IDEOLOGY AND LOW INTENSITY DEMOCRACY

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Ideology and Low Intensity Democracy

by

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A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate

Studies in partial fulfilment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Philosophy

Memorial University of Newfoundland

April 2011

St. John's Newfoundland

Abstract

This thesis will provide an account of how our ideological relationship with democracy is responsible for the problematic phenomenon of low intensity democracy. Low intensity democracy is a relatively recent phenomenon that is becoming a growing concern in a number of fields of study. Low intensity democracy describes a democratically impoverished state. Despite the fact that some basic democratic institutions such as elections are in place, a lack of support and encouragement for democratic development produces a democratically stagnant state. Furthermore, important social and economic challenges remain unaddressed. This thesis will explore the works of Slavoj Žižek and the works of the numerous contributors to the democratic ideal including Aristotle, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Hannah Arendt, in order to establish the link between ideology and low intensity democracy.

Chapter one will explore Žižek's work and its pertinence to the task at hand. Žižek's focus on an individual's relationship to ideology will prove invaluable in exploring the many nuances of ideological relationships. Chapter two will contrast the democratic idea, the collective activities and goals of democracy, with low intensity democracy. The final chapter will use the tools that have been laid out in the previous chapters to establish the precise link between ideology and low intensity democracy. It will be argued that the western experience of contemporary democracy produces the conditions that give rise to an ideological relationship with democracy that allows and encourages low intensity democracy.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to recognise the financial support from the philosophy department of Memorial University of Newfoundland. Special thanks are extended to the thesis supervisor Dr. Natalie Oman. The author would also like to recognise Dr. Suma Rajiva, Irene Brown and Fergus O'Byrne for advice and support throughout the course of the project and prior years spent studying philosophy.

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INTRODUCTION

The ideal of democracy offers a great deal to humanity. It outlines numerous opportunities for building and engaging in collaborative decision making that can be adopted across a number of cultures and contexts thereby providing a constructive method of non-violent conflict resolution for the human race. This feature of democracy, as well as others that will be explored in this thesis, largely accounts for why democracy is frequently described as the best political system currently available. Unfortunately, great harm is often done under the banner of the noblest ideals. In this thesis I will argue that our ideological relationship with the democratic ideal is a primary contributor to the conception of and proliferation of "low intensity democracy."[1]

Low intensity democracy is considerably different from the democratic ideal, the robust vision of democracy that inspires most thriving democracies. It is the unfortunate result of establishing the basic elements of western democratic government infrastructure in states without the necessary foundations to support and build upon these structures. The establishment of this minimal democratic structure is typically pursued in countries with turbulent political conditions as a means of restoring political and eventually economic stability. While major political upheaval is often delayed or prevented, low intensity democracy does not typically result in the eventual establishment of robust democratic institutions and practices that one would expect to find in a democratic state.[2]

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[1] "Our" and "we" primarily refer to the western liberal democratic world within the context of this thesis.

[2] Barry Gills & Joel Rocamora, "Low Intensity Democracy," *Third World Quarterly*, no.3 (1992): 502.

Furthermore, the accompanying economic reforms intended to help these states often create short term challenges that undermine efforts to create stability. Some of these challenges include cuts to public programs, such as education and health care, or the foreign privatisation of key utilities including water and energy distribution.[3]

Despite the aforementioned shortcomings of streamlining the democracy promotion process, this approach to democracy promotion has not yet been abandoned. It continues to be the model employed by The United States Of America, the major proponent of democracy promotion for the past half century.[4] The purpose of this thesis is to argue that an ideological relationship with democracy sustains this flawed approach to democracy promotion that results in low intensity democracy. While the individuals living in most western democracies enjoy and appreciate the many benefits a democratic society can provide, proper appreciation and recognition of the time, work and sacrifice that make up the foundation of these democracies is not given comparable attention. The failure to remain cognisant of the challenges that must be overcome to achieve and maintain democracy will be shown to come about as a result of the particular ideological relationship we have with democracy and from the structural limitations of symbolic communication. Low intensity democracy is a consequence of this failure.

The second goal of this thesis is to articulate the need to abandon instead of simply to fix the current approach to democracy promotion. The establishment of democratic governments within states by exterior sources of power and influence is not a

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[3] *Ibid.*, 509.

[4] Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 805.

process that simply needs to be improved upon. It will be argued that this model of instituting democracy is fundamentally flawed and should be abandoned. This recommendation is an echo of Marx's comments on addressing the issue of improving the life of the working class from within certain conceptual frameworks, a topic that will be explored later in this thesis. If we are attempting to address issues pertaining to democracy within a frame of reference that does not acknowledge or address these issues, little to no progress can occur.

To explore this complex issue most effectively its components must be given individual and detailed attention. Therefore this task will be divided into three parts. The first chapter will be dedicated to exploring ideology. While most theories of ideology are concerned with the ideological relationship that society as a whole becomes involved in, Slavoj Žižek's work on ideology gives considerable attention to the importance of the individual and his or her beliefs as they pertain to ideology. By using concrete examples of ideology at work in the lives of individuals we can expand on our cognitive understanding of ideology thereby adding a more visceral or empathetic appreciation of it. We are presented with the need to appreciate the necessity of ideology, given that human communication uses the symbolic medium of language, while simultaneously respecting the limits of our symbols so we remain conscious of the dangers or limitations of ideological relationships.

The second task will be to contrast the principles of the democratic ideal with low intensity democracy while more thoroughly defining both concepts. The democratic ideal is not a single theory offered by one individual. Key contributors include Aristotle, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant and Hannah Arendt. Despite numerous differences

between these authors' works, which are to be expected given the different cultures, societies and periods in history in which they lived, there are a number of common theoretical threads exploring the ability of human beings to manage their own destiny through their capacity for reason and communication that join together to form a cohesive ideal. The democratic ideal encourages public participation in crafting public policy along with developing the institutions that facilitate this process.[5] Furthermore, this kind of activity builds on itself. Democracy will be shown to be a matter of degree and not a static concept. Insofar as more people are empowered to engage in these activities, the activities become more potent. In contrast, low intensity democracy is largely incapable of being self sustaining. Public empowerment is not achieved insofar as foreign powers must continually involve themselves to sustain political and economic stability. This fact, coupled with the need for considerable power to remain in the hands of a central authority within the state, such as the government or military, further constrains the opportunities for public empowerment.

With the appropriate groundwork in place, the precise connection between ideology, democracy and low intensity democracy will be explored in detail in the final chapter. It will become apparent that our ideological relationship with democracy allows the policies and practices that contribute to low intensity democracy to persist. While western democracies practice most key principles of the democratic ideal, the ideological limits of our ability, and desire, to continually engage with the entirety of what democracy entails leads to the acceptance of a flawed approach to democracy promotion

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[5] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings,* ed. Donald A. Cress (Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1987), 174.

that is more concerned with shaping the political topography of a region then public empowerment.

It will be beneficial to situate this project within the context of contemporary work being done on this issue so that we can remain aware of the problems that arise from the flawed approach to democracy promotion that has been discussed. Democracy promotion is not simply a philosophical or political concern, but also a legal, humanitarian and economic one. The works of two different authors addressing very different aspects of democracy promotion and democracy proliferation largely inspired the goals of this thesis. Having observed that numerous disciplines were facing concerns about the status of and our relationship with democracy, an exploration of that particular issue seemed to be both valuable and necessary. While other positions will also be discussed in this thesis, the two authors that provided the initial inspiration for this project will be briefly introduced to further describe the direction this thesis will take.

The first is Susan Marks. Her project entails an ideological critique of the democratic norm that is emerging in international law. The second is James Bohman. He offers a comprehensive argument against traditional state centric notions of democracy promotion arguing that something far less conventional is required in order for democracy to expand and thrive.

While the following chapters will explore the relationship between ideology and low intensity democracy directly, Marks addresses the issue as it pertains to global visions of democracy. Using the rhetoric of the democratic peace thesis first put forward by Kant and later taken up by other initiatives, democracy promotion is being justified as the best strategy for international development. Research has shown a correlation between

democratic states and peace. Specifically, democracies do not go to war with other democracies.[6] Taken to its logical conclusions, the universal adoption of democracy would presumably eliminate the likelihood of future wars. The findings of these studies have influenced practices in international law. Insofar as democracy appears to be the best form of state government, policies in international law such as the inclusion of democratic nations into international organisations and withholding aid funding from non-democracies, seek to encourage states to become democratic. Mark's project in her book *The Riddle of all Constitutions* is to critically examine this practice.

Marks' critique is targeted directly at the pan-national democratic approach being advocated to support the principle of the democratic norm. Pan-national democracy refers to the universal state adoption of democratic government. She argues that the "spirit of democracy", the goals of the democratic ideal, are not being fulfilled in many cases and low intensity democracy is tolerated in an attempt to satisfy the democratic norm international law is attempting to establish.[7] Marks is concerned that there is too much emphasis on whether democracy is in place. She argues that the quality of democracy is a more important concern than simply its presence. Marks also explores other issues associated with this problem. While giving democratic states greater privileges and recognition in the context of international law appears to be a reasonable proposition in principle, it is difficult to justify in practice. China, the country with the largest population on the planet and a nation possessing a UN Security Council veto, is not a democracy. Restrictions placed upon small totalitarian regimes are only effective insofar

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[6] Susan Marks, *The Riddle of All Constitutions* (New York: Oxford University press, 2000), 43.
[7] *Ibid.*, 60.

as the democratic world has considerable leverage over these smaller states. It is far more difficult to punish a powerful nation like China for undemocratic practices.

The concerns raised by Marks show evidence of a division of democracy as a form of government from the core values of the democratic ideal. Using the basic democratic government structure as a tool for achieving other goals is a flawed practice. The institutions that belong to a democratic government structure only have significance and meaning within the context of a society and culture that has adopted, or is open to exploring democratic principles. Marks' recognition of this division prompts us to explore the origin or cause of this division. It will be argued that the cause is our ideological relationship with democracy.

Globalisation is another concern for Marks. While some argue that it does not significantly reduce the sovereign power of states, there is considerable evidence to support the claim that it does.[8] This further weakens the potency of a pan-national democratic world structure. Insofar as global concerns such as climate change and international economic markets affect and are affected by the actions of multiple states, mechanisms beyond state governments must be put in place in order to address these issues adequately. Independent state policy is insufficient to address these issues.

Doubts concerning the ability of a state centric system to address global political issues link up with the thought provoking, yet controversial claims, put forward by James Bohman in his book D*emocracy Beyond Borders*. Bohman's work aims to describe an alternative vision of global democracy that is built on the principle of non-domination.

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[8] *Ibid.*, 80.

Non-domination dictates that the actions of one group of people cannot impede the ability of other groups to be self defining with respect to their political future. For Bohman, democracy would largely be contingent on this principle.[9] For example, The United States of America is a well established democracy however, at no point during debates over planned invasions in the past decade were the Afghan or Iraqi people consulted on that issue that continues to affect them in the most fundamental of ways. While Marks believes that pan-national democracy is somewhat ineffectual given the impact of global issues, Bohman's theory of non-domination suggests that pan-national democracy is largely inadequate. Local sovereign bodies separated by arbitrary territorial barriers can do little to prevent instances of domination. He argues that initiatives like the European Union are good attempts to create transnational democracy.[10] Transnational democracy consists of a hierarchy of interrelated democratic structures that give individual citizens a greater ability to be involved in policy making that directly affects them.[11] Bohman envisions a human political community where there are no restrictions on access to engage with any issues that are pertinent to anyone involved.

While Bohman's vision for world democracy is certainly ambitious, and not without its flaws, it challenges us to expand our understanding of what democracy can and should entail. Although the establishment of an organised network of publics that

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[9] James Bohman, *Democracy Across Borders: From Dêmos to Dêmoi* (Cambridge: MIT press, 2007), 53.

[10] Bohman, *Democracy Across Borders,* 135.

[11] Transnational democracy refers to democratic structures that exist across national borders. This concept will be explored in chapter two in greater detail.

transcend current state borders is unlikely to occur, we have already begun to witness considerable cross-border political involvement. People from all over the world used the internet to mobilise and show their support for Barack Obama in the last American presidential election. It is also possible to contribute to humanitarian aid, such as donating money to aid the relief effort in Japan, by sending a text message and having the donation charged to your phone bill. Both of these kinds of activities are certainly forms of democratic action but are not easily accounted for from the perspective of state contained democratic governments. It is for that reason that exploring the principles of the democratic ideal is particularly important. Given democracy's propensity to evolve, understanding its core principles is required in order to understand this process.

The project at hand has now been laid out in detail. Concerns raised in numerous fields of study on the status of democracy and the means by which it is promoted make it clear that we must not only try to better understand what key principles make up the democratic ideal but what our relationship with this ideal is. If the pursuit of this ideal can generate a harmful condition such as low intensity democracy, we must take what we learn from this investigation and critically examine the accepted practices of democracy promotion. Through the lens of ideology we are able to examine not only these concepts but our relationship to them.

Chapter 1: Ideology

In order to build a house, a carpenter must possess the necessary tools for the job and be sufficiently familiar with their use. Given that ideology is the conceptual tool that will be used in this thesis for examining democracy and low intensity democracy, developing a thorough account of what ideology entails is a logical starting point for the task at hand. Most people have some familiarity with the popular concept of ideology; however, there are also a number of academic accounts of ideology. These accounts are more refined theories than popular conceptions of ideology insofar as they are often specifically focused on a particular issue or context. For example, Marx was particularly concerned with the historical relations of human beings to labour.

Given the specificity of some theories of ideology, choosing the most appropriate tool for the task at hand is of the utmost importance. The key factor influencing the choice of theory in this case is the important role of individuals in democratic processes. Action, a concept that will be explored further in the second chapter, undertaken by individuals is the spark of democratic evolution and development. Therefore, Slavoj Žižek's work on ideology is appropriate for this project given that his work explores the important relationships and interrelatedness of individuals, their feelings and beliefs, and the ideological symbols with which they interact. Influenced by Lacan, Žižek focuses less on overarching frameworks, often considered the totality of what ideology implies, and concentrates on the multitude of ideological relationships that belong to a social ideological relationship such as society's relationship to labour or in this case, western society's relationship with democracy. The purpose of focusing on the multitude of relations serves as a warning against the assumption that one can easily step out of the

ideological realm to the so called truth of empirical experience as popular conceptions of ideology tend to suggest.

Popular conceptions of ideology typically categorise some things as being clearly ideological and other things as distinctly "real", "true" or "obvious". Žižek's proposes that the division between what is a matter of fact and what is ideological is subtle if it exists at all. However, this should not be mistaken as a move toward relativism. Žižek makes it very clear that our ideological commitments can be a source of considerable insight about the world, our relation to it and ourselves.[1] For example, Žižek addresses a commonly cited anthropological study of one of the Great Lakes tribes. When asked to draw the spatial arrangement of the buildings in the village, two distinct social groups produced completely different sketches of the village. One group is said to have drawn a ring of buildings evenly spaced around the village temple. However, the drawing of the second group indicated a significant gap between two distinct groups of houses. Žižek states that we cannot simply take an overhead picture to discover the "true" arrangement of the building. The conflicting accounts are not the product of human error or a lack of technological aptitude by the tribe to construct an accurate model. The two positions are symptomatic of some form of social cleavage or antagonism within the village regarding the social hierarchy in the village.[2] In this case, the arrangement of the village is symbolic. It is comparable to differentiating half full and half empty when discussing the

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[1] Robert Pfaller. "Where is Your Hamster? The Concept of Ideology in Žižek's Cultural Theory." in *Traversing the Fantasy,* ed. Geoff Boucher, Jason Glynos and Matthew Sharpe (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005), 121.

[2] Slavoj Žižek. *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 25-26.

volume of liquid in a cup. The relative position of the individual to the situation or circumstance will affect the way the event or situation exists within reality for him or her. At this point in our investigation, what we must take from this example is that ideology involves not only the beliefs themselves, but also the people who maintain these beliefs. The two elements are co-dependent. As we are about to see, the popular conception of ideology gives little attention to the role of the individual subject.

Exploring some popular conceptions of ideology will help to better introduce ideology through some easily accessible examples. Having the popular account as a base for comparison will help to better articulate the nuances of Žižek's insights. Most popular usage of the term ideology describes it as a concrete structure. An ideology implies a belief or set of beliefs that are structurally founded on a particular way of interpreting a situation, state of affairs, life, or existence in general.[3] There are typically one or several dogmatic assumptions that underline any ideology. Ideologies, in this case, are things like boxes on a shelf that can be pointed to. Religions serve as some of the best examples of this kind of ideological structure. If basic assumptions of the Christian faith including the existence of a loving God, and an afterlife spent in either Heaven or Hell are accepted, one's approach to life and its challenges will be fundamentally shaped by these assumptions. This set of beliefs offers a single context or frame of reference from which one can engage with the world.[4] This kind of structure is a double-edged sword. On the

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[3] Terry Eagleton. *Ideology: an Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), 1.

[4] This is simply a feature of the popular conception of ideology. Practically speaking individuals are almost always influenced by numerous ideological contexts.

one hand, it can be empowering. An individual who stated with conviction that he was very happy with his life will provide a good example of this phenomenon. While in conversation with him regarding his faith and what holding a belief in God gave him, he made it very clear that it enriched his life. He stated that the knowledge that someone or something always had love and support for him gave him the courage to live life to the fullest. If he should fail or make an error, God would not judge him harshly. God would always be supportive and willing to offer strength and forgiveness. Through a belief in God, this individual is able to set aside most feelings of fear and negative self doubt allowing him to live a courageous and enthusiastic life.

There is a darker side to this same belief structure. While simplifying life down to a particular truth allows one to boldly follow one's convictions, it also reduces the scope of contemplation and reflection given the inherent conceptual boundaries of a fixed ideological context. If an ideology is taken not as a perspective but as fact, it limits the range of possible interpretations for an event.[5] Taking an extreme case for example, if certain accounts of the creation story are accepted as historical fact one must arrive at the "logical" conclusion that geological evidence and dinosaur fossils are either a deception by the devil or a test of faith set up by God.[6] There are countless other historical examples of scientific hypotheses being dismissed on the grounds that they were incompatible with the accepted religious beliefs of that period in history. Theories such as the earth not

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[5] This is not to say that perspectives cannot be held with great conviction. We must simply be prepared for the possibility of alternative theories (not necessarily correct ones).

[6] The purpose of this example is not to critique any particular religious belief. The intention is to highlight the human capacity for creating our own reality.

being the center of the universe, or that the earth was round faced considerable opposition before being accepted as scientific fact.[7] The need for certainty surpassed the desire for scientific exploration. As we will see in the following chapters, a similar relationship with particular accounts of democracy can be equally problematic.

Having briefly examined how ideology is commonly understood, some attention to the role of the individual in popular conceptions of ideology must be considered. The individual, or "idealist" as he or she is frequently described, is something of an afterthought for popular conceptions of ideology. In the example of the individual that has just been offered, insofar as he believes in the ideology of Christianity he is a Christian. The same would be true of a liberal believing in liberalism and a Muslim believing in Islam. These individuals can openly point to the ideology they accept and explain with relative clarity what aspects of their life it affects and in what way. In other words, according to popular understandings of ideology, we can articulate the particular aspects of our lives that are ideological, and those that are not. We appear to be shaped by the ideologies we ascribe to.

We can already observe a significant difference between the popular conceptions of ideology and the perspective Žižek offers. As we observed in the divided village example, the ideological commitment was not restricted to something as explicitly significant as a religious belief: it was concerning the arrangement of houses in the village. More importantly, the villagers were not directly aware of their ideological commitments nor were they aware of what they entailed. The ideological relationship did

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[7] Many groups are still adamant the earth is flat and that the universe is roughly six thousand years old.

not come about as a matter of conscious choice. Instead of being a list of beliefs or assumptions that could be directly named and whose effects in the world could be described, the differing views of the arrangement of the village were symptomatic of an underling social hierarchy that was only being recognised abstractly even thought it fundamentally shaped life in the village. The kind of secondary information regarding the social conditions within the village that hides under the surface of consciousness is, for Žižek, a fundamental attribute of ideology.

Ideology can pertain to things as overarching as religious beliefs and political doctrine, but also to something as apparently simple as the architecture of our toilets.[8] Žižek muses that when we think we are free of ideology we must simply consider something as seemingly mundane as toilet architecture to realise we are in the grip of ideology insofar as the way a culture relates to its excrement reflects the beliefs and values of that culture. Our ideological commitments are such an integral part of our being it is difficult if not impossible to articulate what is clearly ideological and what is not.[9]

Žižek offers an effective yet tragic example to show the force and importance of ideology in our lives. In this particular example, the symbolic entity of the ideological relation is a tangible thing. Žižek describes the misfortune of a friend. His friend's wife died of breast cancer. Emotionally and psychologically, his friend appeared to be coping with the tragedy remarkably well. He was able to function in a seemingly normal capacity

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[8] Astra Taylor . *Žižek!* DVD. Directed by Astra Taylor. Hidden Driver Productions, 2007.

[9] Slavoj Žižek. *The Parallax View,* 311.

and discuss the issue of his wife's death. However, he could only do so in the presence of his wife's pet hamster. Immediately following the death of the hamster, the man became inconsolable to the point where he had to be hospitalised.[10]

This example presents two key characteristics of ideology. The first is its profound effect on us. The man's intense need to resist accepting the death of his wife permitted him to transpose his attachment to his wife onto the hamster. This transfer of his intense feelings was strong enough to sustain the man in the wake of a great tragedy. However, when the hamster died, the man was forced to confront the intolerable situation. Because the hamster had become symbolic of his wife, and the associated emotional relationship, its death was as painful and significant as the death of his actual wife would have been had this symbolic transfer not occurred.

The second characteristic of ideology this example provides is the nature of the symbolic relation. In this example, the symbol was tangible. It was a physical entity, in this case a hamster. For Žižek, ideology indicates a symbolic relationship. For example, in the painting "Lenin in Warsaw" Lenin is nowhere to be seen in the image. His absence is symbolised by his wife being in bed with another man. [11] If her husband were home, the affair depicted in the painting would, of course, be impossible. In keeping with the psychoanalytic tradition from which Žižek takes considerable inspiration, he argues that human beings do not engage with their world at the level of the "Real." The "Real" must

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[10] Pfaller, Hamster, 117.

[11] Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Subject of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 178.

be distinguished from "Reality" as both have unique technical meanings in the context of psychoanalysis and Žižek's work.

Reality describes the totality of intelligible experience that surrounds us. The popular usage of the term "real object" concerning a table, for example, implies that there is a physical thing called a table that one is experiencing or interacting with. Within the context of reality, as it is being defined, the object in question shares its functionality with the popular conception of it. However, we must also recognise a symbolic dynamic of the table. The table has meaning for us by virtue of the roll it fulfils within the symbolic order of reality. Žižek state that "reality, as we have just seen, serves as the external boundary which enables us to totalize language." [12] Reality describes the limit of symbolic meaning and intelligibility. Symbols have meaning within the closed symbolic network of reality. In other words, the table's identity is partially contingent on the food we eat on it and the conversation that occurs while we eat our meal. Similarly, the table gives comparable meaning to the things from which it takes it gains its meaning. Therefore, meaning is a self contained interrelated network of symbolic relations.

A thorough discussion of what the "real" entails would serve as a distraction from the project at hand given that it is the symbolic relations occurring in reality that will provide insight into our relationship with democracy. However, a brief attempt will be made to situate this concept within the context of the theory of ideology with which we are working. The "Real" serve as the boundary for reality. It represents the limit of our

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[12] Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 1991), 112.

symbolic sphere of consciousness.[13] While Žižek engages with numerous descriptions of the real, the common theme among them is inaccessibility. It effectively describes that which exists before it has been symbolised. In other words, the real contains the "undifferentiated thing in itself" or that which has not been symbolised. Given that we operate on the level of reality and symbolic difference however, we have no access to this realm of the real.

One must be more specific in order to properly grasp the full dynamics of Žižek's position. Ideology always involves multiple elements to be present. First, there must be a subject. Next, there must be an "other" that recognises that subject as a subject. This, however, does not require that there is a second individual present. If we see a poster for a horror movie offering the promise of frightening us, we are being addressed and are therefore a subject. While it is not person to person, we become aware that we are being recognised or hailed as symbolically communicative beings.[14] This does not mean that we will all be enticed by the advertisement. If the person who sees the poster is very timid, for example, the thought of being frightened will likely be off-putting and thus produce aversion in the individual towards the film. On the other hand, if the person who sees the poster enjoys the adrenaline rush of being frightened, seeing the poster might excite him or her, or even trigger those frightening but exciting and therefore pleasing sensations.

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[13] *Ibid.*, 112.

[14] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological state apparatus," *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Monthly Review Press, (1971), 20.

The third and final part of the ideological relation is the ideas themselves. Continuing with this example, the mention of a horror movie will inspire similar yet different symbols. The timid person might imagine the shark from *Jaws* bearing down on him and devouring him as he flails helplessly in the water. On the other hand, the thrill seeker might imagine the climax of the film, taking the role of the protagonist who is engaging in a battle to the death with the fearsome beast. The content of the poster has an effect on the subject by inspiring excitement or terror. The subject's reaction and subsequent feelings have a transformative quality regarding the poster. It is transformed from a marketing device into an exciting or frightening image. The reaction of the subject gives additional meaning to the symbol based on the reaction the symbol evokes. While this example made use of a fictional creature from a horror film, the same framework can be applied to notions such as justice, religion and of course, democracy.

Žižek's work provides an analogous example. A group of anthropologists were seeking out a tribe in the New Zealand jungle for the purpose of documenting an apparently frightening war dance that involved "grotesque masks". When prompted, the aborigines performed such a dance. Ironically, the aborigines improvised the dance to please the visitors who had sought them out.[15] The tribe had no such dance that they would regularly perform. The dance that was generated was not a true war dance. It represented both the agenda of the anthropologists and the desire of the tribe to please their guests. As we can see from both examples, it does not matter if the "other" is a present individual or a somewhat static medium. The beliefs of the subject are of such

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[15] Žižek, *They Know Not What They Do,* 108.

importance that they possess a transformative quality that must be accounted for when dealing with ideology.

It is becoming clear that Žižek's occupation with ideology is not purely descriptive but also informative. This should not come as a great surprise given that Žižek's work is continually engaged with Lacanian themes. While exploring ideology he includes numerous examples describing not only the theoretical but the practical consequences of it. For Žižek, explaining the scope of ideology's influence is as important as describing ideology itself. Therefore, to fully understand what ideology encompasses for Žižek, we must explore his three modes or general forms of ideology. They further clarify the many ways ideology affects our lives.

Žižek offers three general states or forms ideology can take. The first form of ideology is reminiscent of the popular usage of the term and of a number of the definitions offered by Terry Eagleton in the introduction of his work.[16] Simply put, ideology involves presenting or describing a situation from such a limited perspective that decisions concerning, thoughts about, and reactions to the situation become automatic and unreflective. There are many familiar examples of this form of ideology. A term employed by the government of the United States of America in 2002, "the axis of evil", is such an example.[17] This title immediately accuses the countries in question, Iraq, Iran and North Korea as being a homogenous entity: an agent of evil. Instead of recognizing three distinct countries that have distinct perspectives, cultures, agendas and sets of

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[16] Eagleton, *Ideology: an Introduction,* 1-2.

[17] State of the Union Address on January 29, 2002.

interests, they are all reduced to proliferators of evil. Because the promotion of evil is something that is undesirable, a generally uncontroversial claim, the only reasonable position to hold, given this context, is to stand in opposition to these countries and furthermore support the United States of America in its initiatives. The first form of ideology is easily identifiable because it is the most common and the least subtle.

Marx's earlier work is likely the academic inspiration for this first form. In his early writings, ideology can be described as the subjugation of individuals to the objects of their thoughts.[18] Marx critiques the Young Hegelians' defence of the primacy of consciousness by arguing that human beings and human activity are not determined by, but determine consciousness. Human life and the activities we must engage in to survive are the determining factors in understanding social relations. These activities are natural to us. If a man is hunting, fishing or cooking he is a man engaged with this activity. He knows he is a man surviving. However, if the man is defined as being a hunter, fisher or cook he is no longer a man surviving. A metaphysical claim about the man is being made in the second instance. He is no longer fundamentally described as a man but as a particular kind of worker.[19] This fundamental shift from man to labourer is an example of the kind of larger ideological transformations described by Marx in his later work. The large transformation itself will be explored in conjunction with the third form of ideology Žižek offers given that there are a number of shared features between the two accounts.

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[18] Karl Marx, *Selected Writings*, ed, David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1977), 159.

[19] *Ibid.*, 169. "Man" is interchangeable with woman in this example. Using a single pronoun both simplifies the grammar greatly improving the comprehensibility of this example and is in keeping with Marx's use of "Man" as it refers to the gender non specific human being.

To free us from the popular conception of ideology, the conception that makes ideology synonymous with the simplification or biased clarification of an issue, Žižek argues that the opposite is equally ideological.[20] The second form of ideology is a reversal of the first. Under this form, the issue or situation is presented in such a way that it is complicated to the point of obscurity. If a situation appears to be sufficiently complex, engaging with it in a productive way becomes all but impossible. For example, consider the conflicts between Israel and Palestine for control over the region known as the West Bank. Under the first form of ideology, Israel might be the perceived victim of Palestinian terrorism. If this contextual characterisation of this issue is accepted, the military activities of Israel such as the separation fence become at worst defensible. Insofar as these measures are anti-terrorism initiatives, opposing them is to tacitly support terrorist initiatives. In contrast, the second ideological form of this issue is a drastic transformation of the first. Using this second form of ideology, the conflict between these two states is described as the product of a highly complex history between the two states. The so-called "true" or "unbiased" interpretation of the conflict can only be grasped if an individual fully comprehends the historical, geopolitical, cultural and religious dynamics that are contributing factors in this conflict. Such an understanding is more or less impossible for anyone other than an expert devoted to studying nothing but this issue.

This particular form of ideology can be particularly problematic when urgency is a factor in addressing a problem. Without the required expertise, any reaction to, or opinion about the conflict is accused of being biased and poorly informed. While it is true that a

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[20] Slavoj Žižek, *Mapping Ideology* (London: Verso, 1994), 5.

reflexive reaction lacking any study or reflection to a particular event would be unproductive, if not harmful, this fact should not require that an individual has to devote his or her life to a particular problem before it is permissible for him or her to weigh in on an issue. While it is important to encourage informed opinions on issues, an overly strict adherence to this policy will not only exclude valid perspectives but dissuade non experts from involving themselves. The need to investigate a challenging issue is intended to promote a higher calibre of opinion and not the paralysis of opinion that this form of ideology generates.[21] The logic of these claims stems from the third form of ideology that is about to be discussed. As we shall soon see, both Marx and Žižek are concerned with any approach that privileges a particular frame of reference given the challenges such a situation can generate.

While this second conception is a reversal of the first, they both produce a similar result. In both cases, a situation has been described using symbolic language to invoke a particular set of beliefs in the subject. The first form inspires confidence in one's assessment of the situation thus encouraging action. The second inspires doubt leading to hesitation on the part of the subject. It is important to recognise that in both cases, while different, describe very effective means of controlling the behaviour of individuals. Although the focus of this chapter is to present ideology as an integral part of our lives as Žižek suggests, we must also recognise it as having the potential to leave us trapped in an

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[21] Pfaller, Hamster, 121.

ideological reality that is not well suited to address problematic situations like the one Marx describes relating to the status of labour.

The third form of ideology is much more elusive than the first two. The reason for this is that once it is recognised as ideology it often falls under the first or second category. The third form of Ideology is, as Žižek describes it, the condition of ideology par excellence. Žižek states this is the most potent form.[22] Where the second form was a kind of reversal of the first, the third represents a different kind of shift. The condition of ideology par excellence has been arrived at when we believe to have escaped the domain of the ideological or context specific perspectives and arrived at the objective truth of a situation. A brief look at literature from the philosophy of science helps to clarify why Žižek and others are resistant to such sweeping ideological "non-ideological" claims such as "the end of ideology" and "the end of history".

Take for example the problem of underdetermination.[23] It states that any theory offered to explain a set of facts or data is always underdetermined by the data points available. If a researcher attempts to graph data points for example, any number of lines might be able to cover all of the points. If an additional point is added, the number of lines that fit the data is still arbitrarily large. For example, if an office worker leaves his desk on a coffee break and upon his return his pen is gone, the possible, albeit not necessarily probable, explanations are numerous. The likely explanation is that a co-

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[22] Žižek, *Mapping Ideology*, 11.

[23] Paul Feyerabend, "Explanation, Reduction, and Empiricism," *Minnesota studies in the philosophy of science: Scientification explanation, space and time* Vol. 3 (1982).

worker borrowed it. Possible explanations might range from it rolling off the desk, to a bird flying in the window and stealing it.

Suppose the missing pen rolled off the desk, however, the man assumes that he placed it in such a way that would make that impossible. Assuming all the windows it the office were closed, the only logical possibility is that someone took the pen. He proceeds to go around the office asking who took the pen while becoming increasingly frustrated as each person denies having taken it. Instead of taking a second look around his desk, he continues to interrogate his fellow employees thus annoying them and hurting productivity for the day. The purpose of this example is not to describe the specifics of the scenario itself but the feelings and beliefs of the individual at the center of it. A simple situation of this sort has happened to most people at one point or another in their lifetime. The emphasis is that from one's own perspective, a certain assumption can appear undoubtedly true. This is to differentiate it from the first and second forms of ideology. When pointing at examples of those forms, they are declared to be instances of ideology. In the third form, a situation we might consider as free from ideology is in fact deeply ideological.

While the previous example was largely benign, if one substitutes the belief that "the pen could only have been taken by the co-worker" with, "the only logical consequence of the fall of the Soviet Union is the universal validity of capitalist liberal democracy," it is clear how this phenomenon has serious consequences. The generation of this form of ideology is perhaps best described as a blurring of truth and validity. The key difference between the two terms in this context is that validity is an assailable proposition while truth is not. Truth typically refers to a binary condition of true or false.

Validity, in its colloquial context, is a thing of degrees. A valid claim can always be challenged as new factors or premises become apparent. The truth, insofar as it is assumed to be objective and complete, cannot be questioned or expanded upon. Take for example the proclaimed dominance of liberal democratic capitalist society, the so called "end of history." Considering this claim in the current economic climate, it is easily classified as an example of the first form of ideology. However, it must be recognised that when it was first put forward, the historical evidence for the claim was substantial and had a high degree of validity. Capitalist liberal democratic states and the prosperity they were enjoying combined with the lack of a significant American rival produced a very convincing narrative to support the validity of the end of history hypothesis. However, over time challenges to this historical narrative began to emerge. Between an increase in international terrorism, defiant totalitarian states, American economic troubles and China's increasing international presence, the validity of the end of history hypothesis is called into question.

According to John Mepham, this concept of ideology that is not recognised as ideological is also a prominent feature of Marx's later works. In an article titled "Theory of Ideology in Capital" Mepham argues that while ideological conditions can be used to deceive and manipulate people, ideology is a more complex phenomenon.[24] It is not the result of simple ignorance, deception or self delusion. Mepham claims that ideology in Marx's Capital entails the kind of qualities that were attributed to it in the discussion of the arrangement of houses in the village. In that example, the villagers did not have a

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24 John Mepham. "The theory of Ideology in Capital" in *Issues in Marxist Philosophy Volume 3: Epistemology, Science, Ideology,* ed. J Mepham and DH Ruben, (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1979) 167.

direct was of relating to the social tension that was present. It was a phenomenon that was present and having a profound effect on the village, but was no easily expressed in the regular activity of the village. Being presented with the exercise of drawing a map of the village however, the ability to subtly express this social division was made possible.

Ideology, in Marx's later work, implies a kind of social naturalisation of a prevailing frame of reference.[25] With regard to economic relations for example, the transformation of labour into a function of wages ultimately changed the terms of debate possible for engaging with this particular issue. When one would seek to improve the life of the working class, the conversation would take place within the linguistic framework that took the relationship of wage labourer as given. While improvements could be made within this framework, the fundamental problem, the framework itself, cannot be addressed. It was clear for Marx that "fair wages" was an impossible proposition because the exchange of labour for a wage is necessarily a kind of slavery. The labourer is always being paid only with a portion of the value his labour generated.

Going back to the language of reality, the third form of ideology represents the emergence of a secondary social reality within reality. Through the emergence over time of a particular symbolic order we find ourselves within a linguistic framework that supports the prevailing conditions even if they happen to be problematic. The language of the framework that emerges does not contain the tools to escape that framework. Using the language of capitalism to escape capitalism is about as effective as using mathematical formulae to describe love, or attempting to describe colors to someone who is blind from birth. The tools needed to accomplish that task are simply not in place.

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25 Mepham, "Theory of Ideology in Capital", 146-148.

While considerable terrain has been covered while exploring Žižek's work on ideology, we are now able to succinctly lay out the central features of ideology. Ideology implies a symbolic relation that involves a number of key elements. First of all, ideological relations exist within reality. Insofar as reality has been defined as the totality of our symbolic communication, a subject who is being addressed as a subject must be present. The subject is presented with or encounters a symbol that invokes certain feelings and beliefs based on the pre-established context within which the symbol is present. However, the intended or common feelings and beliefs that are associated with a particular symbol are not static. The individual subject can shape the importance and the consequences of the symbol. Žižek's example of the hamster was the perfect example of this point. The death of one's spouse would be the symbolic event that one would expect to produce feelings of extreme pain and sadness. However, the subject of this example did not react in the expected way. While the subject is shaped by the symbol, the symbol is also shaped by the subject. In the aforementioned case, the individual symbolically replaced his wife with her pet hamster in order to deny the pain her death would cause him.

While this thesis will focus on the socio-economic consequences of low intensity democracy, the tangential issue of its effect on democracy as a symbol is worth noting. While the power of our symbolic relationship with democracy is sufficient to sustain the activities and policies that produce low intensity democracy, the propagation of low intensity democracy carries the significant risk of negatively transforming democracy symbolically. With a concise description of ideology available to us, this chapter will conclude with a pair of brief examples highlighting all of these features. Their purpose is

also to show that all the events that occur as part of the ideological operation occur simultaneously in one fluid motion.

The first example pertains to a common occurrence. Giving one's romantic partner a rose is a simple gesture from a descriptive standpoint. Within the context of a relationship however, the rose is a symbol for affection, love, caring and thoughtfulness. The act of giving her the rose is not to provide someone a flower. It is to convey all of these feelings at once in a single cohesive gesture. Proclaiming these things verbally does not have the same impact as being able to conjure them all at once in a single moment.

The second example is taken from an interview with Žižek promoting a new book. This example highlights the potentially manipulative quality of ideology. Žižek contrasts how different generations speak with their children. In this case, how a parent tells his child to visit his grandmother. Žižek states that an old style totalitarian father would tell his child "It does not matter how you feel. You must go visit your grandmother and behave appropriately".[26] This direct command is easily understood by the child insofar as it is a clear example of parental authority. While visiting relatives is not always fun for a child, spending time with loving grandparents is clearly important. While obedience is desired by the parent, it is this important interaction between grandparent and grandchild that is what the parent wants the most. Žižek then contrasts this with what he calls the tolerant post modernist father's statement: "You know how much your grandmother loves you, but you should only go and visit her if you really want to." In this second statement the order to the child is no less clear. Žižek states that children possess the intelligence to understand the nuances of such an ideological order. Once again the child is being told to

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26 Taylor, *Žižek!*

visit his grandmother. Žižek claims that this command, while appearing less direct, is in fact a stronger order. This second statement is ordering the child to go visit his grandmother and that he has to like it. The purpose of the order is no longer to create a situation that is beneficial to both grandparent and grandchild. It uses the symbol of the grandmother and the associated feelings in the child, the subject, to evoke feelings of guilt in the child if he or she attempts to be disobedient. In this case the goal is the successful exertion of the parent's authority which in this case is the obedience of the child.

The example that has just been offered will serve as a useful model for examining the use of democracy as a symbol in the development of low intensity democracy. Much like the notion of loving grandmothers, the ideal of democracy inspires a number of thoughts, beliefs and feelings which will be explored in detail in the following chapter. Insofar as democracy symbolically inspires these powerful thoughts, beliefs and feelings in people, its misuse can be particularly problematic. For example, if we become significantly focused on the efficient propagation of democracy, we might ignore a number of important factors that pertain to the quality of democracy being pursued or the unique nuances of other nations to whom we are attempting to democratize.

Ideology can thus be summarised as a particular kind of relationship between a subject, his or her thoughts and feelings, and a symbol that addresses the subject as a subject. The symbol addresses the subject and his or her feelings and beliefs thus evoking particular feelings based on the nature of the symbol and the nature of the subject. This dual relation necessitates the considerable attention paid to matters of context in this thesis. Insofar as either the symbol or the subject changes, the ideological relationship can be drastically altered.

Having reached the conclusion of this first chapter a number of important tasks have been accomplished. First of all the potency and scope of ideology has been explored. Žižek's unique account of ideology is well suited to address the problem of low intensity democracy within the complex context of a global community. Žižek's emphasis on the role of the subject as he or she pertains to ideology largely gives his account of ideology the reach it needs to address the numerous complications of the issue at hand. The task of the next chapter is to explore the numerous dimensions of the democratic ideal. As parts of this chapter have implied, democracy is not a single uniform entity that is or is not present in a country. Democracy will be shown to be a matter of degree insofar as the democratic ideal will be shown to encapsulate a number of important activities and processes that are all important in developing democracy.

Chapter 2: Democracy

The purpose of this chapter is to define the ideal of democracy and low intensity democracy. The democratic ideal is a comprehensive vision of what democracy can entail and is capable of achieving. Its core principles can be found in the charter of the United Nations and are inspired by and resemble the arguments of numerous prominent philosophical figures including Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, Hannah Arendt and Aristotle.[1] Examining the ideal will show that democracy is not a single thing or process, but comprises a number of activities and processes including peaceful conflict resolution, self rule and guaranties for human security. Exploring James Bohman's unique vision of democracy will serve as an example of the diversity of democratic structures the principles of the democratic ideal can inspire. While Bohman's vision appears very different from the forms of democracy we are familiar with, it provides us with an example of a possible evolutionary path for democracy that might better satisfy the democratic ideal. Exploring Bohman's vision will help to showcase some of the rich forms of democratic activity the ideal aims to inspire. It will also serve as a contrast to low intensity democracy thereby showing how deeply impoverished low intensity democracy, the final form of democracy to be described in this chapter, is. Low intensity democracy is produced when basic western democratic institutions are established in a state that lacks the foundations to support the activities of the democratic ideal that ultimately sustain democracy and allow it to flourish.

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[1] The western democratic ideal is being referred to here. The author recognises there are many concepts of democracy however, the western ideal is the most prominent and the one followed by most groups engaging in international democracy promotion.

The first task of this chapter is to examine the core elements that make up the democratic ideal.[2] The first element of the democratic ideal to be examined serves as a crucial foundation for and partner of the other elements. The importance of this element is continually reemphasised throughout the charter of the United Nations. This element is peace.[3] In order for the other democratic institutions and activities to operate effectively, the use of violence and violent conflicts must be kept to a minimum. This does not mean that democratic initiatives cannot overcome violence and oppression. Peaceful movements have had great historical successes. For example, Ghandi's peaceful opposition of oppressive British policies in India was very effective.[4] However, there was a limit to the degree of violence willing to be employed by British authorities. In contrast, the Second World War offers an example of when the presence of incredible violence impedes the possibility of democratic action because no amount of peaceful resistance by persecuted groups would have been effective. Instead of oppressive policies, as was the case in India, the Nazis were seeking the complete eradication of numerous

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[2] The intention is not to provide an exhaustive definition of democracy or an in depth argument in favour of its adoption. Instead, the goal is to explore the foundational elements of the ideal, first individually and then collectively, in order to better articulate the influence the ideal carries.

[3] United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*, 24 October 1945, 1 UNTS XVI, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae6b3930.html [accessed 30 November 2010] Chapter 1, article 1.

[4] Øyvind Tønnesson," Mahatma Gandhi, the Missing Laureate". Nobelprize.org. 1 December 1999. http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/articles/gandhi/ (accessed September 12, 2010).

ethnic and religious groups. Such extreme violence leaves no room for discourse and action.[5]

A parallel exists between the activities within states and between states. If a minimum level of peace and civility between individuals is required in order for democracy to be possible the same is true of nations. As it is stated in Article 33, Chapter 6 of The Charter of the United Nations, the primary goal of the United Nations is the achievement of peaceful dispute resolution within and between nations.[6] The ultimate purpose of this is not only peace, but the democratic opportunities raised by peaceful conflict resolution. When brute force is not a permissible means to resolve a dispute, we must engage in discussion, explore alternate view points and make compromises. These alternatives to the use of force are all democratic goals. They provide us with the means of improving our common life together.

We can trace the connection between democracy and peace back to Kant's writings. While Kant explicitly states that democracy brings about peace, the way he argues this point supports the idea that has just been offered. Peace is necessary for democracy to thrive. Kant condemns a number of military tactics. He states that tactics such as assassination and the use of poison are acts that are so deceitful in nature that future trust between the nations involved in the conflict is severely damaged.[7] Deplorable

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5 The presence of violence that prevents action refers to Arendt's notion of the public space that will be examined shortly.

6 United Nations, Charter of the United Nations, Chapter 6, Article 33.

7 Immanuel Kant, *To Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.), 5.

violent acts, such as those scorned by Kant and the atrocities committed by Nazi forces, undermine the possibility of trust in the future, a requirement of peaceful collaboration.

The purpose of showing that peace and democracy are interdependent concepts is to articulate the unique character of democratic activities insofar as they are not linear activities but cyclical ones. Both the Charter of the United Nations and Kant are correct. Democracy breeds peace and peace breeds democracy. Insofar as we are engaged in democratic activity we are able to enjoy the goods it provides. These goods stimulate further democratic activity. This circular progression will be shown to apply to the other key elements of the democratic ideal and democracy as a whole. However, it should be noted that these processes can also work in reverse. If we allow a decline in democratic activities, it takes time and work to reverse a degenerative cycle.

While the coming discussion of Arendt's notion of the public space should provide sufficient clarification of the role of peace within the democratic ideal, its relationship to the other elements will be made clear in order to prevent any possible confusion regarding the claims being made about the democratic ideal. Within the context of the ideal, peace is not the partner of order. Neither is democracy. This is precisely the position this thesis aims to reject. Within the context of the democratic ideal, peace refers to the opposite of violence. The examples of violent acts that have been offered thus far constrict the public space and the possibility for people to engage in democratic activity. This by no means suggests that democratic activity is safe or free from risk. The citizens of Libya are being forced to engage in combat in order to defend themselves from the violence being carried out by the government in an attempt to eradicate the public space and quash the democratic revolution that is desperately trying to take place.

Insofar as peace allows for non-violent conflict resolution, the next element of the democratic ideal to be disused is precisely that. The democratic approach to conflict resolution and collective action takes advantage of the unique human capacities of symbolic communication and reason. By using our advanced capacity for rational communication through language, the human species is able to solve problems and pursue numerous initiatives that are beneficial not only to individuals, but also to communities. Aristotle was one of the first to emphasise the importance of this kind of activity. He argued that the best life for any organism can only be achieved by taking maximum advantage of its unique capacities.[8] Insofar as the unique capacity for human beings is rational thought and communications, the conditions that nourish these activities will lead to the best human life. This is true for individuals and for the species. Therefore, democratic principles appear to provide a good foundation for human flourishing insofar as they encourage the use of rational communication in problem solving.

Hannah Arendt picks up this argument in contemporary thought. Arendt gives an account of the joint activities of speech and action. Speech entails communicating one's position or interpretation of an issue or situation in the public space to other members of one's political community. The public space is not necessarily a physical location, but the sum total of public media through which citizens can freely express their opinions and act on the information they receive.[9] The purpose of speech is to inspire reflection that

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[8] Aristotle, *The Basic Works of Aristotle,* ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, Inc., 2001) Politics 1253a.

[9] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), 73.

ultimately results in action. Action is responsive activity resulting from reflection upon speech. The goal of action is to bring about substantial change within the political community. While Arendt only describes one cycle of this process in detail, we can see that, like peace, it builds on itself if continued. Insofar as speech leads to action, action will invariably lead to speech. Changes in the political community will inspire speech by different speakers and thus further action by different actors. In the same way the adoption of peaceful practices clears the way for further adoption of peaceful practices and democratic institutions, the initial move from speech to action can begin a cyclical process where action then inspires further speech. As this process continues, more and more people have the opportunity to become involved in this democratic process. Insofar as these activities are permitted and encouraged, political communities adopting them become increasingly democratic.

There is no shortage of examples of this process. The first thing that might come to mind is an individual or group of individuals protesting government policy. In recent history, there have been protests against military initiatives, such as the Viet Nam War, that are deemed by a significant number of people to be misguided. Protest is not the only example of this kind of activity however. A celebrity who begins or supports an initiative to raise funds and awareness for medical research is part of this cycle. His or her action raises awareness about a situation that is important to that individual and to those suffering from a particular medical ailment. Those who witness this action can then decide how they might wish to involve themselves in this cause. This responsive action may come in the form of financial donations, further studying the issue, or making symbolic statements such as wearing a cancer awareness bracelet or a yellow ribbon.

Recognising this kind of democratic activity is an essential part of describing the many ways democracy can be a part of our individual lives and not contained within a set of fixed institutions.

Closely tied to the elements of the democratic ideal that have already been offered is the notion of self rule. The UN charter states that a primary duty of the United Nations is to aid in conflict resolution.[10] Specifically, it intends to help provide states with assistance for solving their own problems with other states and within their own political community. The most well recognised forms of self rule currently involve a democratically elected parliament or congress. Citizens vote to elect representatives based on their geographical location.[11] These representatives will convene to develop the laws that will govern the common life of the political community. While this is the most commonly found structure in contemporary societies, this is not the only way self rule can exist. Rousseau insists that government institutions must address the unique needs of the community they serve.[12] While a representative democracy might be the ideal structure for a nation of millions, something very different is likely best suited to crafting the laws of a community of a couple of thousand individuals. Therefore, what is important is not the structure, or particular details of the process. What is important is that the laws or accepted norms of a political community are decided upon collectively by the individual

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[10] United Nations, Charter of the United Nations, Chapter 11, Article 73.

[11] There are many different approaches to the electoral process but the aims remain more or less the same.

[12] Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings*, 174.

members of that political community.[13] This point is yet another example of the diversity of democratic principles.

The final element of the ideal concerns the status of individuals in relation to political communities. Insofar as we are human beings, we must be guaranteed certain basic rights to preserve our personal security, our dignity and our place within a political community.[14] If an individual is denied these fundamental rights it is difficult if not impossible for him or her to participate as members in his or her political community. For example, an important aspect of human rights is its role in protecting vulnerable minorities. In most democratic structures, the formation of a majority power is always a possibility. Should a large majority support a particular policy or set of policies, it can be difficult for minority groups to contest such policies through conventional means even if they are unfair or somehow discriminatory. The establishment of and respect for basic human rights aims to ensure that the policies of the majority do not seriously impoverish or outright persecute any individual minority to the point where that minority can no longer participate politically.[15] If these individuals are negatively affected by a particular policy, they must maintain the means to argue against the perceived injustice.

To summarise, the democratic ideal is not a definition of democracy. It is a comprehensive vision of the numerous democratic institutions, processes and goals.

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[13] In Greek city states, thousands of citizens would assemble to vote on important affairs of state.

[14] United Nations, Carter of Human Rights and Freedoms, Article 21.

[15] This issue is of great interest to Bohman. He proposes considerable change in current political systems to better address this issue.

Democracies are continually evolving due to the cyclical nature of democratic activity. Peace, public participation, self rule and human security are the aims of democracy insofar as the adoption of democratic practices is intended to provide these things. Concurrently, these aims are the very activities of democracy because participating in and encouraging these activities is a generative process. Because peace permits speech and action, these activities allow people to engage with each other as human beings thereby building trust and respect between all parties involved. With this precedent for respect and tolerance toward other human beings violence is ideally less frequent resulting in a more peaceful climate. These cyclical processes can continually evolve.[16]

While the vision of democracy James Bohman develops in his book, *Democracy Beyond Borders,* is very different from the democracies we live in, his vision is also inspired by the principles of the democratic ideal that have just been presented. In his book, Bohman's goal is to present a vision of democracy that is better suited to addressing the challenges of the current global political context. A principle concern expressed by Bohman in his work is the impact of global issues on our understanding of international politics, specifically, the increasing number of power centers in the international system that challenge the sovereignty of states. While states remain powerful, international organisations and corporations are becoming increasingly powerful. The laws and policies of individual states cannot regulate the behaviour of

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[16] Of course, this is the ideal condition. Human history has given no shortage of examples where this process is either interrupted occurs in reverse. The events that instigated the two world wars of the previous century are an example of the degeneration of this process.

corporations operating in many countries at once.[17] For example, Canada could pass environmental laws that make it illegal to burn cheap but highly toxic fuel in manufacturing plants. However, an international corporation can set up such a plant in a nation without such a restriction and continue to export its product to Canada. Furthermore, human activities in one part of the world, such as the overproduction of carbon emissions, can have serious consequences for the rest of the human population. Such situations, Bohman argues, challenge the principle of self-rule that is a central democratic ideal.[18] If activities deemed inappropriate by one political community can simply be exported and outsourced, the ability of states to regulate the activities of entities that exist across borders is ultimately limited.

The main challenge facing the principle of self-rule that the previous example alludes to is the principle of non-interference. Non-interference, states Bohman, is typically offered as a corollary to self-rule. Insofar as a state is sovereign and managing its own affairs, it has the right to have its sovereignty respected.[19] For example, if two states each have their own governments and goals chosen by the citizens of their respective countries, the policies that are pursued by these governments, operating under a principle of non-interference, are acceptable assuming they do not directly or intentionally undermine the ability of the other state to exercise its sovereignty. While this

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[17] Bohman, *Democracy Across Borders,* 92.

[18] *Ibid.*, 2.

[19] *Ibid.*, 26.

is a reasonably clear and appealing principle, Bohman argues that it does not work in practice.[20]

Hypothetical examples of non-interference often fail to take the reality of global politics into account. When examining political relations, it is rare to find so called isolated events. Global interconnectedness is profound. The status of states as the only entities in possession of sovereign power is becoming increasingly questionable. Powerful international actors operating beyond the bounds of the state system are not the only complicating factor. The notion of interference pertains to one state's activities wilfully disrupting the activities of another state. However, this is not the only way states can affect each other. Phenomena such as global warming and international financial crises are not the result of a single state policy or action. They are the culmination of a wide range of activities by a vast number of people, states and international actors that affect the entire world.

Bohman argues that we must move away from the principle of non-interference and adopt his principle of non-domination. Non-domination is, in principle, a similar concept to the formulation of the categorical imperative that states we must always treat individuals as ends in themselves and never as mere means. To maintain a condition of non-domination, an individual or group cannot engage in an activity or behaviour that would hurt the capacity of another individual or group to democratically pursue its own goals.[21] For example, consider the Great Lakes that are divided by the border between

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[20] *Ibid.*, 93.

[21] Bohman, *Democracy Across Borders*, 49.

Canada and the United States. If one country unilaterally decided to start dumping waste into the lakes, it would violate the principle of non-domination. The offending state robs the other state of the ability to make its own decision about that resource. This situation is problematic if one appeals to the principle of non-interference. Because part of the lake belongs to each country, it would seem reasonable to assume that each country could do what it wished regarding its portion of the lake. The principle of non-domination is designed to be better equipped to address complications that a state centric model cannot account for. While one country such as North Korea might want to explore the development of nuclear technologies, the principle of non-domination contends that their neighbours, South Korea in particular, should have the right to be involved in the decision making process. This seems reasonable given that they too would be at risk if something catastrophic should happen.

Directly tied to the perceived problem of non-interference is the status of state borders. Bohman raises the issue that state borders, which are the currently established boundaries of political communities, are rarely if ever decided upon democratically. The current international state boundaries are largely the product of centuries of conflict and conquest. They are not currently up for democratic debate. This, argues Bohman, is problematic because it limits the publics, political communities, within which an individual can participate.[22] For example, if an individual is born a Canadian citizen yet strongly opposes the United States of America's policy for the war in Iraq because he or she is worried it will increase animosity toward western nations resulting in further acts of

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[22] Bohman, *Democracy Across Borders, 30.*

violent terrorism, he or she cannot directly participate in the American electoral process in an effort to change government policy.

For Bohman, state boundaries should not be the limits of political communities. He believes that the European Union is a good example of publics that exist beyond borders.[23] However, Bohman suggests we can go even further by encouraging and empowering "minipublics." Bohman describes an empowered minipublic as a spontaneously established group of individuals who have a vested interest in a particular issue. These groups would be able to convene on issues that concern them and come up with recommendations regarding how best to address the issue. Bohman's account assumes that minipublics would, at least initially, work with and be granted legitimacy by already existing governing bodies. Belonging to a minipublic would be a voluntary act that is available to anyone wishing to participate. For an issue such as the of managing the Great Lakes, through minipublics, concerned interests on both sides of the border would be able to collaborate in developing policy recommendations to be presented to the governments of both Canada and the United States.

Although the vision of democracy that has just been explored appears to be quite different from what many people are familiar with, it is clear that Bohman is pursuing many of the same ends as Arendt, Rousseau, Aristotle and Kant. By increasing political inclusiveness and increasing the opportunities for public participation, the opportunity for individuals to make the most of their capacity for speech improves. Furthermore, the principle of non-domination is more stringent than the principle of non-interference as it

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[23] *Ibid.*, 125.

forces increased reflection, respect, co-operation and collaboration when developing policy. While Bohman does not use the traditional language of democracy, going so far as to call some of it outdated and inadequate, it is clear that he seeks the same goods found in the democratic ideal.[24] While it is unclear if Bohman's vision ought to be adopted given concerns about efficiency and how to manage these minipublics, the real value of Bohman's vision is as an example of a different structural approach to democracy while maintaining its principle values. Phenomena such as the international involvement in the last American presidential election that was previously mentioned, while significantly less formalised then what Bohman is advocating, gives some support to the basic principles he is promoting. We need to explore an expanding and evolving notion of democratic institutions, according to Gills and Rocamora, to help combat the proliferation of low intensity democracy.[25]

Low intensity democracy is considerably different from the democratic ideal. While the conditions of low intensity democracy include democratic components, they do not come together to form a cohesive whole. Low intensity democracy occurs when the cyclical growth described in the democratic ideal is either absent, or insufficient to foster democratic growth within a state beyond the most basic democratic institutions. Concurrently, there is not sufficient opposition to these institutions and activities to collapse them entirely, thereby resulting in political stagnation.

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[24] *Ibid.*, 2.

[25] Gills and Rocamora, "Low Intensity Democracy," 520.

The challenge of understanding the nature of low intensity democracy comes from the numerous conditions that can undermine democratic institutions. While an impoverished democracy is the end result of the complications that lead to low intensity democracy, the circumstances that restrict democratic growth differ considerably from one state to the next. For example, serious economic troubles can present two distinct problems. The first problem is rampant poverty. If the basic necessities of life are sufficiently difficult for most of the population of a state to acquire, it is very difficult for democracy to flourish. This is not to say that democracy is a luxury of the rich. This issue pertains to the public space. Insofar as political action is concerned, destitution is akin to violent removal from the public space. If an individual is unable, or barely able to provide the material necessities of life for him or herself and his or her family, active political participation is very difficult.[26]

The second problem pertaining to economic factors is the status of state sovereignty. If a state economy is weakened to the point that the inhabitants of that state are almost entirely reliant on foreign investments or businesses, these sources of wealth have considerable control over the autonomy of the state and its people. While widespread polluting by a foreign manufacturer might be highly opposed by the people, it is not feasible to put policies in place to restrict this activity. This is the case because the foreign company has only established itself in that country because of low environmental standards. If the manufacturing facility happened to close, many people would lose the meagre wages they need to provide themselves the necessities of life. While the people

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[26] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 64-67.

technically have choices about policy, condemning oneself and one's family to go hungry is not really a choice at all.

Historical and cultural complications can represent further impediments to democracy. Gills and Rocamora briefly discuss the political histories of Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia. In these countries, either a weak democracy is present or a slightly more potent one is established but it subsequently reverts to some form of authoritarian rule. In each case, a different factor was involved. In Thailand, a history of political corruption allows power to remain firmly in the hands of the political and military elite in spite of apparent democratic reforms. On the other hand, despite the existence of basic democratic institutions, the military remains the dominant political power.[27] The Philippines have a similar history of corruption and bribery among policy makers.[28]

We have now achieved a partial understanding of what low intensity democracy entails. However, to achieve a more complete understanding of it we must pinpoint the major sources of democracy promotion and the motives that shape this practice. Most United States governments, from the beginning of the Cold War through to the current day, have had the most aggressive agenda for democracy promotion. This should come as no surprise given the polarisation of western liberal democracy and communist authoritarianism that was the central conflict during the Cold War. The turbulent political

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[27] Gills and Rocamora, "Low Intensity Democracy," 501.

[28] Steven W. Hook, "Inconsistent U.S. Efforts to Promote Democracy Abroad" in *Exporting Democracy: Rhetoric vs. Reality*, ed. Peter J. Schraeder (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2002), 125.

and economic conditions in the second half of the 20th century left many nations on the brink of political change. As the leadership of a particular nation becomes weak, numerous interested parties seek to become the new dominant order. The United States recognised that a state in political turbulence was an opportunity to support movements that would be supportive of its policies and values. Supporting this kind of regime would, in theory, generate the most stable and economically liberal states in the long run. Henry Kissinger describes a trend of reluctant American involvement in international affairs. According to Kissinger, The United States recognised its unique position as a super potent international actor and as a beacon of democracy and social values. This self perception of value is often referred to as "American exceptionalism." Kissinger states that the sense of duty born from this self perception was, and continues to be the impetus for American foreign policy. Kissinger goes as far as to say that American exceptionalism "must be the point of departure for a Wilsonian foreign policy." [29] The efficient achievement of widespread political and economic reform was of the utmost importance.

The strategy employed to achieve this efficient democratisation involves providing financial, political and occasionally military support to a chosen ally in a state on the brink of political transformation. By sculpting the transformation that is about to occur, the new regime is more likely to be sympathetic to American interests. Once the new regime has established itself and can demonstrate it possesses some basic democratic institutions, it can receive open aid and support for The United States and institutions such as the International Monetary Fund.

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[29] Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 809.

Gills and Rocamora argue that these democratic support arrangements come at the cost of development.[30] Because the foreign policy being pursued is focused on the establishment of a liberal economic order in conjunction with new democratic governments, the economic reforms that are insisted upon as a condition of receiving support are designed to push state economic policy toward more liberal policies. While this can improve some of the state's economic woes, such as decreasing the national debt, there are social costs associated with these policies. Funding cuts to social programs is a strategy common to many governments when attempting to reduce government costs. This strategy is more appealing than other measures such as tax increases given that that kind of policy can discourage potential investors and corporations looking to expand their operations. Unfortunately, the challenges that erode democratic activity that have just been discussed are not addressed and often worsened because the current economic and political elite benefit most from the new reforms.

The purpose of this chapter has been to describe the key elements of the democratic ideal and to explore the phenomenon of low intensity democracy. The democratic ideal is a rich collection of activities and concepts aimed at improving our shared life together as human beings. By allowing us to pursue our aims and resolve our conflicts through action in the public space, we are empowered as individuals and collectively as political communities. While different from the democracies we might be familiar with, Bohman's vision of transnational democracy provides us with one possible example of a democratic structure that the ideal inspires. Given that the scope of political

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[30] Gills and Rocamora, "Low Intensity Democracy," 501.

issues and the public space is evolving, perhaps publics and political communities also need to be transformed. In stark contrast to the democratic ideal there is low intensity democracy. Instead of empowering the people, the focus of low intensity democracy is to generate political stability to facilitate the establishment of long term economic and political reforms. These reforms do not address the more fundamental social challenges and democratic impediments that are present in the state. Having described the ideal of democracy and low intensity democracy in detail, the next chapter will explore our ideological relationship with democracy and explain precisely how this relationship leads to the creation of low intensity democracy.

Chapter 3: The Roots of Low Intensity Democracy

The preceding chapters of this thesis have offered clear accounts of ideology, the democratic ideal and low intensity democracy. This third and final chapter will re-examine the creation of low intensity democracy for the purpose of showing ideology's specific role in its creation. First of all, we must explore the role ideological commitments play in producing and sustaining low intensity democracy. To accomplish this we will briefly re-examine the events and activities that produce low intensity democracy. This time the focus will be on establishing ideology's role in its conception instead of simply defining low intensity democracy. We will see that it is our ideological relationship with democracy and western democratic society that is responsible for low intensity democracy. This conclusion is drawn from two parts of our ideological relationships. The first part is the symbolic aspect of ideology. While symbols are a necessary part of human communication, the symbols themselves, insofar as they are representative, do not capture all the nuances of the thing or phenomenon they are representing. The second part pertains to the contexts or frames of reference in which symbols are located. Reality, our shared symbolic relationships, is by its very nature different across different social and cultural divisions. While many aspects of western reality have found their way into most parts of the world, the overall western experience is certainly not common to humanity as a whole. Ultimately, low intensity democracy is the product of western democracy promotion initiatives taking inspiration from a particular symbol of democracy from one reality and attempting to craft a universally imposable democratic model that ultimately falls short of the democratic ideal and the symbol from which they take their inspiration.

The first task of this chapter is to revisit the relationship between democracy promotion and low intensity democracy. In the previous chapter, the democratic ideal is described as a conception of democracy. It is not a single thing or process but a set of processes, institutions and activities. In order for democracy to flourish, the elements of the ideal must be allowed to and encouraged to expand and evolve. While the democratic ideal described in this thesis is a modern entity, the arguments and theories that support and inspire it have a long and rich history. As we observed in the previous chapter, the democratic ideal has a long list of philosophical contributors from a number of countries and historical periods. While they all have unique philosophical commitments, they share notions about the nature of humanity and about what a good human life entails. For all of the authors, from Aristotle to Arendt, developing the means to use our unique human capacities to the fullest is of great importance. Given that our capacity for rational thought and communication largely define us as a species, developing more and better opportunities to exercise these capacities appears most advantageous to our continued success as a species. As we have seen, the methods for employing theses capacities developed by this philosophical tradition, such as the cyclical motion of speech and action, have had considerable influence on the modern democratic ideal.

Given the richness of the democratic ideal, the name "low intensity democracy" is somewhat paradoxical insofar as the condition it describes has very few democratic features. While there are typically cursory democratic institutions such as periodic elections, the citizens of the state do not get the same opportunities for public empowerment that are present in more flourishing democracies. Instead of creating a variety of opportunities for democratic action, the democracy promotion initiatives

undertaken by the United States we have examined are primarily concerned with creating stable states. These initiatives operate on the assumption that stability is most easily achieved by creating a single legitimate forum for democratic action while marginalising more arguably radical movements and ideas.

The current troubles in Afghanistan serve as example of this problem. Afghanistan has been a highly contested territory for most of its history. The result is a state made up of numerous subcultures and tribes. There is not a single body that can be comfortably defined as "the Afghan people."[1] International activity that began in the Cold War and continues to this day further complicates the political landscape of this region. Early soviet attempts at social reforms, such as the banning of arranged marriages and equal rights for women, were met with stiff opposition from more reserved Afghan groups who strongly supported traditional values. These groups found what would now be considered an unlikely ally in the United States government. Looking to weaken soviet power in the region, the United States government provided groups opposed to soviet forces with money, weapons and training to help combat the soviet military presence.[2] Like other anti soviet initiatives of the Cold War, this support was discretely provided. This would be one in a long list of proxy wars between The United States and the U.S.S.R.[3] Of course, the cruel irony of this scenario is that these former American "allies", having been

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[1] David M Rodriguez, IJC Commander, "Supporting the Afghan Environment," NATO blog entry, http://www.isaf.nato.int/the-afghan-hands-blog/commanders-blog/supporting-the-afghan-environment-david-m.-rodriguez-ijc-commander.html (accessed September 3, 2010).

[2] Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 449-450.

[3] Marks, *The Riddle of all Constitutions*, 52.

abandoned following the end of the cold war so resources spent supporting them could be used to pursue the agenda of democracy promotion in more unstable regions, evolved into the organisations that were responsible for the attacks on The United States of America in 2001.

While democracy has technically been established in Afghanistan, one cannot say that the democratic ideal is in any way fulfilled. While the current government is elected, participation in the election was limited primarily by the fact that the country is still in a state of war. Foreign troops must remain in the country to preserve the questionable but seemingly necessary alliance between the elected government and the numerous warlords that still remain powerful influences in the state. Furthermore the public space is highly constricted. There are still regular suicide attacks and individual security is only somewhat guaranteed, and even then, only in the capital. Such conditions constrict the possibility for action because there are no guarantees for human security.

The most remarkable problem in Afghanistan remains the widespread corruption by the American supported Karzai government. Numerous problems including bribing government officials, buying votes, co-operation with warlords and a silent acceptance of opium production have been reported by well established sources within the country.[4] This problem is doubly problematic. First of all, it undermines the possibility for democratic growth in the state. Because elected representatives are supposed to represent their constituents, corruption represents a serious breakdown in democratic processes.

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[4] Doug Saunders, "Corruption Eats Away at Afghan Government," RAWA news, Posted May 3, 2008, www.rawa.org/temp/runews/2008/05/03/corruption-eats-away-at-afghan-government.html (accessed December 6, 2010).

The other problem is the damage that is done to democracy as a symbol. If democracy is being presented as an answer to corruption yet it permits corruption persist, faith in democracy can be significantly weakened.

While Afghanistan is perhaps a more complex case than most, we can see that most of the challenges to democracy that were described in the previous chapter are present in one form or another. The economic activities of the state are evidently disrupted by the continuing violence in the state. Insofar as there are numerous, heavily divided cultural groups, finding common ground for productive discursive interaction is difficult to establish. The creation and expansion of public space is further challenged by the lingering violence. Furthermore, the presence of active and potent military factions represents a strong non-democratic opposition to the potential for popular rule. Finally, widespread corruption undermines the democratic institutions that are in place while empowering a number of impediments to democracy. Realistically, many of these challenges must first be addressed before democratic institutions are well positioned to grow. Furthermore, given the cultural complexities of Afghanistan, the democratic institutions that work well in North America, for example, might not be the most appropriate for the needs of the unique Afghani political situation.

While the conditions that undermine the possibility for a more robust democracy in Afghanistan are clear we must investigate further if we are to find the ideological origins of low intensity democracy. While exploring Žižek's work on ideology, we observed that it involves a number of important elements including the subject, his or her beliefs, and a symbol that engages the subject and the dynamics of reality within which the ideological relationship occurs. There are two particular aspects of this relationship

that are of interest for this investigation. The first aspect is the contextual placement of a particular symbol in relation to subjects and reality. The second aspect is the limited extent to which a symbol can inclusively represent a complex concept.

The ideological symbol can be many things including objects, phrases or gestures. An ideological symbol is a representation of an idea or a thing. It can be representative in many ways. It can represent the form of an object, call to mind key aspects of a theory, or evoke particular feelings in an individual.[5] The common factor of these elements is context. The symbol has meaning only within the sphere of difference, reality. The context of any symbol typically contains a historical and cognitive component. The intensities of these components can vary significantly. In certain parts of Asia the symbol of the swastika is used on maps to represents a particular kind of vegetarian restaurant. However, for most people of European or North American decent this now infamous symbol evokes powerful feelings of anger and sadness because it represents Nazism and the terrible atrocities associated with that movement.

Symbolically, democracy is very potent because it calls to mind numerous historical and social landmarks. Elections, freedom of speech, the establishment of the charter of rights and the fall of the Berlin Wall are just some of the examples an individual might offer when asked what democracy can accomplish. The pursuit and proliferation of these goods is highly appealing. Furthermore, the democratic governments and institutions that are present in the western world appear to be effective

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[5] The language of "ideas" and "things" is being used casually. The intention is not to describe metaphysical entities, but to rephrase into common language the point that has already been argued that ideological symbols exist in, and compose reality as it has previously been defined.

providers of a good life to its citizens. Contextually, we are familiar with the conditions and results of a longstanding functional democracy because it is a major part of our reality.

The limitations of a symbol and its place within our reality must be discussed in tandem if we are to grasp the nuances of this particular relationship. A pair of examples will prove useful in this task. The first example is an expansion on an example offered in the first chapter. It concerns handing a rose to one's romantic partner. As we have already established, the act itself only has meaning within the larger context, or reality, of the relationship. If a man gives his girlfriend a rose on their second date she will likely be pleased by the gesture. This same act in this same place on the day of their twentieth wedding anniversary would likely evoke all the positive memories and feelings of the entirety of the relationship. Such an act is a very powerful and significant gesture because it not only serves as a current example of affection. That specific act in that specific place demonstrates that even small gestures of affection from twenty years ago were remembered and valued. However, if the couple happened to be experiencing serious marital problems and were together only to spare their children from a bitter divorce, for example, the gift would lack much of its usual significance given the context in which it is being presented. Within the context of that animosity and lack of feeling, revisiting an old moment of happiness is overshadowed by years of anger and frustration. Instead, the gesture represents the acceptance and acknowledgement of the normal conventions of a happy marriage.

Insofar as the significance of an act can change depending on the context of that act, it should come as no surprise that the impact of democratic practices and institutions

can change depending on the surrounding context. The corruption that has been described in Afghanistan is a perfect example of this fact. Because democratic procedures are being abused and manipulated, they will be unable to achieve their desired ends. Elections alone are not sufficient criteria to determine if a state is democratic. Furthermore, the presence of mass corruption does little to make a state more democratic or curb the cynicism of a frustrated public.

Having addressed the issue of context, we must now examine the issue of symbolic limitations. The movie poster example offered in the first chapter deals with this phenomenon. While a person might have looked at every poster and plot synopsis for a movie and was, as a result, able to predict exactly what was going to happen in the movie, some details are always lost from the overall movie experience. When predicting the entire course of the movie, the individual would fail to include the exact feel of the seat, or how sticky the floor of the theatre was in his or her vision of the movie. He or she may have imagined loving the film. Even if the film lives up to his or her expectations, the belligerent theatre patron in the next row might sour the experience leaving the viewer with feelings of disappointment instead of the predicted satisfaction. Given the complexity of the democratic ideal it should come as no surprise that when we engage with democracy symbolically the symbols we are talking or thinking about as we communicate will inevitably miss some of the elements that contribute to democracy. This fact is one of the reasons why trying to provide an exhaustive account of what democracy entails was not possible in the previous chapter. One would be hard pressed to list every possible democratic act or institution.

In his book *The Value of Nothing*, Raj Patel describes a perceived error in our socio-economic thinking that is another example of the limited scope of a symbolic entity. The entity in question is the price and affordability of a MacDonald's burger. The price we pay at the counter for this item is approximately four dollars. However, Patel and others argue that the real cost of that meal is closer to two hundred dollars once we factor in the results of research carried out in the mid nineties concerning the "true price" of producing commodities. [6] Once publicly funded corn subsidies are factored into the price of feeding cattle, and the opportunity costs of appropriating space for pastures are taken into account, the true financial cost per unit of this item skyrockets. Our symbolic relationship to the price is not the number of dollars, but the affordability. Individually, the cost of four dollars per item is quite affordable for the average Western consumer. However, if we factor in the hidden costs, it might become apparent that using that land for other forms of agriculture would allow for the production of cheaper and healthier foods in greater quantities. Given the amount of hunger and malnutrition in the world, we must question if items with high hidden costs are really affordable.

From these examples we can observe a number of issues. The first problem is the reality within which a symbol exists. The fact that a symbol has a particular meaning or significance within one context does not guarantee it will preserve its meaning in other contexts. The second problem comes from the limited nature of symbols themselves. As Žižek and Althusser have argued, human reality and communication is reliant on

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[6] Raj Patel, *The Value of Nothing: Why Everything Costs so Much More Than We Think*, (Toronto: HarperCollins Publisher Ltd., 2009), 43-44.

shortcuts.[7] Without the ability to use language in a non technical fashion human communication would be painfully laborious. If someone were to utter the phrase "everything is composed of atoms," most people would be able to comprehend what that entails within the context of the conversation. Different people would have different mental images of what "everything" might entail but it would always involve a vast number of things. However, if one were to attempt to truly think of everything that physically exists in a single instance he or she would simply be unable to do so. While these symbols or shortcuts are necessary, and a key feature of language, they can lead to problems such as deeming the two hundred dollar hamburger affordable. As Marx might say, we must radically reposition ourselves regarding how we look at the world so that we do not continue to fight for a cause whose goals lie outside the linguistic context from which we attempt to pursue them. The message of Patel's example is that making the fast food industry more socially responsible will not help the fact that the conditions that make this industry possible are fundamentally flawed.

Having provided a general description of these symbolic limitations it is time to examine how they pertain to democracy specifically. Given that it is the more general problem, the descriptive limitations of a symbol will be discussed first. As our discussion of the democratic ideal demonstrated, democracy is a complex concept. Its current incarnation is the product of thousands of years of human social evolution. Despite this considerable progress there are still many authors, such as Marks and Bohman, who believe democracy can improve further. Like the concept "everything" or the complexity

[7] Through the example of visiting one's grandmother and the descriptions of the forms of ideology, Žižek's work has shown how necessary and sophisticated this process is.

of understanding the costs of what we produce, it is difficult if not impossible to be conscious of all the elements of democracy at once. However, for an activity with serious long term consequences such as democracy promotion, measures must be taken to ensure that the most comprehensive and adaptable understanding of democracy is employed when promoting democracy. We would not trust a surgeon whose understanding of surgery was limited to cutting a person open, making adjustments and then sewing him or her back up. We would expect him or her to understand the importance of the patient's health, the proper administration of anaesthetic, good hygiene and all the other nuances of a successful medical procedure.

While many historical events are associated with democracy, we are not typically cognisant of the amount of time many of these developments actually took. Both The United States of America and Canada voted to elect governments, decades before women, some ethnic minorities and individuals without property were permitted to vote. Furthermore, keystones of our democracy continue to evolve. For example, the nature of human rights continues to be hotly debated. Conventional wisdom decreed that the protection of human rights was the job of individual states. Problems with state managed rights, such as the inability to guarantee rights for stateless persons, has helped to inspire the work of Arendt and Bohman who, as we have seen, advocate in favour of measures to ensure that people have rights simply by virtue of being human beings. Furthermore, the explicit inclusion of notions of rights as a fundamental feature of democracy is something of a recent phenomenon insofar as human rights themselves, as we understand them today, are a more recent development. Given the long history of the democratisation

process and the continued debates and challenges, it is clear that a few short years cannot be sufficient for building democracies in the face of unfavourable conditions.

The contextual component of the misuse of democracy as a symbol pertains to the source of most democracy promotion efforts. Democracy promotion, in contrast with grassroots democratic movements, by its very nature comes from outside the state or region in which democracy is being promoted. While the earlier discussion of Afghanistan provided a clear example of radical differences in cultural and social conditions there are less drastic but equally meaningful ones. In an experiment used to test how well human behaviour measured up to the economist description of man as a perfectly rational economic agent, the test results varied considerably based on longstanding social conventions.[8] This interesting correlation suggests that some social groups such as Indonesian whale hunters are highly co-operative while Peruvian nomads favour selfish individualism. The communal structure and access to resources substantially contributed to the behaviours and attitudes of the different groups. As it was argued earlier, Rousseau claims that government infrastructure must be unique so that it services the political community from which it originates. Because as we have only experienced democracy in certain forms, it is difficult to envision what structure democracy might adopt to function in societies that are arranged quite differently from our own. Contextually, democracy symbolically entails western democracy. We cannot help but assume a familiar context for our symbol since as we lack an alternative frame of reference. The communal practices of the whale hunters would likely allow that society to

8 Patel, *The Value of Nothing*, 30-31.

adopt a democratic structure similar to our own. On the other hand, the nomadic people would likely require a different arrangement for democratically resolving conflicts. While a system of compromise in policy might work for the first group, the second might require that each person gets his or her way some of the time. While it is something of a subtle distinction it is very important considering that such an approach would drastically change the institutions used to implement such policies. The same is likely true of Afghanistan given the vast number of sub cultures and, to use Bohman's language, publics.

The result of these numerous complications pertains to the status of the democracy we are attempting to promote. This democracy is only democratic insofar as it is ours and remains within the context of our culture and its history. By attempting to extract key pieces and implant it in other settings, we are not appealing to the importance of culture, history and contexts. Given that democracy grew into its current form in our society from our historical experience and our symbolic reality, it is presumable that the same process must be supported and encouraged in other societies and cultures. While American exceptionalism has some recognisably noble ambitions and is perhaps well intentioned, it is largely unavoidable that democracy promotion becomes a kind of domination, insofar as democracy is used as a tool for statecraft and not treated as a continually evolving process. By using democracy as a tool for establishing stability, we operate within the framework of asking how we might improve this tool and not questioning its use as a tool altogether.

There is an undeniable sense of democratic exceptionalism present in the western world. Our positive experience of democracy and the subsequent ideological social reality

it generates creates an exuberant but blind drive to spread western political, social, and cultural values. Taken up by the United States as a model for foreign policy, that has been supported completely or in part by most western nations at one time or another, this drive has built a machine that propagates low intensity democracy. While Kissinger himself admits that it was the responsibility of the United States foreign policy makers to recognise that a policy of liberal democracy must not be employed arbitrarily with broad strokes, the responsibility of better understanding the nature of our own democracies falls on individuals. Because the knowledge, beliefs and opinions held by individuals are fundamentally tied to the shape of state governments, both groups are equally susceptible to suffer from symbolic myopia and therefore equally responsible for phenomena such as low intensity democracy.

With ideology's role in the creation of low intensity democracy explained, all that remains is to briefly examine some further consequences of low intensity democracy. We have already discussed many of the social and economic consequences in this chapter and the preceding chapter. Low intensity democracy can create short term damage to a state through the implementation of severe economic reforms and subtly limiting political freedom by forcing political movements to use a pre-established medium for competition, elections. Many of the long term implications of low intensity democracy are relatively unknown considering this phenomenon is, historically speaking, in its infancy. It may take centuries before all of the consequences are known. However, some clear trends have emerged.

The first consequence is obviously political stagnation given that it is a principle condition of low intensity democracy. Many of the states cited in the previous chapter as

suffering from political corruption continue to have these problems and foreign sources of capital continue to have considerable influence over the policies of poorer nations. The long term consequence that has yet to be discussed is the potential damage low intensity democracy can cause democracy as a symbol. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to address the issue in great detail some mention of it must be made.

Because our ideological relationships are always evolving, a phenomenon such as low intensity democracy can be very harmful to an ideal such as democracy. There are countless historical examples of movements beginning as positive initiatives only to later be recognised as barbaric imperialism.[9] For every so called democracy that is limiting the rights of its citizens and imposing harsh economic reforms, the general faith in democracy is bound to decrease. While it is likely a mistake to classify low intensity democracies as democratic given the account of the democratic ideal we have explored, they are frequently classified as such. This simple association is sufficient to make us question the value of democracy. The terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001 represent the impact that such a transformation can have. While this is perhaps the most extreme example, it demonstrates the power that one's relationship with a symbol can have. Tangible symbols of American economic and military might and pride were viciously attacked. This further underscores the importance of recognising the status of the ideological relationships that shape our lives in very significant ways.

If the problems that democracy promotion is intended to solve are ever remedied, the complexity of these problems must be recognised. Furthermore, the considerable time

9 British colonialism being perhaps one of the best known examples.

it takes to establish sustained and meaningful social reforms must be respected. Finally, if the unique character of symbolic reality is ignored, progress will be equally difficult to achieve. If we maintain our current ideological relationship with democracy, we will continue to use it as a tool. While well intended, overzealous attempts to quickly remedy challenges abroad will result in more political unrest and dangerous armed conflicts. These initiatives will likely fail to get to the heart of many of the problems we are looking to address. Gills and Rocamora's claim that a western focus on promoting basic development might be more productive is echoed in Patel's work. Working to eliminate sources of desperation such as abject poverty and other major forms of human suffering is a more appropriate goal for the world's most affluent nations.

Conclusion

Over the course of this thesis a number of themes and disciplines have been consulted in order to explore the complex and troubling issue of low intensity democracy. Low intensity democracy exists as a kind of perverse shadow of democracy. It masquerades as democracy while failing to contain or promote the values of the democratic ideal. The democratic ideal serves as a target for which we can aim to improve our lives through the use of our capacity for reason and communication. While there will never be a shortage of human conflict given the emotional nature of humanity, the limited resources of the planet and the scope of human imagination, the democratic ideal steers us away from the violent activities and practices that threaten the destruction of the public space. Through hard work and the willingness to accept the risks and responsibilities of speech and action, our conflicts can be resolved and our challenges met. Democracy is valuable and many lives have been lived and lost to ensure the possibility of democratic activity remains.

Regrettably, the many nuances of democracy and the hard work it requires drop out of focus all too easily. From an individual perspective, the full scope of democracy cannot be engaged with symbolically given that it is such a massive concept. Like any complex idea, it is symbolically trimmed down so that it might fit into the network of interdependent symbols that make up human communication and language. While we regard democracy as a positive and valuable thing, articulating why this is the case takes considerable time and attention. We can easily mistake the targets the democratic ideal has us aim for, as a kind of utopian goal we have achieved or are close to achieving.

While western democracies are well developed there is considerable room for improvement and further evolution. Taking the current (2011) Canadian election as an example, two key issues questioning the quality of our democracy have come up. The first is the involvement of the youth. A general disinterest about politics among young voters is found troubling by many. Many young people simply believe that their interests are of no concern to political leaders. The aggressive use of social media by the major political parties has been a somewhat successful attempt in curbing this trend. This represents a healthy evolution of the democratic process. On the other hand, the media outlets hosting the leadership debates denied the leader of the green party the right to appear in the televised debates. While her party holds no seats in the House of Commons it did receive a significant portion of the popular vote in the last election. The decision of the hosts of the debate to deny an individual who was in the position to make a significant contribution to the debate certainly runs contrary to democratic values. The same can be said of election rhetoric concerning "illegitimate government coalitions." If elected representatives of differing political positions can come together and agree on policy decisions one would be hard pressed to argue that this is not a fundamentally democratic activity.

Reconciling the apparent calibre and stability of our democracies with challenges that have just been mentioned is a difficult task. To adamantly defend and support democracy while having to also be critical of it is a challenging position precisely because of our symbolic relations. We resist anything that would tarnish a thing, position or value that we have placed great importance or faith in. In the same way we often do not wish to meet a celebrity to see their flaws and their humanity, we are not delighted by the

prospect to confront the more demanding aspects of democracy. Because this is the case, a reality where democracy is wonderful and should be shared with the rest of the world is easily accepted and embraced. Like Marx's description of the reality that maintains the slave-labour relationship, we have not deceived ourselves into believing that democracy is flawless. It is simply the case that the language and rhetoric of the democratic age occurs within the context of liberal western society. It is indeed true that the democracy we enjoy exists and is reasonably good. However, this narrative does not include the possibility of alternatives. Like the example of the divided village, certain situations we are forced to engage with challenge the current reality and illuminate the problems we cannot articulate from within the system. The simultaneous pursuit of democracy promotion by the United States and their condemnation of the election of Hamas in Palestine is a contemporary example of this phenomenon. In this situation, a group with ties to terrorists, the supposed enemies of democracy, is elected democratically. This event appears like a glitch in a computer program. Something that should not be possible has occurred and the only explanation is that there is a problem with the structure of the system. Therefore, it is the job of the individual to be aware of cracks in the fabric of reality. Within these cracks, these nonsensical or seemingly illogical scenarios, that we are likely to find more truth then within the frameworks of our ideological realities.

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