Network-mediated/facilitated Protests in Iran, Egypt and Turkey:
Unwitting Leaders and a Test of Activists' Patientia

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Abstract:

State apparatus removes public displays of opposition from the political sphere so that the nature of social kinetics (stability) becomes maintained. Unexpectedly though, collective actions in Egypt, Iran and Turkey indicated atoms of social kinetics may be set in motion upon an impact from deep within the social strata. Conditions of a social equilibrium are likely to be challenged by protest actions. As these are progressively constituted and mediated in digital networks, classical leadership or vanguard figures mutates into new forms. This breeds new pioneers whom I refer to as *unwitting leaders*. As individual cases showed in Egypt, Iran and Turkey, these leaders inadvertently rise to prominence despite disclaiming leadership. As a downside, dissidents (political activists) are subjected to state violence which relies on reinforcement or suspension of laws; their patientia[2] is tested.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Middle East embraced a string of political struggles which gained great momentum over the last couple of years. These conflicts became a sign of collective self-realisation preceded by a *rude-awakening*. With the help of digital networks (technical infrastructure which supports Information and Communication Technologies), these movements forged liberated realms which may be referred to as "space of flows"[3] (Castells 2009, p. 34). Millions in Egypt, Iran and Turkey came to terms with the real character and repressive measures employed by goverments. Masses took to the streets as a redress of their griveances and discontent. Peaceful raids were enacted as a way of *praxis* around physical landmarks such as Tahrir Square, Taksim Gezi Park and the streets of Tehran. Protests that testified "spatial textures [were] woven together which involves a symbolic overlaying of physical space with cultural meaning and narratives" (Gerbaudo 2012, p.

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[2] Latin word for patience or endurance.

[3] For Castells, space of flows signify "the technological and organizational possibility of practicing simultaneity without contiguity. It also refers to the possibility of asynchronous interaction in a chosen time, at a distance" (2009, p.34).

44). While this was the morphology of protests, congregations in the region became a source of inspiration for a line of academic thought. It stood out by scholarly attempts to expound on the so called horizontal [4] and leaderless movements. These academic thoughts were deeply rooted in a discourse, which predicates on an argument that social movements take place (in contemprary societies) benefit from digital media to communicate meanings and coordinate and mobilize protests. These technologies naturally level collective actions in virtue of diffuse networks, which are tought to eliminate organizational hierarchies and the need for leader agency (Castells 2012; Hardt and Negri 2012).

These tenets disavowed leader agency in protest actions. But we can hardly harp on a *leadership vacuum* in place. "Discourse of leaderlessness" (Gerbaudo 2012, p. 157) overlooked the fact that open and flat networks can actually create new leaders. As Gerbaudo (2012) asserts, networks bolster particular protesters to come into play in the production of symbolic processes of these protests. These processes are namely meaning-making and/or refining and spreading of the sentiments (e.g. mental feelings such as pity, symphaty, anger and hope). Symbolic actions become of importance for they function in articulation of new meanings, emotions and aspirations of groups and individuals. They play a part in ensuring maintenance actions, collective mobilization and group consolidation. As Alexander et al. (2006, p. 29) put it, these procedures help propagate actors and audiences to engage in hermeneutical circles which leads to emancipatory politics. As far as it goes, the notion of leaderlessness not only disregards the role of vanguard practices; it also underestimates the role of inherited and/or attained qualities of particular protesters. The fact that some protesters may distinguish others with visionary, self-sacrifice and creativity should not be taken for granted. It would be a mistake to fail to notice that social and cultural capital (e.g. network formation, forging interaction, use of knowledge and technical skills) that these protesters have, can play a good part in protests.

As I will show in this article, this was the fact in Iran's *Green Revolution* in 2009, the Egyptian uprising in 2011 and Turkey's Gezi Park protests in 2013. These movements, among other things, are best remembered with vanguard activists relying heavily on social media, whom I refer to as *unwitting leaders*. These leaders differ from their classical predecessors in several perspectives. First of all, the fashion these protesters "lead" diverges from "charismatic leaders" who are characterized by exceptional sanctity or the heroism they may intendedly show (Weber 1978). *Unwitting leaders* neither become ascribed as a divinity nor do they display heroism. Secondly, these activists can not be described by their *authoritarian* leanings. They are not "autocratic leaders" (Lewin 1939), who make decisions without the involvement or input of others. They are no *solopreneurs* and in fact, they need to tap into crowd-sourced input on social media, in order to reflect on narrational and/or emotional repertoire of movements. This, on the other hand, should not mean that they simply renounce decision-making processes. They enterprisingly step into action and lay the groundwork for mood and morale setting in protest actions. Thirdly, u*nwitting leaders* are in no way "organic leaders" (Burns and Stalker 1961), who are elected by consensus. Protesters hardly attribute them leadership in concert. Fourthly, these leaders do not necessarily possess a drive to take the lead or canalize protests single-handed. Even if they want to set themselves leaders, contemprary movements organized in horizontal principles would "stop them from gaining and

concentrating formal powers on themselves" (Morris cited in Jasper 2002, p. 463). Finally, *unwitting leaders*' vanguardist acts are not formally devised or planned, they do not move in an institutional landscape. Their contributions to protests is embedded in informal frames, drawing on every day life practices and unintended as they articulate[5]. With their particular actions which heavily draw their strength from social media, they become vanguards in "symbolic construction of public space" (Gerbaudo 2012, p. 5). Their distinctive acts become influential in guiding and/or determining the agendum, public opinion and course of protests by way of cognitive and emotive work.

This article will discuss the impacts of *unwitting leaders* in protest actions in Egypt, Turkey and Iran[6]. It focuses on micro power relations (By the notion of power, I denote "soft power" which incorporates noncoerce mainly designed and used to mobilize and co-opt people) stemming from biological discrepancies, as well as access and transfer of online information among individual protesters, which gives some leadership. With a concern to offer a holistic perspective, the article attempts to flag up the link between the state and those challenging it, which I believe would be apt not to overlook the intrinsic fact that political activist are no way immune to peril. The article begins by elucidating how digital networks can bring about horizontal and leaderless movement organization. It then attempts to rebut the discourse of leaderlessness, suggesting that network facilitated/mediated protests give rise to new vanguard figures whom I refer to as *unwitting leaders*, the following section explores the concept of *unwitting leaders* by examining individual cases in Egypt's *25 January* protests, Iran's *Green Revolution* and Turkey's Gezi Park occupation. Individual cases of Ala Abd El-Fattah, Wael Ghonim, *Oxfordgirl* and *Woman in Red*[7] will be touched upon. This section also discusses how *unwitting leaders* utilize social media tools as well as classical strategies and these individuals become pioneers in "symbolic construction of public space" (Gerbaudo 2012, p. 5). I will argue that their acts become apparent in guiding and/or determining the agendum, public opinion and course of protests by way of cognitive and emotive work. These figures harness social media as a *center of online gravity* to coordinate and mobilize protests. Social media communication helps them sustain in-group correspondence among frontline protesters, especially in junctures of communication shutdown. The paper concludes by digging down deep into the issue of how state apparatus can employ

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[5] They publicly disclaim their positions as leaders (see Evans 2012, ICRS 2012).

[6] These cases are interrelated for a few reasons. First of all, ethos of horizontal organization was first re-adopted with the burst of the Arab Spring: namely Egyptian uprising in 2011. Ethos of horizontal organization became widespread and put into effect by succeeding protests in the region. Secondly, vanguard figures appeared in these particular movements and employed social media in similar ways as an over-arching technology. Thirdly, though it holds true that these movements have their own endogenous dynamics (political, cultural, economic, social and historical), they are not *worlds apart*. These movements some of which transpired as part of a domino effect brought about with Arab Spring, can be compared since claims and grievances manifested in any of these movements materially found resonance on one another. For example, "perceived successes of any these movement provides other activists with the inspiration to activate dormant potentialities back home" (Oikonomakis and Ross 2013, p. 6). This, in other words, meant hopes, fury and aspirations for *actualization of another world* can be transferrable from movement to movement.

[7] I select their individual issues since these figures were in the limelight in organization and coordination of protests. Their digitally-mediated/facilitated endavours were reflected in international press (online/offline) and helped mold a different public opinion. Some of them (e.g. Woman in Red) put the cat among the pigeons receiving harm to some extent, in the form state violence. Besides studying leadership in social movements research matters as people may feel the need to be inspired or couraged by others, who have overcome hardship in moments of social dissent. Studying the toolbox of leaders will surely contribute to reservoir of emancipatory tactics and tools, whereby followers will set newer standarts for fighting reactionary governance.

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interdiction and coercion through reinforcement or suspension of laws in the context of prisons in Iran and Egypt. It will argue that laws or *unlawful laws* go against activists' emancipatory politics and render them to mere existence, as *homo sacer* of our times. This will be argued in light of mistreatment of officers during Turkey's Gezi Park protests.

2. THE ILLUSION OF HORIZONTALISM AND UNWITTING LEADERS: EGYPT, IRAN AND TURKEY

Insurrectionary waves engendered in the Middle East in 2011 and 2013 received a standing ovation for daring to "dream dangerously" (Žižek 2012, p. 1). Political personas with mutilated psychobiographies were brought into the *council of honor*, and set in judgement before the conscience of the populace. These rebellions, inflamed by fury and hope, were a call for the essence of being; that is "a revolt for dignity" (İnsel 2013). While this essence remains universal, with the advent of digital networks, rebels turned out to be characterised with use of social media formed around nodes of nodes. These networks act as a spring-board for offline protests and lead to the occupation of urban space. Nodes of nodes are similar to "a swarm of ant or bees" (Hardt and Negri 2004, p. 57). Such a similitude alludes to us a reticulated environment. It seemingly comprises of autonomous nodes who communicate and co-operate in liaision with others around common causes. In appearance, it looks like a *mirror ball* rather than a *Toblerone* and is run by a logic of heterarchy, or what may be better termed a "panarchy" (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 1999, p. 167). Networks enable symmetrical communication alowing for a multitude of turn-maintainers to organise around loose ties. As Castells (2009) argued, that symmetricality of networks actually lie in the fact that self-mass communication brings forth a nonhierarchial communication paradigm, whereby source of message become highly dispersed and polarized. To this respect, network mediated/facilitated protests become often nonhierarchial and without leaders, or as Castells put it, "usually leaderless" (2012, p. 224) in terms of organization.

These assertions imply diffuse networks' potentiality in eliminating asymmetrical relations and the need for leadership in protest movements. While it would be apt to give some credit for these claims, it should be condign that we take a critical stance. We should can go even further to assert quite the contrary that these networks are not legitimately portrayable as free from "asymmetries" or "leader agency". In order to corroborate this argument, as a point of departure, it would be helpful to take Jo Freemans' classical polemic in *The Tyranny of Structurelessness* (1970), in which she articulated her observations of so-called leaderless feminist movements of the 1960s and 70s. We may then elaborate our point beginning with the 2011 Egyptian uprising exploring the case of Ala Abd El-Fattah and Wael Ghonim.

Egypt
The case of Ala Abd El-Fattah

In her classical piece, feminist writer Jo Freeman (1970) argued, that individuals have different talents, predispositions and/or backgrounds, and it is ontologically inevitable to form some kind of structure. She concludes that even if we refused to relate to or interact on any basis whatsoever, we could only come close to 'structurelessness'. To put it differently, human groups or organizations can not denounce or remove leader agency

since it is far from being viable. As contemprary anarchist author Chaz Bufe makes clear, it would be a mistake to think any kind of group or organization exists without leadership; we instead should pore on the question that "what kind of leadership is it going to be?" (1988, p. 21). We can figure out an answer by broaching the case of Alaa Abd El-Fattah and Wael Ghonim.

As an activist and a vocal critic of Mobarak's regime, Alaa Abd El-Fattah "is regarded as one of the godfathers of social media and the blogging scene in Egypt" (Al Gundy 2012). As a software developer, he possess a highly developed knowledge of the digital terrain, on which he actively operates domains of dissent. He launched "an Arabic language Drupal platform designed specifically for activists and human rights bloggers. He started the Egyptian GNU/Linux User Group and *manalaa.net*, becoming the Arab world's first blog aggregator" (Khalil 2014). His page *manalaa.net* served people conveying their thoughts and feelings about the political continuum in Egypt. The page acted as an online switch, which users could leverage to share their fury and hope through posts in English and Arabic. *Alaa's space* helped build a deconstructive discourse against Egyptian state and commercial media, which- operated under the sway of Mobarak regime's ideological dictates and interests. With the help of an alternative online column, Abd El-Fattah paved the way for "a network of people that didn't know each other physically, a free flow of thoughts and a different public opinion of what was formed in the press" (Mekkawy cited in Khalil 2014). In spite of constant coercion enforced by the regime, his vanguardism, true visionary and creativity became inspiring to others. Cultural capital embedded in his online initiatives found broad resonation among people, and contributed to a great deal in the run up to 2011 protests. His morale boosting venture distinguished him among others for keeping the flame alive for a democratic vision: Egypt without the Mobarak regime.

Figure 1. Ala Abd El-Fattah's Drupal Platform affiliate page; manalaa.net

Alaa Abd El-Fattah's blog *manalaa.net* set ablaze a *spirit of initiative* among Egyptians and expats in different parts of the world. Arabic-English platform provided people from all over the world with a *symbolic powerhouse,* on which different views and codes of information come to be negotiated. As Mekkawy echoed above, the page forged a different public opinion. Posts and comments roused mobilization contexts for people to devise and exchange alternative codes and symbols. Flow of information prompted free speech and political discussions among users, which in return helped manufacture of consent. *Information cloud* prepared the substructure through which people may attach

to the cause. It made them realize they were not the only ones feeling uneasy about the regime's politics. Insofar as the script from below grew viral, the pandora's box opened. People now knew about their "hidden transcripts, which subordinates can folly recognize the full extent to which their claims, dreams and anger is shared by others with whom they have not been in direct touch" (Scott 1990, p. 223). Unveiled transcripts served to disambiguate the idea that a good part of people share similar outlooks. The mood seemed to be prevalent: people feel enthusiastic about bringing the change. Given the media blackout and squelched views, stream of information acquainted people with facts/stories unheard of. Alaa's online venture prompted a good deal of feedback and set off a reaction with responsiveness. Transfer of information became a key element in igniting the wick prior to the 2011 Egyptian uprising. This was so in deed, as Castells (1997, p. 359) argued, that given "new sites of power are exponentially constructed in and fought for people's [hearts] and minds". Symbolic spill-over served a *true lever*, which helped win people's hearts and minds. Yet, the fact remains that the potency created by Ala Abd El-Fattah was just a push-off above all. He was not the only one who helped widen the political horizon in Mobarak's autocratic Egypt. Former Google executive Wael Ghonim's toolbox gave an additional fillip to Egyptians to trace and/or chase after their dream.

The case of Wael Ghonim

Digital politics draws heavily on flow of information and negotiation of different perspectives. In this sense, particular nodes would inextricably step forward with script-coding, and as Nunes (2006, p.302) put it, determining the content to traverse. I believe that political activist Wael Ghonim's dynamism offers a handful of insight into this fact. Ghonim, as a digital native, literally superimposed Ala Abd-el Fattah's venture with valuable counteracts. He set up a Facebook group in the infancy of his venture. As the former Google executive, Ghonim knew that upsides of a Facebook group would be plenty. It soon turned out that the page became handy for fellow Egyptians to continously stay in touch. He named his page *We are all Khaled Said*. Khaled Mohammed Said was a young Egyptian man beaten to death under police custody in Alexandria (second largest city in Egypt) in 2011. His bereavement fuelled anger among Egyptians to take to the streets in January 25 protests. Ghonim's page in the beginning operated to reveal essence of the matter about Khaled Mohammed Said's case. The fact remains that there was much more than this to his page. The Facebook group bunched together thousands of Egyptians and channeled them to engage in updates about events, which soon fuelled political talk. Ghonim acutely named the page after the pseudonym "*Al Shaheed* (the *martyr)* which hiked attraction of thousands, [gradually] tens of thousands" (Evans, 2012). The content traversed through the group page became what Lacan calls "a master signifier" (2007). It served as a key node, which gave meaning to a chain of floating signifiers such as *democracy, liberties, freedom* and *justice*. The *victim narrative* Ghonim harnessed on his page was substantial for other people to clear up their minds in an "(...) endless movement of signification" (Lacan 2007, p. 231), dominated by regime's political rhetoric.

By way of these acts, Ghonim unveiled how "a handful of people control most of the communication flow" (Gerbaudo 2012, p. 135). As a vanguard user and page administrator, Ghonim's employment of social media created "emotionally charged interactions with his audiences to sustain a process of collective identification among people sharing a common sense of victimhood in the face of an unfair power system" (Gerbaudo p. 148). The narrative exchanged through social media became functional for

people to bestir themselves in a pursuit to dispel the "pratico-inerte that is the material state of society in which they find themselves" (Sartre cited in Zack, 2005, p.133). Ghonim's page in some sense could form a basis for people to denounce and converse about the wrongdoings of the regime and share their discontent. With the open feed of user comments, political discussions were held which helped collectively explore an alternative *modus operandi,* of how things should/can be worked out in another Egypt.
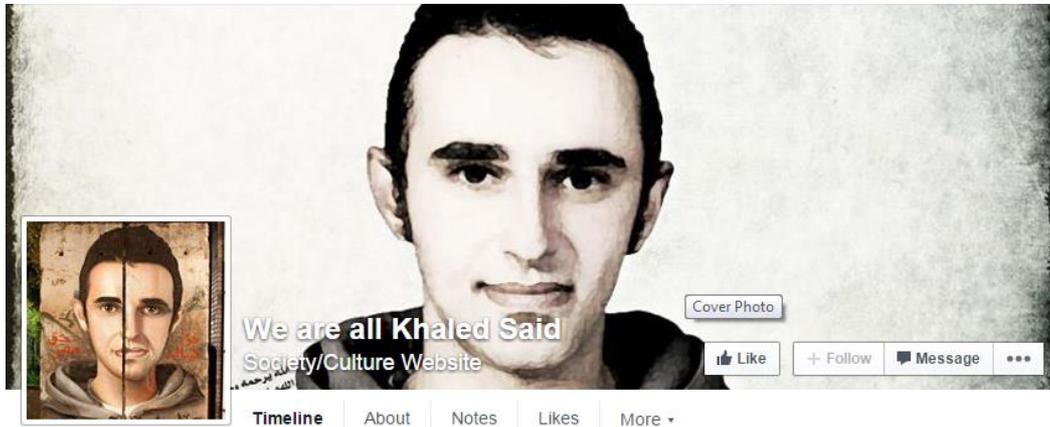
Figure 2. Picture of Khaled Said on a Facebook page named after him

The way Ghonim harnessed digital media was not only limited to production of universal signifiers. He used it to lay the groundwork for ignition of a "contagious sense of anticipation or momentum before the protests, an *emotional attraction* to sit-ins and demonstrations" (Gerbaudo 2012, p. 104). On his Facebook page, he engaged in back and forth private debates with page followers. Spiralling conversations among users composed a bulk of refined information, out of which he could excavate into different cognitive perspectives and moral values of people. This output helped him devise a cultural framing which can address people's hearts and minds. Such a framing ended up in garnering *popular support* which made recruitment of dispersed and nonaligned groups easier.

Ghonim's symbolic interactions exceeded well beyond the online environment. His communicative actions stirred up spirits. His public address prompted masses to take action and stand united against the regime. An excerpt from Ghonim's offline speech in Tahrir Square after his release from detention lays the point bare:

- Wael Ghonim: "I don't feel guilty for the martyrs who died. I don't feel guilty for the officers who died. Those who should feel guilty are those who are looting this country. "I apologize to every father and mother and every person who lost his life for his country. For 12 days, I've been isolated. I saw the people who died. These are the heroes, and you are the heroes."
- The crowd: "One hand, one hand" chants with Mr. Ghonim leading the crowd (Halawa 2011).

Ghonim's address was to the point. He translated emotions, fury and hopes of people into a popular discourse. He performed the process of defining the *us,* as the authentic public of Egypt. *Us* here signified the Egyptians as *heroes* who became martyrs in the hands of the regime. They sacrificed their lives without batting an eyelid for the sake of a free Egypt. In the face *us, them* the *looters* and murderers foreclose political horizons which in theory lives upto popular interests. Ghonim's particular wording laid stress on

chivalry of Egyptians while deeming regime forces perfidy in contrast. While determining "who" *we* are, he drew a demarcation line to "who" *we are not* which operated as a *boundary work* help forming collective identity. By demonising Mobarak's regime, he established a shared understanding, and whipped "strong emotions which instigate people to participate in protest actions: hate, anger, doubt and rage" (Jasper 2002, pp. 193-194). Ghonim's language grounded in binary codes (us against them) in his page, helped pave the way for a symbolic space. Such a space allowed for sentiments and affective ties between dispersed groups to become established and mutually shared. His evocatory adress helped protests ferment too. While mobilizing people, it enforced an ad hoc consolidation among different groups and individuals. His spirit-waking talk urged self-determination and shed a light on the authentic actors of a would-be emancipation: the people of future Egypt. Producing as well as functinolising codes of information and images were essential, particularly in construction and reproduction of a symbolic space. Yet, the way strategic content becomes diffused does more than purification among social groups. It does more than stimulation and contagion of emotions. Furnishing masses with instant flow of practical information could also serve as strategic coordination of protests as was the case in Iran.

Iran
The case of Oxfordgirl

Iran's so called *Green Revolution* of 2009 testified then-trendy key figure: the *Oxfordgirl.* Being a journalist, she lives in a small English town. Despite the physical distance, she could tip the scales in her favor with the help of microblogging; Twitter. Anti-Ahmedinejadism prompted her to become a leading *tweep* among fellow Iranians. She used Twitter as a means from which she drew her strength and used it as a center of *online gravity.* To better grasp how she utilized this technology, we can recall an interview she gave to *The Guardian* in 2010. When asked about how she tapped into digital networks, she replied "Before they [the Iranian authorities] started blocking mobile phones I was almost coordinating people's individual movements – 'Go to such and such street,' or 'Don't go there, the Basij [militia] are waiting'" (Weaver, 2010). As an *infocrat* followed by some thousands of Twitter users- number of social media users in Iran's postelection protests was less than 1% of general population (Morozov, 2010)-, she highlighted ways of avoiding the anticipated crackdowns by *Basij* force. Like a *gyroscope,* she showed *ligne de fuite* (line of flight) for dissidents from a distance on a virtual map, through instant messagging communicated in Persian. This easy interaction made strategic content spreadable fast on steroids. Oxfordgirl ensured and expedited a flow of communication between the *base* (herself) and the *units* (protesters on the ground). Immediate notifications and updates on events eased frontline protesters' mobility. It pragmatically empowered them in ways of adapting manouvre tactics. Instant messages supported protesters in rerouting their way to rather secure places. Relocation in lethal conditions brought about by *Basij* intervention became relatively unlaboured. Feed of information streamlined in-group coordination and helped protesters move in concert to when and where to meet other protesters, or disband when necessary. Tweet loop gave protesters the ability to know about places where brutal interventions concentrate. This made calls of relocation to specific places easier and faster where additional mobilization is called for. As Oxfordgirl's efforts testified, users who have a good command of infosphere, energy and time to invest, and access to information come one step ahead. This gives particular users the upperhand in directing and backing protesters during protests.

Besides of launching a sound pipeline between protesters, Iranian *Green Revolution* was brought into public attention tapping to same aggregate information. This became even more important when we consider a media blackout was in force and access to alternative channels became delimited. This literally meant people elsewhere could hardly know about the developments in Iran's postelection protests. Luckily enough, online amenities embarked upon by Oxfordgirl furnished protesters and the locals with a chance to relay occurences to rest of the country. These channels also made inside stories accessible for rest of the world. As Iranian correspondent Golnaz Esfendiari (2010) wrote, social media communication conducted in Persian language was the only source of news to Western journalists who can read in this language. Tweets often quickly became important in spreading valuable information about the mood in the country. Oxfordgirl's pioneering in collection and dissemination of information had a material impact in alleviating information paucity. Aggregate of information and news gathered from the locals engendered a free information reservoir, which social media users and news experts from all over the world can tap into. Online venture by Oxfordgirl swayed the nature of discussions transfused from digital networks to commercial media. Her technical expertise and time and energy to invest in information gathering, became a key variable in disclosures and molding international public opinion during protests.

Turkey
The case of Woman in Red

Similar implications became manifest in Turkey's Gezi Park protests. Gezi Park occupation which took place in 2013 generated similar signs that the production and dissemination of information is far from being decentralized and leaderless. This point was corroborated by an empirical study by González-Bailón and Barberá (2012 cited in Farrell 2013), which explored the information traffic among social media users during Gezi Park protests. The study found mere 1% of users account for about 80% of all retweets received. On the other hand, three quarters of users active in the protests did not receive any retweets. Findings concluded that the disequilibrium in message dispersion would imply that a minority of users acted as a main source of information. González-Bailón and Barberá (2012 cited in Farrell 2013) deemed these users 'authorities' or the authors whose media content resonate among a great deal of users. Findings also suggested that communication in digital networks relies on a division of labor: while a group of users generate valuable and spreadable content (leaders/vanguards), the rest facilitated the dissemination of same messages. Those as authors produce valuable content came to fore in "script-writing and mood setting" (Alexander et al., 2006) in Turkey's protests. These nodes fed incubation of protests which later stimulated broader participation.

In Turkey's Gezi Park protests, some protesters unwittingly shine out with their cause célèbre actions. As a street poet writing out a script, "Woman in Red"- Ceyda Sungur came to be known as a leitmotif of protests. She epitomized the ethos of individual protest against the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) urban policies. Sungur was well remembered and credited with her attempted challenge, embodied "outside the bounds of institutional political channels directed at political change: *resistance*" (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011).

Figure 2. Picture of Women in Red while exposing to pepper gas by Turkish Basij

Wearing her iconic red dress, Sungur made the apple drop when it was ripe; her scene accomplished to capture broad attention. In the heat of protests, she was caught on cameras with a member of Turkish *Basij*. The photo was striking. The law enforcement officer was crouching down and spraying peppergas into her face from a short distance. Her photograph- along with several other scenes - served uncovering true colors of the AKP regime in the eyes of millions. Her scene became central in communicating masses a concise message: the ruling party is a repressive, merciless villain of the piece. As an eye-opener, this message was heavily mediatized in social media environment and created a "cultural resonance" (Jasper 2002), which fuelled suspicions towards the AKP's rule amongst good part of the populace. It performed a *symbolic sabotage* to the ruling party's "democratic image", and helped uncovere the veil that under the rule of the AKP, civilian's right to life can simply be put at stake. This particular end state raised eyebrows about the credibility of the AKP's commitment to democracy and human rights. To some extent, the attack inflicted by Sungur could disaffect parts of the population from the government. Police intervention laid bare the AKP's repressed dispositions and political attitude towards freedoms. Peaceful protests which gave people a sense of freedom, self-empowerment and self-actualization were quelled with untolerable coercion, in a way disregarding human dignity.

After the attack, protesters emloyed social media to publicize the coercive character of the AKP's power. By adopting nonviolence, Women in Red showed unarmed protesters could go against an entrenched government with superior firepower and numbers. Information exchanged on digital networks channeled accounts of the attack which, in return, created a *backlash*[9]. The backlash endowed the protests with legitimacy; it helped garner popular support and prompt additional participation from almost all sectors of the society. Sungur's leader agency cemented a bond between the highly dispersed and individualised protesters. Despite that Sungur, "the reluctant heroin" (Sherlock 2013),

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[8] The *Basij* Resistance Force is composed of volunteer paramilitary organizations operating under the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps in Iran. It is an auxiliary force with many duties, especially internal security, law enforcement, special religious or political events and morals policing" (see Alfoneh 2013). I prefer to call Turkish police forces as Turkish *Basij* on the grounds that they brutally suppress and victim-ize peaceful protestors in liaision with voluntary paramilitary civilians. For instance, among them was a civilian shopkeeper- he made the headlines as the "man with machete"- who attacked Gezi Park protes-tors and later fled to Morocco (see Hürriyet Daily News 2013).

[9] According to Sharp (2013, p.112), backlash enables protesters who receives harm to some degree. It helps reverse the attacker's violence against him or her. This, in turn, produces anger towards the attacker, while the victim receives a great degree of support from the masses.

refused to speak to the press (with a concern not to rise to prominence), her unwitting pioneering was an important factor which could turn Gezi Park protests into a long-haul resistance. The rhetoric of her photo leveraged a narrative, which rallied hearts and minds of masses, and chanted a resolute *No* to the AKP regime.

3. ACTIVISTS WOULD TAKE A THORNY ALLEY PAVED WITH "STUMBLING BLOCKS": THEIR POTENTIA IS TESTED

Nation states can be described as "concentrated expression of economics" (Lenin, 1965), which nowadays more increasingly employ coercive mechanisms. Coercive practices often occur in liaision with ideological state apparatuses, and have an ultimate aim of forestalling political opposition. In the nexus of punishment and social agency, activists, as antagonistic node-creators are no way immune to interference of state's repression. Concordantly, as a key retributory component of the criminal justice system, the prisons play a vital role in deterring and suppressing public opposition. These buildings designed for confinement and punishment of individuals, are a method of penalty *par exellence*. Its exellence lies in the fact that we all live in a "society in which liberty is a good that belongs to all in the same way and to which each individual is attached by a "universal and constant feeling" (Foucault 1979, p. 232). These buildings, embodying state's repressive substance, are often characterised by the enforcement of inhumane conditions. Prisons can grow into prominence with claims of torture, rape and abuse to inmates. In particular, political activists are often at peril with mistreatment enforced under prison conditions. The infamous *Evin* prison or "the hell on earth" (Mojahedin 2014) in Iran is renowned for mistreatment towards activits ranging from systematic beatings to abuse. Grown into international prominence, *Evin* prison prides itself on being associated with the [murder of] "Omid Reza Mir Sayafi as the first blogger and [political activist who] died in 2009 apparently being denied medical attention (Columbus 2010, p.175). Mir Sayafi's bereavement was a strong warning to dissidents in the country. It signalled how harsh and lethal state repression can be. It also evoked opponents that their emancipatory acts can be restricted at all costs.

While *Evin* prison in Tehran has come to international prominence with inmate rights violations, prisons elsewhere in Iran are seemingly no better. To better grasp the real facet of prison conditions in the country, we can evoke of letters written by prisoners which were publicized by *The Guardian* (Denghan 2011). According to these letters smuggled out from Iranian prisons, authorities were intentionally facilitating mass rape and using it as a form of punishment. Prison guards were providing criminals with condoms and encouraging them to systematically rape young opposition activists (Dehghan 2011). While these letters undisclose the scope of harm imposed on detainees, they are indicative of the mutilation of human dignity and self-respect. Of course, such accounts are not limited to Iran. We may track the use of similar methods in prisons across the region. This was the case in Egypt's military camp-lookalike prisons which I call *vibration absorbers*. The presence of secret prisons in Egypt were first revealed by former detainees after an interview by *The Guardian* (2014). According to these accounts, hundreds of "disappeared" Egyptians were being tortured and held outside of judicial oversight in a secret military prison. Among interviewees, political activist Khaled told that the military police used electric-shock machines and put wet towels on his face to stop him breathing. His clothes were ripped apart, his face was swollen and his eyes were closed. It was reported that he had sustained a wound in his jaw deep enough for a

military policeman to put his finger inside it (Kingsley 2014). These incidents happening behind closed doors voice the fact that liberty of activists and their freedom to exercise emancipatory politics- which is the esence of what makes them activists- are in constant jeopardy. They may at any time receive serious injuries (physically and/or mentally) or simply die at the hands of violence-prone authorities.

The grounds for the incarceration of activists may vary dramatically. In the last instance, *raison d'etat*- in a Kafkaesk style- fabricates charges to fit the so-called crimes of them. Activists are ascribed to a long list of crimes, grounded in the name of the *public good* and/or the *public order*. These crimes include sedition, libel (against political elites, religious beliefs etc.), membership in an illegal organisation, treason, espionage, attempted coup d'etat and breaches of the peace. The syllabus of crimes and legal sanctions issue protagonists a strong message that defiance of any kind in all circumstances will be punished. Punitive statutes and cut-and-dried cases are instrumentalised to disregard issues such as physical integrity, act of habeas corpus and the activists' right to life. As such, as Taylor (2011) argued, natural solidarity, unintentional reinforcement of shared beliefs and relations give way to a shared ideology. State apparatus- possesing the power to create tailor-made charges- holds sway over "whom to" and "how to" outlaw, in the name of eliminating public nuisance. This, in Gramscian terms, may generate "common sense" among general public. Further backed by technicisation or technologicalisation of realpolitik, the imprisonment of political agents is acknowledged by subalterns as part of a conception of the world, uncritically absorbed by the various social and cultural environments according to Gramsci (1971). The masses perceive and judge the every-day run of affairs through a borrowed lens which serves to ferment reproduction of hositilities towards activists. It serves their demonisation as villains defying public order. And, as a consequence, the imprisonment of activists is justified, legitimised and/or banalised in the eyes of people. In other respects, the multitude of resistance from activists, be it with an intent to demand a revision of things or build a different world order, would be hampered. In other words, dreaming up and the expression of ideas for an alternative to the existing social order are endangered.

During Turkey's Gezi Park protests, activists were arbitrarily arrested in İstanbul and Ankara- where the vast majority of protests took place- bundled off to sports halls instead of police stations. They were kept in police detention facilities without detention processes being registered. According to a report by Amnesty International (2013, p. 25), these individuals were detained without access to safeguards in law, such as access to lawyers, family members and mandatory medical examinations. Protesters were often hadcuffed to each other and degradingly treated in public. On some occassions, they were even forced to undress. In this respect, the case of Deniz Kaptan who was unofficially kept in custody was illustrative:

> A lawyer assisting Deniz Kaptan told Amnesty International that Kaptan was apprehended by plain clothes police close to Gezi Park in the evening of 15 June and held for one and a half hours before being released. The lawyer told Amnesty International that at around 10pm in the evening plain clothes police handcuffed him behind his back with plastic handcuffs, while swearing and threatening him, saying "we have got a file on you, you're finished!" The plain clothes police told him not to speak or look around. They allegedly took him to an area behind the panels of the nearby Atatürk Cultural Centre on Taksim Square where he couldn't be seen from the road. The plain clothes police took his identity card from his pocket and checked of his

records. One of the plain clothes police shouted "the pimp has done a masters degree." After around 20 minutes the plain clothes police cut the plastic handcuffs with a fruit knife but kept him there for another hour. After that one of the plain clothes officers took a photo of him with his cell phone and took him onto the street a short way towards Gümüşsuyu [in Beyoğlu district] before telling him to go. His lawyer told Amnesty International that the plain clothes police officers didn't give him back his identity card, telling him to report it lost (Amnesty International 2013, p. 25).

In the course of peaceful Gezi Park protests, state terror crystallised the fact that state politics- by interdiction or coercion through laws or suspension of these laws- creates annexed public spaces, which are invisible from opposition (in linguistic, cognitive and emotional senses). Creating such spaces which I refer to as *political lebensraum* (living space) would entail the "exclusion of some human beings who are not allowed to become full legal subjects" (Lemke, 2005, p.4). Activists who were stripped of their legal rights and reduced to a mere existence are rendered *homo sacer* of our times. *Homo sacer* originally implied a rightless figure, who despite being a Roman citizen, had the fundemantal rights and responsibilities arising from his/her citizenship, which made *null and void* before Roman law. He is reducable to "bare life" or zoē – "the bare, anonymous life that is as such taken into the sovereign ban (...)" (Agamben 1998, p. 73). Activists who joined the ranks of thousands of others in the Gezi park protests were banned from accessing legal safeguards like access to lawyers, access to family members and mandatory medical examinations. The grounds for their arrest were not communicated to them and were therefore kept undisclosed. Worse still, they were treated as if they were *non-living beings* with their basic rights systematically deniable. The case of Deniz Kaptan demonstrates authorities' propensity to undermine the rule of law by suspending it.

On such occassions, Agamben (n.d.) states a *state of exception* as an original structure through which law incorporates the living being- and, this, by suspending itself comes into being. In this way, unlawful administrative paradigm is put into exercise which is indebted in the law and/or in the name of law. Such *lawful-unlawfulness* or suspension of laws dictates a state of exception which constitutes *the camp,* for Agamben "(...) is the pure, absolute, and impassable biopolitical space (insofar as it is founded solely on the state of exception)" (1998, pp. 72-73). Prisoners on detention buses (some darkened from inside with cabin lights off) served to hold protesters for hours before their transfer to police stations. They inflicted beatings and denigration. Camps may take the form of *unknown places* utilised for unofficial detentions. These areas constitute zones behind panels of the Atatürk Cultural Centre on Taksim Square, where detainees could not be seen from the road. These accounts represent the material camps or the borders/lines beyond which:

> We encounter the subject who possesses physiological life without any political significance or representation before the law; it is there that we witness the subject who can be killed with impunity but not sacrificed – he is, after all, beyond the law and therefore unrepresentable within it; and it is there that we see the subject precariously inhabiting a 'zone of indistinction' between life and death, *zoe* and *bios*, law and violence, citizen and refugee, survivor and victim (...) (Downey 2009, p.114).

Spatio-temporal absysses were used in Gezi Park protests, which were insignias of sovereignty and zones of indistinction. *Unlawful laws*- rationalised and normalized through fabricated crimes and fitted charges- brought us over to zones which can be dubbed modern camps. Camps- in which the state of exception prevails- becomes a *modus operandi.* The violation of human rights, denial of the right to assembly, refusing access to medical supplies and use of humiliation and intimidation draw a line between

bare life and political qualities. These state-related acts serve to violate fundemental rights of activists borne with their citizenship status.

4. CONCLUSION

Activists in Egypt, Iran and Turkey defied against unrestrained power and harnessed digital networks to organise and coordinate protests. As argued in this paper, these networks are far from being symmetrical and leaderless. As I contended, digital networks give rise to new forms of leadership structures. Key figures such as Oxfordgirl, Wael Ghonim or the Woman in Red initiated emotional and ideational nodes, which served as engines of uprisings. They helped keeping alive discontent and rouse fury and hopes of individuals and social groups.

Forms of leadership came into view in the context of the digital and social divide. Only mere portion of users could engage in online advocacy inside Iran. In the case of Turkey, just 1% of Twitter users managed to generate tweets, while the online activities of a high number of users were confined to retweeting and/or follow up of events during Turkey's Gezi Park protests. Modern unintended activist leaders combatted for liberatory ends. As Ala Abd-El Fattah showed today's activist leaders are habitants of digital terrain and capable of establishing social ties with random users. They at times risk their lives confronting lethal interventions and use of lethal chemicals by Basij forces. In the case of Wael Ghonim, *unwitting leaders* exploit political agitation through face to face public speeches and/or technology-mediated communication.

Nation states implement deadly actions with an eagerness to deter activists and soon eradicate them from the public space. Prisons as prohibitive tools are brought to prominence as an anti-liberty ensurer for taking away liberty of those who voice their opposition. Activists often face horrendous imprisonment conditions totally free from judicial supervision. Abuse, sexual harresment, humiliation and violence are used as strategies to demoralize activists. Serious harm and risk of death is a genuine concern too. In addtion, prisons achieve a mechanism which ideologically glues the detached masses into a totality.

The laws of nation states are designed to favor the sovereign and crush the defiant. The state terror in Gezi Park protests crystallized that states are conditioned to remove social counteractions from every facet of life; out of sight, out of mind. During such processes, the activists' political and legal rights are annihilated. This is put into practice, for augean stables can be cleansed; so their full legal subjects are reduced to *homo sacer*. Activists are therefore ex-communicated from the protection of the laws and exposed to extrajudicial acts by the sovereign. Once laws and regulations are suspended, a *state of exception* appears as a mode of rule reliant on unlawful laws. The state of exception brings along the *camps*, in which a legalised borderline syndrome comes into existence. These makeshift domains are built to accomodate *homo sacer*, who can be killed with impunity. The camp loomed behind the panels of the Atatürk Cultural Centre in Taksim Square brings such impunity into existence. These areas are borderlines beyond which Gezi park detainees- under arbitrary, open-ended treatment and decrees- are kept out of sight by the sovereign.

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