Trottier D. & Fuchs C., Social Media, Politics and the State: Protest, Revolutions, Riots, Crime and Policing in the Age of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, New York: Routledge, 2015, 251 p.

Book review

Daniel Trottier is working as a postdoctoral fellow in social and digital media at CAMRI (Communication and Media Research Institute) at the University of Westminster. Christian Fuchs is a professor of social media at the same university. The book they edited was published by Routledge in 2015 as part of the "Routledge Research in Information Technology and Society" series and provides fairly recent information on social media activism in the context of the constant expansion of online social media networks and the way they permute social movements across the globe.

Spreading across eleven chapters, this sociological insight into the implications of social media in various struggles against State institutions provides several accounts of civil disobedience aided by platforms like Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Google+ and other Web 2.0 technologies. Not only that, it depicts the ways in which social media was used to spark revolutions, expose police brutality, coordinate marches and question legislation.

The book starts with defining prevalent terms such as "social media", "civil society", "social network systems", "sociopolitical movements", "Web 2.0" and giving a detailed explanation of the "State" and its constituting branches. The questions arise if the corporations that provide social media technology pose a problem to the State and also if they might cooperate with the State in order to achieve leniency when it comes to paying taxes. One of the conclusions derived is that "Corporate power and state power are intertwined" with the distinction that "the corporate elite rules but does not govern" (p. 29). The first chapter ends with defining and distinguishing between protest, riots, revolutions and social movements in general.

Prevalent topics throughout the book are what is known as the "Arab Spring" (the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt that lit the Middle East and North Africa), the "Occupy Wall Street" movement in the US, the "Indignados" movement in Spain, the G20 Summit in London and the "Quebec Spring" of Montreal.

The third chapter is called "Populism 2.0" and is signed by Paolo Gerbaudo. The author defines this title as one ideological orientation that perceives social media as a means to address "the people". A parallel is woven between this new concept and traditional populism resulting in "an interactive and participatory populism" (p. 68). Besides these definitions, the argumentation in favor of this new concept is weak. Gerbaudo assumes that simply being an Internet user makes one the common man of traditional populism and therefore suspicious of Bureaucracy. Furthermore, the author confuses the generic Internet user with someone ready to be drafted into a virtual collective defined as "web people" (p. 79) and even talks of Democracy 2.0 and techno-plebiscitarianism as results of computer users' attempts to redefine democracy through social media activism.

The chapter on the "Anonymous" movement by Fuchs himself offers only glimpses in what this Internet commune really is by presenting disparate activities claimed by or attributed to Anonymous. The text – although augmented by research – fails to catch the essence of the Anonymous collective, its multitude of goals, the chaotic idea-driven Weberian stance against perceived injustice despite lack of leadership, the psychology of the activist that renounces

Răzvan T. Coloja

personal identity if favor of a group of strangers and – most importantly – misses the point of the terminology, social customs, myths and Internet culture that has been crafted around Anonymous. Media coverage of the Anonymous group and the prevalence of discussions about it on social media is a better predictor of the importance attributed to faceless hackers. Furthermore, the 4Chan image board that gave birth to Anonymous and Anonymous idealism provides further proof that this diffuse collective deserves a better-documented stance in this book and a deeper analysis of its roots, goals and structure. All these aside, the chapter does provide valuable information on the revenge tactics used by the hacker wing of Anonymous, it sheds a glimpse on what the group perceives as being "unjust" and even draws an interesting and welcomed comparison between Anonymous and the German "Spaßguerilla" of the 90s.

A pleasant surprise in the book is the chapter "The Rise of Nazism and the Web" by Panos Kompatsiaris and Yiannis Mylonas (p. 109). It gives a detailed insight into the Greek "Golden Dawn" neo-nazi movement and the way its members make use in social media activity of the same propaganda techniques that Goebbels promoted in the years of the Weimar Republic (1926-1933). The text by the authors shows how effective "Golden Dawn" is in silencing its online opponents, gathering supporters through Facebook or YouTube and maintaining a clean online image of the group despite reports of hate speech and violence.

The chapter covering the Quebec student movement of 2012 (by Elise Danielle Thorburn) describes how high-definition live feeds kept Internet communities connected to the events and how dues to these live images every aspect of the protests was captured. Using Twitter's video sharing application Vine and Livestream, volunteers captured police violence, protester grievances and the general feeling of the marches. Sara Salem covers the Egyptian Revolution in depth in the next chapter, detailing the methods protesters used to communicate via social media and how the information managed to get through despite the government's attempt to stop reports from reaching the outside world by shutting down the Internet in the entire country. Lively, well-documented and providing eyewitness accounts, this eight chapter could be considered the heart of the entire book.

Thomas Poell next talks about the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, both aided by Twitter and Facebook; he also mentions Chinese protests sparked on the Sina Weibo microblogging site and compares the previous two countries with China's more permissive government, offering a unique insight into a more flexible online censorship strategy. Worth mentioning here is that the author provides accounts of how Iranian and Chinese Internet users use not only pseudonyms but also codes and symbolic language in the form of misspelled "forbidden words" (p. 195). The chapter ends with an interesting discussion about how corporations sometimes cooperate with totalitarian governments in censoring activists or even squashing online protest forms.

In Chapter 10 Trottier makes a good case of the double-sided nature of social media use in activism. Social media platforms offer not only a way to inform the public and stay informed, form groups with similar goals and interests or organize protests in the street; they also provide governments, the police and secret service agents ways to identify protesters, make use of a free and vast decentralised surveillance system and gather detailed information about individuals that present a potential threat to the stability of a political system. While the regular user has the power of numbers and the direction offered by the common goal, the State and its social order wings are armed with the capacity to request confidential data from social media platforms by invoking lawful interception or with the right to install data-gathering software on a user's computer.

The chapter by Trottier ends with a discussion about digital vigilantism while the final chapter ("Police `Image Work` in an Era of Social Media" - by Christopher J. Schneider) picks up the main theme of Trottier's text and moves from the online to the streets. He describes the events that led to identifying undercover police officers at a protest against the 2007 Montebello summit of August 20-21 in Quebec. The YouTube video sparked outrage among Internet users and led to the police first denying involvement then subsequently admitting it due to public and media pressure.

It is noteworthy that while the better part of the book focuses on how social media channels like Facebook, Twitter, Youtube or Weibo are of great use to protesters and took part in toppling totalitarian governments, the last two chapters focus on the downside of using social media and

presents the obvious disadvantages and dangers it presents to activists. Which in turn makes the book objective enough and a worthwhile read for anyone interested in the sociology of social movements and how social media interacts with social actors on both sides of the issue that sparks civil unrest.

One strong point of the book resides in the fact that it covers a large array of subjects, all related to social media – from the dark side of the network to implications outside of it. The diversity is furthermore enhanced by the fact that each chapter bears different authors with not only different themes but different writing styles and views on the subject at hand. However, certain chapters could have used better research and a deeper coverage of their respective themes. Chapter 4 lacks both the needed technical dimension and a deep understanding of online group dynamics. Chapter 5 by Panos Kompatsiaris and Yiannis Mylonas is truly enjoyable in view of the way it talks about online Nazism, as is Chapter 9 by Thomas Poell in dealing with State censorship and the implications in social media activism.

"Social Media, Politics and the State" edited by Trottier and Fuchs shines when it touches the extremes of social media activism. It also provides clear and concrete definitions of each underlying concept. Not only a good research resource but also an enjoyable read.

<div align="right">

Răzvan T. Coloja
University of Oradea

</div>