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Cyber Space Enabled Role for Public Administrators in Writing History: Developing Countries' Context

Winners get to write history. It is rarely accurate and many facts are distorted and misreported. This has been going on over the ages. Ancient Egyptians kings have been known to remove the cartouches carrying the names of their predecessors, and placed at the hallways of temples, tombs and pyramids, and replace them with new ones having their own engraved names. Much of the same is still going on, especially in developing countries. Many, like our Ancient Egyptian ancestors, like taking credit for deeds they have not done, and achievements they have not accomplished. **A couple of questions rise to the fore. First, with the availability of so much information on cyber space, will perpetrators find it more difficult to distort history? And second, since public administrations have always been charged with keeping records straight, what is their role in making sure history is not manipulated?**

When we studied history at school, it seemed like it was all either black or white. It was about facts, figures and dates. My freshmen year, when I took an elective history course at the American University in Cairo, I realized for the first time that studying history is completely different from what we were taught earlier on in school, and may be surprisingly enjoyable. The study of history was all about viewpoints, pros and cons and different perspectives. You needed to dig out information from various sources, documents and references to be able to understand what really happened. In the old days, this meant going to library basements and checking index cards, hard copies of periodicals, books and perhaps micro-film archives.

Now the situation is much different. After all, anybody can dig out information, watch YouTube videos of live events and news reports of live wars or follow Twitter threads and configure the truth themselves. But is that really the case?

Public administrators are notorious for keeping files. This represents one of the main pillars of Weber's bureaucracy theory, where the ideal bureaucratic organization is file based; files constitute the institutional memory of the organization, and are used as precedents that can be referred to in order to guide future action. Some elements of the bureaucracy theory may be losing favor these days, but its advocacy for the importance of files and documents in governments is not. Accordingly, public administrators have a role in documenting history and they should uphold their responsibility for doing so. For example, Ministries of Education should have a role in checking the objectivity of history and civic education books. Ministries of Culture should have a role in preserving artifacts from the different historical eras, spreading knowledge, and building public libraries, archival repositories and knowledge hubs. Ministries responsible for Information and Communication Technology should provide well-functioning communication infrastructure, and work in cooperation with the major social media companies to make sure they refrain from spreading fake news or misinformation.

Do public administrators in developing countries fulfill their various responsibilities? There are some doubts. The history taught in public schools in developing countries is very politicized. It all depends on the ruling regime and what messages they want to get through to the younger generations. It gets changed from year to year. Civic education curricula list the achievements of the regime in power and downgrade any other achievements. Ministries of Culture, in their display of historical artifacts, may downplay some aspects of history, and emphasize others. ICT Ministries have their ways and means for selectively blocking certain websites and news agencies and allowing others. Traditional T.V. news channels are oftentimes manipulated by governments and used as propaganda machines.

A number of prerequisites are needed for an objective documentation and study of history:

- ***Good governance*** with all that it entails, especially transparency, rule of law and access to information. This will provide the needed context for a citizen-responsive public administration capable and willing to carry out its responsibilities objectively and scrupulously.
- ***A greater degree of democracy*** where there is room for different views and people are capable of expressing themselves without repression and without fear, and where historians and researchers are capable of expressing and documenting different views about what happened and is happening.
- ***Good quality education*** that teaches students to think for themselves and be critical about what they are presented with as historical facts, and be capable of doing research themselves, fact checking and sorting through documents to identify what is credible and what is not.
- ***Cyberspace*** and all the data and information it carries is definitely a very valuable resource, but you have to detach yourself from the entanglements and the misinformation politically propagated.
- ***A greater role for universities and international organizations*** similar to UNESCO not only in documenting world history, but also in disseminating the main findings of their historical research in more user-friendly formats that meet the needs of the current generations.
- ***Enhanced national and global efforts to overcome the digital divide*** and provide better access to the internet and ICT to all.

To conclude, public administrators with integrity, relying on cyberspace, can come up with a more objective record of history.