Computer Mediated Communication and the Promotion of World Cultural Diversity

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ARTICLE DATA	ABSTRACT
	In order to unpack the potential of CMC to promote the world cultural diversity, nomadology as the major cultural medium is considered, especially that it holds structural affinities to orality striking a tripartite media (CMC-nomad-oral). Nomadology suggests a traditional cultural structure that is already re-attracting academic interest with the advent of new media technologies. Rhizome as cultural theory used to explore social media negotiates its structural potential to promote cultural diversity, not just globalization. Considering the global reach of cyberspace, the diversity of world cultures are hosted on the same plane of interaction to "connect" and negotiate their potential of development and spread. Therefore, this study aims at introducing new perceptions to the cultural potential of CMC through arguing that the diversity of world cultures stand a chance of promotion amidst the tech-based globalization sweeping cultural production.

1. Introduction

[We need] to participate actively in the process of collective intelligence, which... makes cyberspace so valueable. Our new tools should serve to enhance our culture, skills, resources, and local projects; they should help people participate in mutual assistance collectives, cooperative learning groups, and so on ...[We should] combat inequality...[,]exclusion and strive for *increased autonomy*. However...[we] must also avoid creating new forms of dependency caused by the consumption of information or communication services designed and produced for purely commercial or imperial ends, which all too frequently disqualify the traditional forms of knowledge and skill belonging to disadvantaged social groups and regions (Levy 223).

Back in the year of 2000, Pierre Levy speaks of collective consciousness as catalyst for cultural promotion under capitalist pressures. Setting the world into a mode of hyper-connectivity instigated by capitalist ambition weaves about a "Grand Society", as Anouar Majid puts it, hegemonizing international cultures under the supremacy of business (Majid 140). However, the 'Others' of this 'Grand Society', the diversity of world cultures, have the potential for development through "reactivating solidarity networks and reinventing a lost mode of social interaction" (Majid 145). Modes of communication made available for an interactive collective both instigate and reveal interesting insights to prospects of cultural promotion.

Studying social media shows that can be a tool for the mobilization and empowerment of the free vigorous collective. This research draws upon the rhizome as philosophical grounds in order to probe the structure of the free mobile acentered "collective" and explore its potential for cultural productivity. The study picks up the free model of collective action and production, namely,

the war machine. Analysis explores the context of the war machine, its plane of productivity scope; its resident, the nomad and its strategy of mobility and vigour communicated in its weaponry/small pieces.

Although Ibn Khaldoun describes nomads from a different perspective than that of Deleuze and Guattari, the value of the (free) collective alluded to in Ibn Khaldoun inspires much of the work of Nomadology. Deleuze builds on Ibn Khaldoun's nomad war machine in his promotion of the "collective" as espirit de corps (morale of a group), proposing a concept which clearly stems from the collective as "families or lineages" (*'asabeyaa*) in Ibn Khaldoun (A Thousand Plateaus 366). He posits that the nomad is the repository of potential needed for establishing a strong civilization. This owes to values of sharing glory and maintaining solidarity (Ibn Khaldoun 20). As civilizations proceed, across generations occupying the same place, the freshness and sharpness of a nomad culture inevitably fades. Glory becomes the trophy of the individual and soon solidarity, which is the basic component of civilization, according to Ibn Khaldoun, shatters (Ibn Khaldoun 29). Eventually, corruption and weakness work hand in hand to bring about weaker phases to the same civilization.

In order to unpack the potential of CMC to promote the world cultural diversity, nomadology as the major cultural medium is considered. Nomadology (dynamic Nomadism) suggests a traditional cultural structure that works away from the sedentary hierarchic. It is traditional in the sense that it has been around since the dawn of history, and is already re-attracting academic interest with the advent of new media technologies. Its rules of expansion and appropriation were presented by Deleuze and Guattari as Nomad Science. My project both proposes to contextualize the Rhizome cultural theory in social media and negotiates its structural potential to promote cultural diversity, not just globalization. The study has largely unraveled structures and patterns of negotiating political-cultures and mobilizing e–users. The war machine operates by laws of nomadology and invents "weapons" as artifacts for promoting its culture. Investigating the Deleuzo-Guattarian philosophy helps explore into depth the potential of internet media through 'reorganizing' its participants along a freer decentralized model (e-nomadology). Cyberspace is a vicinity of mobility and vigour which makes and is made up by the free aggregate of online participants. Considering the global reach of cyberspace, the diversity of world cultures are hosted on the same plane of interaction to "connect" and negotiate their potential of development and spread. Therefore, this study aims at introducing new perceptions to the cultural potential of communication media.

Computer mediated communication (CMC) and Nomadology structurally get closer via orality. Studying the medium of orality reveal affinities of communication properties of the internet when used by the e-nomad free collective. Ibn Khaldoun noted that orality is more in keeping with nomadology than literacy (Ibn Khaldoun 121). Therefore, research on orality deepens philosophical analysis on nomadology through exploring its immediacy of communication, context dependence as well as its being vivid, communal and interactive. CMC takes up the dynamicity, instantaneity and passionate energy of orality adding communicational complexity through pictures, short videos and hypertext. The social function of orality largely falls into either reassembling communal culture through edutainment (education and entertainment) or mobilizing its people to (passionate) action. More depth is reached with CMC read against orality and Rhizome revealing structural affinities to orality and obvious potential for cultural appropriation and expansion as promised by the rhizome.

In the attempt to address the question of cultural promotion online, this study offers to explore nomadology, orality and the internet in order to investigate how far cyberspace works with a culture of oral nomadism trusting in the potential of the collective,

rather than hierarchic established systems, for promoting the diversity of world cultures (globalism[1]), rather than constructing an instance of globalization (hierarchic and power-based homogenization of culture).

2. The Threat of Cultural Hegemony

As technological advancement expands throughout the globe, aspects of distance and detachment seem to be irrelevant. Means of communication develop quickly to promote international efforts of drawing 'better' circulation for raw material and labour. Many countries attempt active processes for "bridging cultures", seeking the ripe fruit of 'liberal' economy and 'improved' human skills. However, an unquenchable interest in capital evolved constructing a "them/us" syndrome reducing the world into the center/periphery divides on the basis of economy, a division engineered to prioritize the interests of the Market rendering all that does not produce capital of secondary importance. This polarity consolidates when codes of industrial and technological production crystallize as the criteria which sets off "developed" countries from the "under-developed". Consequently, many nations are tempted to apply capitalist attitudes to their economies allowing numerous social, cultural and environmental modifications to take place replacing their traditional norms. Besides, they promptly operate "cultural bridging" as long as it allows capitalism to spread into their socio-economic structures.

At a time when cultural borders are constantly being "bridged", multi-national capitalism, and its culture of globalization, weave a discourse of cultural hegemony that hampers the development of other, less popular or traditional, socio-cultural features so as not to risk a "clash of civilizations" that would threaten its endless interests (Majid 10). The world inevitably is reduced to a closed system serving the Market. A number of alert studies set out to analyze attempts to promote globalization (which is widely regarded as a market-based cultural discourse) in ways that would delineate the dangers of cultural hegemony on socio-cultural and political spheres. In *Unveiling Tradition: Islam in a Polycentric World,* Anouar Majid subtly describes the threat of capitalism and market-based cultures generating suppressed tensions, frustrations and speedy random social changes in a world "run by a few transnational corporations in which relatively few people with disposable incomes are offered a dizzying variety of consumer products while the bulk of the world's population is reduced to mere window shopping" (Majid 12-3).

The spacious territories of capital advancement are solidifying at limits constructing a closed system. Market-based culture, a mainstream trend of globalization, promotes a uni-cultured universe preoccupied with scientific and materialistic concerns, helped with mass media corporations and formative education. Majid is one of those who were quick to recognize a number of attempts to preserve cultural specificities and advocate the promotion of more humanitarian cultures throughout the globe. He joins efforts with such attempts by embarking on a theoretical project that suggests "unveiling" and "re-evaluat[ing]… the world's indigenous traditions" (Majid 152). According to him, whatever is not homogenous is specific, in the sense that it is considered a non-mainstream culture. He proposes a cultural progressive agenda that suggests a "delinking", from the system of closed money-based culture as a means of making up for the ethical and psychological tensions in our contemporary society. He suggests a "liberation theory" where global diversities and spirituality are allowed room and development to build "a multi-cultural and more egalitarian world civilization" (Majid 12). His proposition stems from the idea that the world started out as a rich diversity which was subjected to the two-fold forces of colonialism and nationalism. The former planted the seeds of

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[1] R. Bogue posits that "globalism" is a rhizomic world order which reflects an open opportunity for interaction where all cultural components are reassembled in a dynamic ongoing production process. Bogue's concept of globalism describes a way out of globalization for traditional cultures following the Deleuze and Guattari theory of the Rhizome, as an open ended dynamic system of productivity.
R. Bogue proposes "globalism" as a new form of globalization that promotes dynamic interaction rather than confining the world cultures in terms of Western priorities and preferences.

capitalism or money-based preoccupations on global scale promoting concepts of primitivism, division and intolerance as its fuel. The latter, on the other hand, forced isolation on socio-cultural entities hampering the progression of indigenous cultures and traditions, rich with humanitarian and spiritual properties, reducing such legacies to frozen, or rather "museumized", cultural forms (Majid 12).

As if it were not cumbersome enough, static cultural forms are disseminated via the medium of literacy which advocates distance and objectivity. Therefore, pure literacy, coupled with cultural isolation, does not provide the best channel for cultural promotion, or what Majid terms "progressive" traditional culture (Majid 150). The internet does not work with isolation, rather, it encourages multi-national border crossing, as discussed earlier. Moreover, its communication options offer to copy properties of orality as discussed in the work of Havelock, Ong and Lauria. It seems to offer structural dynamicity and vitality needed for the promotion of cultures inviting negotiations and displays sensitivity to its changing cultural context. More on the potential of orality will be discussed in a later section of the introduction.

Given that the internet serves and promotes the culture of the Market, cultural interaction online structurally promises a reassemblage of education, business and political views to weave around a cultural homogeneity or globalization. Anouar Majid's proposition of promoting traditional cultures within a globalist cultural setting suggests the possibility of charting out a productive system that would allow diverse cultures to promote interconnected differences as a means of counteracting cultural hegemony. Such a proposition was also mentioned in Bogue (145) when he pictured a 'globalism' that would counteract globalization. Accordingly, this study sets out to investigate how the capitalist setting and tool of the internet structurally allows for the promotion of non-market based traditional cultures? What will the anchors of belonging be? And what prospects does this convey for traditional cultures? Can the proposed theoretical frame of the rhizome offer a means of development and productivity for multiple cultures without them setting out to out rule each other?

3. Contesting Cyberspace: Global Interaction; Traditional Loyalties and Issues of Belonging

In a study of online interaction among young people from the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa) via the Mideast Youth Network, Christina Schachtner discusses the impact of daily international interaction impact on identity and loyalty,

As [users] draw on unlimited resources … for their self-image and personal strategies, do they see themselves as being part of the worldwide [global] internet society... as upholders of the society of the future, or do hybrid lifestyles ultimately make them lose out on a homeland? (Schachtner 14).

As such, in her "Cultural Flows and Virtual Publics: The Role of Digital Media in Transcultural Discourses", Schachtner addresses the impact of globalisation on personal identities, self-image(s) and loyalties of the international MENA (Middle East and North Africa) users of the internet, as a contested space for promoting the traditional within the globalistic.

Her study is based on a concept of culture as a metamorphosing assemblage of "values, social rules, lifestyles and patterns of interpretation and behaviour...[which are] created, put into perspective, discarded and changed in inter-subjective exchange" (Schachtner 4). She adds, "it has to be acquired and configured in a continual process of development...[as] a porous system that is predisposed towards external impulses", within which we inevitably take up the act of "creating oneself (anew)"(Schachtner 5; 10). With a growing frequency of uses and number of users, with a potential of challenging value systems and norms; developing new codes of behaviour across international users of the world and "creating" cultural surroundings, the question of traditional culture online production becomes increasingly relevant.

In her discussion of Habermas, Schachtner points that an accessibility-for-all, for discussion and collective action, fosters cultural formation for culture as "public" and based on "social consensus" which structurally suggests virtual public space as a *contested*

arena (Schachtner 9). She quotes Habermas' prediction of a public sphere that "would be transformed structurally" as a result of growing commercialization and concentration of communication networks" (Schachtner pp.7-8). Multiple cultural emergences on the same plane, thus becomes competitive, subject to globalist terms. (cf. Globalism as a Rhizomic offer for world cultures, empowers cultures non-discriminatingly).

Reporting on her study of Mideast Youth Network users, Schachtner highlights the significance of religion. Despite users' different cultural and religious affiliations, participants were bound by an obvious interest in religion, spelled out their need to challenge some "absolute truths", reconsider and establish new meanings, alongside with a desire to formulate their own approach to religion (Schachtner 13). Another reportedly common aspect is their agreement on freedom and personal rights for (inter)national interaction for human beings. Communication seems to offer cultural interaction patterns that would make up for the loss of long established values, norms and rules in a changing society" (Schachtner 10).

Schachtner notes that differences are always negotiated. In this mixture of common aspects and differences, areas of "fuzziness, ambiguity and uncertainty" can arise. Accordingly, e-participants can combine "viewpoints, values and lifestyles anew and where something can arise which cannot be attributed to one's own culture or to a foreign culture but is something *in between*" (Schachtner 13- my italics). The noted structure of interaction among differences and in-betweeness very much relates to the rhizomic concept. In-betweenees displays a stance of accommodating diversity for promoting productivity.

Dynamicity, spontaneity, immediacy and in-betweenness are visible components in most cultural studies, and in particular, the theory of the Rhizome. It is used in this thesis for studying cultural promotion and appropriation strategies through analyzing structures of internet communication.

4. Rhizome

Ronald Bogue has noted that scholars interested in the question of globalization have heavily drawn upon "nomadism" for study (Bogue 123), which has a special appeal in Deleuze and Guattari's work, tackled as "nomadology". In his essay on "Nomadism, Globalism and Cultural Studies", Bogue proposes its "potential role in the formation of a domain of cultural studies that promotes a positive, creative and non-totalizing 'globalism' " (Bogue 123).

Nomadology is proposed in the theory of the Rhizome charting out a vivid and dynamic system of productivity. As related in their two books on *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari point out that differences become a chance for productivity; mobility promise creativity and dynamicity, generating endless energy. The rhizome is built on six principles which govern its operations and extend its rhizomic hue to all components of the system. As discussed with more details in chapter one, the rhizome presupposes a world view of equality and dynamicity where diversities are quickly invited to connect, interact and produce in an endless manner. Its major active component of expansion is the "war machine", one of the most unsettling notions in Deleuze (Bogue 129). It copies the structure of the rhizome and seeks to appropriate its surroundings through incessant interaction. Its ecological enemy is the static hierarchic structured *sedate*, which is subject of attack and borrowing at the same time. The theory has attracted enthusiastic reactions from critics, as Mokhtar Ghamboo mentions, describing the text as "stunning and amazing" (Ghamboo 193). He quotes Brian Massumi's introduction of *A Thousand Plateaus*, "[It] points out that the positive power of nomad thought lies in its capacity to synthesize every attempt that is "anarchic", transgressive, and "outside" the intellectual norms" (Ghamboo 194).

The war machine is after system expansion, rather than war; it is a perfect capitalist machine that depends on mobility and speed to create soft power among its surroundings. Owing to the fact that territory is no longer a central theme in the fashionable rhetoric of cultural studies, mobility and border-crossing of the new Millennium are often analyzed in the terms of the rhizome.

However, Sahar Abdel-Hakim points out that this cultural "applaud" for nomadism results in few attempts to "scrutinize the concept and question its validity as a viable means for change. Fewer still are those who question which direction that longed-for change would take us" (Abdel-Hakim 300). The conclusion of the thesis comprises a discussion over evaluating the impact of the Rhizome in relation to the spirit and culture of cyberspace.

The Rhizome is taken up and adapted in this thesis to chart out traditional cultural production online. It takes up the assemblage, as a war machine structure, and relates intrinsic rhizomic concepts like nomads, immigrants and weaponry. The theory both provides the tool of analysis and allows for the handling and intermingling of the diverse study threads: the technological culture and medium; and the traditional culture and medium (orality) within a globalist capitalist culture and/or media (online). Accordingly, the writer proposes to write at the limits of the rhizome addressing an orality war machine in order to capture a vivid productive account of orality, an e-orality war machine to monitor how the orality war machine functions online, e-nomads to describe the smooth and speedy movement of online users and e-immigrants for relating e-users to their off-line backgrounds.

5. Orality War Machine: Tradition and Rhizome

Setting world cultures in textbooks and "written" text material only underwrites the vivid reality and significance of these cultures, at a time when business realities are exceedingly promoting globalization in everyday life in many societies. In the legacy on orality and literacy studies, both Walter Ong and Havelock stress a culturally reducing effect of the literate cultural experience. According to Ong, "written words are residue" of an interaction (Ong 11). Literacy develops an experience of "distance" and "objectivity" which proposes a structure of cultural development different from the oral.

Traditional cultures are typically promoted via orality (with or without a supplementary literacy component). Orality works on structuring identity in a communal setting establishing shared group value systems. The milieu of orality is generally practical; abstraction is deemed unimportant. Objects are identified and grouped on bases of real life utility. Games, riddles and entertainment are socially effective, interactive and didactic. Intelligence and skills are assessed in terms of productivity and sum of social skills that are acquired through apprenticeship (whether spiritual or for survival, and typically blending both). Oral culture is action bound with events related to describe action, names figure in genealogies rather than in neutral lists and information is shared to instigate more action or interaction.

The structure of orality encourages us to think of it in its real dynamic forms instead of reducing it to abstract contemplation. This is one of the reasons of proposing the orality war machine that keeps up the tenor of vitality, dynamicity and productivity of (traditional) cultures. Besides, orality has always been the favourite medium of the nomads, according to the rhizome and the philosophy of nomadology. Deleuze proposed an image of the world as an extended space or *plane* of interaction where inhabitants endlessly and vigorously roam producing their own culture, in a free collective nature, and fighting State hierarchic structures to appropriate them. War is not violence, it is connotative of strong emotions, collective undertakes, revolutionary and winning out through high productivity. (Chapter two delineates the orality war machine in details).

Orality critics have extensively drawn upon religion as an example of traditional culture. Ong, Havelock and Lauria, link up religion to traditional culture via orality medium. Studying the orality war machine, conceptualizing Deleuze, sustains the spiritual edge to the war machine. Peter Hallward says of Deleuze, " rather than...any sort of 'fleshy materialist', Deleuze is most appropriately read as a spiritual, redemptive ...thinker...preoccupied with the mechanics of *dis*-embodiment and *de*-materialisation" (Hallward 3). Although Hallward's reference to spirituality aims at disqualifying Deleuze's philosophy for our world, the very conditions of online virtuality seem to provide an adequate space for Deleuze speculations about productivity to be investigated.

6. The E-Orality War Machine: Cyber, Tradition and Rhizome

Orality studied as a dynamic war machine also reveals a structural affinity to the internet, which charts out obvious potential for the internet to promote traditional cultures. Robert Fowler interestingly notes that from orality to hypertext is like going back to the future! In his electronic book *The Secondary Orality of the Electronic Age*, he draws heavily on Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*[2] which enlists the properties of orality (and contrasts them to literacy) within the proposition of the second coming of orality via new technologies after being undermined by print literacy.

Based on an awareness of the transience of man, orality is keenly used to impart and promote traditions. It encourages people to entrust themselves to the storage and production of information and culture allowing for socio-cultural involvement and interactivity. Similarly, the internet interactivity potential promotes communal and subjective attitudes, and helps users to play both roles of producers and consumers simultaneously, what Burns terms "produsers" (Burns 405). This term he coins for reflecting the double process of consumption and production is based on an active collective.

However, this proposition claims that orality will be re-produced online replacing literacy and print. It is not difficult to argue against this point. Online interaction easily draws from orality (cordial instant communal interaction) and literacy (typed screens, saved sheets for further viewing and asynchronous communication). CMC (computer-mediated communication) interaction will neither substitute earlier forms of communication, nor keep them intact. It seems that it rhizomically produces an *in-between* that makes a more complex communication possible, keeping up to change and development across times of use.

The evolving cultural set up, according to Pierre Levy, is double-fold. It relies on the quantity of production and on the media of production and consumption. He posits that "cultural diversity in cyberspace will be directly proportional to the active involvement and quality of the contributions of representatives of different cultures" (Levy 225). In Deleuzean terms, he suggests that *qualitative multiplicities* would be the way to promote cultural diversity online. He even suggests that online material should be prodused in native language for non-English speakers, besides a translation of some sort for broadest distribution (Levy 227). In other words, the sum of online production is the only determining factor for cultural multiplicity. The more productive the diverse world cultures are, the more cultural diversity is promoted.

Levy adds that media properties make another significant factor in cultural production. According to him, technological inventions "not only enable us to do the same things more quickly or better, or on a greater scale, but also allow us to do, feel or organize things differently" (Levy 119). It simply complexifizes our realities and modes of cultural promotion and negotiates rather than substitute the real. Literacy did not replace orality, but reorganized the system of communication and social memory. Levy explains that the Telephone added a new culture to conversation, but did not replace it. Similarly, the cinema gave a new culture, but did not replace the theatre (Levy 194). Therefore, the concept of hyper reality as a substitution to our immediate reality (as briefly discussed below in Baudrillard) fails to capture the scope of cultural potential of development in communication via cyberspace.

Levy's notion of "complexification", however, betrays an evolutionary hue. He offers to place cyberculture in a perfect globalist mode. Oral societies precede civilized imperial societies which are, according to him, followed by "the concrete globalization of societies" (Levy 234).Hence, he suggests that orality stands for the primitive, the earlier underdeveloped dawn of a "globalization of societies". Hence a need to investigate the option of globalism, suggested via the Rhizome, emerges.

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[2] So much work is done on Ong. I found the work of Robert Fowler, John December, Mary Clark and Neil Corcoran especially useful to my discussion.

The e-orality war machine is thus proposed to investigate the cultural tool of the internet by striking the *warmachine- smooth space* combination. According to Deleuze, this combination is "nomadism" *par excellence.* The nomad and the desert make an assemblage of similarity, not of difference, structurally speaking, constructing a self-sufficient world where the social, political and religious conditions that force an immigrant to move are non-existent celebrating a distinct autonomous world (Ghamboo 204). In other words, the e-orality war machine provides best opportunity to capture the full vent of the cultural theory in order to reveal its empowering impact for the world diversities[3].

7. Conclusion

Speaking of creating a world of our wishes, does it have to be new, or can it be a revival of a shared collective dream. The world of hyper-reality invites new and ancient all on the same plane of *chances*. Can people revive a dream of an ancient perfect civilization in their hearts then connect it to make a reality. Can the past be revisited, resurrected on smaller scales (of video games, motivational speakers, stories and other cultural materials) to promote a *local absolute*? Can the dream be prodused to construct an e-civilization that would largely travel offline and become life-real.

Asychronicity of communication replaces all mediation. Maybe there will be no need to re-write history for recontextualizing its morals. Rather the digitalizing the past reveals interesting points for future research as relates to the impact of inviting cultural codes from the stretches of time and distance unto the same plane of interaction.

Asychronicity stitches the centuries together through digital libraries. "Far from uprooting the pattern of "tradition", cyberculture turns in…perfect synchrony with cyberspace. [It] embodies…purely spatial form of transmission…temporal connections [are] an after-thought…as if all humankind's memory were deployed in the moment: an immense act of synchronous collective intelligence, converging on the present" (Levy 236).

The past and the present, the global and the local stand equal chances of impact. The cultural product is complexified with less chances of a traditional only or a globalized only formats.

This article is developed from a PhD thesis that won the Best PhD Thesis Award in Cairo University, Faculty of Arts, 2013. It serves to reveal insights into the potential for cultural promotion via the growing spaces of CMC, be it social media or other online communication modes. Many of the propositions of study are still relevant today although it started out with the potential of equal consumption and production of knowledge online, users in 2022 will re-read it with questions that pertain to identity and intensity of online knowledge production.

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[3] CF. Ghamboo would repeatedly speak of this theory as an imperialist project that oppresses other cultures. More on this will be discussed in the conclusion.

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