

An Egyptian In London: Watching Revolution In My City Through Modern Media (Guest Blog)

blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2011/02/03/an-egyptian-in-london-watching-revolution-in-my-city-through-modern-media-guest-blog/

2011-2-3



The view from London?

Imagine that you are a young person stuck in London when your home city is engulfed in a revolution on the other side of the world. Your family and friends are at the heart of a dangerous event that commands the attention of the world's media. The Internet is swamped with frantic discussion and disturbing testimony. But can you really keep in touch? How can you properly understand the truth of what is happening? This is the extraordinary account by Sara Romany, one of my students at the LSE, as she used all communications tools to try to keep in touch with events in Egypt over the last few days.

I'm an Egyptian girl who recently moved to London to attend my masters at LSE. I was in Egypt over Christmas break and just came back to London on the 17th of January. When I was in Egypt I received an invitation on Facebook calling for the

protest on the 25th but I didn't pay much attention to it. Coming to London I had no clue of what was about to happen, no one did. Every one was expecting this revolution to be just another protest that would blow over in a day. To our surprise and I think even to the surprise of the organizers of this protest it turned out to be a revolution.

On the 25th I wasn't paying much attention to it and just stayed updated through my friends' status updates. But they called for a bigger protest on the 27th, then we all started realizing this isn't something that will blow over in a day but yet we didn't expect what happened from the 27th onwards. The 27th turned out to be more than just a protest and the people were now calling for Mubarak to leave. Following closely my friends updates as my main source of information.

But all of a sudden first Twitter then Facebook gets blocked by the Government. Of course all my Egyptian friends found ways to bypass the Government blocking. The next day the Government blocked all internet services in the country. So I was left blind here in London.

Country On Fire

The first day was a complete horror since mobile services was also out and I couldn't even call anyone to understand what's really happening. Al Jazeera had full coverage of the events and I couldn't stop watching it, but Al Jazeera framed it in a way that made it seem like the whole country was on fire and not just Tahrir square.

I was worried sick seeing my beloved Tahrir Square on fire (I went to school there for 4 years), but also thinking, Oh God, the whole country is gone. After hours of watching the Al Jazeera site crashed for about 5 minutes so I had to find another news site to watch, turning to the CNN.

Things were a lot calmer there. It still showed what was happening in Tahrir Square but it mainly focused on the speeches being released by the White House on the events, and they were at that point still supporting Mubarak. Al Jazeera also mainly relied on calls coming in from Tahrir Square and these calls were not only emotional and frantic but also had background voices of people screaming, bullets being shot, and so on.

A News Nightmare

The second day I managed to call my parents who were safe, Thank God, but they were asking me to give them the news since most of the news networks were cut off and still the internet was out. Trying to put together news based on the different news outlets was a nightmare since each news outlet had its obvious agendas and biases.

For example, I found that Al Jazeera almost 9 times out of 10 blow things out of proportion. They mentioned that Tahrir square had over 2 million people in it but I know for a fact that it simply could not hold that many people. Not knowing which network to trust and being baffled between all the different views, I remembered that I had a friend who lived in Tahrir Square. So I quickly gave him a call to give me details on what was really happening outside his window.

His view was really different. Apparently there was no more than 50,000 in the square and they seem to really enjoy the protest as they were having mini football matches, poems were being read out, people came together and bonded. Rich and poor, young and old, but that was only on that day. On other nights when it wasn't so peaceful I'd call to ask him: are they clearing out yet or is it over yet? To me that was the most reliable piece of news I could get but still he didn't have the answers of who was fighting who, as he too didn't know.

And then all my prayers were answered when the internet was finally back on. Which was just after the President had given his speech saying that he wants a smooth transition and so he will step down in September.

Overflow Of Information

As I open my Facebook I find an overflow of information. Every person had a view on what was happening in Tahrir. Some were calling for an end to the madness and for a peaceful transition of power. Others were thinking that anyone who wants a peaceful transition was a coward and a traitor. Others were still calling for more people to go to Tahrir Square. Others posting videos and pictures of what happened in Tahrir.

To my surprise there were peaceful demonstrations calling for the peaceful transition which was not at all covered by all the networks I watched. With hundreds of statuses and videos and pictures, I had no clue what is actually happening in Egypt. It was just as if every person of my 956 friends were pulling in different directions giving there own perspective of what they think should happen.

One thing was clear no one was listening to what the other person was saying and I too stopped. I just completely shut down I didn't know what to think or what to believe or who is in Tahrir square fighting who. It was and still is too much flow of information and it isn't like any of my friends have inside information they are all guessing what is happening in Tahrir Square. Some believed that it was now a fight between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Government and this is why the army didn't step in to save the day.

But they are all guesses ,where is the truth? Well for me, I'll stay tuned to Wikileaks!!

This article was written by LSE Media and Communications student Sara Romany.

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