

# Working Paper

## The Egyptian Experience in Dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic: Between Politics and the Media

*AFA Working Paper, AFA in cooperation with  
the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF)  
and the VolkswagenStiftung*



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## **The Egyptian Experience in Dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic: Between Politics and the Media**

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In dealing with the Covid-19 crisis, the Egyptian government tended to focus more on the message communicated via the media and political considerations than on the professional and scientific dimensions of the pandemic – despite their presence at times. The government also witnessed the emergence of a social dichotomy in dealing with the pandemic and in holding other communities responsible for its spread. The Egyptian media dealt with the Covid-19 challenge at multiple levels related to demonstrating the strength and presence of the state as well as its ability to combat internal and external dangers.

The suddenness of the event and its deviation from the usual news and political context – in addition to the lack of experience among media teams in dealing with an unprecedented pandemic – posed a challenge to media outlets throughout the world, including in democratic and highly industrialized countries. The pandemic also provoked a discussion about how to rapidly respond to such an exceptional event and reset the priorities of the media as well as remedy its shortcomings. The message conveyed by media and political discourse concentrated on presenting sufficient representation of the efforts being made by the government in confronting the pandemic, following a state of panic that initially overcame many citizens. The government entered into confrontations with channels belonging to, or considered to be affiliated with, the Muslim Brotherhood and others. Thus, the political aspect was strongly present in dealing with this event, and the media discourse went beyond

issues related to the virus, ways of resisting it, prevention measures and health problems in order to address various internal and external political issues.

In this paper, we discuss some telling issues from the Egyptian experience in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic by focusing on media discourse while also considering the health map and the notable role of the medical syndicate throughout the crisis.

## The medical map

Records from Egypt's medical syndicate reveal that the total number of doctors still practicing medicine in the governmental sector is 188,535, or 1.88 doctors for every 1,000 citizens. The number of doctors in both the governmental and private sector is 212,835, or 2.1 doctors for every 1,000 citizens. The number of medical school graduates has reached 10,000 annually, providing 2.3 doctors per 1000 citizens, a rate that the World Health Organization has announced as being sufficient.<sup>1</sup>

Despite governmental employment representing a dream for many people in Egypt on account of the advantages and social security associated with it, most doctors desert such positions; they refrain from working in the public sector and choose either the private sector or emigrate to work overseas. This has led to a severe shortage in the number of doctors practicing in the country. Out of a total of 220,000 Egyptian doctors, 120,000 work abroad. Additionally, there are nearly 65,000 doctors working in other Arab countries, raising the question as to why doctors abandon governmental hospitals.<sup>2</sup> Who is responsible for the lives of patients for whom medical assistance or operations are delayed because of the absence of doctors? According to international standards, one doctor should be available for every 350 patients. In Egypt, the situation is quite different, as there is only one doctor for every 800 citizens.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Deabe, Aya; "A Doctor for Every One Thousand Citizens in Egypt. The Most Important Numbers About Doctors At the Level of the Republic" Al Youm Al Sabae. November 23, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2Iq2lod>

<sup>2</sup> Atia, Dalia "The Government's hospitals are without Doctors. The Migration of White Coats Threatens the Medical Profession in Egypt": Al Ahram Portal. September 9, 2019 <http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/2270874.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

The total number of hospitals in the governmental and private sectors in 2018 was around 1,848 throughout the various governorates. The total number of hospital beds in the governmental and private sector hospitals amounted to 131,000. The statistics published in the health newsletter issued by the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) state that the public sector's share of hospitals has reached 691 in comparison to 1,157 for the private sector.<sup>4</sup>

One of the main problems that remains is a shortage of doctors working under the Egyptian Ministry of Health (around 60,000); the ministry actually needs around 110,000 doctors, resulting in a shortage of over 50,000 doctors. Additionally, the number of doctors working under the ministry has been declining each year while the needs of the ministry have been increasing in the wake of the recently implemented comprehensive health security measures, meaning that this problem has the potential of inflating even more.<sup>5</sup>

According to the same statistics, there is an acute shortage in the number of doctors compared to the international standards in 25 governorates. The places that most closely approximate these standard are the governorates of South Sinai and Cairo, while in governorates such as Kafr El Sheikh, Assiut and Port Said, the rate ranges between 25- 50% of the international standard. The shortage in the governorates of New Valley, Beni Suif, Qenna and Fayoum hovers around 25%.<sup>6</sup>

In terms of the relationship between the medical syndicate and the state, it is widely known that the syndicate's council enjoys autonomy from the state apparatus and has functioned professionally throughout the crisis even though its relationship with the official media witnessed several episodes of tension. The syndicate complained several times that the government and the minister of health ignored its demands that had focused on four main issues. The first involved overcoming the shortage of

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<sup>4</sup> Adel, Medhat, "CAPMAS: 1848 The Number of Hospitals in the Republic and 131 Beds in 2018" Al Youm Al Sabae. April 20,2020 <https://bit.ly/32Bj1QB>

<sup>5</sup> Abdel Hadi, Dr. Al Said "The Shortage in Doctors: Reasons and Solutions" Al Watan. May 19, 2020 <https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/4778627>

<sup>6</sup> Hussien, Emad ElDin "Do We Need New Doctors?!" Al Shorouk, May 26, 2020 <https://www.shorouknews.com/columns/view.aspx?cdate=26052020&id=cc5533a4-7f94-4055-9c29-170eb5cc29eb>

protective gear, especially since Egypt has suffered from a significant shortage in the number of doctors after many of them migrated abroad weakening the abilities of the health system. The second issue was related to the restrictions on testing medical teams (Covid-19 infections). This was an issue that the syndicate considered to be a primary reason for why so many doctors became martyrs while on duty. The third issue had to do with providing quarantine hospitals for doctors, which is a generally agreed-upon measure applied to numerous groups in the Egyptian society and, therefore, should also be the case for those who put their lives at risk in order to combat the virus. It makes little sense that these medical professionals are unable to find a place to provide them with treatment when they become infected. The fourth demand was related to granting the “doctor martyrs” who die as a result of the Covid-19 the same status as martyrs of the army and police.

It is notable that the state was slow to open up channels of communication with the syndicate and the prime minister was late to meet with the head of the medical syndicate.<sup>7</sup> State representatives actually admitted to the existence of some shortcomings at a time when some media outlets and sites were polluting the atmosphere between doctors and the government by accusing the former of being traitors who were working in accordance with political agendas; regardless of anyone attempting to exploit such a crisis politically, the way to confront this attempt should be through solving the crisis not by engaging politically with the exploiters.

## **The media discourse and the Covid-19 crisis**

### **1 A strong productive state that implements the law**

The media discourse has concentrated on the idea of the state’s presence and strength, with repeated talk of “Egypt following up on everything internally and externally. Egypt is keeping an eye on the Renaissance Dam and, at the same time, follows the Covid-19 issue closely and is controlling the pandemic as well as the monetary

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<sup>7</sup> Fathy, Mohamed “Member of the Medical” Mabdouly Promised the Head of the Syndicate to Open Continuous Channels with the Syndicate”. Al Shorouk. May 28, 2020 <https://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=28052020&id=b6463f4f-27ef-40b6-9134-03ab3f9e6cbe>

reserve, trade and industry, the production cycle, the security situation and the security of the borders. Egypt is monitoring everything around it, and happening within it, with the same sense of importance and urgency”. The media personality Amr Adib (one of the most famous in Egypt) added: “When the damned virus knocked on Egypt’s door, it was surprised with what it saw. It saw a state that is very well grounded. It saw a state that produces, eats, drinks and does not lack anything. It saw a state with a respectable strategic reserve that can stand in the face of anything difficult. It saw a state that produces the necessary means of protection such as face masks, ventilators and alcohol and also exports them.”<sup>8</sup>

Discussions in print and visual media have referred extensively to the presence of the government in confronting the pandemic; these channels presented governmental efforts to return those stranded abroad in a detailed, and sometimes propagated, manner.<sup>9</sup> It has asserted across all media channels that the government was creating a plan to return its children stranded abroad to their home and provide them with all the means of sustenance and medical care throughout their period of quarantine in the context of the state’s comprehensive plan to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic and limit its repercussions.

Light has repeatedly been shed on this role in great detail, starting with procedures related to reception and testing to the transportation and sustenance of Egyptians returning from abroad, as well as the readiness of university dorms to accommodate them during their quarantine period. Various media outlets have published interviews with Egyptians returning from abroad in which the returnees announced their appreciation for the efforts made by the state to bring them home once again along with their gratitude to the political leadership and the government for responding to their pleas, giving them a good reception and providing all the forms of care they needed. The state has been portrayed as strong, in control and never erring.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Adib, Amr “When Corona Knocked on Egypt’s Door, It Entered to Find a Grounded State”. April 11, 2020 <https://bit.ly/3pjtg5S>

<sup>9</sup> Hassan, Karim “From the Airports to the Places of Quarantine” Al Ahram Portal. May 15, 2020 <http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/2406106.aspx>

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*

Media discourse has concentrated on a message implying that work and production are continuing despite Covid-19, with the government taking the necessary preventive measures, even though economic and commercial activities were halted in the majority of countries around the world; “but Egypt continues to work on the national projects that it has started with the intention of reviving work in different sectors while taking into consideration all the precautionary measures and procedures necessary for protecting the workers and those in contact with the different work places, giving the third underground line as an example”.<sup>11</sup> Some media sources affiliated with the government expedited upon what was called “the renaissance of the agricultural sector spearheaded by agricultural exports that witnessed a large leap and invaded European and Arab markets, making Egypt the foremost exporter of citrus fruit with a total of 1.8 tons”.<sup>12</sup> In general, it can be said that print and visual media have stressed the message that the state is pursuing two paths. The first involves confronting the health effects of the pandemic and the second relates to continuous work on national projects and agriculture. In this respect, the media has concentrated on mega projects while reporting on the situation of small and medium projects has receded.

It is also noticeable that, when the media mentions citizens, it has concentrated on state subsidies but rarely on any civil initiatives that people have undertaken. It has provided wide coverage about aid that the government provided, such as the monthly payment of 500 Egyptian pounds for temporary workers who were out of work during the pandemic. There was also intensive media reporting about the activities of large organizations in the face of the consequences of Covid-19, foremost among which was the Tahia Masr organization that is affiliated with the presidency, as well as the Food Bank and Resala, two very large organizations. At the same time, talk about the small organizations that work in neighborhoods and villages has diminished.

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<sup>11</sup> Badr, Nabil “The Third Line of the Metro. One of Egypt’s National Prorjects that Continue Despite the Corona Pandemic”. Al Ahram Portal. May 16, 2020 <http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/2407369.aspx>

<sup>12</sup> Hamed, Ahmed “The Corona Pandemic Intensifies the Efforts of the Egyptian State to Increase Its Agricultural Exports”. Al Ahram Portal, May 10, 2020 <http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/2404839.aspx>



The discourse of the Egyptian media has also concentrated on the role of the state apparatus, especially the army and the police force, in facing the Covid-19 pandemic, providing extensive coverage of the movement undertaken by the medical departments of the armed forces aiming to sanitize and disinfect a large number of critical areas, main streets, buildings and establishments. It has also referred to the role of the armed forces in providing food items and cleaning products to citizens via outlets and cars belonging to the National Service Product Organization, at reduced prices, and distributing free medical protective devices to citizens in public areas<sup>13</sup>.

Moreover, the media has concentrated on the role of the armed forces in raising the effectiveness of a number of university dorms in several governorates – including at Cairo University, Ain Shams University, Helwan University, Alexandria University, Mansoura University, Suez Canal University and Assiut University – so they could be used as quarantine areas for Covid-19 patients if the situation required.<sup>14</sup> The Egyptian media has also expanded on the efforts of the Ministry of the Interior to confront transgressions related to the procedures of the lockdown and take legal action against offenders, as well as closing down restaurants, cafes and malls and dealing with all forms of commercial fraud by monitoring markets.<sup>15</sup>

## 2 Engaging with political issues internally and externally

More recent media discourse has been keen to engage with a number of political issues raised internally and abroad, including a vigorous opposition to the release of some prisoners, considering this part of suspicious calls by members of the terrorist Muslim Brotherhood organization aimed engaging in ransacking and looting activities.<sup>16</sup> Media discourse has differentiated between pardoning some prisoners that

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<sup>13</sup> Fayed, Mohamed Mahmoud “Men of the Armed Forces Donate 100 Million Pounds For the Tahya Misr Fund To Confront Corona”. Al Akhbar Portal. April 21, 2020 <https://bit.ly/38vKSoS>

<sup>14</sup> Salem, Maha “The Armed Forces Raises The Efficiency of a Number of University Dorms In the Context of Its Efforts to Confront Corona” Al Ahram. May 17, 2020 <http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/2407904.aspx>

<sup>15</sup> Mostafa, Asmaa “The Interior Ministry Shuts Down 372 Restaurants and Shops Breaching the Rules of Protection Against Corona”. Akhbar Al Youm. May 15, 2020 <https://bit.ly/3piTcyj>

<sup>16</sup> “Suspicious Calls By the Terrorist Ikhwan Organization To Incite Chaos and Distruction”. Al Ahram Portal. March 18, 2020. <http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/2385651.aspx>



do not constitute a danger to society and releasing terrorists and members of the Brotherhood who pose a grave danger to society.

Using numerous newspapers and websites, the Egyptian media has also addressed many calls and accusations launched by the Muslim Brotherhood concerning the political, economic and health situation. There has been a particular concern with discrediting the Brotherhood's propaganda claims that cast doubts on the participation of the armed forces in providing food for Egyptians. In this context, they refer to the Western media's assertion that third-world countries will be the areas hit hardest due to of the weakness of these states in terms of controlling and organizing their domestic food markets. Food experts (without specifying who they are), however, assert that Egypt will be an exception to this crisis thanks to the system in place that is sponsored by the armed forces and that has been greatly enhanced in the past few years, providing Egyptians with protection from the dangers of this crisis<sup>17</sup>.

Political engagement has been extended, reaching a point of confrontation with states such as Turkey and Qatar that Egypt view as supportive of the forces of extremism and terrorism. There was subsequently extensive coverage about the rising number of Covid-19 infections in both Turkey and Qatar along with a presentation of the deteriorating economic, health and living conditions in Turkey<sup>18</sup>.

### **3 The problem lies with the people**

The Covid-19 crisis has revealed the existence of an influential movement within politics and the media, stemming from the assumption that "the people are ignorant" and that the government is exerting all its efforts in confronting the Covid-19 pandemic – efforts that are being wasted on account of the people's lack of awareness. Many officials propagated the idea that the general populace is responsible for the spread of the pandemic and that "people are unaware". One question that needs to be answered is: How did these people become unaware? (If we give in to the idea that this statement is true.) Are the reasons genetic or due to a socio-political

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<sup>17</sup> "The Corona Crisis Exposes the Melevolent Plans of the Terrorist Organization" Video. Al Ahram Portal. May 15, 2020 <http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/2406259.aspx>

<sup>18</sup> Nazih, Ahmed "Qatar Exceeds the 30000 Coronavirus Infection". Akhbar Al Youm. May16, 2020 <https://bit.ly/3klwKkn>

context? And even while the second reply is more instinctive, many officials and media personalities have ignored it.

People's breach of home quarantine measures is not specific to Egyptians or Arabs alone. In the United States, young people went to the beaches in the state of Florida without giving any thought to the statements of officials and, in France, they went for picnics in parks, forcing the French President to issue firm and strict warnings to his people on multiple occasions. Even though law is the deciding factor in confronting the transgressions of citizens in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic, a selective or lax application of the law has never been suggested as a reason for the spread of the pandemic in Egypt.

The minister of health was the most prominent among the officials that adopted the discourse of holding the people responsible for the spread of the pandemic, even though she was among the most-criticized officials on account of her subpar performance and problematic statements. In one of her assertions, the minister of health said that "if we fail in confronting Covid-19, that will be because of the behavior of the people."<sup>19</sup> She also added that the government has provided all the necessary measures to ensure the prevention of Covid-19, such as face masks and other protective equipment. She further explained that these governmental measures aim at decreasing the daily number of infected cases and mentioned that President Abdel Fatah Al Sisi is closely following the situation moment by moment. She added that "if we fail, it will be because the people did not take the necessary precautions; because we asked them to practice distancing and they insisted on leaving their houses. No state, no matter what its financial ability is, has the energy to operate hospitals that can contain the people [i.e. all of the populace] in case of an outbreak" and that no human power in any state can contain such an outbreak. The minister explained that "we are working on flattening the curve of infections so that this will pass peacefully. The state is exerting exceptional effort and we are working 24 hours a day." In another statement, she said that the increase in the number of infections is

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<sup>19</sup> Atef, Mohamed "Minister of Health "If We Fail in Confronting Corona, That Would Be Because of People's Behaviour". Masrawy. March 21, 2020 <https://bit.ly/2IsJus8>

the responsibility of the citizens, not the state,<sup>20</sup> and criticized the decline in citizen's interest in preventive measures to protect from themselves from Covid-19. She stated: "Citizens should abide by the protective measures that the state has put in place and there are some people who have not." The minister indicated that the state has provided everything, adding that the Egyptian health system is among the strongest health systems around the world in its response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Despite the lack of any scientific evidence showing that the Egyptian health system is among the strongest worldwide, officials have often repeated such claims. The vice president of the scientific committee to fight Covid-19 in the health ministry held the citizens responsible for the outbreak of the virus by failing to abide by precautionary procedures, adding that "if citizens cease to violate the precautionary measures, the number of cases will decrease"<sup>21</sup> without referring to the state's responsibility in confronting the violations of the precautionary measures.

The state's media minister repeated more than once that the procedures for confronting Covid-19 are useless without citizens abiding by the measures.<sup>22</sup> The people being responsible for the outbreak of the pandemic is a repeated feature of the political and media discourse and there has been a regression in talk about the health problems or challenges and the obstacles to putting the law into effect.

## The social battle

Theoretically, everyone is equal in the face of Covid-19, as the wealthy have not been allowed to travel to advanced industrial countries for treatment. They have been obliged to receive treatment in their own countries using the same medical services that are offered to the poor in quarantine hospitals. However, Covid-19 has opened the wound of a deep social dichotomy in a country, which had long been described as

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<sup>20</sup> Said, Ibrahim "Minister of Health: The Increase in Infections is the Responsibility of the Citizens and not the State" Video. Al Youm Al Sabae. May 9, 2020 <https://bit.ly/3eOgXJH>

<sup>21</sup> Afifi, Nermin "The Health Ministry Holds Citizens Responsible for Corona Infections: Eid Visits are the Reason" Al Watan. May 31, 2020 <https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/4806569>

<sup>22</sup> "State Minister for Media: There is no Use of the Procedures to Confront Corona Without Citizens Abiding By them" Extra News. May 7, 2020 <https://bit.ly/36wpcXo>

the most homogenous in the Arab world, in addition to an unprecedented state of bullying and instigation.

It should be noted that the rates of infection among migrants and foreigners in Europe or dark-skinned people in the United States are higher than those among other segments of these societies. This is not due to racism, per se, but rather because these disadvantaged groups receive weaker health services, tend to live in densely populated areas and have lower levels of education and higher levels of unemployment. In Egypt, society has witnessed a heated debate between its different social and class groups and witnessed cases of exchanged social bullying. Some social media websites (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) have been host to severe attacks launched against the people, going to their workplaces and publishing pictures of overcrowded areas such as Attaba Square or Shubra. People frequenting many popular areas were considered responsible for the increase in the number of infections due to their ignorance and lack of awareness while working hard and long hours to make a living. Those living in gated communities or on the beaches of Sokhna and the North Coast were also targeted and considered privileged, lacking any feelings for the people and enjoying special immunity that puts them above the law and thus able to break curfew and the rules of gatherings that are not visible to the public.

Despite the exaggeration and lack of accuracy in many of the circulating images depicting the behavior of each party, it seems that there are some who do not consider the rich, the poor and the middle classes to be in the same boat and believing that the virus does not differentiate between them. Even the theory that the rich among us can book the first plane out to travel for treatment or vacation has ended at the hand of Covid-19. So why the bullying and exchanged incitement?<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, media and government discourse ignored these issues and helped establish that the law is not implement when people break health rules or choose to apply them selectively. This inconsistent implementation of the law led people to violate other rules they did not agree with in terms of social background, culture or lifestyle. All of these are matters that have fragmented society into isolated islands despite the fact that Covid-19

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<sup>23</sup> Al Shobaki, Amr "Exchanged Bullying" Al Masry Al Youm. April 20, 2020 <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1970189>

crosses borders, cultures and classes and has not differentiated between poor developing societies and those that are rich and industrially advanced. Some have, however, insisted on turning this opportunity to unite behind high humanitarian values of equality and the state of law into hatred, instigation and bullying.

A battle was also waged in which “religious communities” confronted “decadent communities”, especially during the month of Ramadan, over the closure of mosques – something that certain groups attempted to mobilize the benefit of political agendas using a great amount of instigation and based on little logic. Old pictures of singing and dancing were being shown as recent occurrences to show that clubs are open while mosques are closed. Other pictures have been used more truthfully, showing the overcrowding among artists and crew filming a Ramadan series. At the same time, the other side responded by publishing pictures of people praying on the rooftops of houses or in front of the closed doors of mosques, depicting these individuals as a reason for the catastrophe and the outbreak of the infection. These two sides seemed to be parties at war with one another. The truth is that mutual instigation by both cannot be compared to the usual rivalries in Egypt and the Arab world about religion and art during Ramadan and at other times. This time, it is a reflection of social congestion that some have promoted on social media websites with certain bad intentions<sup>24</sup>.

We have also witnessed different types of social instigation in the age of Covid-19 that has been characterized by extreme shallowness in an attempt to prove that each class is responsible for the outbreak of the virus. We find people inciting against “the ignorant” who are, in reality, merely hard working citizens going to their jobs. Pictures of overcrowding in popular streets and squares such as Attaba and Shubra are shown, with the pretext that those who walk in these areas are solely responsible for the increase in the number of infected individuals and are accused of ignorance and lack of awareness. Concurrently, many images were distributed of a privileged minority of people living in gated community “compounds” or those who frequent the beaches of Al Ain Al Sokhna or the North Coast for weekends, being considered

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

privileged, lacking empathy for the people and enjoying immunity that renders them above the law and able to breach the quarantine and rules in secluded gatherings.

Despite the exaggerations and the lack of accuracy of many of the circulated images depicting the behavior on both sides, it seems as if there are some who do not consider that the rich and the poor are in the same boat and that the Covid-19 pandemic has not discriminated between them. The theory that the rich in our society can book a seat on the first plane to travel outside of the country for treatment or even vacation has ended at the hand of Covid-19. Nevertheless, incitement and hatred have been exchanged without any amount of political awareness. There were no efforts to promote the role of labour organizations or NGOs in creating a public opinion able to help the government win its battle of managing private hospitals and open them for those who needing treatment among the victims of the virus. The rivalry has continued in superficial and marginal ways that are not devoid of a naïve or inciteful discourse.

## Final Notes

The political and media discourse in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic has been tainted by weakness on the level of health-awareness programs. It may generally be stated that health-awareness programs were absent at the beginning and then appeared repeatedly in the form of health directives that resembled school news bulletins. They are based on preaching and demand that citizens abide by the preventive measures they lay out at a time when we are seeing a regression of programs and intensive investigations to raise people's awareness about the nature of the virus and that are able to address the rural as well as the urban populations. The health experts that have been visible on media channels across the world and in all the major newspapers have not been not granted sufficient coverage in the Egyptian media or in official

conferences to present a scientific understanding about how to fight against the virus based on deep scientific thinking.

The reaction in one of the villages in the Dakahliya governorate, where citizens tried to prevent the burial of a doctor who had died from the Covid-19 in her family's cemetery, may have reflected a complete ignorance of the nature of the virus. There was no prior occurrence of the virus exiting a dead person's grave and posing a danger to those undertaking the burial. Incidents of bullying Covid-19 patients have been frequent, revealing that the "political and media awareness" message is weak. Some people have given into the theory of the unaware and ignorant public, forgetting or simply ignoring the fact that no people in the history of humanity have been born ignorant or unaware due to any sort of genetic composition; rather, it is the political, cultural and media circumstance that make them behave this way.

**Second**, the media discourse has urged businessmen, large corporations and the wealthy to make donations to the weaker strata of society, which is in itself a commendable practice that is required during normal circumstances as well. The importance of this increases in times of hardship and crisis, whether with the intention of paying religious alms or as aid, social solidarity or for ethical reasons. At the same time, interest in presenting the initiatives and activities undertaken by small and micro organizations coming out of neighborhoods has receded as have presentations of such groups to the public to serve as an inspiring example urging people to take collective initiatives that depend mainly on the civil efforts – and thereby making everyone feel that they have ownership of the initiative so their efforts and offerings can be multiplied.

**Third**, it is useful to review the dictating attitude present in some political and media discourse and to find a way to overcome the directive and guiding messages about abiding by the preventive measures that have been repeated in a way that lacks all creativity. This could be done by way of presenting civil initiatives in villages and neighborhoods that pay attention to raising awareness among people in a more detailed way, such as by placing signs in front of post offices, banks and governmental offices, encouraging people to stand at these signs and respect safe



distancing, or by going down to the street to introduce services for citizens, the elderly and other groups.

It is true that laudable examples of giving and doing work were manifested, especially among doctors, but not enough effort has been made to present inspirational examples and initiatives that have taken place in neighborhoods and villages and could have made a bigger impact on the consciousness of people and how they deal with the crisis.

**Fourth,** it can be said in general that, in the exceptional times or times of unexpected crisis such as pandemics and wars or other similar happenings, the state needs a comprehensive crisis unit that incorporates elements outside of the state bureaucracy to work on presenting a more efficient political, administrative or professional approach than what is customary during normal circumstances. Certainly a crisis unit in the case of a pandemic such as Covid-19 would have the role of drafting a live map of the reality of the health situation and preparations to combat the spread of Covid-19 as well as the existing shortcomings. It would also be required to face questions raised by the reality of the situation, including guaranteeing the presence of medical preventive measures at all hospitals and medical units and ensuring that water and electricity are not cut off at any hospital, especially outside of Cairo. There should also be daily contact between the members of the crisis unit and the medical teams on the ground so that their problems can be resolved in a timely manner. Moreover, they should follow up on the latest scientific developments in discovering treatments and vaccines, outside the scope of propaganda. They should be in touch with the World Health Organization and its branches in Cairo, as well as the medical syndicate, and draft a vision on how to contract doctors that are not employed by the government or even from outside of Egypt, if there is a need.

Perhaps in a country with conditions such as Egypt, we do not only need a crisis unit but also “a system to confront the crisis”, or what could be called “pandemic reforms”, encompassing the necessity of setting up a new system that is more effective in confronting this pressing danger – something that has not happened. On the level of the media, it may be useful to call on health experts to set up a general

international framework for different media channels, especially visual media. It may also be acceptable to offer quick courses for media personalities and the editors in chief of programs and news bulletins to raise their awareness about a minimum amount of scientific information regarding the nature of the virus and the means to combat it. This way, the media messages they present to the public will not stray far from agreed-upon scientific facts and they can put an end to the many mistakes that the Egyptian media has made with regard to dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic.