Social Movements on the Internet:

The Effect and Use of Cyberactivism in Turkish Armenian Reconciliation

LES MOUVEMENTS SOCIAUX SUR L'INTERNET:

L'EFFET ET L'UTILISATION DE CYBERACTIVISME DANS LA RÉCONCILIATION ARMÉNIENNE TURQUE

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Abstract: This article aims to explore the use of the Internet as a tool for political activism. Even though there are competing arguments about the virtues of online activism, it is important to demonstrate the use of the Internet for addressing political grievances. The Turkish Armenian reconciliation exemplifies one of the important aspects of the discussion on cyberactivism that is its ability to create public spheres. This paper argues that although the Internet is not as free and self-regulated as it is considered by cyber utopians, it still should be considered and explored further as a useful tool for social movements.
Key words: Internet; Social Movements; Online political engagement; Censorship and Surveillance

Résumé: Cet article vise à explorer l'utilisation de l'Internet comme l'outil pour l'activisme politique. Quoiqu'il y ait des arguments de concurrence au sujet des vertus de l'activisme en ligne, il est important de démontrer l'utilisation de l'Internet pour adresser des réclamations politiques. La réconciliation arménienne turque exemplifie un des aspects importants de la discussion sur le cyberactivism qui est sa capacité de créer des domaines publics. Ce document argue du fait que bien que l'Internet ne soit pas aussi librement et autogéré qu'il est considéré par des utopistes de cyber, il devrait être considéré et encore exploré plus plus loin comme outil utile pour les mouvements sociaux.
Mots clés: Internet; Mouvements sociaux; Engagement politique en ligne; Censure et surveillance

1. INTRODUCTION

The use of Internet has become an important topic for the last two decades in social movement studies. It has been awhile since technology was introduced in to the operation of Social Movement Organizations (SMOs). Different forms of communication media such as TV, movies, newspaper, or radio have been used in order to circulate transformation, make statements, and raise consciousness. Online activism or cyberactivism is commonly defined as the usage of Internet communication technologies (ICT) for different forms of activism. Since the time SMOs started using ICTs, there are conflicting ideas about the virtues of the Internet for SMOs.

In the first section of this paper I will look at the definitions of cyberactivism by different scholars and initial use of cyberspace by activists. In this section I will look at the unique features of the Internet compared to other tools of communication used by social movements. Cyberactivism is considered to be a topic worth inquiring since it is believed to be an important gateway to progressive social change.

In the second section I will look at the conflicting ideas about the usage of the Internet by social movement actors. One side of the argument can be called as utopian view since it emphasizes solely on the positive sides of Internet usage.

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Cyberactivism is praised as a means of change and democracy since it reaches out to state and non-state actors all around the world and it overcomes state regulations. Since it is not constrained by any geographical boundaries, it promotes the idea of creating a virtual public sphere within which it is possible to pursue political goals without any constraints by any form of authority. In addition to its ability to transgress boundaries and forms of control, the Internet is praised for its' pace, interactivity, ability to reach masses and to give voice to the unheard and also non-hierarchical organization. On the other hand, there is a critical view of the use of Internet by social movements. It has been argued that state exercises its authority through the control of the content and infrastructure of the Internet due to the fact that the state considers the Internet as a threat to its sovereignty.

In the third and last section, in order to find middle ground between these two views and also to show how actors use the Internet, I will focus on the Armenian issue in Turkey. After laying out the reasons why Armenian issue is a good example of online activism, I will look at the two main goals of online activism on Armenian issue in Turkey.

The main argument of this paper is that Internet is neither offers a free self-regulated space in which any and every social change is possible, nor it is incapable of helping social movements since the state and other authorities circumscribe it. It is important to look at the real life practices of the usage of Internet to see that it can be used to recruit members and fight against the dominant ideologies in different ways that cannot be explained fully by either of the views offered in the literature.

2. WHAT IS CYBERACTIVISM?

The definition of cyberactivism varies from one source to another but one of the common features of it is the usage of Internet communication technologies for different forms of activism. One of the definitions of cyberactivism by Langman and his collaborators is that the cyberactivism is "the extensive use of the Internet to provide counterhegemonic information and inspire social mobilizations" (Langman, Morris, & Zalewski, 2003). The variance in its definition rises from the fact that the types of cyberactivism range from signing an online-petition to engage in hacktivism. In this paper cyberactivism is defined as social activism assisted by or based on the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and Internet. Based on Langman, Morris and Zalewski's work on cyberactivism it is possible to group the main uses of ICTs and Internet under four groups. First one is the use of these technologies in order to expand groups, recruit member and coordinate movement activities and organizations. Secondly, these technologies can be used to generate media coverage for groups that lack mainstream media coverage. Thirdly, these technologies create a virtual public sphere in which participants practice democracy. Last but not least, hacktivism, the act of hacking into computer systems for a politically or socially motivated purpose, is another use of these technologies that helps activists to disrupt or manipulate Internet technologies to fulfill political goals (Langman et al., 2003).

It is important to note the protests against World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle in 1999 since it is seen as an influential moment in global activism and in the use of Internet technologies as a means of media coverage and communication. Since Social Movement Organizations (SMOs) are in need of media coverage in order to transmit their messages to wider audiences (Smith, McCarthy, McPhail, & Augustyn, 2001), Internet was used as a successful tool for this goal in the course of Seattle protests and afterwards.

The literature on cyberactivism and Internet is not only important to understand as a phenomenon per se but it will also enhance our understanding of globalization and social movement organizations (SMOs). Globalization and the introduction of new technologies are argued to transform the way people communicate and interact socially (Kellner, 2001). Also, these new technologies are seen as the visualization of globalization's impact (Ayres, 1999).

3. IMPORTANCE OF CYBERACTIVISM IN SOCIAL MOVEMENT ORGANIZATIONS

Cyberactivism is seen as an important gateway to progressive social change. It is worthwhile to study it as a part of SMOs since it has an effect on political sentiment, social transformation, social change and social movement theory (McCaughey & Ayers, 2003). It has been argued that even though the introduction of new technologies is not new to SMOs, Internet has a revolutionary impact on the interaction between individuals and its scope. Cyberactivism is praised as a means of change and democracy due to the fact to its ability to reach out to state and non-state actors throughout the world and to overcome state regulations over other communication forms. Since it is not constrained by any geographical boundaries, it promotes the idea of creating a virtual public sphere within which it is possible to pursue political goals without any constraints.

In opposition to all these arguments, social movement literature has another strain of argument in regard to the impact of cyberactivism on SMOs. It has been argued that Internet is not capable of recruiting new members to the movement. Rather than increasing the number of participants, cyberactivism is used as a new medium by formerly recruited offline activists.

As stated earlier, SMOs had been using technology in order to generate media coverage, recruit members, communicate with activists, and organize protests. In the next section I will discuss the novelties brought by Internet into the realm of SMOs. These novelties brought by the introduction of Internet and engagement in cyberactivism can be discussed under four themes that are all related to one another. First and foremost, Internet is believed to create an unbounded sphere transcending time and space (Bennett, 2003) and state authority (Guidry, Kennedy, & Zald, 2000). Secondly, Internet is seen as a means to recruit mass numbers of people to SMOs and contact and organize people all around the world. Third of all, the introduction of Internet to SMOs speeds up the distribution of knowledge and response time of people to the activities of SMOs. In other words, cyberactivism creates an immediate and interactive social movement. Lastly, cyberactivism is seen as a medium by which underrepresented and unprivileged people find a chance of representation.

As can be seen throughout this discussion, one of the main themes of cyberactivism is the relationship between the Internet and the state. In this paper, I will examine the two sides of the argument towards this relationship. On the one hand, it has been argued that the Internet has provided SMOs a new public sphere free from regulations and physical boundaries. Advocates of this argument lay out three main advantages and peculiarities of using the Internet as a medium for SMOs. First of all, they argue that Internet will accelerate the speed of information diffusion, broadens the geography it can diffuse to and also the range of people information can reach. Secondly, they argue that another characteristic of the Internet is its ability to give a voice to the people excluded from or don't have enough coverage in mainstream media outlets. Lastly, they point out that the most distinguishing feature of the Internet is its ability to provide a borderless unregulated public sphere.

On the other hand, it is argued that the relationship between the Internet and the state is not different from any other media outlet used by SMOs since it is not immune to state authority. It has been argued that states fight in this newly found domain as well as other domains in order to preserve their sovereignty. They argue against the idea of self-regulated free space Internet provides since Internet is also under the control of state authority through censorship. The practices of national governments concerning the Internet content and infrastructure show that the Internet is prone to state authority.

In this section I will elaborate on these two sides of the discussion in the literature on cyberactivism. Later on, I will apply these different points of views in our analysis of online activism in support of the Armenian issue in Turkey.

4. ORGANIZATION AND COMMUNICATION OF SMOS ON THE INTERNET

It has been argued that through the use of cyberactivism in social movements, SMOs will be able to recruit as many people they want and be able to communicate with them and organize them on the Internet. SMOs will spend less money but still be able to stay communicated to large numbers of individuals all around the world that are connected via computer networks (Kellner, 2001). As stated by Carty and Onyett, Internet serves as a means in communicating grievances and also sharing and expanding communication across different transnational supporters and activists (2006). It should be noted that I acknowledge the digital divide within and between countries all around the world. It is important to point out that there are still a large number of people in the world who do not have access to Internet especially in the poor nations. Whereas, there are increasing number of people using computer networks. Besides, Internet is known to be a cheaper way of having a social movement. It has been stated that even people with minimal resources are able to create websites, list serves etc. that will bring a lot of people together (Langman et al., 2003).

In addition to this, Internet will mediate the relationship between these members and help movements to organize members and protests. The ideas of protest will diffuse easily around the globe (Ayres, 1999), thus SMOs will be able to engage in protests in larger scopes. As a result of the introduction of Internet into social movements, they are likely to reach a new level in the ways in which they mobilize, build coalitions, inform, lobby, communicate and campaign (Van de Donk, Loader, Nixon, & Rucht, 2004).

Being immediate and interactive (Kellner, 2001; McCaughey & Ayers, 2003; Batra, 2004) is among the characteristics of cyberactivism that distinguishes Internet from other mediums used by SMOs. Besides bringing together people from all corners of the world, Internet provides them a powerful medium through which participants will interact with each other instantly.

5. VOICE OF THE INVISIBLE

I would like to emphasize another aspect of the importance of cyberactivism in Social Movement literature. It has been argued that Internet is the medium of the invisible. Through the use of Internet groups, who are blocked of access by the traditional gatekeepers in media and publishing, are able to bypass the barriers to entry into media and publication (Naughton, 2001). Cyberactivism is seen as a new space for the struggle of voices and groups excluded from the mainstream media (Kellner, 2001). Internet helps the disabled and oppressed and underrepresented to rise from

invisibility (Batra, 2008; Carty & Onyett, 2006). Remote groups or groups with silenced voices will find a venue to be heard (Langman et al., 2003). By providing outlets alternative to mainstream media, Internet enhances the resources available to actors in political struggles (Carty & Onyett, 2006).

6. BORDERLESSNESS

Besides being able to diffuse more quickly and efficiently across geographic boundaries (Ayres, 1999), Internet challenges the idea of the need to have spatial boundaries and bodies in order to have social movements (McCaughey & Ayers, 2003). Computer-linked social movements are seen as a challenge to both national and supranational policy-making institutions (Cleaver, 1999). The performance of democracy on the Internet is deterritorialized since it transcends nation-state boundaries.

The idea of borderlessness brings along the argument that cyberactivism will diminish the power of territorial states to have a control over the activities of social movements. As stated by Goldsmith and Wu, cyberspace is defined as a new frontier, where people lived in peace, under their own rules, liberated from the constraints of an oppressive society and free from government meddling (2006). Decentralized and non-hierarchical organization of the Internet is believed to assist the performance of democracy in the online realm.

7. CONTROL OVER THE INTERNET

In opposition to the novelties of using the Internet for social activism, it has been argued that the relationship between the Internet and the state is not different from other media outlets. State exercises its authority through censorship and interventions to the infrastructure since the state considers the Internet as a threat to its sovereignty. It has been argued that nation state governments are prone to exercise control over the Internet and this control might be in two forms: (1) Controlling the content on the Internet and (2) Controlling the Internet infrastructure. Governments are attentive to the threats that might come from Internet content. As in the case of China, government does not hesitate to confiscate the freedom of speech at the point it is seen as a direct threat to government (Goldsmith & Wu, 2006). In a political regime of autocracy it is easier to accomplish control over Internet since in autocracies governments cooperate with private sector in censoring the Internet content and infrastructure. Though, it cannot be concluded that censorship over the Internet is not a common phenomenon in democracies. Even though both engage in censorship over Internet content and control over Internet infrastructure, the distinguishing factor in democracies is that they have to legitimize their actions to citizens (Giacomello, 2005).

The Internet seems as a threat to national governments because of its complexity and paradoxical multiple jurisdiction issues surrounding it (Giacomello, 2005). Users and producers of the communication technologies are worried about its complexity since no one knows how the "whole" works anymore. In addition to its complexity, government is worried about the ambiguity concerning the source of the threat. There are different judicial consequences of threats originating from domestic or international, state or non-state actors (Giacomello, 2005). Anonymity on the Internet complicates the issue of determining the source of the threat.

The main topics that governments are sensitive about in general are cybercrime, child pornography, and computer frauds (Giacomello, 2005). In the case of Turkey, most of the websites banned by the government are websites for child pornography, pornography and online gambling. In addition to these topics, government censors websites that are seen as a threat to the political regime, and core values of that regime. For instance, Turkish government blocked the access to YouTube in 2007 due to the presence of videos denigrating Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the Turkish Republic.

What are some of the responses of national governments to content in the Internet? It is possible to introduce several tactics used by national governments to keep Internet content and infrastructure under control. One of the tactics used by the government is to rely on Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to filter illegal content (Goldsmith & Wu, 2006). If the website is not hosted abroad governments require ISPs to filter these websites as in the case of Google blocked by Chinese government and YouTube by Turkish government. Another tactic is to cooperate with Google on screening out search results related to banned topics. In addition to this, another tactic used by governments is the seizure of the website domain names. This can be explained as blocking websites on the basis of court orders. This is the most commonly used tactic employed by the Turkish government. Law 5651, which is known as the Internet Law of Turkey, enables the government to take action against Internet websites. Another tactic concerning controlling the Internet infrastructure can be seen in the case of Iran. On December 6, 2009 Iranian authorities have slowed Internet connections to a crawl or choked them off completely in order to prevent students to get together to organize a protest online (GMA News, 2009) .

Literature on cyberactivism lays out the unique contribution of Internet and cyberactivism to Social Movement Organizations. It also points out that even though cyberactivism is considered as free from state authority, this is not what is observed when looked at the practices of national governments concerning the Internet content and infrastructure. Therefore, I argue that although Internet helps social movements to recruit members and communicate with non-state

actors all around the world, cyberspace does not provide a free and unbounded space from the constraints of state authority because of censorship and control over the Internet.

8. INTRODUCTION OF THE CASE

The attempts for online activism in regard to the discussion on the recognition of Armenian genocide and Turkish Armenian reconciliation are chosen as the case study for this work. The importance of looking at this case is to show how these different arguments in regard to cyberactivism come into play in Turkish context. I argue that there are virtues of using the Internet in this context that can be explained neither by the utopian view or the criticism of this view. The Turkish Armenian issue, as argued by the advocates of cyberactivism, is a perfect example of the creation of an online public sphere in the absence of an offline or so called "real life" public sphere. According to this view, the creation of a new online public sphere should have led to a realm that is not bounded by any form of authority or state borders. As I will discuss later on, cyberspace is vulnerable to state authority through the use of control in the form of censorship.

Since 2007, Turkish government banned around 8000 websites based on Article 8 of Law 5651. As a result, Turkey has become one of the countries that dominate its cyberspace. As argued by the critics of cyberactivism and its premise of freedom, the Internet will not be a useful tool for SMOs since it is another realm of state control and authority. The case I have chosen shows that even though Internet content is restricted by the state, Internet is a useful tool fighting against the restriction itself and also the issue you are dealing with.

I argue that rather than being opposed to or in favor of cyberactivism we should see how it is used by SMOs as a tool for organizing a social movement. I argue that we acknowledge the fact that Internet is not as non-hierarchical, self-regulatory, or disembodied as described by the advocates of cyberactivism. Whereas, I also argue that Internet provides tools for communication and organization to SMOs even though its content is restricted by the state.

Thus, I will look at this case to see how social movements and social movement actors use this not-so-free newly established public sphere. First of all, I will look at the historical background of the issue. Secondly, I will argue why it is important to establish a new public sphere in this context. Thirdly, I will talk about the practices of cyberspace censorship in Turkey.

9. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The long history of dispute between Turkey and Armenia dates back to the times in which Armenians and Turks lived under the rule of Ottoman Empire. During the last years of the Empire, as a consequence of political uneasiness, Armenians were expelled from the country. From that time on, the main source of conflict between two groups is the events that took place in 1915. The definition of the events as genocide has been discussed for decades since the end of Ottoman Empire. The request for the formal recognition of Armenian genocide by the newly established Turkish Republic caused problems between Armenians both in Armenia and Diaspora and Turkey. Armenian genocide is defined as the mass killings of the Armenian population, living under Ottoman rule, during and right after WW1. Up to this day, Turkish authorities refuse the fact that the events in 1915 can be constituted genocide. So far, around 20 countries officially declared these events should be considered as genocide. Besides the question of the formal recognition of Armenian genocide by Turkish government, there are two main problems waiting to be resolved between Armenia and Turkey. One of these problems is the opening of borders between two countries that were closed in 1993. Another source of dispute between them is the Karabakh conflict with Azerbaijan.

10. RESTRICTIONS ON THE PUBLIC SPHERE IN TURKEY

As discussed earlier, the discussion on the recognition of the Armenian genocide in the public sphere is subject to legal action since it falls under the Article 301 of Turkish Constitution. Through the application of this article, state has the authority to prevent the formation of open public discussions of the topic. Article 301 states that: 1. Public denigration of Turkishness, the Republic or the Grand National Assembly of Turkey shall be punishable by imprisonment of between six months and three years. 2. Public denigration of the Government of the Republic of Turkey, the judicial institutions of the State, the military or security structures shall be punishable by imprisonment of between six months and two years. 3. In cases where a Turkish citizen in another country commits denigration of Turkishness the punishment shall be increased by one third. 4. Expressions of thought intended to criticize shall not constitute a crime (Amnesty International, 2009). Since the discussion on the events of 1915 is seen as a threat to the unity of the republic, most of the attempts for discussion end in trials based on Article 301. Even though people have been increasingly hold responsible for insulting the Turkishness, the Republic or the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, there have been increasing attempts for the public discussion of the killings in 1915. I would like to discuss two attempts to open up a public discussion of the issue in 2000s. First one is the establishment of Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission and the second one is the conference held in 2005.

In order to build relations between Armenia and Turkey a reconciliation commission was established in 2001 by US State Department. TARC, Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission, was set up in order to strengthen the relationship between these two countries and resolve the disputes between them. The commission was set up after three days of discussion hosted by Henry Dunant Center for Humanitarian Dialogue. TARC consists of ten members, 6 Turkish and 4 Armenian members, who occupied important positions in their country in political, economic or educational arena. According to TARC's term of reference, the main aim of the commission is to "promote mutual understanding and good will between Turks and Armenians and to encourage improved relations between Armenia and Turkey". In addition to this, they stated that the commission is going to support "the dialogue and cooperation between Armenian and Turkish civil societies in order to create public awareness about the need for reconciliation and to derive practical benefits". In order to build on the ongoing attempts for reconciliation, the commission will promote activities in the fields of business, tourism, culture, education and research, environment, media, confidence building, and other areas. As can be seen in the terms of reference the discussion of events of 1915 is not among the main aims of this commission. Although TARC does not define this topic as one of the subjects that needs to be addressed, it called up International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) to request for a report regarding the applicability of the term genocide to the events in 1915. The report concludes that "notwithstanding the efforts of large numbers of 'righteous Turks' who intervened on behalf of the Armenians, at least some of the perpetrators of the Events knew that the consequence of their actions would be the destruction, in whole or in part, of the Armenians of eastern Anatolia, as such, or acted purposively towards this goal, and, therefore, possessed the requisite genocidal intent" (American University Center for Global Peace, 2009). After 3 years, the commission was concluded in April 2004.

After this attempt, a conference was held in Turkey in order to discuss the issue with the contribution of scholars, lawyers and politicians. Armenian Conference was held by Bilgi University in 2005. The conference was a milestone in the relations between Turkey and Armenia since it lays out a new viewpoint by Turkish scholars that does not deny the genocide claims without thoroughly investigating the issue from both sides.

These two are among the few attempts of creating a public sphere in which the Armenian issue can be discussed and relations between Armenia and Turkey can be improved. Since there is no available public sphere to discuss the issue in offline world, our case is an example of the literature on cyberactivism being the unregulated and borderless public space in which free discussions can take place with people all around the world.

11. RESTRICTIONS ON THE INTERNET IN TURKEY

Even though I find support for the idea that the Internet can provide a borderless unregulated public space for political discussions and social activism, this case also contributes to the other side of the discussion. It has been argued that the Internet is at risk of control by state authorities as opposed to its promises as being a free space in which people regulate themselves. In the preliminary stages of cyberspace usage, the definition of the Internet by John Perry Barlow, an influential figure on the Internet and the current co-founder and co-chair of the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), as being 'unspoiled, self-governing, and best left to inhabitants to run as they pleased' was very popular among the users of the Internet. Cyberspace was defined as a new frontier, where people lived in peace, under their own rules, liberated from the constraints of an oppressive society and free from government meddling (Goldsmith & Wu, 2006).

It has been argued that these definitions do not entirely apply to this phenomenon since the Internet can be taken under control by the state. In order to preserve its sovereignty from the threats that might come from people inside and outside of its national territories, states can apply different forms of control and censorship on the Internet. I have discussed these different forms of control earlier in this work. As discussed earlier, one of the main tactics used by Turkish government is the seizure of the website domain names. This is done through blocking websites on the basis of court orders. Law 5651 of Turkish constitution namely "Regulation of Publications on the Internet and Suppression of Crimes Committed", which is known as the Internet Law of Turkey, enables the government to take action against Internet websites. Yaman Akdeniz explains that the enactment of Law 5651 followed concerns for the availability of defamatory videos involving the founder of the Turkish Republic Mustafa Kemal Atatürk through YouTube, combined with increasing concerns for the availability of child pornographic, obscene, and Satanist content on the Internet, and websites which provide information about suicide, or about illegal substances deemed harmful or inappropriate for children (Akdeniz, 2010). The ban on YouTube based on this law was the most popular case that received a lot of media coverage both in Turkey and all around the world. Even though the YouTube ban on Turkey has been lifted on October 30, 2010, there are still over 9000 websites that are banned by the state.

12. ONLINE ACTIVISM IN TURKEY

I have argued that Turkish legal code requires the establishment of a new public sphere but this sphere is prone to state control. Thus, I claim that we need to explore how actors make use of this newly established public sphere. An answer

should be proposed to the question "What is the virtue of using Internet as a tool by social movement actors in their attempt to talking about the Armenian issue?"

While talking about a social movement, I don't refer to a hierarchical organized movement. All forms of online activism on Armenian issue are attempts to create a language to talk about the issue and inform as much people as possible about that this issue is and should be discussable. The Internet has been used to accomplish two related goals in regard to Armenian issue. One of them is the attempt to make the taboo on the discussion of Armenian genocide an issue that can be discussed in public. The other goal is to show people that there is a big group of individuals that are willing to discuss the issue.

In 2008, an online petition campaign has started in Turkey. Initially intellectuals and artists and later on a total of 30000 people signed the petition that apologizes from Armenians. The text of the petition reads: "My conscience does not accept the insensitivity showed to and the denial of the Great Catastrophe that the Ottoman Armenians were subjected to in 1915. I reject this injustice and for my share, I empathize with the feelings and pain of my Armenian brothers and sisters. I apologize to them." This petition has been an important step in the discussion of the Armenian issue since it started a series of offline activism, online discussion and to receive mainstream media coverage. One example of the activism triggered by this petition is the public gathering in Istanbul on April 24, 2010. The call for this gathering spreads on the Internet with a text titled, 'This is our pain'. People are invited to remember the minorities of Turkey that used to be neighbors, friends, or coworkers of the people living in Turkey now. An excerpt from the online text says that: "This is OUR pain…In 1915, when we had a population of only 13 million people, there were 1,5 to 2 million Armenians living on this land...They were our friend. Our next-door neighbors and our companion in bad times...On April 24th, 1915 they were "rounded up". We lost them. They are not here anymore…There EXISTS the overwhelming "Great Pain" that was laid upon the qualms of our conscience by the "Great Catastrophe…We call upon all peoples of Turkey who share this heartfelt pain to commemorate and pay tribute to the victims of 1915…This is a mourning for ALL OF US" (Anonymous, 2010). Both the online petition and online invitation to the gathering chose to set aside the language of the genocide. Instead they prefer to emphasize the pain that was experienced both by Turks and Armenians. They aim to create a new language that can be used in the discussion of the events in 1915 and contemporary relations between Turkey and Armenia.

In addition to these online petition texts, there are several blogs on the Internet talking about the ways to alter the taboo status of the discussion of Armenian issue. As stated by Olick and Levy (1997), taboos restrain claim making about an issue due to its ability to set the terms of discourse. Olick and Levy (1997) talk about the attempts to transform a field of taboo into a field of prohibition in order to change the status of the issues and the ways in which to overcome the constraints. The debates on the Internet around the Armenian issue can be seen as an attempt to transform a taboo into a prohibition. Although, in Turkey there is already a present legal prohibition that put constraints on political claim making. Thus, this case requires further discussion on the historical background of the creation of the taboo on the Armenian issue and the legal code that speaks to and strengthened by the taboo. The discussion on the Internet about Armenian issue aims at creating a new discourse around pain. Both Armenian and Turkish bloggers in Turkey use the language of pain and empathy in their discussion on the events in 1915 and its effects on the contemporary relationship between Armenia and Turkey. Markar Esayan, a journalist living in Turkey, in his blog Dar Kapi emphasizes the importance of not getting caught up with the term genocide but find other ways to encounter the mutual past of people living in Armenia and Turkey. He prefers to use the term Catastrophe instead while referring to the events happened in 1915.

Increasing number of blogs by Turks and Armenians living in Turkey and websites devoted to opening up discussion about the issue; and online petitions signed by large numbers of people contribute to getting attention from public and recruiting new members to the discussion. Especially high numbers of participants to the online petitions encouraged people to proceed with different forms of activism both online and offline.

13. CONCLUSION

In this paper I argued that the Internet is an important tool for political claim making since cyberactivism has some virtues over other forms of activism. I have looked at the literature on cyberactivism to see the views of advocates and opponents of it. Our main argument was that neither of these views explains the real life practices of Internet usage by social movement actors. I claimed that the Internet is not as free, self-regulated and useful as described by the utopian view. At the same time, I argue against the critical view by saying that Internet could be useful for helping social movements even though the state and other authorities circumscribe it.

Internet is used as a realm to open up the discussion of Armenian issue and to emphasize the importance of a new language that puts less emphasis on the discussion of the genocide. Also, the Internet is used to spread the discussion on the Armenian issue and shows that this discussion has a lot of actors involved in it. Thus, even though it is not the perfect tool, the Internet should be considered and explored further as a useful tool for social movements.

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