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# Translating Transformative Human Rights Education through Visual Languages & Informal Spaces

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University of San Francisco

**Translating Transformative Human Rights Education  
through Visual Languages & Informal Spaces**

A Field Project Presented to  
The Faculty of the School of Education  
International & Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in Human Rights Education

by  
Jazzmin Chizu Gota  
December 2015

# **Transformative Human Rights Education through Visual Languages & Informal Spaces**

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in

HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

by

Jazzmin Chizu Gota

December 2015

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approved by all the members, this field project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Approved:

Dr. Onllwyn. Dixon  
Instructor/Chairperson Date

December 20, 2015  
Date

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## ABSTRACT

This project examines methods, theories, and practices of translating human rights education through multiple vernaculars. Developed as a workshop in sociocultural syntax deconstruction and an educational human rights education website focused on the domestic population of the US, the project focuses on localizing human rights concepts to the public vernacular of the country. Human rights education (HRE) and media and information literacy (MIL) are expanded and redefined as social literacy, or the ability to navigate and decode the present, complex realities that both HRE and MIL were developed to address. Reframing media and visual arts as an archive of past and present conceptualizations of memory and narrative formations, the project explores educational methods and theories of adapting human rights concepts into public spaces.

## CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

### **Statement of the Problem**

In 2013, I participated a class project for a graduate course in human rights education (HRE) at University of San Francisco. The project had been developed by my classmates and was titled, “I Have a Human Right to \_\_\_\_\_”, inspired by Candy Chang’s (2013) “Before I Die \_\_\_\_\_” project. As a social participatory public engagement project (Chang, 2013) the class was dispersed around the Ferry Building in San Francisco, California. There was a farmer’s market that day, and the area was filled with tourists and locals alike. We wore our university-issued student identification cards, and in pairs, ran through the market asking, “Have you heard of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)? What country are you from? What do you have a human right to?”

As the project neared its end, I noticed that passersby were taking more interest in the display of “I Have a Human Right to \_\_\_\_\_” cards than being surveyed. They went towards the art display, took photos, tried to read the little notes, did double takes and asked about what we were doing with the card presentation. Observing this behavior, I shifted my opening question from “Have you heard of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?” to “Would like to participate in our art project?”

Two years later, I realize that the “I Have a Human Right to \_\_\_\_\_” project reflected the cultural *conceptual map* (Hall, 1997b) of human rights discourse in the US. Many Americans conceptualize human rights as Constitutional rights (Grant & Gibson, 2013), and art projects illicit a different response than surveys, even if it is the same content. With that in mind:

1. How can the academic vernacular of human rights be translated into a publically accessible form?

2. Can art and visual languages to teach human rights through adapting to sociocultural linguistic syntax?

It has been my experience that starting any conversation with the words *human rights* outside of contexts and spaces that have already adopted the language often leads to blank stares and assumptions that the conversation is about to get political. This project theorizes that part of this problem is in the way that human rights discourse is framed and understood within the context of the US as one that exists in higher academics, law, and politics (Grant & Gibson, 2013; Tibbitts, 2015).

To contextualize this problem within official discourse, in response to the 2015 Universal Periodic Review (UPR)—a peer review of the human rights records of member states of the United Nations—the US articulated human rights in the following paragraph:

2. Human rights are embedded in our *Constitution*, laws, and policies at every level, and governmental action is subject to review by an independent judiciary and debated by a *free press and an engaged civil society*. Not only do individuals within the United States have effective legal means to seek policy, administrative, and judicial remedies for human rights violations and abuses, the government itself pursues extensive and comprehensive enforcement actions to create systematic reform. Our federal system enables our nation to test new methods and strategies for promoting human rights at the state and local levels. (U.S. Department of State, 2015, p. 2, emphasis added).

While *free press* and *engaged civil society* are, in fact, human rights, they represent rights that only exist within the limited spectrum of *civil and political rights* (Grant & Gibson, 2013), thereby lacking the inclusion of economic, social, and cultural rights; community rights, and specific rights for the protection of, to list a few, women, children, persons with disabilities, migrant workers and their families, and victims of enforced disappearance (Center for the Study of Human Rights, 2005).

In recognizing the present-day narrative of human rights in the US, the following project analyzes, deconstructs, and adapts perceptions and discourse on this subject (Armaline,



Glasberg, & Pukayashtha, 2011; Bekerman & Zembylas, 2014; Flowers, 2002; Grant & Gibson, 2013). Through sociocultural linguistic syntax analysis (Hall, 1997a; 1997b), visual languages and multidisciplinary vernaculars will be used to examine how narratives function within the creation of societal norms and standards (Merry, 2006).

Examined as an issue of human rights literacy (Flowers, 2002) and communication of vernaculars, the theoretical framework for the project has been drawn from Hall's (1997b) theory of *representation* (specifically, conceptual maps) and Merry's (2006) theory of *social vernacularization* of human rights norms from the international to national, and national to local, connected through the United Nation Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) (2011) redefinition of literacy:

Literacy is at present recognized to be a *plural and dynamic* concept; increasingly literate individuals are those who have the competencies... that allow them to both understand and relate to their surroundings in ways *more subtle than simply comprehending words or numbers strung together*... Today, *literate individuals need to have a critical comprehension of messages, including 'media texts.'* They, in effect, must be familiar with what academics recognize as the semantics and semiotics of psycholinguistics. (p. 10, emphasis added)

These frameworks examine the large-scale idea of redefining *literacy* for current sociocultural, political and economic realities, and how this can be practically approached through language, presentation, and translation.

Traditional literacy skills, as defined by the norms of the past century, are no longer adequate to address present-day methods of communication and social realities (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2011). The basic ability to read and write no longer provides the decoding skills required to navigate and translate a world where the Oxford Dictionary "Word of the Year" is an *emoji* (illustration) of a "Face with Tears of Joy" (Oxford Dictionary, 2015). In exploring this gap, the project seeks to expand UNESCO's (2011)

redefinition of literacy through the transformational model of HRE (Bajaj, 2011; Tibbitts, 2002).

It is hypothesized that, similar to the traditional definition of literacy, as consciousness of patterns of historical violence, counter-narratives, systemic discrimination, and the effects of colonialism on the diverse, multicultural and intercultural environment of the US expands (Alexander, 2012; Takaki, 1993; Zia, 2000), so must our ability to holistically conceptualize *literacy*. The question is in how to adapt human rights to the sociocultural syntax and vernacularize ideas through engaging public discourses and *shared languages* (Hall, 1997b).

Following these theories, the ideas presented here reflect the philosophy of the transformational model of HRE (Bajaj, 2011; Tibbitts, 2002). As defined by Tibbitts (2002), this model:

is geared towards empowering the individual to both *recognize human rights abuses* and to *commit to their prevention*. In some cases, whole communities—not just the individual—are treated as the target audience. This model involves techniques (based partly on developmental psychology) that involve self-reflection and support within the community. (p. 11, emphasis added)

Furthermore, this model “assumes that students have had personal experiences that can be seen as human rights violations... and that they are therefore predisposed to become promoters of human rights” (p. 11). Within the aforementioned theoretical framework, the goal can be phrased as *social transformation* through raising *social literacy*.

As an educational experiment in HRE and translating vernaculars, the theorized process can be understood as the interruption of social habits, translation of new information through a fluent vernacular and, therefore, the adaption of information based on the context of the individual (Hall, 1997b; Merry, 2006). To this point, the definition of *shared languages* will consider popular culture, examples of narrative adaption across multiple disciplines, and commonly spoken/consumed forms of media arts and vernaculars.

In summary, the problem is that many Americans under-define human rights as analogous to Constitutional rights (Flowers, 2002; Grant & Gibson, 2013). Translated into the theory that all sociocultural understandings are the manifestation and internalization of narratives and stories that develop and adapt over time (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2014; Hall, 1997b), this issue of human rights literacy is framed as an issue of education and social standards that best falls under Article 26 of the UDHR, “Everyone has the right to education” and “the full development of the human personality” (United Nations General Assembly, 1948).

### **Purpose of the Project**

*The world changes according to the way people see it, and if you alter, even by a millimeter, the way a person looks or people look at reality, then you can change it” (Baldwin via Watkins, 1979, p. 37)*

The purpose of this project is to translate human rights into publically accessible forms to expand the perception of human rights by reframing the concept of what it means to be literate in present-day sociocultural contexts. Through translating between academic and public vernaculars the project examines the theoretical framework of culture and language (Hall, 1997b) and how ideas adapt to internalized narratives. For the purposes of bringing this concept into practice, the project will consider examples of sociocultural norm adaption through media and visual art spaces and how to best translate international human rights concepts for the general American public (Hall, 1997b; Said, 1979; Takaki, 1993).

Returning to the “I Have a Human Right to \_\_\_\_\_” project, I observed that there were two ways in which engagement with the project was occurring: Direct interaction through the survey, and indirect consumption of information about human rights through the presentation. Approaching this transformational HRE project from the perspective of the latter, the purpose here is to find ways in which human rights norms are adapted and vernacularized organically, or

automatically (American Psychological Association, 2004; Benson, 2010; Merry, 2006.)

For example, according to Merry's (2006) study on the translation of international human and women's rights discourse to the local level, domestic violence is "framed" differently in India than in China, due to the different cultural stories that inform their social discourse (p. 136). To this point, "the frame is the interpretive package surrounding a core idea" (Merry, 2006, p. 136). If the core idea is expanding the definition of human rights, the "interpretive package" in the context of the United States, this project focuses on two methods:

1. Speaking human rights through popular culture and media & information literacy (MIL) indirectly, as a semi-formal community college level workshop on narrative syntax
2. A United States specific HRE website and social media experiment that utilizes multiple vernaculars, including visual languages, to translate human rights to the public sphere

At the intersection of media and information literacy (MIL) and transformational HRE, these models work through existing frameworks for the purposes of translating, adapting, and transforming discourse through working channels of communication (Bajaj, 2011; Tibbitts, 2002; Hall, 1997b; Merry, 2006).

By using a multidisciplinary approach to teaching transformational HRE, the project explores the possibilities of using localized sociocultural language to adapt human rights discourse through the deconstruction of both systems of information as basic linguistic syntax—i.e. A + N + D = and = & = as well as = together with = in addition to, and so on. The difference in the case of this project is that linguistic syntax (spelling and letter/symbol meanings) is being replaced with concepts in universal human rights (United Nations General Assembly, 1948) and

compared with misguided actions that occur due to misinformation and lack of social literacy of the recent past (Esses, Medianu, & Lawson, 2013; Gross, Moore, & Threadgold, 2007; Mollard, 2001; Ng, 2002).

Framing HRE through this model of transformation, the project assumes that those involved in the consumption of the information within the project already possess the frameworks (in one form or another) with which to deconstruct and consider the realities in which they live. The purpose of using this particular methodology is to reframe these discussions within an adaptable framework that focuses on the *translation* and *adaptation* aspect of discourse evolution on the micro level.

To expand this discussion of adaption and translation of issues social structure, Johan Galtung (1969) defines *structural violence* as “when one husband beats his wife there is a clear case of personal violence, but when one million husbands keep one million wives in ignorance there is structural violence” (p. 171). Reframing this concept within the realm of human rights, the issue is in the central issue of *ignorance* can be applied to the concept of being illiterate in the current influences and semiotics of the present sociocultural landscape, which, at the time of this writing, includes, among other things, universal human rights standards and concepts, multiple versions of histories and contested narratives, and intersecting and emerging fields of sociological inquiry in the realms of equality, power, and constructions of realities (Hall, 1997b; Takaki, 1993).

Updating the definition of literacy to include both MIL and human rights will be defined within this project as *social literacy*: The ability to conceptualize and decode the present-day influences within the social standards of universal human rights language. The use of this term is also conceptualized as another method of translating human rights from the realms of law and

politics to the realm of general knowledge.

Through connecting MIL to human rights education and literacy it is hypothesized that the discourse around HRE could be built upon within spaces of media studies, art history, and art and design practice. The optimistic, long-term goal of the project is to build upon the foundations of transformational HRE and MIL to facilitate language and discourse that makes visible the complexities of present-day realities as they connect to post-colonial theory, post-structural thought, and globalization.

### Theoretical Framework

*At the heart of the meaning process in culture... are two related 'systems of representation'. The first enables us to give meaning to the world by constructing a set of correspondences or chain of equivalences between things... and our system of concepts, our conceptual maps. The second depends on constructing a set of correspondences between our conceptual map and a set of signed, arranged or organized into various languages which stand for or represent those concepts. The relation between 'things,' concepts and signs lies at the heart of the production of meaning in language. The process that links these three elements together is what we call 'representation'.*  
(Hall, 1997b, p. 19).

In the *Decay of Lying*, Oscar Wilde (2007) observes the following about the role of art within sociological spaces, “Life imitates art far more than art imitates life” (p. 378). To interpret Wilde’s observation about the dynamic between life and art within the conceptual framework of this project, according to Stuart Hall (1997a), processes of *representation* work through a *circuit of culture* that goes as follows: representation, identity, production, consumption, regulation, and then back to representation (p. 1). From within this framework, the *consumption* of art (as defined as social narrative/information), theoretically, demonstrates the idea that *life*, does in fact, *imitate art*—or, more specifically, life reproduces and reinterprets the narratives that exist within the scope of its shared languages and conceptual maps (Hall, 1997b, p. 18).

Applying this line of reasoning to an example outside of literal language systems, imagine you are at a traffic signal light in the US and the light is red. Do you know what the red signifies? Do you know what the position of light being at the top of the three circles in the light signifies? Could you figure out what the light meant if it were a horizontal traffic light instead of a vertical one? Why? Why does red mean, “stop”, green means, “go,” and yellow means “prepare to stop”? This is an example of the process of representation, as explained by Hall (1997b) in the section *The Language of Traffic Lights* (pp. 26–27).

The interpretation of traffic signals shows how representation works outside of the structure of written language. Red can stand in for the concept of “stop”, and, in this same example, it is possible to see how the *social vernacularization* (Merry, 2006) of the idea that a *red traffic light = stop* has been accomplished through the idea that the concept is one that is understood by trained/socialized drivers (Hall, 1997b). To bring the concept of social literacy into this mental illustration, drivers would be at a direct disadvantage if they were not given the tools/information to understand this principle (and there is a distinction being made here between those who know and those who choose to ignore the red light), or the frameworks and information needed in order to interpret that *red* still means stop even if the light is horizontal—i.e. critical thinking skills to transfer concepts.

Within the realm of human rights and social justice, this process (and the lack of literacy around this process) has brought to life narratives such as “enemy race = all persons with 1/16 Japanese blood” (Conrat & Contrat, 1992; Ng, 2002; Takaki, 1993), “terrorist = Muslim” (Kozlovic, 2009), and “young + black = criminal” (Alexander, 2012). From this perspective, if we replace the above traffic safety illustration with discriminatory beliefs and the narratives that

justify them, the conversation about human rights can be facilitated through breakdowns in narrative representation.

Expanding upon the basic syntax analysis of representation, Merry (2006) examines *social vernacularization* through the processes and systems that localize and codify international human rights law within different local/national spaces (p. 161). Within this analysis of vernacularization, Merry observes, “translation has three dimensions. First, the images, symbols, and stories through which the program is presented draw on specific local cultural narratives and conceptions” (p. 136). Within the context of this project, this definition of *translation* as it applies to process of *social vernacularization* (Merry, 2006) informs the theory of *representation* (Hall, 1997b) as the dynamic of adapting and shifting narrative realities that inform the sociocultural landscape of a nation, community, or individual.

Returning to the idea of *social literacy*, it is, therefore, helpful to be aware of the current *conceptual map* of human rights in order to determine how to best *translate* human rights so that they may effect the *conceptual map* and *vernacularize* into the social code (Flowers, 2002; Hall, 1997b; Merry, 2006). Social change and transformation, within this framework, could be interpreted as the awareness of social codes and the choice to question them by breaking down the basic sociological constructions of reality through the analysis of sociocultural linguistic syntax of the theory of representation (Hall, 1997b). It is hypothesized that if an idea or *conceptual map* can be broken down into a series of elements (stories and influences) then it may be possible to adapt and amend into larger *conceptual maps*, thereby *socially vernacularizing* the idea into the social code—i.e. structural environment.

In analyzing these theories within the context of United States social history, the idea of changes to realities—adaption of attitudes and shifts/rewriting and retelling of national



narratives—represents the natural development of human histories (Takaki, 1993; Zia, 2000). To summarize: Ideas, stories, and *conceptual maps* are subject to and reliant on their representation and reproduction through these same channels of social does in order to survive.

To highlight another illustration of these same concepts, Ross King's (2013) book *Leonardo and the Last Supper* illustrates this theoretical framework through the history of Da Vinci's famous fresco. The fresco as it currently exists (and is known by the general public) is thought to be, "80% by [art] restorers and 20% by Leonardo" (p. 274). Without delving into the entire history of the restoration process, the point that I am alluding to with this bit of art history is that while *The Last Supper* was considered to be in a "total state of ruin" back in 1582, or that, at one point, Jesus Christ's feet were "amputated" to make way for a door, or that an art restorer in 1770 decided to wash the delicate fresco in caustic soda (King, 2013, pp. 271–272), the piece is still considered a *masterpiece* and one of Da Vinci's most famous pieces (King, 2013).

Through this theory and the aforementioned art analogy, *social codes* must be consumed and reproduced in order for the *conceptual map* to remain relevant and in use. To quote Da Vinci, "What is fair in men passes away, but not so in art" (as cited in King, 2013, p. 271). *Art* could be interpreted here as *stories* and *ideas*—the visual representations of the pieces that make up the *conceptual maps* from which mental illustrations are drawn and interpretations of the world filter through. Stories, in this sense, do not pass away—they adapt and evolve as they are internalized, represented, and reproduced in social code and discourse. However, nothing may exist in its original form forever. All ideas are subject to change and interpretation, which, in turn, affect the larger conceptual maps and social norms. Computer technologies become obsolete, the bindings on books come undone, stones eventually turn to sand—and world

renowned Italian frescos flake off the wall and are repainted and interpreted, digitized, reproduced as canvas bags, and transform into pop-art (King, 2013).

It is impossible to know how the present will transform into the future. However, that is the point. Change is inevitable and the ideas and foundations that are set now will help shape the constructions of the next set of sociocultural maps/social norms and codes. The theoretical framework for this project has been designed to deconstruct and reconstruct macro/micro sociocultural syntax (language) structures to create openings for conversations, consideration, and contemplation on the foundational elements of social beliefs and structures for the purposes of facilitating critical thought and fulfilling the *right to self-determination* (United Nations General Assembly, 1966) and the “right to a social order that articulates this [Universal Declaration of Human Rights] document” (United Nations General Assembly, 1948).

### **Significance of the Project**

The current conceptual map (Hall, 1997b) of human rights in the US leaves a significant gap in domestic discourse when it comes to envisioning the full scope of human rights engaging public spaces (Grant & Gibson, 2013; Tibbitts, 2015). As stated by Armaline et al. (2011) “a 2007 survey of U.S. adults by the Opportunity Agenda found that 80 percent of respondents believed ‘the U.S. does a better job than most countries when it comes to protecting human rights’”, as well as that human rights issues are typically framed as happening “over there”, i.e. not domestically, or related to the US (p.1).

Comparing the statement “the U.S. does a better job than most countries” on human rights (Armaline et al., 2011, p. 1) with “human rights are embedded in our Constitution, laws” (U.S. Department of State, 2015, p. 2) demonstrates this gap in discourse. To this point, the

primary significance of this project is in its specific focus on translation and adaptations of vernaculars from a practical perspective.

Lampert (2013) observes, “When social movements embrace artists, they harness the power of those who excel at expressing new ideas and researching people in ways that words and other forms of media cannot. They harness the power of visual culture...” (p. xi). This project looks at this concept of communication and translation between academic human rights discourse and publically accessible vernaculars through the space of visual and media arts by speaking *through* visual languages to learn to decode and navigate through systems of representation.

Defining art in terms of human rights, art—the creation and participation of it—is the enjoyment of the Articles 18 and 19 (right to expression and opinion) and Article 27 (participation in the cultural life of the community) of the UDHR (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). From this perspective, this project acts as an experiment in the definitions and use of visual medias, as well as a vehicle with which to test the theoretical framework of where representation and social vernacularization of human rights can build upon the present-day *conceptual maps* to shift the foundational discourse around human rights in the United States. It is an experiment in vernaculars and the expansion of the transformational model of HRE through informal spaces (American Psychological Association, 2004; Benson, 2010; Cernat, 2014; Kozlovic, 2009).

The basic framework of the project differs from exhibition projects such as the The Human Rights Exhibition Project (ND) or A People’s Art History of the United States of America (Lampert, 2013) in that it focuses on the breakdown of the syntax of narratives and languages and adaption of rhetoric for the purposes of *translating* human rights into the personal

vernacular. While the aforementioned examples are history and awareness projects, the following project utilizes examples and collects information on similar subjects, but for the purpose of learning to deconstruct and navigate the information that narratives and memories inform.

By focusing directly and indirectly on teaching concept adaption and translation, the project explores educational openings in engaging student-driven learning through setting up frameworks that work through what is known to consider and adapt the unknown, unfamiliar, and misunderstood. This process is designed to question and break down narrative formations dominant discourse and consider stories, information, and perspectives that exist outside the frame of one's reality, with the intention of creating openings and discussions to determine how one will choose to conduct oneself when interpreting actions and events in the present.

For example, if one does not know that one has the right to an “adequate standard of living” or to “health care” or to “education”, how can one call for this right to be respected, protected or fulfilled? (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). As economic, social, and cultural rights, these concepts are not included in the current conceptualization of human rights in the US (Grant & Gibson, 2013), even though, by numbers, the US ranks highest in income *inequality* and has one of the highest child poverty rates in the world (Center for Economic and Social Rights, 2010).

However, as this is not a project specifically focused on only speaking to those who already understand and agree with the universal human rights standards, the translation of these rights through media and visual arts has been selected as a method of communicating through and across political aisles and socioeconomic spaces. While art and media (including literature) is not—and has not ever been—a depoliticized space, the power that it has through interpretation

is of much greater value to this project when looking at public spaces and the language of popular culture than that of a formal government report or academic project.

During my undergraduate program, I learned to translate academic, art, history, and storytelling rhetoric into a diverse number of student jargons. This practice carried into my professional work where I focus on translating concepts to visual projects and design multimedia campaigns. Following this practice of translation, over the past two years I have learned to iterate human rights through everything from analogies to science fiction novels, analysis of Disney films, *Saturday Night Live* skits, Broadway musicals, and the explanation of what happens to a house if you build it on a poorly planned foundation.

Through recognizing and acknowledging the present realities of human rights discourse in the US this project frames this issue as one of literacy that requires an educational intervention. For the purposes of basic human rights information, the base of the current vernacular (human rights = Constitutional rights) will be utilized as a point of reference to translate and expand upon through other informal spaces of knowledge, such as film, television, popular culture, literature, and visual arts.

## CHAPTER II REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### **Introduction**

“[Discourse] scholars are human rights nihilists. Philosophically, nihilism does not entail the rejection of all moral principles... it can signal the call for new values to be created through the re-interpretation of old values that have lost their original sense. Having to live with the supremacy of the language of human rights in contemporary political discourse, to the extent that discourse scholars accept this language, they call for its re-evaluation” (Dembour, 2010, p. 10).

How does information replicate and translate through sociological spaces and across times, places, and social structures? In examining the intersection of media and information literacy (MIL) and transformational human rights education, this review of literature explores multidisciplinary theories and histories that influence social codes and norms (American Psychological Association, 2004; Bekerman & Zembylas, 2014; Hall, 1997b; Merry, 2006; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2011). Parallels and similarities between literature on vernacularizing human rights (Merry, 2006), theories of propaganda and the use of images (Benson, 2010; Cernat, 2014), and the construction and deconstruction of sociocultural linguistic syntax in cultural studies (Hall, 1997a & 1997b) will be considered as they apply to the translation of universal human rights.

An analysis of the development and construction of the macro conceptual map of the United States focuses on the connection of histories that demonstrate the power media-arts have to influence and inform public opinion (Alexander, 2012; Benson, 2010; Kozlovic, 2009). Part of this examination of media-arts and sociological influence/impact will include definitions and clarifications of *art* and *media* as vehicles for communication and messages that are integrally linked to the conceptual maps from which their foundational information is constructed (Hall, 1997b).

To consider the redefinition of *literacy* as it relates to present-day sociocultural realities this review of literature will examine the following areas:

1. Reframing and Expanding HRE in the US;
2. Constructing and Deconstructing Narratives as Social Codes; and
3. Translating Concepts Across Disciplines: Social Theory through Media Arts.

These discussions will consider how transformational human rights education can be iterated through sociocultural syntax deconstruction across and through mediums and methods of communication.

Within the study and practice of human rights there are multiple interpretations and philosophical foundational frameworks from which it can be conceptualized. To frame this review of literature, and give some context to the perspective from which it is written, the key concept in the quote above is “new values to be created through the re-interpretation of old values that have lost their original sense” (Dembour, 2010, p. 10). Discussions around this same concept have been articulated in Chapter I as the *social vernacularization* (Merry, 2006) of social codes and norms into the conceptual map (Hall, 1997b), as defined as the social structure and consciousness of the individual, community, society or nation.

In theory, if one can recognize the realities in which one exists then the possibilities for changing the reality of the present becomes a matter of awareness and tools to conceptualize the present and future (Bajaj, 2011; Dembour, 2010; Merry, 2006). Through language, translation, adaption, and micro to macro vernacularization of human rights concepts, can recognizing patterns and habits aid in the codification of human rights?

Further articulation and illustration of the concept of *conceptual maps* can be found in translating this social theory as *narrative formations*. To Bekerman and Zembylas (2014),

“Stories are not innocent. . . variations in stories constitute one of the most common source of conflict in human affairs” (p. 98). *Stories*, from this perspective, are another way to conceptualize macro and micro sociocultural beliefs that can be broken down as the elements of *conceptual maps*. Written as a pseudo equation: conceptual maps = shared narratives/stories = social structures and codes. The power that information possesses to inform and influence the psyche has been observed to correlate to the translatability of a story into the public vernacular during specific moments in time (American Psychological Association, 2004; Appadurai, 1990; Benson, 2010; Cernat, 2014).

To this point, defining reality within the context of the present-day is complicated. With the abundance of information available at all hours of the night and day from all over the world, determining what is *fact*, what was once fact and has since been debunked, and what will be fact soon is becoming increasingly difficult (Appadurai, 1990). Truth and fact adapt as justice and injustice are redefined through generations of thought and inquiry that revise and influence public memory of an event. For example, the original case for the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II was based on a narrative that all persons with 1/16<sup>th</sup> Japanese blood were members of the “enemy race” (Ng, 2002; Takaki, 1993). As the war came to an end, and multiple civil and legal battles were brought against the government for collecting an entire ethnic group into concentration camps (Ng, 2002), the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 was passed and the narrative experienced an official revision. In a letter to those who had been interned (and their families), President Bill Clinton stated:

In passing the *Civil Liberties Act of 1988*, we acknowledge the wrongdoings of the past and offer redress to those who endured such grave injustice. In retrospect, we understand that the nation’s actions were *rooted deeply in racial prejudice, wartime hysteria, and a lack of political leadership*. *We must learn from the past and dedicate ourselves as a nation to renewing the spirit of equality and our love of freedom.* (as cited in Children of



the Camps, 1999, emphasis added)

This is one example of many instances of history and narratives being revised through time, though it is an unusual example as acknowledgement and mass-redress.

The above history is a counter-narrative that I am familiar with due to it being directly related to my intellectual and family lineage. For this reason, the study of narratives focuses on the redefining literacy to consider structural violence and human rights standards to interrupt social hysterias and misinformation campaigns before they manifest into repetitions of history that will later require apologies and redress.

### **Reframing and Expanding HRE in the US**

“The United States has the dubious distinction of talking the human rights talk—especially when it comes to the actions of others—but failing to walk the human rights walk when international law and standards conflict with the power or interests of the United States.” (Armaline et al., 2011, pp. 1–2)

The US has demonstrated, through both policy and discourse, to be greatly interested in the intervention of human rights affairs of *Others* (Said, 1979) while being generally assured of its own human rights standing domestically, despite the many critiques and domestic issues around human rights within the nation’s recent history and present-day realities (Ng, 2002; Takaki, 1993; U.S. Department of State, 2015; Zozula, 2011). From the dominant narrative within the current sociopolitical vernacular, it would appear as though human rights have been fulfilled and realized in the US, because *human rights* = *Constitutional Rights* (Flowers, 2002; U.S. Department of State, 2015).

The problematic nature of this discourse exists within how human rights, as a system, are codified and conceptualized by both the general civilian populous and in how that same population (separated by complex systems of class and race) makes up the the members of the U.S. government, who, in turn, create policy that governs a specific site of social norm

production in the country. Placing this issue into the official narrative, “Human rights are embedded in our *Constitution*, laws, and policies at every level” (U.S. Department of State, 2015, p. 2); if *human rights = Constitutional Rights* then, from the limited scope of civil and political rights, *human rights* could be interpreted as being in much better shape than present-realities demonstrate them to be (Alexander, 2012; Armaline et al, 2011; Takaki, 1993).

While the record for the US’s record on *civil and political rights* is a questionable and contested area (Alexander, 2012; Zozula, 2011), official discourse on the subject further complicates discussions that seeks to expand into the realm of *social, cultural, and economic rights* (International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights). Additionally, conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, to list a few that have yet to be ratified (or codified in US consciousness) as of 2014 (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2014).

As stated in “*The Path of Social Justice*”: *A Human Rights History of Social Justice Education* (Grant & Gibson, 2013):

As we seek to understand today’s social justice movements, we often turn to the protest movements of the late twentieth century, such as the Civil Rights and Women’s Rights Movements. While these are important forebears, attention to them can ignore the justice work of earlier decades. Thus, we look here to the oft-overlooked Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and its sister documents (1945–1951), arguing that they are an antecedent social justice manifesto that continues to shape global discourse about justice, equality, and social responsibility. We believe that a human rights orientation to social justice can concretize what is often critiqued as an amorphous, ideological standpoint, particularly within education. (p. 82)

In their overview and analysis of the history of social justice and human rights, Grant & Gibson (2013) examine how social justice history is conceptualized and where it intersects with

international human rights. The authors present, “another side to the story of the UDHR (and to today’s resistance to social justice) is America’s elevation of property rights above all other rights” (Grant & Gibson, 2013, p. 82).

To further expand on the relationship between the US and early human rights:

Since 1945, the United States has provided critical leadership in shaping human rights institutions and treaties. It was U.S. leadership that helped to found the UN and, in its Charter, formally codified “human rights.” (Sok & Neubeck, 2011, p. 231)

Historically, the US participated in the development of the UDHR, “led by Eleanor Roosevelt asked as Chair of the first UN Human Rights Commission” (Sok & Neubeck, 2011, p. 231), though, in the present, our participation in international human rights systems has slowed. Discourse around human rights has, as previously mentioned by Armaline et al. (2011) and Grant and Gibson (2013), “selectively championed human rights” (Sok & Neubeck, 2011, p. 231) ascribed issues of human rights abuses and treaties to countries and entities outside of itself.

Within this context, HRE is an existent field in the US but a clearly visible one within the public sphere (Flowers, 2002; Tibbitts, 2015). While progress is being made through educational projects and programs, such as the those detailed in *Bringing Human Rights Education to U.S. Classrooms: Exemplary Models from Elementary Grades to University* (Katz & Spero, 2015), the most common response I have personally received to stating, “I’m studying human rights education” has been a very confused “What is *that*?”

While the US had been at the forefront of the human rights movement during its inception, the current status in regards to ratifying (codifying) international human rights treaties has slowed since the ratification of the UDHR in 1948 (Armaline et al., 2011; Grant & Gibson, 2013). One example of the relationship between the US as international human rights standards can be seen through the country’s status regarding the *International Bill of Human Rights*, which

consists of the UDHR, Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR), and Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESCR). However, the US has not ratified one third of CESCR (The Advocates for Human Rights, 2013).

Regarding treaty status, and to put the discussed discourse and history into perspective, the US is the “only industrialized country in the world” that has not ratified Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (Women’s Institute for Leadership Development for Human Rights, 2006, p. 17), and is the only United Nations member state that has not ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child as of 2014 (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2014). The US also does not participate in the regional Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

With this in mind, another method ratifying human rights treaties was developed by the Women’s Institute for Leadership and Development (WILD) for Human Rights (2006). *Making Rights Real* is a booklet that details the steps that WILD used to ratify CEDAW as a city ordinance in San Francisco in 1998. As a city ordinance, the project involved community engagement, education, advocacy, and coalition building that lead to a change in citywide policy.

A unique aspect of the Cities for CEDAW project is that it is an adaptable model that explains, in a publically accessible language, how and why to engage human rights in a US city.

As stated by Sok and Neubeck (2011) of the San Francisco ordinance:

One of the best ways to support the U.S. human rights movement is by education about, organizing around, and seeking to implement human rights at the local level. The impact of such activities can be beneficial, regardless of the outcome. There is no one exact model for implement human rights in each locale... There is a lot of room for creativity in implement human rights at the local level, and *ultimately how it will occur will be subject to the will of the people in communities.* (pp. 242–243, emphasis added)

Relating this logic to the framework of the project attached to this review of literature, the “will of people in communities” is a key concept. Through familiarity and adapting the standard of

human rights through popular culture and medias, can this aid in the facilitation and initiation of the movement to increase human rights literacy in the US?

### **Constructing and Deconstructing Narratives as Social Codes**

Reflecting on the historical formations of human rights and human rights education, what can be understood about the present-day *conceptual map* of human rights in US? According to Merry's (2006) analysis, human rights norms can be translated from the international to the national and local. In the context of the US it becomes a question of how to translate the current understanding of human rights from one section of rights (civil and political = Constitution) to the larger map of human rights discourse.

To examine the building of *conceptual maps* as a series of *shared understandings*, or, what Bekerman and Zembylas (2014) refer to as *narratives* and *stories*, it is possible to analyze the process from the industries of advertising and what is known as the work of propaganda—who areas where ideas and norms *cascade* at a rapid (and nearly controlled) rate (American Psychological Association, 2004; Benson, 2010; Cernat, 2014). Momentarily departing from discussions on human rights education, what the worlds of marketing and propaganda demonstrate is the ability to affect and subversively influence *conceptual maps* through studying human behavior and formations of habit (American Psychological Association, 2004; Young Eun, Vosgerau, & Morewedge, 2014).

Approaching social change from the perspective of what Benson (2010) calls *unintentional or social propaganda* (p. 154), literature on the oppressive aspects of media (art, design, visual culture, et cetera...) demonstrate the same processes of *vernacularization* that Merry (2006) outlines in her study of the localization of human rights and *norms cascades*. Benson (2010) examines the historic origins of these processes in the *Archival Analysis of the*

*Committee on Public Information: The Relationship between Propaganda, Journalism and Popular Culture*. The central premise of the study revolves around the concept of deconstructing the history of formal propaganda in the United States and where it has bled into other areas of culture, thereby creating “unintentional” (social) propaganda (Benson, 2010, p. 154). The author seeks to “illustrate how even today the world of the CPI continues to have a direct effect on popular culture, journalism, and propaganda” (Benson, 2010, p. 153).

Within the realm of media studies, propaganda is defined as “the movement of information” (Benson, 2010, p. 155), which is similar to Hall’s (1997a; 1997b) definition of representation and systems of communication, as well as Merry’s (2006) definition of the processes of translating and vernacularizing human rights. In connecting these definitions together, the common theme is that of information and varying levels of *literacy* around how to process that information (American Psychological Association, 2004; Appadurai, 1990; Brock-Utne, 2009; Cernat, 2014; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2011). The power of image in the influence of public opinion is an area that has been of growing concern to both national and international entities, such as UNESCO internationally and the Federal Trade Commission on the national level. The term to describe their growing base of literature and educational initiatives has been termed *Media and Information Literacy* (Federal Trade Commission, ND; United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 2011).

Media and information literacy (MIL) is a growing field of education that seeks to address issues of consumer awareness and safety, public health, and the right to self-determination (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 2011). It is education and theory designed to address issues of awareness to the influences that impact and

inform decisions ranging from food purchases, to insurance and financial decisions, to beliefs and social norms that facilitate or instigate violence or harm to the self or Others through ascriptions of identity (Federal Trade Commission, ND; Mollard, 2001; United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 2011). Applying this line of reasoning to human rights, how can these concepts translate to the realm of social habits, behaviors, and the evolution of culture?

To further complicate this discussion, and connect these definitions and concerns into the context of *social literacy*, what information/education does one require in order to navigate the complicated world of intersecting information, methods of communication, and multiple realities that exist within the current sociological landscape? Considering Benson's (2010) observations about the spread and adaption of formal World War I propaganda techniques into the public sphere, "Propaganda is hardly 'in' popular culture; or if so its like a virus—something that infests an environment for its own purposes, which may be harmful to the host organism" (p. 155). Continuing with this analogy, concepts and ideas related to the subversive effects and theories of propaganda (manipulation of information) have already been vernacularized into the conceptual map of consciousness in the US—these ideas are *in* the sociocultural map (Benson, 2010; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2011).

To this point, if we are to recognize, as UNESCO and the FTC have, that the definition of literacy must be updated in order to facilitate personal agency and freedoms from these sociological influences, and that present reality calls for further examinations and interventions within the realms of education when it comes to internalizing advertisements, what can human rights education adopt from these discussions? If it is recognized that sociocultural maps of society and its narratives are constantly being adapted and co-opted through advertising and

media effects, then this information can be translated in two ways: 1) media and information is a subversive force of evil or 2) social norms and patterns can adapt through recognizing the realities of any given sociocultural map and communicating with it to effect perception and literacy about a subject. The line between indoctrination (propaganda) and education (literacy) is defined here in its methods and goals. The former is defined as working to adapt the sociocultural conceptual map for the purposes of its own agenda, while the latter is defined as working bring awareness to the workings of the sociocultural map for the purposes of *seeing* the sociocultural map.

The construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction and interpretations of cultural understandings are, from this perspective, highly impacted by available information on an issue or subject (Federal Trade Commission, ND). Social vernaculars change over time and are subject to the same adaptations and reinterpretations as any other form of information. *Social change*, in this way, occurs on both deep and superficial levels at different speeds. Systemic changes require patience and the acknowledgement of the complex dynamics between *visibility* and *accessibility* as they relate to the adaptability of concepts and ideas. While these changes may not be immediately apparent, with every reiteration and reinterpretation of a social code or narrative, micro-shifts in how or if that story carries on will occur.

Connecting this idea back to the idea of *building shared understandings*, representations—whether true, false, half true, or completely imagined—construct and inform *shared understandings* and, within this areas of research, have been observed to greatly impact the beliefs of those who consume the information (Appadurai, 1990; Kozlovic, 2009). To quote Appadurai (1990), “Images of agency are increasingly distortions of a world of merchandising so subtle that the consumer is consistently helped to believe that he or she is an actor, where in fact



he or she at best is a chooser” (p. 307). If one has not been educated in a way that allows one to read the sociocultural map, which, at present, includes the decoding of *media texts* (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2011), as well as international and global standards of human rights (Flowers, 2002; U.S. Department of State, 2015) how can one fulfill their human rights if one does not fully conceptualize all that one’s rights encompass?

### **Translating Concepts Across Disciplines: Social Theory Through Media Arts**

*The whole question of accessibility is that, on the one hand, music makes very powerful immediate effect, as so many philosophers have noted, and, therefore, is, in a sense, more dangerous because it can stimulate a certain kind of irrationality... On the other hand, it is an extremely esoteric art. It requires a kind of training that you might say is a discipline... (Barenboim & Said, 2004).*

The above quote is from discussions between Daniel Barenboim and Edward W. Said in *Parallels and Paradoxes: Explorations in Music and Society* in which Said observes the power of music in relation to accessibility, communication, and translatability. Within this section of their discussion, Said deconstructs the dual accessibility and inaccessibility of music. The paradox that he considers is in the universality of music as a language, in that “children can understand music without understanding language” (p. 121), but this universalism draws a paradox around itself when it comes to how the music may be “read” (p. 120) by the trained or untrained mind.

The idea of *art*, within the context of this writing, can be interpreted as an aspect of human expression and communication. Art and *media*—being defined as the forms in which art takes, i.e. painting, music, literature, poetry, digital splices of scanned photographs juxtaposed into likeness of a face—are vehicles for messages, ideas, and *stories*. It was through music (songs) that some historical documentation of the experiences of early immigrants to the United States are remembered, or the stories of those who built railway systems (Takaki, 1993). It was

through art and representation that the Committee on Public Information's (CPI) "1,439 designs for posters, window cards, advertising, cartoons, and buttons by over 318 artists" (Benson, 2010, p. 151) and *Four Minute Men*'s propaganda films, such as *Perishing Crusaders*, affected public opinion in a way that Adolf Hitler would cite as a "psychologically efficient" tactic (p. 152).

Representation as a general concept belongs unto the realm of art and communication. In modern times *narrative* control is directly tied to the information produced, consumed, and regulated on any subject (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2014; Hall, 1997b), which, in turn, changes what is considered normal, acceptable, and expected (Merry, 2006).

To illustrate this theory from a specific study, Kozlovic (2009) examines how the space of entertainment media constructs and ascribes identities through representation. *Islam, Muslims and Arabs in the Popular Hollywood Cinema* highlights examples of both macro and micro aggressions, stereotypes, and tropes manifest through storylines, such as in the film *Rules of Engagement* where Arabs are depicted as a mob of extremists "senselessly attacking the US embassy in Yemen", to more subtle, subliminal contributors such as in the 2004 *The Manchurian Candidate*, where one scene shows a "Muslim women in a burka... holding an eviscerated brain to cement that evil-Islam link" (Kozlovic, 2009, p. 219). Through image and narrative analysis Kozlovic examines how images that appear on a screen inform the viewer of how and what to think of the *Other*, whether explicitly or implicitly. This problem manifests through culture, by culture, and can be framed as both a cause and symptom of cultural understanding, codes, and norms. Michelle Alexander (2008) considers this issue in *The New Jim Crow* with respect to the construction of the "young black men as criminals" trope and stereotype in television police dramas (p. 148) as the equation spreads from the fictional world to real world beliefs.

To bring in an example of representation used for the purposes of peace, education, and social justice:

Scholars have often criticized mass media for reproducing oppression through the dissemination of images reflecting cultural, structural, and direct violence... however, activists, artists, and others have harnessed media to create content designed to empower viewers to enact social change... Particularly in conflict and post-conflict zones, educational entertainment is increasingly used to change attitudes and behaviors, especially among children. (Subramanian, Dollard, & Kabba, forthcoming, p. 1)

Similar to Lampert's (2013) statements on the historic role of artists in social justice movements, the *Sesame Workshop* (Subramanian et al., forthcoming) presents a case study of how the "Sesame Workshop's peace education programming is to empower children between the ages of three and eight years old with the skills, attitudes, and behaviors necessary to promote nonviolence" (Subramanian et al., forthcoming, p. 1). Echoing the concept of the relationship between representation and narrative vernacularization:

Sesame Workshop's co-productions harness the power of stories to challenge dominant narratives of hate and to imagine a more peaceful world. Sesame Workshop's scripts include live action films (LAFs), or documentary style pieces; animations produced locally or dubbed from other co-productions; and street stories featuring Muppets and human cast members. (Subramanian et al., forthcoming, p. 5)

What this project explains in detail is that while narratives associated with mass-media can be used to facilitate and promote structural violence (Galtung, 1969), as Kozlovic (2009) described, *media* represents the consciousness and reality constructed by those who produce it. To this point, as with any other communication method in the history of humanity, the key concept here is that it is not the medium that promotes violence, peace, or human rights.

*Media* represents the vision and abilities of those who create them and the environment in which these narratives are consumed and interpreted (Hall, 1997b). As Said (1979) observers of the interconnected dynamic between colonial policies and literary construction of the image of "the Orient", the relationship between our imagined worlds and the manifestation of realities are

integrally linked. Similarly, in *A Different Mirror* Takaki (1993) examines the multicultural sociocultural, economic history of the United States through to analyzing the character roles in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Through this literary analogy, Takaki (1993) weaves through patterns of dehumanization, discourse and rhetoric, and *narratives* ascribed to subjects of colonial and imperialism during the country's beginnings. Said (1979) and Takaki (1993) reflect what Benson (2010) observes as the relationship between propaganda and popular culture in that the two cannot be separated.

To this point, *literacy*, on any subject, the knowledge of how to read (decode) and navigate the macro *conceptual map* that defines the social norms for a community or nation (Hall, 1997b; Merry, 2006). There are many approaches to the telling of the narrative and decoding of the *map*, and art is simply a tangible form. Art acts as the archive of sociocultural artifacts and narratives—evidence of the lineage and evolution of thoughts—as well as the space where new ideas emerge from the collision and reinterpretation of those same ideas into new forms. Reframing HRE through art brings illustrates social theory and rights-based discourse in away that illuminates the sociocultural influences that surround formal systems of knowledge. If practiced or analyzed through this lens art represents change and transformation.

### Summary

*A thousand years ago we thought the world was a bowl... Five hundred years ago we knew it was a globe. Today we know it is flat and round and carried through space on the back of a turtle... Don't you wonder what shape it will turn out to be tomorrow?*  
(Pratchett, 2000, p. 41).

Concluding this review of literature on the construction and deconstruction of sociocultural norms and shifts in ideas and ideologies, the long-term question that underpins these inquires is to examine the dynamic influences the shape the way we view and imagine the world. While the fictional history of the Discworld (Pratchett, 2000) may sound strange, the

evolution of our own real-life sociocultural theories of reality follow a similar pattern of narrative revision. We understand our worlds through the technologies, philosophies, and tools for imagination that we possess at any given moment in history. From the story that the world is the center of the universe, to the idea that it was flat, to the general agreement that the globe is round again, but is not the center of the universe, narratives and conceptual maps change based on what information one encounters.

As demonstrated by the authors cited in this review, narratives and codes may change and transform into a *similar* structures or patterns, but this is determined by the information from which these codes can be reproduced. In this way, tomorrow can be similar to day, but it cannot be fully copied. It can be imitated, represented, and reinterpreted, but it cannot be the same. While this may sound like an optimist's view of social change, it is also a pragmatic one. In 1948 the UDHR was signed by the United Nations General Assembly (Grant & Gibson, 2013). From 1948 to 2015, that is only 67 years. Since that time 18 human rights treaties have been drafted and passed through the General Assembly, of which, as previously mentioned, the US has ratified 9 (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2014).

Within this same country, there have been major changes to policies and sociopolitical attitudes with every event, arrival of a new *Other*, and shifts in generational awareness, labor practices and accepted norms (Lampert, 2013; Takaki, 1993; Zia, 2000). Social codes build upon what information is available, accessible, and visible to consume and the ability of the individual to decode, translate, and reinterpret that information within their own conceptual maps (Deo et al., 2008; Hall, 1997b; Merry, 2006; Said, 1979).

## CHAPTER III THE PROJECT AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

### **Description of the Project**

The Human Rights and Social Literacy Syntax Project consists of two manifestations of the discussed theories connected by a common goal: Transformational human rights education (HRE) (Bajaj, 2011; Tibbitts, 2002). Part one of the project consists of a workshop on deconstructing narratives through U.S. history and examples of popular culture. The language and examples used have been designed to be incorporated into a community college level course or similar setting. Part two of the project consists of a human rights education resource website and social media experiment in vernaculars designed for presenting information on human rights through simplifying language and the use of visual languages.

### **Development of the Project**

Partially based upon the class project, “I Have a Human Right to \_\_\_\_\_” I participated in at University of San Francisco, and partially based upon the reconciliation of my personal educational background and profession as a multimedia designer, this project has been developed through intersecting ideas, concepts, and observations on human behavior. When I began my research, I had an exclusive focus on media representation and acute forms of racial discrimination that carries through these channels of communication and culture. However, as I have expanded my interest and conceptualizations of HRE, I have shifted focus from media representation to the patterns of sociological behavior and linguistic patterns that inform media representations and connect to larger conceptual maps of nations, communities, and individuals.

While the theoretical background of this project lies in philosophical and theoretical inquiries, the form of the project was developed through materials I had searched for, such as simple, general guides to human rights for the US—that were not through the language of law

and policy or catered towards the existing activism, social justice base. Of the multitude of ways to approach education, my inquiries focus on how information vernacularizes *through* culture to consider methods that can address and incorporate two emerging aspects of it: HRE and MIL. With that said, this project has been developed in direct response to two major problems: literacy in human rights and the need for publically accessible materials on human rights specifically designed for and about the US.

In closing, the project has been designed to recognize and acknowledge that technologies and methods of communication change and adapt with the times and minds that expand upon the ways in which we tell, revise, and maintain our stories and memories. The two iterations of this project reflect this philosophy by addressing HRE through a workshop that speaks popular culture, and an internet space that speaks through present-day methods of seeking information in the public realm. The underlying focus on syntax analysis of narratives and communications has been to address the vernacularization and representation of human rights through a form that can only expand: basic social syntax.

### **The Project**

The first part of *The Human Rights & Social Literacy Syntax Project* is a workshop titled, “Seeing Influence & Deconstructing Narratives: Wartime Discourse & Contested Narratives in the United States” (see Appendix). As a semi-formal workshop designed for incorporation into a community college level setting, it has been designed to teach social syntax breakdowns of narratives for the purposes of *Seeing Influences*. Conceptualized for the incorporation and use in history, media studies, visual communication, or social studies courses, the workshop focuses on recognizing social behavior patterns within oneself and society through the theory of representation (Hall, 1997b) and popular culture. This section of the project puts a greater

emphasis on MIL but works through a human rights framework and foundation.

The second part of the project consists of an informational human rights education website, <http://syntaxproject.us/>, to provide simplified human rights resources for the general public. Included in this part of the project will be a visual representations and interpretation of the UDHR, U.S. Constitutional rights in context to the UDHR, international human rights treaty statuses in the US, a guide to international human rights treaties, and a list of resources for learning about human rights in and for the US. To contrast the approach of the workshop, the website aspect of the project works backwards in approach by emphasizing HRE, while utilizing a theoretical methods borrowed from MIL. This project will also involve an experimental social media campaign to distribute information on human rights through the Twitter account @syntaxproject.



## CHAPTER IV CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusions

Adapting human rights education (HRE) into a syntax-based method of analysis through visual arts and medias was originally conceptualized through noticing similar patterns of discourse within multiple industries and disciplines. Through developing this project and examining large-scale ideas such as human rights, U.S. HRE discourse and the development of social norms, I have concluded that a key aspect of any form of education is that of personal vernacularization. However, I also conclude that the basic philosophy of learning art, music, design, and writing apply to the practice of teaching human rights: One must have a strong foundation in the basic framework and theory in order to create new interpretations and improvise when, as many things in life do, things do not go according to plan.

On another note, in addition to the concept of translation, and in direct relation to it, the term *social literacy* is one that I will continue to experiment with when speaking to the public vernacular of the US. Incorporating media and information literacy with transformational human rights education contextualizes HRE within the realm of emerging and current trends in technology and consumer awareness, as well as popular language around education. This strategic linguistic methodology also connects to frameworks that can translate to media and visual arts, media studies, art history, and other forms of informal education.

The choice to focus on human rights education in the US has presented many difficulties and required much personal reflection and deconstruction. As a fourth generation Japanese American woman, my hope for the country is that it learns from the past and, at some point, avoids directly or indirectly following the same paths of social hysterias that lead to human rights abuses. Through this project, I have sought to frame these discussions as an issue of *social*

*illiteracy*. If one does not understand that  $2 = 1 + 1$  and  $1.5 + .50 = 2$ , or, to be more specific, the “enemy race = all persons with 1/16 Japanese blood” (Conrat & Contrat, 1992; Ng, 2002; Takaki, 1993) or “terrorist = Muslim or Arab” (Kozlovic, 2009) or “young + black = criminal” (Alexander, 2012), then we cannot move past the outdated social frameworks that divide and conquer us through our own implicit perceptions and internalized narratives.

It has been my experience that education happens in formal and informal spaces. Through discussions and examples in art, popular culture, social theory, and history, I have described how concepts translate and can be applied across multiple fields. I began this study in film editing and montage theory, as informed by photograph deconstruction through zooming into the point where a full resolution image became nothing but various pixels at different hues and values. Through the development and conclusion of this project, I conclude that there are many ways and methods with which to engage, discuss, and apply HRE. For me, the transformational model (Bajaj, 2011; Tibbits, 2002) speaks the most to my philosophy and values in that I see in it the potential to affect structure and address the realms of social norms, codes, and habits.

In closing, this project is being written at the end of the year 2015, 67 years from the passing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by United Nations General Assembly in 1948. Between then and now we have seen the development of the Internet, a man on the moon, and the passing of over 25 international human rights documents through the General Assembly (Center for the Study of Human Rights, 2005). Humanity and all of its complex sociocultural codes go back much further than 67, or even 239 years. To that point, fulfilling human rights is a long term project that will require a good deal of deconstruction, reflection, and constant innovation.

## **Recommendations**

Following the conclusion of this project the following recommendations have been compiled into three recommendations: reframing literacy, translating across disciplines, and developing accessible and adaptable human rights languages to the public vernacular of the US. In general, it is recommended that human rights education be conceptualized and adapted to existing sociocultural spaces and structures. Discourse and rhetoric does not generate itself, it must be adapted and vernacularized on the micro and macro level before becoming social code. To this point, the main general recommendation is that human rights education must adapt through spaces in which the students and members of the public are already literate.

The first recommendation relates to the reframing of literacy as the expansion of media and information literacy through a foundational base in human rights. For the purposes of this project this has been defined as social literacy for the purposes of making the idea more accessible in language to the present discursive environment of the United States. While the idea of human rights may be a contested area, the goal of literacy for the purposes of self-determination is in line with the current sociopolitical discourse of the country. While it may be preferred to utilize the term human rights education, framing human rights awareness as an issue of social literacy presents another take on how to translate HRE to different vernaculars and contexts.

The second recommendation follows the first in the theme of translation, but focuses on the expansion of HRE into and across multiple disciplines. As demonstrated by this project, human rights education and the translation of concepts present a wide range of possibilities when speaking to diverse audiences. This concept is well known in marketing as understanding target audiences through market research to find what messages, images, and narrative patterns best

communicate the intended message for vernacularization and codification into the social consciousness (American Psychological Association, 2004; Cernat, 2014; Young Eun, Vosgerau, & Morewedge, 2014). By understanding the demographics and vernaculars of your audience, one can begin to conceptualize how to best teach concepts, ideas, and, eventually, shift the sociocultural narrative associated with the story.

The third and final recommendation is to develop accessible and adaptable human rights languages for the public vernacular of the US. This recommendation acknowledges that the US is a diverse and complex sociocultural space that needs to address the issues occurring within ourselves, our communities, cities, states, and nation as a whole. There is a need for human rights education in this country, as well as discussions around updating our working definitions of education, literacy, and equality using human rights as a baseline.

In closing, the decoding of human communications has been a lifelong study, one which I predict will continue into the future. As the field of human rights education expands, I encourage further examinations into the decoding and translation aspect of education, especially as it can be applied through transformational HRE and into and across disciplines and schools of thought.

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## APPENDIX

Seeing Influence & Deconstructing Narratives:  
Wartime Discourse & Contested Narratives in the United States