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Between authoritarianism and democracy: Examining news media usage for political re-socialization and information acquisition in diasporic contexts

Abstract

While political scholars study news media as agents of political learning, the processes of political re-socialization of a conflict-generated diaspora moving from authoritarian to democratic regimes pose significant theoretical challenges that remain insufficiently researched. To this end, this study investigates the importance of traditional and digital media sources from the homeland and host country in fostering refugees' understanding of the democratic norms and values, and political opportunities offered by the receiving country. Further, it investigates the role of online diaspora communities as agents for political re-socialization and tools for information acquisition about Arabic, Swiss and international politics. 60 semi-structured interviews with Arabs from refugee origins in Switzerland were analyzed. Findings show the influence of the early-life political socialization, received prior to forced migration, on the purposive consumption of media from various sources. As Facebook started to lose its value as a source of political information, participants shift to producing and consuming news distributed by strong ties on private WhatsApp groups as a counter-strategy to acquire trustworthy information. Further insights on the impact of perceived media credibility and individual trust in news on the consumption behavior and political learning are discussed.

Keywords: News Media, Political Re-socialization, Arabs with Refugee Backgrounds, Diasporic Context

Introduction

Studies exploring the significant influence of news media on the political behaviors, attitudes and participation identified mass media as an essential agent for the political socialization of individuals (e.g., Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006; Moeller & Vreese, 2013; Kononova, Alhabash & Cropp, 2011). However, the increasing waves of migrants moving from authoritarian regimes to established democracies pose many challenges to the political integration of those newcomers who encounter democratic norms and practices late in life (Bilodeau, McAllister & Kanji, 2010). By providing minority groups with political information and presenting alternative online spheres for opinion expression and political representation (Bozdog et al., 2012), traditional and digital media contribute to the continuous process of refugees' political re-socialization. This is particularly important in the context of European politics, particularly the Swiss political system where citizens play the greatest part in the federal political decision making by engaging in three practices: popular initiatives, optional referenda and mandatory referenda (FDFA, 2018). Considered as future citizens who usually have no way back to the origin countries they fled, learning about the host country's political norms and values is significant to facilitate refugees' political integration, informed decision making and better contribution to democracy in the future. This points to a significant area of research that requires further investigation.

This empirical study offers a new understanding of the different roles of traditional and digital media in the lives of long-term settled Arabs with refugee backgrounds in the three language regions of Switzerland. Almost a decade after the Arab revolts, examining how Arabs engage in local and transnational information acquisition practices to learn about the ongoing conflicts in their war-torn homelands while getting knowledge about the federal politics in the host country, after many years of resettlement, provides a unique context for the current study.

News Media as Agents for Political Socialization

As defined by Gimpel, Lay and Schuknecht (2003, p. 13), political socialization refers to “the process by which new generations are inducted into political culture, learning the knowledge, values, and attitudes that contribute to supporting of the political system.” Various central agents contribute to the political socialization of individuals, especially during childhood and adolescence including family, school, and peer groups (Hess & Torney, 1967; McDevitt & Chaffee, 2002; Moeller & de Vreese, 2013). When it comes to the influence of news media consumption on political learning and behaviors, theories highlight two contradicting roles (Moeller & de Vreese, 2013). While the learning theory explains the positive role of media on the political attitude formation and political socialization (Graber, 1997), other theories, including media malaise, point to the negative influence of the exposure to negative media coverage of politics on the interest in political engagement leading to political cynicism (Moeller & Vreese, 2013). By informing citizens about the ongoing political issues and debates, news enables civic engagement within democratic societies (Fletcher & Park, 2017).

Although Easton and Dennis (1969) argue that political socialization starts since childhood when people begin to form their beliefs and resist to change them for the rest of their lives, Sears (1990) argues that political socialization is a lifetime process that is continuously influenced by new life experiences. When applied to migrants' political re-socialization and adaptation to new political environments, White et al. (2008) discuss three scenarios drawn from migration and classical political re-socialization theories. First, theory of exposure proposes that the more the migrants are exposed to the new political system in the host country they moved to, the more they adapt to its norms and participate in it. Second, theory of transferability proposes that migrants can draw on their prior experiences in the country of origin and transfer them to the new political life in the host country. Third, the

resistance theory assumes that migrants' adaptation to the new political system is difficult and, thus they will resist changing whatever is inconsistent with what they learnt through their years of settlement in the home country (White et al., 2008).

Following these theoretical arguments, Bilodeau, McAllister, and Kanji (2010) questioned whether the pre-migration experiences under authoritarian regimes would hinder displaced people's democratic adaptation, or their political attitudes will gradually change to comply with the societal expectations under the democratic norms. This study supported previous work on the ongoing impact of early socialization by showing that immigrants from authoritarian regimes were also accepting other authoritarian alternatives to democracy (Bilodeau, McAllister & Kanji, 2010, p. 154).

Various forms of communication contribute to the political socialization of migrants and refugees. As Liu and Gastil point out (2014, p. 256): “Through using news media, maintaining interpersonal and organizational connections, and engaging in neighborhood communication, newcomers engage in a dynamic process of political acculturation that has the potential to translate into greater political activity”. Consumption of political internet content was also seen as a predictor for political participation in the migration context. While Taiwanese internet content consumption led to a higher percentage of identification and cultural preference with Taiwan and more involvement in political participation concerning Taiwanese issues, more usage of American internet content led to more political participation in American issues (Wang et al., 2009). However, migrants from different ethnic backgrounds may experience diverse political socialization processes (Liu & Gastil, 2014). Besides, the length of residence has a positive influence on political knowledge among immigrants, contributing to their political socialization which depends on how they receive and process information (Adman & Strömblad, 2018; Cain, Kiewiet & Uhlaner, 1991).

In light of this literature, this study inquiries into how an Arab refugee diaspora moving from authoritarian to democratic regimes engages in processes of political re-socialization to inform themselves about the new political norms and democratic system in the Swiss political life using various media outlets. Hence:

RQ1: How do different types of news media and online diasporic communities contribute to the political re-socialization of Arabs with refugee origins into the Swiss political environment?

Information Acquisition in Diasporic Contexts

The concept of diaspora has been widely used to study settled migrants and refugees and its definition has witnessed important changes over time. While diaspora concept was proposed originally to describe the exiled Jews (Safran, 1991), Clifford (1997) argued that diaspora goes beyond the individualistic focus on exile to involve “dwelling, maintaining communities, having collective homes away from home” (p.251). As new digital technologies allow individuals to preserve transnational relationships over large geographical spaces, they enable creating what Appadurai (1996) describes as “diasporic public spheres”, which proposes an imagined community away from the homeland.

Ogunyemi (2015) argues that previous literature missed the active audience perspective when studying the media usage by diasporic groups who consume different media for various purposes including information, entertainment, engagement, commerce, and faith. This goes beyond merely using media as a means for fostering belonging to a certain community or producing political representation (Bozdag et al., 2012). According to Alencar and Deuze (2017), five motives of news consumption among refugee migrants are identified including acquiring information about current affairs in both the host country and the home

country, acquiring information that facilitate living and functioning in the host country, as well as acquiring information about events and current affairs of foreign countries (p.158).

Such need for information urges migrants to depend on a wide range of media sources including native media from the migrant's homeland, and host media from the receiving country. When individuals move to a new culture, the lack of the host language proficiency limits interactions with other people leading to reliance on native language media (Mansfield-Richardson, 1999). However, the consumption of host country media fosters means of host communicative competence that include host language knowledge, learning what is culturally suitable, being able to act according to the accepted norms, and learning about the host country's laws (Blakely, 2005; Syskova, 2013).

Digital platforms and online diasporic communities created by migrants blur the distinction between homeland and host country media as social media are used by minority groups with no mere focus on any of the two countries, but both. By bridging gaps between the local and the global spheres, such online communities serve as an archive for the textual and visual documentation of diasporic activities and actions (Al-Rawi & Fahmy, 2018), open a space for the process of constructing and debating identities (Marci, 2011) and foster transnational collective mobilization and political learning (Bernal, 2018; Witteborn, 2015). By connecting the political voices of young people in diaspora and back home, social media empower diasporians to change the negative image of their country of origin while updating them about the homeland problems and allowing them to contribute to a political change (Godin & Dona, 2016).

Regarding the context of the current study, prior research can be categorized into two groups. The first pays much attention to investigating media as information sources to facilitate the lives of migratory groups in the host country while keeping them updated about

what is going on in their homelands. The second explores the role of digital media and online communities in fostering means of transnational political activism and collective protest mobilization linking homeland and diaspora people. To connect them, this paper goes beyond answering questions about the information offered by media to serve the basic needs of refugees in the host country to focus on the political learning process that qualifies them to engage in transnational political participation and activist practices in their war-torn home countries. Hence:

RQ2: How do long-term settled Arabs with refugee backgrounds use traditional and new media to acquire political information about Arabic and homeland politics?

Methods

Over six months from September 2018 to February 2019, 60 semi-structured interviews with Arab refugees in the three language regions of Switzerland (mainly in Lugano, Chiasso, Geneva, Neuchâtel, Zurich, and Bern) were conducted. The sample includes 29 females and 31 males who come mainly from 6 war-torn countries including Syria, Libya, Iraq, Palestine, Yemen, and Lebanon, in addition to Algeria, Tunisia, and Jordan. Participants have permanent residency permits, work permits, or citizenship with a few on refugee permits with a minimum of 5 years of stay in Switzerland. The five years is the period after which refugee participants received the permanent residence permit that allows them to work and live in Switzerland without any restrictions before the recent updates on integration requirements imposed in 2019 (Legal Expat Geneva, 2019)

Respondents were recruited using a snowball sampling technique and interviews were conducted at the refugee's houses, mosques, Islamic and integration centers. Seven participants were interviewed via phone because of their tight work schedules. All the interviews were conducted in the Arabic language and the researcher, whose mother tongue is

Arabic, transcribed and translated all the interviews herself. Thematic analysis employed Nvivo 10 Pro Software to draw out in-depth meanings and social constructions.

Conducting interviews allowed for meeting participants in person and spending time with them and facilitated building a long-term rapport and gaining their trust to answer political questions. The findings provide a valuable understanding of political learning and news consumption behaviors among individuals with migratory backgrounds after long years of settlement in the host country.

Research Findings

Swiss Media and Political Re-socialization of Arabs in Diaspora

In response to *RQ1*, Swiss media play a central role in facilitating the political learning and re-socialization of Arabs from refugee backgrounds about the Swiss political system including issues related to the direct democracy practices, federal constitution, legislations, and migration laws. Unlike newly arrived refugees whose lack of host language knowledge can undermine their potential of consuming host country media for acquiring political knowledge (Mansfield-Richardson, 1999), long-term settled Arab participants reported high interest in watching the public service Swiss TV to acquire information about the local current events inside Switzerland and to engage in discussions about Swiss and European politics with their colleagues in workplaces. This demonstrates the bridging role of host television news in the migrants' political socialization (Chaffee, Nass & Yang, 1990). Besides, more than half of the informants read local cantonal Swiss newspapers, especially the free ones.

Interviewed participants who currently have the Swiss citizenship and rights to vote in their cantons reported the increase of their Swiss news consumption before federal or cantonal voting and elections to acquire background information that facilitates reaching an informed

decision (Marshall, 2019). This can be further understood in the light of Vreese and Boomgaarden's (2006) findings which indicate that news media with high political content such as public television news and broadsheet newspapers contribute the most to increasing political knowledge and tendency to vote.

Informants reported depending on a variety of Swiss media outlets to acquire information about the current events. To map these media sources out, 20 Minuti and Corrier del Ticino come on the top of the most read newspapers in the Swiss-Italian part while Radio Televisione Svizzera and Teleticino channels are widely consumed on TV. In the Swiss-French part, 20 Minutes, Arcinfo (local Giornal de Neuchâtel), Tribute de Geneve, Le Matin, Le Temps, and Neuchâtel Express are most read by participants, as well as Radio Télévision Suisse (RTS) and Alfa channel TV for Neuchâtel. In the Swiss-German part, reading 20 Minuten, Neue Zürcher Zeitung (NZZ) newspaper and Der Bund newspaper from the (German Bundestag, the Swiss parliament) is popular among participants. Only four respondents reported listening to radio channels such as radio Bern1 or Radio RaBe in the car on their way to work.

Although all participants showed trust in Swiss media regarding local issues, the majority of them expressed neither finding them effective nor trustworthy sources for acquiring information about Arabic politics or international affairs. “Local issues” here do not include the Swiss reporting about Muslim or migrant-related issues inside Switzerland which participants marked as “always negative”. In this context, participants evaluated trust based on their perceptions about the bias and impartiality of the news coverage and the accuracy of information presented by the media outlet. Seven perceived defects of the Swiss media's coverage of international politics have been reported by research participants. Although these critical arguments reflect the self-perceptions and personal assessment of participants, they

determine their relationship with Swiss media and influence their political news consumption behaviors:

- a) *Centrality/geographically limited coverage*: Swiss media are more local and European oriented, focusing mainly on Swiss-related topics without paying much attention to the international and Middle Eastern news.
- b) *Low-quality coverage*: Swiss media do not usually have correspondents in conflict areas or war zones in Arabic countries and mostly depend on news from other international media organizations including CNN, Euro news, Italian or French media. In this regard, a Yemeni participant (Woman 12, 18 years of residence, Chiasso) argues that “Arabic media is more intellectual than Swiss media” as they usually present first-hand information by having correspondents in various countries.
- c) *Insufficient coverage of Arabic news* which contributes to restricting Swiss people's understanding of the current circumstances in the Arabic world and negatively influences their tolerance and openness to refugees.
- d) *Misrepresentations of conflicts* in the Arabic world, especially in Palestine, Syria, Yemen and Iraq.
- e) *Refugees' voices are not heard in the Swiss media* as they are not given enough or equal opportunities to talk for themselves.
- f) *Negative portrayals of Muslims and Arabs* and the exploitation of media for promoting the right party propaganda.
- g) *Lack of information* about housing, education and health services offered to refugees.

According to majority of participants, such geographically limited coverage of Swiss media that focuses mostly on local affairs is highly influenced by what most of them referred to as “Swiss closeness” while contributing to it to a great extent. This insufficient coverage of

Arabic affairs also has a direct influence on some Swiss people's limited understanding of what is going on in these areas. As a Tunisian participant (Woman 26, 26 years of residence, Neuchâtel) argues, “Most of the Swiss middle-class workers are not interested in politics and do not pay so much attention about what is going on in other countries, even about news in Europe, and thus Swiss media reflect such a closed mentality”. She further explains that her daughter's history teacher was telling students that Mecca is located in Tunisia. Similarly, a Yemeni refugee explains that she once met a Swiss doctor who told her that “Yemen was fought and bombarded by Saudi Arabia”. She had to explain the important role played by Saudi Arabia in the conflict resolution and protecting the south. However, she was shocked by the mistaken image such a well-educated person might have (Woman 12, 18 years, Chiasso).

According to most of participants, such limited coverage about international affairs is also accompanied by misrepresentations about conflicts in many Middle Eastern countries. Many of the interviewed Syrian participants criticized the high focus of the Swiss and European media on the issue of ISIS which they consider “a way of distorting Islam”. As one of the informants further explains, media do not reflect the real face of the ongoing conflicts in Syria by neglecting what the Syrian regime does to people:

Swiss media coverage is weak. I once read a sentence on Swiss info website stating (the civil war between the governmental forces and rebels (القوات المتطرفين و الحكومة) and I find such selection of words biased. I sent some comments to the editors but they did not reply. This coverage influences the public opinion, they understand here that the problem in Syria is only about ISIS and they do not see the right picture (Man 17, 5 years of residence, Zurich).

The same coverage problem was also reported by an Iraqi refugee (Woman 11, 12 years, Lugano) who explained that Swiss media, like international and American media, tend to

“focus mainly on ISIS, ignoring the other older and more dangerous armed militant gangs and popular mobilization forces in Iraq that do not receive a similar coverage although they are older and more dangerous than ISIS” which implies that coverage follows a certain agenda.

Along with the partial coverage, the negative representations about Muslims and migrants in Swiss media seem to have a significant influence on how Arab refugees are perceived and treated. Many participants believe that negative portrayals are the main reason for igniting Swiss people's feelings against them serving the right parties' agendas:

The right parties have a planned strategy and ideology to activate and mobilize individuals and influence some sympathetic followers through the policy of intimidation of the foreigner and speaking about the threatened Swiss identity and the threatening existence of Islam. They use photos of some veiled women in their promotional posters even if the referendum is about something related to foreigners in general to stimulate the older age groups who constitute the biggest bulk of the electorate (Man 24, 25 years of residence, Neuchâtel).

Expectedly, the reported coverage defects have led to a high dependence among participants on media sources from neighboring countries especially TV channels in Italy, France and Germany to acquire information about international political affairs along with entertainment shows. Also, the high trust of Swiss people in their media was criticized by many participants who reported that “Swiss people trust their media blindly”. As a former refugee (Man 25, 10 years, Neuchâtel) comments:

Audiences developed the skills for criticizing mass media in our Arabic countries. Here (in Switzerland), people consider media and press as holy and they believe every word coming out of them.

These arguments are consistent with some statistics that highlight the Swiss people's high levels of trust in their news media. Switzerland, together with Sweden and the Netherlands, came among the top performers in this domain according to Reuters Institute's digital reports (2018). Although trust in 2019 has witnessed a slight drop from 2018, people's trust in individual media brands is still as high as 2018 (Reuters Institute, 2019, p.113).

The findings highlight trust as a central factor with a potential for fostering or undermining the role of media as political learning agents. However, newcomers' consumption of host media for learning about politics cannot be explored away from the host society's presumptions about migrants. While host media's representations about refugees play a great role in cultivating some of these presumptions, they can also help change and improve them.

Acquiring Information about Arabic Politics

In response to *RQ2*, almost all interviewed participants reported their interest in following Arabic and homeland political news on a daily basis in spite of their long-term settlement in Switzerland. Participants felt well-informed by a wide range of media sources that contributed to their continuous political learning about the ongoing events and conflicts in the Arabic region in general, and in their origin countries in particular. Consistent with the arguments of Kononova, Alhabash and Cropp, (2011), the consumption of homeland media did not negatively influence the process of political socialization in the host country as Arab participants use their native media to acquire political knowledge for various purposes.

Like Arabs in Sweden (El-Rabaie, 2011), most of the informants explained watching satellite TV channels from the origin countries or following news and videos posted regularly on the social media pages of these channels, either on Facebook or Youtube. Only a few participants reported reading local newspapers from their homelands online. Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabia are the most frequently used channels by the majority of participants for acquiring

political news about the Arab world. While some participants consider them as having a higher ceiling of freedom compared to other Arabic media sources, they reported not trusting their news one hundred percent. As a Syrian participant (Man 2, 5 years, Lugano) argues, the Arabic satellite TV channels have contributed to enlightening the Arab populations by providing information about politics. Thanks to the different media content they produce and the various political agendas they follow, such satellite TV stations “exposed Arab people to different ideologies, raised their awareness and contributed to their political learning and developing their critical thinking regarding political issues” according to him.

However, fake news and disinformation seem to be a continuous problem that affects refugees even after long years of their settlement in the destination country. Majority of participants showed high levels of media literacy and reported the trustworthiness and credibility of news as the main criteria for selecting their news sources. The same concerns about news accuracy were reported by refugees in camps and en route (Dekker et al., 2018; Gillispie et al., 2016; Wall, Otis Campbell & Janbek, 2015). Because most of participants moved to Switzerland as either human or political refugees fleeing conflicts, civil wars or persecution, many of them hold critical and opposing opinions towards the current political regimes in their homelands. Therefore, most of the interviewees, regardless of their nationalities and backgrounds, reported not trusting the Arabic media sources because they are either owned by the state or dominated by the ruling governments. They described them as “liars”, “influenced by the capital, government, and politics”, or “controlled by the state and existing regimes”. As a consequence, a few informants decided not to watch Arabic news to avoid being manipulated by what they call a “politicized propaganda”. For example, an Iraqi participant notes:

It is hard to know what to believe in Arabic media because each source publishes contradicting news to the other and every channel reports a completely

different story about the same event which facilitates disseminating fake news.

This makes me worried about my family in Iraq all the time because I hear about shelling, bombings and injuries, and when I call them, they tell me it was just exaggerated in the news. I recently stopped following the news because of this contradictory coverage. When my family tells me that something has happened, I only Google it and search for a couple of videos on Youtube (Woman 17, 15 years, Bern).

The murder of the Saudi Journalist Jamal Khashoggi was given as an example by many informants for how Arabic media tend to politicize the news reporting according to their interests, affiliations and political agendas. The incident also reflected the significant influence of media ownership on the editorial policy of the news outlets and their coverage for critical Arabic affairs. While *Al-Arabia*, like other Saudi media organizations, focused on praising the positive efforts the Saudi government has exerted to investigate the crime and arrest the suspects, *Al Jazeera's* coverage allocated more time and space for criticizing the Saudi's politics and arousing doubts. A Syrian participant criticized the media's politicized agenda-setting strategy which prioritizes certain topics and neglects others:

Arabic TV follows a political agenda. The murder of one journalist as Khashoggi dominated the news and undermined the news coverage of the destruction in Syria and the evacuation of thousands of Syrians. Such a topic was paid too much attention by Al Jazeera because of the political conflicts between Qatar and the KSA. (Man 1, 5 years, Lugano).

Another refugee explained why he never seeks analysis from Arabic media:

I never take analysis from the media. I only acquire information about the events because I believe every media channel has its own interests, political references and backgrounds and there is no independence. For me, Al Arabia TV channel is a speaker on the behalf of KSA while Al Jazeera speaks on the behalf of Qatar and that was clear in their contradicting coverage about Khashoggi. They both broadcast politicized news (Man 9, 5 years, Zurich).

Online Diasporic Communities and Political Learning

As a consequence of the lack of trust in news and the perceived low credibility of homeland and Swiss media coverage about Arabic politics and ongoing conflicts, three main counter-strategies are adopted by the majority of participants to get trustworthy political information. The first involves evaluating news through a filtration process by getting exposed to various traditional and digital information sources to compare between what is published in each of them and make a personal judgment. The second involves depending on news distributed by strong ties on social media, especially private WhatsApp groups that allow direct contacts with family members and friends back home as well as Swiss and European colleagues in the country of residence (Swart et al., 2019). The third includes acquiring information directly from trusted Facebook accounts of activists and regime opponents and following online opposition pages. The latter strategy was reported mainly by participants from Syria where the ongoing civil war has contributed to the widespread of rumors, propaganda, and misinformation and complicated the acquisition of accurate information (Yousuf & Taylor, 2016).

These alternative behaviors chime with the findings of Fletcher and Park (2017) who argue that people with low trust in news media have more tendency to engage in forms of

online news participation by using non-mainstream news sources such as social media and blogs to validate news credibility. The same online news consumption practice was also reported by refugees before and during their migration journeys where the information originated from their own existing social ties on social media are considered more trustworthy than official announcements or websites of organizations (Dekker et al., 2018).

A Syrian refugee (Man 10, 5 years, Zurich) explains that the live streaming offered by Facebook pages such as *Yawmeyat Qazefet Hawa* provides “a real face of what happens inside Syria” which he compares with the coverage of the public Syrian TV to verify information. According to an Algerian participant (Man 5, 20 years, Lugano), the high dependence of Arabic refugee diaspora members on social media to get political news enable Arabs in diaspora sometimes to acquire information about what is happening inside their home countries before those who live there who may not have a good internet connection or enough time to get online to follow news. This connecting role gives social media special importance in the hands of displaced Arab diaspora members who know about their home countries what native citizens might not know:

During the time of the Yemeni civil war, we used to find photos of unidentified martyrs online. Because there was an internet signal jamming on Facebook in the home country, the residents inside Yemen could not check those photos. Me, and other activists in the diaspora used to call friends in Yemen and give them detailed descriptions of the dead people to contact their families (Woman 15, 20 years, Bern).

However, Facebook started to lose its value as a source of political information for most of the participants while keeping its importance as a space for opinion expression about general non-political issues among most of them. This is inconsistent with statistics about the Swiss

population that show Facebook on the top of social media and messaging applications for news acquisition in particular (Reuters institute, 2019). Majority of informants reported not expressing their political opinions on social media, especially Facebook, as they fear being tracked by their homeland governments and endangering the lives of their families back home. Instead, private WhatsApp groups come first as the main information source for more than half of the research participants, followed by Facebook. This corresponds to recent findings from other research projects about the widespread usage of WhatsApp for discussing news and political issues (Mefolere, 2016; Swart et al., 2019).

A Libyan participant reports reducing her Facebook usage two years ago although she used to consider it a very valuable information source at the start of the civil war in Libya in 2011. In her opinion, Facebook news started to lack credibility because of “the continuous attack on Facebook pages that publish against the Libyan regime right now” (Woman 2, 20 years, Lugano). Another former Palestinian refugee (Woman 4, 17 years, Lugano) describes Facebook as an “old-fashioned tool with repeated news” and a source of cyberbullying and discrimination for her daughter from her school mates:

I refer directly to the WhatsApp group created by my brother who lives in Lebanon to acquire any news about Palestine or Lebanon. He posts videos, photos and texts from which I get enough news and information, even before they are broadcast in channels like Al-Jazeera or Al-Arabia (Woman 4, 17 years, Lugano).

This highlights the role of WhatsApp as a filtering tool where refugees as news consumers tend to “see news filtered through others who share the content rather than going directly to the reporting source” (Sterrett et al., 2019). Here, the trustworthiness of the person who shares the online story highly matters (Sterrett et al., 2019). As many participants expressed depending on the daily WhatsApp group messages sent by their friends and workmates about

politics, this consumption behavior raises concerns about the roles of these closed groups in fostering echo-chambers where diaspora people prefer to meet those who share the same political affiliations, beliefs and preferences. Although this provides a safer environment for current and former refugees who fear digital surveillance, such online communities might not provide a diverse space or heterogeneous environment for political opinion discussions.

Founding a newspaper or magazine for meeting the informative needs of Arab migrants in Switzerland is a very costly and time-consuming task and requires a high level of cooperation with people in different cities and cantons to collect and verify the information. Therefore, social media networks allowed Arabs with refugee backgrounds to create their alternative media outlets to serve the needs of their diasporic groups locally and internationally. Creating online diasporic communities through social media groups provides an easier and free of charge option according to almost all participants. This led to a complete shift from the traditional ethnic media forms like newspapers, community radios and TV channels as demonstrated by prior research (e.g., Moon & Park, 2007; Pae, 2001).

Reserving the Islamic identity is also important for most of participants as it is a way for connecting them in spite of their different backgrounds and political affiliations. Such identity negotiations are mainly practiced either offline or in private/closed on Whatsapp groups on which Muslims from different nationalities and sects including Arabs, Turks, Albanians, and Iranians meet to discuss social and religious issues. For example, members of *Female Muslims in Ticino* WhatsApp group regularly post in Arabic, Italian, and Farsi languages to plan their monthly gatherings, send wishes on Islamic feast days, and share prayers, advice about raising children, condolences when someone passes away and clips for Islamic scholars preaching about different topics. Closer friends create their own WhatsApp groups to share more private and intimate life details.

Conclusion

The current study investigates the various roles played by traditional and digital media outlets in the processes of political learning and political re-socialization of long term-settled Arabs with refugee backgrounds in Switzerland. While moving to a new democratic environment after fleeing persecution, wars or conflicts in home countries seems to be a privilege, it also presents a big challenge for newcomers whose political integration and acquisition of political knowledge about the host country are among of the main requirements of their naturalization. This translates into a high dependence on Swiss media, especially public services TV and local newspapers in the three Swiss language regions, to understand the political system and form a decision before participating in elections and referenda as reported by the majority of participants.

In terms of political re-socialization, Swiss media seem to play two contradicting roles. On one side, they provide trustworthy sources of information about Swiss non-Muslim related local affairs contributing significantly to the continuous learning processes of Arabs about the political norms and values of the host country. On the other side, providing limited and incomplete coverage about the Arabic affairs seems to negatively influence the Swiss people's learning about the Arabic politics and conflicts, as it edits out the context and conditions under which refugees fled their origin countries which might undermine their acceptance for and sympathy towards refugees.

Despite their long settlement, most interviewed Arabs with refugee backgrounds show a high interest in following politics from their homelands and the neighboring Arabic countries on almost a daily basis. In this context, it can be argued that refugees do not detach themselves from the political sphere back home as the political re-socialization process related to the democratic political system they settled in goes hand in hand with their political

learning and knowledge acquisition about politics in their origin countries. This shows an ongoing influence of the early life socialization they received before their forced migration which significantly contributes to shaping their political interests and understanding. This reflects on their purposive consumption of media from various Swiss, Arabic and international sources that do not necessarily come at the expense of consuming one another (Gezduci & D'Haenens, 2007).

Perceived media credibility and individual trust in news are central elements that significantly influence the migrants' media consumption behaviors and preferences, influencing their information acquisition and political learning which indirectly impacts their political re-socialization processes. Drawing on the previous findings, it can be further argued that the Arab participants' high skepticism in the homeland politics reflects on the low trust of their homeland and Arabic media sources, believing that most of them promote the pre-planned agenda of the state. The perceived low media credibility urges Arab diaspora members to navigate through a wide variety of traditional and online news sources to verify information and reach credible sources. This involves non-mainstream news exposure that allows for seeking alternative viewpoints (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). Therefore, online diasporic communities on social media networks allow building strong and weak ties with individuals who are considered by participants as more credible than mainstream media dominated by governments. The same case is reported by asylees before and during the migration (Dekker, 2018; Witteborn, 2015).

The nature of the sample in the current study presents many challenges and limitations. Being members of a vulnerable group who have fears of being tracked by the home and host countries' governments made it almost impossible to reach a representative sample of Arabs with refugee backgrounds in Switzerland. Many refugees refused to participate in the research and some refused to answer certain questions. Future researchers

should study how the consumption of different news media to gain political knowledge might translate into various forms of conventional and unconventional political participation and civic engagement practices. Because migrants from different ethnic groups might go through different political socialization processes (Liu & Gastil, 2014), comparing how refugees from other countries consume news media to educate themselves about the new political context while keeping themselves updated about the ones they fled also requires further research.

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