Democracy, the Internet and freedom of speech∗

TAKIS FOTOPOULOS

(14.11.2014)

Abstract: This article examines the claims of Anonymous and others about the equality and freedom of speech secured by the internet for its users, as well as about its supposed relation to direct democracy. The conclusion drawn is that, despite some unquestionable benefits offered by social media, these claims have very little to do with reality. Furthermore, given the side effects of anonymity, widely used in the internet for smear campaigns either against other users, or specifically against writers who do not hide behind anonymity in expressing their views, the article argues for the introduction of social controls for the self-protection of society, so that 'free internet' does not end up like 'free markets', i.e. as an effective means to enhance the power of the elites in controlling populations.

The issue of the relationship between freedom of speech and the Internet has become front-page news again because of two very recent events.

The first was the minor demonstrations around the world —except for some bigger demonstrations in Anglo-Saxon countries— organized by the "Anonymous" with the well-known Guy Fawkes mask. However, the new element in the Anonymous movement was not their clearly reformist demands, which have nothing to do with a revolutionary project and strategy. Despite the revolutionary rhetoric and slogans, their demands are merely demands for improvements to the system, i.e. less corruption in the public and private sector, more transparency, etc. - positions which one may easily find in reports of the World Bank and the IMF! The new element, therefore, brought about by the Anonymous refers to the means they use to get their message across, i.e. the Internet. Yet, in London, where perhaps their biggest protest among world cities took place, their members were boasting that "the internet has the power to bring down regimes…It belongs to everyone… we all have a voice now – 7

billion of us... We're all equal."[1] In fact, there are even "anarchists" who declare that "the Internet is a form of virtual direct democracy that empowers the subordinate groups to react against the dominant ones";[2] and this, when authoritative anarchist studies have clearly shown in the past the highly dangerous role of the Internet in relation to real democracy![3]

The second was the recent hot debate over the issue of anonymous smearing in countries that still want to keep at least the image of a well functioning representative 'democracy'. In Britain, in particular, where the public's anger over the hordes of anonymous internet mud-slingers, (who slander, insult and use personal data and distorted photos against their victims) has reached its peak, the smear is either directed generally against other users, or specifically against writers who do not hide behind anonymity in expressing their views.[4] The result of this general condemnation was that the elites (which are far from hostile towards the web when it suits them!) were forced to take measures for the protection of the victims of smear, and quadruple the current six-month sentence. As it was stressed by the proponents of the new legislation, "no-one would permit such venom in person, so there should be no place for it on social media".[5] This forced even the clearly sympathetic to social media BBC journalist to comment, "For anyone who believed the Internet and social media would foster a new era of free expression and open debate, this is a depressing time."[6]

As far as the "Anonymous" allegations about the power of the internet is concerned, it can be easily shown that they have very little to do with reality. I am not aware of any regime supported by the Transnational Elite (TE) that administers the NWO, which was overthrown thanks to the internet, even when hundreds of thousands of "Indignados" and "Occupiers" —who had been mobilized mainly through the internet (e.g. Spain, Greece, USA, Britain, etc.)— took part in relevant demonstrations and other acts of civil disobedience. In reality, the only regimes that were brought down under conditions in which the Internet had really played a major role in it, were the ones prescribed by the

---

[1]   'Anonymous to RT: : "Internet has power to bring down regimes," *RT* (05/11/2014) ; see also "Global Million Mask March as it happened," *RT* (06/11/2014).
[2] "Trolling", *Eleftherotypia* (12/10/2014).
[3] Matt Hern and Stu Chaulk, "Roadgrading Community Culture: Why the Internet is so dangerous to real democracy," *Democracy & Nature*, Vol.6, No.1 (March 2000), pp.111-120. See, also, Takis Fotopoulos' reply in the same issue, pp. 121-123.
[4] see e.g.; Jonathan Brown,"Laurence Easeman, the activist in Brand row: 'I was smeared'," *The Independent* (24/10/2014); see, also, Suzanne Moore, "Trolling is too high a price for freedom," *The Guardian* (07/10/2014).
[5] "Internet trolls face up to two years in jail under new laws," *BBC News* (19/10/2014).
[6] ibid.

same TE to be brought down through velvet "revolutions" (Arab 'Spring',[7] Eastern Europe,[8] etc.)!

Also, the allegations about the relation of the Internet to real democracy and equality are even more far-fetched, if not disorienting. In fact, real democracy, in the classical sense of direct democracy, has nothing to do with civil liberties or the Internet that refer to the liberal, or representative "democracy". It is this kind of 'democracy' and the related ideology of human rights that constitute the basis of the ideology of globalization. Furthermore, it is well known that it was exactly for the protection of such rights that the TE has supposedly carried out a series of wars (Yugoslavia, Iraq, Libya) and encouraged several real massacres elsewhere, from Syria up to Ukraine.

On the other hand, real democracy presupposes "face-to-face" assemblies, where it is only through discussions between active citizens —and certainly not just between the "experts"— that the collective political will can be really expressed.[9] In this sense, the Internet democracy, as I tried to show elsewhere, is a clear distortion of direct democracy:

"In this era of virtual reality which we live, it was inevitable that the dominant social-liberal ideology would demean even the fundamental concept of democracy. Thus, on top of the other kinds of illusory democracy (representative "democracy", radical "democracy" etc.) we now have discovered the virtual "democracy" of the Internet, celebrated by well-known liberal writers and bloggers, in perfect harmony with supporters of the reformist Left. Such people extol blogs and the Internet in general as the "greatest democratic conquest in History", which brings about a real democratization of the media "from below", given that every person can now become a publisher of him/her self. It is worth noting that this mythology is fully compatible with the present social-liberal ideology of "rights" which, of course, has nothing to do with social self-determination, individual and collective autonomy, and true democracy.[10]

It was therefore hardly surprising that *Time* magazine, a well known mouthpiece of the American establishment, pronounced a few years ago the anonymous user of the Internet as "person of the year", while, in 2007, the TE,

---

[7] Takis Fotopoulos, *Subjugating the Middle East,* (published shortly by Progressive Press, vol I & II

[8] Takis Fotopoulos, *Ukraine: The Attack on Russia and the Eurasian Union* (December 2014, Progressive Press).

[9] Takis Fotopoulos, *Towards An Inclusive Democracy*, (Cassell: London, 1997) chs 5–6.

[10] see 'The virtual "democracy" of the Internet," *The International Journal of INCLUSIVE DEMOCRACY*, vol.4, no.2 (April 2008).

which had gathered for its annual informal meeting in Davos, praised enthusiastically internet "democracy"![11]

On top of all this, one cannot really assess the real significance of the Internet without taking into account its built-in deficiencies. First, it is well known that, even today, only a minority of the world population (less than 40%) are considered internet users, most of them (77%) concentrated in the "developed world", where the minority of the world population lives, and that even fewer of them (less than 10%) have a fixed broadband connection.[12] Furthermore, this is not a problem that would just disappear over time, despite the growth momentum in the number of users recently. It is a "systemic" problem directly related to poverty and economic and social inequality, which are phenomena inherent in a system of market economy and representative "democracy". Thus, economic inequality and poverty imply that billions of people on the planet cannot afford the hardware and software, as well as the connection expenses to the Internet. Moreover, there is the equally important social inequality, namely, the various social factors that deter large segments of the population from the Internet (cultural factors, education, etc.). The consequence is that one more social exclusion has been added to the present exclusions: "the digital divide"!

One frequently quoted myth about the supposed democratization of the media brought about by the Internet, is that the blogs have abolished the distinction between producers and consumers of information, so that today we can all be producers. However, this is another theoretical right and not a reality in the present system. Nowadays, there are tens of millions of blogs in the world, but in fact most of them are inactive, or not regularly renewed. Similarly, there are millions of websites, but in reality, few muster daily a considerable number of visitors —as it happens also with the blogs. The reason of course has less to do with the allegation that these are the only really interesting blogs and Web pages, as the misleading social-liberal competitive ideology asserts, and more to do with the designing and especially the constant renewing of a blog or a website, which is an indispensable element of attracting many visitors. However, this calls for not just some significant expenditure but, above all, plenty of time, which of course in today's society is translated also into cash. A sophisticated and constantly renewable blog or website requires either teams of full-time administrators to run them, or bloggers who can spare the extra time (and/or the necessary hard cash) to do so. In other words, the producers of information are actually a very small minority, who, generally, as Glenn

---

[11] Jackie Ashley, "Beware the powerful when they hail the new democracy," *The Guardian* (29/01/2007).

[12] *Key ICT Indicators for developed and developing countries and the world*, International Telecommunications Unions (ITU), Geneva, 27 February 2013

Reynolds, (author of *An Army of Davids*, which explored the explosion in web punditry), pointed out, "tend on average to be better off, better educated and, more importantly, employed". Hence, as found in the same study, more than half of the Internet users on the continent are passive and do not contribute to the web at all, while a further 23% only respond when prompted.[13]

Another myth is that the free access to the Internet secures the freedom of access to knowledge, while others see the medium as an anti-systemic means that could put pressure on power. However, both these functions are, also, illusory. The first is decisively undermined by the anonymity of the medium. The information provided anonymously is frequently unreliable, or even suspicious, as it has frequently been demonstrated in the case of the free online encyclopaedia Wikipedia, which, despite the fact that it provides easy access to generally useful information, yet, interventions by state and secret services have, repeatedly, been made on entries of political and socio-economic content, with the obvious aim of misrepresenting the facts.[14] Also, concerning the operation of the Internet, as an anti-systemic means, (in the sense that it allows criticism of the rulers —something supposedly justifying anonymity) in reality, as it has repeatedly been shown, anonymity was frequently used by various mudslingers and slanderers (and probably by members of the state or secret services) to defame "eponymous" analysts, (i.e. writers using their real names), even if they belonged to the anti-systemic Left themselves!

However, if online anonymity is indeed necessary to protect those criticizing power —and in this sense it is a form of practicing freedom— then, like any real freedom, either it will be ***self-disciplined,*** or it will be ***no*** freedom. It is well known that the greatest danger that, historically, direct democracy faced was precisely the lack of self-discipline, which demands a high level of civil consciousness. The non-publication, for instance, of defamatory or abusive comments as well as of unsubstantiated allegations and characterizations should be an obvious prerequisite for the use of anonymity. Even more so if similar mudslinging comments and characterizations are directed, not against the institutions of power, but against people who have shown absolute consistency in their struggle against power. It is obvious that in the latter case anonymity is no longer used as a means of protection against power, but as a means to protect power itself and its institutions against their enemies! But in this case, we are talking about character assassination, which has nothing to do with freedom of speech, but rather with the freedom required by the professional slanderers to do their "job" effortlessly. It was not therefore

---

[13] quoted in Bobbie Johnson, "Ignore bloggers at your peril, say researchers," *The Guardian* (18/04/2006).
[14] Robert Verkaik, "Wikipedia and the art of censorship," *Independent.ie* (18/08/2007).

surprising to hear that even the EU authorities decided to spend almost 3m Euros out of taxpayers' money on trolling Eurosceptic critics in the internet, in a vain attempt to control the anti-EU popular tsunami, during the run-up to last May's Euro elections![15]

All this does not of course mean that the Internet has no significant positive aspects. It is true, for instance, that usually it is only in the internet that antisystemic opinions may be published, which would normally be excluded from the traditional media. But here there is still another trap, to the extent that the internet itself is being ultimately controlled by the elites of the TE, through multinationals (Google, Facebook, etc.), which have the final say on what goes in and how online. And there are several known examples of banning users, even websites, when their appeal starts becoming dangerous to the elites. Moreover, the Internet plays an important role in mobilization for protests, occupations etc. On such occasions anonymity is of course a necessary precaution against power.

In conclusion, the Internet itself (as any technology in general) is neither 'neutral', by its nature, nor autonomous, and, therefore, not democratic either. It is not neutral, as it has been created within the context of a specific system (market economy and representative "democracy), expressing its logic and dynamic. And it is not autonomous, as it expresses specific power relations and the dominant social paradigm. In other words, it is not just a means to an unspecified end that everyone may use the way s/he wants, since there are limitations inherent in it, expressing specific systemic values. The process that determines each time the actual technology-in-use (as opposed to available technology) is decisively determined by the power structures involved in the existing institutional framework and the corresponding dominant social paradigm. Similarly, the free flow of information that the Internet supposedly provides is another myth. These are issues that have been discussed for some time in the literature[16] and only uninformed users (and the mud-slingers themselves!) might ignore their conclusions.

Therefore, it is critical to define some generally accepted rules regarding the operation of the Internet (to the degree of course that this is possible within the existing institutional framework) in order to restrict similar phenomena that may have significant adverse social implications. But, in case this is not possible, the introduction of social controls for the self-protection of society

---

[15] Bruno Waterfield, "EU to set up euro-election 'troll patrol' to tackle Eurosceptic surge," *Daily Telegraph* (03/02/2013).

[16] see for a survey of relevant literature Takis Fotopoulos, "Towards a Democratic Conception of Science and Technology," *Democracy and Nature*, Vol. 4, No. 1, issue 10 (1997), pp.54-86.

from the Internet is imperative, as was also historically necessary the introduction of social controls for the self-protection of society from the market. This is because the Internet, as well as a perfectly competitive market (I'm not talking of course about monopolies etc.) cannot secure by themselves equality among all participants. As everyone knows, even under conditions of perfect competition, some are 'more equal' than others, as a result of the unequal distribution of income and wealth. But, in the Internet as well, neither money nor time availability are equally distributed among users. Therefore, in the same way that the market, without some effective social controls for the self-protection of society —as is the case at present, following the "liberalization" of markets in the NWO of neoliberal globalization— was bound to lead to today's jungle, in a similar way the internet, without some effective social controls for the self-protection of society, is bound to lead into an online jungle. This is what is at stake today with the war pursued by the "Internet neoliberals" (exactly like the war pursued by market neoliberals) against social controls for the self-protection of society from this jungle. The aim in both cases is the same: to enhance the power of the elites in controlling our "freedom"…

P.S. (24/11/2014)

In relation to the above, I was just informed by an administrator of the ID facebook, who is also a member of the Journal's select Editorial Committee, that a mudslinger under the name Eoin O'Connor slandered me (with no proof whatsoever of course) that I am now "writing for and receiving money" from "the bloody paper of the Russian Communist Party", (i.e. Pravda) and that this does make me "a stooge of a section of the Russian elite" (sic!). As we now understand that this slanderer is also a proud member of Michael Albert's International Organization for a Participatory Society (IOPS) — whose Participatory Economics (Parecon) 'by coincidence' I criticized in the past, without ever receiving a reply to it — I hope that this does not mean that this sort of "Left" has now resorted to mud slinging to attack its critics!

Source: http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/vol10/vol10_no1-2_Democracy_the_Internet_and_freedom_of_speech.html

The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy, Vol. 10, Nos. 1/2 (Winter/Summer 2014); Special Edition: A Collection of the 2014 Articles by Takis Fotopoulos; [The completion of Iraq's destruction by the Transnational Elite and the role of ISIS](#) (11.07.2014); [The new Transnational Elite and Zionist massacres](#) (20.07.2014); [Obama and the Ideology of Globalization](#) (27.07.2014); [The Zionist Brutalization Within the New World Order and the Need for a United Multi-national and Multicultural State](#) (06.08.2014); [The imperative need for popular fronts of national and social liberation in the globalization era](#) (12.08.2014); [The Russian embargo and the Ukrainian "coup from below"](#) (18.08.2014); [The new "growth" economy of the New World Order](#) (25.08.2014); [Russia, the Eurasian Union and the Transnational Elite](#) (31.08.2014); [NATO and planned "chaos" in the NWO](#) (11.09.2014); [Syria Next and the Islamist bogeyman](#) (17.09.2014); [Scotland and the myth of independence within the EU](#) (22.09.2014); [Transnational Terrorism](#) (29.09.2014); [BRICS and the myth of the multipolar world](#) (06.10.2014); [The real objectives of the Transnational Elite in Syria](#) (13.10.2014); [The Transnational Elite and the NWO as "conspiracies"](#) (20.10.2014); [Oil economic warfare and self-reliance,](#) (27.10.2014); [Towards a new Democratic World Order](#) (03.11.2014); [Democracy, the internet and freedom of speech](#) (14.11.2014); [Russia at the crossroads](#) (20.11.2014); [Globalization, Russia and the Left](#) (27.11.2014); [Economic warfare the main Western weapon](#) (06.12.2014); [The Myths about the New World Order](#) (15.12.2014).