

Information Technologies, Meta-power, and Transformations in Global Politics¹

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The transformational impact of information technologies changes the dominant meanings of the identity and interests of global actors. These transformations cannot be ascertained through technology's impact upon the capabilities of actors as understood in traditional accounts of power. The concept of meta-power explains the new meanings, which come about in global politics from an increasing number of perspectives and interactions facilitated through information exchanges and learning. Especially when information technologies diffuse or decentralize relations across global actors, we would expect that increased interactions among them would allow new meaning formation to increase. Individual and social identities are no longer singular or linearly consistent through time, and global politics reveal multiple meanings for the issues and actors in question. Illustrative examples are provided for individual-level identity formation and for the implications for global politics in networked environments.

True, he said; how could they see anything but the shadows if they were never allowed to move their heads?

Plato, *The Republic* (Book VII)

Plato's Allegory of the Cave *can* be understood as a crude case of constrained optimization. The bound group of people in a cave—Plato asks us to imagine that they have been bound for life and cannot move—believes that the shadows on the walls in front constitute reality. The informational base for the group is derived from the only reality it has experienced, that of the shadows in front. Therefore, the group seems to have no other choice but to believe what it sees to be real. As a first-order effect of being bound, believing shadows to be reality is perfectly understandable. However, Plato goes a step further to imagine a philosopher who understands forms and how they arise, which change the parameters of “reality” for the group. This second-order effect challenges us to think if the group would view the world differently if it was no longer bound, though in Plato's allegory such learning, even for the one freed prisoner, is hard.²

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²Plato's concern was with the soul than social identity.

This essay analyzes the interactive cultural processes that facilitate new forms and meanings in global politics.³ The optimistic claim in this essay is that information technologies—rather than philosophers—can broaden the public sphere, by bringing in a diversity of actors and their perspectives, and facilitate interactions that change the identity of the actors and their interests in global politics. Information technologies are unique: they foster interactions that are primarily communicative and related to meaning sustenance and creation.⁴ However, the optimistic scenario holds in environments that are already decentralizing and various actors can effectively participate in meaning formation. In authoritative or hierarchical environments, limitations prevail: existing structures of interaction constrain transformation through reinforcing existing meanings, or homophily effects stovepipe people in narrow confines of like-mindedness. In ideal ones, communications among various types of actors—states, international organizations, firms, civil-society, global activists, individuals—can awaken them to new meanings or discover them through coordinated problem-solving.⁵

The ability of information technologies to foster interactions that change the identity of the actors and the meanings of issues in global politics is termed “meta-power” in this essay. Information technologies can be understood as *affordances*, which Earl and Kimport (2011:32) describe as “actions and uses that technology makes qualitatively easier or possible when compared to prior like technologies.” These affordances arise from lowered costs and facility of large-scale and diverse interactions, encompassing many actors and engendering new meanings. Meta-power results from these affordances, but has to be understood as a social *process* rather than a determinative *resource*. Anthony Giddens (1984), similarly, notes that power must be understood through social relationships that sustain or transform particular practices.

While information technologies themselves alter the cultural environment in which they operate, the existing cultural environments also influence the process of meta-power. Social relationships that result from decentralizing and interactive environments are best suited for increasing the meta-power of a system, and therefore new meaning formation. This case is straightforward at an individual level: with nearly six billion mobile phone users or one billion people on Facebook, communication theorists and social psychologists increasingly outline new forms of social identities and meanings that are circulated and adopted (Turkle 1995; Castells 1997). The rise of cultural identity politics from local to global levels also points to politics where political subjects’ identities are in a flux and they contest the meanings of issues in politics (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Singh 2011). The case for new meanings gets harder when we turn to global politics with great powers, institutions, and hierarchies—the structural limitations of power—that intervene to sustain existing meanings or thwart new

³Cultural processes here pertain to how groups understand their identities and the social practices that are employed to sustain them. Culture is always dynamic; new forms of identity and social practices coexist with earlier ones in parallel or syncretic ways (Geertz 1973).

⁴Information technologies, broadly understood, include conduits *and* content of communication including printing presses, telecommunication lines, films and broadcasting, and Internet and social media such as YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook.

⁵The essay offers a dialogic understanding of human action and its meanings (Habermas 1976). Platonic subjects above undergo a “consciousness awakening” as a philosopher suggests new forms. Paulo Freire (1970) specified the basis of new meanings in dialogic processes, albeit in the case of the struggle of the oppressed to name their world through dialogic processes, as opposed to finding it named for them. His subjects find a “cultural voice” through dialogues. Singh (2008b) explores the relevance of Paulo Freire’s ideas for the information age in a non-radical context, noting that information and representational technologies increasingly offer opportunities for cultural voice.

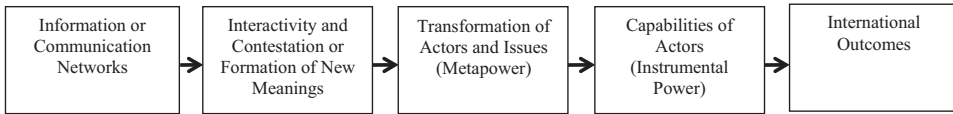


FIG 1. Information Networks and Power

ones. But such hierarchies in an issue or a moment now sit astride decentralization across another. Global politics offers less than the ideal possibilities for “consciousness awakening” but increasingly scenarios wherein discursive inequalities or great power interests *do not always* dictate the outcomes. This essay shows later that hierarchically organized nation-states continue to define the status quo meaning of security around territoriality. However, new meanings of commerce and human rights may no longer be beholden to nation-states. Changed meanings of politics are different from merely changing the capabilities of actors. As Clay Shirky (2008:297) puts it in the context of information technologies: “Societies before and after revolution are too different to be readily compared.”

Conceptually, *meta-power* is antecedent to instrumental notions of power: before actors do what they do, meta-power specifies the meaning of their collectively understood identity and interests. When Platonic subjects gaze at the shadows on the wall in front of them, the meaning has been created for them. When nation-states fight territorial wars, similarly the meaning of a nation-state or security understood in territorial terms has been *imagined* through prior interactions.⁶ In practice, however, meta-power processes overlap traditional ways of exercising power. Actors may continue to do what they do, especially in a hierarchical environment, while decentralized relations elsewhere foster meta-power processes that create new meanings. Figure 1 illustrates the *conceptual sequence* in which information technologies lead to meta-power or the ability of interactions to change the identity of the actors and the meanings of issues in global politics. Figure 3, shown later, illustrates the *practical overlap* between meta-power and instrumental processes: while decentralized technology affords new meanings and actions, existing hierarchical structures can strengthen old meanings.

Meta-power processes have existed throughout history, but now with information technologies, their time has come to generate new meanings with increasing facility through technological affordances in human interactions. Hierarchical interactions overlap decentralized ones: the latter set in place the new meanings of politics, not because traditional actors such as nation-states go away, but because new actors suggest new meanings through their interactions, which make traditional meanings obsolete.

The impact of communication technology interactions on the human mind is not difficult to formalize through mathematical fractals that can specify a set of unchanging identities and preferences but also the processes leading to new preferences and cultures. In Figure 2a, the ability of a cultural group to ensure an outcome or a collective meaning such as “national security” assumes fixity of meanings in which the group is constrained from imagining new possibilities through interactions; successive iterations serve to strengthen the relationship such that preferences stay constant. However, other forms of interaction exist when there are multiple, Cx , culture groups interacting (Figure 2b). As

⁶In his seminal monograph, Anderson (1983) shows how information technologies of a prior era, namely the printing press, enabled the formation of the European nation-state around linguistic lines as printing proliferated in the vernacular, rather than Latin.

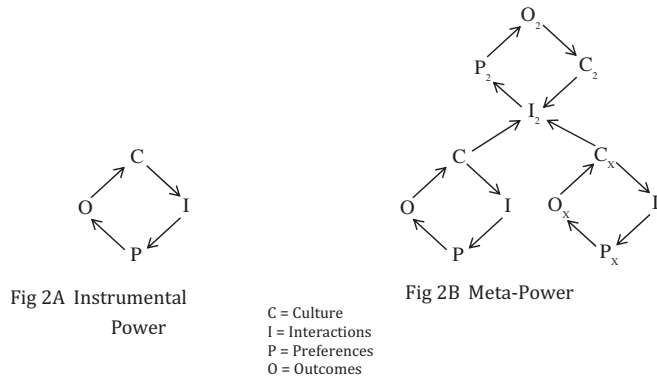


FIG 2. Instrumental and Meta-Power

illustrated in the figure, as culture group C and C_x interact, new forms of preferences, outcomes, and eventually a new hybrid culture (C_2) appears.⁷

The process of meta-power is explained in the theoretical section of this paper just below. Next, the paper details the case for human interactions as the basis for understanding meta-power. Empirically, the essay examines the effects of information technologies at the micro level of social identities to then advance a few implications at the global level.

Understanding Meta-Power

Two conceptual contexts are important for understanding meta-power: the three waves of international scholarship outlining the effects of information technologies upon global politics and, second, the contrast with other conceptualizations of power.

Information technologies first and foremost are technologies of interaction and representation. Nevertheless, their first-order effects can be understood within the constraints of traditional instrumental politics that affect the capacities or constraints of global actors—the ability of states to regulate the Internet, or that of firms to deepen their production networks to cut transaction costs. The second-order effects of technology relate to the social environments and new meanings in which these technologies operate: states must now compete with other entities not only to regulate the Internet but also to define its meaning for people; when firms add value to their products through global networks, the notion of comparative advantage rooted in “national understandings” becomes increasingly untenable.

Evolution

In moving from an understanding of first- to second-order effects of technology, international relations scholarship can be broken into three waves. In the first

⁷An economist would readily accept that short-term preferences arise within *ceteris paribus* conditions (within one fractal in Figure 2). Institutions, tastes, and income levels are held constant to measure the impact of prices on utility maximization. But the fear of changing these underlying conditions has not deterred economists from speaking of cultural mores and habits that shape preferences (Steele 2004) or the relation between human identity and preferences (Becker 1996; Akerlof and Kranton 2010) across the fractals in Figure 2B. A few economists speak of meta-preferences or the underlying set of tastes and institutions that determine different systems of preferences (George 1984; Hodgson 2010). Jon Elster’s (2007) writings also demonstrate how self-understandings and rational conduct themselves arise within social interactions.

wave, lasting until the early 1990s, scholars mentioned technologies in their perspectives, but they remained undertheorized and underexplored. The role of technologies in global politics was understood in an instrumental fashion, either enhancing the power of international actors or constraining the power of others. Gilpin's (1981) research is illustrative of the former, while Marxian and radical scholarship has made the latter point (Cox 1987). James Rosenau (1990) paved the way for a new generation of scholarship on information technologies underscoring the effects of technology in making for a polycentric and turbulent world.

The second wave of scholarship on information technologies and global politics, roughly until the middle past of the last decade, began to theorize the effects of these technologies carefully, albeit in an instrumental fashion, while also attending in-depth to particular issue-areas. All the various paradigms in international relations could claim scholarly works that spoke to the assumptions of that tradition. Neorealists viewed information technologies from the perspective of national power (Rosecrance 1996) and argued that global rules governing these technologies resulted from relative differentials of state power (Krasner 1991). Similarly straightforward applications of liberal international relations theory brought in perspectives dealing with multiple actors and international cooperation fostered through global institutions (Zacher with Sutton 1996; Keohane and Nye 1998). Critical theory perspectives often showed how information technologies helped to delay the crisis of capitalism, while deepening its instruments of exploitation through production and consumption (Henwood 2003; McDowell, Steinberg, and Tomasello 2008).

Building upon these second-wave perspectives, scholars soon began to cross-fertilize paradigms to argue variously that information and communication technologies were not just mere instruments to constrain or expand the power capabilities of global actors, be they nation-states or classes, but that they also provided a way to understand major transformations in global politics (what Gilpin at one time called changes *of* the system rather than *in* the system). Global politics itself could be understood from a communication perspective. For example, Deibert (1997) combined Harold Innis and Marshal McLuhan's medium theory with international relations theorizing to show how world orders had evolved as communication technologies changed from parchment, to printing, to hypermedia. Rosenau and Singh (2002) brought together various first-wave and second-wave scholars to analyze the role of information technologies in global politics to provide various theoretical syntheses and also demonstrate the changing and transformative patterns in power and governance.

The essays collected in this special issue and the 2012 International Studies Association's Annual Convention theme (Power, Principles, and Participation in the Information Age) reflect the salience of information age issues within the study of global politics.⁸ The essays are also emblematic of the recently begun third wave of scholarship that has both expanded as well as deepened these enquiries. The expansion results from demonstrating the relation between information technologies and just about every issue-area in global politics. For example, while only a few theorists imagined the links between security, or commerce, and information technologies in the first wave, it has now become impossible to speak of these issues without some reference to these technologies (Slaughter 2004; Drezner 2007; Buzan and Hansen 2009). The deepening has come from the rigor and the multiple methods being used to demonstrate these results.

⁸The establishment and growth of the International Communication section within the ISA is also demonstrative of this trend. Most foundations and endowments now have programs to encourage scholarship and research, usually interdisciplinary, to explore the role of information technologies. The preferred term at the US National Science Foundation is "cyber-infrastructure" to highlight the convergence of computational and pipeline capabilities.

Therefore, subjects such as Internet governance have emerged as fields of study in their own right (de Nardis 2009; Mueller 2010). Multiple methods from ethnographies (Flyverbom 2011) to quantitative designs (Milner 2006) have been employed to examine them.⁹

The concept of meta-power developed in this essay was first mentioned in Rosenau and Singh (2002) as the various authors sought to name the underlying transformational logic of information technologies in global politics. The concept connects especially with the expansive logic of third-wave scholarship: meta-power changes the collectively understood meanings of actor identity and interests in global politics.

Distinctions

It is important to distinguish meta-power from two forms of power that are often discussed: instrumental power and productive power. Technologies in the instrumental or traditional power equations, outlined in the second wave of scholarship above, enhance or diminish the capabilities of actors.¹⁰ Fung, Russon Gilman, and Shkabatur's (2013) essay in this volume about information technologies enabling advocacy of various sorts or services delivery is a nuanced conception of power in an instrumental sense. It balances pessimistic scenarios that assign no agency to actors stemming from technology against deterministic ones that overestimate technology's effects.

Scholarship on instrumental power is sophisticated in showing how states or great powers reassert their rules through new conditions of multilateralism or technological uncertainty. Nevertheless, when these scholars accord attention to information technologies, these technologies seem to be no different from nuclear bombs, medicines, or agricultural tractors. They miss the role of communication in meaning creation and cultural alteration.

Conceptualizations of power as social processes that constitute the identities and interests of actors provide another useful distinction.¹¹ Barnett and Duvall's (2005) concept of productive power is a variant of power in a constitutive sense, in explaining social meanings. Productive power is imagined as a discourse or "the social processes and the systems of knowledge through which meaning is produced, fixed, lived, experienced, and transformed" (p. 55). As an example, Barnett and Duvall show how the discourse of Global Compact at the United Nations sought to both legitimate and constitute corporations as socially responsible actors. Meta-power as conceptualized in this essay overlaps with productive power because both attend to discursive or dialogic properties as the constitutive basis of politics.¹² However, it also differs in four significant ways in terms of the context and the outcomes resulting from meta-power. First, meta-power is posited as conceptually antecedent to all other forms of power rather than, as Barnett and Duvall discuss, one among the many forms of power that can be

⁹Simmons (2011) argues that Internet search engines and crowd-sourcing themselves suggest new forms of enquiry and questions for scholars to examine.

¹⁰Instrumental notions reign supreme in international relations. Many scholars who had expected new meanings in our politics from information technologies have now retreated to re-specify the old ones. A lively forum on "Who Controls the Internet?" in the *International Studies Review* (Eriksson and Giacomello 2009: 205–230) mostly responded by noting that existing state actors and ideologies control the Internet. Other scholarship on Internet governance has reached similar conclusions. Those lining up behind state actors include Goldsmith and Wu (2006) and Drezner (2007).

¹¹Sociological understandings of power can be traced back to Weber and Durkheim and elaborated in current contexts through Foucault and Bourdieu.

¹²I have also argued elsewhere (Singh 2002) that meta-power is an important dimension of constructivist claims in politics, while instrumental power is important for liberal claims, and structural power for radical and Marxist claims.

understood in any context. Second, the context of meta-power specifies intense interactions among actors, while productive power, at least in the examples that Barnett and Duvall provide, seems to arise from any actors proposing new meanings. Third, meta-power is rooted in a communicative and technological understanding of power and consciousness awakening; productive power is rooted in discourses but not connected with communications contexts. Fourth, meta-power has a normatively positive and transformational dimension, whereas Barnett and Duvall posit productive power in micro, macro, positive, and negative terms.¹³

Finally, there are intellectual antecedents to the term “meta-power.” Meta-power conceptualizations share with Baumgartner, Buckley, and Burns (1975), and Burns and Hall (2013) the sociological understanding of what they also term meta-power to note that relationships among international actors enable organizational rules and world orders. However, these understandings do not involve the ascription of new meanings. Krasner (1985) had employed the concept of meta-power in a similar sociological fashion to speak to the ways in which the Third World sought to change the rules of the game through its advocacy in the 1970s and 1980s. Krasner concluded that the Third World lacked resources to change the meta-rules in its favor. This is not a surprise. Krasner’s meta-power seems to be arrested in a structural straitjacket of a hierarchical ordering of actors.

If we begin with a networked decentralized context, the outcomes would be different. Buzan and Little (2000:286–288) note that communication technologies are transformative because they greatly enhance the “interactional capacity” of the international system.¹⁴ The ability to produce changes in identities of actors and the underlying meanings of issue-areas through interactions builds upon theories of communication and deliberation rather than power understood as resource.

Human Interactions

The theoretical expectation in this essay is that information technologies enable diverse actors operating in highly interactive circumstances to change the meanings of our politics. The formation of new meanings is easier in decentralized contexts than authoritative ones because they allow multiple actors to participate at levels and intensity unimaginable before. In Earl and Kimport’s (2012:71) words, information technologies provide affordances for “supersizing participation.” The additional claim here is that supersizing participation comes with maximizing socialization.

There are two types of human interactions: ones that socialize us into existing meanings and others that create new meanings and subsequent socializations through institutions (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Searle 1997; Grewal 2008). Institutions are like the “dead labor” in Marxian notion of capital; they embody prior interactions, and create or sustain ideational structures or residual ideologies that specify courses of action. It would be hard to imagine that existing institutional meanings, embodied in structures, will step out of the way merely because new ones are being proposed, but it is equally hard to imagine

¹³Another example of a restricted form of constitutive power is Lukes’s (2005) third face of power in which an ideology of due obedience is diffused among subjects. It is hard to deny that all authorities replicate cultures of obedience. Bourdieu’s (1993) concept of diffused power and Foucault’s (1977) of governmentality speak to the ways in which power conditions obedience in subtle ways. Strange’s (1988) formulation of structural power also constrains actors’ agency, not redefines its meaning altogether. These formulations are opposed to noting transformational possibilities beyond micro contestations within global structures of power.

¹⁴Later they note: “Increases in interaction capacity driven by profound developments in both physical and social technologies were another key element in the transformation from the ancient and classical era to the modern one” (p. 350).

possibilities where despite new proposals, old meanings always continue to reiterate themselves. Unfortunately, some international relations theories reify the latter possibility: actors continue to carry the Sisyphean rock of old meanings in new interactions. Critical and realist theorists are especially prone to such ritualistic pessimism.

The necessary condition for meta-power is networks of actors; one actor, or one type of actor, cannot entirely dominate the proceedings or constrain the discussion of the issue to a singular dimension to benefit itself. Networked contexts are better suited for coordination and collaboration, while hierarchical contexts facilitate coercion. Hierarchical contexts generally allow one actor to impose its coercive will upon others: an example would be states insisting upon military security as the only form of security, great powers defecting from multilateral rules to effect trade benefits in their favor through preferential trade agreements, or nation-states limiting discussions of human rights along “universal” dimensions that exclude cultural rights or rights of minorities. Prior socialization can also result in a universally accepted “standard” that makes it hard for new meanings to be accepted (Grewal 2008).

The threat of new meanings can also create a particular type of homophily effect that leads people to only socialize with those who hold like-minded values or are “materially” similar on dimensions such as religion, class, gender, or ethnicity.¹⁵ Such homophily effects can strike all populations and issues but if these effects get supersized they begin to thwart the meta-power effects leading to culture wars over identity. For example, evangelical groups in the United States can be viewed as a special case of the homophily effects to stovepipe conversations of identity issues around standards propagated through evangelical media. Overall, though, homophily effects vary on many dimensions and through time, thus making the aggregated effects of all kinds of homophily difficult to evaluate. Homophily’s overall impact must, therefore, weigh in the effects of a broadened public sphere within which identities and values attached to issues are debated. As later sections will show, identities born of one homophily are often overlapped with other forms of homophily or alternative identities.¹⁶

In networked or decentralized contexts, actors find it hard to impose their interests on others and might even “discover” their interests through interactions. Meta-power in its boldest sense may be conceived as a form of “consciousness awakening” in dialogic practices through which subjects transform their understandings of one another and themselves: “In this theory of action, one cannot speak of *an actor*, nor simply of *actors*, but rather of *actors in communication*” (Freire 2000:129). In an ideal construct, deliberation around new meanings includes every relevant voice and members treat each other with respect (Habermas 1990) or inclusion comes from discursive representation (Dryzek and Niemeyer 2008). Such ideal conditions would be hard to locate in international politics (Fung 2007; Mansbridge et al. 2010). But at a basic level, shared meanings from conversations can only arise from dialogues offering new perspectives from new actors. Mackie (2010) notes that deliberation involves giving of public reasons. Meta-power can arise in less than ideal circumstances: a large network with multiple actors can approximate, if not equal, ideal discursive qualities.

The necessary condition for meta-power to work is thus a decentralized network that allows diverse actors to indulge in meaning formation. Putting it crudely, it entails a network where one type of global actor—nation-states or

¹⁵The sociological literature on homophily effects is immense. Classics include Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954) and McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook (2001). Applications in international relations include Axelrod (1997) and Centola, Carlos Gonzalez-Avella, Eguiluz, and San Miguel (2007).

¹⁶Only if identity was singular would one homophily dominate politics, and this explains the appeal of populist singular identity politics.

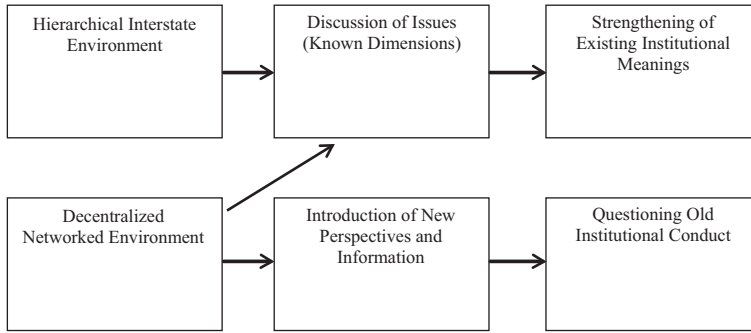


FIG 3. Meaning Formation in International Environments

firms—does not dominate meaning creation or sustenance. Multiple global actors interact or negotiate across multiple issues, making outcomes more indeterminate than structural orderings in which, as Thucydides reminds us, the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must. In a networked context, actors interact through arms-length relationships, often through information technologies, and foster collaboration (Mueller, Schmidt, and Kuerbis 2013). In holding the underlying power structures constant, theories are indisposed toward noticing how learning takes place in interactive environments and how interests change. In a decentralized context, new types of actors (e.g., transnational firms or civil society groups) propose new meanings that may not synthesize with those ossified in prior interactions or regulated through the nation-state. This proposal of new meanings is what in passing Susan Strange (1996:26) termed virtual or “being there” power: the ability of an actor to change the terms of deliberation by its mere presence.¹⁷

Figure 3 illustrates the differences between understandings of issues in an interstate hierarchical environment versus a networked environment in which different types of actors propose and question old understandings through dialogic means. Dialogues do not automatically lead to new meanings. Part of the contestation of meaning takes place in existing cultural or institutional contexts or habits that may thwart new meanings or reinforce old ones. The global conversations on the meanings of security, property, rights, and identity take place in the authoritative contexts in which, depending on one’s predilections, states, or businesses may be *primus inter pares*, hegemonic forces trying to constrain new meanings, or unable to resist new meaning formation.

Meta-power cannot explain the specific meanings that would arise, but by definition, these meanings result from broad participation and thus normatively superior to those specified through structural and coercive circumstances. New actors can bring new perspectives but for these to become new standards, participation and persuasion are necessary and that is where the economies of scale inherent in information networks become important. Social media did not create the meaning of Arab Spring for the protestors but enabled it through broad participation and circulation of meanings. This essay, therefore, claims that the new meanings being proposed through information technologies will be transformative and break down old authority patterns, further emboldening interactivity. This can be imagined as a feedback loop in the lower half of Figure 3.

¹⁷Susan Strange (1996:26) writes: “Power can be effectively exercised by it through ‘being there,’ it through without intending the creation or exploitation of privilege or the transfer of costs or risks from oneself to others, for instance. This recognition of unconscious power is one contribution that gender studies has surely made to international political economy.”

Plato's allegory of the cavemen and the *ceteris paribus* of neoclassical economics are both contingent on limited sources of information for interest formation. Increasing sources of information with new means of communication can suggest new alternatives for interest formation or, in Anthony Giddens' words, "discursive consciousness" that allows individuals to discern the social meanings in which their identity is "embedded": "Consciousness' in this sense presumes being able to give a coherent account of one's activities and the reasons for them" (Giddens 1984:45). However, information by itself is not enough. Like language, meaning is a communal activity, even if it arises from the genius of the human mind, and must be negotiated among participants.

Illustrative Examples: Changes in Identity

Information technologies enable new social meanings of identity and interests, and alter the mix of meanings being circulated over networks. To use Anthony Giddens' word, meanings are again "disembedded." The next subsection examines the changing material conditions for individuals to provide a basis for speculating about changing social identities in global politics, and the subsequent section examines the implications of these changes at the global level.

Individual Level Change

Identity understood in a minimal sense means membership in various social groups, the importance attached to various sorts of memberships, and the values held within these social groups.¹⁸ Thus, changes in identity can be understood in behavioral terms. These conditions examined at the individual level below need not be "aggregated" at the global level but in fact might indicate the opposite: individual identity change may be reflective of broader network effects. Therefore, the purpose of the discussion below is illustrative rather than reductionist.

The ways that information technologies cause changes in social membership and values is first shown here through descriptive data on the incredible expansion of information networks and the role of devices and platforms for social networking among large groups. Such large-scale membership was only imaginable for the nation-state at one time. Table 1 provides an overview of information networks. A first look at Table 1 might indicate a digital divide but for the growth rates of mobile telephony in the developing world. Sub-Saharan Africa has gone from 12 mobile subscribers per 100 populations in 2005 to 53 in 2011. The rate of growth of mobile telephony is exponential. With the growth of applications and uses of mobile telephony, the ability of networks to cater to various uses rises further, especially as users get accustomed to accessing audio, visual, and text messages. The growth of smart phones providing multimedia capabilities has been rising. In February 2012, one estimate calculated that 42 percent of the total US mobile subscribers, and 44 percent of the EU5 (UK, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain) were smart phone users (comScore 2012:4). Figures on smart phones in the developing world are hard to obtain, but anecdotal evidence points to strong growth rates for middle-income users. The *Financial Times* (April 8, 2012) notes that while sales of the Blackberry phone were declining in the developed world, they were increasing and becoming status symbols in emerging markets: of the total 100 million mobile phones in Nigeria five million are already smart phones.

¹⁸This article avoids the inner psychological meaning of identity, although at times such references to works such as Sherry Turkle's help to clarify a few psychological bases of social identity.

TABLE 1. Growth Rates of Information Infrastructures

<i>Category</i>	<i>Income Levels (countries)</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2011</i>
Internet users per 100 people	High Income	3.7	30.8	59.1	72.9	75.6
	Middle Income		1.7	8.0	23.4	27.2
	Low Income		0.1	1.1	4.5	5.9
	Sub-Saharan Africa		0.5	2.3	10.0	12.3
Mobile cellular per 100 people	High Income	7.8	50.1	84.2	110.4	117.4
	Middle Income	0.29	4.8	26.9	76.6	85.8
	Low Income	0.0	0.3	4.7	33.5	40.8
	Sub-Saharan Africa	0.1	1.7	12.0	45.1	52.9
Telephone lines per 100 people	High Income	48.8	55.6	51.5	47.7	47.1
	Middle Income	4.6	8.8	14.7	13.7	13.2
	Low Income	0.5	0.6	0.9	1.1	1.2
	Sub-Saharan Africa	1.1	1.4	1.5	1.4	1.4

Source. The World Bank, World Databank: World Development Indicators (WDI) & Global Development Finance (GDF). Available at databank.worldbank.org. Accessed December 6, 2012.

TABLE 2. Social Media Classification

		<i>Social Presence/Media Richness</i>		
		<i>Low</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>High</i>
Self-presentation/ self-disclosure	High	Blogs	Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook)	Virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life)
	Low	Collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia)	Content communities (e.g., YouTube)	Virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft)

Source. Kaplan, Andreas M. and Michael Haenlein. (2010) Users of the World Unite: The Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons* 53:62.

The growth rates of social media usage bring us one step closer to the notion of social identity being advanced in this paper. Social media enable people to belong to various communities and share online content with each other: they are collaborative but distributed activities allowing for story-telling and self-portraits. They include various technologies for sending text (SMS, blogs), sounds (voice over IP, music-sharing), and visual media (pictures and films). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) employ two dimensions—social presence/media richness and self-disclosure/self-presentation—to present a sixfold classification of social media (Table 2), which underscores the social nature of the media but, more importantly, especially with high presentation, aspects of story-telling, which is important for new meanings. While this storytelling conforms to existing forms of social identity, equally it encompasses them in multiple and contingent ways.

Table 3 presents a few statistics for the most popular social media platform—Facebook: at 974 million users, it now covers nearly one-sixteenth of humanity, and five out of the top ten countries of Facebook users are in the developing world, which also features the highest growth rates as evidenced on Facebook's summation of weekly fastest growing countries.¹⁹ One Facebook data analysis in November 2011 examined 721 million users with 69 billion friendships among them to find that there were only three to four degrees of separation—or “hops” among users—for most people (Backstorm 2012, November 21). This is not only

¹⁹See “Fastest Growing Facebook Countries Over Past Week” at <http://www.checkfacebook.com/>. Accessed December 6, 2012.

TABLE 3. Facebook User Statistics

Total Facebook Users: 974 million

10 Largest Countries on Facebook (millions of users)

1.	United States	168
2.	Brazil	63
3.	India	61
4.	Indonesia	51
5.	Mexico	40
6.	United Kingdom	34
7.	Turkey	32
8.	Philippines	30
9.	France	25
10.	Germany	25

Source: <http://www.checkfacebook.com/> accessed December 6, 2012.

an interconnected network, first of its kind in global terms, but one which at least in these user statistics shows that people are not distant from each other in their connections.

Media rich interactive environments have long been believed to foster integration and break down parochial boundaries (Deutsch 1957). Communication theorists now believe that interactive media are beginning to play a role in political and cultural socialization that was once given to traditional institutions such as the family, community, or political organizations (Bennett 2008; Shirky 2008). People's communication interactions take place "in what used to be prohibitively large groups" (Baym 2010:4). The largeness of groups is coupled with increasing amounts of time spent. Certainly in terms of leisure time spent with media, such socialization is not hard to imagine: In the United States, people spend 5.2 hours a day watching TV, and 1 hour a day on the Internet. While TV dominates, statistics provide another picture: 58.7 percent of the people use Internet and TV simultaneously (Nielsen 2012:4-6). Globally, YouTube offers another look at social media consumption: 70 percent of YouTube's traffic comes from outside the United States; 800 million unique visitors watch 4 billion videos leading to one trillion views or 140 views per person in 2011. Over 100 million participate each week with various forms of social action including likes, commentary, and sharing.²⁰

Evolving social identities on the media need to be examined in nonlinear and multiple ways. As opposed to a single dominant political identity of the past, such as national identity providing continuity through time, current social identities may overlap each another and, at times, change. Furthermore, socialization online complements, rather than replaces, offline socialization. Similarly, online identity groups either intersect with or supplement offline ones. At the same time, social media, Internet, and mobile phones have become increasingly important for maintaining relationships or creating new social networks, as telephones were in a prior era (Beniger 1986; Katz and Aakhus 2002). The evidence on online and offline identities and activism seems to be mixed: while there were some early concerns that information technologies would decrease social capital and deteriorate relationships, subsequent studies point at the opposite. Bargh and McKenna (2004:14-15) and Baym (2010) report a number of studies that found that Internet use is positively correlated with social and political activism. Users with high Internet consumption also participate more in community organizations and maintain their offline social relationships. A Pew Internet study found that those engaged in political discussion on social media are likely to be highly engaged in offline civic engagement (Smith, Lehman Scholzman,

²⁰YouTube statistics from http://www.youtube.com/t/press_statistics. Accessed December 6, 2012.

Verba, and Brady 2009). Similarly, even slacktivism (“lazily” joining various activist groups on social media such as Facebook) is positively correlated with offline activism (Ogilvy Public Relations and Center for Social Impact 2011).

Online or mediated identities are increasingly viewed as complementing offline social identities. Sherry Turkle (1984, 2011) draws upon evidence from surveys to ethnography to outline the links between computers, the Internet, and a postmodern identity wherein identity is no longer linear and monolithic. Turkle (1984) notes that the effects of computers lie not in “what we do but how we think” (p. 13). Just as the dawn of modernity led to questioning of the human relationship to God, computers now make us ask “what it is to be human” (p. 307). While Turkle’s point is rooted in-depth psychology, it is equally understandable in the behavioral terms outlined here. The networked communion allows people to break away from any grand narrative and discover a fluid, even decentered, self that leads to “new ways of thinking about evolution, relationships, sexuality, politics, and identity” (Turkle 1995:26).

There are drawbacks to online identity formation. Turkle (2011) notes that fragmented identities on the Internet cannot supplement physical ones and this leads to anxiety. Turkle’s point might be exaggerated: data increasingly show that people supplement rather than replace their online identities with offline ones, at least politically. However, increased levels of anxiety lend themselves to political manipulation at least in pushing people toward reactionary stovepipes (religious, fundamentalist) or toward embracing nationalism for comfort (Singh 2011). Furthermore, we need research on homophily effects wherein people follow only particular media (Fox/right wing-radio or *New York Times*/NPR), instances where media and political mobilization increase mass support for anti-cosmopolitan values (anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim backlashes in many Western European countries, for example), or cases where online identities enhance conflict. A subtle analysis of three cases of “online insurgency” leads Dartnell (2006) to conclude that our politics are now transformed into mostly image and identity-based politics that might engender more, rather than less, conflict though strengthening nationalist and religious movements. Dartnell (2006) writes that “contemporary global politics is a transnational ‘24/7’ exchange of text, photos, audio and videoclips, blogs, and chat rooms that constantly transmits and retransmits the emotional and moral content of our politics” (p. 5). Nevertheless, the connections between these homophily, insurgencies, and the overall patterns of global politics remain unclear.

In general, the flattened spaces of social media enhance transformative interaction. Social media distributed in large networks offer people the ability to produce their own content and commentaries, the user-generated content of Web2.0. As Shirky (2008:21) puts it, everything in the past was “filtered through relatively rigid institutional structures.” Communication theorists in general agree that grand narratives about identity from above are now contested and “mediated” from below. “Virtual communities,” Howard Rheingold’s term, with detailed rituals and social practices, challenge prior social forms both in online and offline contexts.

Increasingly, surveys tend to ask people to describe their identity affiliations in multiple and overlapping terms, rather than in singular terms. The *World Values Survey*, for example, asks people how strongly they feel about their national identity, but another question asks them how strongly they feel about national, international, regional, or local identity.²¹ Table 4A describes aggregate results for a few countries to measure pride in nationality for the four waves of surveys from 1982–1999/2000. This question assumes a linear

²¹World Values Surveys (<http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>) provide data on political and socio-cultural variable. Surveys began in 1982 and now in their sixth wave cover more than 50 countries.

TABLE 4. World Values Survey: National and Global Identities

	Country									
	Total	Great Britain	United States	South Africa	Argentina	Brazil	India	Indonesia	Egypt	
<i>Fifth-Wave Data (2005–2008)</i>										
<i>(A) How Proud of Nationality</i>										
Very proud	64.5 %	54.0 %	65.3 %	78.4 %	63.3 %	39.3 %	72.8 %	46.2 %	73.6 %	
Quite proud	29.6 %	37.7 %	26.6 %	17.8 %	31.8 %	44.5 %	22.6 %	46.4 %	24.8 %	
Not very proud	4.7 %	6.8 %	7.3 %	3.5 %	3.6 %	10.2 %	4.0 %	6.4 %	1.4 %	
Not at all proud	1.2 %	1.5 %	0.8 %	0.3 %	1.3 %	6.0 %	0.5 %	1.1 %	0.2 %	
Total	14,494 (100%)	961 (100%)	1,193 (100%)	2,963 (100%)	968 (100%)	1,491 (100%)	1,890 (100%)	1,993 (100%)	3,035 (100%)	
<i>(B) I See Myself as a World Citizen</i>										
Strongly agree	31.3%	20.6%	43.3%	16.5%	27.0%	36.8%	30.8%	28.4%		
Agree	44.2%	48.0%	42.9%	52.2%	51.3%	41.3%	61.1%	28.6%		
Disagree	17.6%	25.7%	10.7%	25.7%	19.4%	17.9%	7.0%	24.2%		
Strongly disagree	6.9%	5.7%	3.0%	5.6%	2.2%	4.0%	1.0%	18.7%		
Total	12,882 (100%)	1,181 (100%)	2,877 (100%)	924 (100%)	1,482 (100%)	1,491 (100%)	1,920 (100%)	3,007 (100%)		

Note: Figures not available for Great Britain for the second question.

Source: World Values Survey, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>. Accessed April 13, 2012.

identity that remains fixed thorough time, and judging from the responses, more than nearly 90 percent of the people in the world are quite proud or very proud of their nationality. However, the 2005–08 survey asked people to describe how strongly they feel about their international, national, regional, and local identities, and the results illustrate the idea of multiple affiliations. Table 4B lists results in terms of world citizenship, although survey data are also available for other affiliations.

Norris and Inglehart (2009:183) speak of “multiple nested Identities.” They provide quantitative evidence, based on the World Values Surveys, which confirms that countries that are open to communication media and cultural content flows tend to be more cosmopolitan, tolerant of outsiders, reveal global consumption patterns, exhibit a progressive morality that is open to changing gender and sexual mores, are relatively secular, and show higher political and civic engagement. Media and cultural flows not only socialize but also do so in ways in which national identity is increasingly supplemented with a cosmopolitan consciousness. However, the results need to be interpreted with caution: the authors note that countries that maintain firewalls that censor, filter, or exclude communication or cultural communication flows also tend to rate lower on the cosmopolitanism.²²

This section provides some evidence for the claim that as information networks proliferate, so do multiple social identities and values revealing the process of meta-power. As more and more participants join networks of communication, we would expect that reactions to old and new meanings would increase. Such developments point to a discursive, dialogic, or deliberative turn in politics. Individuals now have some agency to “negotiate” their identities, and of particular importance here is the rise of cosmopolitan and progressive values but also reactions against them. The next section speculates on the implications of these phenomena for existing and new global understandings.

Implications for Global Issues

Global cultural politics feature a double movement. On one hand, we would expect that as cosmopolitanism increases along with multiple online and offline social identities, identities of global actors and issues rooted in linear understandings—usually centered on the nation-state—will be weakened. We would expect that these individuals participate in global politics in ways that skirt or question hierarchical institutional structures and the meanings they provide. On the other hand, we would expect concurrent cultural conflict through structural effects of quashing certain types of identity formation or homophily effects that ghettoize groups. Table 5 summarizes the implications of this claim for five issues—security, property, human rights, diplomacy, and legitimacy. The new meanings arise in the shift from hierarchical to more networked environments, but the two environments coexist, making meaning formation interstitial and, at times, ambiguous. In some cases, the old meanings continue to dominate even with new ones contesting their presence.

²²I would add that even in media-rich “western” environments, ghettoization or mass-mobilizations along cultural identity dimensions are not uncommon. Stark reminders include the July 2011 shootings and bombings in Oslo, the 2009 Swiss ban on minarets affirmed through a 57 percent voting majority in a referendum, or the Jyllands-Posten newspaper controversy in Denmark following the publication of Prophet Muhammad cartoons in September 2005. In the case of Jyllands-Posten and the Swiss minarets vote, instead of ghettoizing racism or xenophobia, mediated interactions seemed to supersize their effects.

TABLE 5. Meta-power and Collective Understandings: Actor and Issue Identities

<i>Global Understandings</i>	<i>Hierarchical Environment</i>	<i>Networked Environment</i>	<i>Dominant Effects</i>
Actor Identities			
Nation-States	Interstate system, with great powers, dominates and shapes outcomes	Networked multiple global actors, sometimes with states as <i>primus inter pares</i> , but where networked social groups can participate in both defining and shaping outcomes	Idea of the nation-state coexists with other forms of "super-sized" membership. Concurrently, ghettoized and cosmopolitan identities proliferate, as do criminal and illicit networks
Firms	Play subordinate role to nation-states	Often primary or dominant actors in global meaning formation	
Transnational activists and civil-society	Marginalized identity		
Issue Identities			
Security	Territorial security	Human security and other networked conceptions	States dominate meaning formation
Property	Chiefly limited to tangible means and materials, rooted in national understandings	Extensions to digital and information technologies, rooted in complex value-chains that only nominally conform to a "national" logic	Old and new meanings overlap. Digital and intellectual "property" contested
Rights	Citizenship defines political community and universal rights	Cultural rights and universal rights	Rights debates in mainstream; ghettoized identities off-stream
Diplomacy	Subsidiary instrument for persuasion, limited to nation-states	Important instrument of persuasion (soft power)	Gridlocks in diplomacy and global politics with clashes between new and old voices, and authority and legitimacy
Legitimacy	Authoritative due-obedience enforced by bureaucracies	Voluntary due obedience through global norm formation	

Security

In a cultural sense, security is the removal of threats and sources of anxieties to ways of life, and conversely, the perpetuation of conditions that allow groups to experience emotional and material comforts. We would expect that individuals in networked environments would recognize the role of the nation-state but other alternatives would arise allowing communities to problem-solve in creative ways. Mueller et al. (2013) cite examples of technical communities coming together to resolve computer hacking problems, in turn producing a collaborative understanding of Internet governance issues. But they also reveal instances in which these communities might themselves turn to nation-states to resolve enforcement issues. At a broader level, Dunn Cavely (2013) shows that while there are multiple extant discourses on security, they are further informed by the meta-narrative of imagining cyber-security either in spatial (inside/outside) or networked/ecological terms. She notes that while spatial and ecological metaphors inform many security discourses, the “strategic military” discourse is mostly rooted in cold war-like spatial or nation-state-oriented metaphors.

The narrative of human security provides a counter-example to state-security. Human security, a concept that arises out of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), includes individuals and various forms of groups (beyond the nation-state) and their freedom from fear and ability to gain material comfort as the referents for security. However, the institutional dimensions of human security may be traced well beyond the UNDP and into other institutional dimensions.²³

A useful example of human security concerns rising to the fore comes from the growing-field of crisis-mapping, which relies on crowd-sourcing, satellite imagery, and multimedia platforms to remove threats to ways of life. The software platform Ushahidi, named after the Swahili word for testimony or witness, was tried out first in the stalemate following the December 2007 Kenyan elections and violence between Kikuyu and Luo ethnic groups (Vericat 2010). A small group of Kenyan software developers assembled and launched the Ushahidi platform in a few days. It allowed citizens to use a variety of media such as mobile phone, landlines, radio, or Internet, to monitor elections and report cases of violence, which were then centrally collected and reported on Google maps. These maps allowed people to avoid areas of violence, and journalists also picked up eyewitness accounts being reported on Ushahidi: it contributed to conflict de-escalation and helped to create conditions for peace—a power-sharing arrangement was worked out between the two electoral contenders. Since then, the Ushahidi platform has had a variety of applications, including reporting from conflict and disaster zones such as anti-immigrant violence in South Africa in mid-2008 and the Haiti earthquake in 2010.²⁴ Apart from Ushahidi, similar platforms include ArcGIS.com, Sahana, Frontline SMS, and Google Crisis Response. Harvard’s Satellite Sentinel Project is well known for analyzing violence between Sudan and South Sudan with images and data collected through DigitalGlobe’s satellites (Raymond, Howarth, and Hutson 2012). The United Nations has also developed crisis-mapping platforms for its humanitarian response in various forms including the UN Secretary-General’s innovative Global Pulse project, which enables information exchanges on crises and disasters among organizations and individuals.²⁵

²³Its relevance is easy to discern in development debates where states cannot or will not meet a population’s elementary needs of material or emotional comforts.

²⁴Ushahidi practices are well documented: see blog.ushahidi.com and community.ushahidi.com.

²⁵<http://www.unisdr.org/archive/24223>. Accessed March 7, 2012. While crisis-mapping is largely a bottom-up phenomenon, relying on crowd-sourcing, policy institutions can use it effectively to enable information sharing. This was the case with enabling the government to create transparency on tsunami relief in Japan in April 2010, or for UN OCHA to respond to and track the political crisis in Libya in Spring/Summer 2011 (Dunn Cavely 2011, November). For tsunami relief, see <http://www.sinsai.info>, and for the Libya crisis, see <http://libyacrisismap.net>.

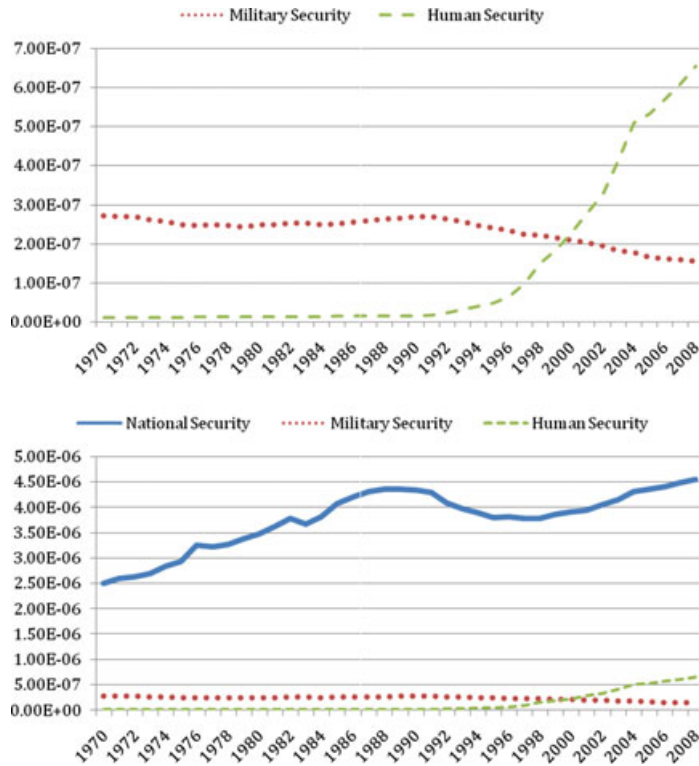


FIG 4. Presence of Phrases “Military Security,” “Human Security,” and “National Security” in Google Books

Source: books.google.com/ngrams

Notes: n-grams measured on the Y axis provide relative frequencies of word counts in Google Books. For example, roughly speaking, the term military security appeared in Google books .0000271 times per 100 words. For details on methodology, see: <http://books.google.com/ngrams/datasets>.

Ideas of human security have increased in salience as interactional spaces and institutions for discussions of security have grown. It may not be coincidental that the growth in ideas of human security has not only benefited from an impetus from global institutions but also the proliferation of the Internet since the early 1990s. Figure 4 provides some evidence for this claim, which compares the frequency with which terms such as “military security,” “national security,” and “human security” appear in Google Books.²⁶ While the term “military security” appears less frequently than human security, the presence of the term “national security” remains strong. The main point is this: notions of human security increase in an era of Internet proliferation even in traditional media such as books. A search for the term “human security” on Google yielded 721 million results and for “military security” 1.18 billion results, implying that this case extends beyond books.²⁷ It would be difficult to claim that ideas of human security resulted from the proliferation of the Internet. These figures imply no causal relation; the Internet could simply be reflecting the rise of human security concerns. Nevertheless, the coincidence of human security and Internet does show that the new meaning of security circulates at great intensity on the Internet.

²⁶Simmons (2011) suggests the use of this technique for garnering a few preliminary results. It is a crude form of content analysis but offers millions of “observations” for how terms appear in literature.

²⁷Search conducted on December 7, 2012. Search results on Google can vary by geographic region and user’s profile.

Imagining and providing security is a representational exercise. Regardless of the rise of new meanings of security, nation-states continue to assert the old meaning of security around territorial terms and exert an important influence in the new meanings as Dunn Cavely (2013) and Mueller et al. (2013) evidence.

Property and Work

The changing meaning of property must be located in forms of work enabled through information technologies, and the ways that people imagine their identities in relation to this work. Economist Fritz Machlup (1962) was first to draw attention to the increasing number of knowledge workers in the United States, noticing that the rate of growth of the “information sector” was twice the rate of GNP growth. At present, information sectors account for over two-thirds of the contribution to GNP in OECD countries. While products such as those of the \$1.7 trillion entertainment industries (Vogel 2011) are primarily information-based, those of sugarcane farmers in Pernambuco, Brazil, or autoworkers in Trieste, Italy, also may be broken down to identify their informational components.

National affiliations are often moot with global practices encompassing complex value-chains that enable production, and as intangible products (information and service-related) cross-national and cyberspace frontiers. Rivoli (2005) traces the story of a T-shirt whose cotton from Lubbock, Texas, is shipped to China, where the cloth is produced and stitched into a T-shirt. It then arrives in the United States where it may be printed and sold and worn, and an afterlife in the second-hand markets of Sub-Saharan Africa. Linden, Kraemer, and Dedrick (2009) show that the 451 parts that go into Apple’s iPod are manufactured mostly outside the United States. Toshiba makes the most expensive part, the hard drive, which accounts for \$73 of the \$299 value, but this Japanese company manufactures it in the Philippines and Malaysia.

The processes of global production have also produced a major challenge for international trade statistics, which are tallied at the national level. If most of the iPod is manufactured outside the United States and then arrives at its shores to be sold, its value would be an import. However, Linden et al. (2008) demonstrate that \$163 of the iPod’s value is captured through US firms operating abroad.²⁸

Another contention surrounds extending meanings of property with products enabled through information technologies. As firms have sought to obtain international property rights for knowledge embedded in patented, copyrighted, or trademarked products, various transnational actors have contested the claim that the systems of reward for inventions and innovations should be considered property, rather than a temporary reward for a given number of years. Second, they have contested the claim that, even if they are viewed as “properties,” they should belong to firms as opposed to being freely circulated or assigned commons rights, especially in Internet spaces (such as Creative Commons). Susan Sell (2013) illustrates the “contest” between these two rival narratives to show how both offline and online activists mobilized to defeat the passage of two bills in US Congress in January 2012 that would have led to restrictive intellectual property provisions. These were the House of Representatives Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) and Senate Protection of Intellectual Property Act (PIPA). The rise of the Pirate Party in Sweden, Germany, and the European Parliament—to advocate against copyright and for Internet freedoms—is another instance of political identity formation and institutionalization around an information age issue. The

²⁸More broadly, China has argued that its trade surplus with the United States would be considerably reduced if the value-added from US corporations operating in China were to be taken into account. This has become an important issue of research for the World Trade Organization’s Economics and Statistics division.

multilateral agreement known as the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA), negotiated between 2008 and 2010, similarly produced heated debates. Kader Arif, the European rapporteur for ACTA resigned in protest after the European Union signed the agreement in January 2012. The European Parliament is unlikely to ratify the agreement, and similar developments are noticeable in other states that signed the agreement including the Mexican Parliament.

The Rights of Others

As individuals begin to imagine themselves along multiple dimensions and produce their own representations of identity through multimedia, we would expect that universal definitions of human rights would be supplemented with “less than universal” dimensions. Certainly, the early advocacy for rights came from stigmatized, excluded, or marginalized groups: online spaces, in fact, allowed them to find each other and mobilize. In doing so, they also redefined rights to mean cultural rights and not just universal rights.

Like security and property, human dignity is a representation. Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man* was such an aspiration, as are the current discourses over the Internet coming from groups that were denied rights or dignity. There is a plethora of communication scholarship, beginning with Said (1978), on how electronic images through film or television assign reason and rationality to white heterosexual males, while emotions and an inferior rank are assigned to women and other groups. Thus, a new language of cultural rights, arising from cultural identities (gender, ethnic, religious, sexual, indigenous, to name a few), is now emerging alongside the notion of civic rights that were once cast in national terms. There is also considerable evidence that marginalized and stigmatized groups utilize the Internet more than their “dominant” counterparts and might even view national or global identities as top-down grand narratives. Therefore, national and cosmopolitan identities are now understood as forms of cultural identity alongside sexual, ethnic, racial, and gender identities often put forth in terms of cultural rights (Singh 2011). Ernesto Laclau poses “incommensurability” between universal and particular cultural rights (Laclau 1995), while Seyla Benhabib (2004) resolves the question in favor of a process rooted in interactive contexts that foster deliberation and discourse ethics.²⁹

Homophily effects from information technologies in cultural rights may work in complex ways. As noted above, the language of cultural rights is being shaped through coalitions of the like-minded online. Nevertheless, these rights must be deliberated in a broadened public sphere involving multiple perspectives seeking an accommodation between existing and advocated practices. Kollman (2007), for example, shows that the perceived legitimacy of LGBT rights through international networks has led to the proliferation of same-sex unions in established democracies, along extant (heterosexual) norms of civil union or marriage. Similarly, Keck and Sikkink (1998) note that networks are about persuasion and socialization and human rights activists adopt frames that appeal to a wide variety of groups.

Diplomacy

In hierarchical environments, where nation-states and great powers are the primary actors, power distribution, rather than diplomacy, dictates outcomes (Bull 1977; Kissinger 1994). To Hedley Bull (1977), allowing in communication technologies is more problematic; “loudspeaker diplomacy” despoils strategic intent

²⁹Benhabib shows how rights of immigrants have developed at the European Union level through successive deliberations even as their membership in the political community of nation-state remains incomplete.

through populism and expands the (secretive) diplomatic realm to make it ineffective.

Despite misgivings against making diplomacy public, it can be argued that diplomacy has come of age in a networked environment where states and other actors use instruments of “soft power” to persuade rather than coerce each other. The idea that diplomacy is effective only if actors remain “boundedly rational” in information-scarce or -exclusive environments is not logical. In fact, the meaning of instrumental “soft power” or public and cultural diplomacy must be understood within the context of meta-power interactions within a diffusion of power, where diplomacy and negotiations—far from becoming elite realms (Keohane 2001), or populist loudspeakers (Bull 1977)—begin to approximate conditions of the public sphere (Singh 2008a: chapter 8).³⁰

Legitimacy

In the old Weberian sense, legitimacy entails due obedience, often embodied in the acceptance of state authority and its instruments. As the public sphere widens through information technologies, authoritative due obedience to hierarchical structures is increasingly questioned in favor of more participatory forms of acceptance of authority, and legitimacy understood as voluntary compliance (Hurd 1999). As information technologies allow for participation and inclusion in politics, through protest or through deliberation, the old meaning of authority rooted in command systems is weakened. Hussain and Howard (2013) points out the role information technologies played in questioning legitimacy of authoritarian regimes in the Arab world.

Beyond instrumental notions about questioning authority, the rise of the kinds of participatory politics that Fung et al. (2013) note may mean that “automatic compliance” with existing systems of authority is unnecessary.³¹ Information technologies create “voluntary compliance” to new sources of information and authority traceable to online or web-based media activism, alternatively termed digital activism, e-advocacy, and cyber-politics. Online activists are now connected to each other and employ a variety of multimedia devices to influence others (Macaughey and Ayer 2003; Joyce 2010). Most scholarship on these issues is rich with case studies of how activists are able to use SMS, bulk texts, videos/photos, ringtones, Twitter, and location ware to organize “smart mobs,” monitor politics, and citizen reporting (Cullum 2010).

Conclusion

The concept of meta-power examines the influence of human interactions upon the meanings of our politics. Liberal political theory underestimates interactions in holding social and political identities and meanings of issues unchanged, while calculating the ways in which pre-determined interests enable particular sets of choices and actions. Soft power, for example, is about persuasion, but the goals and the identities of actors have already been determined: soft power merely seeks to persuade other actors to accept these goals through the power of media or entertainment messages through the “cultural diplomacy” variant (Nye 2004; US Department of State 2010). In the conceptualization presented in this essay, meta-power is antecedent to its instrumental variants.

³⁰Cull (2013) underlines the conditions under which new media practices of cultural diplomacy, as a new of public diplomacy, and as practiced by the United States could be successful.

³¹Critical theorists advance a contrary argument that relations of power are so diffused among participants as an ideology that they do not notice its working.

The existence of meta-power should not blind us to two limitations. First, existing institutions can minimize meaning formation, through direct coercion or the force of a dominant ideology. Despite the emergent understandings of security, for example, nation-states continue to replicate and institutionalize the territorial meanings of security. Second, homophily effects can lead to ghettoized identity formation. Within the supersized homophily of Facebook are the micro homophilies of gender, race, class, and other values. However, homophily would overtake meta-power processes only if one singular dimension or value dominates, which is hard to find in the intersecting homophilies of online and offline identities. In fact, dominant singular dimensions make people explicitly forsake the general trend of overlapping identities and ghettoize themselves into taking extremist positions. Meta-power, in other words, moderates homophily effects.

Information technologies foster human *communication* interactions: increasing interactions exponentially and in large groups increasingly changes the meanings, which shape our politics. The logic is simple in the obverse: deep hierarchies and authoritarianism, through constraining interactions, do not allow for any change of meanings. Therefore, the normative subtext of this essay points to a broadening of the international public sphere through information technology, which is allowing participation and identity creation from the individual to the global levels. Just as individuals take on multiple and overlapping identities, we find that old meanings of global actors' identities and issues are being overlapped with new ones.

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