

## **Propaganda, Netwar, and Revolution: The Case of Zunzuneo**

Our product is a lifestyle...The movement isn't about the issues. It's about my identity. We're trying to make politics sexy (Rosenberg, 2011)

Branding is propaganda...what it boils down to is manipulation and seduction. That's the business we're in.

That's the business of life (Jansen, 2008, p. 135)

In this article, I will attempt to demonstrate that, despite the much-vaunted potential of Web 2.0, social-networking technologies to empower individuals and to challenge traditional centralized hierarchies, these same technologies can work in the other direction in order to maintain and extend systems of control and domination. Much has been made of late of “network economies”; “peer production”; “the sharing economy”; “assemblages”; and “multiplicitous”, “heterogeneous”, “distributed”, “rhizomatic”, networks. The argument of this article is not that these concepts are inherently flawed or have no practical utility or that they will not bring actual benefits; rather, the argument presented here is that too much attention has been paid to how these techniques and modes of organization are liberatory and not enough has been given to how they can work against liberation.

Proponents of the above enumerated concepts describe those concepts in dichotomous terms; centralized governments and the like represent the “bad old way of doing things”, and the new distributed networks represent a qualitatively “better” and inevitable future. To think that oppression cannot occur within a distributed network, or that such networks cannot be used in the service of power is mistaken. Systems adapt. Systems are resilient. Systems are dynamic. There is no reason to believe that new techniques and modes of organization cannot be used by traditional centers of power and there is much evidence to suggest that this is indeed happening.

Today, decentralized and distributed networks can be used to foster Ellul's orthopraxy, the unthinking "right action" of a politically significant segment of the population. The internet and social media allow propagandists to penetrate into social groups and relationships, delivering branded content with a message that bypasses the rational and critical faculties of the targets and works at an emotional level.

In this article the KONY 2012 and Invisible Children, the NGO that created and disseminated the video, will be compared to another political intervention that focused on social media and culture, "Zunzuneo", a Twitter-like messaging app that was created for the Cuban market by USAID. Zunzuneo will be examined against the backdrop of other related attempts by the US to manipulate Cuban culture—one, a scheme targeting the Cuban Hip-Hop community, and other, which involved transporting youth from other Latin American nations into Cuba to foment civil unrest—and by comparison to similar interventions in North Africa and the Balkans. KONY 2012 and these other interventions will be examined from the aspect of the individuals and organizations that designed and implemented them. The article will argue that KONY 2012 is propaganda in that it is an instance of what Arquilla and Ronfeldt (1993) call "Netwar".

### Netwar

While the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri is widely recognized as being a landmark in the theorizing of the political importance and revolutionary potential of networks, John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, two analysts working for the RAND Corporation, beat them to the punch by several years. Once again, the military was at the cutting edge, not only of technology but this time of post-modern social theory. In the early 1990's, changes in technology, communications, and geopolitics led to a new Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), "a new era of warfare dominated by the American military's mastery of the conventional battlefield" (Hoffman, 1995, p. 366). The new era was effectively demonstrated by the US performance in Gulf War I in which the US completely dominated Iraqi forces. However, military strategists realized that "the revolution [would] have little if any impact on American military

capabilities so far as countering terrorism, insurgency, or guerrilla warfare are concerned” and American experiences in situations like the problems the US encountered in Somalia underscored the need to prepare for those new forms of asymmetrical conflict (Hoffman, 1995, p. 367).

Arquilla and Ronfeldt (1993) analyzed the new situation and foretold changes in global struggles, military and otherwise, that would require a turn away from orthodox paradigms and solutions. They posited the birth of what they called “Netwar” as the future to which military affairs were headed. In a seminal policy paper for the RAND Corporation, they described netwar as:

Information-related conflict at a grand level between nations or societies. It means trying to disrupt, damage, or modify what a target population “knows” or thinks it knows about itself and the world around it. A netwar may focus on public or elite opinion, or both. It may involve public diplomacy measures, propaganda and psychological campaigns, political and cultural subversion, deception or interference with local media, infiltration of computer networks and databases, and efforts to promote a dissident or opposition movements across computer networks. Thus, designing a strategy for netwar may mean grouping together from a new perspective a number of measures that have been used before but were viewed separately (p. 144)

In other words, netwar represents a new entry on the spectrum of conflict that spans economic, political, and social as well as military forms of “war.” In contrast to economic wars that target the production and distribution of goods, and political wars that aim at the leadership and institutions of a government, netwars would be distinguished by their targeting of information and communications. Like other forms on this spectrum, netwars would be largely nonmilitary, but they could have dimensions that overlap into military war.

Arquilla and Ronfeldt (1993) reach a conclusion about the struggle between networks and traditional organizational structures within the realm of military affairs: “Institutions can be defeated by networks. It may take networks to counter networks. The future may belong to whoever masters the network form” (p. 40). Arquilla and

Ronfeldt's recommendations did not go ignored, indeed, they mentioned that the US was already locked in a netwar with Cuba

In some respects, the U.S. and Cuban governments are already engaged in a netwar. This is manifested in the activities of Radio and TV Marti on the U.S. side, and on Castro's side by the activities of pro-Cuban support networks around the world (p. 145)

The KONY 2012 and Zunzuneo interventions are examples of netwar put into action, the difference being that the latter was netwar directed outward, while the KONY 2012 campaign was netwar directed internally, with the intent of leading to some military effect in a foreign nation. In other words, these were examples of networks being mobilized against other networks.

### The Integrated Spectacle

The concept of netwar has such utility because it is multidimensional, including communications, media, politics, and military and the way that these factors are influenced by new, decentralized networked forms of organization. There is a felicitous congruence between the three types of networks and the three types of "spectacle" theorized by the French Situationist Guy Debord. Baran (1964), in his RAND corporation-funded memorandum, *On Distributed Communications: Introduction to Distributed Communications Networks*, identified the three types of networks: centralized, decentralized, and distributed. A centralized network is formed when there exist a central node and an array of terminal "client nodes", each connected to the central node but not to each other. A decentralized network exists when there are several central nodes, connected to each other, with each central node connected to its own sub-network of client nodes. A distributed network exists when both the central nodes and the client nodes in the subnetworks have many connections between each other; client to client, client to central node, and central node-to-central node.

Debord (1998) posits three types of spectacular power: the concentrated, the diffuse, and the integrated. The concentrated spectacle gives rise to totalitarian governments such as Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, while the diffuse spectacle is exemplified by post-war American consumer culture (p. 8). Debord said that the integrated spectacle, the third form, has “tended to impose itself globally” (p. 8). Debord explained that the integrated spectacle “shows itself to be simultaneously concentrated and diffuse,” and that, “the controlling centre has now become occult: never to be occupied by a known leader, or a clear ideology” (p. 9). Therefore, in terms of types of networks, the concentrated spectacle corresponds to a centralized network, the diffuse spectacle corresponds to a decentralized network, and the integrated spectacle corresponds to a distributed network. Such is the power of the integrated spectacle that Debord says of it; “When the spectacle was concentrated, the greater part of surrounding society escaped it; when diffuse, a small part; today, no part” (p. 9).

The concept of the “occult” controlling center is important. Apparently, the original title of one of Debord’s last works, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, was “Treatise on Secrets” (Bratich, 2007). Debord preemptively and astutely recognizes something about distributed networks which most contemporary commentators miss; he realized that simply because such networks lack an overt control center this does not mean that control is not being exerted. That control is simply “occult” and this very secrecy is aided by the diffuse nature of exchanges within such distributed networks.

### The “Third Sector” and Democracy

In liberal capitalist democracies, according to the standard view, power is located in two distinct fields; either in the formal structures of government, or the elite power located in the private sector. In the age of neoliberal drives for privatization, the debates about whether the private sector or the state can more efficiently provide services such as education or healthcare are perennial. However, such discussions begin from a false dichotomy, namely, the idea that the

state and private sector are mutually exclusive entities and effectively different. Under such a view, the formal differences between the two sectors are more important than whatever practical effects each has on society, preventing any analysis of how the state can use private forms to govern and how the private sector increasingly carries out functions traditionally considered the preserve of the state, such as security and policing. The strict dichotomy also usually focuses on either centralized, bureaucratic, state institutions or private, profit-making, corporate enterprises, leaving out many important institutions that wield power and affect society, such as churches and cultural organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), government sponsored enterprises, quasi-nongovernmental organizations, private charitable foundations, think tanks, and various types of “public-private partnerships”.

Such entities of the type listed above form a “third sector” of power and governance in liberal democratic societies. This third sector includes what is usually called the “nonprofit sector”, which includes churches, private educational institutions, charities, foundations, and the tax-exempt organizations covered by section 501 (c) (3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code. In neoliberal capitalist societies this sector functions largely as what Roelofs (2003) calls a “protective layer for capitalism” (p. 22). Despite its many charitable endeavors, the nonprofit sector is effectively “a system of power which is exercised in the interest of the corporate world” (Roelofs, 1995, p. 17). Private foundations, such as the Rockefeller, Ford, and Carnegie foundations, perform this function by providing unprofitable services to the public, such as cultural activities or charitable services; providing work and creative outlets for intellectuals who may otherwise become radicalized; and by keeping activists and intellectuals busy with work in organizations that do not offer the employment guarantees and benefits of state-sector work and which depend almost fully on support from foundations for their survival. Essentially, the mostly tax-exempt nonprofit sector and foundations are a parallel locus of governance alongside the official state apparatus. In fact, the nonprofit sector and the big foundations should not be considered in isolation from each other, since members of the same elite class fill the ranks of both government and the leadership of the foundations.

One of the ways that the private foundations maintain social stability and preserve the status quo is by funding scholarship and research, sometime creating whole disciplines. Berndtson (2007) explains that, in their drive to understand the mind of the public in order to facilitate social-engineering, charitable foundations supported social scientific research, and that,

It can even be argued that the whole disciplinary system in the social sciences was created by the Rockefeller funding. In 1891, John D. Rockefeller Sr. helped to finance the University of Chicago. The first President of the University, William Rainey Harper, initiated a new disciplinary system, which was enormously influential. It led to the formation of the departmental structure of the American university, which was internationally unique. Later, this structure was exported all over the world with the help of American foundations (p. 583)

According to Parmar (2015), the foundations and the scholarship they funded worked to govern social change, such as the global movement towards decolonization that erupted after World War II:

Foundations facilitated the penetration of liberal American concepts of law, property, and social order throughout the world by cultivating networks of Western-educated elites in numerous countries. By funding academic work in area studies, political science, economics, and sociology, the big foundations created intellectual hubs radiating influence well beyond their immediate locales. Such networks were established in strategically important countries...where a small group of scholars favoring Western- style modernization over nationalist development could influence doctoral students in the region. They would, in turn, train thousands of other teachers (p. 679)

Domestically, the foundations sought to manage the social change brought about by the Civil Rights and Black Power movements which were influenced by the global decolonization phenomenon. The Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller foundations supported and funded black Civil Rights groups, but their support was strategic:

Foundation support for the civil rights movement was directed toward more conservative (or “moderate”) organizations, sidelining more radical and even revolutionary organizations, which were responsible for more

of the actions and direction of the civil rights and larger black liberation (or black power) movement (Marshall, 2015, p. 776)

There are other third sector entities which do not have their beginnings in the private sector, but which come from the state. In the United States there are a number of quasi-autonomous-non-governmental-organizations (QUANGOs) which have been created by federal legislation and are mostly or partly funded by the government. This group includes NGOs such as the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), The National Democratic Institute (NDI), and The International Republican Institute (IRI). These organizations were created in the 1980s as a part of the Reagan administration's agenda to combat the Soviet Union by, "foster[ing] the infrastructure of democracy, the system of a free press, unions, political parties, universities, which allows a people to choose their own way to develop their own culture, to reconcile their own differences through peaceful means" (The Heritage Foundation, 2012)<sup>1</sup>. The Reagan administration planned to do this by founding several autonomous, government-funded organizations for "democracy promotion". These organizations were to be built on the model of the West German *stiftungen*<sup>2</sup>; non-governmental organizations that were each tied to one of (then) West Germany's political parties and received funding from the West German treasury. The *stiftungen* had been involved in democracy promotion work outside of Germany since the 1960s (Lowe, n.d.). Provisions for the establishment and funding of the NED were made in P.L. 98-164, which became law in 1983. Soon after the creation of the NED, four other affiliated organizations were created: the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), The National Democratic Institute (NDI), the International Republican Institute (IRI), and the Free Trade Union Institute (later organized as the American Center for International Labor Solidarity, ACILS). The NED was to "serve as the umbrella organization through which these four groups and an expanding number of other private sector groups would receive funding to carry out programs abroad" (Lowe, n.d.). Each of the four subsequent

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.heritage.org/europe/report/20-years-later-reagans-westminster-speech>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ned.org/about/history/#1>



foundations are affiliated with important institutions or organizations within American politics; the NDI is affiliated with the Democratic Party, the IRI is affiliated with the Republican Party, the CIPE is affiliated with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the ACILS (now called the Solidarity Center) is affiliated with the AFL-CIO.<sup>3</sup>

Despite President Reagan's lofty rhetoric, the real purpose of his push for democracy promotion was "to restore by subtler means the aggressive imperial prerogatives exercised during the Truman, Eisenhower, Johnson, and Nixon years" (Sussman, 2010, p. 44). In fact, the NED, like the NDI and IRI, was intended "to serve similar purposes to, but avoid the stigma of, the CIA and designed to be a semi-autonomous, semi-private overseas 'democracy promotion' instrument of the U.S. government" (Sussman, 2010, p. 45). Indeed, the first acting president and co-founder of the NED, Allen Weinstein, has said that, "a lot of what we [NED] do today was done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA" (Ignatius, 1991). The NED and its affiliates are able to do this kind of work—such as funding political opposition groups in foreign nations and supporting the production of propaganda materials such as television and radio programs for foreign markets—because, although they receive most of their funding from the federal government, they are nominally autonomous and do not have to report on their activities as much as USAID and other formal branches of the government.

In fact, the creation of the NED, CIPE, NDI, IRI, and related foundations as part of President Reagan's democracy promotion agenda was a shift in the tactics used to promote U.S. global interests from the covert actions, of the likes of the CIA, to overt actions. By being overt and public, the activities of organizations such as the NED gain a veneer of legitimacy, whereas the covert actions of the CIA drew public scorn during the Vietnam War Era and the "dirty wars" and Iran-Contra scandal of the 1980s. Ignatius (1991) calls the NED the "sugar daddy of overt operations" and posits that, "The old concept of covert action, which has gotten the agency into such trouble during the past 40

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<sup>3</sup> Ignatius (1991) comments on the "democracy promotion" activities of the AFL-CIO: "Working mostly in the open, it helped keep the Polish trade union Solidarity alive in the dark days of martial law during the early 1980s...American trade unions and the U.S. Congress provided millions of dollars to the Solidarity underground".

years, may be obsolete. Nowadays, sensible activities to support America's friends abroad (or undermine its enemies) are probably best done openly". According to Ignatius (1991), the NED was very active in the Soviet Union during its last days, and also in other Warsaw Pact nations of Eastern Europe during the same period. Praising the NED's methods, he adds, "Covert funding for these groups would have been the kiss of death...Overt funding, it would seem, has been a kiss of life".

In the original legislation which contained the proposal for the NED, H.R. 2915, funding for the foundation would come from the United States Information Agency (USIA). Later, the NED would act as a kind of clearinghouse for the NDI, IRI, CIPE, and Solidarity Center, who receive their funding through grants from the NED. The USIA was founded in 1953 and was, in the words of Charles Z. Wick, director of agency during the Reagan administration, "America's arsenal in the war of Ideas" (Wick, 1985, p. 16). The agency descended from the World War II Era Office of War Information (OWI) and other propaganda agencies created during the Truman Administration such as the Office of International Information and Cultural Affairs, and the United States International Information Administration (Guth, 2002). These disparate agencies were consolidated during the Eisenhower administration into the USIA, whose purpose was to, "to submit evidence to peoples of other nations by means of communication techniques that the objectives and policies of the United States are in harmony with and will advance their legitimate aspirations for freedom, progress and peace" (Wang, 2007, p. 25). In other words, the purpose of the agency was to produce propaganda targeted at foreign populations that would convince them to equate America's foreign policy goals with their own well-being. This type of propaganda was in large part pioneered by the USIA and is called "public diplomacy". According to Culbert (2010), public diplomacy is, "a form of diplomacy that goes beyond what one government official says to another—it is intended, often, to influence foreign publics, and is generally indirect in its effects," that would have been "unthinkable" as a diplomatic practice before the 1980s (p. 422). The USIA was dissolved in 1999 during the Clinton administration and its duties and activities devolved to other agencies such as the

Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), which oversees U.S. government-funded broadcasters such as Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), Radio Marti, and Radio Free Asia.

These entities are not monolithic. The NDI and IRI, for example, are affiliated with the U.S. Democratic Party and Republican Party, respectively. Accordingly, each espouses a more “liberal” or “conservative” worldview—within the comparatively narrow political spectrum that exists in the United States—and their activities reflect this. Another example, different from the semi-autonomous NDI and IRI, The Center for American Progress (CAP), is a liberal think tank founded by John Podesta, former Chief of Staff under President Clinton and Counselor under President Obama. The CAP receives donations from a number of private foundations<sup>4</sup> such as the Ford Foundation, the Sandler Foundation, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. George Soros’ Open Society Foundation is also a key supporter (Blumenfeld, 2003). The CAP’s sister organization, the Center for American Progress Action Fund is the advocacy organization that houses the blog ThinkProgress, which is an “in-house full-fledged, ideologically driven news organization” that works to counter the conservative media messages of think tanks like the Heritage Foundation and right-wing blogs like The Daily Caller (Smith & Vogel, 2011).

The leadership of President Obama’s transition team in 2008 was pulled from the CAP, and the think tank produced a public policy manuscript, *Change for America: A Progressive Blueprint For the 44th President*, offering suggestions for Obama’s administration (Scherer, 2008). In 2007, a member of the CAP, Gayle Smith, and a member of another think tank, the International Crisis Group, created the Enough Project, “In response to a lack of organized public constituency to respond to deadly conflicts and mass atrocities in East and Central Africa”.<sup>5</sup> The Enough Project partnered with the NGO, Invisible Children, for their KONY 2012 campaign and to raise awareness of the activities of the LRA (Lord’s Resistance Army) in Northern Uganda.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.americanprogress.org/c3-our-supporters/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://enoughproject.org/about>

There are many other such NGOs and think tanks founded by individuals within government or private industry, and many of these have links to the government-funded NGOs like NED or the two major American political parties. Though there are conflicts among the members of these various entities over key ideological points, they operate within an ideological framework of US global hegemony and support for the spread of liberal democracy and, perhaps most important, free markets. For example, the NDI openly admits to supporting opposition parties and civil society groups in Serbia in an effort to oppose former president Milosevic and the “Centralized governance structures [that] have held Serbia back in terms of making its political system fully open and participatory;” the NDI “started its Serbia program in 1996...and supported opposition parties and civil society groups...in defeating Milosevic at the ballot box”.<sup>6</sup>

To draw attention to the power and influence of these organizations is no exercise in “conspiracy theory”. One does not need to subscribe to a belief in a world controlled by a cabal of shadowy figures, gathered together in smoke-filled rooms, colluding to oppress the peoples of the world in order to realize that these third sector entities form a massive diffused network that is an integral part of maintaining America's global power. This network is a feature of the system, not some aberration; it is a manifestation of a type of governance structure that cannot be reduced to “government” in the traditional sense, but rather is a “governance structure”; as such, it produces new forms of propaganda for the control of opinions and the promotion of certain behaviors. As an extension of American primacy, the propaganda produced by this network promotes what French theorist Jacques Ellul (1965) called “orthopraxy”; “an action that in itself...leads directly to a goal, which for the individual is not a conscious and intentional objective to be attained, but which is considered such by the propagandist” (p. 22).

#### Zunzuneo, Otpor!, and Youth Movements Mobilized as a Political Weapon

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ndi.org/central-and-eastern-europe/serbia>

US government clandestine or covert “democracy promotion” (regime change) programs in foreign nations are a clear example of the occult nature of power within decentralized and distributed networks.<sup>7</sup> One example of such covert activity with special relevance to the KONY 2012 campaign is the group of covert actions the US targeted against Cuba during the same time as the Kony campaign was starting. There are three different campaigns of interest here, but chief among these is the creation of Zunzuneo, a Twitter-like messaging service developed by The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for the Cuban market. The word “Zunzuneo” refers to a colloquial name for the sound made by the Cuban hummingbird. Zunzuneo is most relevant to KONY 2012 because of the use of social networking technology as a political weapon, however, the other two examples also demonstrate the use of culture as a political weapon and the covert workings of distributed networks.

The existence of Zunzuneo was revealed by an Associated Press investigation, published on April 4, 2014 by Butler, Gillum, and Arce. The program was launched shortly after the 2009 arrest by Cuban authorities of Alan Gross, a contractor hired by USAID for another clandestine program that sought to expand internet access to Cubans using “sensitive technology”. The purpose of Zunzuneo was to build up a user base of mostly young Cubans through “non-controversial content” until a critical mass was reached, after which political messages critical of the Cuban government would be disseminated through the network with the goal of instigating spontaneous “smart mobs” and protests against the government. USAID staff referenced the role played by text messages and social media in the protest movements in Moldova, Egypt’s Tahrir Square, and Iran’s “Green Revolution”. The aim was to “renegotiate the balance of power between the state and society”.

The service was built through a shadowy network of shell companies located in various countries and financed by a foreign bank. USAID contracted with Creative Associates International, a for-profit, Washington, D.C.-based

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<sup>7</sup> A covert action is specifically defined in US Law. A covert action is not merely any secret government activity and there are government restrictions. First, covert actions must be approved by the President and must be reported to the Congressional intelligence committees and the Speaker of the House and minority leader, and the majority and minority leaders in the Senate. See: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/50/3093>

company that has made millions from federal contracts. Creative Associates obtained a list of Cuban phone numbers from a “key contact” at Cubacel, the state-owned Cuban cellphone provider. Noy Villalobos, a Creative Associates employee received assistance from her brother, Mario Bernheim, who was then working for a technology company in Nicaragua. Villalobos wanted to know if it would be possible to encrypt mass text messages and hide the contents of the messages from surveillance. Bernheim advised her that hiding the messages from surveillance would not be possible but by sending the messages from mirrored computers located in various nations the identity of the sender could be masked (Butler, Gillum, & Arce, 2014).

As the project began to grow it was obvious that Bernheim’s company was not “sophisticated enough” to properly build and maintain a Twitter-like service, so USAID contracted with Denver-based tech company Mobile Accord to manage the project. To cover their tracks the agency found a UK company that was able to set up a corporation in Spain to run Zunzuneo. To handle the expenses, a separate company called MovilChat was created in the Cayman Islands. Eberhard and USAID sought to recruit a CEO and management team for the company but did not reveal the true nature of the service to them.

Around the same time as the Zunzuneo program was underway, USAID was supporting other schemes to undermine Cuba’s government. One scheme involved sending Latin American youth to Cuba under the guise of tourists or students interested in teaching HIV prevention. Another involved infiltration of Cuba’s burgeoning Hip-Hop movement to destabilize the government. Creative Associates was involved in both of these schemes.

The youth sent to Cuba came from Venezuela, Costa Rica, and Peru. The program lasted two years and was operated from a base in Costa Rica. Some of the youth were sent to Cuba under the cover of teaching HIV prevention workshops and other teams were sent to Cuban university campuses with the mission to recruit students “with the long-term goal of turning them against their government”. In a statement, USAID claimed that the purpose of the HIV workshop was to enable “support for Cuban civil society while providing a secondary benefit of training in HIV prevention” (Butler, Gillum, & Arce, 2014). However, documents show that the purpose of the workshop was to identify

“potential social change actors,” and one of the Venezuelan youth, Fernando Murillo, wrote a six-page report to Creative Associates and mentioned HIV only once, noting that HIV prevention furnished the “perfect excuse for treatment of the underlying theme” (Butler, Gillum, & Arce, 2014).

The teams sent to universities used the “cover story” that they were going to Cuba to visit friends. Teams of Venezuelan and Peruvian students visited dorms and students at a University in Santa Clara and kept detailed files on them. They identified student complaints and assessed the leadership qualities of potential recruits. The Venezuelan team identified a group of 30 students who possessed the requisite organizational capabilities to “rebel against the government”. The targeted Cuban students were unaware of the true intentions of Venezuelan and Peruvian youth who visited them and considered them simply as friends.

Concurrently with the previous two programs, USAID was operating a program to infiltrate the Cuban Hip-Hop community, starting in 2009. The “mastermind” of this program was Xavier Utset, a veteran of anti-Castro protest movements, who at the time worked for Creative Associates. The Cuban hip-hop program was run by Rajko Bozic, a Serbian music promoter, and the scheme was inspired by the youth movements that helped to oust Slobodan Milosevic. A front company for the operation called *Salida* was set up by Creative Associates and based in Panama.

Bozic targeted a rapper named Aldo Rodriguez and his group, Los Aldeanos, who were one of the most popular Cuban hip-hop groups at the time. Bozic’s goal was to build “youth networks for social change” and he promised to help Aldo and his group create a TV project that would feature the group and that would be distributed throughout the Cuban underground scene on DVDs and thumb drives. Creative Associates had determined that Cuba was not ready for a revolution and planned for the operation to last at least a decade.

Creative and Bozic planned to co-opt famous Cuban and Latin American musicians, such as Cuban nueva trova legends Silvio Rodriguez, Pablo Milanés, and Colombian rock star Juanes. Creative and Xavier Utset planned to convince Los Aldeanos to join Juanes on stage during a planned concert in Cuba. In order to judge the potential impact of such an appearance Creative Associates used Zunzuneo to administer a poll asking Cubans whether Los Aldeanos

should join Juanes at the concert. Juanes declined to perform on stage with the group but he thanked them after his performance and he met with them at a hotel after the concert. During this meeting pictures were taken with Juanes, Aldo and one of his friends, and Silvito Rodriguez, the son of Silvio Rodriguez. The group's manager, Melisa Riviere, claimed that the acknowledgment at the concert gave Los Aldeanos "unprecedented prominence" in Cuba.

Only one Cuban knew the true purposes behind Bozic and his involvement in the Cuban hip-hop scene, a Cuban video jockey named Adrien Monzon, a "contact of highest confidence". After Bozic was detained when trying to enter Cuba and his equipment and hard drives were confiscated, he ceased all plans to return to the country. Monzon took over leadership of the operation and located 200 "socially conscious youth" and connected them on a site called *Talentocubano.org*. In January 2010 Monzon went to Europe along with some young musicians from Talento Cubano for "leadership training" for cultivating activists. In July 2010, Los Aldeanos travelled to Serbia to perform at the popular EXIT Festival; the rappers received similar training while there.

As evidence of how opaque and covert the USAID Cuba programs were, when Bozic attempted to wire \$15,000 to Cuba in order to help Monzon's Talento Cubano infiltrate an art and music festival organized by the family of Cuban nueva trova musician Pablo Milanés, the US Treasury Department froze the transaction. Los Aldeanos performed at Cuba's Rotilla Festival in August 2010. Rotilla is a three-day electronic music festival and is the country's largest independent music festival. During their performance, Los Aldeanos harshly criticized the Cuban government and the police forces. Rotilla Festival had been supported financially since 2006 by Bozic and EXIT Festival and it grew immensely during that time. The founder of Rotilla, Michel Matos, expressed shock and surprise that the Serbians were working for USAID and said that he would never knowingly accept financial support from an organization working for the USA.

In the end, USAID's plan to use hip-hop to cultivate anti-Castro youth for revolution against the Cuban government failed. Bozic moved onto other projects in Tunisia, Ukraine, Lebanon, and Zimbabwe. Adrian Monzon moved to Miami and started working at a Papa John's pizzeria. Aldo was unable to make a living as a rapper and the



Cuban hip-hop scene began to fade since that time. Xavier Utset left Creative Associates and took a position working for USAID.

### The Serbian Connection

Although the USAID schemes to subvert Cuba's government were criticized harshly once the AP broke the story—Senator Patrick Leahy called the Zunzuneo scheme “dumb, dumb, dumb”—the end of those programs was not the last time (nor the first) that an American agency would attempt to use social media technology and popular culture as weapons to sabotage unpopular foreign regimes (Butler, Gillum, & Arce, 2014). After the end of Zunzuneo the United States Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB) started its own Zunzuneo-like program called Piramideo (Pyramid).<sup>8</sup> The USAID schemes in Cuba were predated by decades of US psychological warfare operations targeting that nation. The OCB, which oversees Piramideo, also directs Radio Marti and TV Marti, formerly called Radio Free Cuba, which is a radio broadcaster modeled on Radio Free Europe from the Cold War Era. These two broadcasters create anti-Castro/anti-communist programming targeted at the Cuban population with the goal of stoking dissatisfaction with the Cuban government and political unrest. They are direct predecessors of Zunzuneo and Piramideo.

Arquilla and Ronfeldt (1993) refer to Radio y TV Marti in their article as an example of “netwar”. These two broadcasters are just two entities within a global web of US agencies that exist to carry out psychological warfare and netwar against regimes that the United States considers inimical or unfavorable. Radio Marti and TV Marti are governed by the International Broadcasting Bureau (IBB), which is governed by the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), an independent agency of the US government. Other broadcasters that exist within the IBB are Voice of America (VOA), Radio Free Asia, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and Middle East Broadcasting Networks, which oversees Arabic

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<sup>8</sup> [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/the-groundtruth-project/us-funding-another-social\\_b\\_5599147.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/the-groundtruth-project/us-funding-another-social_b_5599147.html)

language broadcasters AlHurra and Radio Sawa (Levine, 2015). Together these broadcasters make up one section of a global propaganda network used for perception management and netwar.

The case of USAID's programs in Cuba has connections to previous US activity in the Balkans. It is no accident that two Serbians, Rajko Bozic and Bojan Boskovic, were involved in these Cuban programs. In Post-Cold War Serbia, the US used similar programs to support the youth movement, Otpor! (Resistance), that led to the ouster of Slobodan Milosevic.

Otpor was a protest movement founded by a group of Serbian students on October 10, 1998 in Belgrade. The founders were participants of the previous, failed student protests of 1996 (Cohen, 2000). The movement used nonviolent means to criticize Slobodan Milosevic's administration. For example, in one stunt, members painted Milosevic's face on a barrel and rolled it down a street, if passers-by inserted a coin into a slit in the barrel they could have a chance to strike his likeness (Rosenberg, 2011). Otpor also made extensive use of graffiti, peppering slogans such as "Gotov Je" ("He's Finished"), and "Vreme Je" ("It's Time") around Belgrade. They were sophisticated in their use of visual iconography; their logo was a clenched, black fist on a white background (or alternatively, a white fist on a black background), which was a co-option and reference to the image of a red fist used by various socialist movements (Cohen, 2000).

Otpor was supported by "extensive financing from the United States", which they received through US NGOs and governmental agencies like the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and USAID (Cohen, 2000). According to Paul B. McCarthy, an official in the NED, "from August 1999 the dollars started to flow to Otpor pretty significantly," and of the almost \$3 million the NED spent in Serbia, "Otpor was certainly the largest recipient" (Cohen, 2000). The NED transferred the funds directly into Otpor accounts outside of Serbia. Members of Otpor met with McCarthy in Montenegro and Hungary. They also met with Madeleine Albright in Berlin. There, Albright told leaders of the group, "We want to see Milosevic out of power, out of Serbia and in The Hague" (Cohen, 2000). According to William D. Montgomery, the former American Ambassador to Croatia, "Milosevic was high priority for Madeleine

Albright” (Cohen, 2000). It is unclear how much the US spent in the effort to oust Milosevic, but USAID estimated \$25 million by late 2000; Otpor members also claimed that they received “a lot of covert aid” from the US (Cohen, 2000).

Slobodan Homen, a member of Otpor, admitted that “We had a lot of financial help from Western nongovernmental organizations”. One of these nongovernmental organizations was the International Republican Institute (IRI). Daniel Calingaert of the IRI claimed that he met Otpor leaders “seven to ten times” in Montenegro Beginning in October, 1999 (Cohen, 2000). From October, 1999 to November, 2000 the IRI spent \$1.8 million in Serbia and Calingaert says that some of that money was “provided direct to Otpor” (Cohen, 2000).

From March 31 to April 3, 2000, the IRI arranged a seminar at the Budapest Hilton of twenty Otpor leaders. The seminar was taught by Robert Helvey, a retired US Army colonel, who trained them in the use of non-violence to destabilize governments (Cohen, 2000). The lessons Helvey imparted to the young Serbians show that the colonel had a keen understanding of netwar and the constraints placed on the use of conventional military force asymmetrically: “There is an enormous price—domestic and international—paid today for using force against a nonviolent movement... [t]he dictator still may hold the externalities of power, but he is steadily undermined”, he told them (Cohen, 2000). Helvey taught the Otpor leaders how to identify key constituencies and demographics that support a regime, such as the police or military, and to subvert the leader's' power by co-opting or subverting these groups.

After the abdication of Milosevic, some of the Otpor leaders began to export what they had learned to other nations. The two most important of these are Srda Popovic and Slobodan Djinoic. After Milosevic stepped down, Popovic entered politics and won a seat in the Serbian parliament and advised Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic until his assassination in 2003. Djinoic founded Serbia's first wireless internet service provider and is the leader of the country's largest private internet and phone company. These two founded a new group in 2003 on a trip to South Africa, the Center for Applied Nonviolent Action and Strategies, or CANVAS. The organization teaches the methods of nonviolent struggle to groups from various countries and has been involved with protesters from most, if not all, of the nations which experienced so-called “color revolutions”. Djinoic himself traveled extensively throughout Eastern Europe. He

went to Georgia in 2002 and founded Kmara!! (“Enough”), and hosted Georgia students in Serbia. These students participated in the Rose Revolution that ousted Eduard Shevardnadze. He also spent months advising Pora (“It’s Time”) in Ukraine, in the lead up to the Orange Revolution. Popovic, Djindjinc, and the other alumni of Otpor have been called “modern mercenaries” (Beissinger, 2006, p. 20).

While Otpor and similar student-led opposition groups in other Eastern European nations were mostly portrayed in American media as spontaneously generated indigenous movements that simply sprang forth suddenly from disgruntled groups of disaffected and angry Balkan and Eurasian youth, the truth is much different. Groups like Otpor in Serbia, Kmara in Georgia, and Pora in Ukraine are the offspring of extensive American and Western European political cultivation in the Balkans and Eastern Europe, dating back to the 1980s, when the NED “began handing out generous doses of dollars in every corner Yugoslavia” (Engdahl, 2004, p. 239). In the early 1990s, “USAID provided \$175 million in media assistance to Eastern Europe and the former Soviet states during the 1990s, which included the training of over 10,000 media professionals” (Sussman, 2010, p. 140).

The Black/Bulldozer Revolution in Serbia which ousted Milosevic and the other “Color Revolutions” which erupted subsequently, quite apart from being (merely) native-born uprisings of the popular will, are the results of what Sussman (2010) calls a “revolution template”, the US strategy of “packaging, exporting, and spreading democratic revolution like a module across a broad array of settings, irrespective of local circumstances” (Beissinger, 2006, p. 21). This template makes use of modern tactics of electioneering like focus groups and exit polls, psychological manipulation, branding, and the use of slogans in order to create “short-term, euphoric political upheaval” that makes those who participate feel empowered while power is shifted from one group of elites to another (Sussman, 2004, p. 140). In this process of exporting commodified “democratization”—in reality, regime-change—, nonviolent revolution of the kind taught to Otpor by Colonel Helvey, is merely a cost-effective, non-militarist option for removing leaders who threaten to disrupt the plans of American interests for the region, or who have fallen out of favor with Washington.

Similarly, the concept of “democracy” is reduced to the election process, which is useful for national elites and American interests because it lends a sort of capital, in the form of legitimacy, to any new regime.

In the “Color Revolutions”, student-led opposition groups like Otpor function as “political technology” for opposition elites, tools that can be “mobiliz[ed] rapidly for street protests or the hostile takeover of official buildings or other state property” (Sussman, 2010, p. 168). These highly mobile groups of youth are used tactically as political weapons, against an incumbent regime. These are the “smart mobs” which USAID and Creative Associates hoped to generate and control through Zunzuneo and the infiltration of the Cuban hip-hop scene. Youth, and youth culture, are explicit targets of the democracy-promotion NGOs, as was evident in Eastern Europe and in Cuba. The EXIT Festival that began to support Cuba’s Rotilla Festival has strong links to Otpor<sup>9</sup> and its co-founders (Erer, 2017).

Nonviolence, social media, and popular culture are now mere tools in the “democracy-promotion toolbox” of agencies like USAID, along with others tools such as “training for lawyers, journalists, political party leaders, and trade unionists; direct financial aid for civil society organizations; and exchanges and scholarships for students” (Adesnik & McFaul, 2006, p. 7). In a March 2005 Freedom House report directed by Adrian Karatnycky, a senior scholar at Freedom House, and Peter Ackerman, chair of its board of trustees, the authors argue that support for “people power” in the form of civic resistance groups is one of the most effective “mechanisms by which democracy replaces tyranny” (p. 4). They urge that Western democracy-promoting civil society organizations need to “implement a paradigm shift in [their] priorities in order to promote and strengthen” movements like Otpor and other “civic groups as a means of ensuring that there is civic pressure on the new authorities to continue down the path of liberalization and reform” (p. 10). The authors view such support as not only a good in itself but as “investments in civic life” which have the benefit of being “minimal—a matter of millions of dollars or less,” and which are, “far less expensive than major military expenditures and far less costly than the normal bill for large development programs” (p. 10). In other words, cultivating

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<sup>9</sup> <https://exitfest.org/2/20%20years%20of%20EXIT%20activism.pdf>


pro-American/Western student groups and directly funding cultural events and opposition media outlets is a more cost-effective means of regime change.

Although Ackerman and Karatnycky argue that nonviolent protests and civic groups are the best way to ensure peaceful transitions to democracy, they and their revolution-exporting colleagues overlook evidence that “the outcomes of revolutionary upsurges are highly unpredictable and just as often lead to failure and prolonged civil war as to democratic success,” and that, “one of the unintended consequences of the attempt to export democratic revolution could be the inadvertent stimulation of repression, ethnic conflict, and even civil war,” such as the violent military response of the Uzbek government following the 2005 protest in Andijan and the military coup that followed the 2011 Tahrir Square protests in Egypt (Beissinger, 2006, p. 21). In fact, the Uzbek protests worked against US geostrategic interests in the Central Asian region when the president of the country, Islam Karimov, expelled the US military following the Andijan massacre (Walsh, 2005).

As in many other cases, the US supported Karimov despite awareness of his regime’s brutality, which is another point that Ackerman and the revolution exporters elide; many of the nations which are targets for Western democracy-promotion operations are governed by repressive regimes that were supported by the West. In the case of Karimov, the US paid his government \$15 million to maintain bases in the country after 9/11. According to Craig Murray, a former British ambassador to Uzbekistan who was fired for criticizing Western support for Karimov, other than the payments for the bases there had been “no significant investment from the west for a while,” and Russian and Chinese state-owned companies have stepped in to fill the void (Walsh, 2005).

Former Otpor members and CANVAS were also involved in what would become probably the most publicized and celebrated incident of popular uprisings; the so-called Arab Spring, that swept through North Africa and the Near East.

CANVAS not only exported their techniques to nascent youth movements in other nations, they licensed their intellectual property as well. Otpor's signature clenched fist was used by youth opposition groups in Eastern Europe and Central Asian and the logo showed up in the Egyptian protests against President Mohamed Morsi, used by a group called the April 6 Movement (Joksic & Spoerri, 2011). One of the leaders of that movement, Mohammed Adel, had gone to Belgrade, Serbia in the summer of 2009 to train with CANVAS after the failure of an organized demonstration (Rosenberg, 2011). The *April 6 Movement* also received training and funding from an organization linked directly to the US State department, the Alliance of Youth Movements.

The formation of the Alliance of Youth Movements (AYM) was supervised by Jared Cohen, a former US State Department employee and  CEO of Jigsaw (formerly Google Ideas) (Bratich, 2011). On December 3-5, 2008 the AYM inaugural summit was held at Times Square in New York (Shapiro, 2009). The summit<sup>10</sup> was funded by Facebook, Access 360 Media, Google, YouTube, MTV, Howcast, Columbia Law School and the U.S. Department of State, and leaders from 17 organizations from 15 countries were invited. Among the invitees were Save Darfur Coalition, Genocide Intervention Network, Burma Global Action Network, an unnamed Cuban group that was supposed to participate remotely, and Invisible Children. The Youth leaders were assembled in part to work to create a manual for "youth empowerment" (U.S. Department of State, 2008). Howcast planned to use the field manual developed at the Summit as the foundation of an online hub where emerging youth organizations could access and share tutorials and tips on how to use social-networking and other technologies to "promote freedom and justice and counter violence, extremism and oppression". The hub — (<http://howcast.com/youthmovements>) — which is no longer active, would include instructional videos about organizing social movements online, with titles like, "How to Use Twitter to Effect Social Change", and, "How to Protest Without Violence" (Howcast, 2009 & Howcast, 2009). Howcast, which was

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<sup>10</sup> [https://photos.state.gov/libraries/unesco/231771/pdfs/Alliance\\_of\\_Youth\\_Movements\\_Summit.pdf](https://photos.state.gov/libraries/unesco/231771/pdfs/Alliance_of_Youth_Movements_Summit.pdf)

started by former Google and YouTube employees, is a company that hosts a website that posts instructional “how-to” videos that teach viewers how to perform various tasks or gain skills (Creswell, 2009).

The Alliance of Youth Movements was an expression of a new trend in foreign policy thinking within the US State Department. Ritter (n.d.) explains that a shift occurred during the latter half of the Bush administration when officials noticed the pitfalls of military interventions. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice wanted to focus on “smart power” and “digital democracy policies” with the goal of “harness[ing] the potential of Muslim youth to effect political change in their respective countries through the allure of American Culture and values as communicated via tools of social media”. During the Obama administration, Secretary of State Clinton continued the focus on “digital diplomacy” and the ideas of Jared Cohen, the former Google employee who would go on to lead the formation of AYM, were particularly influential at this time. During the Iranian “Green Revolution”, Cohen convinced the leadership of Twitter to delay scheduled maintenance for the service so that protesters in Iran could continue to post information.

#### KONY 2012 and the Otpor Template

The effectiveness of this digitally diplomatic soft power should not be overstated. It is obvious that the “Green Revolution” was not successful in inciting a revolution against the Iranian government, and the protest movement in Egypt resulted in the Egyptian military staging a coup d’état. Plainly, the soft power method of engineering regime change has not been able to affect the foreign policy directives of the United States with complete reliability. Indeed, the possibilities of failure and unpredictable change were openly admitted at a special briefing to announce the AYM initiative. When asked about the wisdom of supporting opposition movements, peaceful or otherwise, in countries that are allies of the US or that the US supports financially, then Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs James Glassman reaffirmed the American commitment to supporting “pro-democracy” groups whether or not such support places the US at odds with foreign governments. However, the point should not be missed that this is an



explicit aspect of US foreign policy. This much was realized by Mubarak before the coup, as he raided the offices of foreign NGOs in Egypt, accusing them of supporting the opposition and subverting his government.

The participation of Invisible Children in the AYM summit is significant. The organizations and youth leaders gathered at the summit worked with the State Department and leaders of tech firms to share knowledge of tactics of nonviolent struggle and online opposition movement organization. By the time of the summit, the State Department had been involved in supporting and promoting this kind of bottom-up agitation for at least a decade, going back to the involvement of the NED in Serbia, supporting the Otpor movement. The NED, which receives a portion of its funding from the US Department of State through USAID and is subject to congressional oversight, is listed as a partner of *Movements.org*, which is the new name for the Alliance of Youth Movements. By the time of the summit, the State Department would already have a reservoir of techniques and tactics, such as the use of logos and branding, and the transformation of public spaces through the use of posters, graffiti, stickers, and spontaneous events. These were all techniques that Otpor used in Serbia, and subsequently exported to other countries like Ukraine, Georgia, and Egypt.

Invisible Children, as a participant in the summit would have made important personal contacts and would have been able to benefit from the knowledge that was later to be compiled in the online “field manual”. The KONY 2012 campaign and video bear all the hallmarks of an Otpor-type operation. The campaign was highly stylized and used distinctive branding that co-opted and re-appropriated iconography and aesthetics from revolutionary left movements. The campaign even had its own version of the Otpor fist; two raised fingers, forming a “V”, on an arm raised in the air, which appeared on campaign promotional materials and posters. Whereas Otpor used “Gotov Je” (He’s finished), Invisible Children used the phrase “Make Him [Kony] Famous” on posters bearing Joseph Kony’s likeness.

Invisible Children’s “Cover the Night” event was to be a miniature version of Otpor’s widespread use of posters and stickers bearing the visage of Milosevic, along with catchy slogans critical of his regime. Cover the night, which was a worldwide event planned to happen on April 20, 2012, aimed to “plaster ‘every city, on every block’ around the world with posters, stickers and murals of Kony to pressure governments into hunting down [Kony]”

(Carroll, 2012). Cover the Night, while it failed to achieve its immediate goals, was an event identical in form to Otpor's tactics of using posters and stickers to convert public spaces into politicized spaces in furtherance of political aims.

Wittingly or unwittingly, Invisible Children were partners with individuals with ties to the highest levels of American government. Invisible Children's main partners are two other NGOs that focus on the central African region; Resolve Uganda and the Enough Project. Resolve Uganda produces the "LRA crisis tracker" which publishes updates of LRA activity, presumably so that civilians can avoid the group. The Enough Project is an NGO that works to stop atrocities in several different central African nations, particularly Congo, South Sudan, and Uganda. The Enough Project was founded in 2007 by John Prendergast and Gayle Smith. John Prendergast is a former director for African Affairs at the US National Security Council and Gayle Smith is a former Senior Director of African Affairs at the National Security Council. Smith was appointed as head of USAID in 2015 by President Obama.

Prendergast has been involved in many charities and NGOs dealing with various issues pertaining to peace and development in Africa, such as Not on Our Watch, the Satellite Sentinel Project, the Save Darfur Coalition, the Darfur Dream Team Sister Schools program, and the Raise Hope for Congo program. He has also written a number of books, such as *Not on Our Watch*, co-authored with actor Don Cheadle, and *The Enough Moment: Fighting to End Africa's Worst Human Rights Crimes*, both published in 2007. Prendergast has worked extensively with celebrities and cultural figures to draw attention to African issues such as Darfur and "conflict minerals" from Congo.

Prendergast's charitable activities have drawn criticism, especially because of what some see as a well-meaning but very naive and limited understanding of complex issues in Africa. A Ugandan scholar, Mahmood Mamdani, has leveled harsh criticism at the work of Prendergast and one of the NGOs with which he is involved, the Save Darfur Coalition. A debate between Mamdani and Prendergast was held at the Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs on April 14, 2009, presented by the university's Institute for African Studies (Columbia, 2009). During the debate, which was commented on by Kircher-Allen (2011), Mamdani argued that Save Darfur and Prendergast had "turned the world into an advertising medium", and that the Save Darfur Coalition, "has not created or

even tried to create an informed movement, but a feel-good constituency”. Mamdani also made an interesting comparison between the methods of Save Darfur and the African warlords and rebel groups they claim to combat: “[Save Darfur’s] focus is increasingly shifting from college students to high school kids. These are Save Darfur’s version of child soldiers” (Kircher-Allen, 2011).

These statements may not be an exaggeration considering the tenacity with which Save Darfur lobbied the Obama administration to resolve the crisis in Darfur. The organization strongly criticized President Barack Obama’s special envoy to Sudan, retired Air Force General Scott Gration. In a letter to the president, the Save Darfur Coalition said that the Obama should order Sudan to implement a 2005 peace deal that ended Sudan’s civil war and to also remove President Omar Hassan al-Bashir. The group recommended that, if the government in Khartoum would not comply, that “targeted military action” should be used (Charbonneau, 2009).

Mamdani’s objections to the work of the NGO Save Darfur and the Enough Project co-founder Prendergast could also stand as an analysis and critique of the methods of democracy-promotion by means of “digital diplomacy”. The export of Otpor-style, branded “revolutions” that eschew discussions of issues in favor of a focus on image really is the transformation of the complicated world of geopolitics and political power struggles into an “advertising medium” united by short-term, euphoric, explosions of passions masquerading as substantive democratic participation in the governance of a society. And, the explicit policy of targeting youth to do the work of destabilizing foreign governments or of pressuring US legislators to intervene —militarily if need be— in the affairs of foreign nations, while less brutal than forcing them to kill or rape enemies, is not any more respectful of their intelligence or human worth outside of being political tools for the powerful.

Conclusion

The argument of this article is that the “third sector” of (I)NGOs, private foundations, think tanks, and development agencies form a system of governance in the form of a distributed network. This network exists alongside the apparatus of the state as traditionally conceived, but is not “the government” per se. Its locus of power is occult and integrated within the society. The examples from this article—Zunzuneo, Piramideo, Otpor, and the use of culture as a means of effecting American foreign policy—demonstrate that propaganda can be understood as a technology of governance; in other words, it is a means of managing individuals, groups, and political forces to achieve political objectives and to maintain a political status quo.

With this understanding we can view KONY 2012 as an instance of the diffused network of governance aiming its power on the American population itself. KONY 2012 was not the first time this happened; the Save Darfur Coalition’s activities are a different, but related, example of elements of the third sector governance network propagandizing the American public in order to achieve the goal of American intercession into the affairs of Sudan. However, KONY 2012, as the biggest viral internet event at the time, was possibly the most successful attempt at influencing the American public in this way.

An explanation for why such propagandizing is necessary is that the interventions Invisible Children, and their government-linked partners the Enough Project, wanted the US government to make lacked legitimacy. By 2012 the United States had been involved in military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan for almost a decade, and the American public had grown past war-weariness. Given the goal of the campaign (i.e., to “Get Kony”) would require military involvement in an area of the world most Americans would not view as immediately impinging upon national security interests, legislators and policy makers would also be hesitant to lend support to such an operation. In this case, legitimacy would be a type of political capital that needed to be won in order to perform the political work of entering into another foreign military adventure. KONY 2012 and its propaganda, aiming to create masses of youth and anger against Joseph Kony by “making him famous”, would be able to generate the needed legitimacy by engineering an

Otpor-style pressure movement that would force legislators to assent to involvement. Jason Russell says precisely this in the KONY 2012 video:

For Kony to be arrested this year, the Ugandan military has to find him. In order to find him, they need the technology and training to track him in the vast jungle. That's where the American advisors come in. But in order for the American advisors to be there, the US government has to deploy them. They've done that, but if the government doesn't believe the people care about arresting Kony, the mission will be canceled. In order for the people to care, they have to know, and they will only know if Kony's name is everywhere. (Invisible Children, 2012)

The recent scandal following news of the deaths of four American soldiers in the African country of Niger supports such an interpretation (Timm, 2017). Most Americans were probably unaware of their nation's military involvement in the country, and news of the deaths of American soldiers there caused problems for the Obama administration, although US soldiers have been in Niger since the Obama administration.

Invisible Children's partnership with the Enough Project and its participation in the Alliance of Youth Movements demonstrate direct connections to the State Department and suggest that Invisible Children would have had access to nonviolent "democracy promotion" techniques used by the NED, NDI, IRI, Otpor, and CANVAS. A comparison of the tactics of the KONY 2012 campaign and Otpor's anti-Milosevic activity shows many similarities and the former seems to be highly influenced by the push for "digital democracy" and "people power" that was a focus of the State Department at the time, the difference being that KONY 2012 was an application of digital democracy domestically. Or, given the centrality of military intervention to Invisible Children's plans to "get Kony", it was an instance of the waging of netwar against the American people; a protracted campaign that used propaganda to change the perception of events.

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