

Other Tactics of Oppression



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Introduction

- Earlier chapters discussed some tactics used in oppression:
 - Segregation
 - Internalized oppression
- This chapter outlines some other tactics that frequently appear in oppression
- Being forewarned about these tactics can help you prepare for them

1. Divide and conquer

Institutionalised divide and conquer

- Oppressive systems find ways to classify the oppressed into different categories:
 - This can create in-fighting and hinder cooperation between the different categories
- Examples:
 - Under apartheid, South Africa had 3 different non-white classifications: black, coloured and Indian
 - In addition, people were often segregated based on their tribes
 - Colonial powers in Rwanda classified natives:
 - As *Tutsi* if they had more than 10 cows or a long nose
 - Most others were classified as *Hutu*
 - The Tutsi were given higher social standing, thus creating conflict between the Tutsi and Hutu

Institutionalised divide and conquer (cont')

■ More examples:

- During slavery in the USA, different chores, food and living conditions were given to *field slaves* and *house slaves*
- Nazis ensured that each concentration camps had a mix of prisoners from different countries because lack of a common language decreased the chances for prisoners to organize rebellions

■ Quotes from Nelson Mandela's autobiography:

- Chapter 3: "The white man shattered the *abantu*, the fellowship, of the various tribes."
- Chapter 9: "Miners were normally housed according to tribe. The mining companies preferred such segregation because it prevented ethnic groups from uniting around a common grievance [...]. The separation often resulted in factional fights between different ethnic groups and clans, which the companies did not effectively discourage."

Ad-hoc divide and conquer

- You can accuse an activist group of having some “taboo” members. Examples:
 - Accuse a “respectable feminist” group of having some lesbians
 - Accuse a Muslim group of having some “militants” or communists
- Insist you will not negotiate with the group unless they expel the taboo members
 - Doing that is likely to create internal conflict within the group
- Ask a “respectable” activist group if they condemn the actions of a “militant” activist group
 - If they do condemn then you have created in-fighting between the activist groups
 - If they don’t condemn then you can claim the “respectable” group is just a front for the more “militant” group

Ad-hoc divide and conquer (cont')

- A non-X person can:
 - Claim to be sympathetic to the aims of an X activist group
 - But secretly express doubts to some members of the group about their leader
- That tactic can result in a power-struggle within the group
 - This tactic is mentioned in Chapter 8 of Martin Luther King Jr.'s autobiography

2. Dirty tactics

Spread false rumours

- You can spread false rumours about an activist group
- Martin Luther King Jr.'s autobiography, Chapter 8:
 - Rumours that Martin Luther King Jr. had embezzled money to buy new cars for himself and his wife
 - Rumours that the bus boycott has been called off
- Nelson Mandela's autobiography, Chapter 14:
 - "Government propagandists repeatedly claimed that the leaders of the campaign were living it up in comfort while the masses were languishing in jail."

Frame activists

- The *Epilogue* essay at the end of some new editions of *Black Like Me* (by John Howard Griffin) warns:
 - “Racists showed high ingenuity in developing schemes to destroy a man’s reputation as a means of nullifying his work.”
- The essay contains advice to reduce your chances of being framed:
 - Never use a public toilet unless accompanied by somebody to act as a witness that you did not act in an indecent manner
 - If you are a man then never be alone with a woman you do not know
 - Keep a detailed diary so you can account for all your time every day
 - Keep your travel schedules secret and find a pretext to change hotel rooms soon after your arrival

Manufacture the appearance of violence

- A peaceful protest might receive positive news coverage and gain public sympathy
- In contrast, a violent protest usually receives bad publicity and loses public sympathy
- Therefore, you can sabotage a peaceful protest:
 - Use infiltrators to start violence from within the ranks of protestors
 - If that is not possible then you start violence *near* the peaceful protestors

Bankruptcy through legal action

- Governments sometimes misuse the legal system to bankrupt activists:
 - Take a person or organization to court
 - The legal costs of defence may bankrupt the accused
 - If the accused wins the case, the judge might *not* order the accuser to pay the legal fees of the accused

- There is a famous case of a business using the same tactic:
 - McDonald's threatened libel action against people and companies that criticized McDonald's
 - Most avoided a court case by publicly apologising to McDonald's and agreeing to never criticize McDonald's again
 - Eventually, two activists in *London Greenpeace* faced McDonald's in court
(see the *McLibel* book or DVD)

3. Bread and circuses

Bread and circuses

- The expression *bread and circuses* comes from Roman times:
 - It refers to rulers keeping the population content with food and entertainment rather than through good policies
 - In its original context (a satirical poem), the expression criticized:
 - Politicians for using the tactic
 - The population for being foolish enough to fall for the tactic
- Similar expressions have been used in other countries:
 - Spain: *bread and bullfights*
 - Russia: *bread and spectacle*
- The lyrics of *Working Class Hero* by John Lennon allude to the concept:
 - “Keep you doped with religion and sex and TV
And you think you’re so clever and classless and free
But you’re still fucking peasants as far as I can see”

Exercise

- Look at the front-page headlines of newspapers:
 - How many headlines are about important issues?
 - And how many headlines are about unimportant issues, such as celebrity gossip or TV shows?

4. Say one thing but do another

Say one thing but do another

- Politicians rarely say “We are introducing an oppressive law”
 - Instead, they claim a harmful law will be beneficial
- Nelson Mandela states in his autobiography:
 - Chapter 14 of *Long Walk to Freedom*:
 - “[The government] pretended to preserve what they were attempting to destroy. Laws stripping people of their rights were inevitably described as laws restoring those rights.”
- Claims of religion and patriotism are often used to introduce oppressive laws:
 - Throughout history, bigots have used religion to justify racism

Say one thing but do another (cont')

- P. D. East showed some of his research material to John Howard Griffin
 - See the *November 15* chapter of *Black Like Me* by John Howard Griffin
 - “It shows that the most obscene figures are not the ignorant ranting racists, but the legal minds who front for them, who ‘invent’ for them the legislative proposals and the propaganda bulletins. They deliberately choose to foster distortions, always under the guise of patriotism [...]”
- Saying one thing but doing another is not confined to governments:
 - Some businesses introduce policies that serve their own needs at the expense of consumer rights
 - Often these policies have euphemistic names
 - The following slides provide some examples

Oppressive practices by business

- Some companies are introducing *trusted computing* technology into PCs:
 - Trusted computing may give a hardware or software company remote control over computers bought by consumers
 - This means the owner of a computer *cannot* trust it
- Windows Genuine Advantage (WGA):
 - This uses heuristics to detect suspected piracy of Microsoft software
 - Unfortunately, sometimes WGA thinks legal software has been pirated
 - WGA can disable software functionality if it suspects piracy
 - This is a “guilty until proven innocent” policy
 - Despite its name, WGA offers *no* advantage to consumers

Oppressive practices by business (cont')

■ Digital Rights Management (DRM):

- This is an anti-copying technology sometimes used on software, music CDs and DVDs
- The name sounds like it *protects* the rights of consumers
- Actually, it *restricts* the “fair use” rights of consumers

5. Summary

Summary

- There are many tactics that can be used in oppression:
 - Earlier chapters discussed segregation and internalized oppression
 - This chapter has briefly mentioned some other tactics
- It is important to be aware of commonly used tactics:
 - Being forewarned helps you to defend yourself