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Networks role in contemporary social movements

An empirical analysis of the anti-nuclear movement of Japan

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Abstract

Some scholars tend to limit the role of networks as an instrument that gathers participants in one place to achieve a mutual goal. There is no doubt that networks are mobilized as an instrument in the process of individual participation of a social movement. For example, interpersonal relations and social ties can be categorized as an instrumental network. Instrumental networks played a marginalized role in most of both old and contemporary social movements; the Velvet revolutions in Eastern Europe in 1980s, Japanese student's strikes in 1970s, and recently the Arab revolutions in 2011. However, interpersonal relations and social ties are not always mobilized for positive purposes like those mentioned above, but they can also be mobilized for negative and radical purposes like what we are witnessing in the Islamic State, Al Qaeda, and other terroristic groups.

Many theorists have emphasized on the role of the Interpersonal or instrumental networks in individual participation, and this role is not only found in contemporary social movements, but also in other historical

contexts (Shiohara 1988; Oberschall 1973; kriesi 1993; McAdam 1982). The aim of this paper is not to reemphasize on the role of interpersonal networks; rather it is to address other functions that networks have in contemporary social movements that exceeds the role of being just an instrument. By analyzing the Japanese antinuclear movement that took place in Japan after the great Tohoku Earthquake in 2011, I will try to prove my hypothesis that networks have multiple functions and play a great role in collective actions.

Key Words:

(Networks, Anti-nuclear, social movements, Rhizome, Japan)

Introduction:

Before going through my empirical analysis of the anti-nuclear movement in Japan I want to address a very important and stimulating question that was asked to me by one of my Japanese professors during our discussions. Why is it important to emphasize on networks' other functions? Other scholars, like McAdam and [Paulsen \(1993\)](#) have already discussed the answer to this question like. I would like to address the theoretical reasons that I found out after conducting my empirical analysis on the Japanese anti-nuclear movements over the last three years (2012-2015).

One of the complexities of recent collective actions is that there are several groups with multiple goals in one movement. Of course some of them can be analyzed through the framework of instrumental network since they are relatives, work colleagues or even activists. On the other hand, there are housewives, businessmen, retired people, and under 18 year old students who have never had any experience in political activities before. Grasping the dimensions and other functions of the networks will provide us with

better knowledge to know the development of the mechanisms of social movements and how participants get involved in the contemporary collective actions.

As White (1992:67) cites: “*a social network is a network of meanings*”, and by analyzing the functions of networks, this will provide us with more information about the process of constraining participation and collective identities in social movements. In turn this will lead us to the learning more about the mechanisms and dynamics of the contemporary social movements and the process of creating collective identities.

Main Text:

The Organizational Network

When participants engage in any social movement, they share mutual norms and values related to a specific area of political contention (Fernandez and McAdam 1989). However, getting involved in the collective action doesn't probably mean that every one is qualified to be a leader and take a part in the decision-making process. This is the mechanism that “Hangenren” uses in the anti-nuclear movement of Japan. Hangenren or “The Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes” is the biggest group of the antinuclear movement in Japan. They were the first group who called for a movement against the Noda administration in September 2011. They have sponsored so many events and lectures to raise people awareness regarding nuclear energy dangers, and have provided reasons behind joining the movement. In January 2012, they held a movement in Yokohama called Rally for a Nuke-Free world in Japan. More than 4500 people joined and turned it into a large-scale movement. On the memorial day of the great earthquake in March 2012, they held a march for the victims who were lost, calling it “Towards a New

Beginning”. In 2013, they held a candle light vigil against nukes, and it was attended by one million and four thousand participants according to the group website¹. This large group is consisted of 11 groups: the Act 311 Japan, the Orchestra for a Safe Future for our Children, the Anger Drums, the Energy Shift Parade, the Countries Demonstration, the No Nukes Suginami, the Tanpopo, the Twit No Nukes, the No Nukes More Hearts, the Let the Vegetables Say a Word! Goodbye Nukes Demonstration and the Loft Project. These 11 groups that take a part in Hangenren and join the weekly demonstrations in front of the Prime Minister’s residence.

We can conclude that the main reason of this network is to raise people awareness regarding the nuclear energy dangers through a quote by Misao redwolf (48), the main leader and the spokeswoman of Hangenren. She said: *“Although we are the only country in the world that experienced the atomic bomb, most Japanese people still believe that nuclear energy has no dangers. That's why there was a necessity to bridge this gap by creatingg a link between us ‘Hangenren’ and the participants to raise their awareness and stop them from believing the government myths of nuclear safety”*. However, the question here is why does it have to be “organizational”? In Hangenren terms, “organizational” is quite similar to a pyramid or a top-down relation. There is a certain leader who is responsible of the planning of the movement and setting of the goals and agendas of the group. The other participants are not allowed to join in this process due to their lack of experience and qualifications to be involved in the decision-making process. During my interview with Redwolf she said *“Every one is welcomed, regardless of their political or educational backgrounds, but on our conditions”*. Since the

¹ Hangenren official Japanese website: <http://coalitionagainstnukes.jp> there are some English links but they have less information comparing to the Japanese version. The English website is : <http://coalitionagainstnukes.jp/en/>

movement that Hangenren controls is a single issued one, so every one who chooses to join this network is supposed to call for “anti-nuclear”, and anything else that has no direct relation to the main issue is disapproved. During the movement there were some groups who called for gender equality, unemployment awareness, and other demands that are not directly related to “anti-nuclear”. Those who called for such demands were dismissed from the movement because they shared something that did not match with Hangenren’s agenda.

“Everyone is welcomed, but on our conditions” is the core of the organizational network which is represented by Hangenren in Japan. The collective identity in this group is created according to the agenda of Hangenren that was set formerly by Redwolf and not by the will of the participants. The participants of this network are identified as “antinuclear members” but not as a “decision makers”. There is a leader, who is responsible for the process of decision-making, but there is no debate nor is discussion allowed to change the strategy of the network unless it is from the designated “leader”. The organizational network functions as a bridge between leaders and participants in a top-down relationship. In this perspective, participating in the organizational network requires sharing the same ideological values to be identified as a “Hangenren member”.

The Digitalized Network

Rationalist scholars and critical mass theorists tend to stigmatize the digitalized network or SNS as a communication tool that gathers participants by providing them with information related to the action date, time and place (Morozov 2011). Rationalist scholars like Emirbayer and Goodwin (1994) are addressing the same debate in their paper on social networks, defining networks in instrumental terms. They are assuming that social interactions in

any collective action are the main roles of the networks in social movements. In this regard, rationalist scholars are conceptualizing networks as an instrument for something more important which is the collective behavior. Passy (2002) is raising an interesting comparison between rationalists and structuralists interpretation of the functions of networks in social movements. He is arguing that the former conceive social influences in overly narrow terms unlike the structuralists who tend to emphasize on the role of networks in creating participants identities and how it functions in the formation of a potential for participation and recruitment in social movements.

Through analyzing the role of digitalized network in antinuclear movements, I will be able to address two more functions of the digitalized network that were not discussed by rationalist scholars; the role the digitalized network plays in enlarging the scale of the movement and how it can provide a space for individual participation, and how digitalized networks functions as an alternative media and a new space for free deliberation.

Enlarging the scale of the movement

Digital social networks offer the possibility for a free deliberation. On the Internet people can create free communities that are not controlled by any authoritarian regimes or occupied by the interests of the dominant elites and their networks. The digitalized network does not have boundaries or barriers, rather it is de-centered and expanding frontiers where power can be efficiently distributed in it. Everyone is identified as an “Internet user” no matter what his nationality, political affiliation, or educational background is. Moreover every Internet user can join this deliberative space freely turning it into a democratized community for raising other political standpoints with no conditions. Castells (2012) argues that digitalized networks are based on the

term of “togetherness”. According to Castells, “togetherness” is a fundamental psychological term to overcome fear. And overcoming fear is the fundamental threshold for individuals to engage in social movements. The Arab uprisings are a significant example of practicing the term “togetherness” through the digitalized social network, turning the Internet into a democratized political realm to gather people from diverse political and social backgrounds together. This “togetherness” is what ultimately led to the fall of Mubarak Regime. Japan is not an exception to this concept. Although Japan has more rights to freedom of speech comparing to that of Egypt, the Internet has played a great role in enlarging the scale of the anti-nuclear movement. One of the admins who is followed by more than five thousand users on twitter said to me once that without twitter he would have never thought to join the movement in real because he thought he might be the only person who is not satisfied regarding the Noda and Abe administrations. However, after he started tweeting about the anti-nuclear movement he received thousands of positive feedbacks asking him to join the demonstration and say that in real². The retired computer programmer Yukio Kurosu (68), whom I met during the demonstration was posting everything directly to his Facebook page saying that he was receiving messages from people whom he didn't know, personally asking him about the details of the movement and where they could join.

Through digitalized social network people can share the same interests and goals that can motivate them to join the real movement in the urban space to mobilize the values and contentions they shared on the Internet realm. Digital networks function as a motivating and identifying sphere

² The official account on twitter is : https://twitter.com/demo_jhks

where people can gather their courage together carving out their own community in the urban space for social change.

Digitalized Networks as an alternative media

Digitalized networks were necessary in a country like Egypt where there was no real free space for deliberation under the Mubarak authoritarian regime. Therefore, there was a necessity to create a free discursive space that was not controlled by any public institution. However, this is not the case in the anti-nuclear movement of Japan. There is an enough deliberative space for individuals to raise their voices against the government policies with no fear of police brutality unlike the situation in most of the Arab countries. The question here is if Japan has such a free discursive urban space why the digitalized network is needed? As I have mentioned before, the digitalized networks are mobilized in Japan as a space for deliberation and individual participation to enlarge the scale of the movements. On the Internet space, there are unfamiliar demonstrations like “hitori-demo” or the “one person demonstration” which is held by Tachikawa Shinya (50) a farmer in Kyushu; Japan’s third largest island. Shinya is using the Internet as space to share his ideologies because he is not able to join the weekly demonstration in Tokyo. However, those are not the only roles that digitalized networks play in the movement.

Japan mainstream media, like in so many countries, is either controlled by the government or have pro-nuclear agendas. That's why they rarely talk about the “anti-nuclear” movement in the news or any other talk shows. Mainstream media and public institutions cannot be against the operation of the nuclear reactors , since most of the advertising campaigns for the Toden reactors are mainly broadcasted through their channels. Now, here is where

the role of the digitalized network as an alternative source of information and citizen journalism comes into action. Citizen journalists are collecting, analyzing and disseminating news that is not broadcasted in the mainstream media institutions as a response to shortcomings in the coverage of the movement. Aozora Houso³ website is an example of citizen journalism in Japan. The admin of the website is Yoshinori Fukuda (61) a painter and kimono designer, however, his website is alive channel that transmits all the speeches and the progress of the anti-nuclear movement online. *“Mainstream media cannot be a trustworthy information source, since they gain economic benefits from the advertising campaigns of the Toden Nuclear Reactor. That's why there is a great need to show those who are still believing in government myths and mainstream media the truth. I feel disappointed when I see reporters from Germany, France, Italy and china who came specifically to deliver the demonstration news to their countries, while the Japanese TV doesn't mention a single word about the movement!”* said Fukuda criticizing the policies of main stream media and emphasizing on the role his website plays in spreading the movements progress and the situation of Fukushima.

Fukuda is a citizen journalist who was driven by anger and dissatisfaction towards mainstream media and he decided to move to Fukushima to report the truth that is never mentioned. Digitalized networks have played a great role in introducing a new source of legitimate and objective media that is not controlled by certain political party or any public institutions. Yukio Kurosu (68) is a retired computer programmer who never missed a week of the demonstration, always having his camera to take photos and videos to post them on his blog and Facebook page. *“Since we*

³ Aozora Houso is a channel on Ustream that used to broadcast all the news that is related to the anti-nuclear movement until September 2014. The official website: <http://www.ustream.tv/channel/あおぞら放送>

are joining this demonstration we have a duty! Our duty is not about participating in the weekly demonstrations and when it finishes we just go home and wait for the following week, we must share what we are witnessing every week. We must record those moments for our grandsons to know to what extent did their parents and grandparents fought for Japan! I am posting all the videos and pictures I take on a weekly basis on my Facebook page and my blog. I am not forcing anybody to come and join the demonstration, but I share with those who are not able to come the real situation that won't be ever broadcasted on mainstream media" Yukio said when commenting on the importance of digitalized social network and how he is strategically using it. Yukio used to take a part in the Anpo Struggle during the 1970s, protesting against Kishi's unorthodox parliamentary maneuvers to pass the Anpo Bill, despite society's conspicuous dissatisfaction.

Since Japan mainstream media and local newspapers like Yomiuri shimbun are obviously promoting the pro-nuclear agenda, it can influence wide range of its fans and readers to support pro-nuclear strategy. If there was not another strong side to criticize their agenda and prove the opposite and the hidden agendas behind their strategy of mind controlling the readers, nothing will change.

The Rhizomatic Network

Rhizome is a philosophical term that stems from the theories of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. The word is derived from a Greek word meaning "to take a root". Rhizome is represented as a tree model which can be interpreted as a symbol of hierarchy. However it can also refer to binary systems, because every new branch ties back in some essential way to the root that makes all growth possible.

One of the ways in which networks play in the Japanese anti-nuclear movement is unification of all the diversified groups with their multiple goals and agendas into one cohesive network. This is the reason why Fisher (2003) is calling the Rhizomatic Network, “the network of networks”. In this section I am going to hypothesize more functions of the Rhizomatic network and its role in integrating most of the participating groups with their diverse agendas and goals in horizontal, non-hierarchical, acentered and heterogeneous way in the Japanese antinuclear movement of Japan.

As I have argued, both organizational and digital networks play a marginalized role in the movement that exceeds the role of being instrumental. Whilst the organizational network that is represented in Hangenren helps in raising the participants awareness through some educational lectures and sessions to explain the movement demands, the digitalized network functions as an alternative source of media to broadcast all the news that is not shown in mainstream media institutions. Besides it provides a space for free deliberation where individuals, regardless of their political and educational backgrounds, can interact and get to know the necessity of joining the movement and thus they move their deliberative space from the cyberspace to the urban space. The Rhizomatic network is wider than the former two networks. Since it is non-hierarchical it can connect between all the groups without having a certain leader like in the organizational network. Moreover, it doesn't aim for certain categorical organization like the digital network does when it connects internet users, but rather it gathers all the groups with their multiple identities, which makes the Rhizomatic Network unique. As we are going to see in the next analysis of some groups who have joined the movement, I will be able to illustrate the role of Rhizomatic network in the antinuclear movement and why the

movement managed to last for four years without getting disseminated by the government or the police.

Although the main goal of the movement is to stop the nuclear reactors, the movement also acted as a space for raising other social and political demands in Japan. “Mama demo” is a significant example of these groups. “Mama Demo” was firstly created by single mothers who joined the movement in 2011. *“Most of us have never joined any political activity, antinuclear movement is the first movement that we have ever joined”* said Chieko Uomizu (50) one of the active leaders of “Mama demo”. She continues: *“we realized that we, women , are deprived of our rights. We are neglected and we are dismissed from work when we get pregnant. I just want to know what is so wrong with being a mom?”*

“Mama Demo” like any other group firstly joined the movement because they were against re-operating the nuclear reactors. But gradually they started to realize that they have other demands that can not be represented through the anti-nuclear movement or Hangenren channels. Therefore, they decided to make their own group to call for gender equality and single mother rights.

The anti-nuclear movement is divided into several spaces, one of them is the space of “family area”, where mothers were allowed to bring their children to join the demonstration with them. The family area was the turning point that made the members of “Mama Demo” realize that they have other demands that the antinuclear movement was not aware of. Consequently, they created their first group for gender equality and women rights naming it “Mama Demo” as most of the members of the group were the mothers who came with their children to the family area. Each group that is participating in the movement had one major goal, which was to stop the

nuclear reactors. However, by getting involved in the movement, it contributed in raising their awareness to other issues and demands that these groups feel they have been deprived of in Japanese society. “Mama Demo”, being one such group and their pursuance in gender equality. Although “Mama Demo’s” agenda is totally different than that of Hangeren, Kumagai (28) an unmarried stylist and a member of “Mama Demo” comments: *“ we are not more isolated than hangenren or any other groups, you know that we don't have either high political consciousness or an experience in planning movements and peaceful marches, that's why we are communicating with other groups and inviting them to most of the events we are organizing to help us with their advice”*. According to Kumagai, not all the groups that are participating in the antinuclear movement are single issue ones. However, having different agendas doesn't mean the groups are isolated from each other, but rather this opens up a chance for communication among them, to share knowledge and experiences to progress all movements. It is extremely rare to see clashes between anti-nuclear groups or even between the groups participants and the police , which was enlightening for me, because, as an Egyptian, I could never imagine a situation where joining a social movement would not result in clashes between security police and demonstration participants.

One of the most interesting incidents that I have witnessed several times during the movement, was a police officer is shouting at one of the participants and the latter was yelling in anger “you don't have any right to tell me what to do !” “it is not your business!”. At first glance I thought it was going to be the same scenario during Jasmine Revolution in Egypt. However, what happened next was different than what I had been witnessing in any other movement before and that was one of the most important roles Rhizomatic networks play in anti-nuclear movement. Another gentleman had

suddenly showed up, and he started talking with the participant “Ochi-tsuite! Ochi-tsuite!” which means “Calm down! Calm down!” Then he asked him to go back to the demonstration lines while he continued talking with the officer. The whole situation lasted for less than 10 minutes, a confrontation was averted, and things went back to normal. I have seen this process frequently in front of the Prime Minister’s residence, and so I decided to follow this gentleman to know more about his role in the movement.

Ichigaya Kinoshita (44) is a political scholar and activist. He has participated in so many social movements, starting from the “Anti-war in Iraq” protests, to today’s anti-nuclear movement. When I asked Kinoshita about his role in the movement, he said that he is a member of a group called “keisatsu Tai”. *“The group aims to keep the movement peaceful with no clashes among participating groups or between the groups and the police officers. We don't have any political affiliation and we are not members of any of the participating groups. Our agenda is just to secure the movements, and keep the relations between the participants and the police positive in order to keep the movement continuing until it achieve its goals”* Kinoshita said to me when I asked him about his role in the movement. The anti-nuclear movement became a space for free deliberation for everyone starting from young adults just gaining experience and knowledge to the elderly, who have had rich experiences of joining the largest social movements and strikes in postwar Japan participating in the Anpo struggle and the Voiceless Voices movements to act out a model of civic participation in a democratic society.

Conclusion:

Networks have more functions than just as an instrument that gathers individuals. In the anti-nuclear movements of Japan, networks at least function in three ways that rationalist scholars have undermined it in their

researches. First, the organizational network which functions as a bridge that creates a mutual identity, such as the “Hangenren member”, enables each participant to be a member of the network regardless of their diverse political consciousness and educational backgrounds. Although the Organizational Network is a top-down structured network, it has a significant role in raising the awareness of the participants through the educational sessions and lectures that are given to the participants so that they are better able to understand the movement’s demands and progress. Second, are the Digitalized Social Networks, which allow users to have a deliberative and discursive space to create a strong community that eventually moves to an urban space to enlarge the scale of the movement. In addition, Digitalized Networks act as an alternative media that provide people with all the information regarding the nuclear power, the movement’s progress and other incidents that are never reported in mainstream media and local newspapers. Last is the Rhizomatic network, which doesn't aim to lead people or intervene in the process of the individual participation, but to preserve the continuity of the movement for the longest period without troubles or clashes with other groups or with police officers.

If the Organizational Network and Digitalized Social Networks are the reasons for enlarging the scale of the movement, the Rhizomatic network or the “network of networks” is the main reason behind the movement’s continuation regardless of the government oppression. Therefore, the Networks role is not only limited to instrumental perspective, but they also play a marginalized role in facilitating recruitment to social movements. Networks are important because it provides us with better knowledge of the dynamics and mechanisms that induce people to join the movement. They are not just instruments but they should also be analyzed as independent norms that provide participants with a collective identity and a free

deliberative space where they can have interactions with others to change the society through real deliberation and creativity.

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