

Citations, abstracts and keywords for works on Burma by Lisa Brooten

Brooten, L. (forthcoming, November 2008). Burmese political cartoons and the transnational public sphere in times of crisis. *International Journal of Comic Art*, 10(2): 254-281.

This study analyzes political cartoons commenting on two recent crisis events in Burma, also known as Myanmar, the 2007 protests dubbed the “Saffron Revolution,” and tropical Cyclone Nargis and its aftermath. These two events produced *critical discourse moments*, periods of public discussion sparked by events that trigger uncertainty and stimulate media commentary which tends to reassert preferred interpretations to help interpret unfolding events. Critical discourse moments of such magnitude also promote the emergence of a transnational public sphere, where people worldwide debate the same questions provoked by the same events. This analysis examines how the two crisis events as represented in the cartoons of *The Irrawaddy* contribute to the transnational public sphere by reproducing or challenging understandings not only of Burma and its leaders, but also of the local, national and international players involved.

Despite the large number of cartoons produced as commentary on these two crisis events, the analysis reveals that the messages produced are fairly consistent and often repeated. Given the porous nature of the Burmese public sphere in exile, these cartoons may function in the transnational public sphere to keep key international actors off limits for ridicule and to build solidarity during crisis. Crisis events, then, may further the process of simplification already characteristic of political cartoons, so that they paint an unambiguous picture of the bad guys and the good guys, and function to promote within the transnational public sphere a collective call for action in support of the victims.

Keywords: cartoons, *Irrawaddy*, Saffron Revolution, Nargis, transnational public sphere, media analysis, media representation

Brooten, L. (September 2008). The ‘pint-sized terrorists’ of God’s army: Child soldiers, media and global politics. *Journal of Children and Media* (2)3.

Abstract: This study explores US media coverage of the child soldiers of Burma (or Myanmar) in order to better understand how such coverage functions ideologically. The study examines coverage during the past 20 years in five top U.S. print news sources: *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *US News & World Report*. The coverage is dominated by representations of two prepubescent twin boy soldiers, Luther and Johnny Htoo, who became famous as the child leaders of God’s Army, a splinter group of ethnic Karen minority rebels. A close textual analysis reveals a heavy Orientalist framing combined with a lack of context, such as the situation facing the Karen and US investment in Burma, functioning to divert attention from the predicament of the Karen and maintain an image of US superiority. The analysis also reveals how a 2002 report by Human Rights Watch successfully intervened to challenge earlier representations.

Keywords: child soldiers; ethnic minorities; media; Orientalism; media representation; textual analysis

Brooten, L. (2008). 'Media as our Mirror': Indigenous Media in Burma (Myanmar). In P. Wilson & M. Stewart (Eds.), *Global Indigenous Media: Cultures, Practices and Politics*. Duke University Press.

Abstract: This study examines the indigenous media of Burma, also known as Myanmar, which reflect both the country's diversity and the needs of its indigenous groups to protect themselves against the assimilationist policies of a brutal military regime. These media are also part of a multi-ethnic opposition movement against the Burmese regime, and in this context, indigenous media function to protect the dignity of indigenous peoples against the feeling of being overlooked by the ethnic majority Burman dissidents. These media complicate notions of "indigenous media" by drawing information from a variety of non-indigenous sources, by targeting multiple audiences, and by involving/working with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and outsiders. Burma's indigenous media aim to hold a mirror up not only to their own communities but also to the larger Burmese opposition movement, to the Burmese regime, and to the international community. In doing so, they also walk a fine line between representing indigenous peoples as victims in order to evoke sympathy among outsiders and victimizing themselves rhetorically out of agency, so that their indigenous readers become despondent and lose motivation for action. Part of their job, then, is to identify the patterns of resistance and survival that begin to alter stereotypes of indigenous people as helpless, hopeless victims. But they are also beginning to challenge outsiders to think beyond charity, to embrace solidarity and political action.

Indigenous media have grown right along with the opposition or independent media of Burmese-in-exile: promoting, reinforcing and reflecting the growing influence of indigenous peoples in Burma's political development. This chapter provides an overview of Burmese indigenous media and the functions they perform for their communities and the Burmese opposition movement as a whole. It also profiles two indigenous video production groups, Kawlah Films and Burma Issues, that have emerged recently to provide perspectives of rural indigenous peoples, not generally the focus of videos about Burma. The desire of these groups to be heard is long unfulfilled in the history of Burma and its opposition movement.

Keywords: indigenous media, indigenous video, ethnic minority media, opposition movement, media representation, victimization, stereotypes, solidarity, agency

Downing, J. & Brooten, L. (2007). ICTs and Political Movements. In R. Mansell & R. Silverstone (Eds.), *Oxford University Press Handbook on Information and Communication Technologies*. Oxford University Press. [Burmese media is a case study in this chapter]

This chapter examines the use of communication technologies by political movements in the interest of social change. Communication technologies, despite their huge corporate, military and surveillance applications, also afford opportunities within political movements to debate, mobilize, reflect, imagine, fantasize, critique, archive and inform, and will be pivotal to developing a future for humans rather than for capital. In this chapter we focus on some possibilities offered by three such technologies, radio, the Internet, and the mobile phone, to political movements. We provide a variety of illustrations of their uses and applications in social struggles, large and small. [The chapter discusses the Internet campaign for change in Burma that began in the 1990s as one of the earliest examples of global Internet activism.]

Keywords: political movements, communication technologies, media, social change

Brooten, L. (2007). Myanmar (Burma). *Encyclopedia of Global Perspectives on the United States*. Great Barrington, MA: Berkshire Publishing Group.

This encyclopedia entry discusses Burmese perspectives on the United States historically as well as during the post 1988 period by the Burmese military regime and its opposition. The essay discusses highlights such as the sanctions debate and reactions to the Iraq War.

Keywords: US-Burma relations, history, sanctions, Iraq War

Brooten, L. (2006). Political Violence and Journalism in a Multi-ethnic State: A Case Study of Burma (Myanmar). *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 30(4), 354-373.

Debates about the role of media in situations of political violence call into question whether journalists should focus on “objective” reporting or instead facilitate conflict resolution. Yet an increasingly problematic assumption is that journalists are outsiders to the communities in conflict, especially as aid agencies increase their funding for media development and journalism training in conflicted areas. By focusing on the situation facing journalists from Burma (Myanmar) living in exile in Thailand, this article explores the consequences of political violence on the development of indigenous journalism in a multiethnic state. Although influenced by the recent surge in foreign funding, these journalists struggle to develop a context-specific model for their work, calling into question the relevance of the dominant U.S. approach to “objectivity.” The contested nature of concepts such as *unity*, *independence*, and *censorship* in these often high-risk areas suggests the need for a more complex model of media development in contexts of political violence.

Keywords: political violence; journalism; journalism training; indigenous (or ethnic-

based) journalism; media development

Brooten, L. (2005). The Feminization of Democracy Under Siege: The Media, “the Lady” of Burma, and U.S. Foreign Policy. *National Women’s Studies Association Journal*, 17(3): 134-156.

This study explores representations of Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi in three major newsmagazines – *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News & World Report* – analyzing her symbolic role as arguably the most powerful feminine personification of besieged democracy alive today. The coverage examined here employs an Orientalist framework that underpins media representations of both a threat to democracy worldwide and a set of differing national competencies available to deal with this threat. Media representations of Aung San Suu Kyi and Burma invoke a “protection scenario,” which positions the United States as a comparatively mature, masculine form of democracy run by highly competent yet compassionate leaders working to promote freedom and democracy worldwide. This case study demonstrates that within a larger, Orientalist framework, enacting a protection scenario provides a great degree of flexibility for symbolically coding the complex geopolitical environment that has emerged in the aftermath of the cold war.

Keywords: media representation, gender and media, Orientalism, representations of democracy, “protection scenario,” post cold war geopolitics

Brooten, L. (2004). Human rights discourse and the development of democracy in a multi-ethnic state. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 14(2): 174-191.

Abstract: This study examines the effects of the global discourse of democracy and human rights, and specifically the Western emphasis on individual civil and political rights, on the multi-ethnic movement in opposition to the military regime in Burma (Myanmar). The impact of rights discourse on refugees and ethnic minorities from Burma is detailed within the context of changes in international refugee policy and the development of Burmese opposition media. The study demonstrates how narrow interpretations of human rights can act to reinforce stereotypes that create or reify inequalities among the various groups in a multi-party coalition or multi-ethnic state, and calls on political communication researchers and practitioners to attend to the varying and highly contextualized effects of such discourses on marginalized peoples whose perspectives are not normally represented in media.

Keywords: media representation, refugees, refugee policy, human rights discourse, ethnic minorities