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Media researchers between scientific awareness and social commitment

Case Study: Egypt

The present study surveys the evolution of journalism and mass media as an academic discipline in Egypt through three generations: the pioneers who belongs to different academic disciplines mainly humanities and social sciences, the second generation who graduated from the department of Journalism, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University and the third generation of media researchers who are graduates of the Faculty of mass Communication, Cairo University. The study focuses on the third generation in terms of the heterogeneity of their professional attitudes and ideologies, the problems they encounter and the rights they are denied because of these problems.

The Study particularly stresses the importance of media academics and researchers having social awareness with its various manifestations as well as academic awareness. It equally highlights the academic commitment the media researcher should display to his / her field and the ethical commitment to the academic community and the issues of the Egyptian Society at large.

The Egyptian academic community in the field of Mass Media and Journalism is made up of three generations; the pioneers who are the graduates of the Institute of Editing,

Translation and Journalism in Cairo University. Those graduates have initially graduated from different social and human sciences departments (History - Languages - Geography – Arabic Language and Literature).

Those pioneers have presented their academic contribution in the form of a solid foundation for the Media studies. They also represented the nucleus of the academic community in the field of Media research for they have played a role in bringing up a whole generation of academic cadres who were the backbone of the Egyptian press and other Media professions for forty years.

It is worthy to mention that the original specializations of the pioneers were to be seen through their research output in the field of Mass Media. Their early contributions was naturally confined to conducting historical studies using its analytical tools and literary methodologies. This generation should be highly esteemed for their credit as pioneers who explored this unknown field of knowledge at that time in most of the academic institutions worldwide.

As for the second generation, they are the graduates of the Journalism Department in the Faculty of Arts, Cairo University. This generation was fortunate enough to specialize in the field of Journalism and Media from the beginning of their academic years and had a first hand experience from the pioneers' generation. The second generation succeeded in overcoming the shortcomings of the pioneers while attempting to explore and set definite boundaries for this new discipline in the domain of the social and human sciences. The contributions of this generation widened with the expansion of media specializations such as the audio- visual media in addition to journalism. This generation was influenced by the Western school in

media research especially the American school and this was reflected in their methodologies of research. There is also some professors who prefer the French school of methodology, on the other hand, critical approach is emerging and it is gaining more ground among the researchers of the third generation.

The third generation of media researchers are the graduates of the Faculty of Mass Communication which was established in 1972. This generation was quite fortunate in benefiting from the previous experiences of two generation and the emergence of new horizons of specializations in various fields of research which became more specific due to the accumulation of knowledge realized through the efforts of the second generation. But the research problem emanating from the epistemological and methodological intervention between the different media specializations. On one hand and between the field of journalism and media and social and human sciences on the other emerged as well.

Furthermore, there is the main problem concerning the influence of Western methodologies and research instruments and the degree of its compatibility with the Egyptian media problems and phenomena with it trying

unravel its components and laws through the research instruments fitting for it.

The emergence of the third generation of researchers was accompanied with establishing a number of Media Departments in many Egyptian universities which meant that there is an increasing number of researchers but with no specialized professors available to train them and make them qualified researchers.

The new generation of Media researchers suffer from a number of problems that can be summarized as follows:

- 1- The lack of academic references that cover the different branches of Media specializations whether traditional or new, in Arabic or in English. This problem surfaced when the Revolution in Communication and then in Information occurred and it caused new specializations to emerge in the field of Media, Communication and Information.
- 2- The inferior level of library services and the poor performance of its personnel coupled with their inability to cope with the Information Revolution whether in data saving and storage or in media documentation, in addition to the loss of large amounts of old I newspapers reserved in the National Records Bureau.
- 3- The absence of academic co-ordination between the Media Departments on one hand and between these Departments and the Media institutions on the other. This, in its turn, has led to numerous repetitions in the topics covered by the Masters and Ph.D. degrees in the Egyptian universities. Moreover, the Media institutions did not benefit from the research results in enhancing the professional performance of its personnel nor in the advancement of them intellectually.
- 4- The professors supervising the researches are preoccupied in many ways for they are divided between their academic work official duties and teaching in the different Media Departments, at the same time in addition to being away in the Gulf States for as many as ten years which deprives the researchers from the professors' academic supervision and information in their field of specialization. This, consequently, has its negation repercussions on the academic supervision on the Masters and Ph.D. theses.
- 5- The poor academic qualification and lack of training for conducting researches in most of the media departments in the Egyptian universities.

- 6- The wide spread phenomenon of exploiting personal relations and private interests among the academic and research communities and its devastating effect on the quality of the academic theses and the degrees given to the researchers.
- 7- The scarcity of the academic conferences and seminars which play a role in creating an encouraging atmosphere that can guarantee the promotion and advancement of the performance in the field of research and lay the foundation for scholar debates and interaction between different generations of researchers.
- 8- The attempts of intervention and corruption executed by the foreign research centers via the heavily financed research plans which aim at recruiting media researchers who suffer from low income, purpose and academic supervision, the wide spread of the individualistic spirit and favoritism based on gang-like criteria among the decision makers on the academic level in the universities and research centers.
- 9- The absence team-work in the field of media researches while an isolationist spirit prevails among those working in various media specializations and among those and others working in other social sciences.

Commitment in the Media Social Researches:

Whenever the expression academic commitment is mentioned, it had to be coupled with the expression of academic freedoms. This simply and basically means the right of academics to conduct their research in a democratic atmosphere that allows them to freely choose the topic, the appropriate "research and method the theoretical frameworks which enables the realization of the relative truth in the fields of specialized academic knowledge and also allow them to publish the results of their researches either in a written form or oral one. One of the basic guarantees for academic freedom is to ensure and safeguard the independence of the universities and the research centres in the face of any intervention governmental or otherwise. The academic freedom is divided into two aspects, the first one is about the social responsibility of the academic research while the second aspect is concerned with the personal responsibility of the researcher towards himself and towards the academic community he belongs to.

As for the media researchers aforementioned, the testimonies of those

researchers reveal that there are numerous obstacles that hinder them from enjoying such rights. Undoubtedly, obstacles make the academic freedom equation unbalanced because the commitment should be coupled with a number of freedoms.

The researchers stated their legitimate rights such as to enjoy full and integrated academic supervision, to be provided with the most updated references in the field of specialization, protect the researchers from the temptations of the foreign research centres, loosen the bureaucratic restrictions that impede researchers, allow them to participate in conferences and symposia locally and internationally, ensure that the results of the researches to be applied in a way that enhances the professions related to Media and those working in it.

The types of Media Researchers:

The field of Media research in Egypt abounds with different types of researchers who vary according to their class, upbringing, mental abilities, social awareness and academic knowledge. These factors provide the foundations for their academic and ethical commitments. The Media researchers in

Egypt are divided into the following types:

1- The committed researcher both academically and ethically is the researcher whose commitment emanates from a solid code of ethics and an upbringing that is broadminded and cultured. Moreover, he must possess a special talent polished by his thorough readings and ample training on various methodologies of research and is equipped with a theoretical background of his specialization, its main themes and its place on the map of social sciences.

This type is keen on advancing his research capabilities through participating in conferences and seminars and he is characterized with a comprehensive vision of the issues and challenges facing the Egyptian society from within and from outside and its positive and negative impact on the Media.

2- The technocrat type who is dexterous in applying the empirical approach in research and is eager to conduct as many researches as he can without taking into consideration the contribution to his field of specialization. This type is an expert playing with media expressions and excludes consciously the interactive relationship between social reality and media as a profession and academic

specialization. Furthermore, this type can be recruited in conducting media researches that can pose threats to the interests of the academic community he belongs to. This type puts his personal interests above any other criteria or ethics and sees in the academic 'research a social ladder by which he can gain wealth, fame and power among the decision makers in all fields.

- 3- The third type of researchers is the worst type and is characterized by opportunism. He is proficient in applying research methodologies within the framework dictated by the foreign research centers and does not see in his profession anything except a means to promote oneself financially and socially in the shortest period of time possible.

The most urgent need the researchers' testimonies asserted was drafting a code of ethics that comprises general principals that states academic and ethical commitments in the field media research and includes some moral and professional codes.

The Media Researcher and the Duality of the Awareness and Commitment:

it is undeniable that social awareness is the main pillar upon which the media researcher's academic knowledge is

based on this knowledge is composed of a number of levels. The first level is the historical awareness which is a top prerequisite in based on the media research which means that the researcher must have thorough knowledge about the history of his society and most definitely the history of his specialization. The historical awareness provides the media researcher with a foundation through which he can fully understand many phenomena in journalism and media in its sound historical context. Thus, the researcher can ably choose his research topic and interpret the results of the research. The second level concerns the cultural awareness of the researcher by which we mean the necessity of deepening his knowledge about the civilization & cultural background of his society in order to define the most appropriate method of studying the current phenomena in journalism and media. The third and last level is divided into two parts the first one is about the theoretical awareness that requires from the researcher grasping the theories that determine the relationship between his specialization and other social and human sciences whether theoretically or methodologically and also the common

fields of research. It also requires the researcher's familiarity with different ideologies prevalent in his time in order that his theoretical awareness be based on sound bases.

As for the second part, it is the methodological awareness that requires from the researcher to grasp all the methodological problems that encounter his specialization in order to soundly choose the most appropriate methodologies of research and analytical tools for studying the media phenomena that is related to the specialization.

All these criteria help in determining the level of awareness of the Media researcher by what he chooses to study, his research priorities and selecting the appropriate methodologies for his research topic.

What may precede the aforementioned is the researcher's awareness of the current political, economic and cultural situation in his country and his perception of the hidden network of relations and interests connect the Media community with other power groups in different fields. Furthermore, there is another level of awareness that is the social awareness and it requires from the researcher to

study and understand the class structure of the society so he can determine which social group will benefit from the results of his research or which group he wants to voice out its concerns, ideas and interests.

Undoubtedly, identifying the levels of social and academic awareness among the Media researchers helps us to revealing the other side of the awareness that is the commitment with all its different levels and approaches. There are three forms of commitment in the field of the Media research:

Firstly: the academic commitment towards the specialization and it includes:

(A) Committed to the requirements of the research methodology such as the clarity of the research objectives and conducting the research fully with all its sages: observation, description and interpretation.

(B) to be Committed to objectivity which the Media researcher can realize through the following:

- 1- A comprehensive outlook on the Media reality as part and parcel of the social reality.
- 2- The researcher's should acknowledge his theoretical and ideological stand.

3- Understanding the law of change and becoming as a fundamental law that controls the media phenomena as part of the society dynamics that cannot be understood except through a historical background.

4- The expansion of the data base with diversified sources.

It must be noted that the concept of objectivity in the social and human sciences means finding a correlation between every individual case and overall structure of proofs in a way that enables him finally to develop interpreting patterns free from moral judgment. There are two levels of objectivity the first is the external formal level that focuses on the description. The other involves analyzing and interpreting the movement of phenomena horizontally and vertically to follow its chronological development and record its relation with other phenomena accompanying it in addition to stating the stimuli and reasons for these phenomena.

(C) To be Committed to the academic integrity which is manifested in being honest in quoting from academic sources, ascribing every information to its original source, being accurate in information gathering and avoiding distorting summaries and rhetoric verbosity.

(D) To be Committed to the critical perspective in dealing with media phenomena and drawing comparisons in different stages of research whether on the methodological level or on the objective level.

Secondly: The ethical commitment to the academic community which the media researcher belongs to and it includes the following:

(A) Respecting the rights or collegueship and not to undermine the achievements of the academic community in the field of mass media.

(B) To be committed to constructive criticism to the academic efforts of his community.

(C) To be committed to respect and think highly of the value of teamwork and promoting it in order to enhance the research in the field of mass media.

(D) To be committed to the spirit of continuity and co-operation and continuous coordination with those working in the Media as a profession.

Thirdly: The ethical commitment to the Egyptian Media social issues and it includes the following:

(A) To be Committed to the right of the public to know and communicate and

incorporating the public as a main party to the researches concerning the communicative processes.

(B) To be Committed to the national certainties in the political and economic Fields.

(C) To be committed to Respect the heritage of the Arab-Islamic civilization in the historical context of the Egyptian society with its Pharonic, Coptic and Mediterranean tributaries.

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