Analysing Fragmented Narratives: Twitter Reporting of the 3 July Military Intervention in Egypt

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ABSTRACT

This thesis develops a theoretical approach grounded in socio-narrative, narratological and new media theory for the analysis of Twitter and explores how such an approach can help us to better understand the processes of multilingual narrative production and reception on Twitter. I analyse Arabic and English language content in the context of three key events in recent Egyptian history taking place in 2013: the 30 June protests, the 3 July ousting of President Mohamed Morsi and the 14 August clearance of Muslim Brotherhood protests. Combining a constructivist, socio-narrative epistemology and ontology with narratological analytical tools, my thesis analyses the tweets and language practices of three prominent Egyptian Twitter users writing in English and Arabic who rejected the hegemonic Muslim Brotherhood- and military-sponsored narratives of the period: @Sandmonkey, @Zeinobia and @Bassem_Sabry.

It uses the narratological concepts of authorship, readership and narrative structure to identify subtle formal differences between the writing practices of each writer, employing socio-narrative theory to identify the implications of such differences for our understanding of the key events that took place in the summer of 2013 in Egypt and of the functioning of narrative on Twitter in general. I argue that Twitter users produce chronicles in their tweets which are developed into loose narratives by readers in the act of interpretation, rendering them highly dynamic and, in multilingual contexts, strongly dependent on readers' linguistic knowledge. I propose that reader impressions of authors and the implied reader positions offered to them, aspects of storytelling largely ignored in the Twitter literature, greatly influence this process of constructive interpretation. The present study highlights the complexity of multilingual narrative production, translation and reception during this critical period and challenges reductive metanarratives of polarisation promoted by both the Egyptian Military and Muslim Brotherhood, while also demonstrating the utility of narratological theoretical approaches when studying data that moves between and across languages, in this case Arabic and English.

KEYWORDS: Politics in Egypt; citizen media; narrative approaches; activist translation

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