Polis – Egypt's Media War

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The Egyptian national media coverage of the bloody clampdown on the Muslim Brotherhoods sit-ins and the violence that erupted in its aftermath in Egypt gives even more evidence to support the finding of our research project on Arab media under political transitions:

> *The lack of professional field reporting in national media is not only obstructing a fair representation of diverse voices but also contributing to exacerbating social and political divisions in a dangerous game of polarization.*

Fatima El Issawi has been researching in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt. Here's her view on the coverage by the Egyptian media of the current crisis.

While the security forces were carrying out the bloody operation to clear the sit-in sites of the Muslim Brotherhood's supporters with deaths reaching hundreds, local national media was setting the scene for another war: that of Egypt against so-called 'terrorism'. The story broadcast from media studios of national TV stations, with no or extremely limited reporting from the ground, was mostly based on "information" from "security sources".

How did Egyptian media report this?

According to the narratives of both state and private media, Egypt is under an attack by extremist islamists and the army had to react to eradicate this threat. The death toll in the Islamic camp was at first totally absent from the media narratives. Instead they were broadcasting images of what they described as arms confiscated by the army from within the sit-in premises. The focus was also on the violent developments and clashes that erupted in several parts of Egypt and on the "martyrs" of the security forces.

"The world is for the people against extremism" was the slogan adopted by the liberal TV station ONTV which presented the developments as fights between the heroes of the army against the terrorists of Muslim Brotherhood. Guest's intervention were clearly calling for no mercy in dealing in Muslim Brotherhood supporters.

On the liberal TV station CBC, a commentator on the footages of burning governmental buildings was stressing "all those who call for reconciliation with them should shut up". The presenter of an-Nahar TV station, another liberal TV network, was explaining to their audiences that the violence sweeping the country are act of terrorism committed by the Islamic group. The toll death from the Muslim Brotherhood camp was reported finally, only the numbers provided by the ministry of health – denounced by the Islamic group as way below the real figures.

The dead have no identity, they did not spark questions about how they died and why, who killed them? What happened? The fast developing violent clashes all around the country did not incite Egypt's

mainstream media's curiosity to question the future of a country threatened by sharp divisions amid serious economic and political crises.

From their studios, presenters led their media war, bombarding their audiences with a propagandist military discourse and labelling the opposing party as traitors, terrorists, threats to the security, anti-Egyptian, anti-Islam.

The opposing camp was waging its own war on social media after Islamic TV channels and media were abruptly shut down immediately after the military coup. Social media becomes again the voice of those who are denied access to traditional media.

In the field where the battle is unfolding, it was mainly the correspondents of foreign media actually on the ground. For most of local media – with some few exceptions – reporting such dramatic and highly dangerous developments does not require field investigative reporting. They appear to think that they don't need to investigate the truth as they have it already delivered pre-packaged from their official sources.

On the ground, the real journalistic heroes, are those who are there not to voice the discourse of opponents or those in power, but those trying to tell a complex story as accurately as they can and without bias.

For some this was a fatal mission, among them British Sky News cameraman Mick Deane and Habiba Abdel Aziz, a 26-year-old reporter for *Gulf News*.

This article by Polis research fellow Fatima El Issawi @Elissawi

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