

Exploring Tahrir Square as an Intra-active Hybrid Space

Abstract

In this paper, I expand on de Souza e Silva's concept of hybrid spaces through the lens of Karen Barad's¹ *agential realism*, which is defined as the inseparability of intra-acting agencies. I use Egypt's Tahrir Square as an example of a place that has emerged through intra-actions of different agencies. I argue that the distinctive nature of hybrid spaces can be conceptualized through intra-actions, or "the mutual constitution of entangled agencies."¹ With that in mind, I investigate Tahrir Square as an intra-active hybrid space where agency is not endowed to individual entities but is coming from the whole: that is, the intertwining of the mobile technology, social media, the Egyptian people, the army, political parties, and the physical place, which are entangled together in what Barad calls *phenomenon*. The Square is materialized as a hybrid space through different intra-actions. Taking intra-actions into account entails giving up the relations of cause and effect, individual agency, and subject-object dichotomies. Perceiving hybrid spaces through intra-action help us think in rhizomatic rather than linear terms.

Keywords: hybrid spaces; intra-actions; agential realism; Tahrir; interactions

Introduction

The use of social media by Egyptian protestors was instrumental in preparing for the Egyptian revolution that mobilized millions of Egyptians. Tahrir Square posed as a catalyst for change. During the protests, the perception of Egypt's Tahrir drastically shifted from being the peaceful heart of downtown Cairo to a place that is dynamic and charged; it became a place overflowing with political discussions and engagements that cut across divisions between rich and poor, literate and illiterate, and Muslims and Christians. Tahrir provided a venue for exercising resistance and empowerment.

In the past years, many scholars have discussed the role of social media and mobile phones as powerful tools that spur civic engagement and mobilize people.

1 Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

In their study, Campbell and Kwak demonstrate the positive correlation between mobile phone use for exchanging information on the news and public affairs and engagement in political and civic life. The authors found that this is impacted by the technology competence level where “individuals who report higher levels of comfort with mobile telephony and use it for information exchange tend to be more civically and politically engaged than those who report less comfort with the technology.”²

In a similar study by the John D. Gerhart Center for Philanthropy and Civic Engagement,³ the authors discuss how more youth in the Arab world and Egypt are subscribing to social media, which leads to more participation in civic spaces. The report highlights how during the Egyptian revolution, when thousands flocked to Tahrir Square, the “virtual streets,” which were displayed all over social media, were not entirely separated from the “physical streets.” The report also demonstrates how social media played a pivotal role in setting the scene for the revolution by providing an inexpensive alternative for motivating and mobilizing people to participate in civic activity, raising awareness, motivating activists, and presenting a virtual space when the physical one was limited.⁴ Likewise, Rheingold⁵ stresses the power of mobile phones in creating smart mobs. Drawing on literature from historic events, the author demonstrates how mobile communication can converge members of dispersed groups on a specific location simultaneously. Sander and Putnam⁶ also note the huge youth civic engagement in America, yet they remain somewhat vigilant about the role of digital media in producing effects, calling it “in its infancy.” In their book, Gordon and de Souza e Silva⁷ tackle the role of net locality in transforming communities and engaging people in civic issues. Discussing the virtual Birmingham Briefing Hub (b-scape), they illustrate how the project “worked with ‘virtual models’ of the city to coordinate online interaction.”⁸ Such projects, they highlight, pose as useful tools that encourage people to participate in urban space and civic issues.⁹

2 Scott W. Campbell and Nojin Kwak, “Mobile communication and civic life: Linking patterns of use to civic and political engagement,” *Journal of Communication* 60 (3) (2010), 536.

3 *Youth Activism and Public Space in Egypt* (Rep.), (Cairo: The American University in Cairo, 2011).

4 Ibid., 22–23.

5 Howard Rheingold, *Smart mobs: The next social revolution*, (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publ., 2009), 158–162.

6 Thomas H. Sander and Robert D. Putnam, “Democracy’s Past and Future: Still Bowling Alone? – The Post-9/11 Split,” *Journal of Democracy* 21 (1) (2010), 15.

7 Eric Gordon and Adriana de Souza e Silva, “Net locality: Why location matters in a networked world”, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

8 Ibid, 113.

9 Ibid.

Most of this scholarship explores how mobile phone usage plays a positive role in creating spaces for political and civic engagement. This engagement and mobilization, which is triggered via social interaction through the use of mobile technology, has created what Adriana de Souza e Silva calls “hybrid spaces.” Hybrid spaces are understood as the merging of digital and physical spaces, which arises when “virtual communities...migrate to physical spaces because of the use of mobile technology as interfaces.”¹⁰ Despite the numerous studies that have investigated the relation between mobile technology and civic participation, there is not any research that introduces Tahrir as a hybrid space or applies Karen Barad’s “agential realism” – a framework that introduces the concept of intra-action to reassess the binary modes of thinking.

This paper addresses two research questions: How can Tahrir be understood as an intra-active hybrid space? And how can Tahrir be reframed as an intra-active hybrid space? To address these questions, I use de Souza e Silva’s concept of hybrid spaces and Karen Barad’s agential realism as frameworks. Many of their concepts resonate with the events of the revolution and the understanding of Tahrir as a hybrid space that evolved not from the interaction but rather the intra-action of agencies. I first demonstrate how Tahrir Square can be understood as a hybrid space. Then, I propose an expansion of hybrid spaces to address the materialization of those spaces through agential realism. I argue that Barad’s agential realism can provide a rich insight into the creation and understanding of those spaces, particularly during political unrest. Understanding hybrid spaces through agential realism entails giving up the relations of cause and effect, individual agency and subject-object dichotomies. To that end, I explore how Tahrir Square is an example of a place that has emerged through the intra-actions of different agencies in hybrid spaces. I investigate Tahrir as a hybrid space where agency is not endowed to individual entities but is coming from the whole; that is, the intertwining of the mobile technology, social media, the Egyptian people, the army, political parties, and the physical space which are entangled together in what Barad calls “phenomenon.”

The paper has three main sections in addition to an introduction and a conclusion. In the first section, I discuss what Tahrir represents in the context of the revolution, as well as its political and historic importance. I focus on how Tahrir was transformed from a physical space into a symbol for the revolution. In the second section, I introduce and define hybrid spaces and agential realism. In the third section, I define intra-active hybrid spaces as spaces that emerge as a result of the simultaneous intra-actions of entangled entities from the digital and physical worlds. I focus on why intra-actions, as opposed to interactions, provide

10 Adriana de Souza e Silva, “From Cyber to Hybrid,” *Space and Culture* 9 (3) (2006), 261.

a better understanding. I conclude that the messiness of a hybrid space such as Tahrir Square can be better understood as an intra-active hybrid space.

What Tahrir Square represents in the context of the Egyptian revolution

In order to discuss Tahrir as a hybrid space, we must first unpack its contents and understand what the place was in the past and what it became in January 2011. Built in the nineteenth century, the design and architecture of the Square follows a western style, while the fourteen streets that branch out from the Square and into the city remain more of a marketplace. Its design reflects a “more conservative ‘centripetal’ view of the world suggesting as it does a fountainhead to which everything must inevitably lead back.”¹¹ Its design and central location have made the Square an important site on several different levels that will be briefly highlighted.

In term of its history, Tahrir Square is home to some of the most ancient and highly important buildings in Egypt that capture the soul of the Egyptian civilization. The Egyptian Museum, the League of Arab States, the Mogamma administrative building, Omar Makram Mosque and the American University in Cairo are some of the few iconic places in Tahrir Square. Politically, the Square is surrounded by the cabinet headquarters as well as the People’s Assembly.¹² Tahrir Square witnessed several other political protests before the events of January 2011. In 1919, the revolution of Ismailya Square, in honor of Khedive Ismail, took place there. Later in 1936 and 1946, Egyptians congregated in Tahrir to express their objection to the Anglo-Egyptian treaty and demand the departure of British troops. In later years, it witnessed the bread riots, as well as protests against Israel and the US invasion of Iraq. Despite the Square historically posing as a magnet for Egyptians to express their anger and disagreement, it soon returns to its peaceful and calm state and to being a symbol of the state power.¹³

The vigor and the ensuing bloody clashes of the January 2011 revolution, however, have transformed and reshaped this space in ways that cannot be restored. This transformation began when thousands of Egyptians occupied the Square in a revolt against the autocratic rule of President Hosni Mubarak. A few days before the revolution broke out, political parties used social media plat-

11 Mohamed Samir El-Khatib, “Tahrir Square as Spectacle: Some Exploratory Remarks on Place, Body and Power,” *Theatre Research International*, 38 (2) (2013), 105.

12 Ibid, 106.

13 Zvi Bar’el, “Tahrir Square, From Place to Space: The Geography of Representation,” *The Middle East Journal* 71(1) (2017), 9–22.

forms such as Twitter and Facebook to ask the Egyptian community to congregate in Tahrir Square to demand the deposition of the Egyptian president. On the morning of January 25, 2011, a day labelled a “day of rage,” thousands of Egyptians filled the streets and congregated in specified meeting points. Protestors, from Cairo and other cities, marched toward downtown to occupy Tahrir Square – a place that was now overcharged with tension, yet still overcrowded with food trucks and people selling Egyptian flags, as well as others who were singing and dancing on the streets. Coordinating their movement via social media, protestors tried to occupy the National Democratic Party’s foreign ministry and the state television. It was not too long before the police started firing tear gas and shooting the demonstrators, whose chanting of “down with Mubarak” rocked Tahrir Square. The demonstrators would become dispersed and isolated, but soon connected and rebounded. One of the political activists demonstrated how the revolution organizers utilized their mobile devices connected to the Internet and their cameras to document incidents and upload them to social media to attract attention and rally support.¹⁴ Reports state that three protestors and an officer were killed that day.¹⁵ Starting with relatively small, disconnected groups of people, scattered at multiple places, the protestors, who were in constant contact on different social media platforms via their phones, soon became thousands. Several social and religious organizations eventually joined.

During the 18-day uprising, it is estimated that hundreds of people were killed in the clashes between Egyptians and the police forces. The physical space of Tahrir Square has become synonymous with the revolution and Arab Spring. Still, in 2019, the Square has never been reinstated to its original form. Being renamed “Martyrs Square,” it has become a symbol of the tension and ongoing power struggle between the people and the state. In recent years, and to avoid any potential instability or uprisings, the government sometimes blocks many of the streets leading to Tahrir while placing unprecedented security measures to make sure that this place does not witness another revolution.

14 Sahar Khamis and Katherine Vaughn, “‘We Are All Khaled Said’: The potentials and limitations of cyberactivism in triggering public mobilization and promoting political change,” *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research* 4 (2/3) (2012), 157.

15 Al Jazeera. (2011, February 14). Timeline: Egypt’s revolution. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/01/201112515334871490.html>.

Hybrid Spaces and Agential Realism

To better understand how Tahrir Square can be conceptualized as a hybrid space and how it can be reframed as an intra-active hybrid space, we need to shed light on some of the terminology crucial to the issue at hand. Public spaces can be defined in different ways. The understanding of the concept ranges from a strictly legal concept that regulates access rights to physical spaces to a more Habermasian abstract and symbolic understanding.¹⁶ For this paper, space will be used in its broadest most inclusive sense as “a space for the people; a physical and ideological space of encounter, one that comprises historical, cultural and social dimensions.”¹⁷ De Souza e Silva introduces the concept of hybrid spaces to explain what happens when “the Internet became mobile and when communities previously formed in cyberspace could be found in urban (hybrid) spaces.”¹⁸ Hybrid spaces are defined as connected, mobile and social spaces that arise when “virtual communities (chats, multiuser domains, and massively multiplayer online role-playing games), previously enacted in what was conceptualized as cyberspace, migrate to physical spaces because of the use of mobile technologies as interfaces.”¹⁹ Hybrid spaces are what de Souza e Silva calls “mobile spaces,” which emerge through the constant movement of people carrying portable devices that are always connected to the Internet as well as to other users.²⁰ Put differently, the simultaneous occurrence of social practices in digital and physical spaces, due to the use of mobile technology, is what creates hybrid spaces.²¹ With the pervasive use of mobile phones, the gap between physical and digital spaces has been blurred.²² Mobile technologies promote “remote and local multi-personal communication and connection to the Internet, allowing users to exchange information while moving through urban spaces.”²³ This new conceptualization of space leads to perceiving mobile phones as microcomputers embedded in public space, and it is in this sense that the Internet has become portable.²⁴

On the other hand, agential realism proposes the “ontological inseparability of what are commonly perceived to be pre-existing and distinct entities”²⁵; under-

16 *Youth Activism and Public Space in Egypt*, 7.

17 Ibid.

18 De Souza e Silva, “From Cyber to Hybrid,” 273.

19 Ibid, 261.

20 Ibid, 262.

21 Ibid, 265.

22 Ibid, 263.

23 Ibid, 262.

24 Ibid.

25 Katie Warfield, “Making the Cut: An Agential Realist Examination of Selfies and Touch,” *Social Media + Society* 2 (2) (2016), 1.

mines the presupposed dichotomies of animals and humans, males and females, and nature and culture; and emphasizes the entanglement of all entities previously considered as separate.²⁶ It is natural to think of the world as being made of individual discrete objects and that “interactions happened between individuals that existed prior to the exchanges.”²⁷ Barad’s framework suggests that matter and meaning are inseparably entangled elements that can never be torn apart.²⁸ Entanglements, however, do not refer to the act of intertwining or connecting separate entities, but rather to the “lack of an independent, self-contained existence.”²⁹ Barad also unsettles the concept of individualism: the conviction that individual entities, times and places exist.³⁰ Rejecting cause and effect, as well as individual agencies, Barad introduces the neologism “intra-action.” Central to her theory, intra-action signifies the “mutual constitution of entangled agencies”³¹ and challenges the default understanding of causality where “one or more causal agents precede and produce an effect.”³²

In the following section, I will demonstrate how Tahrir was created as a hybrid space during the incidents of January 2011 and will then propose and rationalize how this understanding can be expanded to reconceptualize Tahrir as an intra-active hybrid space and an entangled phenomenon.

Tahrir as an intra-active hybrid space

Tahrir Square has never been a static place, and the period following the revolution is no exception. Despite having always been a central spot in Cairo, Tahrir has gained more traction following the uprising.

A. Proposing Tahrir as a hybrid space

Employing de Souza e Silva’s understanding, Tahrir Square can be introduced as a hybrid space. In her article *From Cyber to Hybrid: Mobile Technologies as Interfaces of Hybrid Spaces*, de Souza e Silva demonstrates that hybrid spaces are

26 “Intra-actions,” Interview of Karen Barad by Adam Kleinmann, *Mousse Magazine* 34 (2012).

27 Ibid., 76.

28 Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, 3.

29 Karen Barad Biography. (n.d.). Retrieved April 11, 2019, from <https://egs.edu/faculty/karen-barad>.

30 “Intra-actions,” Interview with Karen Barad by Adam Kleinmann.

31 Ibid., 33.

32 Ibid., 77.

created by “the constant movement of users who carry portable devices continuously connected to the Internet and to other users.”³³ Put differently, hybrid spaces bridge the gap between physical and digital environments when people are moving and while connected to the Internet via their mobile devices.³⁴ So, during the uprising, the Egyptian community interacted and relied heavily, if not solely, on social media in preparation for the revolution and on communication via their mobiles to create Tahrir as a meeting spot. They used their mobile devices to connect to Tahrir as a physical space. It is in this instance when the Egyptian community used social media on their phones to arrange for the demonstrations that Tahrir was created, to borrow from de Souza e Silva, as a “mobile space.” It was developed through the constant movement of the Egyptians who heavily relied on Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and text messages to plan for the uprising. The use of mobile technology on January 25, 2011, allowed for instant remote and local communication between the different individual protestors and political leaders and the facilitation of crowd congregation and movement through the different streets in Tahrir Square. It is at this instance that the disconnection between the physical and digital spaces started to diminish and Tahrir Square came to exist as a hybrid space.

B. Proposing Tahrir as an intra-active hybrid space: ‘intra-active’ versus ‘interactive’

De Souza e Silva’s notion of hybrid spaces, which involves the overlaying of the virtual communities using digital interfaces onto the physical space, is founded on the idea of interaction. The complexity of the revolution in Tahrir Square, however, can be further analyzed by proposing hybrid spaces as intra-active, as opposed to interactive, spaces. The concept of intra-action, as opposed to interaction, presents a paradigm shift. The usual understanding of interaction “presumes the prior existence of independent entities.”³⁵ In other words, interaction assumes that agents exist prior to acting on each other.³⁶ It relies on a “metaphysics of individualism” that assumes the “prior existence of separately determinate entities.”³⁷ Intra-action, by contrast, is the process in which “distinct agencies do not precede but rather emerge through their intra-action.”³⁸ In other

33 De Souza e Silva, “From Cyber to Hybrid,” 262.

34 Ibid., 263.

35 Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, 139.

36 “Intra-actions”, Interview of Karen Barad by Adam Kleinmann.

37 Ibid, 128.

38 Ibid, 33.

words, it is through intra-actions that the properties of the “components of phenomena become determinate.”³⁹ Intra-action refers to “the dissolution of boundaries between bodies in moving activity,”⁴⁰ as opposed to interactions that “freeze[] activity before generating a constructivist gap between bodies, and between bodies and materials, to generate knowledge.”⁴¹ Accordingly, intra-actions only become decipherable within their given entanglement. There are no intrinsic boundaries that separate self from other; it is through intra-actions that different subjects are constituted, making us presume dichotomies between subjects and objects, humans and nonhumans.⁴²

With that in mind, the understanding of Tahrir as a hybrid space can be expanded by thinking of it instead as an intra-active hybrid space. Whereas an understanding of Tahrir as a hybrid space would presume that the creation of this space is a result of the interaction between the pre-existing agencies, namely, the mobile technology, the protestors, and the physical space, an intra-active understanding would assert that none of these entities pre-existed the creation of Tahrir as a hybrid space. According to agential realism, “these entities are always and already entangled and touching.”⁴³ In other words, entities do not exist prior to the emergence of Tahrir as a hybrid space. They emerge as an entangled phenomenon, as part of, and in relation to, the materialization of Tahrir. Therefore, rather than indicating that the mobile technologies and the Egyptian protestors are separate individual entities that created Tahrir as a hybrid space, this separation can be constructed as a cohesive entangled phenomenon. Tahrir Square during the revolution was not a result of a duality between technology and the social interactions of Egyptians, but rather an entanglement of all humans and nonhumans that worked together to co-constitute and co-produce meaning. That is, Tahrir Square resulted from the intra-action of mobile technology, the protestors, the army, the political and religious parties, physical space, the buildings and stores in Tahrir, the cars that drove across Tahrir, etc.

Moreover, an intra-active understanding demonstrates that entities in Tahrir co-constituted each other. For example, the mobile technology and the Egyptian people have “intra-actively” constructed each other. The process of creating Tahrir as a hybrid space, and hence the instigation of the revolution, was an

39 Ibid, 139.

40 Christian Ehret, Ty Hollett, and Robin Jocius, “The Matter of New Media Making,” *Journal of Literacy Research* 48 (3) (2016), 348.

41 Ibid.

42 Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, 379.

43 Warfield, “Making the Cut: An Agential Realist Examination of Selfies and Touch,” 2.

“iterative and mutually constitutive working out, and reworking”⁴⁴ of the mobile technologies and the Egyptians. It is through the constant Facebook groups calling on the Egyptians to head to Tahrir, as well as Twitter posts asking to put an end to tyranny, that people decided to head to Tahrir. Simultaneously and co-constitutively, the Egyptians agreed to using the mobile technology and the social media posts to participate in the revolution and induce change.

With this in mind, Tahrir Square is constituted of agentive beings and “lively configurations of the world.”⁴⁵ The dynamicity of the situation in Tahrir is understood as an “unfolding of endlessly equal relations of bodies-materials moving each other.”⁴⁶ That is, Tahrir as an intra-active hybrid space is the mutual entangled relation between mobile technology–Egyptian protestors–political parties–the army–the physical space–the roads–the weather that day–etc. Therefore, instead of highlighting that the Egyptians communicated and interacted via their mobiles and congregated in Tahrir Square, we can put forward that “agency is co-constituted in the intra-activity of bodies-materials-environments.”⁴⁷ Tahrir as a hybrid space is the intra-action of more than just human agencies. It is the intra-action of all those elements that acted as constituents in creating Tahrir as a hybrid space. This understanding does not deny human agency, but questions “the nature of agency and its presumed localization within individuals (whether human or nonhuman).”⁴⁸ Barad’s intra-action not only highlights the entanglement of agencies, but also unsettles the role of individualism.

C. Phenomenon, as opposed to individualism, in creating Tahrir

Barad questions the nature of identity, “calling into question the individual/group binary,”⁴⁹ and proposes intra-action, which suggest that “meaning is not a property of individual bodies or technologies, but is a phenomenon.”⁵⁰ Phenomena are the “ontological inseparability/entanglement of intra-acting ‘agen-

44 Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, x.

45 Ibid, 381.

46 Ehret, Hollett, and Jocius, “The Matter of New Media Making,” 350.

47 Ibid, 352.

48 Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, x.

49 “Intra-actions”, Interview of Karen Barad by Adam Kleinmann, 77.

50 Paula Gardner and Barbara Jenkins, “Bodily Intra-actions with Biometric Devices,” *Body & Society*, 22 (1) (2016): 11.

cies”⁵¹ where entanglements are not distinct binary co-productions that are combined.⁵² Thus, in light of Barad’s phenomena, what caused the revolution? Was it the mobile technologies and the social interaction over social media? Or the Egyptians? The revolution enjoys “multiple indeterminacies”⁵³ where its emergence defies any attempt to be explained on the basis of individuals interacting with each other. Any effort to explain the revolution based on individual actors/groups interacting with one another seems to miss something about the nature of the Tahrir Square as an intra-active hybrid space.

In focusing on the Egyptian demonstrators, for example, as only one part of the entanglement, the current understanding of hybrid spaces would propose that mobile technologies are distinct entities that, when coupled with the usage and social interactions of the Egyptians as another individual entity, create Tahrir as a hybrid space. This perspective presumes that several different standalone individuals were combined together and that such a combination led to the creation of a hybrid space. It signifies a representationalist understanding, a view founded upon the distinction or separation among entities, which stems from our own experience of repeating boundary-making practices.⁵⁴ This understanding cannot sufficiently explain how Tahrir Square as a hybrid space came to exist.

While there is some truth to the understanding that the Egyptians in Tahrir Square appear to be individual, distinct and whole entities, a non-representational, intra-active conceptualization of hybrid spaces is more comprehensive. The demonstrators were “a series of interconnected flows, a collection of interconnected cells that have their own knowledge of what to do and how to do it.”⁵⁵ The Egyptians, the Tahrir physical space, mobile technologies, the stores in the area, the cars on the street, all intra-acted and intra-related with each other. Their individuality and participation in the revolution did not end at the edge of their bodies⁵⁶. Parts of them, for example, were outstretched and holding their mobile phones, which acted as extensions of their bodies rather than as distinct entities. If mobile networks were disrupted, they would not have congregated in the specified places; if transportation was not operating, no one would have been able to commute. No one single entity on its own was the cause of the revolution.

51 Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, 139.

52 Ibid., x.

53 “Intra-actions”, Interview of Karen Barad by Adam Kleinmann, 77.

54 Warfield, “Making the Cut: An Agential Realist Examination of Selfies and Touch.”

55 Bronwyn Davies, “Reading Anger in Early Childhood Intra-Actions: A Diffractive Analysis,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 20 (6) (2014): 739.

56 Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, 159.

This is best understood as “flows in intra-action, rather than separate entities interacting with each other. Each one on its own is nothing. It dies. If one falters, the others are affected and may falter too or at least work a lot harder to compensate.”⁵⁷ This understanding does not deny the existence of individuals yet rejects their individuality in the sense of being individually determinate. In other words, individuals only exist in their materializing relations.⁵⁸ The Egyptian revolution only occurred through the repeated intra-activity of the entangled phenomenon and not through the interaction of individual entities.

Conclusion

This paper has expanded on de Souza e Silva’s hybrid spaces through Barad’s agential realism to propose a new understanding of Egypt’s Tahrir Square during the 2011 revolution as an intra-active hybrid space where the Egyptians interacted via mobile social media to create the revolution. It shed light on how the different phenomena that brought the revolution about are entangled together through their intra-actions. By combining Souza e Silva’s concept of hybrid spaces with Barad’s neologism of intra-action, I analyzed Tahrir as an intra-active hybrid space, focusing on the messiness and dynamicity involved in the creation of this space. Hybrid spaces are intra-active, dynamic spaces, and therefore cannot be situated because they are “emergent and enmeshed in intra-activity that is continuously situation making.”⁵⁹ Through agential realism, Tahrir Square can be understood as a hybrid space where entities co-constitute one another and are amalgamated together in a rhizomatic structure. This approach introduces a new way of thinking of spaces as connected and inseparable tangles.

Future research might consider whether we are inhabiting a hybrid world. With the advent of technology, and being always connected – either through mobile networks or as enmeshed entities in Barad’s phenomenon – have we reached a point when we are always in hybrid spaces? It might also consider looking into the role of intra-active hybrid spaces in classrooms, and how classroom activities that merge digital and physical spaces can be perceived as a phenomenon.

57 Davies, “Reading Anger in Early Childhood Intra-Actions: A Diffractive Analysis,” 739.

58 “Intra-actions”, Interview of Karen Barad by Adam Kleinmann, 77.

59 Ehret, Hollett, and Jocius, “The Matter of New Media Making,” 372.

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