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**TV Show Review: Birth of a Rebellion – A Sociological Look at *Andor: A Star Wars Story***

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Very few television shows in modern times showcase the dynamics between an oppressive system and people affected by these forces of oppression. Even fewer show this social dynamic in a relatable, grounded way as it is shown in the show *Andor* (2022). The struggles of a young rebel movement bred from these oppressive forces of the galactic empire are displayed in a brutal yet relevant way that mirrors real-life rebel causes in our society and history. Many themes and social issues highlighted throughout the show's episodic arcs hold much truth and act as important social commentaries that spark dialogue about real oppressive factors in our own social institutions. In this review, I will focus on a few major sociological aspects that I feel are important to cover. The forces of colonialism at work, acts of cultural rebellion, critiquing the status quo, and mass incarceration are some of the key themes throughout *Andor* showcasing how individuals from various backgrounds are socialized due to the colonialistic nature of an oppressive regime. A highlight of the show is that it shows how individuals from different social statuses react to oppression and what steps they take to adapt or resist the societal norms laid by the forces of oppression. As much as the themes are important, the range of the diverse characters of *Andor* are the heart and soul of the show. Through their points of view, we as an audience are compelled to understand how people of different social statuses and backgrounds react to oppression and rebellion. The working-class struggle, what roles the privileged play in these struggles, hopeful revolutionaries, and those fighting for a cause that they struggle to support.

**BEHIND THE SCENES**

The show is created by American screenwriter Tony Gilroy. He is known for the spy thriller franchise under the *Bourne* Series. Gilroy also acted as a lead advocate during the recent writers' strike, due to the poor treatment and unfair pay to writers in

Hollywood, which caused a pause in most Hollywood productions. *Andor* was created for the streaming service Disney+ and serves as a prequel to the hit Star Wars Spin-off film *Rogue One*, which was released in 2016 and was heavily worked on by Tony Gilroy. *Andor* strives to create more character depth for Cassian Andor, who was a secondary protagonist in *Rogue One*, and other smaller characters featured in the film. This Star Wars show received positive critical reception and was nominated for numerous Emmys and Golden Globes. It is set to receive a second and final season in Spring 2025.

#### AN UNLIKELY HERO'S JOURNEY

*Andor* takes place within the larger Star Wars franchise, specifically the events in the show fit in between the movies *Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* (2005) and *Episode IV: A New Hope* (1977). To understand the sociological themes of *Andor*, I must briefly summarize the state of the Star War Timeline. At the end of *Revenge of the Sith*, the Star Wars galaxy's fair Republic reformatted into a sinister Galactic empire. During this transition, the Empire conducted a genocide on the peacekeeping Jedi Knights. With their religion and culture being outlawed throughout the galaxy, the Jedi Order represents Peace and Justice, somewhat unconventional for super-powered law enforcement individuals. Without the Jedi, the new Galactic Empire could impose its will upon the people of the galaxy with little to no resistance. Fifteen years after the fall of the Jedi, the galaxy is at a tipping point. The sinister motives of the Galactic Empire are in full effect across the galaxy, with some individuals having had enough of living under this umbrella of oppression. *Andor* follows a rogue protagonist named Cassian Andor as he experiences firsthand the oppression nature of the Empire and the birth of a rebellion that he will eventually give his life for.

Star Wars broadly tells the tale of good vs. evil, and *Andor* further expands this general concept to a more mature audience. Often when watching one can forget that this is a show taking place in the Star Wars universe with its mature themes. The opening act shows Cassian visiting a brothel, where his motive is revealed to find his long-lost sister. After he leaves the brothel, he is stopped by two corporate security officers (or "corpos"). The

altercation ends with Cassian accidentally killing one of the corpos with him murdering the other. Cassian is forced to flee the scene and this altercation with the forces of oppression leads him toward a path of rebellion. As a wanted man, Cassian manipulates and uses his friends to survive a galaxy under the oppressive rule of an empire. Throughout the duration of the show, Cassian evolves from a common criminal and a con man to a revolutionary and leader. It goes to show that Cassian is not your typical hero, he is forced to act and survive circumstances that he does not really have control over.

### COLONIALISM IN SPACE

The acts of colonialism are highlighted throughout the many arcs in the show's duration. The concept of "Colonialism refers to the direct political control of a society and its people by a foreign ruling state . . . The ruling state monopolizes political power and keeps the subordinated society and its people in a legally inferior position. But colonialism has had significant cultural, social, and economic correlates and ramifications" (Go 2007:1). These corporate security forces act as an extension of the Empire which displays a form of colonialism. The Empire employs this corporation's services to enforce their rule upon colony planets such as Cassian's home planet Ferrix. When we are first introduced to Ferrix we see how deeply rooted the community is grounded. It is a lively place until the empire takes over. Colonialism is showcased in multiple different scenarios, but it is displayed openly on the planet Ferrix, which serves as a hub-world where we see the Empire's colonialist nature slowly take over the planet. It starts off with the corporate security rule and ends with the planet becoming occupied by Imperial forces. Livelihoods are crushed, citizens imprisoned, and stormtroopers march the streets of Ferrix. A once independent working world now faces the consequences of becoming an Imperial colony. Additionally, we see the aftermath of colonial exploitation in Cassian's birth planet Kenria. Abandoned mining equipment with dialogue suggesting that the planet went through a disastrous environmental situation that led to the planet becoming hazardous.

## CHARACTER MOTIVATIONS

As much as Cassian is the main protagonist, the supporting characters are as equally as important as Cassian's role in this Star Wars story. *Andor* shows a diverse range of characters that are differently affected by the oppressive nature of the Empire; some embrace it and many rebel against it. There are more characters than I can feature in this review, but I will explain two who play the most important roles in connection to the sociological nature of society under the Galactic Empire. Each is on a different end of the spectrum that represents how one is shaped and influenced in such a society.

First off is Syril Karn, an over-achieving, by-the-book corporate officer who leads the initial effort to hunt down Cassian. Syril believes that the system works, he represents those who fully trust the government and believes that those in power can do no wrong. But there is a side to him that is extreme, where he sees his superiors as lazy, and he takes matters into his own hands. Syril believes in the system and will do whatever it takes to uphold the system. A sort of blind devotion that drives Syril. He can be seen as a representation of younger members of alt-right movements. Even when the very system he supports punishes him and disregards him, Syril's blind devotion to the empire makes him a dangerous extremist, which leads to fascist tendencies. Syril is helping a system that does not even care about him and his belief that if he helps the empire in any way he can to gain favor might lead to his end.

Another important rebellious figure in *Andor* is Mon Mothma. She is an Imperial senator but secretly funds rebel movements. Mothma understands the power that comes with her privileges and seeks to use them for a cause that does not oppress. Mothma is a deep-cut Star Wars character who originally made her first appearance in *Return of the Jedi*. Diehard Star Wars fans will recognize her as the future leader of the rebel alliance. But at this point during the events of *Andor*, we find her at her most vulnerable. Mothma, due to her social status, struggles to understand the necessary steps to fight the empire. She has lived through a luxurious and comfortable life while becoming a prestigious senator, though she does acknowledge the injustices of the Empire. Mothma also faces her own oppression, due to the

culture of her home world, such as arranged marriages, which causes conflict in Mothma's life between her and her daughter. Mothma is in an unfulfilling arranged marriage that has caused her to become disillusioned over the practice and gives her a counter-cultural feeling toward it. But her daughter embraces it, following the traditional trap of cultural norms. Mothma is so caught up with her duties that it takes time away from her being a mother, and the relationship between the two is strained in a way similar to how families today can feel separated due to holding different ideals on social issues. One of the most important scenes with Mothma is during a meeting with a shady businessman where Mothma needs his services to adequately fund the rebellion, but the cost is high: an arranged marriage between her daughter and the businessman's son. Mothma knows that her daughter will wholeheartedly embrace this tradition, but it is something that Mothma does not want her daughter to go through, especially since these arranged marriages are implied to happen when these individuals are pre-teens to teenagers. However, Mothma realizes that she must do whatever it takes to fight the empire, even at the cost of her daughter's freedom; personal sacrifices must be made for the greater good, and rebellions always come at a cost. Also, it is important to note that the Empire's CIA equivalent is spying on Mothma and suspects her of rebellious motives. Mothma faces oppression on levels only accessible to her status, and she risks losing everything that makes her comfortable for a cause that goes against the very system that gives her comfortability.

Every character faces their own rebellion and becomes a rebel in their own way, though how they rebel can depend on their social status and experiences of socialization. Socialization "is the process through which we can learn not only cultural beliefs and social rules, but also the underlying structure or grammar that enables us to behave individually, organically, and seemingly spontaneously" (O'Brien 2017:135) and can be used to describe the dynamic between individuals and the institutions with which they are involved. From people with privileged upbringings funding causes through the safety of their status to the common criminal that finds it necessary to rebel for their own survival. The way a society operates enables certain individuals to act or react accordingly, whether it be to work their way up the system or work

to dismantle it. Cassian becomes a rebel due to necessity, Syril commits acts of rebellion to uphold the system he believes in, and Mothma rebels due to her acknowledgment that her privilege enables her to help those in need. Through the different perspectives of social classes shown in *Andor*, we see how people from different social backgrounds react to an oppressive system.

## CONCLUSION

*Andor* doesn't shy away from the brutal social commentary that enables sociological dialogue. Often throughout the show, we see rather realistic depictions of oppressive forces at work. Through the many social issues and crises in our society, *Andor* acts as a piece of media that helps to showcase these acts of social injustice by incorporating an already well-known franchise to engage the audience in the story. There are many other sociological aspects within the show that may serve as an introduction to sociology for the general audience, as well as a form of mass media that may help the audience create correlations to aspects of our society. I highly recommend viewing this show to gain some modern representation of sociological knowledge!

## REFERENCES

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