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ABSTRACT

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Classification: LCC Code: JQ1850.A91, HM851JQ1850.A91, HM851

Language: English



Great Britain
Journals Press

LJP Copyright ID: 573350
Print ISSN: 2515-5785
Online ISSN: 2515-5792

London Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences

Volume 23 | Issue 14 | Compilation 1.0



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ABSTRACT

The fomented fulminations of social disarray, rebellious revolts and the outrageous outbursts of scandalously turbulent political turmoil inflamed during the dystopian plight of the Arab spring have been monumental milestones and remarkably watershed moments old-anchored in the Arab political history and its cultural memory. The tragic war casualties, catastrophic disasters, the horrendous butcheries of innocent civilians and collateral damage have been quintessential centerpieces of intense national and international media coverage alike. Hence, amid the chaotically sweeping whirlwind of such insurgent uprisings and insurrectional upheavals, the indispensably fundamental role of digital media, the practical serviceability of New Information Technologies (ICTs) and Cyber-Activism or digital disobedience become thought-provoking areas of extensive research theoretically reconfigured within the contextual contours of cyber-anthropology and digital sociology. Hence, the principal sine qua non of this research paper is to critically re-interrogate and re-investigate in depth the influential contributions of Cyber-activism and digital media of diverse electronic types in filming, recoding and documenting the cataclysmic calamities and the destructive apocalypse of the Arab spring. In so doing, it also aims to perspicuously cast the spotlight on the practical applicability, versatile multi-tasking and significant operations of multimedia platforms, online outlets and social networks in the democratization of the Arab autocratic regimes and their crucial roles in prompting regime transformation through re-appraising their importance in the liberalization of the Arab constitutions.

Keywords: youth media agency, cyber-activism, cyber-anthropology, digital communities, online identities, virtual political mobilization.

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I. INTRODUCTION

There is complexly intertwined nexuses, symbiotic interplay and complementary interdependence between the Arab Spring's pro-democracy counter-protests and cyberactivism. The revolutionary uprisings and the insurgent counter-protests of the Arab Spring, whose volcanic eruptions and explosive blowup have engendered tumultuous disarray and fomented outrageous fulminations across the MENA Region, tightened the grip of mass mobilization and cemented the bonds of collective action and co-operative collaboration among the marginalized underdogs (Mourtada, 2012). Throughout this paper, I re-interrogate how the groundbreaking whirlwind of irrepressible political dissidence and iconoclastic insurrections fertilized the soil for democratic enfranchisement, engendered the rise of *cyber-activism*, facilitated the prevalence of virtually interactive online communities and augmented the ubiquity of digital identities that boomed the widespread of online-activism shifting it to real-life organized demonstrations (Howard, 2010).

The Arab insurgent youths and their effervescent enthusiasm as Netizens and influential Facebook vloggers, cyber-enthusiasts or opinion-leaders harnessed the practical serviceability of cyber-activism to instigate social overhaul, economic *perestroika*¹ and engendered political

¹ According to Merriam-Webster and Cambridge Dictionaries, the term Perestroika refers to the economic and governmental reform instituted by Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union during the mid-1980s. Ever since, Perestroika is

reforms through the subversive overthrow of autocratic regimes (Mourtada, 2012).

With the exponential upsurge and the cumulative growth of Facebook registrations and twitter penetrations, social movement amid the riotous proliferation of the Arab Spring have been staggeringly skyrocketed and reached their climacteric flashpoint by lifting the curtain on economic parsimony, governmental austerity and the flimsy fragility of their socio-economic infrastructure (Wolfsfeld, 2013 et al.) Since accessibility of Media predetermines the control of political gatekeeping and the distribution of speech and voice articulation, Arab youth political dissidents disheveled the autocracy of the state and catapulted their smothered voices to the international community and externalized their dismal grievances by translating them into real-life protests (Wolfsfeld, 2013 et al.). Hence, it is salient that the technological invention of the so-called cyber-activism has transgressively demolished the ivory-towered recluse, the dismissive marginalization, economic deprivation and the social withdrawal exerted by the armchair Arab intelligentsia and the supremely oligarchic dignitaries who monopolize constitutional ratifications and policymaking. By the same token, cyber-activism has been a groundbreaking breakthrough which swerved the pendulum of the public opinion and reawakened the sleepily dormant and frozenly paralytic spirit of the downtrodden underdogs by raising their political consciousness to divulge the tyrannical dictatorship, malevolent encroachments and the abusive misrule inflicted the Arab autocrats.

The practicable applicability of the media networks and their communicational functions have been expedient in prompting a transgressive trespass of the state enforced political surveillance and its media censorship. The public opinion which was once enchained captive by the enslaving bondage and the constrictive constraints of stifling suffocation is, now, freely unfastened loose and extricated to unleash its furious outrage (Mourtada, 2012).

deployed as a terminological neologism to refer to socio-economic overhaul, reformist refurbishment and constitutional reform in the field of political economy.

Drawing on the theoretical inscriptions, epistemological prescriptions and the conceptual precepts devised by the disciplinary sub-set of Cyber-Anthropology as a deconstructive framework, I shall re-explore in depth how cyber-activism fractured the handcuffing shackles of state-terrorism and went grassroots to exhume the silently asphyxiated political interests and expropriated human rights of the subaltern minorities living outside the power structures under the Arab despotic governments.

II. THEORIZING CYBER-ANTHROPOLOGY AND DIGITAL ACTIVISM AS THEORETICAL PARADIGMS: RE-ASSESSING THE INFLUENTIAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF CYBER-ACTIVISM IN THE ARAB SPRING

Cyber-anthropology is a newly emerged disciplinary field of inquiry and an unprecedented scholarly realm which scrutinizes the virtual interactive communication, the formation of digital communities, online identities and the reciprocally transactional exchanges of internet-users in the cyberspace (Sivilisic, 2012). Cyber-anthropology as an epistemological doctrine and disciplinary endeavor re-interrogates the cyberculture of technosociality and artificial modes of digital communication systems and the formation of social network online communities that interact virtually. (Johana, 2011, p. 5).

Cyber-anthropology is a sub-set of science-art interface, techno-culture theory and digital sociology which is critically deployed to deconstruct the discursive artificiality involved in cyberspace, and how the exponential upsurge of electrical-mechanical communication systems, teleconferencing techniques and the rampant proliferation of computer-generated works have dominated the human social relations, molded their ideological proclivities and eventually refashioned their behavioral patterns. By the same token, the cumulative growth of ICTs (Information Communication Technologies), and how they influentially reshaped the worldviews of the youth culture and conjointly dovetailed it with the developmental viability of cyber-culture,

videotaping photography and the explosive blowup of digital mania are also quintessential centerpieces recurrently unraveled by the doctrinal epistemology of cyber-anthropology (Sivilisic, 2012).

While cyber-anthropology re-examines the digitally technologized youth culture, its customary traditions, modernly updated lifestyles and avant-garde thinking trajectories or groundbreaking illicit activities associated with cyber-criminology such as hacking, privacy disclosure, plagiarism or literary forgery, digital sociology focuses intensely on the type of online conversational exchanges, virtually circulated discourses, the dominantly overarching perceptions and the digital assumptions upheld by the audio-visual postmodern technologized culture (Sivilisic, 2012). Both, digital sociology and cyber-anthropology are practically applicable and efficiently workable once a comparative contradistinction and evaluative juxtapositions of how power dynamics in real-life social relations are correspondingly reflected, incarnated and computerized in the online digital cyberspace. (Sivilisic, 2012).

Extrapolating from Cyber-Anthropology as a preliminary groundwork and a theoretically foundational springboard, I shall argue that the multi-dimensional efficiency and the pluralistically multi-tasking versatility provided by cyber/Digital Activism have consolidated the grip of the politically conscious and mobilized Arab youths. In the same vein, I am also inclined to demonstrate how *'the right to the city'* (Lefebvre, 1968), which reiterates the re-appropriation and the invasive occupation of the urbanized central cityscape, is contextually re-configured in this current study as a metaphoric metonymy for proclaiming the right to the democratization of the virtual cyberspace and the de-politicization of digital media through the efficacious serviceability supplemented by cyber-activism.

In so doing, I shall revisit and re-conceptualize cyber-anthropology not as a disciplinary field of study but rather as a conceptual praxis, a theoretically analytical paradigm to re-explore

how digital technology assisted the Arab insurrectional uprisings to formulate undetected online identities, construct surreptitious digital communities and circulate seditiously anti-totalitarian pro-democracy protests, via multimedia platforms, that eventually culminated in the efflorescing springtime of constitutional reform, regime transformation, socio-economic overhaul and democratic transition in the Arab autocracies.

Based on the theoretical framework of Cyber-anthropology, the principal mainspring of this paper is to reaffirm how cyber-activism, a sub-set or a fraternal offshoot of cyber-anthropology, has empowered the insurgent upheavals of the Arab youth political dissidents and left-wing human rights activists to democratize the political spectrum in the Arab world and topple the theocratic orthodoxy and jurisdictional encroachments fiercely wielded by the despotic rulers and their old-entrenched regimes.

In a conference on Media and the Arab Spring hosted by the Communication Studies Master Program at AL-Akawayn University in Irfan, the scientific committee explicitly divulges the integral centrality of multimedia outlets in strengthening the Arab revolutionary revolts underscoring that *"In a region where traditional media have been under strict government control, the internet and social networks provide a space for youths to articulate their political views and organize their political actions"* (SHSS, 2014. p. 1). Hence, it is plainly salient that cyber-activism marks the interdisciplinary consilience, the symbiotic interplay and the intersectional convergence between digital technology and concretely in-person collective arousal or political mobilization amid the social disarray and the tempestuous turmoil prompted by the Arab spring. Besides, I shall succinctly reconfigure how digital activism aided the politically disenfranchised youths and the downtrodden peripheral underdogs to outvoice their hijacked political interests outside the multimedia modalities and normative mainstream discourse of the Arab governmental autocracies.

III. REFLECTIONS ON YOUTH DIGITAL DISOBEDIENCE AND CYBER-ACTIVISM AMID THE ARAB SPRING UPRISINGS

The integral centrality of the multimedia corporations, newsmaking institutions and cyber-activism in the diffusive promulgation of pro-democracy protests and anti-totalitarian demonstrations as well as the deposition of the autocratic tyrants rejuvenated heedlessly under-researched political implications and resurfaced the synergistic interplay between real-life insurrections and digital riots during the Arab Spring (Mourtada, 2012). In the scholarly realm of social movements and political activism, media is construed as a liberating cyberspace, an instrumental locomotive or communicative mouthpiece that replaces representative spokespersons as it facilitates collective action, cements the bonds of mass mobilization, streamlines the process of social assembly and relocates the hijacked agency of the silenced peripheral subaltern to the central metropolis of political decision-making and social integration (Wolfsfeld, 2013 et al.)

With the cumulative growth of digitalized technology and the ubiquitous popularity of multimedia corporations and other communicative outlets, social media networks have been the vehicular mediums whereby videotaped footages displaying homicidal criminalities of police brutalities, sadomasochistic violence, sexual molestation and physical assault were put in the limelight of the public's eye to unmask the callous cruelty of the Arab autocrats (Mourtada, 2012). Besides, Media is the oxygenating lifeblood of virtually 'cyber-activism' and pro-democracy counter-protests as it is an accessible gateway of self-representation, political criticism and unconstrained freedom of speech which broached the constrictive shackles of stifling censorship dismantled the enchaining strictures of regimental regulations and political surveillance. Thanks to multimedia outlets, newsmagazines and documentaries, Bouazizi's tragic demise and his dystopian plight have gone global as they prevalently occupied the institutional agendas of human rights organizations, inspired the strategic vision of diverse NGOs and triggered global

citizenship or universally altruistic solidarity as well as transnational realignments irrespective of the divisive disjunctures of cultural heterogeneity, racial disparities, ethnic differences and geographical remoteness. Through media circulations and its diffusive online transmissions, Bouazizi's suicidal tragedy went grassroots and stimulated a popular ubiquity which generated an ideological backlash deconstructing the ivory-tower paradigms of stifling censorship and repressive suffocation (Wolfsfeld, 2013 et al)

Media is an incentivizing catalyst that fertilizes the soil for irrepressible social activism, the formation of social network cobwebs, the construction of virtually digital communities and collective action of mass mobilization (Wolfsfeld, 2013 et al.) The peripheral subaltern protesting for democracy harnessed the practical serviceability of media to dishevel the autocracy of the state and catapult their smothered voices to the international community. As Wolfsfeld et al critically remarks "*When the level of anger and violence rises, all forms of media can serve as accelerators for increasing the speed and intensity of protests.*" (p.182).

The profitable serviceability and the diffusive transmissions of the aired newsreels and televised broadcasts have engendered an unprecedented turn in protest politics through making a transformational shift from real-life orchestrated demonstrations to virtually mediated cyber-activism. The latter is a practically workable mechanism whose rampant proliferation garnered the spotlight of the international media coverage, relocated the hijacked agency and the stifled voice of the displaced peripheries to the central metropolis and destabilized the technocratic suzerainty of the Arab policymakers by exerting lobbying pressure on the elitist stakeholders to democratize the political spectrum. Hence, media as a liberating cyberspace to outvoice the subdued aspirations of the twisted subaltern has subversively created a periphery-inclusive counter-narrative that disruptively demolished the state-sponsored rhetorical propaganda, frustrated its insidious disorientations, infiltrated its unscrupulous corruption and supplanted its monological dogmatism by calling into play

dialogical inter-discursivity as a democratic policy of state-citizen reciprocal negotiations to propound strategic visions of state-rebuilding avenues and constitutional remaking (Mourtada, 2012).

The de-politicization of media initiates the inaugural startup of the democratization of policymaking, the liberalization of constitutional ratification as well as the de-militarization of the state (Wolfsfeld, 2013 et al). Metaphorically, Cyber-activism served as an agora-like terrain of political leadership negotiations, the reciprocal exchange of attitudes and the large-scale diffusion of conscious-raising anti-government campaigns that blow the whistle on heinous aspects of corruption, chronic unemployment, social injustice and economic impoverishment. Media is a democratizing mechanism of expository denunciation, castigating revilement and divulging disembowelment which blows the whistle on ferocious rapacity, greedy avidity and covetous avarice of the pot-bellied parliamentarians who ravish the innately inborn rights of the civil society and politicize public sectors by militarizing the country. It casted the spotlight on administrative corruption, chronic unemployment, aggressive pugnacity and belligerent political detention exerted by the state as it disclosed its dysfunctional deficiency, myopic shortsightedness, constitutional misconduct as well as ideological miscarriages (Mourtada, 2012).

Cyber-activism and virtually interactive transaction across social networks have consolidated the perceptive conceptuality of the rebellious youths and equipped them with a spacious arena to sharpen their innovative creativity, strengthen their sagacious perspicacity and deepen their political consciousness empowering their ideological stamina. Accordingly, Media platforms served as prophylactic immunity and oxygenating lifeblood that resurrect their deadened spirit from the underground dungeon of peripheral subalternity through foregrounding it to the frontispiece of socio-economic integration, political engagement and participatory involvement in the decision-making system and the democratic declaration of their destiny (Wolfsfeld, 2013 et al).

A variegated array of zoom symposiums, virtual assemblies and online teleconferencing summits have been frequently held to reflect upon and bureaucratize protest politics propounding state-rebuilding avenues, alternative strategic visions of constitutional reform, socio-economic overhaul and regime transformation (Sivilisic, 2012). The seditious mobilization and the co-operative collaboration of collective rallies are orchestrated through interactive virtual communication and message-texting as well as teleconferencing digital techniques.

Media is the mechanical locomotive and the supportive linchpin which served as a pivotal pillar, if not empowering backbone of political protestations and instigated a shift from real-life demonstrations to cyber-activism (Mourtada, 2012). For instance, *Intifada* is an independently autonomous and anti-totalitarian Facebook page devised by the downtrodden underdogs and the marginalized peripheral subaltern living outside the power structures of the tyrannical regime to relocate their hijacked agency of political mobility and unconstrained social action to the central locus of decision-taking and policymaking. Intifada is a media platform originated as a defensive crackdown, a liberating cyberspace and a confrontational countermeasure to democratize the state and re-bureaucratize parliamentary elections of electoral presidency. Media, therefore, destabilized the tectonic plates of state-citizen asymmetrical power imbalances, architectural configuration of space occupation and disheveled the socially structured pyramidal hierarchies of class stratification and divisive disjunctures through counter-forcing the mainstream media.

At the individually micro-level, cyber-activism served as expressive mouthpiece that aided the disenfranchised subaltern living outside the power structures to externalize their despicable grievances, disclose their alarming discontent and unfold their disappointing letdown inflicted by the selfishly egocentric and tyrannical rulers. While the mainstream media and its repressive military apparatus exerted mouth-shutting policies of disproportionate violence, tragic casualties and focused on the separative dispersal of the orchestrated protests, the mass controlled

cyber-activism concentrated on tightening the grip of convergent unification, co-operative collaboration and mobilized collective action (Mourtada, 2012).

Evoking McLuhan's conceptual paradigm of the "*Medium is the message*", the Arab youth iconoclastic rebels have revolted through the cyberspace as a vehicular spacecraft and a liberating outlet that can relocate their agency and disruptively unsettle the constrictive strangle holds of online censorship and suffocating political surveillance enforced by the totalitarian Arab regimes (McLuhan, 1964; Johana, 2011, p. 5). Hence, the omnipresent ubiquity of the cyberspace has blurrily overstepped and transcended the boundaries surpassing the divisive disjunctures which used to distinctively demarcate the ordinarily conceivable real from the unfamiliarly artificial hyper-real. Accordingly, the real-life revolutionary mobilization and the fomented fulminations of appropriating the central urban spaces as riotously turbulent hotspots of social activism are supplanted by the contagiously transmissible outrage of cyber-activism and the thickly ascendant domination of the cyberspace as a '*third-space*' of power negotiation to outvoice the stifled subaltern minorities outside the preponderantly hegemonic jurisdictional autocracy of the Arab dictatorial governments. Therefore, the heretical defiance and the rebellious disobedience of the Arab youth cyberculture is unabashedly channeled and outlined outside the normative patriarchal infrastructure and the intransigently uncompromising belief systems inherently fossilized in the Islamocentric conservatism-oriented regimes.

The traumatizing case of Tunisia, whose riotous atrocities and police brutalities, account for the tragically suicidal self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in the small-scaled town of Sidi Bouzid after he had been humiliated and stigmatized by a female police officer, had gone virtually viral pervading the cyberspace before they were translated into nationwide organized counter-protests. It is, therefore, remarkably insightful to note that "*through blogs and text messages that Tunisians experienced what the sociologist Doug*

McAdam calls "cognitive liberation." (Howard, 2010, p.2). Similarly, In Egypt for instance, the tragic casualties, political detentions, repressive imprisonment and the catastrophic collateral damage catalyzed the explosive outbreak of civil disobedience manifestly incarnated in the proliferation of cyberactivism as "*Wael Ghonim started the Facebook group "We are All Khaled Said" to keep alive the memory of the 28-year-old blogger, whom police had beaten to death on 6 June 2010 for exposing their corruption."* (Howard, 2010, p.2).

It is a markedly phenomenal veracity and an irrefragable assertion to reiterate that politics of intimidating terrorization and dismaying trepidations usually breed forms of confrontational media backlash and defensive pushback. As Foucault critically articulates in his voluminous treatise on the historical archeology of *sexuality* that "*where there is power, there is resistance*" (Foucault, 1984). In the same vein, while evoking Spivak's philosophical reflections on protest politics in the Arab world enunciated in her intriguing essay, *The Subaltern Speaks Through Dying* (2021), The notion of death becomes a provocatively stimulating impetus that animates the inextinguishable flames of both, social demonstrations and cyber-activism as complexly complementary avenues, if not strategic blueprints of political democratization. By the same token, as Daniel Gaxie pinpoints in his article, the *Rewards of Activism* (2017), that a political commitment to a deep-seated convictions and irreversibly unshakable political cause fuels the unstoppable willingness of self-sacrifice because the steadfast attachment to a politically committed belief is a satisfactory reward in itself.

Despite the virtually displayed videotaped footages, organized cyber-activism and the broadcasting of online newsreels and screen images, the Arab youths proved recklessly fearless, and that they developed an unconquerable immune indomitable intrepidity and ideological stamina that securely shields and safeguards them against politics of fear. Hence, bravely undeterred by the repressive state political apparatus inflicted by the police violent torture and dehumanizing felonies, the heroic

youths remained persistently resilient and tenaciously strenuous clinging to their imperishable cause of demanding democracy harnessing the power of multimedia corporations as practical mechanism. Once again, in Spivak's conceptual percepts, the Arab peripheral subaltern social and ethnic minorities rebelling against the heinous forms of social deprivation and presidential wrongdoings have been loudly overheard and outspoken through the monopolization of mass-controlled media and cyber-activism as enabling power structures (1988).

IV. CONCLUSION

In her critically electrifying and thought-provoking classical essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak* (1988), Gayatri Spivak has reflexively re-envisioned and revisited the state-citizen dialectical power relations and conflictual discordances or what social movement scholars designate as the cultural Incongruence hypothesis (Sakbani, 2015). The elected enunciating social actors and the representative political stakeholders as supremely hegemonic policymakers and governmental dignitaries overlook the periphery-inclusive policy of conversational dialogues, political engagement, and co-operative collaboration as the rudimental terrain of obtaining contractual consensus and procuring the general will subscribed by the uniformly collective conscious. They paradoxically take recourse in the employment of mouth-shutting avenues or truncheon-oriented approaches as repressive state-apparatuses to exert jurisdictional theocracy, despotic totalitarianism, marginalizing dismissal and coercive oppression (Spivak, 1988).

Whether consciously recognized or unconsciously undiscerned, the explosive blowup and the outrageous outbursts of the Arab youths political dissidents are dubbed as the prognosticative harbinger heralding the advent of an optimistic springtime of political consciousness and the temperamental penchant towards social democracy. The de-politicization of the news-making agencies and the democratization of media platforms disruptively unsettled the

top-bottom hierarchized monological flow of media transmissions and transformed them into a dialogically inter-discursive monopoly which adopts an inclusively centrifugal approach. The architectural configuration of discourse industrialization, consent-manufacturing and the panoptical surveillance of the technocratic Arab state are deposed and toppled by a heterotopical auto-ethnography which re-narrativizes the repressed history of the margins which was erstwhile thrust in the wasteland of amnesiac oblivion.

Media platforms strengthen the widespread promulgation of tweets, anti-totalitarian hashtags, videotaped footages of police brutalities and images of the severely injured peaceful protestors during their frictional encounter with the horrendous repression of the military apparatuses. Hence, it is plainly decipherable that the young *"The cyber-enthusiasts express optimism about the ability of the new media to empower people living in nondemocratic societies and to allow insurgents to adopt new strategies."* (Wolfsfeld, 2013 et al, p. 117).

In a synoptic brevity, it is, hereby, noteworthy to espouse the assertion that Cyber-activism instigated unprecedented transformational metamorphosis in the tectonic plates of citizen-state power structures prompting an upside-down reversal in the periphery-center hierarchized paradigm that supplanted the exclusively state-centered model of tyrannical dictatorship by a periphery-inclusive bottom-up reformist approach which is democratically centrifugal.

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