

6. Jun. 2013

von seditioni

in Interviews,  
Sicherheitskultur,  
Zivilgesellschaft

Kommentare ( 0 )

## Interview with egyptian blogger and researcher Sherief Gaber



*Sherief Gaber is a researcher in issues related to the right to the city and socially just cities and a member of the Mosireen Independent Media Collective in Cairo. Mosireen documented the protests during the 'Egyptian revolution'.*

**At a conference in Berlin you said the internet's influence on the protests and revolution in Egypt was overrated. How would you describe its impact and why do you think others exaggerate it?**

There's a great many people out there who want to believe that the internet and social media tools caused the revolution, I think because it allows one to paint a picture that's familiar, accessible and unthreatening to audiences without context or understanding of Egypt or similar social struggles elsewhere. I think that because people were writing about or posting updates regarding the ongoing events during the 18 days in 2011 using Facebook, twitter, and the like, it allowed journalists an easy way to project understanding of events, and sympathetic, largely middle class protagonists to be seen as the centre of those events.

There's no better contradiction to this narrative about a social media revolution, however, than the events of the 28th of January, where on the one hand internet and mobile phones were shut off, but also where the revolution was not about Facebook groups, "likes" or statements online easily digested by the media but about a very real, very violent confrontation with police that was a necessary condition to whatever gains were made in those weeks but he revolution. When the police were driven back and defeated, that was a revolutionary moment, one which had nothing to do with the internet. Similarly, this idea of the internet or social media being causes or playing a significant role ignores the fact that for years, decades in some cases, social struggles had been going on in Egypt over issues of labor, antiauthoritarianism, police violence, and more. These were the building blocks of the revolution, these were the sources of organisation and discontent that pushed people out into the streets, not the few thousand people who had subscribed themselves to a Facebook event to go down and protest.

This is not to say that the internet has not been a tool used by activists and ordinary people: for information gathering, for distribution of certain

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photographs or video, or even for sending out calls for action (although this really only happened successfully once, and it's a tool of dubious value). But if we want to talk about what role the internet plays in social struggles, we have to look at it as one piece of technology within an entire ecosystem of organisation and activism, a network which includes other less "sexy" technologies like telephones and newspapers, but also things like personal relationships, knowledge of cities and neighbourhoods, even the tiles used to pave sidewalks that have been used to make barricades or projectiles against the police.

The internet is not some unique, separate entity with godlike powers, it is a set of tools that can be useful or not. Presuming it is natively oriented towards progressive forces, or even sociability is wrong; Facebook and other corporations make their money by giving users things that they like, not things that they need, and our lives on the internet are occupied in walled gardens where we are lead to believe everyone agrees with us and that by engaging in online clicktivism we are doing something out in the world. I shouldn't have to talk about how this isn't the case. Even putting that aside, corporate and government surveillance of and ownership of telecommunications infrastructure places very real limitations on how progressive and how free or liberatory these tools are.

### **What's the biggest misconception the West has about the 'Arab Spring'?**

I think everything attached to this notion of an "Arab Spring" is problematic; it makes it appear as though peoples in the Arab Region suddenly one day woke up to the fact of their oppression, took to the streets chanting and holding banners, and the tyrants suddenly abdicated and everyone went home. What we saw through the spring of 2011 was a culmination of years of struggle, and explosion of political unrest and desire that had been there all along. Furthermore these struggles are not like the Prague spring or white revolutions in the early nineties, these are not groups of people simply wanting to discard atavistic, despotic rule in favour of joining other capitalist democracies. The rebellions in the Arab Region are fundamentally connected to a rejection of that global system of capitalist dispossession and exploitation masked by a veneer of democratic consensus. The struggles for social justice embodied in these rebellions go far beyond the Arab Region, they are connected to global systems of colonisation, injustice and inequality.

### **What are benefits social movements and revolutionary protests gain from a globalized world, what are disadvantages?**

I think, like with the issue of the internet, we're quick to presume that the contemporary shape that globalisation has taken is unique, novel, whereas in fact it seems clear that the world has been globalised in some way or other for centuries, millennia even. Political systems have been intertwined as long as there has been trade (or warfare) between nations or societies. The conditions of contemporary globalisation notably represent a hegemony of a

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particular system of capitalist accumulation from the South by the North, and political neocolonialism to buttress this theft. At the same time as this makes it difficult to ensure success when there is a vast, overarching system which seeks to preserve itself, it also points towards the need and opportunity for global action; Europe and America are part of the Egyptian struggle, and people there, though they are the beneficiaries of much of this dispossession we see in Egypt, can also be allies in the struggle against it. Connecting our myriad struggles across different countries and scales is a challenge ahead of us but also a potential opportunity to make our impact stronger and more effective.

### **What are the difficulties Egypt has to face now? How do young people participate or oppose?**

This is a rather broad question, but generally Egypt is facing problems brought about by an unequalitarian global system of capitalist wealth accumulation and dispossession, and problems locally of a regime that benefits from and serves this system through the repression and dispossession of its citizenry. Egyptians are struggling to bring about real social justice and a meaningful, participatory political environment in a global political environment that would much rather not see those things come to pass. Young people necessarily participate in this because they are the ones who have been condemned by this system not to have a future. In Egypt, but also in America, Spain, Greece and elsewhere we are seeing older generations carving out the welfare state and systems of social cooperation that brought them to where they are in order to maintain their own wealth, at the expense of all future generations.

### **Are you optimistic or pessimistic about Egypt's future prospects?**

I like to fall back on the old Gramsci quote, hackneyed as it may be: "Pessimism of the Intellect, Optimism of the Will." There's no value in being groundlessly optimistic, and the struggle ahead of us (and everyone, not just Egypt) to achieve a socially just, sustainable world is a difficult one with many powerful structures opposed to it. That being said, however, the persistence of struggle and mobilisation in Egypt and elsewhere leads me to be hopeful that other worlds remain attainable, however tiring and trying the path to reach them may be.

 Tags: [Arab Spring](#), [Egypt](#), [protest](#), [Revolution](#), [Sherief Gaber](#)

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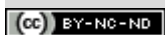
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Wähle den Monat



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