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The Arab Spring dubbed in Turkish



Syrian official media outlets, and other supporting news outlets, drowned in funny comparisons whilst covering Turkey's protests. They found water hoses and tear gas used by Turkish security forces to be "brutal." Yes, water seems horrible when compared with the scent of sarin and the lightness of explosives barrels and Scud missiles launched by the Syrian regime.

To go beyond the light heartedness of such comparisons, the protests at Taksim Square deserve an observation from several angles. I will limit the discussion here to the journalistic angle. As the famous Taksim Square in downtown Istanbul was full of angry protesters, the most famous channels in the country were busy covering other topics. One was broadcasting a documentary about penguins whilst another resumed its broadcast of cooking shows. The Turkish media made the uprising in Taksim Square a global event. It did not do so by broadcasting the events, but by ignoring them. Global media outlets even categorized Turkish developments as their top news. Turkish protests were in the top news on CNN whilst the Turkish CNN broadcast a documentary on penguins. This bird became a symbol of the Turkish media, a scandal and a joke that circulates amongst the Turks.

Erdogan's hold of the media

It seems that during his ten years of governance, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan succeeded in making private media channels part of the network of his economic interests. He has made them submissive to a group of companies that are part of the Justice and Development government's economic network. In one aspect, Taksim's uprising is an uprising against Erdogan's attempt to discipline media figures after he succeeded in making institutions submissive. He previously requested a media outlet to discipline one of its journalists, and his request was met. He has also punished a number of other journalists. During the peak of protests at Taksim, he crowned this tendency by saying that social media is a real disaster to society. The truth is, when traditional media failed to fulfill its duties, social media did the job, exactly like what happened in Tahrir Square in Egypt. The Turkish activity on Twitter became a phenomenon as 3,000 tweets were made per minute, in one night.

Erdogan's statement that social media is a disaster indicates that controlling traditional visual, audio and written media is no longer enough to prevent covering events. As the world's media broadcast developments to the world, the Turks in Taksim resorted to Twitter and Facebook to provide a coverage for the local public opinion. Turkish media outlets lost a round in this competition, and they admitted to that and apologized. But it doesn't seem that their move is useful since the discussion that led to this downfall has been witnessed again and is represented by the extent private media outlets are controlled by a network of interests sponsored by the government. Activists and protesters launched huge campaigns in Turkey to punish media outlets for their failure, and they called for boycotting them. They took it upon themselves to cover the developments of their activities after they felt that traditional media betrayed their cause. Some Arabs rejoiced with the protests at Taksim, considering it as the first Turkish dubbing of an Arab soap opera. Let's hope dubbing is inaccurate so the Turks don't drown in the mud we're stuck in.

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Diana Moukalled is the Web Editor at the Lebanon-based Future Television and was the Production & Programming Manager with at the channel. Previously, she worked there as Editor in Chief, Producer and Presenter of "Bilayan al Mujaradah," a documentary that covers hot zones in the Arab world and elsewhere, News and war correspondent and Local news correspondent. She currently writes a regular column in AlSharq AlAwsat. She also wrote for Al-Hayat Newspaper and Al-Wasat Magazine, besides producing news bulletins and documentaries for Reuters TV. She can be found on Twitter: @dianamoukalled