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Abstract

In the opening months of 2011 the world witnessed a series of tumultuous events in North Africa and the Middle East that soon became known as the Arab uprisings. What is striking about them is not only their historical momentousness and stunning speed of succession across so many countries, but also the different ways in which media and communications became inextricably infused *inside* them. Indeed some have been so bold as to label them as the 'Twitter Revolutions' or 'Facebook Revolutions.' This, however, does less than justice to the media complexities involved. This essay sets out to capture something of the broader, overlapping and interpenetrating ways in which media systems and communication networks have complexly conditioned and facilitated these remarkable historical events and communicated them around the world. In this way it aims to broaden the frame of reference for future in-depth, scholarly research.

In the opening months of 2011 the world witnessed a series of tumultuous events in North Africa and the Middle East that soon became known as the Arab uprisings. Mass protests, first in Tunisia, then in Egypt and a succession of other Arab states, including Morocco, Algeria, Yemen, Oman, Bahrain and Libya, as well as Syria, Iran and Lebanon and, more tentatively, Saudi Arabia, all challenged the repressive, anti-democratic nature of these regimes (International Crisis Group, 2011). They called for an end to corruption, improved living conditions, democracy and the protection of human rights. When Mohammed Bouaziz set fire to himself in the Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid in

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December 2010 – a desperate act of defiance following his denied attempts to work as a street vendor to support his family – he lit a flame that soon burned in capitals and cities across much of the Arab world. The scenes of his self-immolation captured by passers by and posted on YouTube as well as those of the mass protests that followed his funeral, quickly circulated in Tunisia and beyond.

New social media – YouTube, Twitter, Facebook – along with online bloggers and mobile telephony, all played an important role in communicating, coordinating and channelling this rising tide of opposition and variously managed to bypass state controlled national media as they propelled images and ideas of resistance and mass defiance across the Middle East and North Africa. The startling and dramatic scenes from Egypt of the 'Day of Anger' (25 January) followed by the 'Day of Rage' culminating in the 'March of the Millions' (1 February), that forced President Hosni Mubarak's departure, also pulsed through satellite and international news coverage. Foreign correspondents in Tahrir Square not only helped to focus world attention on these momentous events but also helped grant them a human face. Mass uprising on the streets of Egypt now appeared less distanced, less humanly remote. Visceral scenes and emotional testimonies elicited on the street brought home to watching millions something of the protestors' everyday despair and democratic aspirations as well as their extraordinary courage in confronting, by non-violent means, repressive state violence. And some, we know, lost their lives.

As the world's news media and new social networks communicated these dramatic images of mass opposition from across much of the Arab world, so western democracies, practised in the ways of doing business with authoritarian regimes as well as oppressive states skilled in the means of coercive power, looked on and will have wondered what these shocking events meant for them. A seismic shift in the world's political tectonic plates was taking place, comparable perhaps to 1989 but, as then, no one could foresee how far, how deep or at what pace this opening fault-line of democracy would continue to run. It took a rupture in the earth's geological tectonic plates off the coast of Japan (11 March) and the resulting earthquake, tsunami, nuclear meltdown and financial turmoil (also captured in real-time by a variety of media) to temporarily dislodge the Arab political earthquake from its centre position on the world news stage.

At the time of writing it is too early to say how these popular uprisings will eventually play out and whether they will manage to win regime change, social justice and the democratization of states and civil societies. Zine al-Abedine Ben Ali in Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt have both been ousted and interim authorities have promised elections and thorough-going reforms, though military and conservative forces remain in the wings. Ali Abdullah Saleh in Yemen has also promised to step down in forthcoming elections. Protests meanwhile continue elsewhere in the Arab world and have been met with brutal violence, promises of reform and, as in Saudi Arabia, cynical bribes seeking to buy off discontent. The iron fist in the velvet glove is barely disguised. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates sent military forces to help squash the peaceful protests in Bahrain, and video scenes of appalling state violence in Syria and elsewhere, as well as reports of abduction and torture across many Arab states, circulate widely.

In Libya, popular mass mobilization had initially liberated much of the country from Muammar Gaddafi's 42-year grip on power, but from his stronghold in and around Tripoli he unleashed mercenaries and military forces against his own people, winning

back rebel towns and plunging the country into bloody conflict (the rebels dispute the designation 'civil war'). At first the world watched as governments procrastinated and debated the possibilities of military and humanitarian intervention, before finally the UN Security Council agreed to a no-fly zone and authorized member states to 'take all necessary measures' to 'protect civilians and civilian populated areas under attack.' (UN Resolution 1973, 18 March).

What is striking about this wave of uprisings is not only their historical momentousness and stunning speed of succession across so many countries, but also the different ways in which media and communications have become inextricably infused *inside* them. Indeed some have been so bold as to label them as the 'Twitter Revolutions' or 'Facebook Revolutions' in recognition of the prominent part played by new social media, whether in the co-ordination of mass protests, communication of real-time images and up-to-date information, or processes of contagion across the Arab region. This however is to do less than justice to both the political *and* media complexities involved or their mutual interaction moving through time. The following sets out, therefore, to capture something of the broader ways in which media and communications have variously entered into these events. While certainly granting new social media their due, the discussion seeks to invite a more holistic appreciation of the overlapping and interpenetrating ways in which media systems and communication networks have complexly conditioned and facilitated these remarkable historical events and communicated them around the world. In this way it aims to broaden the frame of reference for future in-depth, scholarly research.

A preliminary inventory identifying 10 different forms of media and communication inscription within these events is outlined later. These point to the complex ways in which today's media systems and communication networks have become infused within the uprisings and as they have politically unfolded over time. Mass protests and political uprisings do not simply erupt from nowhere of course, even if the 'event orientation' of news and authorities 'in denial' may suggest otherwise. No matter how spontaneous or seemingly unplanned, they arise from somewhere and are informed by preceding grievances and ambitions for change. Flash mobs have a political home. And major protests and demonstrations can continue to live on in the collective memories and political (re)actions of the reconfigured political field left behind – sometimes long after the news cameras and foreign correspondents have moved on. (A symbolic down payment of sorts, deposited in the future political account.) How today's media ecology has become infused within the Arab uprisings stretches, therefore, across the period of growing discontent and opposition that precipitated the uprisings, the period of the revolts themselves, and the ensuing processes of revolutionary consolidation, state reforms and/or ongoing repression and resistance that now characterize the situation in different Arab countries.

Across these moments of political struggle and change, media and communications have played an inextricable part in extending their scope and sending visible shock waves like a political tsunami through the Middle East and North Africa and beyond to different national, regional and global shores. Ten different ways, then, in which media systems and communications networks have become inscribed inside the Arab uprisings and entered into their unfolding political trajectory.

1. State controlled Arab media, blind western media

Though it is tempting to focus on the role of media and perhaps new social media specifically in the immediate events of the Arab uprisings, a more politically contextualized approach would need to inquire first into how state-run Arab media have performed over preceding years and how they served to legitimize their political regimes (see Hafez, 2007; Miladi, 2011; Sakr, 2007); also how outside mainstream news media have played a less than critical role when reporting on many of them. This includes the western media's conspicuous silence toward the everyday suppression of political dissent, human rights abuses and earlier emergent protests whilst uncritically reporting on their own government's trade and arms initiatives and conciliatory diplomatic relations bolstering such regimes in power. If western media had performed a more independent and critically engaged role, is it conceivable that the Arab uprisings of 2011, though surprising in terms of their speed and scale, could nonetheless have been better understood and contextualized within a preceding narrative of growing political disenchantment and despair?

2. Media, consumerism and democracy

Though western news media have played less than a democratizing role in the political run-up to the uprisings of 2011, the globalizing culture of consumerism and normative outlooks of western democracies arguably forms an unspoken backdrop in western entertainment conglomerates and their satellite news channels. This has contributed to the globalization of the values and tenets of economic individualism and liberal democracy. Media penetrated societies can no longer remain hermetically sealed from this global culture of valorized consumption, or the 'soft power' of communication flows that now transverse the globe providing symbolic referents for democracy and its emulation (Giddens, 2002; Nye, 1990).

Noticeably, the general democratic impulse expressed within the Arab uprisings surprised many in the West, confounding expectations post 9/11, post Afghanistan and Iraq, that Islam and anti-western sentiments would play a more prominent steering role in processes of regime change. The youthful composition of Arab populations and their broad-based demographics more generally have no doubt played an important part in defining the political ambitions and seemingly secular aims of the uprisings as well as their human rights focus. Kristian Ulrichsen and his colleagues, amongst others, for example, observes how: '65% of the population of the Middle East is under the age of 30 and are increasingly technology-savvy and adept at using new forms of communication to bypass state controls and mobilize around common issues or grievances' and 'Bloggers in Egypt and Tunisia were instrumental in publicizing and spreading accounts of torture and human rights violations by the security services' (Ulrichsen et al. 2011). Young people, plugged into western media and immersed in wider cultural flows that normalize democratic practices and civil rights as well as conspicuous consumption, have become an established communications backdrop in much of the Arab world notwithstanding the tensions and contradictions this poses to 'embattled' religious authorities and patriarchal structures of domination.

3. Media conviviality in everyday life

Media and communications in the Arab world not only convey images and ideas that are circulated and consumed more widely in today's globalizing communication flows, they also enter into the everyday via new social media, becoming part of the mundane sociability and conviviality of modernity. Though not necessarily enacting elevated forums for 'high' political debates about 'Democracy', the popular uptake of social media within everyday life proves 'democratizing' nonetheless. New social media help to bring into being a new space for social inclusivity, group recognition and pluralized participation as well as different forms of political conversation and engagement (Dahlgren, 2009). This everyday conversation and conviviality entered into via new social media helps to instantiate moments of social connectedness and interaction in which identities and interests, rights and responsibilities can become recognized and performed and may even produce new templates for the conduct of civil society beyond the virtual world.

According to a recent research report, *Social Media in the Arab World* (Ghannam, 2011), documenting the uptake and use of new social media across different Arab countries and published in the immediate aftermath of the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, 'the Arab world has witnessed the rise of an independent vibrant social media and steadily increasing citizen engagement on the Internet that is expected to attract 100 million Arab users by 2015'. It concludes, 'These social networks inform, mobilize, entertain, create communities, increase transparency, and seek to hold governments accountable' (Ghannam, 2011: 4). The new tools of sociability and conviviality can thus prove to be 'democratizing' in both the sense of facilitating pluralized interaction and intercourse in everyday life as well as providing the means for organizing for system change and the political establishment of 'Democracy' (Ghanavizi, 2011; Sreberny and Khiabany, 2010).

4. Facilitating/communicating protest

New social media, including YouTube, Facebook, Flickr and Twitter, mobile telephony distributing SMS (short message service) messages, images and live video streams, and internet bloggers have all played a key role in the recent uprisings though in differing permutations across the different countries concerned. Inflated claims about the power of new social media to foment protest and revolution lend themselves to the charge of media centrism and technological determinism, theoretical optics that obfuscate the preceding social and political forces at work as well as the purposive actions of human beings prepared to confront state intimidation and violence in pursuit of political change. But, equally, claims that simply deny the important role of new media in coalescing broad-based, non-hierarchical political movements and coordinating and channelling their demographic weight into real democratic power, fail to understand the changed nature of today's media and communications environment or how this can now be harnessed by activists and protestors and creatively infused *inside* political struggle (Cottle and Lester, 2011). The argument, therefore, is not so much about whether new social media did, or did not perform a determining role in the events in question but rather how exactly media systems and new communication networks complexly interacted, entered into and shaped them.

A Tunisian blogger, Sami Ben Ghabia, maintains, for example, that much of the content about the revolution in the mainstream media originated from Tunisians using Facebook, but this was then collected, translated and reposted on the website Nawaat, an independent blog set up for dissenting Tunisian voices and produced in exile, and then passed on via Twitter for mainstream journalists (cited in Ghannam, 2011: 16). Each uprising, easily accessed by their different hashtags (Tunisia #SidiBouzid, Egypt #Jan25, Bahrain #Feb14, Libya #Feb17, Saudi Arabia #Mar20), constantly updated information and links to crowd-sourcing maps. These offered journalists and others an accessible if not always strictly verifiable overview of what was occurring on the ground. 'If content had remained strictly on Facebook', it has been argued, 'its audience would have been limited to those who are members of certain groups, and would not likely have been disseminated in ways that proved pivotal to the media coverage' (Ghannam, 2011: 16).

In other words, new social media and mainstream media often appear to have performed in tandem, with social media variously acting as a watchdog of state controlled national media, alerting international news media to growing opposition and dissent events and providing raw images of these for wider dissemination. International news media, in turn, including Al Jazeera, have distributed the flood of disturbing scenes and reports of the uprisings now easily accessed via Google's YouTube and boomeranged them back into the countries concerned. Mainstream newspapers and news broadcasters in their online variants also increasingly incorporate direct links to these new social media, effectively acting as a portal to their updating communication flows and near live-streaming of images direct from the protests themselves. This moving complex of interpenetrating communication flows and their political efficacy across the different uprisings deserves careful documentation and comparative analysis in the months and years ahead.

Generalizations about the role of news social media in the uprisings, for the present at least, must be desisted: 'the importance and impact of social media on each of the rebellions we have seen this year', concludes one media observer, 'has been defined by specific local factors (not least how people live their lives online in individual countries and what state limits were in place). Its role has been shaped too by how well organized the groups using social media have been' (Beaumont, 2011: 2). Even more fundamental in this respect is the varying penetration of these new technologies into daily life within and across different Arab societies (Ghannam, 2011).

5. Facilitating repressive state responses

It is not only activists that have become increasingly media-savvy in recent years, deploying new social media to organize and coordinate protests and distribute tactical information and so on, but also repressive regimes. The Arab uprisings produced numerous instances of regimes trying to censor and contain the flow of images and information by 'pulling the plug' on the internet, monitoring telecommunications and disrupting the work of foreign journalists through personal intimidation, targeting particular foreign news bureaus or simply refusing journalists visas and access to the country. Mubarak's government, as well as Colonel Gaddafi in Libya, have also sought to rally

pro-government supporters in particular locations at particular times by ordering mobile service providers to send text messages; a tactic that has also been used to dupe protesters into arriving at particular locations, dispersing them and/or positioning them to be picked up by the security forces.

As Evgeny Morozov (2011) elaborates in *The Net Delusion*, the internet is not solely the preserve of the democratically inclined. Repressive regimes around the world now deploy sophisticated digital censorship and monitoring capabilities and engage in cyber attacks and the targeting of media activists and dissidents – and have done so for some time. And needless to say, state controlled media, whether press, television or radio, will be put to full propaganda purposes when repressive regimes are challenged. A laughable example of this, perhaps, was Muammar Gaddafi's opportunistic claims on Libyan state television that scenes of the TUC's mass demonstration in London against the coalition government's cuts (26 March 2011), was in fact depicting protests against the western invasion of Libya.

Rather than seeing the authoritarian use of the internet as a knockout blow in the argument against so-called 'cyber-utopians' and their medium-centric enthusiasm for the net's democratizing possibilities, this is better conceived as an inevitable part of all political struggles when conducted in, through and on the media and communications battlefield. Historically this is neither new nor surprising and remains contingent upon the weighting of political forces and their respective capacities to exert control and creatively innovate in the communications field.

Repressive states do not hold all the technological trump cards in their hands and, increasingly, media-savvy activists swap and share theirs to help protesters circumvent attempted controls and gain the communications initiative. When states have sought to deny internet access to particular websites by blocking servers, activists have made use of 'proxy' international servers and 'ghost servers' disguising the networks involved. When Mubarak turned off the internet and SMS services (28 January 2011) for nearly a week, an Al Jazeera producer observed how within days 'clandestine FTP (File Transfer Protocol) accounts were set up to move videos out to international news outlets', and 'While accredited members of the media struggled to communicate and coordinate, street protestors were using landlines to call supporters, who translated and published their accounts on Twitter for an international audience hungry for news . . .' (Ishani, 2011).

Views of the internet and new social media as either democratically benign or essentially open to repressive state appropriation and control, then, generally fail to interrogate the dynamic play of power and constantly updating war of technological manoeuvre that informs the battle for communication power.

6. Media contagion

There is an understandable reticence by many media scholars to entertain causal ideas of media contagion and even more so when invoked in the context of political uprisings. Behaviourist claims about the media contagion of urban riots in 1960s' America (see Kerner, 1968) and 1980s' Britain (Scarman, 1986), for example, as well as the term's pathological connotation, tend to render the political motivations involved literally meaningless and thereby encourage conservative interpretations of collective violence

(Cottle, 1993: 18–31). Though this may be so, the breathtaking wave of uprisings and their rapid spread from one Arab country to another point nonetheless to the evident ways in which contemporary communication of dissent can help to embolden others, provide templates for action and thereby help to release pent-up political forces of change. The way images of political dissent and protest spill over national borders or leapfrog across entire countries or even regions, to impact upon political struggles waged elsewhere around the world, points once again to the transnationalizing nature of global protest communications as well as their capacity to help build and sustain feelings of political affinity and solidarity (Allan and Thorsen, 2009, Cottle and Lester, 2011).

It is not only the demonstration of people power, however, that is 'contagious' and communicated via media and communication networks lending hope and inspiration to those embarked on similar struggles elsewhere, or via the replication of symbolic forms of protest such as the occupation of city central squares/plazas or extreme acts of self-immolation by 'martyrs' to the cause – like Mohammed Bouaziz. Also 'contagious' are the constantly evolving communication tactics and creative adaptations of the same communicated around the world by media activists seeking to evade and counter media censorship and imposed media controls. In the years and months before the uprisings, media activists in Egypt and elsewhere, for example, were actively studying the tactics of networked opposition conducted elsewhere, including Iran's Green Movement and the communications tactics developed in the mass protests challenging the June 2009 election (Ishani, 2011).

7. International recognition and protest legitimation

Media and communications also enter the frame of political uprisings and mass protests in terms of how they become defined and deliberated in the international arena, especially as mass demonstrations destabilize the regimes in question. Whereas western governments at first seemed to be wrong-footed by the surprise and speed of the Arab revolts and equivocated about their possible causes, demographic composition and legitimacy (especially in respect of their foremost Middle-East ally, Egypt), the news media in the UK in contrast, and possibly more widely, appeared to grant early recognition to the protesters' aims, sense of grievance and cause. In other words western news media helped to grant them legitimacy and in advance of elite political statements. Only as the political efficacy of the protests was grasped and the demise of the regimes such as Mubarak's in Egypt anticipated, did official pronouncements begin to move toward a more supportive position toward the demonstrators, their civil rights and legitimate claims for democracy.

Contrary to established models of elite indexing (Bennett, 1990; Bennett et al., 2007; Hallin, 1994), this finding seemingly suggests that mainstream media can, on some occasions, adopt a more independent and critically informed news stance even when political elites exhibit a relatively united front in terms of their expressed views on the political contention in question. At least part of the explanation for this more independent and sympathetic media representation can be found in today's global news ecology (Cottle, 2009). This now includes the cross-fertilization of different communication flows from around the world and the influence particularly of 24/7 satellite channels such as CNN,

BBC World and Al-Jazeera (the latter increased its market share exponentially during these events).

It is also located in those up-close and personal scenes and testimonies collected by correspondents physically 'embedded' in the crowds, witnessing their situation and possibly feeling their collective hopes and vulnerability in the face of an increasingly desperate political regime. The phenomenological dimension of embedding, so acutely observed and consequential in the context of war reporting (Morrison and Tumber, 1988; Tumber, 2004), may also be at work in other contexts of journalist immersion especially when witnessing human vulnerability and traumatic events, whether humanitarian crises and disasters (Cottle and Nolan, 2007) or popular uprisings confronting state violence. Stories and sentiments are now also vividly captured via new social media and media monitoring services such as BBC Monitoring, that survey round-the-clock, TV, radio, press, internet and news agency sources worldwide, and these are also available to journalists and editors back in the newsroom.

Activists and protesters on the ground can also be acutely aware of the need for international media recognition and are often seen clamouring for opportunities in front of mainstream news cameras to put their case across to international audiences and governments. Indeed the performative and dramaturgical nature of protests is in many respects premised upon this underlying political need to win wider recognition, legitimacy and support (Alexander, 2006; McAdam, 2000). How exactly this dramaturgy *for* democracy became conducted in and through today's overlapping media flows and communication networks remains fertile ground for further research.

8. Media and the global village of repressive states

Just as repressive regimes confronting political opposition and dissent inside their borders will tighten their grip on media and redouble their efforts to censor, monitor, dupe and target their opponents, so repressive regimes elsewhere in the world are also predisposed to do likewise when witnessing the potentially toxic infusion of mediated images and ideas of resistance from afar. They will also seek to learn lessons from the communication struggles waged elsewhere and seek to implement or adapt them when required. Both China and Iran, for example, sought to control the tide of images and information of the Arab uprisings coursing through the global news networks and internet. The Chinese authorities clamped down hard after calls for a 'Jasmine Revolution' modelled on the pro-democracy protests surging through the Middle East, quickly detaining suspected activists and censoring online calls to stage protests in Beijing, Shanghai and other major cities. The reverberations that flow from the Arab uprisings further underline the global intensification of communications within today's political geography as their impacts move outwards as powerful ripple effects to repressive regimes and democracies with vested interests around the world.

9. Human rights surveillance and the responsibility to protect

As protestors came up against state repression and military violence, so images and accounts of human rights abuses began to course through available media and

confounding the efforts of authorities to censor and impose a communications blackout. When Libya banned journalists from entering Libyan territory in the initial days of the uprising and military crackdown, images soon circulated on YouTube that were incorporated into mainstream news media and documenting attacks on rebel forces by Libyan heavy armour. Dubbed 'The Global YouTube News Bureau', vivid images bearing witness to human rights abuses and impending humanitarian catastrophe circulated despite the absence of foreign correspondents on the ground. As they did so, calls were increasingly heard for those responsible to be pursued and prosecuted in the International Criminal Court.

In the context of the Libyan dictator's refusal to concede power and his preparedness to use military force, including heavy weaponry and military aircraft against his own people, the world's media increasingly gave vent to the calls for humanitarian and/or military intervention. A period of governmental procrastination ensued before the United Nations Security Council eventually agreed a no-fly zone and the necessary military measures to protect civilians. Though a far cry from a simplistic 'CNN model' of media causality, how these scenes and calls became communicated in the news media and registered on the international political stage warrants serious attention. This is all the more so in the context of the United Nations' proclaimed acceptance of the 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P) doctrine and the establishment of political precedents that may yet have consequences for future humanitarian interventions (Evans, 2008).

Precedents established in Libya, as elsewhere, therefore, can influence future events, international policy responses and even the self-interested calculations of autocratic dictators when contemplating violence and genocidal actions against their own populations in the future. Though western media have given some time and space to the issues of humanitarian response and a possible no-fly zone, rarely has this sought to contextualize this debate in respect of the evolving world acceptance of the 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P) doctrine, formally recognized since the UN World Summit in 2005, and how it requires a reconceptualization of ideas of national sovereignty. In the days and weeks following the UN Security Council's mandate for member states to 'protect civilians and civilian populated areas under attack' the voices advocating forced regime change and military support for the rebels have become more pronounced. In this context the news media narrative, at least in Britain, appears to have succumbed increasingly to the classic forms of 'war journalism', not 'peace journalism' (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005), forgetting the original humanitarian-safeguarding mission authorized within the UN's 1973 resolution.

They key point here, however, is that the media can sometimes perform a necessary and possibly influential role in alerting world opinion to repressive and potentially prosecutable acts of inhumanity such as those following in the wake of mass uprisings and can serve moreover as a public forum for deliberating the moral dilemmas and practical difficulties involved in humanitarian militarized intervention. Ideally these same media could yet perform a more educative role in informing publics around the world about the existing Responsibility to Protect framework and how this obliges the world's governments to intervene to protect human lives when sovereign states manifestly fail to do so, or worse when they deliberately target their own citizens.

10. New media systems maintaining democratic momentum

And finally, the role of media and communications in maintaining the democratizing momentum of political movements for change in the post-uprising phase will inevitably continue to have deep significance for the reconstruction of civil society and the pace of democratic advance. In countries such as Tunisia and Egypt this will require revised systems of media regulation and institutional governance as well as shifts in professional practices and cultural outlooks on the part of those media workers and organizations closely associated with the former regimes. And so too will new media organizations and media forms be required to better express established and emergent constituencies of political, social and religious interests now beginning to compete to steer processes of reform and civil society reconstruction. Though we need to be wary of rushing to make comparisons with media performance and difficulties observed in post-communist societies and societies in transition (e.g. Downing, 1996; McNair, 1994), these research findings may yet hold lessons about likely difficulties and obstacles to journalism's role(s) in the democratization of civil societies including processes of 'elite-continuity' (Sparks, 2008).

In Libya it was interesting to observe how almost immediately following the liberation of Benghazi, the stronghold town of opposition to Gaddafi's regime, a new daily newspaper simply called '*Libya*' quickly sprang up, carrying on its masthead a picture of the national flag before Gaddafi took power and carrying the words 'We do not surrender – we win or die' – the rallying call of a Libyan resistance leader during the Italian occupation. 'Radio Free Libya from the Green Mountain', a new radio station, also appeared and the BBC Monitoring Service reports on a new three-page newsletter, *Intifada*. Published on a daily basis and produced by citizen journalists, this has been distributed on the streets and uploaded to the internet since the beginning of the Libyan uprising.

New forms of political communication often come into being and can flourish when there is a felt need for them. Inevitably these will make use of whatever communication technologies are available at the time (Sreberny and Mohammadi, 1994). They can perform a vital role in maintaining, expressing and steering political momentum and constituting a public sphere (or spheres) for its wider deliberation. Media and communications necessarily will form no less an essential part in the continuing political struggles for regime change and the democratization of state and civil society across the Middle East and North Africa just as they have in the uprisings themselves.

Toward future research

In time, a more considered, in-depth and comparative analysis of the Arab uprisings will necessarily have to attend to how media systems and communication networks have complexly entered into their different and continuing trajectories. This media performance will also need to be situated in relation to the preceding structures of state power, the role(s) of the military and also the organization of political opposition in and across the different societies concerned. Scholars and researchers, some hopefully close to the events themselves, will also seek to address how media and communications, both old and new, have entered *temporally* into the political struggles unfolding within

these different states and also examine how they *spatially* extended their reach and repercussions across different political jurisdictions and with what impacts. What seems clear, even from the very preliminary discussion in this article, is that today's media ecology and communication networks have played an integral and multifaceted part in building and mobilizing support, coordinating and defining the protests within different Arab societies and *transnationalizing* them across the Middle East, North Africa and to the wider world.

In each of the 10 different ways indicated, media and communications have variously enabled and enacted, performed and propelled, represented and resisted the Arab uprisings of 2011 – and are likely to continue to do so and in no less complex and consequential ways in the years ahead. Together they point to how overlapping, interpenetrating media systems and communication networks entered into these revolutionary political struggles and transnationalized them as they unfolded over time, across space and reverberated politically around the globe. This now demands scholarly attention and in-depth analysis.

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