

SEIZING THE MEANS OF EXPRESSION: WHISTLEBLOWING AS THE DIALECTIC OF FREEDOM AND POWER

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ABSTRACT

This chapter argues that whistleblowing, rather than being a procedural safeguard, constitutes a radical form of resistance against the systemic suppression of freedom of expression in working life. Drawing on Michel Foucault's theories of surveillance and disciplinary power, Antonio Gramsci's concept of the organic intellectual, and Frantz Fanon's call for decolonial rebellion, this chapter situates whistleblowing as a praxis that disrupts exploitative labor regimes and exposes the complicity of state and corporate institutions in perpetuating workplace injustice.

Through a comparative analysis of two key cases, Athanase Serge Ouanre's whistleblowing against military corruption in transitional Burkina Faso and Frances Haugen's critique of Facebook's exploitative practices, the chapter explores how whistleblowing intersects with workplace dynamics, labor rights, and democratic accountability. Ouanre's actions underscore the precariousness of whistleblowing within post-colonial governance structures that replicate exploitative labor systems while Haugen's revelations expose how corporate workplaces suppress employee expression under the guise of professional ethics, thereby enabling global harm.

Foucault's concept of biopolitics illustrates how whistleblowers disrupt the mechanisms of control that permeate workplaces while Gramsci's organic

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intellectual reframes whistleblowers as leaders of workplace resistance. Fanon's decolonial lens positions whistleblowing in post-colonial contexts as a necessary act of liberation against labor systems rooted in colonial domination.

The chapter concludes by advocating for the creation of transnational solidarity frameworks that empower workers as whistleblowers and shield them from retaliation. By reframing whistleblowing as a collective act of resistance, it envisions a global labor movement that reclaims workplaces as spaces of freedom, equity, and radical accountability.

Keywords: Biopolitics; corporate-state complicity; democratic renewal; freedom of expression; revolutionary praxis

Whistleblowing has long been framed as a necessary mechanism for ensuring transparency and accountability within institutions. However, this conventional framing conceals its radical potential as an act of subversion against the entrenched structures of power that shape workplace relations under global capitalism. This chapter argues that whistleblowing is not merely a function of liberal democracy but a disruptive force that exposes the contradictions of neoliberal governance, where the rhetoric of transparency masks authoritarian control over workers and citizens alike. Far from being an isolated ethical choice made by courageous individuals, whistleblowing represents a broader dialectical struggle between power and resistance, surveillance and exposure, and domination and subversion. The act of whistleblowing is inherently revolutionary because it fractures the ideological apparatuses that sustain capitalist accumulation. It disrupts the smooth functioning of institutions by revealing their complicity in exploitation, state violence, and corporate greed. In a world where surveillance has become the backbone of governance, whistleblowing forces into public view the hidden mechanisms of control that sustain exploitation.

Drawing on Michel Foucault's concept of disciplinary power (Foucault, 1977, p. 200), this chapter positions whistleblowing as an act that disrupts the mechanisms of surveillance and self-regulation that keep workers in compliance. It operates as a moment of rupture in what Foucault termed the panoptic gaze, a gaze that compels obedience through internalized fear rather than direct coercion. Whistleblowing is thus a radical assertion of agency in spaces where agency is deliberately curtailed, a direct confrontation with the technologies of domination that mold workers into docile subjects. Antonio Gramsci's notion of the organic intellectual (Gramsci, 1971, p. 5) provides the foundation for understanding whistleblowers as agents of workplace resistance, individuals who rise from within oppressive systems to challenge hegemonic power structures. Gramsci argued that the war of position, the slow, grinding struggle against ideological dominance, must be fought not only through overt political movements but also through the infiltration and subversion of institutions. Whistleblowers represent precisely this form of resistance: they weaponize knowledge against power, undermining the legitimacy of the institutions they once served.

Further, Frantz Fanon's theory of decolonial struggle (Fanon, 1961, p. 23) situates whistleblowing in the broader fight against post-colonial forms of

economic and social subjugation. Fanon's work reminds us that power is not merely coercive but also epistemic; it governs not only bodies but also ways of knowing and articulating reality. Whistleblowers, by exposing hidden truths, engage in a form of epistemic insurrection. Their revelations destabilize the carefully crafted myths that sustain modern capitalist democracies, myths of corporate benevolence, government accountability, and institutional neutrality. In post-colonial contexts, whistleblowing becomes even more radical, as it lays bare the persistence of colonial violence in contemporary governance structures.

Through a comparative analysis of two key cases, Athanase Serge Ouanre and Frances Haugen, this chapter examines how whistleblowing functions as a dialectical struggle between power and resistance. Ouanre's disclosures on military corruption in Burkina Faso illustrate the dangers faced by whistleblowers operating within post-colonial states where democratic institutions remain weak (Harsch, 2017, p. 75). His case highlights the continuity between colonial administrative violence and the modern authoritarian state, showing how whistleblowers in the Global South face not only institutional retaliation but also direct physical threats. Ouanre's revelations about the military's involvement in economic crimes disrupted the fragile balance of power in a state still grappling with the legacies of colonialism and military rule, marking whistleblowing as a revolutionary act of defiance against post-colonial authoritarianism.

Frances Haugen's critique of Facebook reveals how multinational corporations weaponize workplace ethics to stifle internal criticism while exploiting users on a global scale (Cadwalladr, 2021, p. 14). Facebook's unchecked monopolization of the digital sphere exemplifies the predatory nature of platform capitalism, where user data are extracted and commodified while internal dissenters are silenced. Haugen's whistleblowing exposes the corporation's deliberate prioritization of profit over ethical concerns, demonstrating that corporate governance is not merely about efficiency but about control and ideological enforcement.

Taken together, these case studies illustrate that whistleblowing is not simply an appeal to the conscience of institutions but a radical act of rupture that exposes the systemic nature of exploitation and control. This chapter contends that whistleblowers are not merely individuals acting on moral conviction but insurgents within bureaucratic machines, individuals who momentarily reclaim the means of expression in an otherwise silenced landscape. By situating whistleblowing within broader theoretical and political frameworks, this chapter underscores its revolutionary potential as an act of resistance against neoliberal, neo-colonial, and authoritarian structures.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Foucault and the Panopticon of Capitalist Workplaces

The Panopticon as a Model of Workplace Surveillance

Foucault's concept of the *panopticon* (Foucault, 1977, p. 215) serves as a foundational lens for understanding how workplaces function as sites of surveillance,

discipline, and control under capitalist economies. Originally conceptualized by Jeremy Bentham as an architectural design for prisons, the panopticon ensures compliance through the internalization of an omnipresent, yet often invisible, gaze. Foucault expands this notion to illustrate how modern institutions, including workplaces, schools, and hospitals, cultivate self-regulating subjects who internalize mechanisms of discipline, rendering overt coercion unnecessary. The panoptic mechanism is particularly effective in contemporary workplaces where hierarchical structures and technological surveillance converge to create an environment of constant observation. Employees are not only subject to managerial oversight but also peer monitoring, performance assessments, and automated surveillance through workplace technologies. This leads to a state of hyper-vigilance in which workers pre-emptively adjust their behavior to conform to expected standards, even in the absence of direct supervision (Foucault, 1977, p. 201). The psychological effects of this internalized surveillance are profound, fostering an atmosphere of compliance where deviation from corporate norms is minimized.

Neoliberalism and Self-Policing in Capitalist Workplaces

In contemporary capitalist workplaces, power operates through both structural and psychological mechanisms. The neoliberal labor market, characterized by precarious employment, performance-based evaluations, and digital monitoring, intensifies Foucault's panoptic model. Employees, aware of potential scrutiny from supervisors, colleagues, or algorithmic management systems, engage in self-policing to align with managerial expectations. This is particularly evident in workplaces governed by surveillance capitalism, where data analytics and algorithmic oversight further entrench self-discipline (Zuboff, 2019, p. 130). Workers internalize not only the disciplinary gaze of their superiors but also the pressure to conform to corporate values that prioritize productivity, efficiency, and brand loyalty over ethical considerations. The fear of being perceived as non-compliant or disruptive leads to an environment of silent complicity, where individuals suppress dissent to maintain job security and career progression.

This dynamic is exacerbated by performance management systems that reward efficiency and penalize perceived underperformance. Employees often feel pressured to overextend themselves, normalize unpaid labor, and avoid actions that could place them in conflict with management. Consequently, corporate environments foster a culture where self-surveillance and disciplinary conformity become naturalized behaviors rather than imposed regulations (Foucault, 1977, p. 222).

Whistleblowers pose a fundamental challenge to this disciplinary structure. By exposing unethical practices, they disrupt the internalized compliance that neoliberal capitalism demands. Their act of revelation fractures the illusion of corporate accountability and transparency, unveiling the exploitative dynamics hidden beneath polished public relations narratives. In this sense, whistleblowing is more than a legal or ethical issue; it is a radical act of defiance that reclaims autonomy from the omnipresent gaze of managerial oversight. It embodies an

epistemic rupture, challenging the hegemonic discourse that legitimizes corporate governance while exposing the contradictions between stated ethical commitments and actual institutional practices (Alford, 2001, p. 17).

The act of whistleblowing also brings to light the mechanisms through which corporations attempt to silence dissent. Retaliation against whistleblowers, through legal action, dismissal, or character defamation, demonstrates the lengths to which institutions will go to protect their power structures. In doing so, these reactions reaffirm the deeply entrenched panoptic control within capitalist workplaces, as organizations seek to neutralize disruptions and restore compliance (Near & Miceli, 1985, p. 10).

Biopolitics and the Management of Workers

Foucault's concept of *biopower*, the control over bodies and populations, further illuminates the disciplinary role of workplaces. If workplaces function as sites where biopower is exercised, then whistleblowing disrupts this control by undermining the normalization of corporate misconduct. The act of speaking out destabilizes managerial authority, creating counter-discourses that challenge the dominant ideological structures sustaining neoliberal capitalism (Foucault, 2003, p. 243). Corporate governance increasingly extends beyond workplace productivity to influence employees' personal lives, particularly in sectors where performance expectations demand high levels of emotional labor and constant availability. The expectation that employees demonstrate corporate loyalty beyond working hours reinforces workplace discipline, illustrating how biopolitical control shapes not only professional conduct but also identity formation (Rose, 1999, p. 87).

Whistleblowers, in revealing these mechanisms of control, expose the broader structures of corporate power that govern contemporary labor relations. They highlight the contradictions within corporate rhetoric, revealing how institutions prioritize profit over ethical considerations while simultaneously promoting narratives of corporate social responsibility.

With the rise of digital surveillance, the panoptic model has evolved beyond the physical workplace into virtual spaces where employees are constantly monitored through keylogging software, productivity trackers, and AI-driven analytics. This shift intensifies workplace discipline, as employees not only fear direct managerial oversight but also the impersonal yet pervasive gaze of machine intelligence. Algorithmic decision-making further deepens the asymmetry of power, as workers are subjected to opaque performance evaluations that can determine promotions, pay raises, or even termination (O'Neil, 2016, p. 42). Digital surveillance technologies reinforce panoptic control by ensuring that every action is recorded, assessed, and potentially used against employees who fail to conform to prescribed standards.

The expansion of panoptic surveillance into remote workspaces further exacerbates this dynamic. Even in work-from-home environments, employees remain under constant scrutiny through productivity software and communication tracking systems. This omnipresent surveillance eliminates traditional

boundaries between work and personal life, extending capitalist discipline into private spheres (Lyon, 2006, p. 56).

Gramsci and the Whistleblower as the Organic Intellectual

Antonio Gramsci's concept of the *organic intellectual* (Gramsci, 1971, p. 7) provides a compelling framework for understanding the role of whistleblowers within capitalist workplaces. Traditionally, intellectuals have been perceived as academics, theorists, or cultural figures detached from the material conditions of labor. However, Gramsci challenges this notion by arguing that every social class generates its own intellectuals, individuals who emerge from within the workforce, not only to provide technical expertise but to articulate a counter-hegemonic vision that challenges the dominant ideology. From this perspective, whistleblowers function as organic intellectuals because they expose the ideological apparatuses that sustain exploitation, reveal the contradictions within corporate governance, and disrupt the mechanisms through which consent is manufactured in the workplace.

Gramsci (1971, p. 12) argues that ruling classes maintain dominance not merely through coercion but through the manufacture of consent, what he calls *hegemony*. Institutions such as the media, education systems, and corporate workplaces function as ideological state apparatuses that normalize capitalist exploitation, creating an illusion of fairness and meritocracy. Within this framework, workers are often conditioned to accept power asymmetries as natural and to internalize corporate values that prioritize efficiency, competition, and brand loyalty over ethical considerations.

Organic intellectuals emerge within the working class to contest this manufactured consent. Unlike traditional intellectuals, who may serve the interests of the ruling elite, organic intellectuals derive their knowledge from lived experience and use it to challenge hegemonic narratives. They articulate the grievances of their class, expose hidden forms of exploitation, and construct alternative ways of organizing labor and governance. In this sense, whistleblowers embody the role of organic intellectuals by breaking the silence imposed by corporate power and offering counter-discourses that reveal the realities of workplace injustice.

Whistleblowing as Counter-Hegemonic Praxis

To understand whistleblowing as a form of counter-hegemonic praxis, it is necessary to examine how workplaces function as sites of ideological production. Within the capitalist labor structure, corporate governance relies on the systematic reproduction of dominant ideologies that obscure exploitative practices. Management constructs narratives of corporate social responsibility, ethical leadership, and financial necessity to justify profit-maximizing decisions, often at the expense of worker rights and public accountability. These narratives create a hegemonic order that discourages dissent by framing whistleblowing as an act of disloyalty rather than as a legitimate challenge to systemic corruption.

Whistleblowers disrupt this hegemonic order by exposing the contradictions within corporate ideology. For instance, when employees reveal financial fraud, environmental violations, or human rights abuses within an organization, they challenge the corporate rhetoric of transparency and social responsibility. By bringing hidden truths to light, whistleblowers weaken the legitimacy of corporate hegemony and create space for alternative modes of governance rooted in accountability and ethical responsibility. Gramsci (1971, p. 20) emphasizes that counter-hegemonic struggle is not spontaneous but requires conscious effort to organize and sustain resistance. This is particularly relevant for whistleblowers, who often face severe retaliation for their actions. The legal and institutional barriers designed to silence dissent, such as non-disclosure agreements, corporate surveillance, and strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP) illustrate the extent to which ruling elites seek to neutralize organic intellectuals. Despite these obstacles, whistleblowers contribute to the formation of collective resistance by mobilizing workers, journalists, and civil society organizations to challenge corporate impunity.

The Role of Whistleblowers in Class Struggle

Gramsci's analysis of class struggle highlights the centrality of intellectual labor in sustaining and contesting capitalist dominance. While traditional intellectuals often serve the ruling class by legitimizing its policies and reinforcing capitalist ideology, organic intellectuals emerge from within the proletariat to advance the cause of working-class emancipation. Whistleblowers fit this mold by utilizing their insider knowledge to critique the contradictions of capitalist governance and advocate for systemic change. One key aspect of Gramsci's thought is the notion that hegemony operates not only in the economic and political spheres but also in the cultural domain. Capitalist enterprises invest heavily in shaping public perceptions through corporate propaganda, philanthropic initiatives, and strategic partnerships with media outlets. This cultural hegemony creates a climate where whistleblowers are vilified as disgruntled employees or traitors rather than as principled individuals seeking justice. The demonization of whistleblowers serves to discredit their revelations and maintain the illusion of corporate integrity.

However, Gramsci (1971, p. 34) also notes that counter-hegemonic forces can challenge this narrative by constructing alternative discourses that resonate with the working class. Whistleblowers who expose labor abuses, financial misconduct, or environmental crimes play a crucial role in disrupting capitalist cultural hegemony. Their testimonies humanize the abstract statistics of corporate malfeasance, transforming hidden injustices into tangible social issues that demand collective action. Through media engagement, legal advocacy, and grassroots mobilization, whistleblowers contribute to the broader struggle for workplace democracy and corporate accountability.

Gramsci distinguishes between two forms of revolutionary struggle: the "*war of maneuver*" and the "*war of position*." The *war of maneuver* refers to direct confrontations with the ruling class, such as strikes, protests, and armed uprisings. In contrast, the *war of position* is a prolonged ideological and cultural struggle aimed

at eroding the foundations of capitalist hegemony (Gramsci, 1971, p. 57). Whistleblowing aligns with the war of position because it challenges the ideological justifications that sustain corporate power. Rather than engaging in immediate, large-scale disruption, whistleblowers initiate gradual shifts in public consciousness by revealing corporate malpractices. Their disclosures serve as catalysts for regulatory reforms, organizational restructuring, and shifts in consumer behavior. In some cases, whistleblower revelations lead to the emergence of new labor movements and policy changes that strengthen worker protections. This incremental erosion of corporate hegemony aligns with Gramsci's vision of a long-term struggle to transform social structures from within.

Challenges and Contradictions in Whistleblowing as Organic Intellectualism

Despite its revolutionary potential, whistleblowing as a form of organic intellectualism is full with contradictions. First, whistleblowers often operate within the very institutions they seek to challenge, which means they are subject to corporate influence and legal constraints. Unlike traditional activists who position themselves entirely outside the system, whistleblowers must navigate complex power dynamics that shape the effectiveness of their actions.

Second, not all whistleblowers adopt a class-conscious perspective. Some individuals expose corporate wrongdoing out of personal grievances rather than a broader commitment to social justice. While their actions may still disrupt corporate hegemony, they do not necessarily contribute to a transformative political movement. This highlights the need for organized networks that can harness whistleblower revelations for sustained resistance rather than isolated acts of defiance.

Third, the commodification of whistleblowing presents a challenge to its radical potential. In some cases, corporate entities co-opt the language of transparency and accountability to maintain their legitimacy while suppressing genuine dissent. Whistleblowing hotlines, internal compliance programs, and ethics training initiatives often serve as mechanisms to manage and contain resistance rather than to empower workers. Gramsci warns against such passive revolution, where ruling elites incorporate elements of dissent to neutralize their impact without fundamentally altering power structures (Gramsci, 1971, p. 60).

Fanon, Decolonial Struggle, and the Whistleblower: Decolonization as Rupture

Frantz Fanon, one of the most prominent theorists of *decolonization*, conceptualized the process as an inherently violent rupture. Decolonization, for Fanon, was not merely a transfer of power from colonizers to colonized but a radical, irreversible dismantling of the colonial order, an order deeply entrenched in the political, economic, social, and psychological structures of the colonized world. In his seminal work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon contends that decolonization is a complex process involving the reorganization of society and the uprooting of colonial power structures that perpetuate exploitation and domination. The violence of this rupture is, in Fanon's view, a necessary response to

the dehumanizing effects of colonialism, and it marks the beginning of true liberation for colonized peoples (Fanon, 1961, p. 37). Within this framework, the role of whistleblowers in post-colonial states can be understood as a form of revolutionary resistance. Whistleblowers, those who expose corruption, systemic injustices, and human rights abuses within government agencies, corporations, or military establishments, play a crucial role in challenging the enduring colonial bureaucracies that persist under the guise of neoliberal governance. Despite formal political independence, many post-colonial states remain structurally tied to global capitalist networks that continue to sustain neocolonial domination. In this context, whistleblowers become agents of rupture, breaking the silence around ongoing exploitation and revealing the deep connections between contemporary systems of power and the colonial past.

Fanon's analysis of post-colonial states emphasized that national independence did not automatically result in genuine liberation. In fact, many former colonies found themselves trapped in the cycle of internalized oppression. The ruling elite, whom Fanon terms the "*national bourgeoisie*," often mimicked the colonial administrators they had replaced. Rather than dismantling the structures of colonial rule, these elites maintained exploitative systems that concentrated power and resources in the hands of a small minority while the majority of the population continued to suffer from economic, political, and social marginalization (Fanon, 1961, p. 122).

In many post-colonial states, the bureaucracies inherited from colonial regimes remain in place. These institutions, rather than serving the needs of the people, function as instruments of surveillance, discipline, and repression. They ensure that power remains concentrated in the hands of a few while the masses are kept subjugated through corruption, economic inequality, and the suppression of dissent. Whistleblowers, in this context, serve as disruptors of the neocolonial order. By exposing the ways in which state institutions and multinational corporations continue to extract resources, exploit workers, and suppress democratic freedoms, whistleblowers challenge the legitimacy of these systems. Their actions bring to light the enduring colonial logic that underpins these post-colonial bureaucracies and reveal the persistence of colonial patterns of exploitation and domination.

In this sense, whistleblowers engage in an act of resistance that mirrors the broader decolonial struggle Fanon described. Just as anti-colonial fighters sought to disrupt the colonial system and establish new political and economic structures, whistleblowers confront the neocolonial systems that perpetuate inequality and exploitation. By revealing the hidden workings of these systems, they force society to reckon with uncomfortable truths about the persistence of colonialism in the present day.

The Psychological Cost of Speaking Truth: The Coloniality of Power

Fanon's work on the psychological effects of colonialism offers an important lens through which to understand the psychological costs borne by whistleblowers. The colonial order, according to Fanon, operated not only through

direct economic and political domination but also through the internalization of fear, obedience, and alienation among the colonized (Fanon, 1952, p. 18). Colonization functioned through a complex web of psychological mechanisms that reinforced the inferiority of the colonized and the superiority of the colonizer. Similarly, whistleblowers face immense psychological pressure in their struggle for truth and justice. They are often isolated, marginalized, threatened with violence, or criminalized for exposing institutional wrongdoing. The fear of persecution, job loss, and social ostracization mirrors the mechanisms of control that colonial regimes used to suppress resistance and maintain their dominance.

Fanon's concept of the "*colonial mentality*" remains highly relevant in understanding why many individuals within post-colonial institutions choose silence over resistance. The colonial mentality is a form of internalized colonialism, where individuals internalize the values, norms, and authority of the colonizer. This mentality leads to a culture of compliance and submission, where individuals avoid challenging authority due to fear of punishment or an ingrained sense of subservience (Fanon, 1952, p. 22). Whistleblowers, in defying this psychological conditioning, engage in an emancipatory act. In speaking truth to power, they break the mental shackles of colonial domination and assert their agency in the struggle for justice and liberation.

The psychological costs of whistleblowing are immense. Whistleblowers often experience profound emotional and mental distress due to the pressure placed upon them by the institutions they seek to expose. They face threats to their career, their reputation, and their personal safety. Yet, in choosing to speak out, they perform a revolutionary act, resisting the coloniality of power that seeks to keep them silent. This aligns with Fanon's vision of liberation as a struggle for both physical and psychological freedom. Whistleblowers, in their defiance of the status quo, contribute to the dismantling of the psychological chains that bind them to oppressive systems.

Whistleblowing as Decolonial Praxis

Within the Fanonian framework, whistleblowing can be understood as a form of *decolonial praxis*, an act of resistance that goes beyond merely exposing individual instances of corruption or injustice. Whistleblowers challenge the very structures of exploitation that sustain neocolonial power, seeking to dismantle the systems that perpetuate colonial forms of domination and exploitation. As Fanon argued, true liberation requires the creation of new structures that reflect the interests of the oppressed rather than maintaining the political and economic frameworks established by colonialism (Fanon, 1961, p. 176). In this sense, whistleblowing serves as a form of counter-colonial resistance. Whistleblowers, by revealing systemic injustices and demanding accountability, contribute to the creation of new political and social structures that are more just and equitable. Their actions challenge the legitimacy of the colonial apparatus that continues to operate under the surface of post-colonial governance. Whistleblowing, then, is not simply an act of exposure; it is an act of defiance against the colonial and neocolonial systems of power that continue to dominate and exploit.

The struggles of prominent whistleblowers such as Edward Snowden, Chelsea Manning, and the many African activists who have exposed state corruption and corporate malfeasance underscore the global significance of whistleblowing as a form of anti-colonial resistance. These figures have revealed how former colonial powers continue to exert influence over post-colonial states through military alliances, economic policies, and surveillance operations. By exposing these hidden relationships, they bring attention to the ways in which neocolonialism operates on a global scale.

Whistleblowers who operate within the context of post-colonial states often find themselves at the forefront of struggles against entrenched power. These individuals, much like Fanon's anti-colonial fighters, force society to confront uncomfortable truths about the nature of power, sovereignty, and oppression. Through their courage and resistance, whistleblowers contribute to the ongoing decolonial struggle, challenging the systems of exploitation that continue to shape the world in the wake of colonialism.

CASE STUDIES

Athanase Serge Ouanre and Military Corruption in Burkina Faso: The Reproduction of Colonial Exploitation and Repression

In the shadows of Africa's post-colonial landscape, where the aftershocks of imperial conquest continue to reverberate through neocolonial economic structures, militarized governance, and elite domination, the figure of the whistleblower is emerging as a radical disruptor of entrenched systems of power. These individuals, often imperiled by the very institutions they once served, seek not merely to correct administrative wrongdoing but to challenge the political economy of repression itself. Among such figures, Athanase Serge Ouanre stands as a compelling example of the dangers and emancipatory potential of whistleblowing in post-colonial Africa (Harsch, 2017).

Ouanre's decision to expose military corruption in Burkina Faso transcends the boundaries of internal institutional critique. His whistleblowing, carried out at great personal risk and eventually leading to his exile, represents a form of external reporting that challenges not only bureaucratic malpractice but the foundational logics of military authoritarianism (Harsch, 2017). As such, Ouanre's actions are not merely managerial or reformist; they are politically subversive. His case invites us to reframe whistleblowing not just as a regulatory mechanism within neoliberal capitalism or statecraft but as a radical act of decolonization, especially when it confronts institutions whose authority is rooted in the reproduction of colonial violence. To understand the revolutionary potential of Ouanre's dissent, we must first situate Burkina Faso within its historical matrix of colonial exploitation. Under French rule, the colony (then known as Upper Volta) was subjected to extractive labor regimes enforced by a repressive military apparatus. The colonial military was not merely a security force; it was a coercive structure designed to safeguard imperial accumulation and to pacify resistance (Zongo, 2015, p. 57).

After formal independence in 1960, many of these colonial institutions were inherited intact. Rather than being dismantled, they were retooled by post-colonial elites, often trained within the same military and administrative frameworks, to consolidate their own power (Harsch, 2017, p. 80). Far from representing a rupture with the colonial order, the post-independence state in Burkina Faso, like many others on the continent, reproduced the same coercive logics under the banner of nationalism. The military remained central to this postcolonial regime. Its role was no longer to protect a European empire but to ensure regime stability through surveillance, violence, and resource capture. This entanglement of military and state interests laid the groundwork for a military-industrial complex that would become increasingly opaque and unaccountable (Ouedraogo, 2016, p. 112).

Ouanre's Whistleblowing: Beyond Internal Complaint to Public Exposure

Athanase Serge Ouanre, a former soldier, did not raise his concerns through institutional channels or within the command structure (Harsch, 2017). His revelations were not part of an internal reporting mechanism aimed at enhancing the military's efficiency or organizational integrity. Instead, his whistleblowing constituted external reporting, a public denunciation of state-sanctioned corruption and violence. In doing so, he rejected the role of loyal functionary and assumed that of political dissenter.

This distinction matters. While whistleblowing in many bureaucratic and corporate contexts is framed as a loyalist act, aimed at preserving institutional efficiency or shareholder value, Ouanre's whistleblowing challenges the entire *raison d'être* of the military in Burkina Faso. It is not the malfunction of the military he exposes but its functioning as a mechanism of elite enrichment and popular repression. This moves the act of whistleblowing out of the domain of procedural compliance and into the terrain of revolutionary praxis.

Moreover, whereas internal whistleblowing may be encouraged or even mandated in neoliberal governance systems as a form of managerial control, Ouanre's external disclosure aligns more closely with *public interest whistleblowing*. This form of whistleblowing appeals to a higher sense of justice, one that may transcend both employer loyalty and national allegiance. In contexts where the state itself has become an instrument of exploitation, such whistleblowing becomes an act of radical rupture rather than reform.

Ouanre's revelations must be read within the broader critique of the *coloniality of power*, a term that describes how colonial structures continue to shape post-independence institutions. In Burkina Faso, the military has remained a key site through which this coloniality is expressed. Ostensibly national in character, it functions as an apparatus for the protection of elite interests and the suppression of dissent, precisely as it did under colonial rule (Harsch, 2017, p. 79; Zongo, 2015, p. 67).

Ouanre's account exposed a range of corrupt practices: the embezzlement of military funds, illegal arms deals, and the deployment of force to crush civil resistance. These were not isolated deviations but emblematic of the systemic rot

within an institution that had never been fundamentally transformed. In this sense, the whistleblower's act was not a call for better governance but an indictment of an entire system built on coercion.

Compliance, Control, and the Illusion of Reform

A deeper theoretical point raised by Ouanre's case concerns the ambivalence of whistleblowing itself. In corporate and bureaucratic settings, whistleblowing may be framed as a mechanism of organizational self-regulation. Employees are encouraged, or compelled, to report wrongdoing as part of compliance regimes designed to preserve the legitimacy of the system. In this context, whistleblowing is less an act of dissent than one of discipline; it sustains the very structures it appears to challenge.

This co-optation is important to recognize. The imposition of a duty to report wrongdoing may function as a form of managerial surveillance, where employees are both subjects and enforcers of institutional norms. Far from being subversive, such whistleblowing may enhance the system's resilience. Ouanre's case resists this paradigm. His actions cannot be reduced to a compliance function. His refusal to remain silent constituted a rejection of the entire architecture of military power and its complicity in the ongoing exploitation of the Burkinabe people. In this, his whistleblowing aligns more with Fanon's call to decolonize the state and less with liberal calls for transparency within the existing order.

Whistleblowing in post-colonial contexts is full with peril. States built upon colonial scaffolding often retain the repressive capacities of their predecessors. Dissenters are routinely subjected to imprisonment, torture, exile, or assassination. Ouanre's exile is part of a broader pattern wherein those who challenge the security apparatus are branded enemies of the state or agents of foreign powers (Harsch, 2017, p. 84). These dangers are compounded by the complicity of international actors. Post-colonial militaries often depend on foreign aid, arms, and training from former colonial powers and global hegemonies. In this sense, whistleblowers like Ouanre are not only challenging domestic elites but also the global structures that enable their violence.

Conclusion

Athanase Serge Ouanre's case challenges us to rethink the political meaning of whistleblowing. His act was not one of managerial oversight or institutional repair; it was a direct confrontation with the colonial logic embedded in the post-independence military state. In this context, whistleblowing becomes an act of decolonial praxis: a refusal to comply with the systems of control, exploitation, and surveillance that continue to define African political life.

To call whistleblowing "radical" in such settings is not rhetorical excess. It is an acknowledgment of the existential risks undertaken by those who expose truth in conditions of authoritarianism. Ouanre's whistleblowing is both a political act and a moral call, a reminder that the fight for justice in post-colonial

Africa is ongoing and that exposing state violence remains a crucial step toward building a decolonized future.

Frances Haugen and Corporate Supremacy: The Authoritarian Control of Corporate Power and the Undermining of Democratic Accountability

Corporate Whistleblowing and the Struggle for Democratic Accountability

In the contemporary era, corporations, especially transnational tech giants like Facebook, wield enormous influence over our daily lives and political systems. Unlike state institutions, which are subject to mechanisms of democratic accountability, corporations operate in opaque, hierarchical ways that often escape public scrutiny. Frances Haugen's whistleblowing in 2021 is an important intervention in exposing the authoritarian dimensions of corporate power and its impact on democratic institutions, revealing the inadequacy of existing regulatory frameworks to govern these entities.

However, in understanding Haugen's intervention, it is critical to distinguish between *internal* and *external* forms of whistleblowing, as well as the divergent implications of *public* versus *private* sector contexts. Haugen initially engaged in internal reporting within Facebook, alerting leadership to the dangers posed by the platform's algorithmic structures and societal impacts. But when internal efforts were ignored, she took the radical step of going public, testifying before Congress and leaking internal documents. This shift from internal to external whistleblowing marks a rupture: while internal whistleblowing may be aligned with organizational loyalty and procedural compliance, external whistleblowing constitutes a more profound challenge to institutional authority, especially when it involves public disclosure of malfeasance in defiance of corporate non-disclosure agreements.

Haugen's case thus highlights a broader point: external whistleblowing can become an act of political resistance, particularly when the information revealed exposes systemic harms facilitated by corporate secrecy. Unlike whistleblowing that merely enhances organizational efficiency, Haugen's disclosures dismantled the façade of corporate ethics, unveiling Facebook's complicity in the erosion of mental health, political stability, and democratic discourse.

Internal Versus External Whistleblowing: Navigating Corporate Structures

Whistleblowing, broadly defined as the disclosure of organizational wrongdoing by individuals from within the institution, can be analytically distinguished into internal and external forms, each with its own implications for power, ethics, and accountability.

Internal whistleblowing occurs when employees report misconduct through mechanisms sanctioned by the organization itself, such as reporting hotlines, ethics committees, or line managers. From an organizational theory perspective, this practice can be interpreted as an attempt to preserve institutional integrity and self-correct through internal feedback mechanisms. It may seem aligned with the ideals of corporate social responsibility and ethical governance.

However, a critical lens, particularly from Foucauldian perspectives on power and surveillance, suggests that internal whistleblowing mechanisms often function as instruments of disciplinary control rather than genuine platforms for accountability (Miceli & Near, 1992; Vandekerckhove, 2006). In many instances, these mechanisms are designed less to resolve systemic issues and more to contain dissent, pre-empt reputational damage, and surveil the boundaries of employee loyalty (Alford, 2001).

The danger here is that internal whistleblowing may reinscribe corporate hegemony under the guise of ethical practice. Employees may be co-opted into a culture of silence and complicity, especially when the hierarchical power dynamics discourage upward feedback or retaliation is subtly sanctioned. In such settings, whistleblowing is rendered performative, allowed insofar as it does not challenge the fundamental logic of the institution (Perry, 1995).

In contrast, external whistleblowing involves disclosing information to parties outside the organization, such as the media, regulatory agencies, civil society organizations, or the broader public. This form is often framed within organizational discourse as an act of betrayal, an affront to corporate loyalty and confidentiality. Yet, from a socio-political and ethical standpoint, external whistleblowing can be crucial in exposing systemic and deeply entrenched malpractices that internal channels are either unwilling or incapable of addressing (Grant, 2002; Kenny, 2019). In capitalist political economies, where corporate actors possess increasing influence over regulatory regimes, media ecosystems, and even legal frameworks, external whistleblowing may be the only available pathway to public accountability and democratic oversight.

Notably, public interest whistleblowing (a subset of external whistleblowing) functions as a form of counterpower. It disrupts the privatization of knowledge within corporations and asserts the collective right to transparency, particularly when corporate practices endanger public health, safety, civil liberties, or democratic norms (Glazer & Glazer, 1989). Here, whistleblowers occupy a liminal space between moral agent and political dissenter, often at great personal cost.

Legal frameworks such as the UK's Public Interest Disclosure Act (PIDA) of 1998 were enacted in recognition of this function. PIDA offers protections for individuals disclosing information deemed in the public interest, including corruption, environmental damage, or gross negligence. However, the effectiveness of such legislation is uneven. As scholars have noted, statutory protections are often procedurally burdensome, narrow in scope, and contingent on complex evidentiary requirements (Devine & Maassarani, 2011; Lewis, 2001). Moreover, legal protection does not insulate whistleblowers from retaliation, career sabotage, psychological distress, or social ostracism, common consequences documented across multiple jurisdictions (Alford, 2007; Dworkin & Baucus, 1998).

Further complicating the terrain is the neoliberal restructuring of work, which has intensified job precarity, individualized risk, and diminished collective protections like unionization. These conditions disincentivize whistleblowing and reinforce a culture of fear and managerial supremacy. In this context, whistleblowing becomes not only a moral act but a political one, a challenge to

the foundational logics of neoliberal capitalism that prioritize profitability over justice, loyalty over truth, and opacity over accountability.

Thus, the distinction between internal and external whistleblowing is not merely procedural, it is ideological. It reflects divergent visions of accountability: one rooted in institutional containment and image management and the other in democratic transparency and resistance to corporate authoritarianism.

Whistleblowing as a Radical Act

Frances Haugen's decision to leak a cache of internal Facebook documents and provide testimony before the US Congress in 2021 constitutes not merely an act of dissent but a radical rupture with the normative expectations of corporate loyalty, confidentiality, and internal compliance. Within the discursive architecture of Silicon Valley, employees are often valorized for innovation but simultaneously subjected to strict regimes of information control and ideological conformity. Haugen's actions, therefore, should be understood as a deliberate challenge to *corporate authoritarianism*, a term that encapsulates the hierarchical, opaque, and increasingly transnational power wielded by technology firms over public life and democratic processes (Morozov, 2014; Zuboff, 2019).

Crucially, Haugen's whistleblowing illuminates the limitations of internal reporting mechanisms in environments where corporate governance is shaped less by ethical deliberation and more by algorithmic opacity, investor interests, and user commodification. The internal channels available to her, as she herself testified, proved structurally inadequate for addressing Facebook's systemic disregard for user safety, democratic integrity, and mental health, especially among adolescents (Haugen, 2021). By choosing to act externally, she transformed whistleblowing into a political act of resistance, one that exposed the ideological contradiction between Facebook's public commitments to "community" and "connectivity" and its operational realities of platform harm and profit-driven inaction.

From a critical theoretical standpoint, Haugen's disclosures function as a counter-hegemonic intervention (Gramsci, 1971). They challenge not only Facebook's internal culture but the broader capitalist logic of surveillance capitalism, which commodifies human experience for behavioral prediction and profit extraction (Zuboff, 2019). Whistleblowing in this context becomes a praxis of *truth-telling (parrhesia)*, in the Foucauldian sense, a courageous act of speaking truth to power despite the potential for personal risk and retaliation (Foucault, 2003). It disrupts the epistemic monopolies corporations construct through public relations, selective transparency, and algorithmic governance.

Furthermore, Haugen's case exemplifies how whistleblowing serves as a form of democratic reclamation. It contests the informational asymmetry between corporations and the public, rupturing the corporate-state nexus that has increasingly come to define digital governance. In doing so, it demands a re-politicization of ethics in technological development, a move away from voluntaristic corporate codes toward robust, rights-based, and democratically accountable regulatory frameworks.

The Broader Implications for Democracy and Accountability

The implications of Haugen's revelations extend far beyond Facebook. They cast into sharp relief the governance crisis in the digital age, wherein states struggle to regulate corporations that operate with transnational reach and quasi-sovereign power. Tech giants like Meta (Facebook's parent company), Google, and Amazon function not merely as economic actors but as informational infrastructures that mediate public discourse, electoral processes, and knowledge production itself (Couldry & Mejias, 2019). The lack of enforceable oversight mechanisms, combined with lobbying power and regulatory capture, creates conditions in which corporate priorities, namely, user engagement and profit maximization, often override societal welfare.

Haugen's testimony before US and European lawmakers galvanized global discussions on algorithmic accountability, platform governance, and the protection of digital publics. Her disclosures provided empirical evidence for long-standing civil society claims about social media's role in facilitating polarization, misinformation, and political violence (Gillespie, 2018). More importantly, they reignited the normative question of who governs the digital sphere, corporate boards or democratic societies.

In this light, whistleblowing emerges as a democratic safeguard, a means through which individuals can circumvent institutional inertia and catalyze public discourse. It is not merely reactive but constitutive of democratic renewal, especially in a context where technological acceleration has outpaced legal and ethical deliberation. Haugen's actions thus illuminate the urgent need for legislative reforms, including comprehensive whistleblower protections, mandatory transparency obligations for tech companies, and independent oversight bodies with transnational jurisdiction.

Conclusion: Reframing Whistleblowing as Democratic Praxis

Frances Haugen's intervention should be understood not as an anomaly but as part of a broader genealogy of technological dissent, a lineage that includes figures like Chelsea Manning, Edward Snowden, and Christopher Wylie. Her case demonstrates that when internal mechanisms of accountability are structurally foreclosed or complicit, external whistleblowing becomes a moral imperative and a political necessity. It affirms the idea that whistleblowing is not merely an act of disloyalty or deviance, as corporations often frame it, but a form of radical democratic praxis, one that asserts the primacy of public interest over private capital.

To meaningfully support such acts, societies must resist the individualization of whistleblowing and instead locate it within collective struggles for transparency, accountability, and justice. As Haugen's disclosures reveal, safeguarding democracy in the digital age will require more than ethical codes and voluntary compliance, it will demand a transformation in how we conceptualize power, truth, and responsibility in the corporate-technological complex.

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