

New Media and the Arab Spring of 2011

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Abstract

This paper examines the impact and interplay of news media and social media network sites on the contemporary political revolutions and crises that have been unfolding in North Africa and the Middle East. Known as the ‘Arab Spring’, these began in Tunisia, in February 2011, and spread to Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Libya and Syria. In spite of concerns expressed by professional journalists drawn from the conventional media at the rise of citizen journalism since the 1990s, the middle-class citizens and the intellectual groups that pioneered the crusade for governmental change in the region resorted to social media networks, in collaboration with the traditional media, to ‘legitimise’ the people’s protests and the civic resistance by the citizens against the governments. The citizen journalists, who were part of the mass protest, used both old and new media to reveal incidences of human rights abuses and crimes against humanity committed by respective governments during the revolutions. Having reviewed the media reports on the revolutions, together with the opinions of experts on Middle East studies², it is clear that: the abuse of human rights; corruption among public officials and the high rate of unemployment in the region were the three main factors that ignited the civil disobedience across the Arab World in 2011. Nevertheless, the citizen journalism that facilitated these revolutions remains a novelty in many developing nations, including Nigeria.

Key Words

Citizen Journalism, New media, Middle East crisis, the Internet, Elections and Democracy

Introduction

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² The origins of this paper may be found in a discussion panel on the Middle East Crisis, held at the University of Derby in April 2011, accompanied by an interview on BBC Radio Derby.

The news media is deeply involved in shaping public opinion, perceptions and an awareness of events in the world as they unfold. The various mediated forms: television; radio; the newspapers; and, ever-increasingly, the Internet, serve, not only, as a first-draft of history, in a more conventional and traditional sense of representation, but also as a major actor and agent of civil society. Audience interest in the news is always at its highest at a time of conflict and revolution, and the modern moral response to armed conflicts and humanitarian crises is strongly influenced by the media. This means that the news media has been endowed with a tremendous responsibility, because it has such a powerful voice within any given democratic society, particularly with regard to image. No more so, perhaps, than in how the media represents armed conflict, revolutions and post-conflict trauma, reconciliation and peace-building initiatives.

Clearly, the media lies at the heart of our own civic society, and its traditional representatives, professional journalists have been enabled to question those responsible for our governance so that, in democratic societies the media industry can often serve as a counterbalance to those politicians and actors whose policies might endanger our democratic society. Indeed, with reference to the late Edward Said's comments on the role of intellectuals in democratic society, journalists themselves will often find themselves in a position of '...speaking truth to power'.³ Witness some of the current debates in the United Kingdom over the freedom of information act, the anti-terrorist legislation and the ongoing onslaught against traditional civil liberties and individual freedoms in our society.

Furthermore, news media and more recently social media networks have had a tremendous impact on the scope and perspective of news and information across the globe as members of the public can now send and receive information on public issues using any of the social networking sites; thereby increasing the volume of news and information being made available to the general public through online based media organisations. In an earlier article, published by this journal, Robert Hudson commented on how:

³ Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, 1994.

The power of the Internet is based upon in its ability to escape censorship; that it is unregulated and allows for anonymity and that it crosses frontiers, reaching a global audience and provides access to millions....Furthermore, it has become far more difficult for tyrants to control people, especially dissidents. As a means of communication and an instrument for the propagation of ideas, this author believes that the Internet triad, made up of telephone network, computer and modem, is as important to communicating ideas now as printing was to the Reformation and the Enlightenment...⁴

More recently, citizen journalism (also known as public journalism) has become the media equivalent of the grassroots democracy. This is because, as each participatory democracy encourages its citizens to participate and contribute to the administration of the state, so citizen journalism allows for public engagement in media practice. According to McQuail (2005, p.183):

The public needs not only information but also engagement in the day's news that invites discussion and debate..., the means of achieving the goals of the new movement (public journalism) remain somewhat in dispute, since the media themselves are structurally unchanged and it is in doubt whether this version of the professional task can really transcend the constraints of a comparative media market system and counter the fundamental causes of political apathy and cynicism.

For the purposes of this article, we shall define citizen journalists as individuals who are not professional journalists: '...playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and dissembling news information' (Bowman, S. and Willis, C., 2003). Whilst acknowledging that new media technology, such as social networking and media-sharing websites, and the exponential use of mobile camera telephones (mobile phones with cameras built in) since the earlier years of the first decade of the twenty-first century has made citizens journalism more accessible to people all over the world.⁵ Engagement in citizen journalism does not involve considerable financial investment in broadcast media technology. It can be done cheaply, efficiently and effectively; and, often more swiftly than the conventional methods of journalists and media technologies, hence the increasing resort to amateur participation. The Arab Spring of 2011, and the Occupation movement against social and economic inequality, which took its inspiration from the Arab Spring and led to the occupation of Wall Street and the City

⁴ Hudson, Robert, 'Conflict, identity and the Internet: Use of the Internet by Serbian intelligentsia during the 1999 Kosovo conflict', *Journal of Communication and Media Research*, Vol. 2, No. 1, April 2010.

⁵ The first camera phone was invented and built by Philippe Khan in 1997.

of London in the autumn of that year, provide clear examples of the use of citizen journalism by conventional news media. Although the first global news event in which conventional media resorted to images from mobile camera phones was the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami of 26 December 2004, it was the London bombings of 7 July 2005 which had an impact in distributing video footage taken from beneath the ground of the carnage inside the broken carriages of the distressed underground train were taken by passengers employing mobile telephones to relay images to the news studios of the national television channels (BBC, ITV and Channel 4) which in turn were broadcast worldwide. Whilst this fed into the ‘CNN effect’ and its thirst for news and comment in the brave new world of 24/7 news media, it also served as a classic example of cooperation between old and new media. Indeed, the mediatic representation of the July bombings led CNN executive Jonathan Klein to predict that video footage, taken on mobile camera phones by ‘citizen journalists’ would be increasingly used by news organisations in the future.⁶ Since then, as network-connected devices, megapixel camera phones are playing a significant role in journalism today.

From another perspective, while it is practically impossible in a democratic society for any government to consult with everyone in the country before making decisions on state matters, the quality of public participation in government can be enhanced as the media enable greater access for members of the public to express their views, and contribute to public debates on topical issues, witness the raft of political discussion shows on radio and television in the United Kingdom alone over the past three decades⁷. Yet the bureaucracy and commercialisation of the mass media provide some of the major hurdles which ensure that many people unable to use the media, remain disempowered, whilst members of the elite group, who by their status in society alone naturally attract the attention of journalists, gain easier access to media outlets. By contrast, citizen journalism has grown out of the peoples’ need to participate in media production. So this type of journalism encourages the members of the public to contribute to the public debate on national issues using any of the social

⁶ It was also in late 2004 that a fad called Happy Snappy broke out in the United Kingdom, whereby someone would be assaulted whilst others filmed this on a camera phone. The images would then be circulated by mobile phone.

⁷ For example: *Question Time*, BBC 1 on Thursday evenings hosted by David Dimbleby and *Any Questions* on BBC Radio 4 hosted by Jonathan Dimbleby and broadcast on Friday evenings and repeated on Saturday lunchtimes.

media networks. The problem now is that as the barriers to becoming a journalist are lowered, and no formal training is required, the potential for unethical journalistic behaviour may increase (Joyce 2007, p.8). This argument does not invalidate the usefulness of citizen journalism, rather it serves as a word of caution on the need for policy framework to guide the activities of the people who send and receive messages using the online media.

Similar concerns have been voiced over the past few years in the United Kingdom by professional journalists, such as Nick Gowan, Jonathan Steele or John Simpson, focussing on: the lack of experience; the potential for bias and a general lack of depth and historical understanding of the background of events as they unfold. Although, the counter argument might be that at least by resorting to citizen journalists on the ground, they provide vital experiential, eye witness accounts of unfolding events in localities and situations where professional journalists have been banned and have to resort to reporting on events from neighbouring countries. Witness for example recent televised reportage on Syrian, North Korea and Zimbabwe.

What is most interesting, from a historical perspective of looking at the media industry through the prism of the representation of conflict, is that the bloggers of today, as citizen journalists, in many ways provide a return to the roots of the war correspondent in the late nineteenth century (as though the wheel has almost come full circle). Whereby the opinionated and sensationalist blogs of today are not that far removed the often jingoistic and gung-ho style of those war correspondents found in the American and British newspapers of the nineteenth and early twentieth century.⁸ Let us not forget that those journalists and war correspondents were themselves amateurs at one time, so well depicted by Evelyn Waugh in *Scoop*, his 1938 novel which had satirised sensationalist journalism and foreign correspondence.⁹

⁸ This theme is fully explored by Phillip Knightly in his ground-breaking book *The First: From the Crimea to the Falklands: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist and Myth Maker* 1989 (First published by André Deutsch, London in 1975).

⁹ The novel recounts the story of William Boot, who works on the *Daily Beast* and is sent to the fictional African state of Ishmaelia, where a civil war is looming. Totally unsuited for the task in hand, he succeeds in getting the eponymous “scoop” of the title.

Yet, many of these citizen journalists indeed lack the expertise which is to be found in many of our better foreign journalists and war correspondents in the UK. One immediately thinks of the likes of Robert Fisk, Misha Glenny, Tim Judah and Noel Malcolm *inter alia*, who wrote, for example on the wars of the Yugoslav Transition and the conflict over Kosovo. These were writers who had a deep knowledge of the region, they had a working knowledge of the local languages and were all history graduates, indeed, Robert Fisk holds a PhD in history. These journalists were writing the first drafts of history with the skill, knowledge and experience to do so.

In journalism, there is this dictum that was coined by Marshal McLuhan, which says that the 'medium' is the 'message'. This presupposes that the value that a target audience would place on any message is a function of the credibility of the medium through which the message is delivered. In fact, the credibility of most of the messages that citizen journalists place on Face Book and Twitter is hard to verify since there is no immediate feedback process as in the case of the traditional media. Both the old and the new media facilitated the political revolutions that took place in the Arab World in 2011. Nevertheless, the majority of the stories that were written by the citizen journalists on the revolutions were slanted in favour of the insurgents, who led the civil resistance against the governments. It was indeed an unusual journalistic practice because the media ideally are not expected to play the role of an advocate to any individuals or group who are involved in conflict, rather they are to help to resolve conflicts in the interest of peace. Brown explains the two ways of evaluating the direction of any message: when a message stresses the interests of the receiver or the mutual interests of the source and receiver, such a communication process can be described as persuasion. But it becomes propaganda when the message only serves to betray a single-minded pursuit of the source's own interests only (Brown 1961 cited in Folarin, 2002, p.82).

Among the most commonly-used social media network sites accessed by the members of the public, are: Face book, Twitter, YouTube, Linked In, Ohm News and TED.Com. Citizen journalism has made it possible for citizens to function as both the users and the writers of media messages. The civil space that citizen journalism creates is a neutral area, a place where anyone can put any issue on the agenda, as

long as they comply with the basic house rules of the site. Although participants are likely to encounter opponents to their own particular points of view, the social-media environment encourages them to engage in a dialogue rather than a diatribe (Nieman Reports: *Citizen Journalism, and the BBC 2005*, p.3 of 4). This paper therefore examines the role of old and new media within the context of the landmark political changes that recently occurred in the Middle East, where citizen journalism was used to facilitate political revolutions by the lower and the middle class citizens in the Middle East and North Africa.

Using the Analytical Induction Method, this paper examines the factors responsible for the civil resistance that occurred in the Middle East and North Africa in 2011 with a focus on how the citizen journalists used the old and the new media to initiate and sustain the revolutions. The Analytic Induction adopted in the study involves a repetitive interplay between data collection and analysis, whereby the result of the data earlier collected and analysed by a researcher, further determines what data will be collected and analysed until the researcher provide the answers to the research questions (Bryman, 2008, p. 539). Therefore, this paper will attempt to respond to the following questions: what were the factors responsible for the uprisings in the regions and, how reliable are the social networking sites when compare to the mass media, and what are risk and benefits associated with the new media?

The interface between the new media and society

People across the world are now able to express their views on a number of issues through the Internet as communication and information technologies have eliminated the geographical barriers that once obstructed the effective interactions between different nations. This psychological reduction of the entire globe into one big information community (the global village) acts as the fulfilment of an earlier prediction by the social scientist, Marshal McLuhan. In 1965, he predicted that communication and information technology would one day bring the entire world together into one big information community. His insights were revolutionary at the time, and fundamentally changed how everyone has thought about media technology and communication ever since (*The World's First Web Publisher Book*, 2000, p 1 of 2). The new traditional media in collaboration with the social media have increased

the scope of public awareness on the activities of government. Citizen journalists can now initiate the public agenda using Face Book and Twitter.

For example, the phone hacking phenomenon that occurred in the United Kingdom in 2011 caused the British government and Members of Parliament to initiate a process of re-appraising the freedom of the press in the context of the activities of the new media. The central objective of democracy in any country is to create an enabling environment where the people can exercise their fundamental human rights, including the freedom of expression. Nevertheless, this freedom can easily be abused by either the citizens, or the government of the country hence the necessity for each country to have a set of laws in place to regulate the social contract that exist between the government and its citizens. Citizen journalism, an innovative approach to media practice, grants everyone access to send and receive news on any issue using the social networking sites. The opportunity the new media have provided for people to express their views on public issues can also be abused if appropriate measures are not put in place by the government to check people against excesses. The problem with the public-oriented journalism, or citizen journalism, is that it tends to take for granted that untrained citizen reporters can quickly and adequately replace the professionally trained reporters (Glaser, 2008b). The recent increase in media related offences, such as the phone hacking scandal in the United Kingdom (which continues at the time of writing) and the concomitant invasion of privacy that this has entailed, are among the occurrences often associated with the online based media organisations.

Theoretical Perspective

The Knowledge-Gap Theory was chosen as the appropriate intellectual construct for this study. The aim is to evaluate the impact of both old and new media in connection with the increase in the volume of the news and information in society through the activities of the online and offline media organisations. This theory believes that as the mass media provide additional news and information on public issues, so the knowledge of the elites about events in society increases, while the knowledge of the lower class citizens on the same issues decreases. The attempt to improve people's life with information via the mass media might not always work the

way it was planned. The media have the effect of increasing the gap between the different members of classes [in society] (University of Twente Portal, 2011). It is this occurrence that leads to the constant expansion in the gap between the knowledge possessed by the information-rich members of any given society and the information-poor citizens. The information-rich members of any country are the educated elites, and this category of people belongs to the upper class citizens of the society.

To explain this more clearly, let us take Nigeria as an example. One of the major attributes that distinguish the members of the elite group from their fellow citizens in Nigeria is that the elite have a valid interest in acquiring all the relevant information necessary to enable them to retain their socio-economic and political positions in Nigerian society. These knowledge-driven members of the society read newspapers, journals and magazines, and they equally have access to the Internet from where they browse and get any information they need. While the majority of the people in the lower economic class still find it difficult to afford the price of a newspaper, let alone subscribing for additional information through the online media. The Internet has given the elites an unlimited access into the world of information. The fact that many Nigerians only access the new media for the purpose of entertainment is highlighted in the Knowledge-Gap Theory. Most of the people in the lower economic class tend to pay less attention to the importance of education, while the ruling elites, researchers, captains of industries and pastors who have already overcome the risks associated with poverty still crave for knowledge and information relevant to their career. This presupposes that the increase in the volume of news and information being made available to the Nigerian public through the various social media networks does not reflect equally on the living standards of everyone in the country. This is why it is necessarily for scholars to constantly investigate the possible ways that the old and new media would help to bridge the information-gap between the urban and the rural population in the country.

The Old and New Media

Prior to the proliferation of Internet services in the early 1990s, information was seen mainly by many people as a means of establishing and sustaining relations between and among the people, in a bid to create an awareness of the events that occur daily in society. The individuals who are responsible for the writing, editing and

publishing of news stories on the pages of the newspapers are called journalists. For anyone to be a qualified journalist, the person must have obtained a certificate, diploma, or a degree in either Mass Communication or Journalism. This is because most media proprietors seem to be more comfortable employing professionally trained journalists, who are conversant with the act of writing and have the knowledge of the universal laws and ethics guiding media practice across the world. Notwithstanding, every Nigerian citizen is qualified to establish a media outfit based on the provision in section 39 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, which states that “every person shall be entitled to the freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and receive and impart ideas and information without interference” (1999 Constitution of Nigeria). Nevertheless, there are stringent procedures a prospective media proprietor must undergo before the Federal Government can issue him or her with a licence to operate a broadcasting station. In Nigeria for example, it is the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) that is the body charged with the responsibility to approve and control the broadcasting stations in the country, while the Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC) allocates frequency (radio waves) to media operators for purpose of broadcast transmission.

Radio waves are a type of electromagnetic spectrum that facilitates the movements of information signals between a broadcasting station and its target audience. The electromagnetic spectrum is an invisible natural resource that is usually located in the stratosphere. Aside from it being used for broadcast transmission, it also facilitates the operation of satellite communications, computer networks, radar detectors, X-Rays and many other communication activities. In a broadcasting station, the vocal sounds (acoustic signal) that echo from the mouth of a radio reporter while reading a news story are usually converted into an electrical impulse by the microphone positioned in front of the reporter. The electrical signals in the microphone are further transferred to the transmitter by the microwaves (the shorter version of the radio waves). The transmitter acts as a booster as it pushes the information signals into the atmosphere. And with the aid of an antenna connected to a radio receiving set, the information signals in the atmosphere are retracted into the radio receiving set, where the electrical impulses that were released earlier by the transmitter into the atmosphere are reconverted into acoustic signals (audio), the form in which the message is received by the target audience.

The above description paints the picture of the rigorous processes involved in the production of news stories by radio stations. Every story is properly edited before being disseminated to the members of the public by the media. In a sense, there is no free and open access for everyone to send and receive messages using the mass media. The use of the media is restricted to the well known members of society - the ruling elites and the captains of industry- are among the categories of people that have access to use the media. It was the desire expressed by members of the public to participate in media practice that led to the emergence of citizen journalism, facilitated by the onset of the Internet in the early 1990s.

Public journalism (another name for citizen journalism) has increased the quantity of information available to the public. Notwithstanding, it is information and communication technologies that have also increased the risk of terrorist attacks across the world. The September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in the United States of America were carefully planned and executed with the aid of information and communication technology. The new media have the potential to either promote or demote development, depending on the purposes to which they are deployed to serve by the users. The Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) is a very useful communication tool in society.¹⁰ Almost every person has a mobile phone in Nigeria. For example, the police use mobile phones to communicate with one another as they keep track on state security and prevent the occurrence of threats by criminals against the lives and property of the people. Ironically, it is the use of mobile phones that has increased the risk of armed robbery attacks and hostage-taking in many parts of the country. This was realised in England in the summer of 2011, when unrest took place across the capital and major cities of the country in which the rioting and concomitant looting were coordinated by mobile telephone.¹¹

¹⁰ Originally known as *Groupe spéciale mobile*, the GSM is a benchmark devised by the European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI) to standardise second generation digital cellular networks.

¹¹ Another example of the usefulness of the mobile phone in conflict is demonstrated by what happened to one of our colleagues who was conducting ethnographical research in Lebanon, in July 2006. He suddenly got caught up in somebody else's war, when the area in which he was conducting his research, a Christian village on the Lebanese-Israeli border came under Israeli bombardment. His life was no doubt saved when details of his SMS signal were lodged with the Israeli army who ensured that his position would not be fired upon by Israeli tanks and artillery. A fascinating account of this may be found in Mollica, Marcello, "Ethnography

With the aid of the new media, Terrorists are able to carry out coordinated attacks on their victims as in the case of the July 2005 Terrorist attacks in the United Kingdom. In that particular incident, bomb explosions occurred in three different places in London almost at the same time, and many people were killed in the process of the attacks. Furthermore, according to Hudson (2010, p.13): “The potential application of computer viruses and ‘logic’ bombs to cause chaos in a state security and financial systems became apparent in the first quarter of 2001, when the America and Chinese ‘hackers’ tried to spread viruses and clog up the Internet systems in each other’s countries.” This is why it is necessary for every country to come up with up a policy framework to regulate the activities of the social media network providers, so as not to plunge the world into chaos.

Despite the ubiquitous nature of the new media the information they provide are often less reliable than the news and information the professional mass media provide on events that occur daily in society as amateur citizen journalists or ‘hackers’ are often lacking in the depth of historical and political insight that might be held by professional journalists, some of whom are writing the first draft of history. By contrast, the citizen journalists are actually there on the ground and can comment experientially as eye-witnesses to events as they unfold.

Another problem, confronting conventional news media is the speed in which information can be relayed from conflict zones. One of the concerns expressed by the ITN broadcaster Nick Gowan, has been what he has termed the ‘tyranny of real time’ television. Whereas, only a few years ago news was recorded on ten-minute cans of celluloid film and would have to be shipped back physically to the laboratory somewhere and then sent to London, where it would take 90 minutes to develop and it could take a few hours or even a few days to broadcast. Now, with a video cassette and digital electronic signal the process can be instantaneous or take no more than a few minutes for the signal to be beamed up on a tiny bit of highly profitable transmission equipment from the middle of nowhere. The upshot of Gowan’s concern is that the speed of transmission today, does not allow much time for reflection. So

under Fire: Alma el-Shaab Summer 2006” in Hudson, Robert and Heinze, Hans Joachim (eds.) *Different Approaches to Peace and Conflict Research*, Humanitarian Net, University of Deusto Press, Bilbao, Spain, 2008, pp.159 – 182.

that truth and accuracy can never be guaranteed in real time. This makes us think back to the reporting of the July bombing in 2005, so much of the ‘enfolding news’ was speculation and comment rather than hard fact.

The dynamic of new information technology in armed conflict has also meant that journalists have become far more intrusive, and therefore more vulnerable. The very act of ‘bearing witness’ in conflict can be construed as ‘significant military activity’ these days. Gowan has also expressed his concerns about the security of journalists in conflict zones. It all seemed to start in the 1990s in the Balkans, when journalists seemed to be becoming ready targets for the various fighting factions. Indeed, former BBC journalist Martin Bell has added to the debate, commenting that:

In the past ten years, they’ve [the journalists] gone from a danger where the main risk was being caught in a crossfire – it could happen to anybody – to being targeted, taken out, executed, held hostage.
(Press Gazette, Interview with Martin Bell, *Press Gazette: Journalism Today*, London, 17 November 2006)

Clearly the situation has worsened further since the conflicts in Bosnia, Somalia and Iraq, as in the case of the filmed de-capitation of journalist Daniel Pearl, shown on Al Jazeera, ten years ago.¹² The fact that this was instantly broadcast world-wide on the Internet is itself a form of misappropriation of ‘citizen journalism’ used for propagandistic purposes, admittedly with terrorist intent.¹³ This demonstrates clearly the power of the Internet as a medium which can give voice to and empower any counter cultural group or terrorist group in times of heightened tension and violent conflict. Nowadays, Journalists are being actively targeted by warriors, warlords and the armed forces of even the most highly developed governments who do not want us to see what they are doing. So, for any journalist, the very act of pulling out a video camera now puts them at greater risk.

¹² Daniel Pearl was an American journalist working for the *Wall Street Journal*, he was kidnapped members of a militant group in Pakistan, in January 2002, whilst investigating alleged links between Richard Reid, the so-called “shoe bomber” and Al-Qaeda. He was subsequently beheaded by his captors and images of his execution were subsequently distributed world wide on the Internet.

¹³ Some of the earliest examples of using the Internet as a means of empowerment by raising the international media profile of revolutions and insurgencies have been provided by the Zapatistas/Chiapas in Mexico from 1994, or by the KLA used the Internet to broadcast images of Serbian atrocities in the Drenica Valley of Kosovo from 1997.

There is a positive side to all this, given that people anywhere who want to know more about the world outside their own communities can now turn to the Internet for deeper coverage of international news. The Internet provides almost universal access to both quality journalism and citizen journalism for anyone with the means to use the Internet.

The Political Revolutions in Middle East Region

The political revolutions that took place in the Middle East and North Africa in 2011 were led by middle class citizens, together with some of the members of the elites who were sympathetic to the plight of the people, following the high rate of unemployment, corruption and the abuse of human rights in the region. The mass protest that led to civil resistance by the citizens against their governments started in Tunisia when a young man voluntarily set himself ablaze in protest against the neglect and insensitivity of the government toward the suffering of the people. HUFFPOST WORLD (2011) observes that the Tunisian revolution started through the mass protest by the citizens over the high rate of unemployment in the country and the allegation of corruption levelled against the government. But the riots that brought about the change of government in Tunisia were sparked up by the suicide of a young man who could not find a job and was again barred from selling fruit without government permission. Other citizens who heard of the news about this protest suddenly took to the streets in order to sustain the revolution. The leaders of the revolutionary group in Tunisia demanded the immediate resignation of the president, and for the full implementation of participatory democracy in the country. When President Zine El Abine Ben Ali could no longer withstand the pressure from the people, he decided to resign in January 2011. While the Tunisian revolution was unfolding, another mass protest started in Cairo and other Egyptian cities where the people also demanded the immediate resignation of President Muhammad Hosni Mubarak. Following the pressure the citizens mounted on the Egyptian Government to relinquish the people, President Mubarak decided to resign from office in February 2011.

The successful outcome of the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt probably encouraged the citizens in the other Arab countries to demand the removal of their

presidents, and the full implementation of democracy in their countries. Consequently, in February 2011, revolutions broke out in several countries including Bahrain, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen. Whilst in Libya, people who started the mass protest and civil resistance against the Libyan president, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, have since metamorphosed from being protesters into becoming the members of the National Transitional Council, the former Libyan rebel government, which was recognised by the United Nations on 16 September 2011 as the legal representative of Libya. In Saudi Arabia and Bahrain the governments have been able to quell the revolutions, and relative peace has been restored in these countries, though at the time of writing (April 2012) there have been renewed protests sparked off by the hosting of the Formula One Grand Prix in Bahrain, with the intervention of troops from neighbouring Saudi Arabia to help the Bahraini police.¹⁴ People exploring Citizen Journalism in support of the various revolutions in the region that instigated these uprisings across the region, and the citizens using the various social media sites reported the incidents that occurred during the revolutions. Public journalists took the photographs of incidents of the abuse of human rights and the crimes against humanity committed by respective governments during the protests, and sent them to media houses, such as: Aljazeera, the BBC and CNN. This enabled people across the continents to follow and monitor the Middle East crises from the comfort of their own living rooms. Although the media were expected to provide balanced and objective coverage that would have reflected the stance of all the factional groups in the conflicts, the western press nevertheless took a predetermined position to side with the members of the dissident groups in the revolutions. This was probably one the reasons why the leaders of the dissident groups in the region rejected the entreaties made by the governments to resolve the conflicts. The United Nations, France, Britain and the United States of America may have decided to support members of respective revolutionary probably because of the way and manner in which the media reported the crises in the regions.

The Media, Democracy and Elections in the Middle East

If the government fails to recognise the inalienable rights of the people to elect the members of government and parliaments, the citizens could revoke the legitimacy of the government through the instrument of sovereignty that resides with the people.

¹⁴ Source: Reuters, Friday 27 April 2012.

“In a democratic government, the people are sovereign and remain the highest form of authority. Power flows from the people to the leaders of government who hold power temporarily” (Adejumbi 2004 cited in Omadjohwoefe 2011, p.53). It is therefore the duty of government in any society to create an enabling environment where the rights and liberties of the citizens can be preserved by the state, as the government provides the direction for the steady growth and development of the country. This does not preclude the fact that there might be occasions where there could be conflict among the citizens, or even between the government and the people. Nevertheless, every ideal democratic society strives on the basis of the application of the rule of law, upon which the judiciary resolves every conflict in the interest of peace. The members of the international community sometimes disagree with one another as the government of each country tries to protect its national interests in harmony with the interests of the other member states. But there are procedures approved by the United Nations by which the members of the global community can resolve their differences. For example, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, David Cameron told journalists during the official visit of the president of the United States, Barack Obama to the United Kingdom in May 2011 that despite his intimacy with President Obama, both of them have had reasons to disagree with each other over certain issues.

Through the auspices of international trade and diplomacy, stakeholders are bound to disagree with one another from time-to-time as each country seeks to protect its own national interests, but without necessarily compromising the interests of other members of the global community. Nevertheless, these same leaders hardly disagree with one another regarding any opportunity they have to support the implementation of democracy in any country where the citizens had collectively expressed their displeasure and frustration in having to endure a dictatorial regime. The campaign on global democracy is an open agenda of the United Nations. Therefore, the ongoing revolution in the Arab World, where the citizens are clamouring for a change of government, is an opportunity for the United Nations to encourage the installation of democratic governments in the region. It will be recalled that it was the mass protest and the civil resistance by the citizens against the governments of the Middle East region that attracted the attention of the United Nations to the internal conflicts in the region in the first place.

The citizen journalists that reported on the revolutions in the Middle East disclosed that it was the increase in the abuse of human rights by their governments, and the high rate of unemployment in the region, which were among the major factors responsible for the revolutions in the region. [I thought we should link this]

During the period of civil resistance, Arab governments argued in many forums that there was no basis for the revolutions in the region since the governments themselves were providing all the essential needs of their citizens. What the Arab leaders probably forgot is the fact that human needs are relative. Therefore, what may well constitute the essential needs of some individuals in any given society might be considered as a luxury elsewhere. Poston (2009, p.1) noted while reviewing the Hierarchy of Need Theory by Abraham Maslow that as people work their way upward in the pyramid of success, their needs start to become more complex, and may include safety needs, social needs, esteem needs, and finally at the very top, the need for self-actualisation. People now place more value on freedom and liberties than the value they have for other things. The revolutions that occurred in the Arab world in 2011 were the result of a conflict of interest in the desire by the governments to preserve the cultural identity of a particular society in the face of globalisation and the interest of citizens to entrench democracy in the region. There is the need for the governments of the Arab states to embrace democracy and encourage public participation in government, but without neglecting the problem of unemployment across the region. Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Need Theory identifies food, clothes and shelter as the basic needs of human beings; thereby providing the mainstay of humanitarian rights interventions in the modern age with reference to all the inter-ethnic conflicts that took place since the end of the Cold War in 1989. Particularly thinking of those missions instigated by the United Nations and respective IGOS (and indeed NGOs) such as the OSCE, The International Red Cross, or the *Médécins sans frontières*, in all conflict and post-conflict scenarios. These assumptions have been neglected today in the affluent, democratic states of the 'first world', which has been described elsewhere by Robert Cooper, (1997 and 2003) as being made up of post-modern states.¹⁵ As people no longer need food and essential clothing alone, rather than the

¹⁵ Robert Cooper, "The Post-Modern State: Re-ordering the World", The Foreign Policy Centre, London www.fpc.org.uk since published in Robert Cooper (2003) *The Breaking of Nations: Order and Chaos in the Twenty First Century*, Atlantic Books, London. In these two works, Cooper has divided the world into three types of state: pre-modern, modern and post-

freedom to choose the kind of food they would like to eat, and the kind of clothes they would like to wear.

Prior to the 2011 political revolutions, the governments of the Middle East region were making frantic efforts like every other nation in order to meet the socio-economic needs of their citizens, while at the same time disregarding the right of the people to elect their own governments. Many of the governmental leaders in the region had not been elected into office by the people. The late Libyan President, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi for example, had been in power for over four decades. He came to power when the euphoria associated with the doctrine of sovereignty that forbids any government from interfering with the internal affairs of another country, was still in force, pre-dating the Right to Protect (1997) which blew away the old Westphalian-style principles of international law based on the tenets of the sovereignty of the state. Since the Right to Protect military intervention in the internal affairs of a state became permissible if human rights abuses were being conducted by any state. This was the reason the military could previously stage a coup in Africa to abort a legitimate government, and establish a military regime that would later be recognised by other nations. Unfortunately, it is no longer possible today for any government to create such an unsafe condition even within the limit of its territorial integrity, and remain in power. This is because information and communication technology have reduced the entire world into one big information community. The incidents or conflicts in any given country today have either a direct or an indirect impact on the interests of the members of the international community. Hence the United Nations, Britain, France and the United States being among the major players of international relations and having a vested interest in installing democracy in the Middle East since it is one of the best options available to restore peace in the region.

modern. If the pre-modern state represented chaos, and the modern state was quite prepared to resort to war in a Clausewitzian sense as, presumably an extension of politics by other means, then the post-modern state no longer thought of security in terms of conquest or of going to war, but rather in terms of the transparency of "mutual interference." Cooper went on to advocate the need for "a new age of empire", in which western powers no longer had to follow international law in their dealings with "old fashioned" states, whereby they could use military force independently of the United Nations and impose protectorates to replace regimes which are seen to misgovern. For a full assessment of this theory see Hudson, Robert (2007) "Lessons from Kosovo: Cluster Bombs and their impact upon Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Rehabilitation" in Ferrándiz, Francisco, Robben, Antonius C.G. (eds.) *Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Peace and Conflict Research: a view from Europe*, University of Deusto, Bilbao, Spain, pp.223 – 252.

There is the need therefore for the governments of the Middle East region to equally work out the modalities of evolving people-oriented governments (call it democracy if you like), whereby the people can freely without any inhibition elect a representative sample of the citizens to represent the entire population in parliaments and governments. Most of the Arab leaders seem to be indisposed toward embracing fully-fledged democracy in the region. This perhaps is predicated upon the argument that the campaign for the implementation of democratic Arab republics in the Middle East by the United Nations is likely to change the norms and values of the Muslim societies in favour of the western culture and beliefs. This assumption is however debatable since the central objective of a democratic system of government in any country is to promote peace and development in society as the government provides the leadership for the state. Every nation ideally is expected to retain its religious and cultural values; so long as state religion where it applies, does not violate the rights of the citizens and the responsibility of the United Nations to preserve the value of human dignity across the continents. According to McQuail (2005, p. 113):

Culture also can refer to texts and symbolic artefacts that are encoded with particular meaning by and for people with particular cultural identifications... It must have some symbolic form of expression, whether intended as such or not; it has some pattern, order or regularity and therefore some evaluative dimensions (if only degree of conformity to a culturally prescribed pattern). There is (or has been) a dynamic continuity over time (culture lives and changes, has a history and potentially a future [for every nation]).

Therefore, the major problem in the Arab world today is the failure by the governments to organise credible elections at every interval, where the citizens can freely elect their political leaders to form governments. Prior to the 2011 revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa, the Libyan Government was among the few countries that were not indebted to financial institutions. However, both the anti-Gaddafi group and Muammar Gaddafi's government struggled to gain control over the political leadership of their countries, and have compromised the debt-free status of the Libyan Government, together with the future prosperity of the country.

Moreover, both the old and new media can do more than simply report on the abuses of human rights in Syria, Libya and Yemen; and, in turn the western press and broadcast media are able investigate all those countries that are providing military

assistance to the governments in the region who are attempting to hold on to power, and commit heinous crimes against their own citizens. This ties in with Martin Bell and his theory on journalism of attachment. The journalism of attachment is an idea from the former BBC war correspondent Martin Bell, who as a result of his experience in Bosnia argues that journalistic neutrality and integrity in war is inappropriate, with the comment: “You can be fair to everybody, but you can’t stand neutrally between good and evil.”¹⁶ The way journalism handles events may help to determine both appropriate and misguided policies towards victims.

Bell adds:

You can’t be objective, because you are a subjective person, you see things with your own eyes and ears, and through the prism of your own experience. But you can be fair.¹⁷

In a guest lecture at the University of Derby on 24 April 1996, Martin Bell advocated a journalism of attachment as opposed to one of detachment. This message was widely discussed in the United Kingdom and he came in for some criticism from fellow journalists such as Simon Jenkins and from ministers of the then Conservative government, such as former-Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd.

Traditionally, journalistic neutrality has been one approach to reporting conflicts and humanitarian crises. Elsewhere, this has been referred to as a ‘journalism of detachment’.

However, another UK journalist and editor on *The Guardian*, Jonathan Steele, argues that:

To be a good journalist a certain amount of emotion is indispensable in your work. Anger is particularly important. In a world where there is so much injustice, unfairness, misery, and cruelty you have to feel anger. Anger is the fuel that keeps you going.

(Steele, in Aguirre & Ferrándiz (eds.), 2002: 15)

¹⁶ See interview with Martin Bell in the Press Gazette: *Journalism Today*, 17 November 2006.

¹⁷ Op.cit.

Similarly, the South African journalist Johannes Botes affirms that reporters are not just channels of communication, rather that:

The idea of the journalist as a neutral, objective observer and someone whose presence and professionalism has no impact on conflicts and their resolution is out-dated. Journalists do something more than report the news. As a sub-product of the narration of a conflict, journalists very often adopt similar roles to those of other actors who intervene in conflicts. Thus, they examine and analyse the parties at war, they research issues, they generate opinions and suggest possible solutions, and in the process they also establish (or destroy) relationships between the main adversaries.

(Reflections on Humanitarian Action: Principles, ethics and considerations (2006) London: Pluto: 167

This particularly applies to the coverage of the conduct of revolutions and peacekeeping operations, where journalists play an important role if they can offer information on the complexity of these missions and events, the relationships between the actors and the differences between the mandate of international forces and the reality that they must face, as for example in the case of the wars in Bosnia and more recently the conflict in Libya.

Perhaps we should end this section with the words of Jonathan Steele:

The biggest occupational hazard for journalists, as well as for people who work in aid agencies abroad, is cynicism: the feeling that you have seen it all before, that nothing can be done, and that life is a perpetually recurring cycle of violence and hopelessness. If you succumb to cynicism, then your work stops being effective. So you should never lose your anger. Of course, your anger must not become so strong that it makes you lose your reason or turns you blind. But a kind of low intensity, smouldering anger is the crucial force which gives reporters energy and helps them keep going, with luck doing a decent job.

(Steele, in Aguirre & Ferrándiz (eds.), 2002: 15)

Conclusion

The effort the United Nations, Britain, France, and the United States of America to restore peace in the region is highly commendable. But it would be

helpful to investigate why any government in the world would agree to lend support to an autocratic government to hold on to power even at the detriment of the citizens.

[I think we might need to link this properly with the succeeding paragraph]

Both the old and new media have created the opportunities and conditions for citizen journalism to flourish. The political tsunami that occurred in the Middle East and North Africa in 2011 were ignited and sustained through citizen journalism. The revolutions which started in Tunisia, and spread to Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Saudi Arabia and Syria were initiated by the lower and middle class citizens, who demanded the removal of their presidents and the implementation of participatory democracy in the region. The people succeeded in removing the presidents of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, but the civil resistance against the governments of Yemen and Syria is as yet to be resolved as at the time of writing (April 2012). The focus of the western media coverage on the 2011 revolutions in the Arab world was on accounts of the abuse of human rights, corruption and the crimes against humanity committed against the citizens by government forces during the mass protests that took place. The citizen journalists who covered events during the revolutions also participated in the mass protests. Therefore, they simply reported their own opinions on the conflicts, together with the need for changes of government in the region, without providing an adequate opportunity to the governments to explain their own side of the story, something that might have been provided by professional media outlets. The United Nations and the other major stakeholders of international relations took sides with the members of the revolutionary groups probably because of the way the media reported the events. Nevertheless, a review of the opinions of experts on Middle East crises confirmed that the abuse of human rights and corruption were among the major factors responsible for the political crises in the region. The media being the judges in the court of public opinion should have granted a fair hearing to the dictators in the region to explain to the world the philosophy that empowers any government to remain in power against the people's mandate

We have discussed the responsibility of old and new media sources, but what about the responsibility of the individual citizen before the media? At the end of the day, being informed should be a proactive activity; it should not just be a passive act.

Given the plethora of media opportunities and outlets, It is up to the individual, to take responsibility and actively inform him/her-self about current affairs.

We live in a world where there is an over-abundance of information that is almost free, especially with the onset of the Internet, which means that we have no excuse for not making use of the information available. But we must be pro-active in the way we access the news media, otherwise the system of information will take advantage of the laziness of the individual, so that he or she will be unaware the gross manipulations carried out by the governmental authorities and representatives in times of conflict, revolution and humanitarian crises.

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