

Story Corp Project

Interview Transcript

Interviewer: Perihane Mostafa

Narrator: Dr. Firas Al- Atraqchi

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Place: Narrator's office P029 in Journalism and Mass Communication Department,

The American University in Cairo

College: The American University in Cairo

Prof.: Dr. Kim Fox

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The interviewee is Dr. Firas Al- Atrqchi. He was born in Beirut, on 26th October 1970. He is The Professor of Practice in the Journalism and Mass Communication Department and The Academic Adviser of the Caravan. He received his BSc (1994) and MA (1997) from AUC.

This person was worth interviewing because he is a professional journalist and very integrated in the media field. With his work background, he built his vision in which he wants to develop the media to the best. Furthermore, as I was an editor in Caravan, I worked with him and I saw his enthusiasm in work and his great experience.

List of interest topics touched on by the narrator:

- The effective role of media by delivering the necessary information.
- Al Gesira's strategy in covering Egyptian news.
- The poor coverage of the Egyptian state television especially, during the first days of the revolution.
- The youth and revolution effect over the Egyptian state television.
- The latest incidents in Egypt; Maspiro, Mohamed Mahmoud street clashes, and the veiled woman.
- The different coverage in most of the events.
- The unknown people behind the little coverage of the Former Mubarak's trial.
- The Port Saeid massacre.
- The failure of the civil disobedience.
- The next generation's enthusiasm and hope.
- The effectiveness of accountability and the expression of opinion.

22 February 2012

Persons present: Perihane Mostafa

Dr. Firas Al- Atraqchi

Mostafa: Hi. I'm Perihane Mostafa. Today, I'm going to conduct an interview with The Professor of Practice in the Journalism and Mass Communication Department and The Academic Adviser of The Caravan, Dr Firas Al-Atraqchi, to know more about the role of media on the current Egyptian situation.

Mostafa: Dr. Firas, based on your experience in the field of media, to what extent does the media help in shaping people's perspective?

Al-Atraqchi: Has a very important role to play, particularly in a country that is trying to become a democracy. The media has a very constructive role to play, in terms of providing people with the necessary information that they would need to make inform decisions, whether when they go to vote or their considering which parties to join and so on. So, it is the media responsibility as well as service to the public that it provides them with as comprehensive coverage it can, of news events and the politics that are shaping the country.

Mostafa: And being the Senior Editor in Al Gesira, can you tell us about the difference between the international coverage and the Egyptian coverage?

Al-Atrqchi: Yes, when it comes to international coverage of Egypt, it always tends to look at the events in Egypt through the prism of how Egypt rules and is understood to be in front of capitals. Al Jazeera probably has an advantage over other foreign media and that it is from the region, and it has included people from Egypt and the other Arab countries as well as foreign correspondents who have made it their priority to understand the new events and the political atmosphere that is going on is completely better than their colleagues in the other foreign media. I have been said that local media in covering local events might have been affected by the 40 or 50 year relationship of the government, so the government's hold on media over the past five decades is surely to play a role in what media decides to be a priority and what the media decides to ignore. So for example in the first 10 days of the Egyptian revolution in Jan 25 on Jan 25, 2011, state media could not provide the coverage that independent media or foreign media was covering because they had to first get the green light from the authorities and the authorities might not have wished or in fact has been upset. In fact, the authority did not wish to capture the public decision that we saw so in this regard local state, particularly state controlled media ended up choosing a side until they discovered that they will be back in a while in which case they flip to become the voice of the revolution.

Mostafa: Do you think that Egyptian media channels changed their strategy and policy in coverage after the Egyptian revolution?

Al-Atracchi: I think they did that causematically. I remember reading newspapers in February just after Mubarak step down and they all had these supplements about the youth of Egypt, and the revolutionary youth of Egypt, and how the youth of Egypt that want to change and so on. So, I find that they are forced to embrace the revolution and what it stood for, but they did not fundamentally apply what the revolution really stood for. That's why we ended up having very scewed emerge once again, like the Maspiro massacre for example, or coverage of events in November in Mohamed Mahmoud street clashes, or coverage of events recently in late December and January when we had clashes and that a poor women was video tapped being raped by soldiers and was a veiled woman, and the state TV provided it in an account, and the independent media provide it in a different account. So we see that although state media appeared to be service to the revolution and the changes that were met to be brought on by the revolution they really didn't change.

Mostafa: And to what extent does the former President Mubarak's trial affect the media coverage?

Al-Atracchi: I don't think it affects the media coverage very much. I think it's getting very little media coverage, comparatively speaking other expected to be much more fair about. I guess that because somebody running the media or have control over a channel doesn't want to make to a big issue of this.

Mostafa: And do you see that the Port Saeid incident coverage revealed the whole truth?

Al-Atrachchi: No, I think that there are many components of the Port Saeid massacre that are left and covered and nobody has made to pay, they have to been government or prominent cliché that is going on, and they made their suggestions of whom they blame. However, there is no enforcement that comes on the back of this capability, which is again the media should be calling for somebody to pay for what happened and no one has even paid to the “baltageya” that’s how they call them. So, again the media should be playing a role or by calling for answers questions to be answered. But, it’s not doing that.

Mostafa: Do you think that media is one of the main factors causing the failure of the civil disobedience?

Al-Atrachchi: No, I don’t think so. I think the failure. For going to say the civil disobedience movement failed because it itself lack the command and the support structure, and I don’t feel that they were able to affectively communicate their message to a largest section of the egyptian population, and they were like sort of a gap and into that gap state media entered and was able to influence people. I won’t blame state media. I actually blame the civil disobedience movement for their failure.

Mostafa: And do you think that AUC student movement in the civil disobedience days helped to improve the country's situation or it doesn't affected at all. As the media said that AUC is affecting the situation in Egypt?

Al-Atraqchi: They have to specify what they mean by affecting the situation in Egypt. AUCians are all young people that want the future for their country. So, you can't just put them out by saying they are one side, you can't polarize this discussion . Unfortunately, egyptian state media was trying to do that but it doesn't help anyone. I think it's contrary to the hopes of many who want to develop their country.

Mostafa: Do you think that the coming approach can improve the country's situation?

Al-Atraqchi: What coming approach?

Mostafa: The upcoming approach of the next generation.

Al-Atraqchi: There are several key themes that need to be implemented in Egypt. Number one is accountability. If somebody has a flood or failed economic program, then they should be help the accountable for it. One way to hold accountable is the potter box, they don't get to vote in the next elections pshcho. Freedom of expression also allows people like labors and people who work in several industries to protest what they feel or unfair working conditions. You know nobody is unhappy on his job will going to do good

job. When u feel respected either by media or authorities, integrate and invest more themselves in developing their country. So I think there is hope, because there is a growing atmosphere of public say. A lot of people are speaking out openly whether in the café, on TV, interview, twitter, social media, etc etc. More and more people are expressing their opinion and that's always a good thing.

Mostafa: Okay, thank you so much Dr. Firas for your time.

Al-Atrqchi: Thank you very much. Thank you.