New Media in the Public Sphere:
Public Sphere Formation in Spaces of Conflict

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ABSTRACT
This paper looks at the effect of authoritarian governments on public sphere formation and how new media is used in circumventing state control over communication outlets. The Iranian government greeted student protests throughout 2009 with violence, hostility and absolute control of all national media outlets. As a result, Iranian citizens used citizens' media to ensure their political messages were heard throughout Iran and the rest of the world. This action established a transnational public sphere of citizens engaging the discussion and sending support to Iranian protestors. The event that occurred in Iran reveals how public spheres and counter public spheres can form in areas of civil unrest and how they can transcend national borders to create transnational public spheres.

Keywords: public sphere, digital media, counter public sphere, transnational public sphere

INTRODUCTION

In an everchanging world, perceptions of media and media usage are perpetually shifting. From transnational conglomerate media to citizen media in local communities, how societies engage media as a civic practice is evolving. The freedom to dissent one's government is a right reserved for very few countries in this world and through transnational public sphere formations one can see the ongoing struggle within countries across the globe to obtain that freedom as well. Scholars have analyzed the public sphere and key components to public sphere formation within democratic societies for decades (Habermas, 1991; Negt & Kluge, 1993/1972; Fraser, 1993; Landes, 1995; Asen, 2000; Warner, 2002; Dahlgren, 2006). But with what struggle does this formation occur when taking place under a totalitarian or authoritarian regime where the government does not allow freedom of discussion and controls all access to communication? Does a public sphere even form at all? This paper looks at the effect of authoritarian governments on public sphere formation and how new media is used in circumventing state control over communication outlets.

The country of Iran has historically had moments of authoritarian rule in spite of changes to its governmental structure from a monarch to a clerical theocracy in 1979 (BBC, 2009). Several instances of protest and dissent erupted in recent history to oppose governmental oppression and control, all of which were met with violence and

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hostility. The most recent protests occurred in June 2009 after the re-election of conservative president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and have remained perpetual ever since (Dareini, 2009). In June 2006, after the announcement of Ahmadinejad's victory over Hossein Mousavi Iranian students and reformists took to the streets in protest of the election under the accusation that the election was rigged and false votes were entered into the polls (RFE/RL, 2009). The protests and riots that ensued after the election were the largest the country had seen since the Iranian revolution from monarchical to theocratic rule in 1979 (Taylor, 2009). Throughout the protests and governmental opposition, the Iranian government exercised its authoritarian control and shut down various channels of news information in an attempt to repress dissenting voices and views of reform (Al Jazeera, 2009a; Dareini, 2009).

Iranian reformists and protestors created a transnational public sphere to be able to bypass the government's media control and express dissent and engage in discussion against the government. This public sphere focused on rhetoric addressing revolution, reformation and change, all concepts strictly forbidden by the Iranian government. However, this public sphere needed to be established by the Iranian reformists in order to organize their protests, engage citizens and create social change from within their own country. Although their initial target audience was Iranians, their public sphere turned transnational when they turned to modern alternative media like YouTube and Twitter to engage citizens across the globe for acts of global protest and dissent. According to Todd McDorman (2001), "the ability of the WWW to function as an alternative to mainstream media is an important feature in revitalizing public and counterpublic spheres" (p. 193). That is exactly how the Iranian reformists used alternative media to engage global citizens.

As a result, local newspapers, Internet access and even mobile phone services were cut off by the Iranian government in an attempt to control their national image in front of global viewers; however, protestors remained vigilant in expressing their dissent by hacking systems, using global mobile phones and creating their own news publications (Smith, 2009). Through their success in using alternative media to address a global audience, Iranian protestors and reformists created a transnational public sphere in the hopes of creating a dialogue with their own government. This dialogue could only occur once Iran was placed under a global microscope and international media, governments and organizations reach out to resolve the civil unrest within the country. By creating an environment where open, dissenting dialogue could occur, albeit a virtual and cellular environment, protestors formulated a public sphere where free speech could be available and social change possible.

Within this paper the types of media used, how they were used and how this usage contributed to the creation of a transnational public sphere will be examined. The next section will explicate the origins and requirements of the theoretical foundation of a public sphere and how the Iranian protests and global dialogues created a public sphere under the wrath of an authoritarian regime. Following that, this paper will overview the concept of citizens' media and its applicability in Iranian public sphere formation as well as an analysis of media selection and usage throughout the protests within Iran.

The Public Sphere: Origins & Requisites

The public sphere theory was built from an historical examination of the bourgeois society in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the transformation from an era of monarchical rule and oversight to a time of democracy, public opinion formation and rational-critical discourse (Habermas, 1991). Within his theory of the public sphere Jürgen Habermas identifies several key concepts: the distinct line between the public and the private sphere, the overall infrastructure and inner workings of the public sphere itself (political, literary, and institutional), what constitutes public and who is (and more importantly) who is not permitted in the public sphere, the existence and use of rational-critical debate and the subsequent public opinion that forms from such. Habermas delineates several separate realms, each distinct from one another: the private sphere (with its intimate realm), labor and the public sphere. The private sphere existed of civil society, which mostly focused on the exchange of commodities and social labor. Also within this sphere laid the intimate realm of the family. "Women and dependents were factually and legally excluded from the political public sphere" (Habermas, 1991, p. 56). As a result, households created a division where the male head of the house could engage in the public sphere but women and children could not, although bourgeois women found ways to be involved in the public sphere through the development of salons. In Habermas' concept of the public sphere, laborers and people within the working realm were also excluded from the public sphere due to their lower class status.

The third realm and focus of his theory is the public sphere. This realm consisted of three internal structures: the institutions (town and salon), the literary public sphere, and the political public sphere, each one interdependent of the other. The public institutions of the town, coffee houses and salons within homes created the context and location for rational-critical discourse to be held. Because discourse dissenting dominant political structures was not allowed in public, open forums at that time, institutions and safe havens were established where debates could be held without fear of retribution. "Wherever the public established itself institutionally as a stable group of discussants, it did not equate itself with *the* public but at most claimed to act as its mouthpiece, in its name, perhaps even as its educator—the new form of bourgeois representation" (Habermas, 1991, p. 37). For the bourgeois society, which was obviously prior to the advent of new media technology like the Internet, public sphere participants were dependent on the existence of locations like salons and coffee shops to hold political discussions. For Iranian protestors and reformists, new media locations like Twitter and YouTube, serve as these safe havens where dissenting views can be expressed without fear of retribution or consequence. The existence of a location for political discussion, even if dissenting, is necessary in order for the formation of a public sphere to occur.

The literary public sphere helped both create the institutions while also stemming from the institutions as the mouthpiece of the bourgeois "movement." "Privatized individuals in their capacity as human beings communicated through critical debate in the world of letters, about experiences of their subjectivity" (Habermas, 1991, p. 55). In Iran after the government shut down mainstream publications expressing dissenting

ideologies, protestors and reformists began to create “street papers.” These papers carried news from the people involved in the protest to other people involved in the protest to ensure dissemination of important information and the possibility for social mobilization (Smith, 2009).

In Habermas’ conception of the bourgeois public sphere, private people also engaged in the public sphere through political means “as owners of commodities communicated through rational-critical debate in the political realm, concerning regulation of their private sphere” (Habermas, 1991, p. 55). So in these two delineations between the literary public sphere and the political public sphere an interdependent relationship was forged based on the common denominator of the land-owning male who was at least educated enough to be able to read, write and critically debate; in other words, the bourgeois male. This very restrictive conceptual definition also applies to the Iranian protests. As many scholars have pointed out (Fraser, 1993; Benhabib, 1993; Landes, 1995; Phillips, 1996; Asen & Brouwer, 2001) the restriction of the public sphere to land-owning, white males is not applicable to today’s society where even in countries with very specific restrictions on women participation in society like Iran, the possibility for women to express dissent and engage in protest is available. This availability also applies to minorities and laborers. The significant concept within the political public sphere is the reliance on rational-critical discourse. International mainstream media organizations have debated whether the reformist propaganda fueling the protest is rational or whether it is based on illogical fallacies. Media focus has centered on arguments concerning class perception differentiation between Tehran and the rest of Iran and whether national votes accurately reflected the entire nation’s desire for the political victor. Some arguments suggested that the views of upper-middle class citizens in Tehran (where most reformists reside) do not coincide with the conservative religious views of the rest of the country. However, according to an analysis conducted by NewsWeek (Ellison, 2009) from information gathered from the Iranian government regarding the election results in comparison to practices of rigged elections, several facts emerged that supported the assertion that the electoral votes had been tampered with to include vote tallies in specific cities totaling more than the number of registered voters, candidates expected to win in their home districts where they have historically done well did not, and a hasty verdict was disseminated only two hours after the polls closed despite the use of paper ballots. From these arguments and discussions a rational-critical debate circulated amongst protestors and reformists in support of Mousavi and against the failed stability of the Iranian voting process and current regime. As such, the dialogues concerning the Iranian election and protest have been supported by a rational-critical debate within a political public sphere.

In response to the public sphere theory established by Habermas, many scholars have criticized it for its limitation of access and denial of the existence of the possibility of multiple public spheres (Asen & Brouwer, 2001; Asen, 2001; Warner, 2002; Downey & Fenton, 2003; Hartley & Green, 2006). In addition to the criticism of restriction of access as addressed previously, the concept of multiple public spheres, specifically of counterpublic spheres, is interesting when applied to the formation of a public sphere within the Iranian authoritarian regime. To begin with, in order to define what a

counterpublic is the assumption must be made for the existence of multiple public spheres. In accordance with Nancy Fraser's (1993) critique, Habermas conveyed the assumption that a singular, cohesive public sphere is ideal for public discourse and that fragmented multiple publics would demonstrably stray from greater democracy. Political scholars have since asserted that multiple spheres always existed, even during the time frame of eighteenth century bourgeoisie (Negt & Kluge, 1993). During this time, the relationship of spheres was segregated into public sphere, private sphere and labor, and even though labor and the private sphere did not have "voices" in the public sphere they still existed and were capable of holding political discourse outside of the public sphere. By their very nature of exclusion from the public sphere, these outlying spheres fell into what Warner would describe as groups that maintain "at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status" (Warner, 2002, p. 56). Counterpublics are then, groups within the public sphere or within alternative public spheres that in some way show dissent for the dominant overarching status quo.

Research on counterpublics has shown how they are formed, how they communicate with larger public spheres, and how they work to create their discourse within an alternative public sphere. One example of this is Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge's (1993) research regarding the proletariat public sphere. In their research, Negt and Kluge build off Habermas' concept of the public sphere but critique the theory for its exclusion of the proletariat publics. During the time of the bourgeois public sphere, not only did elites exist to discuss and critique political and public life but the working class labor also existed within a subaltern realm excluded from this public sphere. Although Habermas restricts this labor class from the privilege of the bourgeois public sphere, Negt and Kluge argue that without the proletariats the bourgeois sphere would have never existed. Each sphere depended on the other for definition of their own existence. Without night, what is day? Without working class labor to do the work for the elites how would elites run their home, businesses and societies without being subjugated to becoming a working class proletariat themselves? So in this argument Negt and Kluge agree with Habermas' conception of a bourgeois public sphere but determine that that public sphere would never have existed if the proletariats had not produced the substance for it. Within this public sphere however, proletariats are encouraged and at points even manipulated from forming a unified political voice to assert their human rights. The bourgeois use blocking and exclusion to keep proletariats from understanding the larger picture of their oppression, for if they understood it and realized how they have been stripped of not only human rights but of human dignity and pride of craftsmanship they would rise up and rebel against the oppressing structure that confines them. In their research Negt and Kluge point out the irony of Habermas' public sphere with its goal of increased civil discourse for emancipation and equality that does not benefit those who need it most, the proletariat working class, but instead for those who may already generally have it, the bourgeoisie.

The example of Negt and Kluge's work addressing the existence of proletariat counterpublic spheres in opposition to dominating public spheres is interesting when examined in relation to the Iranian debate of power struggles between the overarching theocratic system and supporters of reform who would like a change away from that

system of government. Within the country of Iran a dominating public sphere is not as apparent due to the restrictive control of the government that creates mainstream public opinion and ideologies that coincide with theocratic beliefs. The Iranian government generally represses dissenting voices and reformist supporters in order to maintain the impression that the people support their government. However, from the results of the election and the blatant defiance of protestors towards the government it became harder for the government to control this image. In the aftermath of the election, public dissent was not only shown but grew across the country and across the world as clear divisions grew between government force and reformist support and began to show that a creation of counterpublic groups had emerged. Counter to the dominating beliefs that a theocracy is the best form of government for Iran, reformists have been continually protesting the regime in hopes of social and governmental change. Fraser (1993) asserts that true emancipatory potential stems from the existence of subaltern counterpublics that give minority groups a voice in public discourse; and although reformists voice their dissent by force they still attempt to establish this discourse in opposition to their oppressing government. According to Negt and Kluge (1993), "If the masses try to fight a ruling class reinforced by the power of the public sphere, their struggle is hopeless; they are always simultaneously fighting against themselves, for the public sphere is constituted by them" (p. xlvii). Through the protests in Iran, reformists are trying to separate the overarching theocracy from the dominant public sphere and public opinion in an attempt to validate their counterarguments as legitimate and for the possibility of a greater social change to occur.

Through the act of protesting, reformists have maintained a forum to express dissent. According to Kendall Phillips (1996) agency is used when showing dissent and as seen through the Iranian protests dissention is not necessarily a negative use of agency in opposition to the beliefs of other scholars like Habermas and Thomas Goodnight who assume the ultimate goal of agency should be consensus. According to Phillips (1996), "the public sphere has been portrayed as a place where these individual, local sites of contest might be gathered into some transcendent dialogue; however, we cannot truly engage diversity without recognizing the diverse sites and conditions in which differences come to the fore" (p. 244). With this, Phillips makes the argument that dissent is not characteristically a negative thing even if it opposes public consent. And in the case of Iranian protests dissent is a necessary element in the formation of a counterpublic sphere in order to express their perceived need for social change.

Citizen Media: Homegrown Freedom of Speech

Within the country of Iran where the government largely controls the media through power and force, dissenting ideologies have been consistently shut out of the national media. When examining media uses, particularly in spaces where a dependency on alternative media is necessary in order to create a dissenting public discourse like in Iran, it is important to parse out the various terminologies that could be applicable to this type of media use. According to Gaurav Mishra (2009), "terms like social media, digital media, new media, citizen media, participatory media, peer-to-peer media, social web, participatory web, peer-to-peer web, read write web, social

computing, social software, web 2.0, and even crowdsourcing and wikinomics can mean similar or slightly different things depending upon who is using it" (para. 4). For the purposes of this paper, the terms alternative media and citizen media will be used to address the media forms being used by Iranian protestors that are alternative to the mainstream, national media of Iran as well as the unique, community-based media forms that were created. For the Iranian protestors to create a public discourse surrounding their dissenting views alternative media and citizens' media were necessary tools in order to establish a public sphere for reformists. With regard to alternative media use and function, Clemencia Rodriguez (2001) says "alternative media spin transformative processes that alter people's senses of self, their subjective positionings, and therefore their access to power" (p. 18). In other words, oppressed peoples can re-appropriate power and empower themselves through using alternative media.

Citizens' media is a term coined by Rodriguez (2001) that addresses the use of media in facilitating the engagement of citizens in political democracy. According to Rodriguez (2001) the conceptual basis for this term centers on the definition of citizen as being different than merely being born in with passive acceptance and specific rights. For Rodriguez, based on Chantel Mouffe's theory of radical democracy, "citizens have to enact their citizenship on a day-to-day basis, through their participation in everyday political practices" (p. 19). For Iranian reformists where democracy is not established and the government suppresses the freedom for political dissent and acts of defiant citizenship, expressing citizenship has been difficult for those involved in political protest. In order to engage in citizenship, Iranians have used what Rodriguez calls citizens' media to create public discourse and engage other citizens. Based on the concept of citizenship, the term citizens' media:

> Implies first that a collectivity is *enacting* its citizenship by actively intervening and transforming the established mediascape; second, that these media are contesting social codes, legitimized identities, and institutionalized social relations; and third, that these communication practices are empowering the community involved, to the point where these transformations and changes are possible. (Rodriguez, 2001, p. 20)

To address these by point, Iranian media usage during the political protests that have been occurring since June has by its very nature changed the established conservative mediascape by turning towards alternative media to disseminate dissenting ideas. Secondly, the specific media being used by reformists and protestors (as will be further explicated below) go against the traditional media of Iran, like the newspapers and broadcasting channels, because they allow for the opportunity of opposing ideologies to be published. And lastly, by being able to establish a counterpublic sphere through alternative media, reformists are able to empower citizens and protestors to fight for social change. The following sub-sections will look at how Iranian reformists and protestors have used alternative and citizen media to create a counterpublic sphere in a space of conflict.

Mobile Technology: Handheld Human Rights

In spaces of conflict and countries under authoritarian regimes advanced communicative technologies like mobile technology have helped to establish political dialogues, public records and even human rights. According to Enrico Menduni (2005), "it has been argued that these technologies encourage a broader access to information and a freer debate, thus promoting the establishment of horizontal relationships among citizens and extending political participation to varied groups, both large and small, in civil society" (p. 90). In spaces of conflict where access to free communication is restricted, the ability to use mobile technology opens the availability for message dissemination and group mobilization for social movements and protests. According to Janey Gordon (2007):

> At times of national and personal calamity, the mobile phone is used to document and report events from eyewitnesses and those closely involved. Using multimedia messages (MMS) or text messages (SMS) to communities of friends and families, as well as audio phone calls, mobile phone users may precede and scoop official sources and thwart censorship and news blackouts. They are what have become known as 'citizen journalists'. (p. 307)

Some of the key functions of this technology that facilitate this are text messages (SMS), multimedia messages (MMS), video recording, camera capabilities and audio recording. Among the most disseminated are images and videos of the protest from protestors themselves that depict police brutality and conflict between protestors and hard-line Basij militia. According to the Middle Eastern news publication, Al Jazeera (2009b), "Amateur video of Saturday's protests, which could not be independently verified, showed dozens of Iranians running down a street after police fired tear gas. Other footage showed protesters trying to give first aid to a badly injured woman in the street" (Protests 'quelled' section, para. 1-2).

One example of the success of mobile technology for use in protest prior to the Iranian protests of 2009 was a monk-led protest in Myanmar (Burma) in 2007 (Jacobi, 2009). The protest was a large milestone for civil rights and democracy in the country because of the incorporation of mobile technology throughout the protest. Because the government has a stronghold on media and communications within the country, protestors ensured the event would not be covered up like the last protest in 1988, where a student-led protest ended in the massacre of 3,000-10,000 people. The number killed is unknown like much of the protest was unknown because the government controlled and suppressed all forms of communication within the country. The monks ensured thorough documentation of the event through camera phone images and camera phone videos taken throughout the protest and sent to media agencies and individuals around the world. In the case of the Myanmar protests, technology played an important role in transferring information out of the country to the world as well as transferring information back into the country to various areas around the country involved in protests that could not speak to each other through the government-controlled forms of communication.

A new mobile technology that has emerged in response to human rights violations in Myanmar creates global human rights networks to aid in countries where communication access has been cut off. A blog posted on Netsquared (2009) explains

the process for building a Handheld Human Rights Network, an SMS technological application for increasing communication and civic engagement in countries with suppressed lines of communication. The project uses the government restrictions of Myanmar as a case study to determine if this type of technology and communication network would work in other countries of civil unrest as well. The blog details how to build a communication network between everyday citizens, activist groups and global media organizations to document human rights violations in countries where communication lines are controlled by the government. Through the use of mobile technology, citizens can fight back anonymously against authoritarian regimes to document atrocities and make progress towards establishing democracy. Mobile activism is a fairly new phenomena but can grow further throughout the world through websites like Netsquared that show everyday citizens step-by-step how to be involved in the process. Blogs and articles like this are important for oppressed citizens like Iranian reformists who may think they have no voice in their society and no possible way of becoming civically engaged.

Iran & the 'Twitter Revolution'

One form of alternative media that gained the most global attention by supporters and mainstream media is the Iranian protestors' usage and reliance on Twitter to get their message out. Twitter is a social networking tool created in 2006 that uses technology similar to mobile SMS where users post statuses up to 140 characters that are shared among a network of people (Twitter, 2009a). At the onset of the protests following the election results angry Iranian reformists flocked to Twitter after the Iranian government shut down mobile phone services and restricted access to certain websites including Facebook, another social networking site heavily used throughout the protests (Veiszadeh, 2009). Although created by a private U.S. company, Twitter became transformed after the elections and re-appropriated as a citizen media where reformists and citizens alike could post news, protest updates, warnings of police brutality and street violence, and even solicitations for mobilization. With the success of government suppression on traditional forms of media, protestors were still able to get their messages out to one another and across the world. Mousavi alone has 27, 408 followers on Twitter following his posts regarding the election and protests (Twitter, 2009b). "Some absolutely riveting and thrilling reporting has been done over Twitter by a university student in Tehran who goes by the moniker Tehran Bureau. The Iranian authorities shut his website down over the weekend and he was attacked by hard-line militias but he's been able to send short posts around the world over Twitter" (Berman, 2009).

Despite global media organizations entitling the effort as a revolution, new media researchers viewed it more as an effective use of publicity for putting an international spotlight on the civil unrest in Iran. "Twitter didn't really change much in Iran in terms of organizing the protests, but it did play an important role in engaging the international community in the protests and focusing media attention on the protests" (Mishra, 2009). By creating a global dialogue that coincided with political action taking place in Iran, Iranian citizens successfully managed to create international interest and establish a transnational public sphere. In response, the Iranian government banned access to

Twitter through computer Internet access but those with access through their mobile phones (once service was re-established the day after the election) were still able to continue the dialogue (BBC Monitoring, 2009).

The Face of Protest: YouTube and Iran

In conjunction with mobile technology and the highly debated Twitter revolution, Iranian protestors also relied on the website YouTube to post videos of life in the protest, including the struggle, violence and oppression from the Iranian government. The videos on YouTube are from various sources: official news reports broadcasted by the BBC in Britain, home video cameras shooting from buildings above the crowds, and sketchy mobile phone videos taken by protestors in the streets themselves. The storyline the mass amount of YouTube videos create details a story of every aspect imaginable within the public sphere of the protest. Some videos show protest and opposition while others show deaths of protestors and retreat (Parr, 2009). The unabashed rawness and real life shown through these videos are labeled graphic and disturbing for viewers who may not be able to handle watching the death of a young girl dying in her fight for freedom (Parr, 2009). In one YouTube video created by the BBC, a protestor was interviewed and said, “this government won’t allow us to say what we want” and was followed thereafter with a shot of the crowd pumping fists, chanting, “we want freedom! We want freedom!” (YouTube, 2009). That video alone has had 334,182 views, 1,133 ratings, and 3,665 comments since it was posted on June 13, 2009 (YouTube, 2009). When searching on YouTube for videos related to Iran election nearly 72,000 videos result; however, due to the limited search options on YouTube it is hard to determine if these had all been posted since the election in June and the quality and relativity of all of the videos to the protest and election without watching all 72,000.

One aspect of YouTube that makes it a successful tool for disseminating messages globally is its ease and encouragement for passing on videos and posting them to other sites on the Internet, to include corporate mass media websites, social networking sites, blogs, websites and even person to person e-mail chains. Through this capability, videos like the one described above may have been seen 334,182 times on the YouTube site but the times it has been seen on other sites is incalculable (although the view totals do not discern between original views and repeat viewers, so original viewers may be slightly less than 334, 182). Even after the Iranian government banned access to YouTube citizens were still able to send videos through mobile phones or to contacts in other countries that would then pass them on through YouTube. For the success of disseminating their messages and engaging the world, the YouTube videos were able to put people half a world away in the shoes of the citizens fighting for their freedoms in the streets of Iran. No other media could do that with as much power as these videos.

Citizen Journalists: Taking Back the Media

Citizen journalism is a concept that grew in popularity along with the Internet in the early to mid-90s (Flew & Wilson, 2008). With the transformation of gate-keeping power from mass media corporations to everyday people and citizens through the open availability for creating blogs and websites by anyone with the technical knowledge and access to

the Internet, everyday citizens were suddenly empowered to report news that was important to them and their community in opposition to mass media representatives who were far removed from the situation (Flew & Wilson, 2008). The phenomenon of empowered citizens to report news that is significant to their communities began to occur all over the world, especially in Arabic countries where the restriction for dissent is much stronger than in western countries. Arab bloggers have been seen as:

> Masters of producing raw, uncensored flows of communication and are thus often referred to as citizen journalists. Benefiting from the use of personalized digital technologies and powerful innovative content, these citizen journalists are disrupting old media monopolies with the discourse on their blogs. In fact, they are often acknowledged members of the 'news media' as they are citizens who monitor events and create news content in both conventional journalistic forms and in novel forms such as blogs and social networks. (Hamdy, 2009, p. 92)

According to Terry Flew and Jason Wilson (2008), citizen journalists through their presence and action, question established media roles of journalists and raise publicity for everyday citizens as alternative experts and creators of reality. For Iran, citizen journalists played a large role during the protests to assist in spreading the dissenting views that were being suppressed by the Iranian government as well as "real" on-the-ground reports from participants enduring the struggle. The following sections will examine how citizen journalism was used in Iran.

Taking Back the Streets: The Use of 'Street' Newspapers

Although new and alternative media have played major roles in the dissemination of messages and engagement of global publics, Iranian protestors and reformists have also turned to more traditional forms of media, albeit in a citizens' media approach through the creation of "street" newspapers. The newspapers were created by two Iranian citizen journalists/protestors to disseminate news for other protestors relating to the protest. The paper circulated not only throughout the streets of Iran but also via the web of the Internet in an attempt to cultivate a public discourse that involved the voices of the protestors themselves. Because of the language barrier (Farsi to English) many English-speaking Iranians have created an effort to translate the newspaper so even more people around the world can read the struggle of the protestors (Ward, 2009). This effort is also being done in Arabic as well (Meedan, 2009). The newspapers address issues of solidarity and dissent against the violence and oppression of the Iranian government, poetry of hope and struggle, as well as news concerning the protest and important information protestors should know. As written in *The Street*:

> We do not have any media but the world has gotten smaller so we no longer see one thing on the streets but read something else in world media. We do not want the next generation to be ignorant about what happened on the streets of Tehran, Esfahan, Tabriz, Shiraz, Mashhad, Ahvaz, Kermanshah, and the rest of the cities, large and small. We will represent a new voice in this power play: the voice of the people crying out in the streets. The people who have no delusions about colors and who demand change. (Ward, 2009, Media and the streets section, para. 4)

By creating their own media to represent their own voice, Iranian protestors took on not only the role of agents for change, advocates for social justice and protestors for a legitimate regime but they also assumed the role of citizen journalists to create a public record of their struggle so all the world could be involved.

Citizen Journalists and the Mass Media

In addition to the creation of self-made publications, Iranians have established a sense of citizen journalism through their input for mass media networks. Near the very beginning of the protests after the election, the Iranian government could sense the protests would progressively get worse and in response banned international journalists from Iran (Al Jazeera, 2009a). From the onset, the Iranian government shut down local papers that expressed dissenting views like *Kalameh Sabz* (Al Jazeera, 2009a), but the government soon progressed to expelling even international journalists in the hopes of saving face in the world press. "Geronimo Akerlund, a spokesman for the Swedish network SVT, said its reporter had been asked to 'leave Iran as soon as possible', and Al Arabiya, the Dubai-based news network, said its correspondent in Tehran was verbally told by Iranian authorities that its office would be closed for a week" (Al Jazeera, 2009a). In response to the bans, international media organizations began to rely on on-the-street, citizen journalists to provide updates and news regarding the protests. On the New York Times webpage through a minute-by-minute newsfeed with protest updates, the organization solicited anyone in Iran to post updates to the comment section to provide up-to-the-minute news reporting for the organization (Mackey, 2009). CNN also solicited similar requests but did so through its additional website that works in conjunction with its main website but are strictly for Citizen journalist reports and are therefore not verified by the news organization (CNN iReport, 2009). Through their posts to global media organizations like CNN and The New York Times, citizen journalists within Iran were able to disseminate their messages from a local audience towards a global audience. The repercussions of the use of citizen media like Twitter and YouTube as well as the creation of citizen journalists for global media organizations allowed the Iranian reformists and protestors to not only create a counterpublic sphere within Iran to oppose the national government, but also to create a transnational counterpublic sphere to involve citizens across the globe to participate in the public discourse.

Iran's Counterpublic Sphere & Transnationalism

As the theory of the public sphere continues to grow every year and be applied to varying societies and social atmoospheres, each with its own intricacies and subtle nuances, one aspect of the theory's evolution that is particularly applicable to the Iranian protests is that of the public sphere with regard to transnationalism. According to Nancy Fraser (2007), transnationalism within the public sphere encompasses "the existence of discursive arenas that overflow the bounds of both nations and states" (p. 1). Habermas (1991) and Fraser (2007) assert that a public sphere cannot exist transnationally because of the necessity for public sphere participants to engage with a sovereign power, which is difficult if the participants are not located in the same proximity. However, by using alternative media, reformists are able to circumvent authoritarian control over communication outlets and extend their public sphere globally.

Through the use of alternative and global media systems like Twitter, YouTube and websites, reformists have been able to create not only a counterpublic sphere but a transnational public sphere that includes citizens from across the globe. Some notable aspects of this have been global protests coinciding with Iranian protests, global media organizations attempting to be involved in the reporting of the events in Iran, and international government bodies like the U.S that have spoken out within this counterpublic sphere in order to address the need for peace, democracy and freedom within Iran.

When the protests first began in Iran international media organizations broadcasted the events with little to no interference. Soon thereafter and after being banned by the Iranian government, citizen journalists within Iran spread the word globally of the events occuring nationally. One repercussion of this was the mobilization of global protests in support of Iran worldwide. On July 25, 2009 protestors across six continents gathered in support of Iran to include the countries of Amsterdam, the U.S., and Pakistan in conjunction with over 100 cities globally (CNN, 2009). Through the global unity of protest and dialogue organized by international human rights organizations like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Reporters Without Borders the counterpublic sphere established in Iran crossed national borders and created a transnational public sphere.

In conjunction with international protests and citizen journalism through international media organizations as explained above, Iranian reformists and protestors succesfully appealed to international governments through their use of new media. One example of this is the response American politicians expressed in result to Iranian messages.

> Barack Obama, the US president, condemned the violence and urged Tehran to allow Mousavi's supporters to stage peaceful protests. “The Iranian government must understand that the world is watching,” he said. "We mourn each and every innocent life that is lost. We call on the Iranian government to stop all violent and unjust actions against its own people." (Al Jazeera, 2009b, Protests ‘quelled’ section, para. 9)

In response to this, Al Jazeera’s DC correspondent, Nick Spicer said, “he's trying to make this not an Iran-America thing, but a global human rights argument that he's putting to the leaders of Iran" (Al Jazeera, 2009b, Protests ‘quelled’ section, para. 15). This sentiment was not only expressed in the U.S but also Britain, Israel and other countries as well (Wall Street Journal, 2009). Through global and alternative media, Iranian reformists and protestors were able to create an international dialogue amongst citizens, media organizations and governments in order to establish a dialogue with their own government.

CONCLUSION

The Iranian protests in 2009 revealed a new aspect to public sphere theory, that of the development and formation of a transnational counterpublic sphere under an authoritarian regime. Through the use of alternative and citizens’ media Iranian citizens were able to circumvent authoritarian control over communication outlets in order to

mobilize their efforts, express dissenting idoleogies, and establish global public discourse. By establishing dialogue in opposition to the theocratic government regime, reformists and protestors created a counterpublic sphere that not only opposed the June election results on the basis of fraud but in turn denounced the Iranian clerical theocracy based on its delegitimacy in handling the election results. For the purposes of establishing democratic freedoms like the freedom of speech in Iran, Iranian reformists created a counterpublic sphere. This sphere in turn spanned the globe in a transnational effort through the use of alternative media associated with the Internet. Whether this public sphere endures the authoritarian regime in which it was conceived under depends on the success of the protests and their fight for freedom of speech. For at the end of the day when these protestors return to their homes they continue their struggle throughout the course of the night, chanting protests from private, secure rooftops; and even this is captured on YouTube and spread across the world (Parr, 2009).

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