Digital Media and the Politics of Transformation in the Arab World and Asia
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Abstract: This review focus on the content of the above-mentioned book in order to examine its contribution to the changing world of the Middle East and parts of Asia. With a distinguished focus on information and communication technologies, this collection of case examples provides a solid basis for further research.

Keywords: MENA, Communication Studies, New Technologies

The books main aim is to investigate the importance of information and communication technologies (ICT) in selected Arab countries and Asia and their role in civil uprisings and protests. Far from being naive, the authors clearly distinguish themselves from the scholar block that see's ICT's as the main catalyst for events like the Arab spring 2010/11. They vividly underpin their point of view of giving ICT's an auxiliary position in transition and transformation of selected case studies, but never the less presenting the reader long-term effects that have already been present in the respective situation. It's core argument stays didactic throughout the book, when to each specific opportunity the respective constraints are presented. The acclaimed aim to go "beyond the revolutionary moment" (p. 5) was reached particular, as all the authors contributed in their case studies that each historical moment has a pre-history in itself, meaning that the impressive pictures - that where broadcasted around the world in the turmoil of the Arab spring - cannot be fully understand without their context. The Bourdieu'ean concept of power relations is present in almost all contributions, giving a high effort towards power relations - but still merging it with a local-global approach. As actors are not only located in the field of media, the authors try to make even the hidden one's visible. Relying on Tufekci's concept of *computational agency* (2015) they identify the core obstacles in social media. As they point out 1) the lack of visibility, 2) information asymmetry and 3) the hidden influence of algorithmic gatekeeping or editing (p. 140). By using this mode of analysis the authors do not lose their track in showing the reader that not only the user of social media is involved in social actions, but also large companies, state agencies (who provide the infrastructure and can be a source of constraints or access) and 'loose' agencies. The widely spread case examples always try to bring in mind the surplus as well as the risks

of media and their role in transformation processes, being the source of interconnectivity as well as narcissism and distraction.

On the other side, as all their case examples investigate quasi semi-authoritarian states or fragile environments (Tunisia, Palestine, Iran, China or Egypt), the question rises in how far the findings are transportable and transmittable to democratic states. A good alternative and somehow contradictory book with a similar content would be "Media Worlds - Anthropology on new Terrain" from Ginsburg et. al. (2002). Here, from an anthropological point of view, similar concepts are discussed earlier, like the role of media in shaping identity (as in the case of India) and it's usage in controlling or "softly guiding" masses (like the case example in Egypt). Even if the two books have a different background - one from communication sciences, the other anthropological - interlinks and interconnectivity would arise if the authors would have consulted it. As the social life - or its intertwinedness - of technology and social life has already been discussed by Larkin (pp. 319), some of the findings were not really new. A quite similar approach regarding constraints and opportunities was started by Madianou and Miller (2012) already in their 'polymedia'-agenda. They identified five points that a researcher has to have a closer look on: media as an integrated structure, access, affordability, literacy and remediation (pp. 174). As a last point that is noteworthy, the quantitative approach of the authors in visualizing the Elite Network of a Chinese Communication channel was done with a Force Cloud algorithm and conducted in Gephi (pp. 97). As Force Cloud is definitely the most used algorithm, it does not necessarily mean that it is always the best (Fruchterman and Reingold 1991; Onaka 2013). In opposition to other algorithms, there are several ways to make groups or cliques easily visible and an interpretation more suitable for non-statisticians. To sum up, the book gives an exciting overview of several case studies and shows us once more that the world is even more connected than we think, with all the disruptive possibilities and positive chances that come with it.

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