Blogging, Nationhood, and the Egyptian Revolution: Rethinking Bridgeblogging

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Abstract

The common interpretation of "bridgeblogs," or blogs written in English by bloggers in countries where English is not the primary audience, understands them as primarily serving to explain the local political context for an international audience. This article aims to complicate the existing understanding of bridgeblogs through ethnographic research into five Egyptian bridgeblogs. Specifically, this paper considers bloggers' engagement in discussions about nationhood in 2011, in the wake of the Egyptian uprising that overthrew Hosni Mubarak. This paper argues that by participating in conversations about the future and shape of the Egyptian nation, bridgebloggers are highly engaged in domestic political networks, are dedicated to political causes within the country, and write for both domestic and international audiences.

Keywords

blogging, Egypt, nationhood, nation, bridgeblog

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INTRODUCTION

On January 2, 2011, Egyptian Wael Eskandar wrote in English on his blog *Notes from the Underground*, "People accuse me of treason when I say that I don't love Egypt anymore. The reality is that I'm just being honest…Egypt has been lost and we're not even aware of it." He went on to explain, "I do not fool myself by giving love to this evil replica. Surely this is not my country; it's not a country that I want to be associated with. It's a country of thugs, thieves and murderers."

In this post, Eskandar expressed frustration with the current state of Egypt, suggesting that the political regime had turned his country into something unrecognizable. During Hosni Mubarak's presidency from 1981 to 2011, an autocratic state dominated political life in Egypt. Restrictive laws governed the creation of political parties, preventing new ones from forming, while existing parties served largely to provide just enough dissent to further entrench the regime (Albrecht 2013). The state maintained tight control over the media, and dissenting voices were regularly silenced through censorship.

But Eskandar's lament for Egypt in early January was not merely a narrow critique of its political system. Rather, he seemed to invoke a more meaningful sense of loss of his country and of what it meant to be Egyptian. He wrote, "I love the old sinking Egypt that was full of kindness, full of beauty. I don't like this new one that's full of ignorance, poverty, injustice, hate, extremism and disrespect." Here he presented a dichotomy of shared values and social conditions between the "old Egypt" and the "new one." Though it is unclear when this perceived degradation took place, Eskandar had a firm sense that the people bore some responsibility for the changes. "This is a country that we shape, not a person that we have to accept," he stated, clearly staking a claim in the process of building a better Egypt and assigning responsibility to the people for the construction of their own nation.

On January 25, Eskandar joined the protests that would topple the government of Hosni Mubarak after eighteen days of uprising across the country. As the uprising built momentum in the ensuing days, Eskandar remarked that the change he hoped for was beginning to take shape, thanks to the protestors in Tahrir Square in Cairo: "I had thought the country would take numerous years to change into that which we hoped for. All it takes is a visit to Tahrir Square (which I now call Tahrir Republic) to see that it took only four days to change people." In Tahrir Square, Eskandar experienced a version of Egyptian nationhood very different from that which he had experienced under the Mubarak regime. In the wake of Mubarak's fall, he reflected, "In Tahrir, I found out what [belonging to a nation] really means. It means your brothers and sisters and your whole extended family living in the same place, sharing the same emotions and sharing the same

thoughts." At this time of opportunity for change, Eskandar suggested that a new kind of nationhood could take hold in Egypt.

This article presents ethnographic research into blogs that, like Eskandar's, were written by Egyptians in English in the year after the Egyptian revolution of 2011. This category of blogs, known as bridgeblogs, is commonly understood in academic literature as primarily intended for a foreign audience, because they are written in English. However, I examine bloggers' involvement in national political dialogue oriented towards a domestic audience. Specifically, I focus on their discussions of nationhood, during this key period for re-envisioning the nation of Egypt. As the above passages from Eskandar's blog *Notes from the Underground* suggest, bloggers who had been actively involved in the revolution discussed new visions and opportunities for the Egyptian nation. Through ethnographies of five blogs written in English, I will explore the ways the bloggers participated in conversations about the Egyptian nation, presenting diverse visions of nationhood, yet often invoking of the resounding spirit of protests in Tahrir. I argue that by taking part in discussion about the shape of the nation, bridgebloggers are in fact highly engaged in domestic political dialogue, dedicated to political causes within the country, and oriented towards both domestic and international audiences.

In the following section, I provide an introduction to the Egyptian blogosphere and briefly review existing literature on bridgeblogging. In the third section, I consider the concept of the nation, and situate this project within Lila Abu-Lughod's (2005) study of the Egyptian nation through television and John Kelly and Martha Kaplan's (2001) theoretical framework for studying nationhood. The fourth section explains the methodology that shaped this research. The fifth section, which is at the ethnographic heart of this article, presents an ethnographical exploration of each blog and its discussion of nationhood. In the sixth section, I discuss the shared and divergent claims of nationhood in each blog and characterize these blogs' engagement in national political dialogue. The seventh section, the conclusion, offers some final thoughts on my findings and the implications for our understanding of bridgeblogs.

THE EGYPTIAN BLOGOSPHERE & BRIDGEBLOGS

From the advent of the Egyptian blogosphere in the early 2000s (Radsch 2008), Egyptians have used blogging as a platform for political discourse, engagement, and activism. Early bloggers were generally young, liberal, and anti-establishment. As Kefaya, a protest movement against Hosni Mubarak, developed from 2004-2005, a "natural symbiosis between Egypt's early core bloggers and the emerging protest movement helped popularize the Egyptian blogosphere as a site of protest" (2008, 2-3). Subsequently, the blogosphere thrived as a venue for activism. Many

bloggers knew each other in person from offline meetings and joint political actions. As the blogosphere began to grow and diversify, "cyberactivism" became a more established practice, though at the same time, with the spread of blogging, there was much greater variety in the content of blogs and the demographics of bloggers (2008).

Scholars of new media have sought to understand the political significance of blogs in Egypt and across the Arab world in greater depth. For instance, Hirschkind (2010) has argued that blogs create spaces to transcend traditional political divides, while Hamdy and Gomaa (2012) have argued that blogs portray news events through a human interest lens distinct from other forms of media. With respect to blogs written in English, scholars have argued that they act as a medium of international information sharing.

Zuckerman identifies blogs written in English but published in a non-English speaking country as "bridgeblogs". In an early article about bridgeblogging, Zuckerman (2008) distinguishes bridgeblogging as one of three types of activity characteristic of Arab political bloggers. He offers the following definition:

> Bridgeblogs are weblogs that reach across gaps of language, culture and nationality to enable interpersonal communication. They are distinguished from the vast majority of blogs by their intended audience: while most blogs are targeted to friends, family or countrymen, bridgeblogs are intended to be read by an audience from a different nation, religion, or culture. A Tanzanian blogging in Kiswahili about local politics is not bridgeblogging; a Tanzanian blogging in English about Tanzanian politics, explaining the position of the politicians mentioned and the context of the issues debated, is bridgeblogging (48).

Bridgeblogs are characteristically identified by their use of a language other than the language native to the bloggers' country—primarily English. According to Zuckermans' analysis, this linguistic choice indicates a blog that primarily endeavors to provide a political primer for an international audience.

The little scholarship available on bridgeblogs shares this narrow view of their purposes and political significance. Lynch (2007) emphasizes the role that these blogs play in reaching Western audiences, noting that Arab bridgebloggers disproportionately attract the attention of Western media, as compared to bloggers who write in their native language. Though he notes that some bloggers can occupy multiple categories, he generally takes a limited view on the political engagement of bridgebloggers. "They often stand aloof from their own national politics" (17), he writes.

This analysis assumes that the sole reason for use of English is to connect to an international audience, ignoring the presence of an English-speaking elite in countries such as Egypt, among other factors in the choice to write in English. Moreover, this analysis implies that bloggers who write in English are less involved in political dialogue within their country than bloggers who write in their native language, as their audience is not their fellow countrymen. In contrast, this article pursues a deep ethnographic study of bridgeblogs to explore their engagements in national politics and with domestic audiences, seeking a more multifaceted understanding of bloggers who write in English.

My focus on bridgeblogs arises from the relative lack of focus on, and seemingly insufficient understanding of, this particular corner of the Egyptian blogosphere. This article will not attempt to draw any comparative conclusions regarding Arabic and English blogs in Egypt, though it will make note of certain bloggers who make use of both languages. Rather, this article will engage in a close reading of a selection of bridgeblogs in order to better understand the significance of the political writings within.

THEORIZING THE NATION

This article locates bridgebloggers' engagement in national politics in their participation in discussions about the shape and future of Egyptian nationhood. In considering nationhood, it is important to acknowledge the subtleties and difficulties of that term. The "nation" is not intended here as a homogenizing, hegemenizing concept. Against the risk that the concept of the nation elides differences and frictions, Claudio Lomnitz-Adler has described "'a national space' rife with tensions, inequalities, and regionally configured power systems" (in Abu-Lughod 2005, 9) and Partha Chatterjee (1993) has written of "the nation and its fragments". These formulations draw attention to the disjointed, contentious nature of the nation.

After the 2011 revolution, the Egyptian nation was highly fractured, which this article acknowledges through exploration of the specific, varied forms of nationhood described and envisioned by bloggers.[1] Taking heed of the fragmented, tense nature of the nation suggests that the visions of nationhood offered by these bloggers, not shared by the majority of Egyptians and not supported by strong institutions of powers, are yet important. Anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod furthermore notes, "Rather than studying 'the nation' or any particular nation, we

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[1] Abu-Lughod writes, "The 1990s signify a particularly complex political moment in Egypt's national history when the hegemony of one vision, of which state media was to be an instrument, was seriously eroding" (2005, 14). If the hegemony of a single, state-sponsored vision of nation was eroding in the 1990s, through much of 2011, there was no state authority capable of putting forth a commanding vision of nationhood.

must admit that we are always studying nations at particular moments in their histories" (2005, 14). The study of Egyptian nationhood at hand is neither a study of nationhood writ large nor a study of any permanent, intrinsic qualities of nationhood. Rather, it examines dialogue about the nation at a time that seemed to make possible a momentous reconfiguration of Egyptian political authority and nationhood.

Abu-Lughod has argued that media can construct particular forms of nationhood. In Egypt in the 1990s, television serials served a pedagogical role in promoting certain national ideologies, shifting from themes of developmentalism to themes of consumerism to mirror Egypt's political trajectory and encroaching globalization. The vision of nationhood depicted on television found mixed reception among Egypt's impoverished citizens whose "realities [did] not correspond to the promises of national television" (2005, 242). Importantly for this role in producing a sense of nationhood, television serials are widely popular Egypt. Blogs do not have nearly as wide circulation as television serials, but nonetheless also offer a medium to propose, critique, and defend different ideas about nationhood for an Egyptian audience.

Moreover, television is largely a top-down enterprise in Egypt. Though Abu-Lughod notes that the production of television serials involves the collaborative work of many individuals and should not be mistaken as emanating directly from the state (2005, 88), it is yet a medium of few producers and many consumers. Blogging, on the other hand, is a medium of many producers. On television, only certain individuals have access to the means of production, but the media circulates widely. Others may contest the viability or accuracy of the nation represented in this media because it does not accord with their own experiences. Blogging, alternatively, is a platform that enables those with an Internet connection and the desire to publish their thoughts to do so. Importantly, this does not mean that all Egyptians have equal access to blogging or that bloggers are representative of the Egyptian voice at large. Nonetheless, it does allow for those individuals who do maintain a blog to express their opinions. Furthermore, whereas the state was able to maintain a dominating influence over television serials, bloggers are far less subject to state control. While television serials may present a more dominant vision of nationhood, bloggers propose ideas about nationhood that are more tenuous, emerging and evolving as the political situation changes.

In the blogs discussed below, bridgebloggers demonstrate strong commitments to national politics by passionately narrating their ideas about Egyptian nationhood. Kaplan and Kelly, among others, have argued that greater attention must be paid toward national narratives, proposing that narrative is crucial in filling in the content of national spaces. "Narratives are proposed that connect people to their rulers as one people, versus outside others" (2001, 141).

This argument turns attention away from the political power structures that may provide the skeleton of the nation and towards the means of creating and perpetuating a national character. Kelly expands upon the importance of narrative elsewhere, arguing, "'The nation' itself is a narrative" (1995, 257). From this theoretical stance, the nation is a ground for contestation, rather than an essential substance (257-258). The contested nature of the nation opens the possibility for bloggers to assert visions of nationhood that contradict with each other or with authoritative versions of the nation.

METHODOLOGY

This article comprises a close ethnographic reading of five English-language blogs, all written by Egyptians who were involved in the 2011 revolution. It is difficult to quantify the proportion of Egyptian blogs that are written in English. Notably, in a 2009 Berkman Center report on the Arabic blogosphere, the Egyptian cluster did not include an Egyptian-English bridge subcluster, as was the case for other clusters discussed in the report (Etling et al.). In 2006, an Egyptian blog aggregator run by prominent bloggers Alaa Abd El Fattah and Manal Hassan included 1,500 blogs, of which more than half were Arabic (Zuckerman 2006). Though the blogosphere has matured significantly since then and its demographics have likely shifted, it is reasonable to assert that a meaningful portion of Egyptian blogs is written in English.

The five blogs studied in this article are all relatively prominent within the Egyptian blogosphere. It is again difficult to quantify this prominence; it was gauged qualitatively based on my exploration of the blogosphere and the ease with which a casual reader may find these blogs, through links from outside sources and from each other.[2] The five blogs are *Rantings of a Sandmonkey*, *An Arab Citizen*, *The Big Pharaoh*, *Notes from the Underground*, and *Egyptian Chronicles*. Selecting for more prominent blogs attempts to ensure greater quality and regularity of posting, but beyond that, is not highly relevant, as the diversity of the blogosphere prevents any small fraction of blogs from being representative.

Based on available data, readership of the blogs varies widely. Web analytics provider Alexa lists the five blogs in its global rankings in the following ascending order of popularity: *Notes from the Underground*, *The Big Pharaoh*, *Rantings of a Sandmonkey*, *An Arab Citizen*, and *Egyptian Chronicles* (Table 1).[3] The global rankings reaffirm that there is a wide range in the size of the blogs' audiences. Furthermore, the rankings provided for other Egyptian news websites

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[2] For example, two of the blogs studied here were listed in a 2013 *Daily Beast* post titled "Six Best Egypt Bloggers to Follow." http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/01/30/six-best-egypt-bloggers-to-follow.html.

[3] Data captured on 15 April 2015. Relative rankings may – and have likely – changed since 2011.

in Table 1 suggest that the blogs do have a significantly smaller readership than mainstream media.

Table 1. Global Ranks for Blogs with Comparisons
Rankings are drawn from Alexa (www.alexa.com), which calculates a website's global rank based on a combination of the site's average daily visitors and page views on the site over the past three months.

Site	Global Rank
Blog Rankings	
Notes from the Underground	12,845,540
The Big Pharaoh	9,145,531
Rantings of a Sandmonkey	6,924,659
An Arab Citizen	2,183,819
Egyptian Chronicles	1,474,097
Rankings of Comparison Sites	
Jadaliyya (Independent e-zine with analysis of the Arab World, http://www.jadaliyya.com/)	166,553
Daily News Egypt (Independent English-language newspaper, http://www.ahram.org.eg/)	40,944
Al-Ahram (Egyptian state newspaper, http://www.ahram.org.eg/)	2,717

This article considers posts on each blog from January to December 2011, all accessed between December 2013 and April 2014. This period effectively begins with the revolution that overthrew Mubarak and ends with the first parliamentary elections succeeding the revolution, encompassing numerous other events of political significance, including a constitutional referendum and many prominent protests. A year's worth of observation material provides sufficient time to build a complex understanding of each blog; for bloggers who only post a few times per month, any shorter time scale would likely prove insufficient. Furthermore, this year was an important window in Egypt's political development post-Mubarak, and a particularly fruitful period of time to propose new conceptions of nationhood.

This article rests upon an ethnographic sensibility in order to pay careful attention to the voices of bloggers and their dialogue about nationhood. In the introduction to the volume *Political Ethnography*, Edward Schatz describes an ethnographic sensibility as "an approach that cares…to glean the meanings that the people under study attribute to their social and political reality" (2009, 5). I hope, with this approach, to "[produce] detailed evidence of the sort that can flesh out, or call into question, generalizations produced or meanings assigned by other research traditions" (10).

BLOGGING THE NATION

This section engages in an ethnographic reading of the five blogs to discuss the visions of Egyptian politics and nationhood that each blog puts forth. It also introduces information about the authors of the five blogs and the blogs themselves, in order to build a basic, if limited and partial, understanding of the context of the blog posts discussed.

SANDMONKEY

Blogger Mahmoud Salem has been writing on his blog, *Rantings of a Sandmonkey*, since 2006. He writes almost exclusively in English, and published an average of 2.33 posts every month throughout 2011. He posted between one to five times per month, with the exception of November, when the blog was silent. The blogroll on the margins of the webpage—that is, the sidebar where bloggers often link to other blogs—had an extensive list of links to both Arabic and English blogs, throughout the Middle East and North Africa region, though many of the links were defunct or the blogs were outdated.[4] *Rantings of a Sandmonkey* has a strong political focus, and posts often address general principles and big picture concerns rather than day-to-day activism.

Salem studied business at Northeastern University and worked in investment banking and marketing upon his return to Egypt. He began the blog at age twenty-three, writing under the pseudonym Sandmonkey. He did not reveal his identity until the 2011 revolution, after the police arrested him during the protests. He has explained why he began blogging:

> It was all about, "Someone on the Internet is wrong, and I must correct it"…I guess I had a reverse culture shock by how closed the entire society was…You know, there was no freedom, conformity was everywhere. And people spouted truisms as if they were true. There was no argument…[This was] the natural conclusion to an educational system based on memorization and not critical thinking. I wanted to confront some truisms that were existing in the Egyptian mind (Gitlin 2011, 5).

Salem chose to blog in English because he hoped it would help him evade censorship, on one hand, and, on the other hand, reach the elite. Notably, Zuckerman (2008) does not consider either of these reasons as motivations for bloggers to write in English. At the time, Salem felt any political change would have to come from Egypt's elite, though he has since changed his views (2011, 6).

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[4] As of April 2015, Sandmonkey's blog had been redesigned and this blogroll had been removed.

He hoped that blogging in English would enable him to communicate openly and effectively to a target demographic within Egypt.

A recurring theme in the blog posts throughout 2011 was the divide between the revolutionaries (sometimes referred to as "the protestors") and the people (also addressed as "the general public" and "the silent majority"). This division emerged while the protests that toppled Mubarak were still underway. Sandmonkey was closely attuned to the people who saw the revolution as an unwanted disruption in their lives. On February 6 he wrote, "I am sorry that your lives and businesses are disrupted, but this wasn't caused by the Protesters. The Protesters aren't the ones who shut down the internet that has paralyzed your businesses and banks: The government did." He went on to list several more charges against the protestors that he believed the government was actually responsible for.

Again and again, Sandmonkey would return to this relationship between the revolutionaries, the people, and the state. He discussed how the revolutionaries and the people were divided, but argued that the real enemy should have been whoever was wielding state power—initially, the government, but later on, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) and the military. If national narratives often attempt to create bonds between people, in this moment of revolution, Sandmonkey aimed to exclude the ruling class from the Egyptian nation while uniting all others. He attempted to align the interests of the citizenry against the state.

Nonetheless, the antagonism between the revolutionaries and the general public became more apparent after the constitutional referendum in March, in which the activist campaign to vote no failed. Sandmonkey pointed out that this failure was due primarily to the reality that only a small fraction of Egyptians participated in the revolution; the campaign to vote no did not reach the rest of the population, and particularly not the population outside of Cairo. His hope of creating a united nation of Egyptian citizens had failed thus far. This is not to say that a divided electorate cannot constitute a united nation; however, given that this vote was on a matter of national constitution, it revealed a failure in the revolutionaries' ability to build popular buy-in for their vision of the future of the nation. In a post addressed "Dear Jan25 people," he wrote, "You no longer represent the people. You really don't, at least when it comes to their concerns." In response to this growing gap, Sandmonkey urged the revolutionaries to strengthen their grassroots organizing and pay greater attention to the general public's desires, envisioning a nation in which the revolutionaries built support and created greater consensus.

He also used his blog as a venue to urge the people to join in the revolutionary movement. In a post on March 23, 2011 addressed to the "Dear Free People of Egypt," he recognized the people's concerns, but also wrote

persuasively of the comparative freedoms of a state regime versus the democratic government he envisioned the revolutionaries bringing about. In conclusion, he wrote, "As you can see, what we are asking for is totally unrealistic and we are completely dedicated to destroying ourselves. If we are truly such a problem, we urge you to help us make that happen, so we can get out of your hair as soon as possible. But if you are insane and unreasonable like the rest of us, please join us and help us." Here Sandmonkey attempted to convince the people that the ideals and values of the revolution were worth fighting for, and provided a vision of all Egyptians fighting together to shape their nation.

The way in which Sandmonkey addressed his letters to the revolutionaries and the people revealed how he positioned himself in relation to each of these categories. In writing to "Jan25 people" he drew upon a popular Twitter hashtag used to catalogue tweets about the revolution, #jan25. In this context, it served as a shared identifier and asserted the legitimacy of his assessments of the current state of the revolutionary movement. He also signed the earlier post he addressed to the people as "Mahmoud Salem (A Jan25 Protestor)." In this earlier post, he wrote to "Free People of Egypt." This form of address seems to cast as wide a net as possible, though it becomes clear he was truly addressing those who opposed the activists. "Free" reminded the Egyptian reader of his or her rights as a citizen, for which Sandmonkey urged him or her to fight. "Of Egypt" created the sense of unity that he was trying to promote amongst Egyptians. Thus, while his identification as a "Jan25 Protestor" rooted him in the protests of Tahrir in January and February, his form of address to others emphasized their agency and ability to join in his cause.

For ten months after the revolution, Sandmonkey remained highly optimistic about Egypt's prospects. He focused on encouraging protestors to form strong political organizations that would enable them to accrue power and support from the people. As early as February 6, amidst ongoing protests to topple Mubarak, he urged protestors across Egypt to gather contact information for participants in the protests: "with such Proper citizen organization and segmentation, we'll have the contact information and location of all the protesters that showed up, and that could be transformed into voting blocks in parliamentary districts." In this way, the revolutionaries would be able to assume political power and bring their vision for the nation to fruition. Sandmonkey continued to be a strong proponent of political organization throughout 2011, posting a guide to forming a campaign and continually urging activists to build grassroots support for their cause. In late 2011, he ran unsuccessfully for a seat in parliament and managed a winning campaign for another candidate.

During the campaigns, he was absent from posting for over a month. In the two posts that he wrote after the campaign, he was sad and unhopeful about Egypt's future, disappointed by what he saw as the Egyptian people's submission

to the army and ashamed of what the revolution had failed to accomplish. The revolutionaries had not been able to bring about the new Egyptian nation they envisioned. And yet, he wrote, "We get it. We get your fears, your hate, your deeply nurtured prejudices, and we refuse to give up on you." Though his ideas about the future of the nation—of Egyptian people united, and of all citizens joining in the cause of revolutionary change—were failing to gain ground, he continued to use his blog to engage with citizens, both allies and opponents, in dialogue about the nation.

AN ARAB CITIZEN

The masthead for the blog *An Arab Citizen* has both the blog's title and its slogan—"Covers Egypt, the Region, and current affairs"—in Arabic and English. The posts are likewise a mix of English and Arabic, with an increasing portion of posts in English throughout 2011. The blog's first post was in January 2011. The author of the blog, Bassem Sabry, was one of the more prolific bloggers among the five studied here. Over the rest of the year, he published between one and thirty-eight new posts almost every month, for an average of 14.58 posts per month.[5] The blogroll links to three other blogs: two are Arabic-language blogs, and the third is *Egyptian Chronicles*, which is discussed below. A widget allows readers to translate the blog into various languages using Google Translate. Sabry describes himself on Twitter as a media and political consultant. As a political commentator, since starting this blog, he has been interviewed numerous times by the international media and has contributed pieces in several English-language publications.

Sabry seemed to use his blog far more as a means of building his own career than any of the other bloggers profiled here. In some of his early posts, he urged readers to like, comment, and share the post in a short standard message at the bottom of the post. A few of his commentaries also included acknowledgements at the end, listing those who provided contributions and feedback along with their Twitter handle; this linked Sabry to a network of Egyptian political commentators. He perhaps positioned himself as a node within a web of national political actors more consciously than the other bloggers at hand.

Sabry wrote about numerous countries in the Middle East, in particular, Tunisia, Libya, and Yemen, with a strong emphasis on Egypt, as he is Egyptian. The focus of *An Arab Citizen* is generally political, but includes much content on media more generally. For example, the first post published in English was a personal note on "losing the magic of music." Overall, the English-language posts primarily fall into three broad categories: posting copies or translations of relevant

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[5] The blog seems to have gone defunct in 2013. The last entry on the blog was posted on September 9, 2013, as observed in April 2015.

political documents, sharing interesting political media, and personal thoughts or political analysis. While Sabry's most pro-active engagement in conversations about nationhood may be found in the third category, the first two categories of content also provide important contextual material for Sabry's contribution to building a new vision of the nation.

Sabry posted a range of political documents in 2011, mainly regarding proposed laws and the constitution. In one such post of the proposed constitutional principles, originally published by the daily paper *Al Masry Al Youm*, he explained, "I'm mirroring it here on the blog as I do with all important documents, again for easy future access and documentation." Thus, it seems this category of posts was both for his readers' benefit, in providing access to important documents, and for his own records. This act could be understood as a means of creating shared memory of the post-revolution political processes through documentation and building a repository of important documentation regarding the new Egyptian nation thought possible after the 2011 revolution.

The content of the posts in which he shared political media ranged from a series of photo collections of Arab leaders, including Mubarak and Gaddafi, to a music video entitled "Gaddafi's Hat," by the maker of another popular music video of Gaddafi, "Zanga Zanga." The media Sabry posted tended not to be Egypt-specific, but to have broader origins in the Arab world. This suggests he felt a heightened sense of solidarity with people and politics across the Middle East and North Africa, perhaps engaging in the interconnected opportunities for narrating new visions of nationhood opened by the Arab Spring.

Political and personal commentary made up the largest portion of Sabry's posts in English, and most clearly communicated his visions of nationhood. Some posts were links to articles and interviews given elsewhere, such as an article on Mohamed El Baradei that he wrote for *Bikya Masr*.

In the substantive political commentary that Sabry posted on his blog, he did not seem to write often as an activist with a strong ideological stance, as Sandmonkey did; rather, his approach was frequently more intellectual. His writing displayed a familiarity with Western political thought and complex political ideologies, such as a post that "explores meaning of Centrism, Third Way, and Social Liberalism, and talks about their future in a new Arab World" and another post comparing Egyptian and American politics. One post with an Indian parable on fear suggests that his thinking is highly cosmopolitan.

In July, Sabry hinted at his political leanings in a series of three lengthy posts analyzing why Egyptians no longer supported the revolution. Before enumerating a list of reasons why the revolutionaries had failed to maintain public support, he explained:

> The entire experience of the revolution revealed many things about the psyche and mentality of the standard Egyptian. The largest majority of Egyptians are politically conservative…In fact, I would say many Egyptians didn't necessarily "Love" Mubarak, but didn't hate him either…A truth is that a significant number of Egyptians are either uneducated, undereducated, or truly depend on the national media and "common first story heard from a friend" for news and opinion, and they grew used to the National Media's constant illusionary newsfeed that portrayed images of stability and growth…Within the Egyptians are true revolutionaries who fought against the government in much more dangerous times, in the 60s and 70s and 80s and 90s. I am speaking however, in my view, about a significant percentage of Egypt.

In this passage, rather than proposing a new vision of nationhood, he implicitly critiques the existing national dynamics.

Other posts offered greater clarity on his stake in Egypt's fractured political landscape and how this informed his thinking about the nation. Sabry identified as a supporter of and participant in the Tahrir protests in a series of posts at the end of November, on the eve of parliamentary elections. These posts were some of the most clearly politicized writings that he published throughout the year. In one post, he argued that boycotting the elections would be futile, concluding, "with a heavy heart, I will vote. Then return to Tahrir..." In another post, he noted that though the demands of Tahrir activists had previously been vague and not cohesive, the activists were now presenting a unified demand for "a national salvation government with full authority." He reflected, "It is remarkable to see the evolution of a revolution." Thus, though his blog acted more often as a collection of media and political analysis than as a space to elaborate a manifesto or expression of personal politics, Sabry did occasionally use it to express his personal political beliefs. His admiration for the way in which the revolution had developed into what he perceived as a more cohesive political unit suggests that he perhaps hoped this movement would present a viable alternative vision of nationhood.

Nonetheless, Sabry also invited critical discussion of Tahrir by sharing the thoughts of a friend who wrote, "You people in Tahrir are doing almost everything you claim to hate about the former and current regime…You Tahrir people are trying to impose your will on us." By presenting opposing views, Sabry created a space on his blog to discuss different viewpoints on what the nation was and could become. While Sabry may not have presented a clear, holistic vision of nationhood in his blog posts, he participated in critical

discussion of how individuals and movements could collaboratively create such a vision.

THE BIG PHARAOH

The Big Pharaoh blog was founded in 2004, modeled after Iraqi blogs to share information about the region. One of the first posts answered a variety of general questions about Egypt and Egyptians that seemed to be geared towards a Western audience. Big Pharaoh is a Coptic Christian, a minority in Egypt. He left blogging in 2008; upon his return in February 2011, he explained that he felt frustrated that despite a significant amount of media coverage, nothing had changed in Egypt during his first blogging stint. Big Pharaoh began posting regularly again in May 2011, and thereafter published one to four new posts almost every month, with an average of 1.83 posts per month throughout the year. All of his posts are in English. His blogroll links largely to outdated or defunct blogs—though Sandmonkey is included—in Egypt and across the Middle East. He also links to media mentions of his pre-2008 blogging, largely in Western publications, including *NPR*, *BBC*, and the *Christian Science Monitor*.

A prominent theme in Big Pharaoh's blog in 2011 was the Egyptian army. His posts conveyed an increasingly strong anti-army sentiment throughout the year. One of his first posts published after the revolution speculated on the role of the army in the coming months. He provided two scenarios: either the army would soon squash the revolutionaries and take control, or it would ensure a smooth democratic transition so long as it was clear that its own power was not to be diminished. Big Pharaoh suggested that the second scenario was more likely, although by May, he decried the army's one-sided decision making. Later, he began to speculate that the army was plotting against the activists, for instance, by inciting violence at a protest in July. By August, he wrote, "It is crystal clear SCAF wants to intimate [*sic*] and eventually get rid of its last critics: the youth who did the revolution and their supporters," and he blamed SCAF for exacerbating the rift between the revolutionaries and the general public. Big Pharaoh seemed to view the army as a threat to the Egyptian nation, and attempted to write it out of the national collectivity by questioning its legitimacy as an organization aligned with the people.

A majority of Big Pharaoh's posts attempted to explain current events by surmising what the cloaked intentions of certain players, often the army, may have been. Thus, after protestors stormed the Israeli embassy in September, he speculated that the army allowed this to happen. In the wake of the massacre of protesting Copts at the Maspero building in October, he proposed four competing explanations: supporters of the old regime infiltrated the protests and incited violence, a radical Christian shot at the army, SCAF instigated the violence, or

SCAF attempted to pit Christian radicals against Muslim radicals to win over the street. None of these scenarios are backed up by convincing evidence, but Big Pharaoh believed that the powerful players in Egyptian politics were deeply invested in retaining power and thus subject to strong suspicion. In these instances, Big Pharaoh offered alternative narratives to explain events of national importance and to write these events into his own vision of nationhood, largely reinforcing his anti-army sentiments.

Big Pharaoh also wrote in strong opposition to Islamists and the Muslim Brotherhood. However, showing sensitivity to political realities, he predicted the Brotherhood's election victories, indicating an awareness that all Egyptians did not share his political views and vision of the nation. In a post on August 16, 2011, Big Pharaoh outlined what he thought Egypt would be like under Muslim Brotherhood rule in the worst-case scenario. He concluded, "A government with a strong MB [Muslim Brotherhood] presence can be tolerable and intolerable. Depends on where you draw the line. And depends on how long you can wait till an alternative emerges and till Egyptians, like their Iranian counterparts, discover that those who manipulate them using religion are not worthy of their votes." This implied appeal to his fellow Egyptians asked them to support a more secular government, revealing a strong bias against a religious government in Big Pharaoh's vision of the nation.

As a Coptic Christian himself, Big Pharaoh devoted particular attention to the struggles of this group in post-revolutionary Egypt and suggested a prominent role for Copts in the nation. In a post memorializing a young Copt who died at Maspero, Mina Danial, he asserted that Copts had an important stake in being active in Egyptian politics. He noted that it was commonly assumed that Copts were absent during the protests that toppled Mubarak because their pope ordered them not to participate. However, he countered this assumption by stating that numerous Copts disobeyed the pope and *did* participate in the protests. He concluded, "The blood of Mina calls out to Christians to follow in his footsteps. To get out of their churches, their ghettos, and join their Muslim fellow countrymen in changing the future of this country even if it looks bleak today. There is simply no other alternative." Interestingly, he never used "we" in talking about the Coptic community and did not directly address his comments to anyone in particular, thus refraining from explicitly identifying himself with the Copts. Nonetheless, his membership in the Coptic community shed light on his opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood and his particular vision of nationhood. He urged his Coptic audience to pursue active participation in shaping the nation, as Sandmonkey had also urged his readers to participate.

One of Big Pharaoh's most popular posts of 2011, attracting over one hundred comments, was an ironic proposal to form the Republic of Heliopolis. Writing in December after the parliamentary elections, Big Pharaoh stated that in

order to become a citizen of this republic, "you have to be an open minded person who does not mind the diversity of our country. You will have to keep religion to yourself and not force it on other fellow countrymen." In a follow-up post, the republic developed into a federation with Nasr City; neither of these districts elected a Muslim Brother or Salafi candidate. This utopia embodied Big Pharaoh's notion of nationhood as a space of diversity and tolerance. It suggests that his beliefs were perhaps, in fact, pluralist, but he did not believe that the Brotherhood shared the same values, and thus he condemned the group.

In his final post of the year, Big Pharaoh clarified that he did not actually want to live in the Republic of Heliopolis. He wanted to live in the Republic of Tahrir. He described Tahrir as "a utopia…a dream. A place that enabled us, Egyptians, to overcome many of our ills." This was one of the few moments when Big Pharaoh focused on the optimism of the revolution rather than the missteps and injustices of the ensuing political processes. In his view, Tahrir was a place where all of the perceived shortcomings of Egyptians were reversed. It was clear that the legacy of Tahrir continued to inspire his political action: "I tend to look at Tahrir as a mental state. As a seed that was planted in this country. And just like any seed, it is destined to grow. This is the reason why they're doing everything to choke it. Because if Tahrir came out of Tahrir, this country will change forever and threaten whatever interests they're trying to protect." Thus, he portrayed Tahrir as the ideal antithesis to the struggle for political power in Egypt. Like Sandmonkey, Big Pharaoh memorialized the harmony of Tahrir, and its legacy inspired his vision for Egypt.

NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND

Wael Eskandar has been blogging on *Notes from the Underground* since 2006, and through 2011 he posted between 2 and 8 times every month, with an average of 5.83 posts per month. He describes himself as a writer and journalist, and he has written for numerous Egyptian media outlets. According to his Blogger profile, he has cosmopolitan tastes; he lists Pink Floyd as his favorite musician, and his list of favorite books includes Russian, British, and Arab literature. He follows three blogs via Blogger, including *An Arab Citizen*. The sidebar on Eskandar's blog lists his Twitter handle and highlights popular previous posts. His blogroll links to a few, mainly non-political blogs. The site visit counter shows 178,372 visits.[6]

Eskandar blogs exclusively in English, but his posts seem intended for an audience of Egyptian nationals and foreigners. At times, he addressed his posts directly at those who are outside of the country, such as a post from early 2011

[6] As of April 15, 2015.

that provides instruction in evading government censorship of social media sites during the revolution. The post began, "To anyone who stumbles upon this, please share with Egyptians." With this tactic, Eskandar seemed to call upon existing multivectored links of communication between Egyptians and internationals. Nonetheless, the need to explicitly address foreign readers in some posts may suggest that they were only part of a wider audience with whom Eskandar engaged.

As a journalist, Eskandar has occasionally been called upon to offer his own testimony and analysis of Egyptian politics. He posted videos of interviews he gave on *Al Jazeera* and *Alhurra*, a U.S.-funded, Arabic-language news channel broadcast in the Middle East. In early February, he expressed this role in a blog post, writing, "I'm asked often how I feel about what's going on in my country. I'm asked for news while I follow the news on Al Jazeera, twitter, friends from the scene or what have you." In these instances, he was called upon to serve the definitional role of a bridgeblogger, translating news for international audiences.

However, Eskandar's blogging was far more complex than that. Eskandar engaged deeply with Egyptian nationhood through personal reflections on Egypt's political situation in 2011, as demonstrated in the introduction to this article. He wrote of complex, conflicting emotions following the downfall of Mubarak: "Much of this is emotional; unlike many, my heart is not all filled with celebration. I'm filled with fear, with joy, and with remorse." To a foreign audience, this may have been taken as an account of Egyptians' reactions to the revolution, but to other Egyptians, this may have been a thoughtful provocation to consider their own reaction. Eskandar's blog arguably served both communities.

Eskandar's engagement in discussions about nationhood arose out of his time in Tahrir. As early as February, he realized the uniqueness of the Tahrir community, much as other bloggers later memorialized Tahrir. Eskandar wrote:

> We found something in Tahrir that we've missed for so long, indeed it may be something many haven't ever found. In Tahrir there was unadulterated love of a nation by people who have been crushed by it. So many voices silenced in the past, so many talents wasted, so many lives not spent well. In Tahrir we found each other, we found the true meaning of nationalism. I always hated that sentiment though, that pride of belonging to a nation. The whole world was my nation, but in Tahrir, I found out what it really means. It means your brothers and sisters and your whole extended family living in the same place, sharing the same emotions and sharing the same thoughts.

Eskandar emphasized the unity—the oneness of emotions and thoughts—that characterized the sense of nationhood that arose during the collective action in Tahrir. He hoped that the spirit of Tahrir would endure in Egyptian politics, writing later in February, "Tahrir is no longer a place we live in, it's a place that lives in us." The nation, as Eskandar would have it, would take its inspiration from the unity and memory of Tahrir.

Throughout 2011 Eskandar remained devoted to the cause of the revolution but decried the lack of progress. By April, he expressed nostalgia for Tahrir:

> It's a time that I miss immensely, where childlike hopes and dreams got us together in hopes of changing a nation…My Tahrir nostalgia comes not from missing the place, but from missing the spirit. It's a spirit which was crushed for ages under the weight of oppression, a spirit which was once told it would never amount to anything; that they were young and foolish, and other generations were better…That spirit of Tahrir faded for some time, and I look back upon it ever so lovingly, missing it.

In identifying his emotion as nostalgia, Eskandar suggested frustration that the spirit of Tahrir had not been able to inspire a new nation, and was perhaps even dying out. As the spirit of Tahrir faded, Eskandar wrote about his dislike of SCAF and the illegitimacy of elections. Like other bloggers, he expressed frustration with "the couch party," and pronounced that no amount of persuasion would convince them to join protests in the streets. Nonetheless, he continued to remain hopeful about the people of Egypt. In June, he wrote, "The bravery, resilience, valor and persistence expressed by people all over Egypt to fight injustice brings the cynic in me to his knees." There were enough continuing revolutionary activities for Eskandar to preserve hope that the remaining spirit of Tahrir would bring about the nation that he witnessed there.

Nonetheless, the institutions for political change being employed in Egypt in 2011 did not embody the nationhood that Eskandar envisioned. Rather, he voted against the constitutional referendum in March and strongly criticized the elections held in December. Numerous posts devoted to the elections suggest that Eskandar realized the importance of elections as a possible representative institution for the nation, though he wrote that these particular elections were neither legitimate, nor free, nor fair.

In December, he posted an "Open Letter to My Oppressors," begging these unidentified oppressors to halt their repression. He wrote, "These are real lives you are destroying, these are real people whose lives you are taking…Have you not that much love in you to see how they too can be loved? Do you not see the extent of the damage you have done and are doing to other human beings?

Have you become too selfish and too self-involved to have any kind of sympathy?" This appeal reflected the emphasis he placed upon solidarity in Tahrir. Eskandar asks for interpersonal recognition of Egypt's oppressed by their oppressors, which would allow them to envision working together, towards a new nation, on common grounds.

EGYPTIAN CHRONICLES

The tagline for the blog *Egyptian Chronicles* is "Egypt That You Don't Know," which immediately positions the blog as a helpful source of information and context for outsiders. The blogger, Zeinobia, describes herself as an "Egyptian girl who lives in the present with the glories of the past and hopes in a better future for herself and for her country." She follows an extensive list of other blogs in both Arabic and English according to her Blogger profile, and has at times maintained two other blogs. One of her other blogs was named "Stuff Egyptian People Like,"[7] suggesting a fluency in Western culture reinforced by her choices of favorite music, movies, and books listed on her Blogger profile. Zeinobia seems to be the best networked of the bloggers studied here, with an extensive blogroll and links to her profiles on various social media websites. She also links to numerous news websites published in the U.S. and the Middle East in the sidebar on her blog. *Egyptian Chronicles* is written entirely in English, though, like *An Arab Citizen*, it has a widget that enables readers to use Google Translate to translate the entire website. Zeinobia started blogging in 2004. During Mubarak's presidency her family feared she would encounter censorship or punishment, though she did not. She posts with far greater frequency than any of the other bloggers studied here; during 2011 she published between 50 and 116 posts per month, with an average of 79.41 posts per month. This frequency is due largely to the nature of her blog, which provides current news updates on a daily basis.

Though Zeinobia may have written primarily as a news source for foreign audiences, her involvement in the Egyptian activist and blogger communities and the personal viewpoints that she sometimes expressed in her posts positioned her as an active participant in Egypt's political culture in the year after the revolution. She described this role on February 12, the day after Mubarak resigned, writing, "I am just like a reporter, a biased reporter to her country and her people, the great people, the oldest nation in the world." This statement revealed not only that she saw herself as having a stake in the news she reported, but also that she felt great allegiance to "her people," howsoever she imagined that community.

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[7] Likely a reference to the popular blog (and later book) *Stuff White People Like*.

Like other bloggers, Zeinobia found a unique, new sense of nationhood in Tahrir. She wrote, "My experience in Al Tahrir on February 1, 2011 was unlike anything I experienced. All those people from all backgrounds and classes came for one reason to express their refusal to Mubarak and his regime. It was with strange to see all those people from different classes in one place treating each other as if they were one big family [*sic*]." While Eskandar emphasized the unity of the revolution, Zeinobia remarked on the diversity of the participants, who were nonetheless able to work together to bring down Mubarak. Moreover, she noted that the revolution happened in cities throughout the country—not just Cairo—and with participants of all ages, again reinforcing the notion that the diversity of the nation was represented in Tahrir Square. This diverse citizenry would need to continue to work together in a unified way if it was to build a new vision of nationhood. The tension between diversity and unity was at the core of her visions of nationhood, which had to address the reality of a fractured society.

Zeinobia drew a clear boundary between the people, on one hand, and the existing government, on the other, excluding the latter from her vision of nationhood. In March, she criticized Ahmed Shafik, the interim prime minister at the time, for laying claim to the revolution. She wrote, "But the thing that I do not understand it is how he claims now that it is 'our revolution.' No general it is not your revolution, it is our revolution to get rid from Mubarak's regime and this includes you." The revolution was an important representative moment for the people, and she did not want to allow the government to co-opt it. Nonetheless, unlike many other bloggers, she remained supportive of the army. This illustrated the difficult conflict over which institutions were harmonious with a new Egyptian nationhood and which were antithetical to it.

Throughout the year, Zeinobia continued to track ongoing protests in Tahrir, and their success or lack thereof. None of these protests reached nearly the same numbers of attendance as the January 25 protests, but organizations repeatedly called for "million man protests." This emphasis on the numerical count of protests revealed the importance of participation in order for these to be legitimate political expressions of the nation. In May, after a small protest, Zeinobia wrote, "For the sake of the country, we should be more than this insh Allah [God willing] next week, we should be more diverse in order to represent a large sector from the Egyptian people." Protests continued to be an important means of reasserting the nationhood expressed in Tahrir in opposition to the government and SCAF. On May 27, the day of one of the more prominent protests in 2011, Zeinobia wrote, "Today is the day, today is #May27 where thousands we hope to turn in to millions will head to Tahrir square in order to remind the government and the SCAF with our demands." The hashtag #May27 clearly placed these protests in a genealogy originating in the #Jan25 protests. Furthermore, this statement challenged formal representative structures with

grassroots collective action representing the nation. Zeinobia seemed to see the nation represented with greater legitimacy by the protests rather than the government.

However, Zeinobia ultimately envisioned transcending protest as a means of enacting nationhood. She urged participation in the parliamentary election, even getting involved in a campaign to ensure Egyptians abroad would be allowed to vote. In November, she wrote, "I think we should think Egypt first before anything including the revolution, Egypt is our goal while the revolution is just a means." "Egypt," here, was not merely a geopolitical entity, but a nation of people who were working together to define and shape their very nation. While Zeinobia's post-Mubarak vision of nationhood was firmly rooted in the revolution in Tahrir, she hoped this new nation would find harmony with formal institutions of government.

NARRATING NATIONHOOD

These bloggers are deeply engaged in national political debates and networks. Beyond explaining the current situation to others, they use their blogs to actively participate in ongoing political discussions, including discussion about the shape of a new nationhood that seemed possible after the revolution. Some bloggers more clearly asserted their personal visions for nationhood, such as Sandmonkey and the Big Pharaoh. Eskandar and Zeinobia likewise offered unique ideas about what Egyptian nationhood might look like. Sabry did not present such a clear original vision, but he did participate in building a repository of reference documents for framing the new nation forming after the revolution. He also discussed and critiqued the ideas about nationhood being put forth by prominent political actors, thus amplifying the reach of and refining versions of nationhood that he did not invent himself.

Importantly, the five bloggers did not share a single vision of nationhood. While they shared a similar broadly revolutionary ideology, some emphasized diversity more than others, such as Big Pharaoh's attention to the Coptic community; some envisioned greater participation by those who had not yet joined the streets, including Sandmonkey, who continually appealed to those who oppose the revolutionaries; some acquiesced to a greater role for the army in Egyptian nationhood, like Zeinobia. The platform of blogging allowed these individuals to express their own, unique ideas about the nation, rather than demanding that they conform to the official narrative of nationhood.

Nonetheless, the bloggers' diverse ideas about the future of the nation share a strong grounding in the protests in Tahrir Square between January 25 and February 11. The bloggers remembered Tahrir as a space of nearly utopic nationhood, and aspired to spread its character to the Egyptian nation at large.

Alongside this hopeful narration of what the Egyptian nation could be like, the bloggers discussed the current state of Egyptian nationhood, characterized by fragmentation, a lack of trust, and disempowerment. Several of the bloggers considered the significance of the popularized division of the "couch party" and the protestors, each with a different perspective. Tahrir was positioned in between "imaginations of the present and future" and memories of the past (Kelly and Kaplan 2001, 36), as the bloggers invoke the nationhood created by the revolution both to remember and to inspire the present.

The bloggers' engagement with Tahrir places them within a wider public debate among revolutionaries and others about the legacy of Tahrir and the future of the nation. By contributing to this shared discussion about nationhood through their writing, the bloggers participate actively in domestic political networks. Though the bloggers did not often directly interact or cite each other, several also connected themselves to a domestic network of political players through links to other blogs on their own pages.

The audience of blogs is surely small, and bloggers do not have the institutional power to widely disseminate their vision throughout the nation, as do Abu-Lughod's (2005) television producers. However, blogging allows individuals inscribe their words publicly and thus gain greater visibility within national political discourse than they might otherwise be able to. For instance, Zeinobia of *Egyptian Chronicles* asserts authority as a reliable, frequent source of current news, and other bloggers assert their prominence as thought leaders. While some posts contain mainly personal reflections, others urge readers to follow the blogger's lead on a particular issue, such as the question of voting in or abstaining from elections. These blogs were an important way for individuals to engage meaningfully in the public dialogue about the nation's future.

At the same time, as bridgeblogs written largely or entirely in English, these blogs are, to varying degrees, intended for and accessible to a foreign audience. While Zeinobia seemed to establish her blog with the purpose of offering foreigners a perspective on Egyptian politics, Eskandar used his blog to cross-post interviews he had given to international media outlets. For foreign audiences, they provide individual, on-the-ground – but not definitive – perspectives on the political events unfolding in Egypt after the 2011 revolution. However, the analysis above makes clear that these bloggers are not merely writing to provide cross-cultural translation.

Contrary to the categorization of bloggers writing in English as intended to reach a Western audience, these supposed "bridgebloggers" were very much invested in domestic politics and audiences. Their concerns with nationhood reveal that they are deeply committed to, rather than aloof from, ongoing national political struggles. Though their blogs do indeed in part fulfill the bridgeblog role of communicating with foreigners, their posts also address Egyptian audiences.

Their discussions of nationhood, in particular, demonstrate the desire to communicate with fellow Egyptians who might share in the realization of that nationhood. It is crucial not to overlook this Egyptian audience when considering blogs written in English, insofar as it suggests that the blogs play an active role in Egypt's domestic political sphere.

CONCLUSION

This ethnographic study of five Egyptian blogs has drawn out the bloggers' unique contributions to discussion of a new nation in the wake of the 2011 revolution. It has revealed far more than mere explanations of the context and unfolding political events for a foreign audience in these bridgeblogs. Though I have focused on the discussions of nationhood present in each blog, other approaches might find these bloggers committed to domestic political dialogue in different ways.

Close reading of these blogs has also revealed more diverse reasons why a blogger would choose to write in English. Some, such as Zeinobia and the Big Pharaoh, certainly do seem to fit the characterization of blogging in English in order to make Egyptian politics accessible to an international audience. However, contrary to this assumption, Sandmonkey stated that he chose to blog in English to avoid censorship and to reach the Egyptian elite. Other bloggers still write in both Arabic and English.

These findings suggest the limited utility of the term "bridgeblog" to describe blogs written in English from bloggers within non-English-speaking countries, as that term circumscribes our understanding of the bloggers' work. At the very least, blogs written in English may merit closer consideration to determine what other roles they may be playing, beyond that of a bridgeblog. The scope of this study is small, but it opens the door for further inquiry into what kind of political dialogue occurs in these online spaces. The findings call for deeper research into bridgeblogs to ascertain if these arguments hold true in a wider range of bridgeblogs.

These five bloggers conveyed passionate ideas about Egypt's nationhood and future. As Big Pharaoh expressed optimistically, "Just like any seed, [Tahrir] is destined to grow…Because if Tahrir came out of Tahrir, this country will change forever." The trajectory of Egyptian politics since 2011 seems to suggest that the reality of Egyptian nationhood has diverged significantly from the bloggers' early visions of nationhood after the revolution. Nonetheless, those early discussions about the nation provide fruitful grounds for research into the many complex political commitments English-language bloggers may have in their own country.

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