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J201 – Section 305

February 28, 2023

WC: 1191

**Revision Comments**

* Removed “in this essay, I will” and organized the thesis statement to better fit the structure of my essay.
* Added evidence and analysis utilizing Salahieh’s article on the protests from Tyre Nichols’ death.
* Added analysis utilizing the protest paradigm and a counterargument in the conclusion

**The Power of Protest: How Media Coverage Shapes Public Perception**

From the Arab Spring to Greta Thunberg’s strikes, protests have sparked massive change by bringing together diverse communities and demanding action from those in power. However, what really causes protests to spark change is the way they are presented to a wider, global audience. Examples can be seen in the cases of Black Lives Matter and #MeToo, with the movement starting in a few cities and eventually spreading to other continents through articles that detailed the issues involved and protesters’ grievances. However, it is essential to combat the conventional protest paradigm that relies on official sources to “de-legitimiz[e], marginaliz[e], and demoniz[e]” (Harlow 2) protesters. To ensure fair and thorough protest coverage, journalists must prioritize the experiences and perspectives of those most directly affected by the issues being protested and avoid relying solely on official sources.

In a *Washington Post* article, Lily Kuo, the China bureau chief for the newspaper, describes a rare occurrence in authoritarian China – protests against the government. China’s response to COVID-19 has been criticized as being extremely harsh; Kuo says that many have “lived through almost three years of unrelenting controls that have left many sealed in their homes, sent to quarantine centers or barred from traveling.” (Kuo 2). The catalyst for these protests was a fire in the city of Urumqi, where ten died due to fire services not being able to get close enough to the apartment because of COVID-related restrictions. Officers later denied that COVID restrictions had nothing to do with rescue efforts and that “some residents’ ability to rescue themselves was too weak” (Kuo 1), fueling more anger. Kuo only uses this state messaging to prove a point and to offer a better perspective on why the protesters have such intense feelings about the government. Another example can be seen at the end of the article, where Kuo mentions that a state-run newspaper called the People’s Daily called for “unswerving commitment to the current COVID policies.” (Kuo 2) after the protests were broken up by police. In the rest of the article, Kuo takes eyewitness accounts from the protesters to communicate a sense of urgency and unity among protesters. Kuo quotes a photography student saying that he “feel[s] that we are all brave, brave enough to pursue the rights we are owed, brave enough to criticize these mistakes, brave enough to express our position.” (Kuo 2). Repetition in the quote emphasizes the braveness of the protesters and encourages the reader to consider the protesters in a good light, while only mentioning the state-run media to make the reader consider them as malevolent and controlling. This slight bias towards protesters and antagonistic portrayal of the state turns the protest paradigm on its head and legitimizes the protesters to the reader instead of the government.

A second example of this “reverse protest paradigm” can be seen in Farnaz Fassihi’s coverage of Iranian protests after a woman was supposedly killed after being arrested by morality police for violating hijab rules. In this article, Fassihi collects quotes from people both directly and indirectly involved with the protest to show how much this incident and the following protests have affected the country. The most powerful quote in the article is from the woman’s mother, who says “[the government] [has] to explain for what crime, for what reason did they do this?...I am her mother and I am dying from grief.” (Fassihi 1). This quote shatters the distant connection often associated between readers and news articles and lays bare the full extent of a mother’s grief, making the reader feel emotionally invested in the story and on the side of the protesters. Fassihi enforces this perspective by showing responses from people outside the scope of the protests, including “officials, senior clerics, celebrities, and athletes”. She even quotes soccer legend Ali Daei’s Instagram, where he asks “What have you done to the country? My daughter asks what happened, what can I tell her?” (Fassihi 2). Fassihi uses these emotional quotes like these to connect the reader to the protests and have them thinking about the article after they read it. She also rarely mentions the statements given by the government and focuses on the protesters’ grievances, justifying the protesters and not allowing official sources to have a statement that could perhaps delegitimize what the protesters were trying to do. This reversal of the protest paradigm allows the reader to view the conflict from the protesters’ standpoint rather than from a distance and allows them to empathize with the protesters.

A poor example of journalists prioritizing protesters’ grievances rather than their actions can be seen in Nouran Salahieh’s article covering protests in Memphis due to Tyre Nichols’s death at the hands of police. The article opens with inflammatory rhetoric that describes Nichols’s death; the reporter says that in the video of his death, he “could be heard yelling for his mother… [the video] goes on to show officers repeatedly beating the young Black man with batons…including at one point while his hands are restrained behind his back.” (Nichols 1). The use of the adjective “young” and the reiteration of the amount of violence performed on the man makes the reader feel as if this killing was wholly evil. One might say that this use of emotive language is like Fassihi’s article, but while Fassihi elaborates on the protesters’ grievances by using their quotes, Salahieh mostly uses information from the police department and other “official” sources to corroborate his story, mentioning that the police officers’ unit was disbanded with a quote that “it is in the best interest of all to permanently disband the unit.” (Salahieh 2). Salahieh also uses city council members’ quotes to show the opinion of the general population on this action, where they say that this disbandment does not “go far enough in addressing issues within the agency” and that disbanding the unit without giving the officers training would be “…putting lipstick on a pig.” (Salahieh 2). However well-meaning this inclusion may be, it does not accurately portray the protesters’ grievances and assumes that the city council members represent the population protesting. This use of the protest paradigm to portray the protesters as a separate, distant entity causes the reader to consider the protesters in a negative light and the officials in a positive one, preventing the protesters’ agency and giving the institution a chance to oppose them.

The power of protests to inspire change is undeniable, but it is important to acknowledge that media coverage plays a role in demonstrating their message. As demonstrated by Salahieh’s article, protests that are presented in a distant manner are incapable of bringing about significant change. In some cases, it might even be appropriate to be slightly more biased towards the protesters to communicate a point and spread awareness, as seen in Kuo’s article. Even though one might say that this will just serve to delegitimize the institution instead, sometimes it may be necessary to give the protesters a larger voice by removing the institution’s. By giving a voice to those who are fighting for change, journalists can help ensure that protests are seen and heard, and ultimately lead to meaningful progress.