CHANGING FACE OF CITIZEN ACTION

DIGITAL NATIVES WITH A CAUSE NEWSLETTER VOL 10.3 / DEC 12

Hivos
people unlimited

2002
- World Bank Oslo Protests
- World Economic Forum protest
- Student protests in Iran
- Multiple city protests on Iraq war

2003
- Civil Human Rights Front in Hong Kong
- WTO Protest in Cancun, Mexico

2004
- France Bans Hijab; Protest in 30 Countries
- U.S. Republican National Convention Protest the Nomination of George W. Bush

2005
- Dongzhou Protest in China
- Anti-Japan Protests in China
- Protest for Democracy, Hong Kong

2006
- U.S. Immigration Policy Protest
- Anti Caste-based Reservation Protest, India
- Youth Protest in France
- Muslims Protest Publication of Danish Caricature of Prophet Mohammed, London

2007
- The Lawyers' Movement, Pakistan's Long March
- Anti-Government Protests in Burma
- Georgians Call for Resignation of President
- Indians in Malaysia protest racial discrimination

2008
- Protests in Serbia
- Cameroon Anti-Government Protest
- Protests in Thailand
- Students' Protest in Chile
- Protests in Lhasa, Tibet
- Protests in Tehran, Iran
- Moldova Civil Unrest

2009

2010
- Civil Unrest in Tunisia
- Telangana Protest by Students, India
- India Against Corruption Campaign
- Occupy Wall Street, U.S.
- Protests in: West Asia, Egypt, Libya, Jordan, Morocco, Greece, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Algeria, Mauritius, Oman, Lebanon, and Sudan
- Nigerian Fuel Protest
- Pakistan and Other Muslim Nations Protest Film Screening of 'Innocence of Muslims'
- Protests against SOPA and PIPA, U.S.
- Rising Tibetan Immolations in China

2011

2012

Interactive timeline compiled by Rashmi Menon

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OUT OF AFRICA

DIGITAL ACTIVISM

ASIAN IRE

The past decade has been heralded as the 'decade of citizen activism'. *Time* magazine went so far as to declare the everyday protestor as 'Person of the Year.' Nishant Shah unpacks the age-old idea of citizen as change agent.

The first decade of the 21st century made its mark as the 'Decade of Citizen Action'. In extraordinary and unprecedented ways, accompanied by the power of digital and network technologies, large groups of people around the globe mobilized themselves to demand their rights as citizens. From the Facebook and Twitter Revolutions in Middle East, Asia and North Africa, to the *Blackberry Riots* in London; from the Occupy Everything movements in North America, to flash-mobs protesting corruption in India, we have witnessed an immense amount of energy catalyzing people to express their discontent with the way things are.

There has been much media and academic attention to these uprisings, with strident voices fiercely arguing about the role that digital technologies and new media forms had to play in these protests. There are those who explain the power and the energy of these movements by looking at the distributed networks of participation enabled by mobile and portable computing devices in the hands of everyday citizens, acknowledging that the digital networks, in their ability to surpass containment and censorship, were successful in building collectives in geographies where it was impossible.

On the other side, there are analysts, who warn us that the technologically over-determined accounts of these protests make the larger human and political histories opaque, rendering them one-dimensional and neglecting the efforts of those who were not a part of the spectacle of digital technologies. On both sides, the arguments are strong and often persuasive. Taking an either-or stance in this debate might be fruitless and it is perhaps better for this debate to co-exist, in a state of tension, exploring both the human commitment and the technological conditions that have made this spate of actions possible.

While the arguments continue, impassioned and somber, there is something else within that discourse that remains unquestioned on all the sides of the debate and might be worth exploring. This is the imagination that whether you are on the side of the people or of the technologies, there is a consensus that 'change' has happened. It is a given that whether or not our accounts are comprehensive and/or our frameworks biased, we are witnessing a change that needs to be accounted for and explained. So deeply ingrained is this idea of change that we have almost no qualifications of what this change is. There is a series of buzzwords that emerge as answers to the question of change – mobilization, participation, collaboration, networking, peer-2-peer, etc. These buzzwords are meant to be self explanatory. The change is sometimes at the level of tactics, at others the level of technological platforms, and at yet others, the level of scale and scope. They indicate, in their presence that a shift has taken place. It is almost a circular dialogue:

Q: What changed?
A: A whole lot of people mobilized themselves using Facebook and Twitter and Blackberries.
Q: So what changed?
A: They participated in demanding for their rights.
Q: True, but what exactly is this change that we are talking about?
A: New collectives have come into being to challenge the status quo.
Q: Right. But what changed?
A: Well, these new collectives are mobilizing themselves using peer-2-peer technologies and networking in unprecedented ways.

Facetious as this imagined dialogue might sound, it is symptomatic of the blind spot that we seem to have developed about the nature of change that is embodied and enabled by these digital technologies.

And it is time perhaps to ask what exactly has changed, apart from the technologies of protest, the modes of engagement, and inclusion of new kinds of citizens in the processes of change. There are a few ways of unpacking this change that we need to build towards.

1. History of the Future
Most change action is geared towards building new futures. However, change can be defined only in its relationship to something else that preceded it. The novelty of the digital technologies is so seductive that it erases the historicity of the contemporary and immerses us only in the contemporary moment. Change cannot be universal. Change cannot be the same everywhere. Change needs to be contextualized and we need to look at the historical confluence of social, cultural, political, and economic forces that have led to the moment of change.

2. Systemic and Surface
There is no denying that there is much that has changed in our demands of change and how we make them. However, we need to make a distinction between modes of engagement and the ambitions of that engagement. What happens when the mobilizations are towards reinforcing certain fundamental and regressive values of control and oppression? What happens when the tools that we celebrate are used for violence and harm? While the new forms of engagement – which are often surface – are interesting because they include more people in the fold of citizen action, they also need to be examined in the light of what they seek to change.

3. Citizen and the State
Citizen action is not new. The history of the modern nation state is a history of citizen action, which fought against feudal structures of power to give birth to the nation as we know it. Similarly, the central role of technologies in crafting citizen action is also not new. Different technology revolutions like print, cinema, telecommunications, etc., have significantly shaped the ways in which citizens have orchestrated themselves to fight for their rights against States and state-like structures that perpetuated social and political inequities.

So, what has changed then needs to be located not in the fact that people are asking for change but that they are reconfiguring their relationship with the State. The State which was the patron of rights and was the central addressee of these protests has lost its position of power and hence we see a wide range of actions which are seeking to build new forms of governance and administration which need to be analyzed.

The young have always been influential in our imagination of the future because they have the most at stake. They continue living in inherited structures as long as those structures promise them a safe, sustainable and equitable future where they can see themselves living in wealth, dignity and safety. When the promissory note of this future disappears, we see the fissures of discontent and anger surfacing. In our conversations around digital natives and citizen action, we need to move beyond the 'How' and concentrate on the 'Why'. Why do so many young people take to the streets as architects of their own future? What are the constants that have failed them, producing a deficit of future, which they are seeking to counteract through these actions? If there is a revolution around the corner, what is it voiced against? And how do we build new conditions of safety, security and stability which enable these digital natives to craft the kind of future they want to occupy? With the *Changing Face of Citizen Action*, we hope to explore these questions in the hope that beyond the technology-human debate, there is something more to be learned about our future and the human will to change.

Political, clandestine and often-times steeped in mystery, street art has gone from being a tool of subversion wielded by gangs, graffiti artists and street kids to playing a prominent role in chronicling – and hijacking – the city's civic action movement. Maesy Angelina gives us a street-side view from Jakarta, Indonesia.

I am enthralled by street art. It snaps me out of my stupor while being stuck in traffic and teases my mind to try and decipher the messages behind the murals. It occupies a battleground, a two-dimensional interface where street artists compete with corporate billboards, government campaigns - and even with each other - for space, to co-exist and voice a discourse. For this reason, its very existence is a form of citizen action, which is amplified when the art deliberately addresses current social and political issues. Then, there is the thrill of risk and mystery – street art is not exactly a legal activity and many street artists remain anonymous while making powerful, social and political commentary, *a la* the infamous British street artist, Banksy.

I wrote a love note for street art in Jakarta along similar lines after my first up, close and personal tour of the graffiti beneath the city's bridges a couple of months ago. I visited two areas: the Dukuh Atas underpass in Central Jakarta and Gatot Subroto in South Jakarta. I posted it on my travel blog, shared it on Twitter, and to my complete surprise, received responses from street artists in Jakarta! The conversations and links shared led me to observe and engage with several street art initiatives that ended up challenging my current perception of the medium.

Street art: Clandestine, Commentary, and Exclusive?

One of the first things the street artists told me was that the area I visited (Dukuh Atas underpass in Central Jakarta) had been proclaimed as a 'street art gallery' by the City Artistic Bureau. Despite the official sounding name, the Bureau has nothing to do with the government. It is an initiative of several street artists who experimented with non-covert mural painting. Instead of waiting until the wee hours of the night, the group brought a full set of paint and brush, lights, a generator, and a 'Work in Progress' sign to the underpass and began working on their murals just after the rush hour. It turned out that they were left to work in peace by the authorities and passers-by who assumed that the artists were government-commissioned workers. The group then upped their antics. They included uniforms and a logo into their ensemble, which are both very similar to the properties used by the Ministry of Public Works.

Although the murals produced by the Bureau are periodically painted over by the government, as is the case with most street art, they have been able to use the same tactic to create more murals in the city. All this I learned from the Bureau's official website. The murals I saw in my tour were indeed political and social commentaries. "Public space does not belong to the corporate!!" was spray-painted over a billboard and not too far from it a poster reminded Jakartans "Don't sell your vote!" in the upcoming governor election. However, links tweeted my way also showed that street artists engage with everyday issues. The City Artistic Bureau worked with a street art crew called Carterpaper to mimic bus stop signs for motorcycle-taxi bases that are informally spread around the city, acknowledging their importance as an alternative transportation in a heavily-jammed city. The Bureau is also collaborating with bicycle-riding communities in Jakarta to paint bicycle lanes in their areas, since the city government has yet to show any signs of putting this into action.

Finally, I have always thought of street artists as anonymous and exclusive, partly because of the law-bending nature of their actions. Apparently this is no longer the case (of course, there are exceptions). In June 2012, the social media networks in Jakarta received invites to participate in the Sunday Street Art Movement, a day where everyone in Indonesia was encouraged to work with a medium of their choice to promote diversity, tolerance and pluralism, and then upload the photo in one's social media account. Participants were also asked to mention Twitter accounts of other existing pluralism campaign initiatives, which

Image: The City Artistic Bureau's Bicycle Lane project

were established as a response to increasing attacks against religious minorities in the country. When I browsed the #SundayStreetArt hashtag on Twitter, contributions did not come exclusively from graffiti artists; I saw a chalk-written message of 'Unity in Diversity' on the walls of an apartment complex, a photo of a *hijab*-wearing girl and a guy with a cross necklace holding hands in front of a mosque, and other amateur contributions from ordinary citizens, all acknowledged by street art crews that retweeted them. Every contribution was welcomed.

Street art 2.0 as Citizen Action

These exchanges and discoveries unsettled my notion of street art, which I now realize is modeled on the idea of Banksy as a political street artist. I assumed that street art was a clandestine, exclusive, mysterious activity and that the messages they highlighted only appeared as commentaries. The few initiatives I share above show that this is certainly not the case.

Street art in Jakarta, and I suspect in other parts of the world as well, share similar features with emerging forms of youth activism. An obvious trait would be the use of Web 2.0 platforms, but the more striking one is how the 2.0 principle of interactivity runs through street art as a form of citizen action. There are times when it has grown more inclusive, asking the public to co-produce messages instead of the typical one-sided campaign led by the creator.

In addition to the one-way communication through murals or posters, now there are forms of street art that become fully meaningful only when it interacts with other occupiers of the urban space, such as when cyclists ride on the bicycle lanes painted by street artists. Concrete, formal politics, like elections, is part of the concern, but so are everyday concerns like traffic jam that reflects dissatisfaction at the government's performance. The tactics of action are creative and playful, as demonstrated by the tongue-in-cheek mimicry of the City Artistic Bureau that echoes the meme-generating practice of digital natives.

These are new, up-and-coming forms and modes of street art, which are most likely heralded by a younger generation of street artists. It has been increasingly argued that to understand new forms of youth activism, one needs to be willing to shed preconceived notions of activism and genuinely attempt to understand the (youth) actors' theory of change – the same is required if we were to truly appreciate these emerging forms of street art as citizen action.

Photo, courtesy of the City Artistic Bureau's official website and Facebook page.

From stunning Neolithic cave art to becoming an iconic symbol of protest, the human fist has traveled a revolutionary road. Lincoln Cushing takes us on a guided tour.

A persistent symbol of resistance and unity, the clenched fist (or raised fist) is part of the broader genre of hand symbols that include the peace sign, the forward-thrust-fist, and the clasped hands. The clenched fist usually appears in full, frontal display showing all fingers and is occasionally integrated with other images, such as a peace symbol or a tool (hammer, for example).

Early examples of the fist in graphic art can be found at least as far back as 1917, with another example from Mexico in 1948. Fist images, in some form, were used in numerous political graphic genres, including the French and Soviet revolutions, the United States Communist Party, and the Black Panther Party for Self-defense. However, these all followed an iconographic convention. The fist was always *part* of something: holding a tool or other symbol, part of an arm or human figure, or shown in action (smashing, etc.). But graphic artists from the New Left changed that in 1968, with an entirely new treatment. This "new" fist stood out with its stark simplicity, coupled with a popularly understood meaning of rebellion and militancy. It was easy to reproduce at any scale and modify (long lines of fists, sun rays of fists, etc.) Michael Rossman and I have concluded that, to the best of our knowledge, the moment this first occurred was a poster by San Francisco Bay Area graphic artist Frank's Cieciorka for Stop The Draft Week, for actions January 14, 1968 protesting the arrest of the "Oakland Seven" This poster was adapted from one he had done earlier for Stop The Draft Week (October 17, 1967) that used a large, blocky figure wielding a fist. The second poster took the fist and was used on its own.

This fist, or versions of it, was adopted by "the movement," appearing in numerous posters and flyers for student, anti-war, women's, and other political activities within the United States. It showed up almost immediately within the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS, which used it on a flier for the 1968 Chicago National Democratic Convention protest). A virtually identical fist used in the 1969 Harvard student strike traces its design to School of Design student Harvey Hacker. Another version drawn by Frank Cieciorka also saw widespread dissemination. As he describes it, "…in the summer of '65, I had just returned to San Francisco after a year as a SNCC field secretary in Mississippi. I had been inspired by Jose Posada's corridos (small woodcuts that sold for the equivalent of a penny in early 20th century Mexico). I had planned to do a series of small woodcuts and wood engravings in unlimited editions that I could sell for a buck apiece. The fist was the first wood cut of the series & became very popular".

The use of the fist declined towards the end of the 70s, but its persistence as a movement icon is evident by its occasional reappearance, as in a 2000 Women Take Back the Night flyer, the 2004 logo for a chapter of Earth First!, and the CD cover for progressive music NGO Axis of Justice. As with all movement symbols, there is the real risk of appropriation by commercial culture; witness the "radical" shock-jock Howard Stern's logo evoking the struggle to break free from FCC regulation, complete with an added crossbar across two knuckles making it an "H".

A recent conflict over the use of this charged image involves the Socialist Party of Malaysia (PSM), whose distinctive, clenched fist logo has been deemed "violent" by the government, denying it recognition as a legal political party. One of the groups involved in the 2011 popular uprisings that toppled the Egyptian government recycled OTPOR's fist. Yet, the militant fist continues to be co-opted, even as a tool for capitalism and right-wing and conservative groups. The other side uses this potent image for labor film festivals, environmental activism, and the labor resistance in Wisconsin. The fist has become universal and so, context is crucial to understanding its meaning. The Occupy Wall Street movement of 2011 that spread throughout the U.S., proved fertile ground for more street graphics, some new, some recycling the iconic "hand" of Frank Cieciorka. Renewed labor resistance in 2012 produced the clever "No Justice, No Piece" for Milwaukee pizza workers.

There is a story within this story. Vast amounts of work need to be put into better documenting for analyzing our own history. One would think that there would be authoritative treatises on such basic social movement icons as this image, but that is not the case. Misinformation abounds. In researching this article, I ran across this statement on the website of the Tom Robinson band, an important though underappreciated gay/revolutionary group from England, whose logo was a clenched fist like SDS's: "The TRB fist logo...was from a 19th century miner's union banner…" Inquiries to Tom led to a three-way conversation in which the designer, Roger Huddle (of Rock Against Racism) revealed he had first seen it in a Black Panther context. Scholarship in this area suffers from the dual stigmas of being "political" and involving poster graphics, which get very little respect in the United States. Alternative archives, such as Rossman's AOUON archive and the Center for the Study of Political Graphics in Los Angeles, are vital to our cultural health, and must be supported.

This article is a work in progress. Check for updates on Cushing's website.
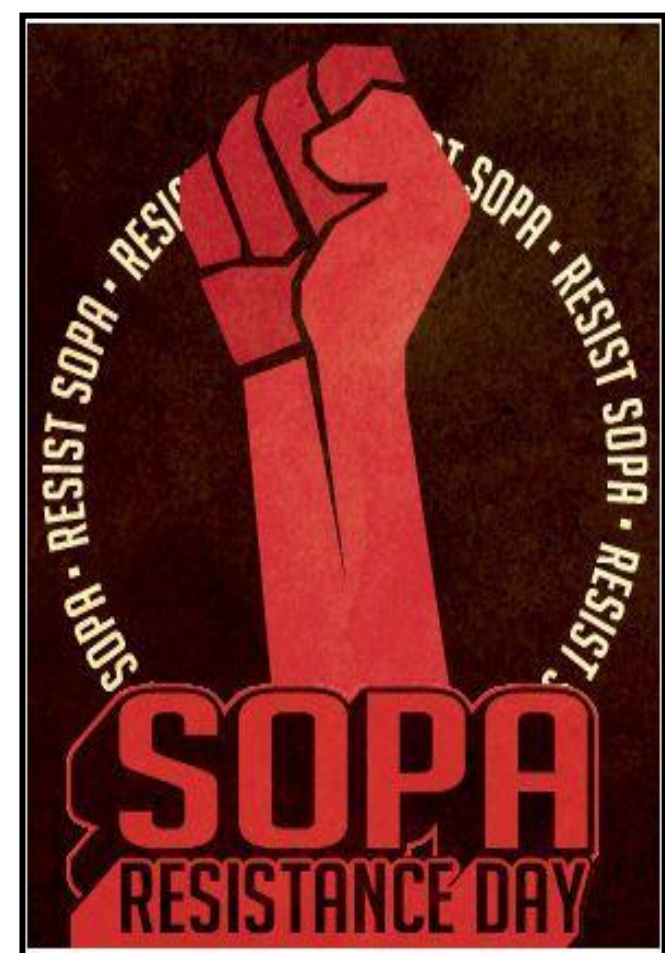
A Consideration of the Implications of New Developments in Practice, by Daphne Plessner.

By way of clarification, there are contested views of what constitutes citizenship. Some argue that it is implicitly bounded by the nation-state and therefore is meaningless without a legislative and juridical system that polices an individual's status within a geopolitical space. This view focuses on the rights of an individual in terms of the benefits they accrue under a state's protection. Conflicts arise between state and citizen due to the reality of migration, dual identities, resident aliens, minorities within a population where governments, particularly in the United States, struggle to justify democratic commitments and values (articulated in the Constitution) while exploiting those who are not recognized as citizens but who contribute to a nations economy, its labor force and social fabric.

Others argue that citizenship is a psycho-social set of behaviors that extend beyond a formal system of legal protections and instead captures a dimension of belonging that promotes our democratic aspirations such as liberty, equity and fraternity. Membership in this sense involves 'participation'. And participation is a technique (or a 'technology') through which members form, and can potentially reform, the democratic state.

Understanding the manner in which social and political life is structured is therefore germane to this discussion, albeit limited in scope for the purposes of this paper. However, to offer more context, intellectuals such as Paolo Virno, Antonio Negri, Franco "Bifo" Berardi, Maurizio Lazzarato et al, outline the character of our 'postmodernist', 'post-Fordist' past and have addressed the ever widening gap that has emerged between internationalized political elites and the increasingly degraded social and economic conditions of those who are governed within 'democratic' states.

To take a specific example, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's book *Empire*, published over ten years ago, helped set the tone for proactively rethinking politics and had contributed to discourses within activist networks due in part to their characterization of society, in particular, their reviving the idea of 'multitude' that fitted with contemporary sensibilities and experience. This new notion of multitude is a key concept within the autonomist intellectual network and authors such as Virno and Lazzarato lend their own refinements to its meaning.

However, to continue with Hardt and Negri's analysis of the problem: they suggest that under the banner of an empire (loosely understood as a political domain) society can no longer be understood as a cohesive whole. Instead, the social space is constructed of a "plural multitude of productive, creative subjectivities".

The multitude is nomadic, de-territorialized, and "in perpetual motion". In short, the multitude is a boundless mass of networks of people who "express, nourish, and develop positively their own constituent projects". Hardt and Negri have characterized a world that is peopled by active autonomous networks. They argue that these vying networks and associations are vital to the development of democracy. Why? Because the presupposition is that democracy only thrives under a social and political discourse that embodies difference. Difference, intellectual conflict, debates, etc., inherently constitute the power of the sovereign. The point is not new and has its origins primarily in the work of Machiavelli and they lean on Machiavelli's understanding of the constitutive elements of a democratic state as agonistic. Being combative then, is necessary for a democratic state to succeed in first, being democratic, and secondly, to expand beyond its own borders.

Hardt and Negri also identify the conceptual barrenness of society understood as a collective mass. There is no doubt that there has been a shift in the social imaginary in the recent decade, which their notion of the multitude beautifully captures. It encapsulates our engagement and habituation to new communication technology that not only extends the limits of our body but also psychologically amplifies the atomization of society. Such atomization must be seen in conjunction with persistent neoliberal strategies reducing every aspect of human life to the marketplace, which ultimately has configured the world differently and infused our collective imagination with the sentiment of perpetual precariousness. And this has a deep bearing on how we understand and act out our relationships to one another as members of a political community and as citizens of the state.

Where Hardt and Negri are wrong is in their assumption that the multitude is deliberative and participatory in ways that allow for democratic ideals to flourish. The networks could equally be understood as indifferent, or worse. The multitude is constituted of amorphous and nebulous groupings, subjective, yes certainly, but ultimately self-selecting, temporal alliances based on emotional need, shared beliefs, and ambitions and/or lifestyles. Nor are the networks analytical or objective. The networks are, for the most part, family, friends, and fans. In political instances that extend to single issue direct-action groups, unions, etc., the public landscape is increasingly a space where no single entity moves very far from its own satellite of associations and the lines of communication—the means of public discourse— have dissipated. This environment, this networked subjectivity, is not a precondition for a thriving democracy. It instead points to a kind of materialistic feudalism, which conflicts with the view that we have of ourselves as citizens of a society allegedly striving for equity and freedom.
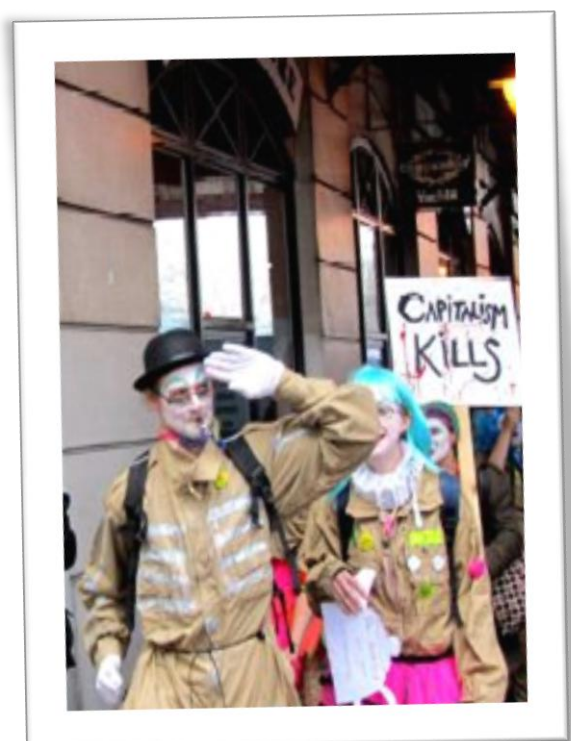
Music of Resistance

They are unique musical personalities from some of the world's most troubled areas - what makes them different is their need to communicate their politics through music. They are all ambitious and talented but for them 'making it' is not about diamonds and sports cars - it is about radical political change. They come from Nigeria, Mozambique, the favelas of Brazil, Cape Verde, the desert of the Southern Sahara and inner-city London. Read more at: **http://aje.me/xjrcWt**

Dance Protest in Israel

More than 250 women participated in a flashmob in Beit Shemesh, a city located 30 km west of Jerusalem in Israel's Jerusalem District on January 6, 2012, dancing in protest of gender segregation in public spaces. Passersby were surprised to see a group of women grooving to Queen's "Don't Stop Me Now" in the small town outside Jerusalem, a flashpoint of conflict over gender segregation in recent weeks. Inspired, some residents joined into the dancing, which was organized via Facebook over the course of three weeks. Read more at: **http://bit.ly/zqXeBS**

Painting from a Burmese Prison

Htein Lin has six and a half years' worth of art painted on white cotton prison uniforms. The paintings? His own. The uniforms? Also his own. Lin is a Burmese painter and performance artist who spent more than seven years as a political prisoner — seven months of that time on death row. And during all that time, he has never stopped creating art. Read more at: **http://bit.ly/PQ24nX**

Your Gods Have Failed: Poetic Protest by Cambridge University Student Leads to His Rustication

November 2011 saw the rustication – suspended for a couple of terms – of Owen Holland, who is reading for a PhD in English at Cambridge University, for his part in the protest staged against David Willetts, Minister for Universities and Science, when he was about to commence a speech. Read more at: **http://bit.ly/w9Wujj**

Can you attribute activism and charity to a 'savior' complex, or is there something more behind taking up a cause and showering generosity on those less fortunate than us? Chaya Babu explores the Kony 2012 campaign in its aftermath.

> **Teju Cole** @tejucole — Follow
>
> 5- The White Savior Industrial Complex is not about justice. It is about having a big emotional experience that validates privilege.
>
> 8 Mar 12 — Reply Retweet Favorite

> **Teju Cole** @tejucole — Follow
>
> 1- From Sachs to Kristof to Invisible Children to TED, the fastest growth industry in the US is the White Savior Industrial Complex.
>
> 8 Mar 12 — Reply Retweet Favorite

Whether or not you tweet, you have probably at least heard about Teju Cole's cynical twitter posts about the Kony 2012 campaign. Aside from this particular rant and the debate that ensued around it, much of the media centered on the absurdity of Invisible Children's viral ploy for Americans to just simply STOP KONY NOW. I think Cole's views are a bit extreme and oversimplified, and Max Fisher at the Atlantic explains why:

> Cole makes the same mistake as Invisible Children, reducing an entire culture to his interactions with it and a few easy stereotypes, a monolithic mass to be judged and maybe even solved. Not all Western involvement in Africa is driven by the "White Savior Industrial Complex" — just as there are capable African leaders, so are there responsible Western aid workers — and some of it has been remarkably productive.

Still, on the whole, I 100% agree with the criticism of Jason Russell and Invisible Children's 'call to action,' not to mention the ridiculous reel of images in the YouTube video, which has garnered almost 74.5 million views at the time of this posting. The juxtaposition of Russell's big-eyed, tow-head toddler - the very picture of white, American, childhood innocence - next to Ugandan teenagers harrowed over the prospect of abduction, brutality, and murder at the hands of the LRA is surely meant to tug at the heartstrings. And it does a little, unless you're remotely aware of the issue summed up well once again in the Atlantic:

> Invisible Children has turned the myopic worldview of the adolescent — "if I don't know about it, then it doesn't exist, but if I care about it, then it is the most important thing in the world" — into a foreign policy prescription. The "invisible children" of the group's name were the children of northern Uganda forcibly recruited by the LRA. In the group's narrative, these children were "invisible" until American students took notice of them.

Obviously it's just silly to think that buying a "stop kony" bracelet (which comes with a 'free one for a friend' yay!) can realistically influence policy or affect change on the ground. The dialog around America's deeply problematic views of paternalism and self-importance does need to resurface from time to time, just to remind us of the many sad instances when we've only made things catastrophically worse by acting under the misconception that nations in turmoil need our genius intervention.

As an American in India, however, I am curious to explore more closely Cole's generalizations/accusations about what's behind westerners' desire to work, give aid, or generally hope to create positive results in conflict-, disaster-, or poverty-stricken areas far from home. Is it always as simple as the WSIC (white savior industrial complex): stroking our own egos, gifting ourselves with a big emo journey of self-discovery while briefly touching the lives of the less fortunate before leaving them behind and returning to the wide, spotless, peaceful, paved streets of American cities - the setting of our *normal* lives?

It has to be more complicated than that. Like Max Fisher says, there are countless westerners in Africa (and India) doing great work. It's hard for me to provide firsthand empirical evidence of this because I don't ask my expat friends in the social sector here to show me data measuring the impact they have had. I feel like that would be weird. At bars and stuff. And just in general. But I have seen enough to be confident that a lot of the people I have met out here are not the romanticizing, exoticizing, poverty-porn sort. Of course some are, but we have covered that already.

I am interested, though, in locating the fulcrum between either scorning or praising those in positions of relative power who want to improve the situations of those who have clearly been dealt a shittier hand in life. When is this patronizing and when is it generous, kind, beneficent? What would the world look like if the haves never decided to help out the have-nots? I am not taking a stand on either end - clearly I think many of us Americans can be raging, ignorant idiots when it comes to problems both at home and overseas, and yet I am also someone with big ideas about influencing cultural attitudes, and therefore, politics relating to women and racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities. I guess you could say I am guilty on both accounts. Do I abandon those dreams just because people frequently ask me, "but who are *you* to care?"?

I think about these issues frequently since i write about social development and tolerance in a poor country, and from childhood I have had a desire to blast the systems that keep certain groups in sustained oppressive conditions in the U.S. But if i gain some sense of purpose, and therefore happiness, from seeking a semblance of justice and equity, does that make it wrong or somehow lessen the meaning of the work? Just asking…

I interviewed a man from Chennai (city in southern India) named Joe Madiath. He is the founder of an NGO called Gram Vikas, which means "village development." Gram Vikas has seen huge success over the past three decades in elevating some of the poorest and most marginalized tribes in India, bringing piped water and sanitation to 1,090 villages in Orissa (state on the eastern coast of India). One of Gram Vikas' biggest obstacles in starting out was gaining the trust of the communities it was trying to help. So many others had come and gone and exploited their need. Now the organization is scaling its model across India and internationally; it exercises this same patience with each and every new village it works with.

This has all been made possible because in the early 1970s, when Joe decided to make something positive out of the brewing disenchantment with the status quo felt by large swaths of global youth, he recruited individuals graduating from south Indian universities who could afford to put off entering the professional world. these were the original workers of Gram Vikas - their comfortable financial circumstances allowed them this time to bring relief to refugees from the newly created Bangladesh and to victims of the largest typhoon to hit India.

I asked Joe why he does what he does. He said, "It was clear from the beginning that I would get the most amounts of happiness and psychological satisfaction if I worked with the underprivileged and improved their conditions." I think Joe is cool people. I wanted to say, "I feel you Joe. We're not that different, you and I."

I hope it's evident that I wholeheartedly support the backlash against the Kony 2012 campaign. I understand the harm caused by misguided and misinformed efforts toward change. The uproar just happened to spark some related thoughts.

This is a modified version of the original posted at Chaya's blog.

"I am a visible child from Northern Uganda. Who are the 'Invisible Children'?" asks **Maureen Agena**.

Having grown up in Northern Uganda, Lango sub-region to be more specific, and studied at St. Mary's College, Aboke, a school from which Joseph Kony's rebels abducted 139 girls, the name Kony is not new to me. For the four years that I spent in that school (1999-2002), together with other students, I remember praying the Rosary at the School Grotto every day and in the process, reading out the names of the 30 girls who had remained in captivity after Sr. Rachelle, an Italian nun, together with a Ugandan teacher, John Bosco, rescued only 109 of them.

An annual date (October 10) was set aside and dedicated to prayers for all the captives. All we did on that day was pray for the girls to be released from captivity. For those four years, I had never heard of an organization called "Invisible Children" (it was founded later). But all I heard was the stories from some of the girls and children who had escaped from captivity. In 2002 alone, I could count the number of days I spent at school as we were frequently sent home because of the threats and rumours from villagers (Abongodero and Otwal areas) that the rebels wanted to abduct more girls.

#Stopkony: A joke or a wakeup call?
I had traveled to western Uganda for field work on issues of maternal health when I first read a tweet on March 6, 2012 with the hashtag #stopkony. Initially, I treated it as a joke, until I saw 'Uganda' and 'Kony' trending worldwide on Twitter. Being a social media enthusiast, I rushed to Facebook to cross-check and find out that a similar discussion was ongoing. I was shocked to find a video shared on my wall by a girl from St. Mary's College, Aboke, who works as a communications person with Invisible Children, here in Uganda. This was the message that accompanied the video that has now gone viral. *"Trusting you will do more than just watch....help spread the word..."* I watched the video and sent her my feedback: "So what exactly am I supposed to do with this video? Share? Not me dear." For the first 5 minutes I had no idea what the video was about, until I saw the old images of LRA and listened attentively.

As the discussion grew on Twitter, I realized that the internet has indeed become part of everyday life and has played an increasing role in the delivery of news about issues that concern citizens. Today, a new form of internet journalism – Citizen Journalism – has taken root and many ordinary citizens have learnt how to compile, cross-check, report and present news and videos, much like the Kony video.

However, I have problems with this *campaign* because it not only tarnishes Uganda's image by distorting reality, but also undermines the effort that different governments and peace lovers like Archbishop Baptist Odama of Gulu put in to have peace talks with the rebels. Moreover, it only portrays the hopelessness of Ugandans (the citizens and the military), who are shown asking for help and some form of intervention from the government and citizens of the United States, who are shown to have much concern for the plight of children in northern Uganda. What is obvious is that the video throws the spotlight firmly on one guy alone, and the campaign comes across as a 'one man show'.

I doubt that the people of Northern, Eastern and West Nile regions in Uganda, the most affected by this war, have any idea that a video talking about their plight has gone viral on the internet. It is 2012 and the people of these regions have moved on from the conflicted times depicted in the video. It's actually a time of rebuilding and peace now. The video should have highlighted the current situation rather than threatened the globe with outdated information. The organization has painted Uganda as a country still in the grips of terror. Who will reframe this reality now?

This is a modified version of Maureen's original article that appears on her blog.

How did you react to the Kony 2012 campaign video?
I came across the video on March 6, 2012, first as a link on Twitter. The video takes a very simple view of the situation in Uganda and is not holistic in its approach. What we indirectly get from this video is that Ugandans fit the one dimensional African stereotype of 'poor, helpless and dependent' citizens in need of Western intervention. It does not present a 360-degree perspective of the people affected by this war. So many points could have been highlighted: the stories of the families from whom the children were abducted, the diplomatic and military efforts of the government, and the fight by ordinary individuals over the years to bring peace to that region.

The video only focuses on the child soldiers and then straightaway takes us to the efforts put in by a bunch of Americans to deal with the conflict in Africa - without involving the people directly affected. There is a total disconnect between the Invisible Children and the community they claim to serve. Why make Kony famous, anyways? In the video, they advocate a militaristic approach of apprehending Kony through the help of the U.S. army. They should have shown the possibility of having other channels open too, because in trying to get Kony, lives of many might be lost. Secondly, now that Kony has been made famous on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc., what next? If he is not captured by December 31, 2012 what will happen? Stopping Kony lies beyond the comfort of our living rooms.

What is the situation in Uganda today with regards to the children afflicted in this conflict?
The children who come from the areas affected by this war have returned home to their families. They are starting all over again and trying to rebuild their lives and resettle. The Kony video depicts a reality that is almost 6 years ago. Imagine how these children would react or feel when they see that a video doing the rounds of the Internet is depicting them as helpless victims, suffering under a man who they have long escaped!

Do you think the merchandize sold on the Invisible Children's website went towards raising awareness?
Bracelets, t-shirts and other promotional material being produced by Invisible Children can only be worn by those people who have no idea what this war did to the people. I personally would not wear such a shirt or bracelet to be reminded about the atrocities Kony caused, to be reminded about my schoolmates who were abducted and held in captivity for years; to be reminded about the sleepless nights I had in fear of being abducted and raped; The list is long.

What are the positives of the Kony 2012 video?
The video has been one of the biggest advocacy initiative organized using social media. It became extremely popular on social media and millions of people engaged with the information presented to them. It is evident that ordinary citizens, without any professional training in journalism, can leverage digital media tools combined with the global distribution of the internet, to spread their message.

Uganda Gets to Trend Worldwide on Twitter. The Question is Why?
Albert Mucunguzi

Uganda is a poor country. Uganda is unknown to so many people outside Africa. But those who know about it today are a few millions more than those that did at the beginning of the week. How do I say this? I'll borrow the words of TIME Magazine's Ishaan Tharoor: "Most Americans began this week not knowing who Joseph Kony was. That's not surprising: most Americans begin every week not knowing a lot of things, especially about a part of the world as obscured from their vision as Uganda, the country where Kony and his Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) commenced a brutal insurgency in the 1980s that lingers to this day."

http://blog.almuc.me/2012/03/random-thoughts/

#STOPKONY: Different Perspectives
Rotimi Olawale

I am sometimes amused when I read about my country, Nigeria from a foreigner's perspective. Sometimes, the issues are seen in a different context. Issues are muddled up. Small challenges are overblown while sometimes international development agencies and non-profits tilt the information in their favour to appeal to an international audience. Most times, they gain global attention and ordinary people affected by these campaigns hardly have their say. Things are changing. This is 2012. The highlight of the year was the 'Stop Kony' campaign created by Invisible Children. It plays much on emotions to garner viewership and places a lot of emphasis on the role of the United States to solve a crisis.

http://youthhubafrica.org/2012/03/09/stopkony-different-perspectives/

Kony 2012 Campaign and Lessons Learnt
Javie Ssozi

The approach this campaign takes is aimed at deriving support from the United States and other western countries to intervene. It's about time that the whole world realised that Africa appreciates the support (foreign aid and donations) but we – Africans want to be more involved in solving our own problems. Over the years Africans have tried to prove to the world that we can contribute sustainable solutions not just to Africa's problems but also to some of the world's biggest challenges. The problem is that, often Africa's opinions are disregarded. I must acknowledge that it's partly an African problem – that some lazy Africans like to be provided for – or spoon-fed.

http://jssozi.wordpress.com/2012/03/08/my-take-on-kony2012-campaign-and-lessons-learnt/

Worst Idea Ever
Kate Furman and Amanda Taub

First, organizations like Invisible Children not only take up resources that could be used to fund more intelligent advocacy, they take up rhetorical space that could be used to *develop* more intelligent advocacy. And yeah, this may seem like an absurdly academic point to raise when talking about a problem that is clearly crying out for pragmatic solutions, but, uh, the way we define problems is important. Really, really important. Choosing to simplistically define Congolese women as "The Raped" and Ugandan children as "The Abducted" constrains our ability to think creatively about the problems they face, and work with them to combat these problems. Second, treating their problems as one-dimensional issues that can be solved by a handful of plucky college students armed only with the strength of their convictions and a video camera doesn't help anyone. These gets back to something very simple and very smart that Alanna Shaikh wrote a few months ago: "Bad development work is based on the idea that poor people have nothing. Something is better than nothing, right? So anything you give these poor people will be better than what they had before."

http://www.wrongingrights.com/2009/03/worst-idea-ever.html/

Kony 2012: Why Slacktivism is Conceptually Misleading
Zeynep Tufecki

My argument is this: the concept of slacktivism is not just naïve and condescending, it is misinformed and misleading. What is called commonly called slacktivism is not at all about "slacking activists"; rather it is about non-activists taking symbolic action—often in spheres traditionally engaged only by activists or professionals (governments, NGOs, international institutions.). Since these so-called "slacktivists" were never activists to begin with, they are not in dereliction of their activist duties. On the contrary, they are acting, symbolically and in a small way, in a sphere that has traditionally been closed off to "the masses" in any meaningful fashion. In other words, slacktivism should be seen as the encroachment of politics and civics into people's everyday worlds which tend to be dominated by mundane concerns of day-to-day existence–or dominated by the consumerism transmitted through traditional media. It's also a step in the unravelling of the professionalization of human rights and cause advocacy. [Credit: parts of this argument were developed in discussion with Alaa Abdal Fatah of Egypt and Sami Ben Gharbia of Tunisia].

http://technosociology.org/?p=904

The Problem with Oversimplification: Unpacking Kony 2012
Ethan Zuckerman

The campaign Invisible Children is running is so compelling because it offers an extremely simple narrative: Kony is a uniquely bad actor, a horrific human being, whose capture will end suffering for the people of Northern Uganda. If each of us does our part, influences powerful people, the world's most powerful military force will take action and Kony will be captured. Russell implicitly acknowledges the simplicity of the narrative with his filmmaking. Much of his short film features him explaining to his young son that Kony is a bad guy, and that dad's job is capturing the bad guy. We are asked to join the campaign against Kony literally by being spoken to as a five year old. It's not surprising that a five year old vision of a problem – a single bad guy, a single threat to eliminate – leads to an unworkable solution. Nor is it a surprise that this extremely simple narrative is compelling and easily disseminated. The Kony story resonates because it's the story of an identifiable individual doing bodily harm to children. It's a story with a simple solution, and it plays into existing narratives about the ungovernability of Africa, the power of US military and the need to bring hidden conflict to light.

http://www.ethanzuckerman.com/blog/2012/03/08

The Kony video campaign brought about an endemic shift in how the world perceived the average digital native from the Global North versus a youth from the Global South, says Nilofar Ansher.

Right at this moment, there are thousands of active campaigns online with modest goals of 'Saving the Planet'. For every social media-linked petition, you will read an equal number of rhetoric that dismisses these campaigns as nothing more than the digital native's idea of lazy social service. Often, bytes of digital print are devoted to coining new terms and definitions for this kind of activism: clicktivism, slacktivism, couch-campaigns, take your pick.

We know that the first step in tackling an issue, especially systemic social issues such corruption or gender discrimination, is by raising awareness. A couple of decades ago it would have been books, speeches, newspaper exposes or pamphlets distributed at rallies. Today, online campaigns are partially taking the place of these traditional whistleblowers; they highlight problems through a medium that the young are most comfortable with and persistently get the message across. And persistence is the key to impacting the demography. Online campaigns have to be relentless in churning out messages and action points. They have to employ multiple streams of communications: video, text, sms, images, memes, posters, events, discussions, and couple that with on-field activities that have to once again connect with the web constituents. So, a demonstration in a public space organized through Facebook has to be live-streamed or live-tweeted so that people supporting the cause online – yes, safely sitting on their couch - understand the impact of their support and clicks and shares.

Why then this nagging criticism of digital activists?

The Kony 2012 campaign received equal amounts of vitriol on one hand and blind support on the other. The critics felt that the campaign was more of a marketing blitzkrieg directed at grabbing young – meaning, gullible – eyeballs, than a sincere effort in effecting policy changes or mobilizing aid. While the organization might be trying to raise funds by selling Kony merchandize, it just came across as being too commercial and less of a goodwill effort. The move didn't backfire though, as scores of people willingly supported the cause and contributed time, money and efforts in raising awareness about the atrocities committed by Kony. However, did it all come to nothing when it became known that the Kony campaign managers falsified information and distorted the issue about the Ugandan war lord's activities and present whereabouts? No one can dismiss this allegation and Invisible Children Inc. should be answerable to the public for taking license with the truth. They should be held accountable for the content they put out there. In this case, if the message has been distorted, then the end results also don't hold up to authenticity or praise.

The Kony campaign was not merely a web-only movement. It was not restricted to signing e-petitions or liking a Facebook page. Invisible Children are a registered organization and they held several on-field activities, meetings and workshops in colleges to highlight the plight of hundreds of Ugandan children recruited as child soldiers by Kony. So, it would be incorrect to say that online initiatives have no accountability. A registered not-for-profit working in the field for decades could also be the hotbed of corruption. The problem then is about accountability in the sector and not the medium itself. Yes, Invisible Children deserve to be censured, but the medium they chose to highlight an issue – Internet and a video campaign – does not.

One outcome of the Kony debacle is what it brought out in sharp relief: the insidious split in how the world perceives a digital native from the Global North in comparison to a digital native from the Global South. Digital natives themselves turned on their digital native peers. Instead of engaging with the Director of Invisible Children and offering an honest critique of how the video campaign could have shifted gears or portrayed information in a different format, we went on a warpath, not really interested in the initiative's raison d'être but crucifying the organization's director for his off-screen antics. The fracas kind of ended with a footnote saying that a White, Male, Youth from North America didn't have the sensibilities to understand such a sensitive issue, where as a Brown / Black Male, Youth from Asia or Africa would have handled this episode quite sensitively.

The last time I looked, digital natives from anywhere around the world are no different from all the average youths studying for a college degree, surviving life on unpaid internships and entrepreneurial dreams, with a vague idea that they can change the world. They are earnest, probably not do-gooders, but concerned enough to highlight issues that bother them. The means they choose are definitely new: sending out petitions via email (or cyber-flash mobs); after all, the web is where they spend the maximum time in a day! If the message gets across, why be so cynical about the medium? We are concerned enough to 'Think up a Meme' when our small world is threatened. Perhaps it's not enough to get a headline grabbing, "Memes Achieve World Peace!", but there is always a precedent for something to happen for the first time, right?

COUNTERFOIL

PERSPECTIVES
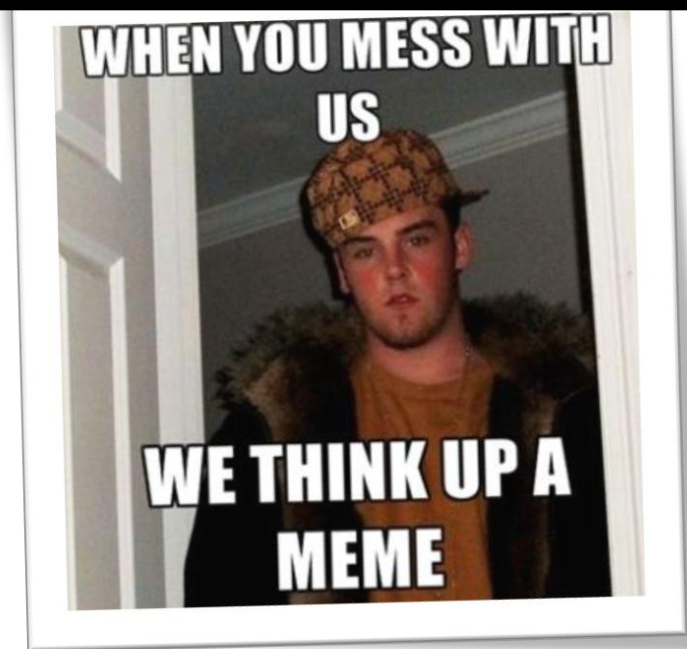
Be it online or offline, successful citizen movements are approached through careful planning and foresight, and not merely by paying lip service to popular imaginings of protest campaigns, says Jillian C York.

Digital activism—that is, collective action tactics conducted online—has often been derided as "slacktivism." The premise is simple: "Armchair activists," those too lazy to take to the streets to protest, click the Facebook "like" button or retweet something, assuming their mere approval, or sharing of content, will have a 'real' impact. The slacktivist is assumed to contribute minimal effort to a cause, to take undeserved pride in his/ her minimal accomplishment.

It is certainly true that some online actions, when unaccompanied by strategic vision, are the very definition of slacktivism. But the term has become overused, thrown at anyone who raises a voice instead of a picket sign. We discard online action as useless while simultaneously feeling nostalgia for the tools of our predecessors: the leaflet, the cassette tape, the samizdat (a Russian form of dissent involving reproduction of censored publication by hand and passing it on to the public).

Last year in Egypt, the world watched, stunned, as a city, then a country, rose up against the 20-year dictatorship of Hosni Mubarak. Indeed, what the world saw was a mass of humans converging upon a city square in protest. But what they missed was everything else: Offline actions—such as labor strikes—and online ones, such as the years of collective blogging about police brutality, torture, and other human rights violations. The online actions in particular served a dual purpose: They raised awareness amongst a certain subset of the population, certainly, but perhaps more importantly, they confirmed for many what they always knew but couldn't talk about.

When expression is stifled, either by government censorship or self-censorship, what often occurs is a phenomenon known as "pluralistic ignorance," a situation in which a majority of group members privately reject a norm, but assume that others accept it. The lack of public opposition to Mubarak may have left many activists feeling as though ousting him was impossible; it was only when they were able to come together—both through online communities and offline ones—that they were able to see how widespread their beliefs were.

On the blog of Egyptian activist Hossam Hamalawy, there reads a quote: "In a dictatorship, independent journalism by default becomes a form of activism, and the spread of information is essentially an act of agitation." In Egypt, this was certainly true. It took years of writing, organizing, and yes, activities deemed by many to be "slacktivism" to reach the beginnings of revolution.

It has also proven to be true elsewhere: In Tunisia, where in the mainstream media's absence, the mere act of blogging enabled activists to gain global support for their cause, perhaps even sparking a domino effect throughout the region. In Sudan, where weeks of offline protest would have gone ignored had it not been for the Twitterati of Khartoum, who ensured with their tweets that their government's crackdown didn't go unnoticed. In Pakistan, where global organizing—most of which took place through online channels—defeated government plans to install a large-scale online censorship system. Similarly, in the United States, the "blackout" of dozens of websites to protest the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) got enough attention—and enough people to pick up the phone and call their elected officials—that the bill was ultimately quashed.

But these examples all have something in common: They were all pushed ahead by dedicated groups and individuals who knew how to rally support for their causes. Indeed, a Georgetown University study published in 2011 looked at American interactions with online activism and found that those who engage in social issues online are twice as likely as their "offline" counterparts to volunteer and participate in events.

There are, of course, plenty of counter examples as well. One prominent one is the early 2012 release of the STOP KONY 2012 campaign, in which a group of naive young Americans promised that watching and sharing their video would somehow enable them to capture Joseph Kony—a worthy target for sure—by the end of the year. Similarly, the "Save Darfur" campaign—which spent millions of dollars on PR alone and has been criticized for having minimal impact on the ground—relied upon selling ubiquitous green bracelets in the hopes that "raising awareness" would be enough to solve a problem.

The right conclusion, then, is not that online activism is inherently "slacktivism" (nor is offline action inherently effective). Rather, it is that a mere click of a mouse here or there, without any focus to a particular cause or strategy, is the online equivalent of throwing a few quarters in a donation jar, wearing a bracelet, or marching once in a rally and calling yourself an "activist." The problem is not, however, the medium; as it has been demonstrated time and time again: online action coupled with strategic vision works.

Unraveling the Arab Spring

By Taylor Marvin

Many Middle Eastern countries have had a long history of stable autocratic governments, at least for the last thirty years. What conditions, in your opinion, allowed a mass democratic protest movement like the Arab Spring to emerge now for the first time in decades? There is the demographic issue of young population who are educated and worldly and engaged in digital media, paying attention to the news and who are not well employed — either unemployed or underemployed. http://bit.ly/RuvFpV

Connected Conflict

The Internet amplified but did not create the bravery that freed Libya
By Moez Zeiton

The media centers had basic equipment: simple PCs and digital cameras. But Libyan youths were creative, editing footage of the conflict into montages uploaded to YouTube and Facebook channels. As Libyans watched Tunisia and Egypt erupt in protest, we knew that our own revolution would be less connected. Free press was nonexistent in Libya, Internet penetration was very low, and what few media outlets existed were plagued by censorship. The Internet blackout didn't stop the media centers, though. http://bit.ly/WbtPyn

Rap Music Fueled Arab Uprisings

Rap music has inspired freedom fighters and pro-democracy protesters from Tunisia to Bahrain.
By Karl Bostic

A bazaar in Libya's rebel capital of Benghazi might not appear to be the most obvious place to find a would-be Jay-Z. But 18-year-old Boge and many others like him are pushing the boundaries of freedom of expression across the Middle East. The rappers have even been credited with helping to spark the so-called Arab Spring uprisings that deposed three long-serving dictators and rocked several other regimes. Boge who is following in the footsteps of his hip-hop heroes. "Our families are dying but yeah we're still tough, Gadhafi is trying to assassinate us," he rhymes during an impromptu performance amid vendors selling flags at a market in the eastern Libyan city where the revolt against Moammar Gadhafi began. http://nbcnews.to/Tgf0Ez

While words and weapons were wielded in equal measures by the rulers and protestors in the countries heralding the Arab Spring, women in several Arabic nations chose to challenge the status quo of society – by placing their **bodies** at the heart of the public debate, writes Nadia Aissaoui.

In conservative societies, men have always subjugated women by exercising control over their bodies. The female body, virgin and fertilizable, shackled, covered and concealed, is the object of all manner of prohibitions and obsessions. It is both coveted as the symbol of family honor and stigmatized as a source of temptation and discord - the word in Arabic is *fitna*, *by Nadia Aissaoui and Ziad Majed (original text in French translated by Eric Rosencrantz, Mediapart.fr)*.

To challenge this very obsession, women in several Arab countries are bent on overturning the established order by putting the issue of their bodies at the heart of public debate. They want to show a patriarchal society that a revolution really is going down - and that it won't be happening without them.

Defiance in Egypt against sexual harassment
It all began in Egypt when the scandal broke about the virginity tests women protesters were forced to undergo in military detention. This practice, hitherto unknown and hushed up by many women for fear of being stigmatized by their families and society, was denounced by a woman named Samira Ibrahim as a deliberate effort by the army to humiliate women protesters. Ibrahim took the Egyptian military to court and won when the administrative tribunal in Cairo ruled that the tests were illegal.

In another humiliating act, this time in full view of rolling cameras (see below), a veiled female protester was dragged down the street in Egypt, beaten and stomped on by security forces, who tore off her clothes, exposing a blue bra underneath.

This incident sparked public outrage and a spate of political, cultural and artistic (on posters and in graffiti) reactions. Such violence reflected a determination to curtail women's civil and political rights. Stripping off their clothes was an act specifically aimed at humiliating them as well as suppressing their freedom to assemble, to protest, to move through public space at all. The fact that these women were veiled added a symbolic message of intimidation from the powers that be: from now on, no woman would be spared harassment.

The blue bra used as a symbol by protesters
Samira Ibrahim's denunciation of police brutality and of the violence done to other women has given rise to a protest movement, in Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab world that puts the body at the focus of calls for freedom, dignity and self-determination. Since then, a great deal has been said and written about sexual harassment, and campaigns to stir up outrage at this widespread social evil have been steadily gaining momentum. See for example the 'map of harassment' created in Egypt. At one demonstration in Beirut women prominently displayed a blue bra on a protest banner.

Another Egyptian woman, Alia Al-Mahdi, scandalized the nation when she posted a nude picture of herself on her blog. Al-Mahdi's unthinkable act of transgression in exposing herself on the web triggered a deluge of anger and indignation in the blogosphere – even in the progressive circles that had mobilised in support of Samira Ibrahim against police violence. What unsettled them most was that this photograph exhorted them to rethink the revolution, to see it as a quest for absolute and unconditional freedom. Some bloggers disparaged it as an excessive act that had more to do with exhibitionism and provocation than with social subversion.

Still, the fact remains that Al-Mahdi got plenty of attention and, detractors aside, set off a worldwide wave of sympathy. To show their support for Alia,

one group of Iranian feminists designed and publicized a Nude Revolutionary Calendar (see below): the point was to send out a message of solidarity with women in general and Iranian women in particular.

Various individual initiatives have helped to boost this nascent emancipation movement through affirmation of the female body. Two actresses, one Tunisian, the other Iranian, recently posed for magazines exposing parts of their bodies. These revealing poses, far from being isolated instances of merely anecdotal interest, have clearly become a means of reclaiming freedoms far too long denied.

In Syria's extraordinary and regrettably bloody revolution, the body is being used as an artistic medium of political expression. Women have decided to pit pictures bearing messages of freedom and resistance against those of mutilated corpses.

Images: (top) Yasser Abou Hamed, (bottom) Lobna Awidat. This is an edited version of the article that appears in Aissaoui's blog.

Sacrificing food in the name of a cause is considered an elemental and age-old form of protest. How successful are fasts in striking a chord with the gastronomically-inclined public? Rashmi Menon reflects.

A hunger strike can grab the attention of your most powerful opponent – after all, it's the question of our most basic need being denied – and that is exactly why it remains a popular form of protest even in the 21st century. In India, for instance, social activist and anti-corruption campaigner Anna Hazare's (age: 75) hunger protests undertaken periodically over the last two years, and more recently, yoga guru Baba Ramdev's fast protesting corruption, has caught the nation's attention. Both men aim to highlight systemic corruption and the practice of 'black' money laundering. Targeting high-ranked government officials, including members of the ruling political party, the hunger strikes underwent different phases of transition, beginning with the media ignoring, and later, even criticizing Hazare for seeking publicity. Eventually, the public showed solidarity with Hazare's cause and he received much support from the media and citizens.

Over the years, hunger strike has been undertaken for a plethora of reasons, ranging from the public protesting the separation of states, climate change, development issues, injustices of law and order, etc. The recent ones in India tackle larger but non-quantifiable social evils like corruption, accountability and transparency within the government. The time span of these strikes varies, ranging from a couple of days to a few months and in some cases, several months depending upon the gravity of the issue. For instance, look at the indefinite hunger strike called by the leader of a political party in the south Indian city of Bangalore to pressurize a Central Bureau of Investigation enquiry into the chargesheets filed against him by the ruling state government. After 28 hours, he ended his fast citing family pressure. Despite the short duration, his fast succeeded in getting the government's attention and he was assured that the term 'chargesheet' would be dropped. Another day-long hunger strike was carried out by former Tamil Nadu state chief minister in 2009, who was miffed by the government's passive response towards violence against Tamilians in Sri Lanka.

Not all fasts are undertaken on such short notice. During the heights of the *Narmada Bachao Andolan*, a campaign to protest the building of a dam across the River Narmada (1993) in India, social activist and campaign spokesperson Medha Patkar was arrested and force-fed by authorities after she went on an indefinite hunger strike. In the country's north-east region, Manipuri activist and poet Irom Sharmila has been on a protracted hunger strike to repeal the Armed Forces (special powers) Act for well-over a decade. She is routinely force-fed under government orders. Unfortunately, her demand hasn't yet been met.

Then there was the case of Swami Nigamanand, who died after four months of hunger protest against illegal mining on the banks of the Ganges at Haridwar (north India). Unlike other hunger protests, this one went unreported in the national media until the death of

Hunger protests are not new to India. Some of the earliest scriptures record Lord Rama's brother Bharata in Ramayana threatening hunger strike to get Rama back from exile. However, one of the prominent hunger protests that are fresh in public mind is the one undertaken by M.K. Gandhi during freedom struggle. Some of his fasts were observed in prison and he received support from the public. Such was the nature of the hunger protests earlier that it was considered a serious affair and protesters would not call it off until their demands were met. They lent credence to the civil rights movement tagline 'do-or-die'.

Nigamanand came to light. Soon, environmentalist Professor G.D. Agarwal went on an indefinite fast protesting development plans on the River Ganga. Fortunately, his agitation received international coverage and also became popular on Twitter (India), trending under the hashtag #SaveGanga. The result was that government officials came to meet him in hospital and pleaded qhim to cease the protest.

Reports have emerged of cases of hunger strikers in West Asia, with Palestinian activists protesting against the endemic issues of Israel-sponsored violence, illegal occupation and ethnic cleansing. For instance, a Palestinian national team football player, Mahmoud Sarsak, went on hunger strike for being illegally held by Israeli government. Sarsak was released after three years of confinement. The same article also mentions Syrian blogger Hussein Ghrer's hunger strike, which began on July 11, protesting against illegal detention since February, this year. Many bloggers launched a campaign demanding Ghrer's release and statements were sent across in several languages online. The campaign also made its presence felt on Twitter, with supporters using the #FreeHussein hashtag in a bid to take the issue global.

In some cases, attention from both, traditional and digital media outlets, has helped the cause of the protestors. Khader Adnan, a baker from the West Bank, who undertook the longest ever fast - 66-days while in jail – was released by the Israeli administrative detention centre after the international media highlighted the situation. The story of Moroccan activist and rapper Mouad Belghouat, who was jailed for writing a protest song, also trended on Twitter.

Social scientist Shiv Visvanathan feels that the present hunger strikes cannot match the human rights movements that took place in 1980s and

1990s. He goes on to describe them as T-20 protests. "Hunger protests were not so much of a movement but an event. In Gandhian era, it was a philosophy, a way of obtaining the truth. It is non coercive and moves to the truth of consensus. Also, fasts should be observed as a last resort. Now, it is more of a technique," he said.

Recalling an incident Visvanathan says that "several years ago, some of my friends at JNU (a university) had visited then Prime Minister Morarji Desai and threatened to go on a week-long fast if their demands were not met. Desai told them that he would not take them seriously if the fast was not indefinite." In other words, announcing a hunger strike is an ethical commitment not to be taken lightly. "I don't see that ethical stand at all now. The strikers try to gain moral value over their opponents but they have not been successful," he says.

Anna Hazare's strike, points Visvanathan, was engineered as an "event" by the media. With 24x7 media coverage, protests, nowadays, operate on two kinds of timelines: The first one is run by the media, which helps accelerate the momentum of the movement. The other is the actual time taken by the government to react and negotiate the terms of the protesters. "A depoliticized era is being re-politicized in different ways. It (media) misleads the correlations between high reportage and followers of the movement. So, people who are watching or reading about the movement maybe mere spectators and not followers," he says. In real terms, the protest might not carry much *gravitas*, but ends up being projected as one. Visvanathan adds that along with traditional broadcast media, social media, too, has played its part in lending urgency to hunger strikes. However, he is yet to see a movement bounce out of social media in India, like the Arab Spring.

Sociologist Sherman Apt Russell, author of *Hunger: An Unnatural History*, doubts whether hunger strikes have increased or whether they are now reported real time in the media. Interestingly, she states that one historian recorded more than 200 hunger strikes in 42 countries between 1972 and 1982. "Hunger striker aims at shaming or influencing people into doing something they don't want to do. Maybe, the protester is shaming the person or authority before the public - to withdraw from food is a real act of discipline and commitment. And, mass hunger strikes indicate a serious commitment or belief," says Russell over an email chat. Not all hunger strikes are taken up for a noble cause, though and vested interests conveniently use it to tug at people's heartstrings. "A real hunger strike always *humanizes* the hunger striker. We see the frail human body pitted against larger forces. We see a David fighting Goliath," adds Russel.

However, for a hunger strike to have an impact – especially on the demography under target - it has to be noticed. It must also have an audience that empathizes with and cares for the plight of the one on strike. Social media certainly amplifies the individual and isolated stories of protest and helps bring more eyeballs to a cause. In some ways, it also protects hunger strikers from fasting unto death. Most fasts are successful if they get media coverage, including social media. The protesters get attention for their cause even if they don't always get what they specifically demand for. Sometimes, perhaps often, what a hunger striker wants is too big or entrenched as a social problem to be solved in any immediate way. Yet, it remains to be seen how many such citizen-led protests stand the test of time; how genuine and neutral the cause might be against the opponent and whether constant media focus might make viewers immune to the plight of the protesters. As history shows us, we always remember the protagonist of a story, the one who saves the day with his heroic act, like India's Gandhi. The rest of the striking multitude fades into the footnotes.

EDITOR'S PICK

INSTITUTION
Making Political Art Work
The Center for Artistic Activism is the home for artists, activists and scholars to explore, discuss, reflect upon, and strengthen connections between social activism and artistic practice. They facilitate projects and strengthen networks. The goal is to make more creative and more effective citizen activists.
http://bit.ly/uWYT2s

BOOK
The Art of Protest: Culture and Activism from the Civil Rights Movement to the Streets of Seattle
By T.V. Reed | 2005 | University of Minnesota Press
Imagine the civil rights movement without freedom songs and the politics of women's movements without poetry. Or, more difficult yet, imagine an America unaffected by the cultural expressions and forms of the twentieth-century social movements that have shaped the nation. The first broad overview of social movements and the distinctive cultural forms that express and helped shape them, *The Art of Protest* shows the vital importance of these movements to American culture.
http://bit.ly/TwbicP

REPORT
Blogs and Bullets II: New Media and Conflict after the Arab Spring
July 2012 | Peaceworks by Sean Aday, Henry Farrell, Marc Lynch, John Sides and Deen Freelon
Of the four major Arab Spring protests analyzed—Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Bahrain—large differences were found across the four in the amount of information consumed via social media. The events in Egypt and in Libya (#jan25 and #feb17, respectively) garnered many more clicks on a much larger number of URLs than those in Tunisia and Bahrain.
http://bit.ly/NIKi8D

COURSE
Technology and Human Rights Advocacy
8-week online module by Ivan Marovic
This session will introduce the concept of human rights advocacy and examine how it has changed in the last decade or two, with a greater emphasis on community organizing and public participation in human rights campaigns. We will also explore technological changes which happened in this century and compare some high-tech and low-tech tools used in advocacy and organizing. The courseware is courtesy **E-Collaborative for Civic Education – Tavaana.org**
Pocast http://bit.ly/RqTZ9V
Powerpoint http://bit.ly/TVIdDJ

Besharmi Morcha: Little Slut, Even Lesser Walk, And No Message

Dressed in modest clothes to avoid ruffling feathers, a bunch of elite, English-speaking people came forward to march for women's rights in India. Is the message becoming redundant in a world where medium rules, wonder gender rights campaigners Makepeace and Urvashi.

July 15, 2004. Hundreds of women stood outside the gates of the Assam Rifles headquarters in Imphal (Manipur), naked, holding placards that read: "Indian Army, rape us" and "Indian Army takes our flesh." What instigated this was the discovery of 32-year-old Thangjam Manorama's body, found 5 days ago, riddled with bullets, showing visible signs of sexual assault. These women cared two hoots about the women's rights movement in India or elsewhere or about being politically correct or apologetic to any political wing.

To this date, we don't know whose individual brainchild it was to carry out one of the most brazen protests by women in the entire history of the world. They sure sought attention, but to the issue at hand, using their bodies only as a medium. They were simply outraged.

That was 2004 – when Yahoo! was still God on the web and what happened in Manipur did not make it to "Breaking News" on television sets or trend on Twitter. Seven years later, the reality hasn't changed much; neither for Manipur, where the AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958) continues to rule the law and order situation, nor women's rights in India, which remains a directionless pursuit notwithstanding the latest addition, the much borrowed and bandied 'Slutwalk'.

With digital power being a major force in the lives of middle and upper class Indians, activism is becoming every second person's sidekick career. Social media has undoubtedly done the greatest favour to causes and non-profits, lifting them off beaten paths. Yet, its inclusiveness and accessibility have compromised the quality of engagement to gain participation from the masses (yes, familiar words). Moreover, information and messaging have become so instant (not to mention, more competitive) that publishing today often precedes thoughtful processing.

The Times of India first carried a preview on the Slutwalk (when it was scheduled on June 25th 2011), on the basis of a Facebook event that was created. Before anyone could fully digest the word 'slut', the creator of the event page, Umang Sabharwal, was interviewed everywhere, with tabloids, magazines and TV segments carrying her views on women's safety in the city accompanied by labels like third wave feminism. And before people could digest that, she was labelled as one of 'India's leading daughters'.

To sort out the logistics of a public protest and work on worrying questions about why women should 'slutwalk', Sabharwal postponed the event to the month of July. On July 30, 2011, the organizers of the Delhi 'Slutwalk arthaat *Besharmi Morcha*' claimed success - they had mobilized 800 attendees. Despite giving it an indigenous name (Besharmi Morcha – meaning shameless protest or march) to make the event more inclusive, the protest saw representatives mostly from the English-speaking, educated class and even there, much fewer in number than the Facebook event page declared. The number of media people was startlingly large to the extent that they dwarfed the actual participants of the Slutwalk.

Commenting on the large media turnout, Anne Andrews, an American participant said: "This slutwalk is much smaller than in the States and the media for some reason thinks it's really big here. In the States, there isn't so much media interest." According to Rohit Sharma, a worker with a child rights organization, 'Besharam' was not a tag for women but for those who have qualms about harassing women on the basis of their

attire. "The walk sends out a strong message to the law and enforcement agencies that they ought to be more sensitive in their approach and not give unsolicited advice to women who come to them with complaints that they should be dressed in a particular manner or be accompanied by a male member of the family", he said.

Fearing action from right wing groups and following the strict guidelines laid out by the Delhi Police, the march was restricted to the sidewalk circling Jantar Mantar. Volunteers closely monitored the movement and behaviour of those marching, coordinating via walkie talkies. Trishla Singh, the media coordinator of the Slutwalk, said that the organizers campaigned in areas like Seemapuri and Shahdara by performing street plays and holding discussions. A man asked if the play had been shown to the Chief Minister, Sheila Dixit, and if it had made an impact. "We did. And if the play made any difference, the situation wouldn't be what it is today", responded Arvind Gaur, Founder of Asmita Theatre Group, who also directed the play.

The defeat of the Slutwalk in India is not so much the thin participation of an exclusive bourgeoisie as it is the organizing committee's stance of being 'conservative rebels'. The organizers asked people to come in whatever women and men wear on a 'daily basis'. The argument was that the walk was not just about the clothes but women's rights in general. But the right to decide what to wear is probably one of the most basic rights a woman can be given, something women in Middle Eastern countries like Iran and Saudi Arabia would best know.

When Belinda Fleischmann decided to make the SlutWalk a tad more colourful by baring her midriff, the organizers went into a tizzy and swiftly approached her, presumably to ask her to stop. But the light bulbs had already popped by then and the moment had been recorded for posterity. The censorship stood in complete contradiction to the original intent. A male volunteer said, "We asked people to come in ordinary clothes as provocative dressing is not part of our culture and heritage". It was interesting to find volunteers using the same kind of justification we hear from the local police, eve teasers and rapists.

So between the noise on social networking sites and the media covering it, who's listening?

Photo courtesy, Makepeace Sithou. This is an edited version of the blog that appears in The Alternative.

The recent attack on Pakistani youth activist, 15-year-old Malala Yousafzai will not shake women's rights activists, writes Nighat Dad

An exceedingly sad, insensate and astounded feeling comes to mind while writing this piece about an innocent 14 year-old activist Malala Yousafzai shot in Swat, Pakistan earlier today. This young girl who exemplifies active participation in the Take Back the Tech! campaign in Pakistan.

Across the globe, countless women and human rights defenders risk harassment, torture, family kidnapping and even death threats. Women activists keep breaking cultural taboos and make efforts to lead an exemplary life – not only so their own lives can be better, but also to help other women have an independent and inspiring life.

Malala, our young activist was attacked while she was going home from school with other girls in a school van in the country's northwest, a region of the country that is known for its political unrest. The unknown assailants shot several bullets to her vehicle, injuring her and the other two school girls. Malala received two bullets to the head and neck, and is currently in critical condition in a hospital in Peshawar.

She started receiving death threats soon after her identity went public as the author of the BBC's Diary of a Pakistani schoolgirl, in which she denounced the atrocities that took place during Taliban rule under the pen name Gul Makai. In March 2012, shortly after Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) announced that she, and another social worker (Shad Beghum) where on the militant's hit list, she was provided with unarmed security by her school.

Hailing from Mingora Swat, this 14 year-old girl fought to restore peace and promote girls'education in Swat during the stronghold of Taliban in 2008. She was awarded National Peace Award by the former Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gillani for her outstanding and ardent efforts under extremely hostile conditions. She was also bestowed with Sitara-e-Jurrat by the Government of Pakistan acknowledging her courageous services to promote peace. She was the first Pakistani to be nominated for the International Children's Peace Prize by children's advocacy group Kids Rights Foundation.

Like many other girls, Malala is a victim of the ban imposed by Taliban on girls' education during their stronghold of Swat in 2008. The teenager kept encouraging her fellow students to continue with their schoolwork despite of militants' threats before the Pakistan Military launched an operation and flushed out the militants.

The attack on a children rights activist is an unmistakable indication that the Taliban is not a group that is willing to negotiate girls' education and women's rights.

It is not the first case of attacking human rights defenders (and particularly women's rights activists) in Pakistan. The famous Human Rights Commission of Pakistan has been getting such threats for years. The daring lawyer, Asma Jahangir, is also one of the many who keep receiving threats from miscreants. Adding to this, women's rights defender Farida Afridi was ambushed and shot dead outside her house on 4th July in Hayatabad, in the tribal agency of Khyber.

Be it in Pakistan or Afghanistan, the efforts and contributions of these activists has been under constant attack by the Taliban. The need of the hour is for the international community to force the State to be responsible and take appropriate measures to protect women and children rights defenders in hostile regions. Activists' spirit will not wear falter from such attacks, but it will surely affect the peace process in the region.

It is the State's responsibility to take the activists along the road of peace and make policies, programmes in a closer collaboration and consultation with the human rights defenders. They are the ones who are suffering and helping the victims and survivors on the ground. Designing policies in conflict zones will only be successful and bear long term fruits, when governments take women human rights defenders together in the peace process.

Republished with permission from the author. The article originally appears in:
https://www.apc.org/en/news/attack-pakistani-youth-activist-will-not-shake-wom

Image: Nighat Dad with Malala Yousafzai (right)

OUTSIDE VIEW

Why Malala has Become an International Heroine
There's something important shared by a majority of the people who are anti-drones (most of them are Pakistanis) who are incessantly posing the question "why Malala?" and are also constantly posting pictures of children killed by the drones: hardly any of them talk about the Pakistani army operation in FATA while standing against the drones.
http://bit.ly/TqWrRw

The Poster Girls of Pakistan
The photo shows a rosy-cheeked girl with silky brown hair and a maimed leg, who has been purportedly injured in a drone attack. This is Laiba, the poster girl of the Taliban-sympathisers, propped up in response to the outpouring of grief and sympathy for Malala, who by this time has been consecrated by liberals as a heroine who stood up to the Taliban, the epitome of all hope for girls' education in Pakistan.
http://bit.ly/Rrzrkf

Does Islam Give you a Right to Education?
Someone is missing from this picture. Because just when I was wondering if extremists could do anymore damage to Islam's image, they committed yet another despicable act. As if flogging the adulterers, executing the civilians, and selling the women were not enough, on Oct. 8, the Taliban attempted to assassinate a 14-year-old girl, Malala Yousafzai. She was coming home from school in the battle-scarred valley of Swat, Pakistan, when Taliban shot her in the head and neck for her public advocacy for education. She is in critical condition.
http://wapo.st/R1p0BN

Digital spaces continue to open up new possibilities in broader struggles for an equitable and just world, says Shafika Isaacs.

2011 will be earmarked as the watershed year when cyberspace became more decisively a potent space for political change. Since the beginning of last year, in the midst of revolution and rebellion in many countries, digital media provided a prominent space for mobilization, opinion formation and political expression. The coincidence of this phenomenon, with growing protest movements, the onset of global economic recession, and the 'uprising of nature' through a notable increase in natural disasters, unquestionably exposes a global system in crisis.

Protests have been triggered by different issues and the struggles assumed different forms in different geographies. In Spain and Greece, rising youth unemployment was a major source of discontent. In countries across the Middle East and North Africa, whilst the rising cost of living and unemployment were contributory factors, the sentiments were more explicitly political and have led to the toppling of regimes in a way that changes the political landscape of the region. In Chile, mass demonstrations were sparked off by high education fees. In Swaziland, youth-led uprisings flared up against a patriarchal monarchy.

Whilst we cannot paint these uprisings with the same brush because they each have their distinct features, there are also noteworthy similarities across them.

What do the Protest Movements have in Common?
The 'biological gap' is evident in all of these 'movements'. All of them have been initiated and most have been led by young people, whether they are students, unemployed youth or disgruntled youth who have jobs. This is the generation born into the digital era and a relatively stable period of global economic growth. In almost all cases, the concerns expressed have been with a glaring disconnect between the interests and aspirations of Digital Natives and the older, more conservative, traditional, and predominantly patriarchal powers that be.

Social media in the form of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have invariably played an instrumental role in protest mobilization in a number of cases, although not all countries have been involved. In Yemen and Libya, social media appeared to be used less. However, even though Malcolm Gladwell of *The Tipping Point* fame disagrees, much of the evidence suggests that social media have contributed significantly towards accelerating emergent protest movements in countries like Egypt and Tunisia over the last two years. Here, things came to a head faster with the

help of Facebook and Twitter. Social media have contributed towards giving expression, entitlement and ownership to different forms of community voices and have influenced opinion in official spaces as events unfolded. These movements would arguably still have happened without Twitter and Facebook, but the latter as an expression of the rapid evolution of digital technologies and the influence they wield in all our lives has undoubtedly created a platform for direct and proactive engagement of individuals and communities in ways never experienced before. They have enabled new and different forms of activism. Examples include the way Avaaz.org successfully organized a global campaign against a homophobic bill to victimize homosexuals in Uganda or the way WikiLeaks are exposing government secrets.

The nature and extent to which this space was used for contestation and mobilization around democratic, human and civil liberties have astounded many, especially those at the behest of political rule for decades in many of these countries, including monarchs and autocrats. On the opposite extreme, social networks have also been used as a space for police intelligence as part of attempts at gaining state control over the protests. In the U.K. for instance, the police confirmed that they were looking at Twitter and Facebook (users, as well as the platform at large) as part of investigations into the widespread riots.

However, the way these events have unfolded, varied from country to country. If we take Egypt, the U.K. and Chile as examples, the differences in the form and character of rebellion and their use of digital spaces is rather glaring.

Comparing Egypt, Chile and UK
In Egypt, a country with little if any tradition of mass democratic struggle, the Digital Native-led uprising assumed an explicit and overt political flavor. Social media was particularly influential in this revolutionary movement. Facebook and Twitter were systematically used to support protest organization. Social media also played an instrumental role in shaping the stories of the revolution as growing numbers of 'ordinary people on the ground' used the space to language their stories in ways that could not be ignored. In this way, the grassroots opinion and insight influenced the way traditional media spun the 'official' narrative of the revolution. And the temporary shut-down of the Internet by the falling Mubarak regime in a feeble attempt to quell the regime, proved to be extremely short-sighted.

As Egypt attempts a democratic transition, the nature of the revolution showed a strong sense of family and community among the Egyptian citizens in general, given the homogeneity of its population compared with disparate groups that characterize countries like Libya and Yemen in the Middle East.

The Egyptian revolution contrasts with the protests by students and workers in Chile. The latter has a history of democratic resistance and organization. During the 1970s, students and communities were organized in mass organizations, and workers in trade unions. It was this growing movement that the Pinochet regime aimed to crush in 1973. 'They Dance Alone,' a song made famous in the 1980s by the rock star Sting, highlighted the experience of the Chilean mothers under the Pinochet dictatorship. Protests in Chile assumed the form of a more cohesive, organized engagement with clearly articulated demands and mobilizing strategies. Protests escalated over a three month period and assumed the form of general strikes and a show of unity between organized students, their parents and organized workers. Social media also played a significant role in the mobilization of protestors.

BlackBerry Riots
The riots in the United Kingdom, however, assumed a very different character. Following a peaceful march in response to the fatal shooting by the police of a local youth on August 4, 2011, a riot began in Tottenham (North London) and spread to several boroughs, and eventually to other areas of England. These riots stand in stark contrast to the events in Egypt and Chile. The riots were reportedly characterized by unprecedented looting and arson attacks. No single group

could explain why these riots occurred even though a host of underlying causes were identified, ranging from the lack of police presence, cuts in social spending, etc.

These riots appeared far more amorphous, anarchic and disparate and the Digital Natives involved seemed to have no clearly articulated cause. Interestingly, BlackBerry Messenger was the medium of choice for many of the young people involved, although use was also made of Twitter, Facebook and YouTube during the riots (August 6-11, 2011).

Certainly, the first online gathering of people mourning – and soon vowing to avenge – the death of Tottenham resident Mark Duggan took place on Facebook. Some of those behind the page organized a meet-up outside the police station on Tottenham High Road (Wikipedia). The *Financial Times* reports on a preliminary study of a database of 2.5 million riot-related tweets, compiled by the Guardian. It shows that there was no clear evidence that Twitter played a role in inciting violence and that instead, it was used mainly to react to the riots and looting.

However, the most powerful rallying appears to have taken place via BlackBerry Messenger (BBM). For many U.K. teenagers armed with a BlackBerry smartphone, BBM replaced text messaging because it is free, instant and part of a much larger community than regular SMS users.

Dawn of a New Era?
The nature of the protests, the use of digital spaces and the responses of the authorities differed in each country. In the case of the U.K., the authorities appeared to clamp down hard on what they refer to as looters and hooligans. There does not appear to be any form of institutional engagement with representatives of youth to understand their concerns. This contrasts with the approach of the Chilean President who seemed to be pressured to engage with the representatives of students, parents, teachers, and education institutions, and negotiate around their demands.

These developments, with particular reference to the influential role of digital media, appear to be the music of the future. The musical genres and associated dances will assume a digital and political character conducive to their local socio-political and cultural contexts. Whether it is digital belly dance in the Middle East, digital 'toyi toyi' in Southern Africa or the digital samba in Latin America, unlike the 1970s and 1980s, digital spaces will continue to open up new possibilities in broader struggles for an equitable and just world, under the leadership of differently-politicized Digital Natives.

Image on this page courtesy Flickr.
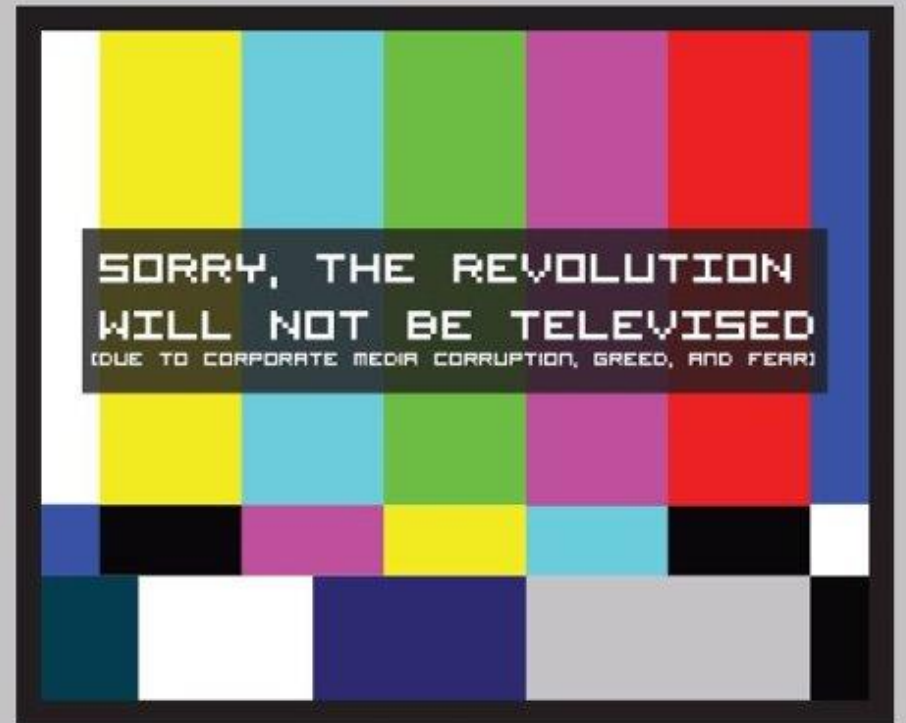
IGNITING A REVOLUTION

I stared at the newspaper, the e-paper. It enraged me.

I'm one of those young men, you know,
whose blood boil at the hint of injustice.

The paper was full of terrifying news;
The iron-fist dictator, the oil-greedy invaders,
The hate-spreading religious fanatics,
The self-indulged political acrobats,
The money-laundering financial giants,
The tree-felling capitalist pot heads.

The hate surging in the veins,
Hurried fingers running all through the keyboard

A picture, a slogan,
A wake-up call,
And thus began the revolution.

By Aswin Vijayan

U.S. political campaigns have much to learn about the immediacy and mutability of the Social Web. They can pick up a strategy or two from the meme-loving internet public, writes Rodrigo Davies

This year's U.S. presidential election saw the amount the two main candidates spent on digital advertising and campaigning more than double from 2008, to almost $52 million. The gap between the Democrats' spending over the Republicans also increased more than two-fold, with President Obama outspending Republican candidate Romney by 10 to one - most of it being invested in online advertisements, web-based fundraising and social media teams.

On the face of it, it's a big victory for digital campaigners. They've fought hard to convince veteran campaign managers that their teams are worth investing in, and done so in much the same manner as online teams in the publishing business have: by focusing their attention on bringing in revenue. That's why, this year, users who registered to support one of the campaigns found themselves being asked for fundraising donations many times a week, and almost always before, they were asked to donate their time or write a message of support.

But as the money began to speak this year, especially for Obama, a harder question was raised: can digital campaigns influence the direction and tone of the debate that is taking place online, especially via 'spreadable' social media?

It's a question that unnerves even the most seasoned campaign hacks because of the so-called 'second screen' phenomenon - the idea that when an individual is watching television they will also be glancing at either their laptop or their mobile phone, commenting on what's happening on-screen, and being influenced by other social media users. That means unruly social networks are now intruding on the carefully controlled, stage-managed broadcast environment on which every campaign for the past half-century has focused.

So, can digital campaign teams deploy the same skills that gave us carefully manicured websites and social media profiles to fight guerrilla-style, in real time, and shape the public's reaction to events? The answer, in 2012, was a resounding no!

Both campaigns tried to do so via Twitter, rolling out rapid response accounts to dispute claims made by the other side (Obama's team used @OFAdebates and @TruthTeam2012, while Romney's team used @RomneyResponse. These skirmishes were concentrated around the presidential debates, reflecting the perceived importance of that media real estate.
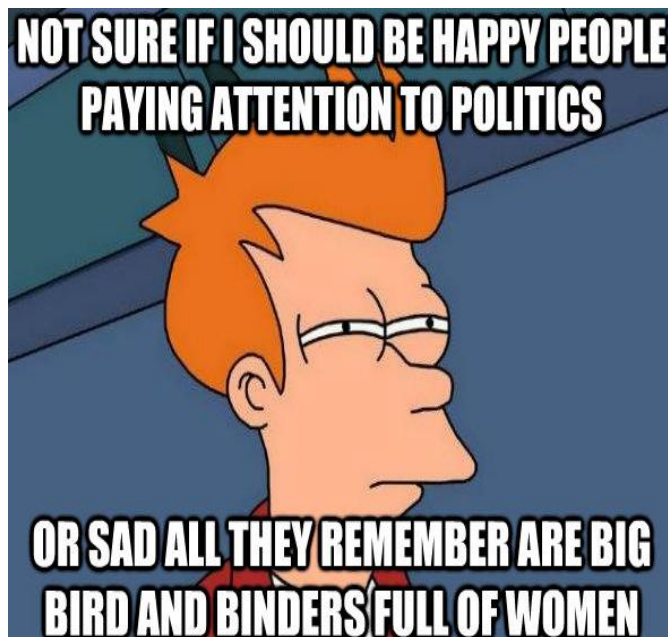
Meme courtesy: knowyourmeme

The problem was that for every string of 140 characters each side could rattle out – usually between 30 and 80 each, per debate - the internet's attention was wandering elsewhere, and taking most of the media's attention with it. For every pithy statistic or carefully rendered visualization about healthcare, there were thousands of posts on 'Big Bird' or 'Binders Full of Women'.

For anyone who hasn't paid much attention to social media, the explosion of interest in these memes might have been either confusing (why are the electorate more interested in looping animations of facial expressions and found images?) or downright irritating (why has the debate moved from discussions of fact to riffs on a repetitive theme?). But we shouldn't be surprised at the content or the manner of the internet public's reaction.

One way to explain this phenomenon is to think about how social (or spreadable) media differs from traditional, written forms like newspapers, and broadcast forms like television. Despite having a strong text component, social media in many ways has more in common with verbal communication than it does with text forms. I would argue that it's a hyper-oral world, and depends on three things: ephemerality, brevity and repetition.

As with heard conversation, posts appear and disappear rapidly in a user's stream. This ephemerality is irresistible - so there's little to be gained by trying to fight it. No one would try to make an audio or written recording of every conversation they ever had. As a result, for a message to be heard and understood, it needs to be delivered concisely. Twitter skeptics are quick to point to the platform's 140-character limit as a sign of stunted discourse (Facebook posts are truncated at 320 characters), but it's at the very least on a

par with a newspaper headline or a television slogan, if not more generous.

Verbal conversations are rarely lists of facts or colorless observations; they are much more likely to be personal, opinionated reactions to a topic. The ability to respond, and to engage in conversation is, of course, the most feted aspect of social media, and it's this that makes repetition a critical part of an influential message. In an ephemeral world of brief messages, a piece of content needs to be echoed many times in order to be memorable: it goes without saying that unless a message gets many retweets or shares (and immediately following the original post), it won't gain traction. But what's even more compelling about a meme like 'Binders Full of Women' is that it gives the user the ability to retell the story in their words.

For instance, in a verbal conversation, a perfectly quoted story may be an engaging performance for the listener. However, it's unlikely to be as engaging as if the story has been fully internalized by the teller, reshaped to reflect his or her immediate environment and delivered in their own words, with subtle nuances that reflect the place, time and people to whom they're speaking. This kind of repetition of a message also invites the audience to think about how the message applies to them, and to create their own retelling.

So what does this mean for digital activists, and political campaigns in particular? Firstly, in trying to foment change online, change makers need to embrace the ephemerality and brevity of the format. Concise messages are something that most effective campaign groups do extremely well, already. Factual battles may be an important, defensive tactic at times, but they are unlikely to inspire people to join a cause. Movement leaders also need to relax their ideas around authorship and empower movement participants to create their own retellings of the message. This means thinking beyond one-dimensional control of the message that the public is hearing.

To be sure, the economy of spreadable, concise ideas that social media thrives on is not a new mode of human experience, and digital campaigners would do well to learn from the hard-hitting, memorable banners and protest songs of the past. In a hyper-oral age, there might even be more to learn from these forms of expression than from the mass broadcast era that is coming to an end. Regardless of the platform that political change occurs on - whether the revolution is televised or tweeted - it needs to be shared.

Young Adults: The Future of Social Activism

The profound impact social media has had on our society (and the world) in the past years has led people to take it far more seriously and think differently about how it can affect social issues. Not only are people sharing content with family and friends, but they're standing up and supporting issues they feel strongly about. In 2010, TBWA/Worldwide posed the question, "How can brands engage young adults in social responsibility?" The answers were critically important, yet simple: make it easy, make it social, and make it fun. Two years later the study has been updated, and insights into engaging this crucial audience of pro-social consumers, as well as ideas about creating a better world have been found.

More young adults (ages 20-28) are now actively supporting the causes they care about. They're going beyond simply being informed or talking about social issues with their friends and instead taking real action in ways that companies and organizations should take note. For example:

Young Adult Social Activists:

- 7 in 10 American young adults are social activists.
- 1 in 2 donate time to support the causes he or she cares about.
- 1 in 3 boycotts or supports a business based on the causes he or she cares about.
- 1 in 5 participates in a rally or meeting, or contacts their local representative.
- 3 in 5 are female, and 3 of 5 of all activists are educated and working.

Young Adult Social Activists do one or more of the following:

It can also be said that this group are activist consumers. They're more likely to purchase from a company that supports a cause they care about (if price and quality were equal), and they want companies to take action. They believe corporations should create economic value for society by addressing its needs. If a corporation is able to take the wants of this group to heart, not only will they think more highly of a company that supports a cause, but they would also be more apt to seek employment with a company that does so.

View the complete infographic online.

Digital Natives: Children of Globalization Exposing Empire – An Analysis of the Occupy Movement in the United States of America | Philip Ketzel, University of Potsdam

Excerpts from the thesis:

The year 2011 saw a wave of civil protest movements that changed the world. It was the year of the Arab Spring, the Spanish Indignados and the Occupy Movement; the year of the Facebook and Twitter revolutions. As indicated in the latter, what has been so new about these movements is not the fact that citizens have marched on the streets and 'occupied squares' to protest dictator regimes and/or social and economic injustice, but the manner in which these protests have been organized and conducted. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) such as satellite television, personal computers, mobile phones, digital cameras and the internet with its various social media networks – probably the most influential product of the digital revolution – have enabled ordinary people around the globe to coordinate, mediate and promote their protest in a distributed and networked manner, thereby appearing to bypass the dependency on established centralized institutions, like mainstream media outlets, unions or political parties (Tufekci 2011). Yet not everybody is able to apply these technologies in such a fashion. It needs actors who master its usage. Looking at images of the protesters of the mentioned movements, one is drawn to assume that it is mainly the young who play a pioneering role in revealing the potential of such new technologies.

The tendency of young people incorporating digital technologies into their everyday life, in a seemingly natural manner, has been thematized using the term 'Digital Native'. Since Mark Prensky coined the term in 2001, it has led to controversy and produced an interdisciplinary discourse that has dealt with the social, cultural, political as well as the biological consequences of the digital revolution. What the discourse has achieved is the fact that the idea of the Digital Native "has been helpful in looking at the new practices of knowledge production, community building, sharing, participation and collaboration that have emerged with the rise and spread of digital and internet technologies". However, the term becomes highly problematic, when it is used in a universalistic way to denominate a certain group of people, because then one runs into danger of fostering sweeping generalizations or discriminatory stereotypes. Shah and Jansen therefore suggest using "the idea of a context-based Digital Native identity and practice".

Following this suggestion, the present study focuses on the cultural impact of ICT practices by Digital Natives in the context of the U.S. Occupy Movement, which took off with the Occupy Wall Street protests in the autumn of 2011. The key question this study asks is, 'How to interpret the role that Digital Natives play within this Movement?' To answer this question, the study poses the hypothesis that the movement clearly shows the influential role of Digital Natives practices in shaping culture, society and politics from the bottom up. In order to prove this, the study will examine prominent examples of the practices used by Digital Natives in the Occupy Movement in the United States.

Read the entire paper on Ketzel's Scribd page.

CONTRIBUTORS

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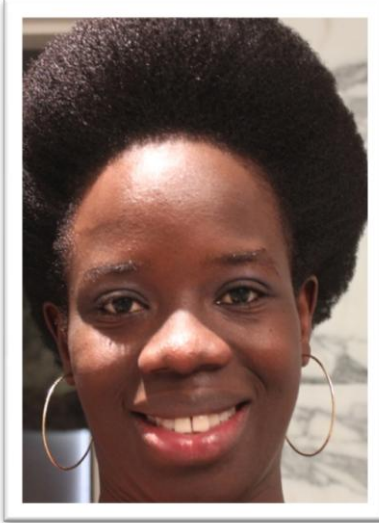
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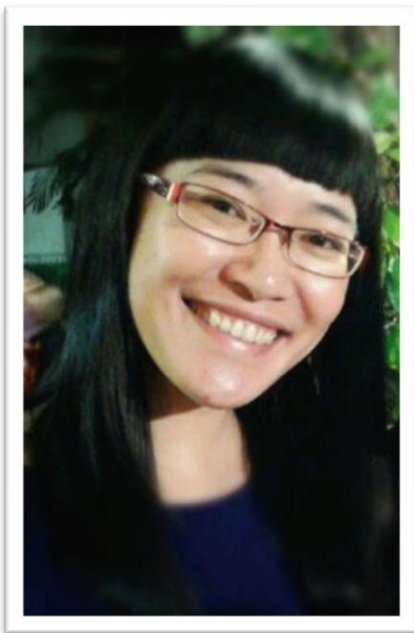
Nilofar Ansher is a writer, editor and researcher from India. She recently earned her Masters of Arts in Ancient Indian Civilization from Mumbai University. Nilofar is also the Community Manager for the 'Digital Natives with a Cause?' project, a research initiative of the Centre for Internet & Society, India. She is still trying to figure out the most basic questions of life: what motivates people to get out of bed each day, how do we save the planet, how does inter-space travel work in Isaac Asimov's books! In the mean time, she keeps busy with her communications job at the United Nations initiative, G3ict, maintains a blog and another one. She tweets as @culture_curate.

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Lincoln Cushing is an author and archivist specializing in social movements. He is currently the Digital Archivist for Kaiser Permanente. Previously he was the Cataloging and Electronic Outreach Librarian at U.C. Berkeley's Bancroft Library and held a similar position at U.C. Berkeley's Institute of Industrial Relations Library. He is also a designer, and has created graphics for the Coalition of Labor Union Women, the Labor Party, U.S. Labor against the War. http://www.docspopuli.org/ArtWorks.html

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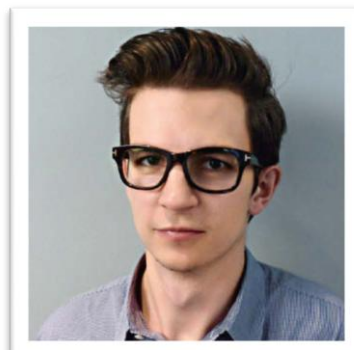
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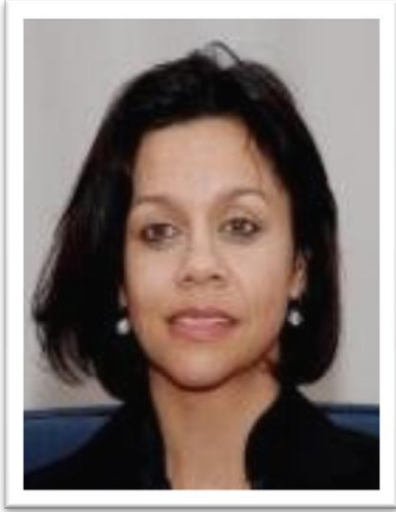
Philip Ketzel is a native of sunny East Berlin and dabbles in DJing and his own record label Hidden Hawaii, which brings out electronic music digitally as well as in the form of handcrafted, limited vinyl. He is a newly minted Magister Atrium in American and English Studies with emphasis on culture and linguistics, and a minor in Comparative Literature and Comparative Religion. In his spare time, he works as an IT analyst for a marketing research company and as a content manager for a tourism portal. He blogs at http://www.gottloburrhythm.tumblr.com

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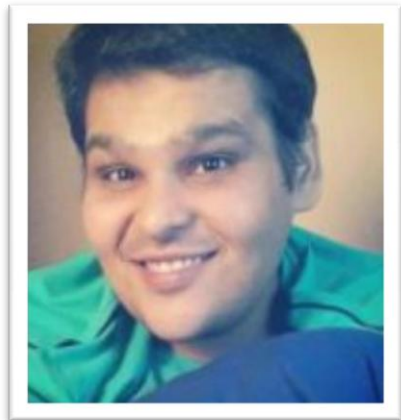
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