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“HEGEMONY VS. NEW MEDIA: A NEO-MARXIST PERSPECTIVE ON A NEW WORLD ORDER”

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ABSTRACT

The term “ideology” refers to a system of beliefs, either individual or institutional, that justify values, behaviors, expectations, and perception; decisions and judgments are made through the lens of one’s ideology. By definition, then, ideology is oppressive. Every psychological and social assessment is manipulated by ideology, and very rarely do people operate outside of their philosophical construct. We trust our own personal ideology to be explicative of who we are as individuals. But ideology is dynamic and can be manipulated, as it always has been. Placing power in the wrong hands can lead to an unbecoming lower-class ideology that benefits the desires of those who control.

For centuries, the media has played an important (if not the most important) tool for influencing ideology. What captures the most media attention is what is perceived to be the most significant story/event, what is attractive is determined by what is pleasantly displayed in the media, and the media frame revises what occurs in reality. In so many words, whoever controls the media has the potential to influence the general public in a way that transcend physical coercion. But who is in control? Is it the print and digital media corporations, or perhaps the government? Whoever controls what is publicized usually establishes a community’s ideology. Major social change only occurs when reform can rival the voice and reach of the media.

However, the onset of Web 2.0 has flipped the status quo on its head, especially social media. There is a tremendous amount of information now available to the public at the touch of a button, which does not bode well for tyrannical bourgeoisie because citizens can easily discover oppression and injustice. International borders are collapsing due to the Internet and globalization, and so communal ideology is no longer limited to members of one nation; there is widespread exposure of every society. Therefore, people who have their rights restricted recognize there are those who do not and quite often demand change. It is not difficult for a
person to boot up a computer and speak through a medium that was never available to ordinary citizens before: a medium that makes his or her voice available to the public.

For the first time in history, traditional media has competition. Scholars, especially Marxist and neo-Marxist, have viewed traditional media as controllable, and therefore, the entity that differentiates the bourgeoisie and proletariats. New media, however, has made the line of power between the two extremely transparent. The floodgates have since opened and the battle has begun with ideology playing the part of Jerusalem. This modern day crusade, much like those based on religion, battles for control of an abstract concept with no clear good or bad guy. Those who feel oppressed try to accumulate enough support to overthrow whatever or whoever is subjugating them, while those in power are trying to maintain order. This struggle is ongoing and has sparked riots and reforms worldwide.

However, as we have seen riots and rebellion developed through new media and online social networking, we have also seen the inherent danger of revolutions being creating so quickly without a cohesive ideology of the activists. We have seen tyrannized citizens assemble online and rise up in the streets to gain their freedom, and we have also seen revolutions ill advised and stopped short. We have seen the Arab Spring spark social and governmental reform as well as chaos and death. We have seen the Occupy Wall Street movement address economic inequality and power imbalance, but also misinformation and eventual dissipation. What we haven’t seen, however, is civic disobedience accumulated so densely and so expediently, all to the credit/blame of new media.
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Chapter 1

Ideology and Power

The ideology of an individual is the base from which all psychological judgments are made. Through the lens of his or her unique ideology, a person can comprehend, categorize, and critique every sensation. Ideology is the foundation of values, ethics, and emotion, and determines what is appropriate and what is attractive. It is what enables a person to be consistent; if every decision, judgment, and feeling comes from the same ideology, then there is commonality from day to day. Ideology is extremely powerful, though intangible. It is oppressive, and it is liberating: oppressive because one cannot act outside of ideology, and liberating because it enables one to comprehend anything. Ideology allows humans to interpret what exists and how it is perceived. Though ideology is formally defined in a myriad of ways, varying from source to source, it can be understood as the totality of beliefs, values, doctrine, etc. that guides an individual or institution. It encompasses “the relationships of men, all their actions, their chains, and their limitations” (Marx, 1846). It is the psychological and social lifeblood of an individual.

Humans are not born with a set ideology, though; it is developed through experience, nurturing, and education. “There is no abstract ‘human nature’, fixed and immutable (a concept which certainly derives from religious and transcendentalist thought), but that human nature is the totality of historically determined social relations, hence a historical fact which can, within certain limits, be ascertained with the methods of philology and criticism” (Gramsci, 1971). Socially accepted ethics, government, law, politics, rhetoric, mannerisms, attractiveness, and beliefs are a few dependents of ideology. They govern the values and behaviors of the members
of the community and establish what is acceptable and true. All available information and the way it is presented influences ideology, and ideology influences the way people perceive all available information and how it is presented. Observing a people’s characteristics enables ideologies to be categorized from one community to the next, which can identify the source of relationships and conflicts between competing parties. There are inherent ideological constructs that accompany certain types of societies. A democratic society, for example, is conceived from a state governed for and by the people. Meanwhile a tyrannical society breathes through the top of the hierarchy. Christians pray to an alter while Muslims pray to the Mecca. A female in America braids her hair while a female in Iran hides hers. A society can successfully exist when its members’ buy into its ideology and are willing to act accordingly. The general understanding of the accepted values, ethics, behaviors and practices allow members of a society to interact and cooperate.

There is no right or wrong ideology, though one can be criticized through the lens of another. Differences in ideology are usually the foundation for conflict and war as well as the foundation for allies and partnerships. The Cold War, for example, exemplified the battle between two ideologies rather than between nations. The United States of America never formally fought The Soviet Union during the war even though these were the two primary competitors. Instead, it was the people of democracy fighting to contain communist influence. The Truman Doctrine established the American strategy during the Cold War and formally explained the primary conflict of the two nations. The doctrine was in response to a series of moves by the Soviet Union to geographically spread communist influence and outlined a policy using numerous strategies to prevent the broadening of such staunch socialism abroad. The policy represented a middle ground between inaction and aggression directly against communist countries, most specifically the USSR, but put America into violent conflict elsewhere like Korea, Vietnam, China, and Eastern Europe. In short, the Truman Doctrine labeled the war as two competing
ideologies rather than two aggressive militaries. Nearly every war not fought over possession of territory or resources is justified through the lens of ideology.

In short, ideology is the social construction of an individual established through experience and education; it is the foundation from which values, behaviors, and interests are built. A particular society’s collective ideology is which of these characteristics are shared between its citizens. However, there is an undeniable link between ideology and power, and this relationship to power is what can legitimize inequality. British sociologist Anthony Giddens defines ideology as “shared ideas or beliefs, which serve to justify the interests of the dominant groups...[and] the mode in which forms of signification are incorporated within systems of domination so as to sanction their continuance” (Giddens, 1983). In a perfect world, there would be a perfect democracy: all people have an equal say in government and no person has greater importance than another. Income would be evenly distributed and all people would have inalienable rights. But alas, there has never been and will never be such harmony. There will always be those who are more privileged, those with more power, those with more money, and therefore those with potential to influence ideology. To be able to influence an individual in such a way is to have a unique and tremendous power over that person, and to be able to influence a society unlocks control over a general population. Questions undoubtedly arise with such enormous potential involved: who controls a community’s ideology? Can anyone control the ideology of another? Can anyone be trusted to govern ideology? Is power taken or is it earned? Do people even know what ideology is and, if so, when it is changing?

In studying the history of man, eras begin and end when a new power becomes dominant by influencing ideology more than any other party. Religion has undoubtedly been the most socially influential factor in the course of human existence; to do right by the god(s) has been the driving force behind the ideology of man. The Greek and Roman gods were the “be all-end all”, and whatever was done to please them was certainly just. The Catholic Church preached that a
spiritual, monotheistic life lived by the Golden Rule (do unto others as you would like be done unto you) was the way to heaven. Even Imperialist Japan in the 20th century viewed their Emperor as a deity and entrusted his maxim of “death before dishonor”. Religion is an ideology, for man has lived by the phrase, “if the god(s) will it, then so it shall be done”. Man’s progress consisted of their “subsuming the allegedly dominant metaphysical, political, juridical, moral…concepts under the class of religious or theological consciousness,” and, therefore, the political, judicial, and/or moral man was then inherently religious (Marx, 1846). Though religion is based on testimony and myth, their dogmatic principles bring certainty to the public sphere. People presupposed governance by religion. The authority figures are known and their counsel is truth. Every dominant relationship was held to be religious and made into law, state, etc. The teachings of religion are unquestionable to its believers, so when entire groups of people believe in the same infallible doctrines, it makes it very easy to relate and communicate to those people. There is a reduction in uncertainty because everyone knows which values are preferred, which behaviors are acceptable, how others should be treated, how government should be run, what traditions should be practiced, and why decisions should be made. The world was sanctified, and everything could be comprehended if reduced to religion.

But over the course of the previous three centuries, there has been a gradual movement towards freedom of religion, creating an opening for another ideological influence to become dominant to the public. With the onset of widespread religious tolerance in most Westernized nations, religion has become less publicized and, therefore, less customary. Today, religion still demands credit for influencing the philosophy of the majority of people in every nation, but being less established in the community channels this influence towards individual values and beliefs much more so than those of a society as a whole. The result is a disconnect between strangers. Without a universal religion, one cannot assume that another person follows the same spiritual ideology. But society needs common ideological constructs in order to be synergistic, even if it is
not wholly the same. What is the string, then, that connects two strangers of the same society?

How thick is the string? Who or what is the marionette controlling the string?

The convention of separating church and state is responsible for the shift away from universally accepted religious ideology, and gives government the most authority over society. The fundamental structure of government and economy influences the core ideology of the society and authorizes who makes decisions that affect the public. A tyrannical government places all authority in the head of state; it is understood to all citizens that the tyrant is responsible for laws, diplomacy, economy, etc. The citizens, then, concede to the fact that there is little they can do to influence government in any substantial way and are relatively more content with performing the role given to them by circumstance. A democracy, on the other hand, empowers its citizens by allowing them to have a say in government and influence political affairs. Members of democratic societies are much more egoistic and individualistic because the structure of their government allows them to be so. They believe that they determine their own fate; they may choose from any career, court any partner, and be mobile through classes if they perform the required work. Citizens believe individual liberties are a birthright, and that no person or institution could alienate them from their rights. What freedom is given to one should be given to all citizens for equal participation in society. The United States of America, for example, is a democracy and can be characterized by the ideals aforementioned: its citizens believe in personal goals and equal say in government. However, by voting people into power, America becomes a representative democracy, and so its citizens forfeit certain privileges to those appointed to power. But the state does not solely function on the interests of the politicians and their electorate -- corporations, media, and military influence government much more than do ordinary citizens. Who is the authority in America, then? Who has the final say? Who is dependent on whose interest?
The law of the government also influences ideology by creating a value system and allows the people to live harmoniously; respecting another person’s life, property, and rights are an ideological construct that is adopted by living within the confines of a legal system, for example. Law also establishes a system of ethics and informs citizens what is right and what is wrong. Often times, what is illegal is also considered unethical, and vice versa. The law can be the structure that asserts authority as well. If it is illegal to speak out against the state or its policies, citizens will most likely obey that authority for fear of punishment. Such coercive laws allow legal precedents to establish ideology. In the ancient Greek and Roman Empire, to rebel against the state or the gods would more often than not be a death sentence, and therefore its citizens’ philosophy was to be obedient to higher powers. Laws are accepted and become ideological constructs, and consequently maintain order in a community.

To Karl Marx, the economic and industrial state of a nation is the determinant of ideology, both externally and internally, and thus creates a power structure. The external relationship between nations, he asserts, depend upon the extent to which either nation has industrialized, has established a division of labor, and has practiced commerce. Insofar as the external relationships are formed by economy are the internal relationships as well. Marx is unprecedented in his scholarship because of his acknowledgment of a division within a society’s ideology and the relationship between this division and power. Marx believed in a class system where laborers are subjected to a lesser quality of life because the elite are unwilling to give up power. The bourgeoisie, or the dominant class, uses its material advantages to assert authority over the proletariat, the subordinate class, in the commercial, political, and judiciary systems. Alike in material production, the dominant class has a more substantial contribution in intellectual production, such as law, morality, science, etc. Indeed, a person’s thoughts and ideas are his own, but only as much as they are conditioned by their ideology. Marx categorizes these divisions my two determining characteristics. The first division is geographic, separating those who live in
industrialized cities to those who live in agricultural areas and causing a clash of interests. Cities are more populated and the hub of commerce, which consequently draws people in power to live in cities. Marx identifies that the interests of the rural areas are often misrepresented, granting city-dwellers more command of public policy. Further, Marx identifies the second division as existing between those cooperating in the same sector, such as the production of a CEO to that of an entry-level employee. The CEO has more influence over the company’s production and therefore is the authority to intellectual production; the entry-level employee, on the other hand, is dependent on the decisions of management. Marx states, “definite individuals who are productively active in a specific way enter into these definite social and political relations”, and that this relationship “relies on production and is independent of their will.” Ideology does not determine life, according to Marx, but life determines ideology.

Though he never directly refers to the term “ideology” as a means of imposing the superstructure, he offers an explanation on how power is maintained, namely that, “the ideas in any given time period are above all the ideas of the dominant class.” According to this proposition, the dominant class has access to notions that can, in some sense, disseminate to legitimate its own domination (Giddens, 1983). Marx is generally credited with identifying how the elite exploit the proletariats, and how this exploitation leads to alienation, or the perception that one has little control over his or her future. To draw from example, Marx claims capitalism is the type of economy that encourages alienation the most. In a capitalistic society, people lose control over their own means of production and “sell” their time to an employer to compensate. Workers in a capitalistic culture become enslaved to the gods of production. Once Marx establishes the division within a nation, he discusses the concept of power and influence.

To Michael Bakunin, it is the political structure more so than the economy that ascertains power. “The state is the organized authority, domination, and power of the possessing classes over the masses,” Bakunin claims. “…It is the most flagrant, the most cynical, and the most
complete negation of humanity” (Chomsky, 1973). There is no doubt that, with power and ideology so intimately linked, the potential for crippling oppression exists. Ironic, though, because this “negation of humanity” is, after all, the very essence of what a government is; its greatest duty and greatest accomplishment is control of the masses in such a way to protect order. There must be some control, some domination, to preserve order and prevent chaos. But government is intangible and laws are abstract ideas. Citizens are more likely to accept the ruling of a government if they believe it is only run by ideals that they consider just and necessary. However, because government is run by humans, it is also run by their flaws, and therefore susceptible to corruption. History tells us that man can become power-hungry, egotistical, and selfish. It is the practices of people in positions of power that make government tangible, which subsequently makes government susceptible to corruption. With the flaw of man infused with government, so too is the potential for abuse.
Chapter 2

Cultural Hegemony and Counter Hegemony

To further complex the distinction between the necessity of order and oppression of hegemony, questions arise such as, “why do citizens willingly subject themselves to oppression?” and “do they even know they are being oppressed?” It is difficult to assume a power over ideology, – how can a person willingly concede power over philosophy, if such a power exists at all? – but Antonio Gramsci, an early-1900s Italian Marxist, revealed a dominance that was much more intricate than his predecessor, Karl Marx. Gramsci agreed with the fact that the economy and socioeconomic status of an individual was the determinate of social position; the economic status quo was natural and inevitable and the bourgeoisie ruled over the proletariats. However, he viewed this dominance by coercion through violence, politics, and economy as incomplete. He believed that, in order to systematically dominate members of a diverse working class, one must influence ideology. Consequently, Gramsci deciphered the concept of hegemony. Hegemony can be defined as the leadership or dominance by a state or social group (West & Turner, 2009). Gramsci was not the first to analyze the idea of hegemony, but defined it more appropriately and coined the idea of cultural hegemony. It was considered by Marxists at the time that a worldwide socialist revolution is inevitable, but Gramsci implies that his colleagues were overlooking an important strategy that the capitalists utilize, a strategy that would prevent revolution. Hegemony was always considered as dominance via military, economy, and politics, but Gramsci noted that capitalist added a fourth criterion: ideology.
To Gramsci, ideology is the learned framework used to make sense of our existence and, because it is learned, can be controlled. Acknowledging this, the bourgeoisie imposes cultural hegemony, which establishes the control of abstract ideals and cultural norms that include beliefs, perceptions, values, expectations, etc. over a diverse working class and, therefore, further entrench the power structure of a society. It is through this dominant ideology that divisions of labor, law, government, traditions, and social customs are justified as perpetual and advantageous for everyone, not just the ruling class. The working class does not perceive cultural hegemony as negative oppression, nor do they label it hegemony. Rather, it is viewed as an unchangeable fact of life that everyone, bourgeoisie and proletariat alike, are subjected to. He further explained how the values of the dominant class are subtly imposed upon their society through consistent dialogue between the two classes and, consequently, accepted as truth and common sense. Once this framework is established, the goals and virtues of the subordinate class align with those of the dominant class whether or not they inherently would be without hegemony. This imposed ideology allows sectional interests to be represented as universal interests, and so the proletariat then trust the bourgeoisie and do not feel or recognize that they are being oppressed since both classes are working towards the same natural and necessary goals. Thus, the status quo is established and maintained with all social and economic goals aligning with the interest of the dominating class (Gramsci, 1971).

For such hegemony to exist, obedience must be automatic; it must “not only must it come about without any demonstration of necessity or rationality being needed, but it must be unquestioning” (Gramsci, 1971). Automatic obedience is demonstrated when maintaining the example of America’s representative democracy. It empowers Americans to vote for their leaders; it gives the citizens the perception that they have a say in government. In the most recent Presidential election of 2012, Americans voted Barack Obama into his second term believing that he would best represent their interest in the White House. The fact that the citizens granted
Obama the right to lead and restricted that right to others does endow its citizens with power. But why was it so easy for those who did not vote for Obama to pledge allegiance and recognize him as president? In this situation, the Americans are oppressed by their democratic system and follow the rules and customs in place. These same Americans, however, because of their identification with the oppressor, have no consciousness of themselves as persons or as members of an oppressed class. Rather, they concede to the idea that it’s just the way the society functions.

Civilian reform, therefore, seems nearly impossible. In order to change the superstructure of society, not only will a citizen need to become skeptical of the imposed constitution, but must also be able to discredit the deeply entrenched ideology of the entire community. A nearly impossible feat, true, and yet revolutions have occurred in history. Recognizing this, Antonio Gramsci lays out a blueprint to a successful social movement:

“One may say that no real movement becomes aware of its global character all at once, but only gradually through experience – in other words, when it learns from the facts that nothing which exists is natural (in the non-habitual sense of the word), but rather exists because of the existence of certain conditions, whose disappearance cannot remain without consequences. Thus the movement perfects itself, loses its arbitrary, "symbiotic" traits, becomes truly independent, in the sense that in order to produce certain results it creates the necessary preconditions, and indeed devotes all its forces to the creation of these preconditions.”

Ideology is dynamic; even if it is firmly established, no social order has ever withstood the test of time without modifications. Social progress is often accompanied by a fundamental change in ideology, as Gramsci states. When the philosophy of the citizens change to contradict
the previously accepted norms of a community, sometimes they attempt to utilize the same
resources and strategies as the dominant social groups that challenge that supremacy. Gramsci
referred to this as counter-hegemony. This idea is pivotal because it implies the capacity for
change by the dominated group if the resources are available and acknowledges that people are
never completely submissive to the status quo if something exists that they disagree with. In
essence, the goal of counter-hegemony is to “understand history from other [the working class,
the minorities, other cultures] lenses…to raise the volume on muted voices.” It is through counter
hegemony that protests, riots and revolutions occur.

However, the oppressed that are accustomed to the imbalance of power in their society
have become resigned to it and are inhibited from the struggle for freedom because they feel
incapable of running the risks it requires. The subordinate class, having “internalized the image of
the oppressor and adopted his guidelines,” says Paulo Freire, “are fearful of freedom. Freedom
would require them to eject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility” (Friere,
2005). When citizens realize injustice or manipulation and develop a desire for change, they
perceive that this desire can be transformed into reality only when the same desire is realized in
their peers. But while dominated by “the fear of freedom…they refuse to appeal to others, or to
listen to the appeals of others, or even to the appeals of their own conscience” (Friere, 2005).
Only once repression is uncovered and the social movement associated with it gains enough
momentum to overthrow this fear of freedom can the society challenge hegemony. This challenge
may lead to protests, riots, and, if successful, revolutions accompanied with a change in ideology
evidenced by restructuring government, laws, policy, behavior, etc.

The American Civil Rights Movement during the 20th century illustrates this process of
counter hegemony causing a gradual change in ideology. Though slavery was abolished by the
late 1800s, the rate at which African-Americans gained civic equality and political rights was
agonizingly slow as it took until 1964 for the Civil Rights Act to be enacted. Even though blacks
were “free” after the Civil War, the fact of the matter was that they were still dependent on whites. The white people of the time were the ones who owned land, held positions of power, and paid the wages of the African-Americans. Only meager employment opportunities were available for Afro-Americans, and they did not have the learned skills, literacy levels, or education to advance much further. Blacks were also segregated by means of the Jim Crow Laws and could only vote if they passed literacy tests and paid an unreasonable poll tax.

As time passed, blacks did indeed become more apt to fit into American society, but the cultural norms prevented hasty infusion. The Civil Rights Movement needed either momentum or a slow ongoing change in the philosophy of the entire nation. In addition to the opposition from American whites who were not yet ready to accept biracial incorporation, not all African-Americans expressed their support of the movement either, which made it impossible for the movement to gather any substantial energy. To demand equality as an African-American at the time was asking for trouble and was usually accompanied by humiliation, lowered working conditions, and physical abuse. To some African-Americans, speaking out against their injustice was not worth the repercussions. In 1909, however, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was founded, giving blacks an outlet for rebellious discourse and would serve as the most influential equal-rights organization for the next century. The Association was a tremendous leap in the right direction for civil equality, but the Civil Rights Movement still lacked one thing: a reason for America to change its deeply entrenched ideology. To the majority of Americans, even if they were not white supremacist, the social utility did not match the burden of change in customary norms. It is innate for people to desire stability, especially stability in society, government, and tradition. In order to succumb to the pressure of change, we need to be convinced of its rationale.

It was not until World War II when the Civil Rights movement was given legitimate grounds for its insurrection. Though blacks fought in every major war for America since the Civil
War, they were always segregated from the whites and were more so treated as pawns of war instead of legitimate soldiers. However, during World War II, America fought for civil liberties; the U.S. was trying to eliminate the threat of imperialistic nations conquering others and stripping them of their rights to assert their dominance. African-Americans in the military and those domestic began to realize the irony of the situation. America is fighting for ideals the she does not fully practice, and blacks are fighting for liberties that they do not possess themselves. Thus, the March on Washington Movement was organized and captured the support of all African-Americans and some progressive whites. The March on Washington Movement was created by A. Philip Randolph as a tool to coordinate a mass protest on Washington. Its primary focus was to demand that the U.S. government to protect against discrimination, segregation in the armed forces, and racially unequal working opportunities. The anticipated march garnered so much encouragement and momentum that it pressured President Franklin D. Roosevelt to comply with Randolph’s demands immediately before the demonstration occurred. He signed the Fair Employment Practices Committee, which stated that there shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers based on race or national origin” for positions in government, government contracted companies, or defense industries.

The March on Washington Movement paved the way for the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s to accomplish its goals, and the African-American struggle from the Civil War to the Cold War represented the gradual increase of the movement’s character that Gramsci asserted as necessary for perfection. It elucidated why the African-Americans deserved equality and established its legitimacy. Once the preconditions preventing Americans from change were logically refuted, most Americans were willing to acknowledge the fraudulancy of their ideology. The Civil Rights Movement exemplifies just how deeply entrenched a superstructure can be, but also how skepticism of such hegemony can lead to a revolution and, eventually, a shift in widespread ideology.
Chapter 3

Power in Mass Media and the Challenge of New Media

It has been approximately 600 years since Johannes Gutenberg utilized his idea of moveable type to invent the printing press and, along with it, mass media. Little did he know, Gutenberg would be introducing the greatest tool to govern society with since the royal crown. In fact, the two can be quite synonymous: he who wears the crown has the ability to influence public ideology, which is likewise to he who controls mass media. Since 1439, societal changes have seldom come from), but from who has wielded the metaphorical crown. Whether it is the media corporations, advertisers who commoditize society, or maybe even the government, those who remain prevalent in mass media and control what is depicted command public ideology.

Very few institutions affect the public more than media and it is nearly impossible to overstate the reliance on media. Its presence is invasive; radio, television, film, newspapers, magazines, and the like are ubiquitous. The media has become so intertwined with society and follows people everywhere they go. But newspapers do not write themselves and advertisements do not magically appear. Someone exposes us to media and influences us in some way, even if that was not the intended goal (although it often is). Media plays the most important role in maintaining a collective ideology; it is the medium for the “constant dialogue” mentioned by Gramsci that is necessary for the elite to align subordinate interests with their own. When this dialogue is interrupted, the power structure is also. In fact, Gramsci’s life provides us with a relevant example. Antonio Gramsci was very publicly in opposition of Benito Mussolini, the fascist dictator of Italy during World War II. Fearing Gramsci’s increasing popularity due to his written documents, Mussolini spoke at Gramsci’s trial after he had been arrested saying, “we
have to prevent that this mind continue thinking” (Simon, 1991). By imprisoning Gramsci, Mussolini was attempting to maintain his dominance of public ideology. Mussolini knew the significance of media (Gramsci’s literature) and felt the need to regain complete control of it. If the entirety of the media were not praising him, it would create doubt and cause a disconnection between the virtues of the two classes. When Mussolini said they needed to “prevent that this mind continue thinking,” he was not necessarily referring to Gramsci, but rather that they needed to stop his thoughts to become the thoughts of others; Mussolini wanted to stop ideology from changing.

Ideally, mass media should be considered a public’s number one tool for checks and balances. It’s no coincidence that freedom of the press was guaranteed in the very first amendment. Humans are imperfect, deceitful creatures, and so even a system of government in a free, democratic state is prone to corruption. In times of corruption, a nonpartisan and independent press can be the nation’s saving grace by shedding light on injustice. It is also imperative for a voting citizen to acquire some knowledge regarding national and international affairs, diplomatic debates, and politicians. Alexis de Tocqueville stressed the importance of a media trusted by citizens sustaining democracy. “Voters need some intelligence,” he said. The media can “drop the same thought into a thousand minds at the same time...[it] maintains civilization.” (Huffington, 2000). Unfortunately, this kind of righteous, independent reporting in the media has subsided – “another victim of corporate pressure to the bottom line,” states Arianna Huffington of the Huffington Post. “Its that kind of reporting that we need more than ever, as politicians are becoming increasingly adept at deceiving the public, and we become increasingly inured to it.” Alike Gramsci, Huffington acknowledges the fact that a general public becomes so
habituated to the publications of the media that it begins to formulate an ideology consistent with that of mass media.

As a person becomes more accustomed to the narratives in the media, he or she begins to accept it as a representation of reality. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, two scholars of the Frankfurt School, acknowledged the importance of media for hegemony and championed the idea of the *culture industry*: the production and distribution of cultural goods as if they were tradable commodities. In this “industry”, ideology is reproduced and sold, and the members of the society work akin to assembly line workers to meet the needs of this ideology. Similar to Gramsci, Adorno and Horkheimer assert that the ruling class dominates obliviously to the working class who believe they are unbound and independent. The bourgeoisie create problems that members of the society can solve and needs that their society can fulfill, giving them a sense of entitlement and distracting them from the realities of their oppression. Consumption of these “goods” enables all to be docile and content with their situation and the status quo of their society, no matter how low their socioeconomic class.

In the cultural industry, mass media is the tool for dominance. Film, radio, television, newspapers, magazines, etc. are used in uniform to direct society into passivity. If all outlets are displaying the same virtues – that is, what is a good verse what is bad – then a cultural ideology is implemented. Popular culture and ideology are considered goods easily consumed through mass media. Mass media is the subjective representation of reality, which is what makes it so easy to influence ideology. Take film for example; even the subtlest features of the movie will influence public thought. Men will fall for women that the film defines as attractive, the hero will save the day from what the film defines as evil, and even the products and commodities in the film are defined in some way.
The dominance of the mass media carries with it an extraordinarily negative connotation, but lest we forget the good that can come from a message reaching a large audience. In the 1980s and 1990s, the number one rated television program was *The Cosby Show*, a show about two working African-American parents and their children. In nearly every episode, the children were taught the values of honesty, respect, and responsibility, and family was consistently implied to be a top priority. The show also served as an educational medium of black culture by alluding to many African-American artist, musicians, colleges, and traditions. The show also served as a virtuous light for the black community in the midst of overwhelmingly negative press. The show helped dispel the negative messages about African-Americans constantly portrayed by the media elite, especially on the nightly news: the absent father, the uneducated and rebellious children, and the low living standards (West & Turner, 2009). The show demonstrated how the media could be used as a virtuous influence on the general public as well as doubling as a tool for counter-hegemony.

The scene established in a film, program, article, etc. has come to be known as a *media frame*. Todd Gitlin, a sociologist and cultural commentator, examines the media in his book “The Whole World Is Watching” and critiques the framing of the riots in America during the Vietnam War. He defines a media frame as a “manufactured world” that becomes truth to those experiencing the situation for the first time, and argues that an individual only personally experiences a very small portion of society as a whole. This individual therefore lacks deep tradition, and therefore is susceptible to rumors, news, trends, and fashion and relies on mass media to present them. Citizens “rely on the media for concepts, for images of their heroes…information…public values…even for language” (Gitlin, 1980). Gitlin champions the idea of a digitally connected society: a society that can only be connected through media. A
A person living in Maine could never be ideologically connected to someone in Arizona if it were not for the media. Media informs (or imposes on, depending on how critical the observer) the public of changes and traditions in an ideology that is never static. Consequently, the culture of a digitally connected society is entirely shaped by media frames, and therefore, those who decide what and how something is framed control ideology. Gitlin reinforces this conclusion by blaming the media for “orchestrating everyday consciousness…through which ideology becomes manifest and concrete” (Gitlin, 1980).

Not only are people affected by what the media presents, but also what is hidden from the frame implies what should not be important to a society. From the 1960s to the 1980s, the coverage of the AIDS virus in America revealed how the media operates. According to Edward Alwood, because the AIDS virus was first diagnosed within the gay community and most news editors did not consider gay deaths to be newsworthy, major news outlets failed to provide coverage of the disease. Fatal diseases such as Legionnaires and toxic shock syndrome were given ample media coverage, which garnered the attention and concern of the American public even though AIDS was killing more homosexuals than the other two were killing all people combined. It was not until the death of actor Rock Hudson in 1985 that more media coverage was devoted to AIDS. The disease took more than 6,000 people before this date. The media’s message was not apparent but was significant: the deaths of homosexual men were not newsworthy and should not be paid attention (West & Turner, 2009).

The media frame presents a reflection of reality, however accurate or inaccurate, which revises what is true to the public. According to the industry theory, values, perceptions, behaviors and the like are subjectively produced and distributed, then taken objectively by the consumer. This industry is recognized as a “system of domination” in which the control is reduced into the authority of only a few entities that control mass media. Horkheimer and Adorno claim “there is
the agreement...of all executive authorities not to produce or sanction anything that in any way differs from their own rules, their own ideas about consumers, or above all themselves” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1976).

The contrast between the few producers and the large number of consumers allows manipulative organization and planning by management, and so propaganda is introduced. Propaganda need not be defined; the exploitation and consequences have been ubiquitous and well documented. Joseph Goebbels, the mastermind behind Nazi propaganda, described the term as “the art of simplification, constant recapitulation, appealing to the instinctive and the emotional, and simply ignoring unpleasant facts.” The cyclical relationship between media and its audience limitlessly empowers the propagandist. Mass media’s primary goal is to present to the public with what they want to see, hear, and watch, and so naturally the public believes that they influence what is being presented; the media caters to them. But, if the aforementioned media theories uphold, it is the bourgeoisie who set the ideology of the public. Consequently, propagandists simply portray themselves as the mouthpiece of the people but set their own agenda.

As aforementioned, in lieu of indecency and corruption, the media could be a nation’s saving grace. But if the media itself is corrupt or controlled by those who are, how can it serve to check and balance? The path to freedom, then, would be an insurmountable climb. Perhaps that was true a decade ago; but today, salvation may be a click away. “Call it the machine to beat the machine,” says Arianna Huffington. New media: the simultaneous connection of millions of people, no matter the social class or economic standing. With the introduction of the Internet to society, an extraordinary amount of information is accessible easily and instantaneously. Further, the development of Web 2.0 (the median where anyone with access to the internet can edit and share information online) has unlocked even more potential. Whereas traditional media is limited to a few production centers, new media allows every person with Internet access to have a voice
that can reach millions. The Net provides a way to get around the hegemonic lock on available information and, as a result, diminishes control over public ideology. It is now very difficult for injustice, discrimination, and oppression to overpower the public relative to one decade ago.

New media is therefore inherently democratic. People share ideas, criticisms, interests and habits; there is an overwhelming surge of information that allows all people to become more educated about others. To those who live in a democratic society, the Internet provides new opportunity and convenience. However, to those who live under tyrannical or authoritarian regimes, the Internet is their first real taste of democracy. They are given rights that have been restricted or nonexistent like freedom of speech and freedom of press and begin to wonder why reality does not reflect their virtual freedom. In addition to being democratic, new media is also borderless. Not only can information be shared within one community, but it also becomes available internationally. Thus, the people enjoying new democratic rights also are becoming increasingly aware of the freedom and higher standard of life that people in free nations have. They begin to ask questions. Why am I not allowed to hold such rights? Why doesn’t my government put my interests first? What can I do to make my life more like theirs?

Civilians who feel neglected or exploited by their government are using the Internet as a tool to speak out against institutions that far too frequently ignore their relevance. “The Internet is exploding as a revolutionary tool for political change,” (Huffington, 2000) Huffington claims. From democratic electorate who are now able to actively voice statements for or against political candidates and policies to tyrannized populations searching for freedoms that should be innate, people all over the globe are trying to remove corruption and abuse of government. They are able to use the power of the media to voice their opinions clearly, efficiently, and if they choose, anonymously. One cannot understate the importance of anonymity online; those who would be too concerned to speak out against forces stronger than themselves can, for the most part, be protected behind a virtual wall. It is much easier to express candid sentiments when your identity
is unknown. There is truly no feasible way short of taking away all Internet access to control so many voices distributed over a boundless geographic area. The world as we know it has changed forever and the Internet is the cradle of this neo-Renaissance.

What Web 2.0 does regarding an established power structure is simple, but significant: it raises public perception of oppression from obliviousness to consciousness. As Antonio Gramsci noted, in order for a status quo to be established and maintained, the dominant class influences the ideology of the subordinate class so that they believe the interests and goals of the dominant class are their own. The Internet, however, allows this subordinate class to realize they are being manipulated. Social media is important in opening a second front to a conflict, supporting a deception operation, pressuring for peace or discrediting a regime’s authority. Lieutenant Colonel Brian Petit identifies unconventional digital warfare as a battle over psychology and acknowledges that “social media proliferates information so quickly and broadly that the narratives replace ideology” (Petit, 2012). Over the course of the past few years, engaged citizens have transformed into makeshift militias online. Due to the capabilities of social networking platforms, people have been able to speak out against injustice, have it heard by thousands regardless of geographical area, and exponentially increase support for rebellion overnight. The main reason why hegemonic powers were able to maintain power with little disobedience was because of the passivity of their subordinates. As noted in previous chapters, the majority of people do not feel oppressed and have no reason to protest. If someone does become skeptical and would like to see change, he or she often considers their voice to be too miniscule in comparison to a dominating institution to produce any substantial reformation and dismisses the thought. However, online social networks enable all citizens to access information that leads them reconsider the existing social structure and gather enough support to vastly outnumber the administrators. The collective ideology begins to shift, which causes the cynicism of the status quo. The people then demand change, causing disorder and instability.
In addition to the influx of information and idea sharing online, social media has become the best tool for assembling the masses in the streets. Organizing information can be sent directly and instantaneously to any number of people at once. A protest organized on Monday morning could be a national movement by Monday night. Introducing mobile devices to the equation increases social media’s potential even further; a person does not even need to wait to be behind a computer before being notified of anything wherever they may be. New media opens up a new battlefield for conflict and must be monitored by all parties. John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, creators of the concept of “Netwar”, define this combination of cyber, social and military capacities into the concept of *swarming*. Swarming is “seemingly amorphous, but it is a deliberately structured, coordinated strategic way to strike from all directions” (Petit, 2012).

The most important thing to note about new media and its relation to civil disobedience is that it is the tool for the disruption of the constant dialogue that Antonio Gramsci claimed was imperative to maintaining order. Again, ideology is influenced by the same constructs of ideology being repetitively delivered through this dialogue; all policies, all news stories, all entertainment, and all rhetoric are consistent in their ideological emphasis. However, it is difficult to control what people post and what they experience on the Internet. It becomes inevitable that citizens will be exposed to something that contradicts some ideology, and thus, the dialogue is broken. Once that happens, people become skeptical and compare both philosophies; any rational person will choose whatever they feel will lead to a better life. That spells bad news for repressive regimes.

Reestablishing a constant dialogue in any society, free or not, will be nearly impossible for a dominating class to do. New Media cannot be governed globally. Though there may be ways to restrict Internet access within designated borders, the majority of people on earth have the right to use. Because of this, no one entity can control ideology like they could with traditional media. As information is exchanged across borders, so too are ideological beliefs. Borderless social mobilization enabled by mass digital communication “allows like-minded groups to coalesce
digitally with less risk than the traditional early, vulnerable stages of building a resistance movement” (Petit, 2012). In short, people do not have to break away from chains that do not restrict them, and any institution that does try to negatively impose will meet an inestimable opposition from all people online who share a globalized ideology.
Chapter 4

The Arab Spring

There have been four nations where government was overthrown, six nations to incur government changes, ten nations with notable protests, one ongoing civil war, and about 100,000 dead all in the span of one year. This is the statistical summary of the twenty-one nations associated with the Arab Spring, a domino-like chain of civil disobedience that occurred during 2011, although most of the twenty-one countries are still dealing with the ramifications today. The Arab Spring refers to the wave of rebellion and revolution instigated by the dissatisfaction of domestic governments. Factors that led to these protests include tyrannical rulers, human rights violations, corruption, income disparity, and failing economies, just to name a few. But whatever factors led to the uprising, one thing is certain: none of them were new. Some of the tyrants were in power for decades, inhumane acts by law enforcement were not uncommon, and extreme income gaps were not created overnight. The structure and ideology of these nations was in place for years, but technological advancements allowed the subordinate classes to become aware of their oppression and spurred the chaotic revolutions.

For the first time in history, we see hegemonic rule falling with a domino effect. But the intriguing fact of the matter is that these revolutions occurred with the utmost expediency. They were not planned for years or exhausted in debate about what would be the best way to overthrow government. They were able gain tremendous support, even if unorganized, in an extremely short amount of time, an accomplishment that would have never occurred if the Internet (more specifically, social networking) did not exist. As aforementioned, Antonio Gramsci argued that
the working class would need to discredit the predisposed ideology collectively in order to spark enough of a flame to overthrow hegemony. The role of social media was critical in achieving this goal. Activists were able to spread cognitive dissonance to the masses quickly and expanded the network of people who were willing to take action. Most citizens in the Arab region were those who experienced more freedom online than under the rule of hegemonic dictators that restricted basic human rights, and so a revolution was a cause that most believed would be worth fighting for. The ease of communication through new media allowed the subordinate class to organize protests in such a way that overwhelmed the hegemonic use of traditional media. The states retaliated both physically by military and digitally by suspending or eliminating access to the Internet, creating a war both on the streets and online.

The opening of instantaneous, ubiquitous peer-to-peer connection generated a collaborative force that sparked defiant acts of resistance. Social media distributed images and testimonials that reverberated through the local community and worldwide, stirring outrage and called for action. In December of 2010, the protest that started it all was in Tunisia by Mohammed Bouazizi as he set himself on fire in response to continued cruelty by the police force. Bouazizi would die, and his story would go viral on the Internet. Soon, the longstanding dictator had been removed from power. Less than a month later, the Egyptians followed suit by forcing longtime President Hosni Mubarak out of power through riots and sheer numbers. The wave of revolutions continued to spread around the region as it reached Yemen, Libya, Syria, and Bahrain, and caused major protests in other states along the coast of northern Africa and the Middle East. The connected masses forged digital alliances “too dynamic to be ignored and too unpredictable to be countered” (Petit, 2012). In a remarkably short time span, social-media communities justified their collective action with a necessity for ideological change.
The Arab Spring demonstrated how activists can inform its users digitally, and then quickly shift to assembling offline. Focusing on the Egyptian revolution as an example, we are able to clearly see how social networking allowed a nation to regain control of ideology, and thus turn citizen against state. Social media became rivaled conventional media, which was state controlled in Egypt (if there is a totalitarian hegemony, it is a safe bet the government controls the media). The revolution began to take shape when a Facebook page dedicated to a 28-year-old Egyptian by the name of Khaled Saeed was created. Saeed was a blogger who was beaten to death for allegedly having video evidence implicating members of the Egyptian police in a drug deal. The coroner’s autopsy, however, dubbed the cause of death as “choking on a piece of hashish that he tried to swallow” (Al Jazeera, 2010). Unfortunately for Egyptian law enforcement, there were witnesses of the fatal beating of Saeed, witnesses who spread the word digitally. One man, Wael Ghonim, created that Facebook tribute page and posted gruesome pictures of Saeed after his death. The page attracted almost 500,000 members and generated a rallying point for outraged Egyptians who undertook the motto “We Are All Khaled Saeed” (Crovitz, 2011). Though none were as affected physically, the phrase was a metaphor for how the Egyptian government has beaten down the citizens and dismissed their rights. According to L. Gordon Crovitz, writer for the Wall Street Journal, leaders of the revolution (about 15 people including Ghonim) used Facebook and Twitter in such a way that they were able to remain a step ahead of the Egyptian regime. The Egyptian protestors were able to organize actual meeting, as well as publicly post information about decoy meetings to deceive officials. “This is an internet revolution,” Ghonim declared. “I’ll call it revolution 2.0” (Crovitz, 2011).

During the week before Egyptian president Hosni Mubaraks resigned, the total rate of tweets from around the world about political change in Egypt ballooned from 2,300 a day to 230,000 a day. Videos featuring protest and political commentary went viral; the top 20 videos received nearly 5.5 million views (O’Donnell, 2011). This immense exposure of the swift victory
for the people of Egypt and, on a slightly smaller scale, Tunisia caught the attention of those neighboring Arab states that faced the same opposition from their respective governments. The revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia indirectly created the same type of disconnect between classes in the other Arab nations that caused their citizens to doubt the imposed ideology. The first insurrections of the Arab Spring spread optimism to the spectators with hopes of democracy and basic human rights. It was not long before these spectators became activists themselves and began domestic protests.

The Arab Spring looked like a monumental success; it was an outbreak of democracy in an area in which freedom was not known. But we are reminded that revolutions are violent conflicts, whether digital or physical. Revolutions have since reached an impasse, yet blood continues to be shed and progress is moving much slower in relation to the immediacy of the protest, if progress is being seen at all. The Arab Spring has seen success, has seen failure, and has left an entire geographical region in an awkward transition. The reconstruction and re-stabilization of the Arab States cannot keep up with the expediency of the revolutions. Consequently, these rebellions become decentralized and loosely organized insurgents that lack definitive leadership. One could argue that the instances that sparked each uprising would not have reached the point it did had it not been for new media. But social media can move quicker than people can organize, and anything that goes viral will be impossible for leadership to control. “Successful insurgencies and resistance groups require leadership,” Lieutenant Colonel Brian Petit claims. “…The proliferation of social media has introduced a new type of underground: a digitally connected, leaderless organization with varying levels of commitment to the cause.”

Some say the Arab Spring moved too quickly and, as a result, left nations with vacancies in government with no leadership assume. The outcome is an awkward transition with no guarantee the new government will address all the needs the old government ignored. It awakens
danger in establishing a new order in the nation; a nation with little experience with one type of
government may not set up a reliable foundation. Therefore, problems and instability will come
again. Lieutenant Colonel Petit goes on to say that “nearly all the Arab Spring insurrections lack
ideological cohesion for governing; what they have in common is powerful narratives for
dismantling.” Some Arab state have received support from international organizations and
powerful democratic countries, but others have had their protests dissipated and their activist
killed. Rebuilding – structurally, governmentally, ideologically and psychologically – is a
challenge for many of the now unstable states; a challenge not many know how to solve.
Chapter 5

Critique

“Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea that becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion” (Freire, 2005). In his book The Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Paulo Freire examines the relationship between dominant and subordinate classes and the struggle over ideology discussed in this essay. He talks about the traditional power structure, agrees with the characteristics of cultural hegemony, and acknowledges the challenges an oppressed person must face if he or she desires change. He lays out a blueprint for a successful revolution given the books context in the 1960s that is so accurate, citizens of totalitarian regimes risk punishment reading it. Indeed, most revolutions up until the time the book was written satisfied his criteria of successful uprisings, but the new era revolutions like the Arab Spring seem to cut the corners of this blueprint for success.

In order to overcome oppression, according to Freire, people must first critically evaluate its causes, “so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity…they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform.” In other words, an oppressed person must realize that he or she is oppressed, understand what is being restricted from or forced from them, and determine how the oppressor is imposing such power. Next, this individual must choose between action and inaction; the pursuit of freedom is awkward and risky. Not only does a person have to contradict the way of living he or she is accustomed to, but he or she must also be willing to confront a greater power and risk even more
repression. The conflict lies in rejecting the oppressor within and extrinsically. If the citizen chooses to turn activist, he or she must then gather support of others who are in a similar position. Gathering support is possible if the activist can prove oppression, have the ability to convey to others that it prohibits them from authentic humanity, create a strategy to overthrow the hegemony, and propose a new social order that has more freedom and/or utility than the previous administration. Freire then recognizes the reconstruction of ideology as a long and gradual accomplishment, one that must be back with tradition, innovation, and stability. In short, the cause must be something to believe in and worth the fight, and it also must be carefully implemented into the existing social order.

To Freire, the most important asset of a successful revolution is *praxis*, or informed action. Freedom is a result of praxis because through praxis, a dialectic balance of theory and practice can be achieved. Freire stresses the importance of objectivity in reform; through objective measurements can a logically stable form of subjectivity be based. Humans have the ability to act and reflect, but also theorize an action and hypothetically reflect on it. “Revolutionary praxis must stand opposed to the praxis of the dominant elites,” Freire continues. “…It is absolutely essential that the oppressed participate in the revolutionary process with an increasingly critical awareness of their role as Subjects of the transformation” (Freire, 2005). Through praxis and only through praxis are revolutionaries are able to use the essential tools cooperation, unity, organization and cultural synthesis.

The new aged civil disobedience occurring within the past five years, however, has demonstrated that the medium is as important as, if not more important than, the message itself. Omnipresent connectivity can cause small acts of resistance like the immolation in Tunisia or the police brutality in Egypt to “go viral”, reaching and influencing people around the world instantaneously. The immense nature of the Internet is uncontrollable, which makes it difficult for leaders of either side of a struggle to keep up. Even if statewide revolution was not the goal of
these acts, it was the result, as the digital medium produced chaotic momentum quickly. Social media enables activist to easily overcome the initial challenges of a movement that Freire identified. First, there is an intrinsic fear of speaking out against authority, but if someone can do so behind a virtual curtain and be anonymous, it encourages the defiance. Second, there is the challenge of gaining support, but social media can be used as a tool for persuading populations to support a developing movement; a controversial video, post or message could create favorable conditions for a civilian campaign. Lastly, the capacity for anything posted on the Internet to go viral suggests a concern for controllability.

Yet, the most pressing concern is that the majority of the new-aged revolutionaries lack a cohesive ideology from which to rebuild an appropriate social order; their movement is not based on strong enough praxis that is essential for successful reform. “If they are drawn into the process as ambiguous beings,” Freire claims, “...and if they come to power still embodying that ambiguity imposed on them by the situation of oppression—it is my contention that they will merely imagine they have reached power.” Looking toward the Arab Spring, the lack of a incontrovertible praxis led to a weak revolutionary ideology, which in turn led to a difficult transition, a vacant government, or dissipation of the movement completely. It seems that the collection of millions of like-minded and interconnected citizens expressing dissent was enough to accelerate a movement to a revolutionary level. The Internet gives communities the ability to quickly plan and act without first developing a fundamental praxis.

If informed action is not the rallying point for these revolutionaries, then what is? Lieutenant Colonel Brian Petit offers an explanation in the form of narratives. All intellectuals discussed – Gramsci, Freire, etc. – acknowledged that ideology was the key to oppression, and a change in ideology was imperative for social reform. But Petit (2012) does not believe the recent rebellions are on the basis of ideology:
“Continuing considerations must ascertain how to compete in a fickle psychological arena in the era of the electronic narrative. Historically, insurgent ideological indoctrinations were slow-boiling, methodical processes in which narratives were used for the “hook,” and ideological indoctrination followed…With greater emphasis on building a narrative and less on ideology, social media offers an alternative to the historical, linear progression of developing a resistance storyline…Social-media content — personal, citizen-centric, picture-rich, story-filled — promotes personal narratives in greater volume and frequency, resulting in the increasing centricity of personal chronicles that demote the importance of ideologies.”

Social media proliferates information so quickly and broadly that the narratives replace ideology. Unfortunately, the Internet allows for thousands (if not millions) of media frames to exist at one time, all of which biased and influenced by the persons creating the narrative, just like the media frame of traditional media is. Those narratives that gain momentum and start civil disobedience, therefore, are often based on skewed representations of reality instead of well-researched information and praxis. The freedom of Web 2.0 allows anyone to post anything with minimal screening and censorship, which consequently encourages anyone to post anything with minimal research on its repercussions.

If we were to examine some of the new aged “revolutions” that are more appropriately labeled as a flash in a pan, we see just how narratives overwhelm ideology for a short period of time, but eventually dissipate due to ideology’s more deeply rooted foundation. For example, last year brought about the “Kony2012” phenomenon. Kony2012 is a short filmed depicting the inhumane war crimes and crimes against human carried out by an African militia leader, Joseph Kony, created by three filmmakers under the organizational tag Invisible Children. The film’s primary goal was to raise international awareness and pressure leaders of nations to have Kony arrested by the end of the year. The film largely focused on the coercive nature of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) led by Kony, especially in their sadistic recruitment of child
soldiers/prostitutes and terrorization of communities in Uganda. The film ended with a call to action; it encouraged people to become active in their communities, spread awareness, and demand action from political and military leaders.

The short film took to the Web and went viral, as was its goal. As the Invisible Children official website states, the campaign started as an experiment: “Could an online video make an obscure war criminal famous? And if he was famous, would the world work together to stop him? Or would it let him remain at large?” Within a matter of days, the video generated close to 33 million views and gathered endorsement from celebrities ranging from Bill Gates to Justin Bieber to Oprah Winfrey. Viewers were motivated by the film’s message and followed its lead, and, just like that, the Kony2012 campaign was off and running. With the world’s attention, the Invisible Children website urged everyone to participate “make Kony famous” by performing charitable service for the African nation and post Kony2012 posters around their city. The organization also supplied shirts, buttons, flyers, etc. for anyone willing to help the cause. The viral campaign succeeded in its goals to bring fame to a war criminal on the loose, even though his arrest never happened.

Even with noble intentions, the Kony2012 film demonstrated what a small group of people could do with a message without regard to its consequences. As the film became more popular, outrage grew in Uganda: the same country the film aspired to help. Kony and his then-diminishing troops had fled Uganda in 2006 and were dissipated in the jungles of neighboring countries. “What that video says is totally wrong, and it can cause us more problems than help us,” Beatrice Mpora, director of a community health organization in Uganda. “There has not been a single soul from the LRA here since 2006. Now we have peace, people are back in their homes, they are planting their fields, they are starting their businesses. That is what people should help us with.” The people of Uganda are scared of the ramifications of the video giving Joseph Kony publicity and promoting nations to become militarily active in the region. Making Kony “famous”
could make him stronger by empowering him and his troops to become active once more.

“Suggesting that the answer is more military action is just wrong,” said Javie Ssozi, an influential Ugandan blogger. “Have they thought of the consequences? ...Arguing for more US troops could make him scared, and make him abduct more children, or go on the offensive” (Pfianz, 2012).

In addition to fear, the people of Uganda are also concerned with the image of Uganda that was made famous. “This paints a picture of Uganda six or seven years ago, that is totally not how it is today,” says Rosebell Kagumire, a Ugandan journalist. “It’s highly irresponsible” (Pfianz, 2012). The film misleads its viewers to believe the war is still in Uganda, and that Kony’s power, even though he may be a top war criminal, is still as influential as it was a decade ago. From the criticism of most Ugandan citizens, the film can only have negative consequences.

The Kony2012 movement, along with the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, London Riots, San Francisco Bay Area Transit episode, and all other new age revolutions, have shown just how powerful narratives can be if they find coverage on the Internet. Narratives can be created quickly and posted online even quicker, but ideology does not move as fast. A shift in ideology, however, is what allows a revolution to be successful. Once narrative are disproven or are forgotten, ideology takes over once more as the basis for human action; however, a lot can happen in the time between narrative conquest and dissipation. It is in that timeframe where these revolutions happen, and some have succeeded in changing ideology, but some have also caused irreparable damage for little to no progress. Time will tell just how successful these densely compacted acts of civil disobedience are, but the Internet and social media keeps the door open for more rebellion to occur.
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