>34</sup>

Under SCAF, the level of freedom of the press fluctuated wildly, with moments of unprecedented coverage coupled with brutal repression. As the 2012 Freedom of the Press report concludes, “Egypt improved from Not Free to Partly Free as a result of the flourishing of new, independent media outlets, less self-censorship, and some loosening of centralized editorial control.... However, by year’s end there were worrying indications that these gains were being reversed.”<sup>35</sup>

Indeed, after the revolution, the ceiling of acceptable topics to cover—or red lines, as journalists call it—rose dramatically: while still subject to censorship (and in particular the taboo of discussing the military), journalists recall the euphoria of the first few months when it seemed the system was really changing. A wave of privately owned satellite channels like ONTV and CBC embraced this new space, with lively debates among citizens, activists, political and business figures becoming the new nightly norm.<sup>36</sup>

At the same time, the laws on the books remain much the same, as does the mindset of the men at the top controlling the legislative process and the Supreme Press Council. This persisting problem trickles down to many workers within state-run media’s aging newsrooms who, some *Al Ahram* journalists are quick to point out, have simply replaced their unquestioning support for Mubarak with support for Morsi. Long accustomed to making a certain kind of news, this bloated and politically hard-to-fire cadre of workers has received neither the training nor instructions to do otherwise. In a newsroom culture where obedience reigns supreme, the old proverb rings true, “The King is dead, long live the King.”

Relations between SCAF and the media—especially the private and independent media--began their descent as the military took an increasingly hard line against political expression and the press who was reporting on it. With these battles, media coverage began to take a notably more polarized flavor, with state media parroting the official line and the private and independent press assailing the government. A slew of Salafi and religious satellite channels added to the politicization.<sup>37</sup>

“After the revolution the margins of freedom of expression and publication throughout society expanded to an unprecedented level, but also a not protected level,” explained MENA editor Merghany.<sup>38</sup> Many journalists lamented not only the rise in assaults on and threats to journalists but the emergence of yellow journalism that seemed to sensationalize the news in response to these threats.

With hopes for legislative change increasingly deferred, the syndicate struggled to address the limited safeguards for journalists in the field and in the newsroom. There was

a concerted effort to increase professional and safety training to meet the changing times; but with limited resources to work with, these programs had a limited impact.<sup>39</sup>

The climate for journalism training also did not improve. In December 2011, when security forces raided the offices of 17 NGOs (including two media development organizations) citing foreign funding violations, the international journalism development community received a serious blow. Journalism training programs offered by foreign NGOs had long been viewed with suspicion by the Mubarak regime (and some journalists themselves); now SCAF was acting on these same fears by trying to delegitimize the intentions of these programs and cast doubt on calls for change.

The NGO raids further strengthened the entrenched interests resisting syndicate reform, in particular innovative training and development initiatives. In *Transformations in Egyptian Journalism*, Sakr notes, “the episode highlighted the urgency of resolving legal contradictions over freedom of association as well as those affecting freedom of expression. It demonstrated once again the difficulty of institutional capacity building for the media in authoritarian settings....”<sup>40</sup>

The past year has seen an even more adverse approach to media freedoms by the government. When former Brotherhood member Mohamed Morsi defeated former Prime Minister Ahmed Shafiq in the presidential run-off in June 2012, there was initial hope for the prospects of democracy in Egypt. But there were also deep fears over what kind of rule and regulations would follow. In the critical months since, both sides have claimed the moral high ground, painting a picture of stark contrasts between the government and opposition. The Morsi administration and the Muslim Brotherhood’s party have praised the *nahda*, or renaissance, that Egypt has undertaken: in January 2013 Morsi told the Arab Union of Journalists that Egyptian journalists had never been freer.<sup>41</sup> In response to these types of blanket statement, the view from the other side is expressed in similar absolutes. “This is the most critical period in the history of the syndicate,” said syndicate undersecretary Gamal Fahmy. “It is fighting a ruling group that has now proven beyond doubt that it opposes freedoms.”<sup>42</sup>

Echoing Fahmy’s sentiments, Yehia Qallash argued that the trajectory of press freedoms under Morsi’s government is particularly concerning in the long term. “When we talk about the Brotherhood, we are talking about a state,” he said. “SCAF was a temporary situation, while the Brotherhood are building institutions. There is a big difference.” He added, “All of their [MB] statements are in opposition to freedom of the press. They don’t represent the revolution.”<sup>43</sup>

In other words, while the Muslim Brotherhood are not unique in their press repression, incorporating techniques from SCAF and the former regimes, it is the institutionalization of these practices under the first democratically elected Muslim Brotherhood-led

government that is the most worrying for media freedoms in the long term.<sup>44</sup> While the court system has become the main battleground in which the government persecutes journalists, the Muslim Brotherhood online, print, and satellite channels have also vilified certain mediums as “black media”—with their own propaganda serving as the “white media” counter-model. In spring 2013, protests at the Moqattam Muslim Brotherhood headquarters between Morsi supporters and opponents degenerated into chaotic clashes in which journalists themselves became targets alongside the sparring sides.

For syndicate leaders like Fahmy and board member Abeer Saadi, the frustration is felt not only in the violence in the streets, but also in the lack of progress on the legislative front. “We believe that this constitution is not supporting freedom of expression,” said Saadi, who since 2011 has been responsible for syndicate training and development.<sup>45</sup> In 2011, when the syndicate officially came out against the constitution, a fistfight at a general assembly meeting ensued between those supporting it and those against it.

Saadi, a foreign affairs editor at *Al Akhbar*, expressed her particular dissatisfaction with several constitutional clauses, among them an article making it possible for media houses to be closed with a court ruling. She also deplored the lack of independence of the National Media Council (which is set to replace Sadat’s Supreme Press Council as the main body overseeing the Egyptian press). For Saadi, the constitutional process was also emblematic of the way that syndicate leaders have been marginalized from important decision-making processes. For years, for example, the syndicate had been advocating for a freedom of information law. But when the Muslim Brotherhood-controlled Shura Council (which oversees legislative work in the absence of a parliament) began to discuss such a law, they did not ask for or include any input from the syndicate. Syndicate leaders have also requested reform of the current *badal* and taxation system to increase their own independent revenue sources. The syndicate has proposed that 20 percent, rather than one percent, of the newspaper advertisement tax go directly to the syndicate for it to distribute, rather than have the government supplement shortfalls through handouts.

The Shura Council, however, has refused.

“They are putting the syndicate on the edge of a very big financial and economic cliff,” Saadi said. “It’s really halting us. We know it’s not sustainable.... They don’t want us to be independent. We think that they want to put us under starvation and to put us under pressure to stop opposing the president and the ruling party against freedom of expression.”

Saadi and other syndicate members say that, backed by their new head Rashwan, they will continue to push for these reforms nonetheless.



### **“Can they take the responsibility?” The rhetoric and reality of reform**

For leftist journalist Wael Tawfik, the EJS has long been too broken to fix. In 2007 he joined with several other similarly disgruntled journalists to form a new association, the Independent Journalist Syndicate (IJS). The aim, he explained, was to do what the EJS no longer could do: independently organize and support journalists in Egypt. The status quo, Tawfik explained, was for him no longer an option. Following the revolution, it seemed that many others agreed.<sup>46</sup>

Seated in a popular downtown café filled with cigarette smoke, Tawfik apologized for his tired demeanor. He had just returned from a friend’s funeral. The day before, the IJS’s lawyer, Sayed Fathy, had suddenly passed away, stricken by a heart attack at the age of 55. Fathy was a renowned human rights lawyer revered for his work with labor activists, revolutionaries, and the poor. Tawfik worried about how Fathy’s loss might affect his struggle.

The IJS is facing an uphill battle. In the first place, it is technically not a legal entity. The EJS’s official lawyer has filed several lawsuits against it, on the basis that its existence transgresses Egypt’s “one syndicate, one profession” policy. (To bypass this restriction, the IJS can try to register as an association rather than syndicate.) The IJS also lacks a steady source of funding (and therefore does not provide unemployment insurance or have an emergency fund) and does not yet have a permanent headquarters.

But what Tawfik’s association does provide, he says, is a progressive alternative for the profession. “We know we will succeed in the end,” he says.

The IJS purposely does not provide its 600 or so members a monthly *badal*, a practice that Tawfik dismisses as “bribery.” The membership criteria are also intentionally more inclusive. Membership is contingent upon a substantial archive of journalistic work, whether print or online. Tawfik explained that the aim of the syndicate should be to help the journalist achieve meaningful employment—not to require the journalist to enter into a faulty contract in order to qualify for membership. “Employment is an aim and not a means for the syndicate,” he said.<sup>47</sup>

In a notable break with tradition, newspaper owners can become members of IJS but cannot have voting rights. According to Tawfik about 70 percent of the association’s members work in the private press, reflecting the general trend in Egyptian media. Unlike the EJS, the independent syndicate also accepts foreign journalists as members.

The Independent Journalist Syndicate is one of several alternative journalism associations to sprout up in recent years. For decades the state has tightly controlled labor organizations, but movements for labor reform began to gain strength in the years

preceding the revolution. Since the uprising, over 30 fledgling independent unions have attracted around 300,000 members.<sup>48</sup> The Independent Online Journalists Syndicate, created in 2011, is another such body trying to create a new space for marginalized Internet reporters. On the broadcast front, members of the state-run Egyptian Radio and TV Union (ERTU) have been trying to organize an alternative space for government- and privately affiliated broadcast journalists that is independent of state control.<sup>49</sup>

Opponents of a variety of syndicates often cite the constitution as a support for their position: under the law, they say, only one syndicate is allowed—and it is hard to change that law with an absent parliament. But media law expert Mendel argues that with a degree of creativity an adequate middle ground can be reached through a federation of associations under one syndicate umbrella.

“Within the framework of the constitution I think it would be perfectly possible, with a little bit of imagination, to open up in practice the organizational framework for journalists,” he said. “All of the journalists could organize in different associations that represented their interests and they could coalesce in a framework, single syndicate that would meet the constitutional requirement, for example.”<sup>50</sup>

As noted, Egypt is a signatory to several international labor conventions that provide for freedom of association. Yet the EJS continues to ignore, and even blocks, demands for a more pluralistic syndicate system. The most vocal opponents within the journalist syndicate are former NDP and FJP members who no doubt view a pluralistic labor force as harder to control.

According to Saadi, the EJS has made some concessions. It has granted some online-only journalists syndicate membership, as long as they have a contract with a print organization. She expressed interest in opening up the syndicate to include online journalists officially, and supported the right of broadcast journalists to independently organize.<sup>51</sup> But she did not endorse the idea of a competing journalist syndicate such as the IJS. “We opposed the creation of a second syndicate for print journalists but it would be OK to have another syndicate for people working in a different part of the media,” she told Sakr in *Transformations in Egyptian Journalism*.<sup>52</sup>

Balshy, on the other hand, is one of the few who openly support alternative syndicates. “If you don’t change these laws, then these people have the right to go and make their own syndicate that represent them and protect their rights,” he said.<sup>53</sup>

But among those in power his ideas are still, it seems, too revolutionary.

On the transnational level, the EJS is also somewhat resistant to reform. It refuses to be part of the International Federation of Journalists because Israel is a member; participation in the IFJ’s training and conferences would violate the syndicate’s anti-

normalization stand. The Federation of Arab Journalists is in theory another source for funding and training, but in practical terms journalists consider it a merely symbolic body, constrained by domestic and regional Arab politics.<sup>54</sup> “It’s a big collective of failures,” Saadi complained. “It puts all of the Arab syndicates with all of their problems together. I don’t think that they can do anything.”<sup>55</sup>

The question of the syndicate’s independence is hence interconnected with Egypt’s larger political and socio-economic transformations. Since the revolution, media and political analysts have questioned whether the limits on freedoms of the press and expression in Egypt have been raised, or just rearranged. As the syndicate demonstrates, the latter is unfortunately the far more accurate story. Shaped by the legal system, political pressures, economic conditions, and individual proclivities, entrenched interests, big and small, have proven a persisting barrier to the enactment of reforms that reflect the ideals that once ignited an uprising.

“The heart of the slogan of the revolution was freedom,” said Qallash. “And in our opinion, the opinion of the Egyptian people, that means the right to a free and independent press. But what happened in the last two years is that this slogan has not been achieved on the ground.”<sup>56</sup>

IJS member Tawfik paused before answering a final question: was he optimistic about the future of the syndicate since the revolution?

“Look,” he said. “There have been three major changes in the syndicate since the revolution.” He continued to list them: the removal of many supporters of the old regime, small changes in the way that those applying for membership are treated, and improvements in the rhetoric and tone of syndicate leaders, in particular since the election of Diaa Rashwan. “But unfortunately this change has not been seen in a direct way on the ground,” he concluded. So no, he was not optimistic.<sup>57</sup>

Tawfik attributed this mixed report on syndicate reform to a simple fact about the Egyptian revolution. “It was a change in society not a change in laws,” he said. And unfortunately in the case of the syndicate, he added, both the laws and the culture have been slow to change.

Saadi does not deny this problem either. Seated in *Al Akhbar* foreign affairs newsroom, she is quick to blame the Muslim Brotherhood and political cronies for the syndicate’s sickened state. They hold the power, after all, and are wielding it recklessly. “The situation of the country, and the situation of the syndicate, is going in the wrong direction,” she said. “People have given up in this country. They are fed up and really frustrated.”

But she admits that the failures of leadership trickle down to the members of the syndicate. “To be truthful, there are a lot of things that need to be not just reformed, but changed. And change is not easy even on the personal level, so what about an entity that is 72 years old? ... If the syndicate is not able to change itself this year, and I mean 2013, then we are not going to survive strong. We are going to survive, yes, as a building, etc. But as a truthful entity that deserves to stay and sustain itself, we are not.”

Referring to Rashwan’s election, she touched upon a challenge facing journalists across Egypt: the challenge of not falling back into the corrupted practices of the past.

“At that time we knew, and everyone knew, that they [MB] did not present any candidate for the Chair position because they knew that they are hated in the syndicate,” she explained. “And unlike in other syndicates they’ve never been a majority, but an organized minority... The battle was formed by the Nasserists and the leftists because they wanted people to come vote in these elections. That’s true. And now the syndicate is theirs... But this is actually a very big responsibility. Can they take the responsibility and not rely on the government?”

Reforms in a post-Mubarak era are indeed not easy in the face of decades of entrenched interests; but changes in the EJS membership and financial structures are an imperative for meaningful reform going forward. As this article has reported, however, small developments alone are not enough. Egyptian journalists have the right to freedom of association and no government—revolutionary or not—should be able to deny this right unchecked.

Indeed, while Egyptian journalists face numerous obstacles two years after Mubarak’s fall, the most dangerous remains avoiding the pitfalls of the past. “There is a need for public acknowledgment that good journalism is not possible in corrupt environments,” concludes Sakr in *Transformations in Egyptian Journalism*.<sup>58</sup> For those in the syndicate calling for freedom of the press and expression, avoiding the gulf between rhetoric and reality is indeed a great responsibility—and increasingly consequential. A strong syndicate system can provide the backbone for such a transformation—but a co-opted one can also deeply stall progress. The question hence still remains, can they take the responsibility?

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**Notes:**

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<sup>1</sup> Miriam Berger, “With new journalist syndicate president, hopes for a profession in transition,” EgyptSource, March 19, 2013, <http://www.acus.org/egyptsource/new-journalist-syndicate-president-hopes-profession-transition>.

<sup>2</sup> Rana Muhammad Taha, “Abu Deif’s family allege assassination,” Daily News Egypt, December 9, 2012, <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2012/12/09/abu-deif-family-allege-assassination/>.

<sup>3</sup> Salma Shukralla, “Brotherhood losses in Egypt Press Syndicate Suggest Waning Popularity,” Al Ahram Online, March 18, 2013,

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/66989/Egypt/Politics-/Brotherhood-losses-in-Egypt-press-syndicate-polls-.aspx>; Heba Afify, “Journalist syndicate polls reveal anti-brotherhood bloc, but many challenges lies ahead,” Egypt Independent, March 26, 2013, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/journalists-syndicate-polls-reveal-anti-brotherhood-bloc-many-challenges-lie-ahead>

<sup>4</sup> Karim Yehia, interview by author (Arabic), Cairo, April 2013.

<sup>5</sup> As part of a larger study on Egyptian print media and the Internet, about fifty journalists at private and state-run papers were asked about their views on the syndicate.

<sup>6</sup> Amira Wehdeh, interview by author (Arabic), Cairo, February 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Toby Mendel, interview by author (English), Skype, April 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Balshy is the former editor-in-chief of *Al Badeel* newspaper, which was abruptly shut down last year; Mai Shams Al Din, “Stuck between state and corporate owners some journalists seek another way,” Egypt Independent, March 10, 2012,

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/stuck-between-state-and-corporate-owners-some-journalists-seek-another-way>.

<sup>9</sup> Khaled Balshy, interview with author (Arabic), Cairo, May 2013.

<sup>10</sup> Ragaie al-Merghany, interview with author (Arabic), Cairo, March 2013.

<sup>11</sup> UNESCO, *Assessment of Media Development in Egypt based on UNESCO’s Media Development Indicators*, 2013, 33 <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002207/220742E.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> As an Egypt Independent story reported, the 1970 law states that the syndicate “should spread socialist and nationalist thought among its members,” and it still refers to Nasser-era jurisdiction of several institutions and positions that no longer exist. See Noha El Hennawy, “Accusations fly as faction moves to restrict journalists syndicate membership,” Egypt Independent, August 8, 2011, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/accusations-fly-faction-moves-restrict-journalists-syndicate-membership>.

<sup>13</sup> UNESCO, *Assessment of Media Development*, 15.

<sup>14</sup> Naomi Sakr, *Transformations in Egyptian Journalism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013) 76.

<sup>15</sup> Jano Charbel, “Job security, financial problems and dangers plague journalists,” Egypt Independent, April 25, 2013, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/final-issue-job-security-financial-problems-and-dangers-plague-journalists>.

<sup>16</sup> Charbel, “Egypt’s journalists battle to organize independently,” Egypt Independent, March 6, 2011, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/egypts-journalists-battle-organize-independently>.

<sup>17</sup> Karim Yehia, interview by author (Arabic), April 2013.

<sup>18</sup> A recent case captures this complexity. One week before the March 2013 election, Rashwan and his opponent Salama threatened to stop the elections because the Illicit Gains Authority

detained two journalists from *Al Gomhoriya* over claims of illicit dealings. According to syndicate by laws, the authority should have brought the case first to the syndicate, which would then initiate legal action. The candidates expressed their stance in support of the *Al Gomhoriya* journalists as a sign of syndicate solidarity against political interference. But, as several journalists interviewed noted, at the same time they did nothing to address the corrupt advertising case. Regardless of whether the government acted inappropriately, the problem still remained.

<sup>19</sup> UNESCO, *Assessment of Media Development*, 32; Merghany, interview by author, Cairo, April 2013.

<sup>20</sup> Yehia, April 2013.

<sup>21</sup> Merghany, April 2013.

<sup>22</sup> Yehia, April 2013.

<sup>23</sup> Naomi Sakr, interview by author (English), Cairo, April 2013.

<sup>24</sup> UNESCO, *Assessment of Media Development*, 63.

<sup>25</sup> In 1975 Sadat created the Supreme Press Council to license newspapers and to implement a code of professional journalist ethics, among other elements. In 1976 he passed a decree allowing the creation of political parties, and their subsequent party newspapers, thereby in theory, opening up the press. (Nasser had nationalized the press in 1960, silencing a previously cacophonous field.)

<sup>26</sup> Sadat's signing of the 1978 peace treaty with Israel is another critical moment in shaping the syndicate's perception of itself as a politically oppositional force. Already angry with Sadat over a number of domestic decisions, the syndicate decried what they saw as Sadat's abandonment of the Palestinian cause. They enacted new by laws that forbade "normalization" with any Israeli—journalist, politician, or average citizen—as well as visits to Israel. (The Camp David Accords called for the normalization of relations between the two states.) Journalists were further incensed when syndicate leaders put in by the NDP visited Israel—in blatant disregard of the syndicate's rules. Until today, the syndicate's anti-normalization stand is recalled by members as a source of pride and professional identity—and seen as congruent with calls for a free press.

<sup>27</sup> The first state-owned satellite communications company, Nilesat, was launched in 1996. In 2001 the government licensed Dream TV, the first private satellite channel that set the stage for a new array of opinion, commentary and entertainment (private television channels are prohibited from broadcasting news). In 2005 the Mubarak government allowed the licensing of the first private newspaper in Egypt, *Al Masry Al Youm*, a phenomenon considered one of the first in the series of events that enabled the revolution.

<sup>28</sup> Karim Yehia, *Hurriya 'ala al-Hamish* (Alexandria: Ain Publishing, 2011) 155-166.

<sup>29</sup> Yehia, *Hurriya*, 163.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 155.

<sup>31</sup> Shaden Shehab, "Change at Press Syndicate," *Al Ahram Weekly*, August 7-13 2003, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2003/650/eg5.htm>. For a moment in 2003 it seemed that there was a window for change when prominent Nasserite writer Galal Aref beat the government's candidate, *Al Ahram* columnist Salah Montasser. For the first time in decades, Aref was the first syndicate leader that did not belong to state-owned media or publication houses. Syndicate members attributed Aref's win to the significant anger among journalists that the regime—despite its hegemony in syndicate affairs—had still failed to improve their working conditions. However, by

the next round of elections, the syndicate proved unable to maintain the advance in the face of entrenched interests: in 2008 members elected government-selected Makram Mohamed Ahmed, former head of Dar Al-Hilal publishing. In another election held in 2009, Ahmed won again in a tight election against Rashwan. Journalists at state-run newspapers and agencies, however, reported a concerted, and quite costly, effort at intimidating and enticing them to vote for Ahmed. In a move typical of the previous regime, NDP supporters also tried to frame Rashwan as a former Nasserist turned supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood, or the “banned organization,” as it was then called in the press.

<sup>32</sup> Karim Yehia, *Tamarrud Fi Al-Thakana* (Rebellion in the Barracks) (Cairo: Gazirat Al Ward Publishing, 2012) 174-183.

<sup>33</sup> Yehia, interview by author, Cairo, April 2013.

<sup>34</sup> Adel Iskandar, “A Year in the Life of Egypt’s Media: A 2011 Timeline,” *Jadaliyya*, January 26, 2012. [http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/3642/a-year-in-the-life-of-egypts-media\\_a-2011-timeline](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/3642/a-year-in-the-life-of-egypts-media_a-2011-timeline)

<sup>35</sup> “Egypt: Freedom of the Press 2012,” Freedom House, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2012/egypt>

<sup>36</sup> The image of writer and political thinker Alaa Al-Aswany challenging former Prime Minister Ahmed Shafiq on ONTV became emblematic of the new kind of accountability that the media could seek on the airwaves.

<sup>37</sup> The October 2011 Maspero demonstrations (in which 27 Coptic Christians were killed by police while protesting outside of Maspero, the state broadcasting headquarters) came to epitomize the state media at its worst: during the violence, a state-TV broadcaster urged Egyptians to come out to defend the police and in the days that followed, state newspapers portrayed biased accounts of the event. Maurice Chammah, “The Scene of the Crime,” *Arab Media and Society*, Issue 15, Spring 2012, [http://www.arabmediasociety.com/articles/downloads/20120408132709\\_Chammah\\_Maurice.pdf](http://www.arabmediasociety.com/articles/downloads/20120408132709_Chammah_Maurice.pdf).

<sup>38</sup> Merghany, April 2013.

<sup>39</sup> In late 2011, the syndicate held a series of training sessions and conferences with UNESCO aimed at developing a code for self-regulation. UNESCO eventually published a report outlining key professional ideals, but the larger conversation about professional identity in the post-revolution context is still lacking in many newsrooms.

<sup>40</sup> Sakr, *Transformations*, 85.

<sup>41</sup> *Al Masry Al Youm*, “Our journalists have never been freer, Morsy proclaims,” January 11, 2013, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/our-journalists-have-never-been-freer-morsy-proclaims>.

<sup>42</sup> Afify, “Journalist syndicate polls reveal anti-Brotherhood bloc, but many challenges lie ahead.”

<sup>43</sup> Yehia Qallash, interview by author (Arabic), Cairo, March 2013.

<sup>44</sup> Noha El-Hennawy, “Thursday Papers: Black media, beards, and commandments,” *Egypt Independent*, May 7, 2012, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/thursday-s-papers-black-media-beards-and-commandments>.

<sup>45</sup> Abeer Saadi, interview by author (English), Cairo, May 2013.

<sup>46</sup> Wael Tawfik, interview by author (Arabic), Cairo, May 2013.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Sakr, *Transformations*, 77.

<sup>49</sup> Mai Shams El Din, "Maspero workers delayed salaries highlight institution's dire finances," Egypt Independent, April 8, 2013, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/maspero-workers-delayed-salaries-highlight-institution-s-dire-finances>.

<sup>50</sup> Mendel, April 2013.

<sup>51</sup> Saadi, May 2013.

<sup>52</sup> Sakr, *Transformations*, 79.

<sup>53</sup> Balshy, interview by author, Cairo, May 2013.

<sup>54</sup> Yehia, *Tamarrud*, 196.

<sup>55</sup> Saadi, May 2013.

<sup>56</sup> Qallash, March 2013.

<sup>57</sup> Tawfik, May 2013.

<sup>58</sup> Sakr, *Transformations*, 93.