Article

the International Communication Gazette

the International
Communication Gazette
2015, Vol. 77(8) 717–734
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DOI: 10.1177/1748048515611022
gaz.sagepub.com
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Traumatized victims and mutilated bodies: Human rights and the 'politics of immediation' in the Rohingya crisis of Burma/Myanmar

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Abstract
In June of 2012, global media attention turned to the deadly violence erupting in Western Burma/Myanmar between the Rakhine Buddhists and the stateless Muslim Rohingya, widely identified as one of the world's most persecuted minorities. This study employs critical human rights theory and literature on the use of emotion in media to analyze the constructions of the Rohingya situation in *The New York Times* (NYT), *Inter Press Service* (IPS). and the largest and most active Rohingya Facebook site, the *Rohingya Community* page. The Facebook page engages in an obvious *politics of immediation*, in which social actors mobilize extreme, violent victim images to provoke global political activism. Surprisingly, the NYT employs a similarly straightforward delineation of the savage–victim–savior framework while the IPS coverage is far more complex. This suggests the utility of a concept we have called the *corporate politics of immediation* and raises important questions about mainstream conflict reporting.

Keywords
Burma, conflict journalism, corporate politics of immediation, emotion in media, journalism, politics of immediation, refugees, Rohingya

The advent of the Internet and social media has raised concerns in both academic and popular discourses about the use of graphic images and hate speech in

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reporting on events without traditional gatekeepers, and about the function of such mediated imagery. This article explores how three different media outlets represent the ongoing wave of conflict and resulting bloodshed between the Buddhists and Muslim Rohingyas in the troubled country of Burma, also known as Myanmar. The conflict in the Western Arakan State flared in June 2012 after the rape of a Buddhist woman by a group of Muslim men, and resulted in the death of nearly 200 people and the displacement of more than 100,000 after the destruction of their homes, villages, and religious sites. Further violence then spread to other parts of the country, displacing thousands more.[1] In addition to traditional conflict reporting, graphic, and emotional images began appearing in social media expressing concern and outrage over the plight of the fleeing Rohingya, and mobilizing worldwide protests to address this group's statelessness and abject living conditions.

Using the lens of critical human rights theory and literature on the uses of emotion in media, we compare constructions of the Rohingya situation in *The New York Times* (NYT), *Inter Press Service* (IPS), and the *Rohingya Community* Facebook page, where the absence of gatekeepers has helped the diasporic Rohingya community to lobby for the Rohingya cause. We are interested in how human rights discourse and framing functions in these three very different sources, each with a different agenda. We employ the savior–savage–victim (SVS) framework by the critical legal and human rights scholar Makau Mutua to understand how media both challenge and reinforce traditional patterns in their conflict reporting, as well as how they construct the key players.

We find that the *Rohingya Community* Facebook page introduces a 'politics of immediation,' in which social actors mobilize extreme, violent victim images to engage a larger global community, using appeals to global values such as human rights and our common humanity. Surprisingly, while the IPS models a typically 'objective' form of coverage, the coverage in NYT employs a modified form of the *politics of immediation* we call the *corporate politics of immediation*, which despite traditional gatekeepers, still highlights in detail the plight of the Rohingya and rhetorically reinforces their victim status. The corporate politics of immediation has its own ideological function given the agenda of NYT as constructed in this coverage.

The Rohingya conflict in historical context

Burma is the second largest country in Southeast Asia, and prior to the current period of opening that began in 2010, had been under tight military control since 1962. Until recently, on the rare occasions when the country has invited international attention, it has done so for its lack of democracy and its abusive human rights record. Despite Burma's diversity, with 135 ethnic groups legally recognized by the 1982 Citizenship Law, the Rohingyas are not listed as such, although many have lived in Burma for generations. Thus the Rohingya remain stateless, with a total population in Burma of approximately 800,000, a component of the four percent of the Burmese population who are Muslim in a country that is 90% Buddhist. The Rohingyas have been much maligned, called 'ugly as ogres,'

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dirty, terrorists, and 'kalar,' a racial slur. Myanmar's government refers to the Rohingya as 'Bengalis' or 'illegal Bengalis,' which speaks of their status as uprooted Bangladeshi immigrants during the British occupation.

Anti-Muslim violence occurred in 1978, 1997, and 2001, in different areas of Burma, and violence between the Muslim Rohingyas and the Rakhine Buddhists has been referred to by one UN official as a 'chronic crisis' (Fuller, 2012: 19). In the June 2012 violence, almost 5,000 Rohingya houses were burned down by Rakhine Buddhists, police, military, and other 'security' forces, more than 30,000 Rohingyas became homeless, and many lost their lives. The violence between June 2012 and March 2014, including a major wave of violence in October 2012, resulted in the deaths of more than 200 people and displaced another 140,000, the vast majority of them Rohingya. While there have been Rakhine victims, the majority have been Rohingya. While some Rohingyas are taking shelter in displacement camps, others have tried to enter neighboring countries such as Bangladesh. Most often they are denied entry, facing dangerous and often deadly conditions at sea. Their plight has triggered international calls by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), human rights groups and other countries to grant them entry into Bangladesh and other countries according to international law.

Despite elections in Burma in 2010 that led to a nominally civilian government, the military's influence remains strong, as it is constitutionally guaranteed 25% of the parliamentary seats. Former military general and now president, Thein Sein, and Burmese opposition leader and now member of parliament, Aung San Suu Kyi, have both vowed to work towards democratic change. The nature of these changes, and the international interest in Burma that has skyrocketed since the first signs of democratic progress in the country, are the focus of much discussion and debate.

Our purpose here is to analyze how the three media sources construct the story of the sectarian violence threatening to derail the reform process, and the implications this may have for Myanmar's media and for media systems in countries in transition. We find that combining attention to Mutua's SVS framework with attention to the *politics of immediation* provides insight into how different patterns of media representation imply different policy solutions. The next section contextualizes Mutua's approach and framework.

Critical approach to human rights discourse—Mutua's 'SVS' framework

As critical scholars interested in how human rights discourse is employed globally, and in whose interests, we have found the work of critical postcolonial scholars especially useful for the shift it provides from the dominant lens through which we normally view human rights. Building on Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, the work of other postcolonial scholars such as legal scholars Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im and Balakrishnan Rajagopal, rhetorician Pheng Cheah, and communications scholar Francis Nyamnjoh is useful for our purposes here. All of these writers demonstrate, from various perspectives, how the dominant definition and

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prioritizing of human rights tends to reinforce global neoliberal and neocolonial structures. They urge us to think critically about how human rights are defined, employed, and defended—which rights, for whom, and in whose interests? Here, however, we draw heavily from legal and human rights scholar Makua Mutua.

Mutua (2002) explicitly identifies how this basic phenomenon manifests in dominant human rights discourse, striking at the very foundation of the global human rights corpus on the basis of its western character, which he and others believe is detrimental to the interests of non-Western societies and peoples with non-Western culturally based norms and practices. He argues that the common framing approach from 'the main authors of the human rights discourse, including the United Nations, Western states, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), and senior Western academics,' is what he calls a 'three-dimensional prism,' or the SVS construction; it is 'a black and white construction that pits good against evil' (p. 10). In this discourse, globally privileged whites 'redeem themselves by ''defending'' and ''civilizing'' ''lower,'' ''unfortunate,'' and ''inferior'' peoples' (Mutua, 2002: 14). He does not argue that human rights are 'bad per se' or 'irredeemable,' but rather that 'the globalization of human rights fits a historical pattern in which all high morality comes from the West as a civilizing agent against lower forms of civilization in the rest of the world' (p. 15). In this literature constructed by the main authors of human rights discourse, he argues, the United Nations is 'in a sense, the grand ''neutral'' savior,' with Western or Western-controlled institutions as a ''second powerful tier of saviors,'' and the foreign policies of Western states as 'the conveyer belts of ''civilization''(p. 35).

This critique forms our starting point for inquiry. Does the discourse we find in our sources function hegemonically? In whose interests does it function? How? What silences resonate? We analyze whether or not the SVS patterns Mutua identifies in human rights discourse also emerge in the news discourse. Mutua (2002) argues that the savage is not limited to a single identity. Historically, the state is 'the classic savage' but not the 'real savage' (p. 22). Instead, culture, understood as a dynamic and changing set of local truths to guide action 'produces competing social visions and values' which dominant interest groups, in control of the state, use to translate their social vision into public expression (p. 22). Mutua (2002), therefore, demonstrates how in mainstream human rights discourse, (non-European) states, prominent leaders, or cultural practices are often constructed in the role of savage.

The metaphor of the victim provides the basis for the entire enterprise of the savage and savior, and global human rights literature constructs the victim as powerless and dependent, a multitude of the nameless (Mutua, 2002). Women, children, and marginalized ethnic groups are the most probable categories of these 'dispirited masses,' doubly victimized because of their gender and age (p. 29). The lack of empowerment and inability for self-defense automatically makes a victim dependent on outside help. Mutua (2002) explains that the face of the prototypical victim in these texts is nonwhite. He discusses contemporary human rights discourse as an outgrowth of colonial discourse, where the inferiority of the native mind was an established norm in comparison to the 'civilized' one,

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and a recurrent theme was that 'the ''native'' is weak, powerless, prone to laziness, and unable on his own to create the conditions for his development' (p. 31).

The savior figure in Mutua's (2002) framework is a combination of ''Eurocentric universalism and Christianity's missionary zeal'', largely derived from the Enlightenment project (p. 31). The savior figure protects, vindicates, civilizes, restrains, and safeguards the victims, with the goal of freeing them from the tyranny of the state, their traditions, and culture. The ultimate savior is the human rights corpus itself, which further pushed the frontiers of European domination, giving the white race a reason to interfere in 'other' cultures to universalize Eurocentric norms (Moyn, 2010; Mutua, 2002; Williams, 2010). Therefore, 'human rights are part of the cultural package of the West, complete with an idiom of expression, a system of government, and certain basic assumptions about the individual and his relationship to society' (Mutua, 2002: 34). According to Mutua (2002), an aura of neutrality constructed around the United Nations and the carrot-and-stick approach enforced through global financial institutions such as the World Bank (WB) and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) are means to achieve imperial global policy objectives. Therefore, conflicts emerging in the third world are constructed as requiring the US and its Western allies as saviors by employing human rights discourse and (potentially) intervening militarily. Recourse to such violence on behalf of the victim is often justified through the use of emotion in media news coverage.

The role of emotions in media and the 'politics of immediation'

The role of emotions in media has been studied from various angles. A common theme in 'objective' journalism training discourages journalists from being overwhelmed by emotion in their reporting (Pantti, 2010). In addition, the emergence of the 24/7 news cycle, while helping to dissolve the differences between journalists and citizens through citizen journalism, can also be threatening in that the faster a medium gets, the less rigorous the gatekeeping and more emotional the content. This leads Naghibi (2011) to ask, 'what does it mean to celebrate a medium that makes us *feel* faster than we think?' (p. 58). For our purposes here, we will focus on what research has found about the relationship between emotion and political action.

The use of emotions in social movements and activism has proven to be effective in drawing audience attention and influencing audience cognitive processes and perceptions (e.g., Dang-Xuan and Stieglitz, 2012). Emotional words and images carry the potential to attract attention (Bayer et al., 2012), and Forgas (2006) notes that emotions 'appear to influence what we notice, what we learn, what we remember, and ultimately the kinds of judgments and decisions we make' (p. 273). Dang-Xuan and Stielglitz (2012) argue that cognitive processes such as attention and arousal-related effects caused by emotions in communication are determinants of online message sharing. Emotional devices draw audiences to participate in a cause and have an impact in online communication, such as the fact that those who use

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affective language in discussion forum messages generally receive more feedback than those who do not and that article sharing is positively related to the emotions contained in that article (Berger and Milkman, 2012; Huffaker, 2010).

Important to consider in this regard is how Facebook and other social media can create 'an intimate public sphere that creates feelings of belonging and community' that differs from traditional or even online news media and in many cases motivates action (Naghibi, 2011: 66). Naghibi (2011) discusses the impact of online spaces that 'generate powerful affective responses' that get reproduced and shared, 'creating a sense of global connection' (p. 57). Research on the Arab Spring adds to our understanding of this phenomenon. Alterman (2011) argues that scholars writing about the Arab Spring have concentrated on the importance of people's ability to *receive* information through social media, and underplayed the importance of their ability to *send* content, 'transforming them from observers of activism to activists themselves with a greater stake as leaders, not just followers, of unfolding events' (p. 104). He argues that 'social media and user-generated content lowered the threshold to become an activist, making it easier for people to see themselves as activists within a movement they saw sweeping the country' (p. 112).

Yet strategies for taking a movement from the local to the global level of attention require association with a broader set of values that moves beyond local values and concerns to engage a much larger community (Woods et al., 2012). It is often the case that in order to project a local concern onto the global stage, it becomes necessary to 'exclude local contexts, values, symbols and historical knowledge' (Neumayer and Raffl, 2008: 9). One way to do so is to engage a *politics of immediation*.

In an important analysis of mediated 'visions of people in states of acute physical and emotional distress,' Allen (2009) discusses a *politics of immediation* in which social actors mobilize extremely graphic images politically. She draws from the concept used by Mazzarella (2006), who uses the example of e-governance to define immediation generally as a political practice that is inherently transparent and removes the middleman, a kind of direct connection between the source and receiver that essentially denies or downplays the process of mediation. The way Allen (2009) uses the concept is most helpful for us, as it focuses on situations of violence, specifically the violent struggle in the Palestinian occupied territories, and argues that immediation is a 'covert denial of mediation that occurs in the formal properties of institutions and social interactions' in order to 'give access to an authentic experience and truth' (p. 162). She describes how, when repeated calls by social actors for change have been frustrated by inaction, 'the immediacy of pain—and sympathy for it—[becomes] a weak core of politics… mobilized to shock political systems into change, to incite civil intersessions, and to justify… sympathy, diplomatic attention, or military intervention' (pp. 162–163). The *politics of immediation*, she argues, is part of a broader picture raising questions about 'how a reconstructed humanism is put into the service of an anti-colonial struggle forced to speak itself through the universalizing idiom of violated human rights' relied on by the burgeoning sector of human rights NGOs (p. 163).

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These modes of immediation are increasingly drawn upon by marginalized and traumatized groups to draw the attention of the international community to their plight, which can also increase their chances of support and funding. In doing so, however, the politics of immediation diverts attention from claims for justice, fairness or liberty and instead presents 'human(ist), emotional appeals for sympathy and solidarity. Immediation is presented as apolitical and relies on this framing for its power' (p. 167). Immediation works to create 'an actual visceral-affective sharing—or compassion' and to provoke action (Allen, 2009, 169).[2]

Methods

For this comparative analysis, we examined texts from NYT, the IPS, and the *Rohingya Community* Facebook page. For NYT and IPS, we searched back to 2010 to gain insight from the few references to the Rohingya prior to the beginning of the June 2012 violence, and collected all texts that appeared on the subject until the time our analysis began in December 2012. We analyzed the *Rohingya Community* page since its founding in 2010. We searched the archives of both NYT and IPS using the keyword 'Rohingya' and analyzed all the articles containing at least some reference to the situation in Arakan State. This yielded 28 articles in the NYT and 11 articles in the IPS. We read these articles closely through first for initial inductive thematization, and then more carefully, identifying emerging themes and looking at how key players were constructed in the discourse. These articles included very few visuals, none of which were graphic, so we focused on the text and the language strategies used. For the *Rohingya Community* Facebook page, we concentrated our attention on the timeline's visual displays, the photo albums, and the language in the texts.

Once initial themes were identified, we employed Mutua's (2002) SVS framework to assess construction of the key players, and the language strategies used to do so in all three media outlets. We identified the use of metaphor, repetition and graphic textual imagery as strategies, which along with the politics of immediation, a strategy in itself, function to represent the Rohingya crisis for global audiences.

What we present here is our synthesis of these thematic categorizations and language strategies that lead to the construction of major key players (SVS) in each of the three sources. While multiple savage, victim, and savior constructions appear in the texts, we focus on the repeated, dominant tropes in each source. We also describe the larger construct within these texts of the national and the geopolitical contexts in which the Rohingya situation unfolds. We will begin with a discussion of the *Rohingya Community* Facebook page.

Rohingya Community Facebook page: 2010–2012

The Rohingya Community Facebook page is the largest and most active page dedicated to the Rohingyas. Its origin is not clear, but many posts originate in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The page was established on Facebook on 1 January 2010. From its founding until June 2012, the site was primarily in Arabic, and depicts

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events of a local, community nature. In June, however, the page began focusing on the victimization of the Rohingyas. The page then had a striking increase in the 'People talking about this' tally, which counts the 'Likes' and posts to a page, and the shares and comments on posts. The tally jumped from 388 in April to 4,702 after the violence began in June and 28,351 in August 2012. After a short transition phase from 4 June to 11 June, the community activities disappeared and the page took on a transnational flavor, switching from Arabic to English and focusing on the plight of the Rohingyas while working to build a global solidarity network. Our analysis begins from the start of the transitional phase on 4 June through December 2012; during this time, emotive language and highly visceral images were posted.

The photo albums on the *Rohingya Community* Facebook page focus primarily on brutalization of the Rohingyas, destruction of their homes and mosques in Arakan state, local images of internally displaced people (IDP) camps as well as protest events worldwide and relief operations for Rohingyas. The page uses reposts from mainstream and alternative media, international conferences, and other events related to Burma and the Rohingya. One noticeable transformation since the page's inception is its shift in apparent audience, from a local community at the start, to regional Muslim communities in the immediate aftermath of the June 2012 violence, and finally to a much larger pan-Islamic target audience and to more diverse global solidarity networks. By November 2012, the page was documenting days of global action to draw global attention to the plight of the Rohingyas in Pakistan, Malaysia, India, Bangladesh, England, Indonesia, Germany (Berlin), France (Paris), the United States, Denmark, Australia (Sydney), and Egypt. Signs and slogans call on people to 'help Rohingya Muslims from the evils,' to be outraged by 'human rights violation on Rohingya [s] in Burma' and to 'save the people of Rohingya before it is too late.'

Savage–victim–savior

The page constructs the Rohingyas as the clear victims of violence and hatred, presenting images of Rohingya men and women in crowded, squalid refugee camps, under rainy skies or covered in mud. The Rohingya page calls on viewers to 'save Rohingya from extinction' by displaying gruesome images of savagery. An album labeled 'Planned massacre and early indication of mass genocide in Arakan State of Burma' shows images from the June 2012 massacre, accompanied by a lengthy report describing the murder of eight men and two women. Images include both male and female corpses with blood soaked clothes, swollen faces, and a variety of wounds, including gruesome head gashes and gouged eye sockets. About six pictures in another album titled 'Rohingya massacre' document a tragic incident using close up shots and long shots to capture a wide view of events. One image shows floating bodies of women and children strapped together and disposed of in a lake. Another graphic image shows severed body parts and heads of about 10 family members in a pool of blood, with curious children standing by. These are typical portrayals of periodic violence which the page presents to

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its users with captions meant to illustrate Rohingya suffering. The language and visual strategies used here present violent victimization as the primary framing device. This is also the basic strategy of the *politics of immediation*.

The savages that emerge on the Facebook page take both abstract and concrete forms. The Rakhine Buddhists, the Arakan security forces, the Burmese army, police and navy, and even Bangladeshi officials all emerge as savages. More metaphorical savages include genocide, racism, ethnic cleansing, oppression, looting, killing, and burning. One photo album showed nine Bangladeshi soldiers with weapons, some dragging four children into a van, while others point their guns at the children. This picture is captioned 'Muslim kids are taken away by soldiers.' Other photos depict violence against the Rohingyas by military forces and radical Buddhists, commonly referred to as 'Rakhine terrorists.' Unlike the newspaper articles, where the use of the word 'terrorist' either refers to anti-Rohingya activists, the Myanmar media's use of the word to describe the Rohingya, or remains in the keywords for the articles rather than the texts themselves, the Rohingya Facebook page liberally adopts the word to describe the Rakhine Buddhists and monks. The graphic images of Rohingya victims highlight the state's inability to establish the rule of law and claims a direct state role in the atrocities against Rohingyas. Uniform wearing Burmese soldiers stand by the burning site of Rohingya properties, while active armed perpetrators carry out destruction. In one example, four policemen crouch 'in front of Mosque to kill Muslim people.' The images suggest that the only safe places for the Rohingyas are the refugee camps, and these are also grim. The state is accused of 'preventing foreign aid meant for Rohingya,' restricting media access, and withholding Rohingya 'citizenship rights,' hence the state is referred to as a 'murderous regime.' Global silence over violence against Rohingya is also metaphorically portrayed as a savage, including the silence of opposition icon and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi. Protest signs read 'your silence is deafening' and 'silence kills,' and 'your father fought for ALL ETHNICS RIGHTS, you should fight too.'

Saviors include the international community, United Nations (UN), UNHCR, and various international Muslim groups as well as relief workers from Malaysia, while justice, rule of law, democracy, freedom, and restoration of ethnic rights emerge as more metaphorical saviors. Images and text about protest groups and rallies focus on the media as potential saviors by emphasizing the work of journalists and reporters on the ground. Overall, by framing them as saviors or potential saviors, the page appeals to the many actors that make up the international community to intervene on behalf of the Rohingya.

Graphic visual imagery and repetition of themes provide the primary strategies through which the text and images on the Rohingya Community Facebook page construct representations of victims, savages, and saviors. Because graphic visual imagery makes the victim and savage status clear, the Facebook page relies less than the newspapers on metaphorical images to construct their representations. The Rohingya emerge clearly as the victims, with the Rakhine Buddhists and the state authorities as the primary savages, and the international community as the savior, to whom they direct their appeals for solidarity.

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NYT coverage: 2010–2012

Our search for coverage of the Rohingya situation in the US paper of record, NYT, resulted in a total of 28 articles from the two-year period from January 2010 to December 2012. Of these, 13 were stories covered in the 'Foreign Desk' section of the paper, 11 were NYT Blog stories, one was in the 'Travel' section of the paper, and three were opinion pieces or editorials. We included the NYT Blog articles, as these are key to the overall production of the NYT news on the Rohingya situation. The NYT Blogs are presented on the NYT website in various categories, and the blogs that carried the 11 articles analyzed here were primarily presented as news blogs; only two of these blog articles are presented as opinion pieces. Therefore, of the 28 articles analyzed here, the majority are presented as news, while only five articles are presented as opinion or editorial. Of these 28, nine include images, some of refugees and IDPs in camps, protests, and burning buildings, and in one case, an injured boy lying on a bed, but none of these images display graphic violence or its mutilated victims. In the case of NYT, the graphic images are presented through text.

Savage–victim–savior

NYT coverage highlights in great detail the situation facing the Rohingya victims of the recent violence, especially the refugees and IDPs. The 28 articles analyzed included a total of just over 200 direct references to the Rohingya and 46 references to refugees, mostly Rohingya, as victims, compared with 15 direct references to the Rakhine and 25 references to Buddhists as victims. The Rohingya are 'one of the most oppressed minorities in Asia,' 'a beleaguered Muslim minority… lashing out at decades of official discrimination and daily humiliations' and living in 'unspeakable squalor and despair,' and in one journalist's 'polite assessment,' are '"virtually friendless" among other ethnic groups in Myanmar.' In addition to the Rohingya in Burma, 'another one million Rohingya are scattered about the world—there has been a major diaspora… and they have flung themselves from Saudi Arabia to Pakistan to Thailand to Indonesia.'

Sympathetic NYT coverage of the Rohingyas as victims began prior to the violence in 2012. In a 2010 article, Rohingyas are described as 'suffering beatings and deportation in Bangladesh… crowding into a squalid camp where they face starvation and disease' and poor treatment by 'the police' and the Bangladeshi host population. This article, like later ones, notes that the Rohingya do not have citizenship in Myanmar and 'flee repression and fear' there. The camps in which they live as refugees or IDPs feature 'dirt-floored hovel[s] made of sticks, scrap wood and plastic sheeting,' are running out of food, have sky high mortality and malnutrition rates, and 'little access to safe drinking water, sanitation or medical care.' Referring to the lack of latrines in the camps, this article quotes an aid worker saying 'I've seen small children using piles of human feces as toys.'

Once the violence breaks out in June 2012, the victim status of the Rohingya increases, the descriptions of their plight increasingly visceral. The Rohingya are

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described as 'inhabit[ing] the worst position in Burma's dreadful human rights landscape' and living 'in total despair,' having faced 'generations of persecution' and 'torture, neglect and repression in the Buddhist-majority land.' One article describes 'villagers in the affected area carrying swords and sharpened bamboo poles,' arguing that 'the Rohingya… are perhaps the most vulnerable minority, plagued by what one United Nations official has called a ''chronic crisis.'' They are not allowed to own land, suffer frequent food shortages and are technically restricted from travel outside Rakhine.' The recent violence has resulted in 'thousands of stateless men and women floating in a river, their corpses washing up on its shores.'

While the primary victim status in this coverage belongs to the Rohingya, Burma's 'fragile attempts at democratic reform,' often conflated with investment, are also a central metaphorical victim, although the language can be indirect, implying grave threats to economic development, business and trade. The NYT articles examined here made three direct references and 13 indirect references to investment as a victim of the ongoing violence, along with 55 direct references to violence as threatening to derail reforms. The July 2012 op-ed piece entitled 'Ethnic Cleansing in Myanmar,' which noted that the previous spring, 'a flowering of democracy in Myanmar mesmerized the world,' exemplifies the hyperbolic discourse used to celebrate the economic opening in the country. Yet threatening this opening is the possibility of 'a pogrom' against the Rohingya, 'the ugly side of Myanmar's democratic transition—a rotting of the flower, even as it seems to bloom.' The very first article reporting on the 2012 violence, on 10 June in a NYT blog, is entitled 'Conflicts Endanger Reform in Myanmar,' and another worries that the violence in Arakan State 'could spread to other parts of the country during a fragile transition from authoritarian rule to democracy.' This latter article gets even more specific, linking the democratization process to investment, and specifically to 'the Chinese pipeline project' which 'now faces instability' due to ongoing fighting in Kachin ethnic areas. Other articles express concern for the 'bilateral economic relationship' between the US and Myanmar, and that the 'renewed violence' has 'raised new worries about the possible impact on much-needed economic development,' in Myanmar and the entire Southeast Asian region.

The coverage in the NYT constructs two broad categories of savior—a more concrete category of people, institutions, governments, international organizations, and NGOs, and a more metaphorical category including investment, democracy, transparency, rule of law and national reconciliation. But overall, NYT articles present investment not only as a victim but as a primary savior for democracy in the country, and the ongoing violence as threatening to derail the newly invigorated investment potential. The 28 articles include 17 direct and 15 indirect references to investment as a reform strategy. Implicit in the coverage is the assumption that western-led liberal economic reforms are the most desirable. In a meeting with US business executives, Thein Sein 'dressed in a business suit instead of the traditional Myanmar attire he wears at home' and 'spoke in English about how his government was dropping the ''centralized system'' of the past 50 years.'

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NYT coverage promotes investment as beneficial, and while it presents critical perspectives on US policy, these also nevertheless implicitly promote investment, such as Aung San Suu Kyi's argument that US economic sanctions on Burma had very little impact. Rather, she argues, the country's economic problems were brought on largely by economic mismanagement. By overemphasizing the importance of US economic sanctions, the military perspective she critiques reinforces the discourse of US paternalism, since in this version of events, the US was 'very important because without the removal of the sanctions, the economy was not going to be able to move forward.'

This echoes the clear pattern of paternalistic discourse in this coverage in which the US is constructed as the father-figure savior at global as well as local levels. In an article about 'the first sitting American president to visit Myanmar,' US President Barack Obama is said to have 'played nursemaid to the opening of Myanmar' and though 'just six hours, his visit was seen here as a validation of a new era.' Referring to a meeting between President Thein Sein and US businessmen, one article notes that 'the easing of sanctions and the quick invitation to Myanmar's president turned what had looked to be an ordinary visit into something special.' Another writes that 'the US approval of the country's reform process has been one of the core political objectives that the regime has tried to secure since transitioning into power.' The US has made an effort 'to reward the Myanmar government for the reforms it has undertaken so far' despite the fact that 'big hurdles' remain.

The victims and saviors are constructed as confronting both actual and metaphorical savages, including the previous military dictatorships; both the Rakhine Buddhists and the Rohingya Muslims; elite, corrupt and unaccountable businessmen; and the media, especially the local Myanmar media. The two most discussed savages in these articles, however, are the violence itself and, as one article put it, the 'military governments that took power in 1962 and relinquished control only last year,' and their current vestiges, including a culture of authoritarianism within the ostensibly civilian government. There are 77 references to the military governments as savage as well as the 55 references mentioned earlier to the violence itself as threatening to the reforms. NYT language often lingers over detailed, romanticized descriptions of these 'spasms of violence' and the abject conditions and human rights abuses that result. These are said to be elements of a broader culture of factionalism and sectarianism, 'long-simmering tensions' and 'unsettled relations' that threaten the 'future of a democratic Myanmar.'

Other savage figures include, at times, Thein Sein, who is criticized for giving 'preferential treatment to one religion—Buddhism' and for not stepping in sooner to quell the violence, and Aung San Suu Kyi, who is critiqued for taking 'no clear stand in the conflict.' The media also get play in NYT coverage, especially local Myanmar media, as irresponsible in their reporting on the Rohingya, 'cast[ing] them as terrorists and traitors.' Two articles quote from many of the hateful comments, such as 'Terrorist is terrorist' and 'Just kill them.' One notes that the 'Rohingya are referred to as dogs, thieves, terrorists and various expletives. Commentators urge the government to ''make them disappear.''

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The use of metaphor is greater here than in the Facebook page, as the NYT cannot rely on the same freedom of visual imagery. While the Rohingya remain the primary victims, the reform process and the investment that is presented as its driving force also emerge as metaphorical victims. They are also presented as potential saviors, although their potential depends on an end to the violence, implicity requiring benign intervention from outside.

IPS coverage: 2010–2012

Set up in 1964 as a non-profit cooperative of journalists, the IPS is one of the world's leading news agencies, focusing on marginalized voices, vulnerable people and civil society organizations from the perspectives of those in the global south. As the IPS mission statement on its website says, the agency acts as a 'communication channel that privileges the voices and concerns of the poorest and creates a climate of understanding, accountability and participation around development, promoting a new international information order between the South and the North.' According to their website, their stories are reproduced by more than 5,000 print and online media in 138 countries. Their agenda differs significantly from that of both the NYT and the Facebook page, and they therefore offer an important comparative example of possible alternative framing strategies.

Savage–victim–savior

The IPS uses less emotional language than the NYT in its portrayal of grassroots violence and highlights the Myanmar government's policies, constructing communal tension (factionalism), foreign investment, and Myanmar media as the primary savages. The 11 IPS articles make 55 references to the government and its policies as savage, and 42 references to violence or terror as savage. Burmese military, policy makers, and government officials, according to the IPS, have 'clearly failed' to restore peace and that is why 'there will be a long, rocky road before we see peace.' The official lack of commitment is also manifested through the Myanmar government's refusal 'to allow the media, international observers or even international aid' into the country. The outcome is the 'ever-lengthening catalogue of abuses' which belies the Myanmar government's 'supposed efforts to restore calm and ensure the international community that its reform agenda is still on track.'

Another key theme addresses 'sectarian violence in Western Myanmar' as a savage force causing a 'slow-burning genocide.' Due to decades of mutual distrust between Rohingya and Rakhine, inter-communal tension is behind the intensified violence. Yet the IPS coverage reports on this sectarian violence in such a way that Myanmar's ethnic minority groups, especially Rakhine and Rohingya, are all constructed as victims of militarization and structural violence. In cases when the IPS mentions one community as a savage and another as a victim, the same relationship is later subsequently turned upside down. For example, one article holds 'a mob of 300 Buddhists' responsible for victimizing ten 'Muslim pilgrims,' but the

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following sentence brings in the earlier rape incident of a Rakhine woman 'by three Muslim men.'

In direct contrast to the NYT, the IPS constructs investment as a potential savage, and links the Myanmar government's reform agenda with the grassroots human rights situation. Therefore, the IPS cautions against 'over-eagerness' by aid agencies and foreign investors. The US sanctions 'successfully isolated the [Burmese] junta on the international stage' and that is why 'any significant concessions would weaken the international community's ability to react punitively should the Myanmar government begin to renege on the current reform process.' The IPS, therefore, suggests that before taking any action the principled donor should 'offer a frank, honest assessment of the climate for development and identify the urgent changes that are still needed.' IPS notes that Aung San Suu Kyi, on her first trip abroad in more than 20 years, 'advised foreign investors against ''reckless optimism'' regarding the country's reform process.'

In this way, the IPS coverage presents a conflict between international investors' support for the reform process in Myanmar and opposition to investment, or at least reckless investment, by groups demanding respect for human rights. For example, the WB's support for the reform process is said to be 'naive' because of its 'rose-tinted view on human rights in Burma.' In one article characteristic of this IPS framing, Jessica Evans of Human Rights Watch is quoted arguing against financial support to the Burmese government since this step 'celebrates Burma's steps towards reform while closing its eyes to the ongoing repression.' Constructing human rights groups as saviors, the IPS criticizes the 'US investment in the country including its controversial state oil and gas company' and 'challenges the U.S corporations to put human rights before profits' as they 'exploit a largely untapped market.'

The IPS blames Myanmar journalists, official media, and social media for their savage role in keeping 'mum' over the plight of ethnic minorities and exacerbating hate speech, and argues that 'ethnic minorities lack voice in the mainstream press and face prejudices from journalists themselves.' One article quotes Aung Zaw, founder and editor of the respected online news outlet *The Irrawaddy*, saying that 'the prejudice and self-censorship prevailing among journalists about ethnic groups are very real issues.' IPS also asks, quoting an Amnesty International official, 'how can you expect them to protect these communities when the Burmese official media is calling Rohingya terrorists?' The media's savage role in IPS coverage is extended to online platforms such as, 'websites, blogs, and Facebook pages based in and outside of Myanmar,' which 'are brimming with hate speech calling for the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya.' One article argues that 'this online outburst by the Buddhists inside the country and in the diaspora, ''openly asserting that action tantamount to genocide is acceptable,'' has surprised even long-time human rights champions in Myanmar.'

The *IPS* focuses on the savior role of international and local groups such as the United Nations, social and human rights activists, writers and others in the international community, and reproduces discourse largely from the human rights perspective. Grassroots communities and organizations such as the Rohingyas, the

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ethnic Karens, the Kachin Women's Association, and women's groups emerge as local saviors. The IPS articles make 33 references to the potential savoir roles of international development or aid agencies, 14 references to activists and advocacy campaigners, and another 27 references to both Burmese officials and foreign governments and officials as potential savior figures. These latter references are couched in terms of the potential of the new Myanmar government in contrast to the former military regimes, but are focused on human rights and the need for caution on the part of foreigners eager to encourage reforms. The articles note that President Thein Sein relaxed the ban on international aid for the Rohingya 'in order to avoid being referred to as inhuman by the international community.' Thein Sein's acknowledgement that the 'international community is watching ongoing progress in Myanmar with interest' becomes a reason for the IPS to argue that pressure and sanctions work in dealing with the Myanmar government.

The IPS coverage uses the least graphic imagery of all sources analyzed. It represents both Rohingya and Rakhine as victims of larger structural forces, such as the state and its policies, which emerge as primary savages. Media and investment are also metaphorical savages in this coverage, which differs from the emergence of images framing investment as a savior in the NYT.

The politics of immediation and the corporate politics of immediation

Engaging Mutua's (2002) SVS framework helps us understand how each media source constructs these roles differently, thus constructing either explicitly or implicitly different actors and strategies for solving the problems the Rohingya and Myanmar face. The problems themselves are defined differently. NYT constructs the primary problem as the threats to democracy and investment, conflated in their discourse, and clearly promotes neoliberal economic policies which favor US interests. NYT constructions reinforce the US's paternalistic, hegemonic role, especially as Obama turns US foreign policy attention towards the East. The IPS, on the other hand, has a different agenda, focusing on participatory development and social and political change. IPS coverage constructs the problem as lying both with the Burmese government and international investment strategies, by linking economic and political macro-level changes to the situation facing people on the ground. Thus, Burmese people and people's organizations are constructed as the primary saviors, locating strategies for solutions in very different quarters and providing local people with agency that is not reflected in the NYT constructions of Rohingyas as victims. The *Rohingya Community* page identifies the problem not only with the state and its 'security' forces, but also with the Burmese people themselves, especially the violent Buddhists, and also represents protestors as agents of change, including both local protestors and groups and individuals of the international community outside of Myanmar.

Interestingly, we find that the *politics of immediation* most closely fits both the use of graphic images on both the *Rohingya Community* Facebook page and the

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discourse of NYT, although with slightly different flavors. The graphic and emotionally visceral visual images posted to the *Rohingya Community* page reflect the politics of immediation as described by Allen (2009). The appeal to the claims of an apolitical common humanity presented by the gruesome pictures provide audiences with visceral connections to one another in a politics of immediation apparent in the larger *Rohingya Community* context, which also features multiple protests and their calls to action. This, after all, is the ultimate goal of the politics of immediation, that people will be provoked by the use of extreme images as 'irrefutable proof of injustice' and 'claims to a humanity shared in common with the international community and, therefore, the resultant call to our common humanity and human rights' (Allen, 2009: 161).

NYT coverage romantically describes the victim status of the Rohingyas, lingering in great detail over especially the aftermath of the violence, the abject living conditions of refugees and IDPs. This coverage constructs a particular form of the politics of immediation which we call the *corporate politics of immediation* that appeals similarly to a visceral, emotional connection with the reader but differs because of the corporate voice and agenda it projects. The *corporate politics of immediation* offers emotional, and often graphic descriptions of the Rohingya victims and their plight, but does so within the boundaries of commercial news gatekeepers and acceptable, dominant forms of 'objective' journalism. Editorial gatekeepers prevent NYT from using the type of extreme and graphically violent images found on the Facebook page. Perhaps for this reason, the references to victims, savages, and saviors are often more metaphorical than concrete, and the emotional textual images tend to emphasize the abject conditions that are a result of the violence, rather than the actual violence and its immediate victims. These NYT images emerge in an overall context in which neoliberal economic policies are championed, with a causal connection made, implicitly or explicitly, between economic investment and stability. In this way, a *corporate politics of immediation* claims a shared humanity by presenting victims as powerless, helpless and innocent, and very much in need of outside intervention. However, while Allen's (2009) politics of immediation as it emerges on the *Rohingya Community* Facebook page calls for change from the bottom up in the form of global grassroots solidarity networking, the *corporate politics of immediation* provides an elite, top-down perspective that celebrates rather than challenges power center decisions. By using graphic, visceral, emotional language to call for intervention from elite policymakers, the corporate politics of immediation emphasizes the victim status of the Rohingya in order to bolster the imagined need for benign paternal guidance, in this case, from the US and its promotion of global neoliberalism.

In addition, while the politics of immediation as displayed on the Facebook page allows for a forum for Rohingya voices, albeit primarily for the Rohingya in diaspora, the NYT, while occasionally quoting Rohingya victims, tends to speak more often on their behalf. The Facebook page constructs an 'us' (victims and their supporters) versus 'them' (the militarized Burmese culture and Rakhines as savage) discourse in order to provoke action on the part of its target audience. In its

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construction of the savage, as well, the Facebook page holds individuals responsible, such as Aung San Suu Kyi and Thein Sein as leaders who are critiqued for remaining silent and not doing enough to change the situation. The NYT coverage, on the other hand, calls for action from the international community ('us') as a collective to support the status quo by discouraging the violence in a passive manner, or at best as members of a symbolic savior in support of democracy (read: investment).

The language of the IPS is more descriptive and less emotional than much of the language found in the NYT, yet presents a challenge to the idea that investment is a savior, positioning the international investors' support for the reform process in Myanmar against those groups prioritizing respect for human rights as the savior. IPS also focuses on the role played by local and international development institutions and advocacy groups, and similar to the Facebook page, constructs a somewhat different set of actors and potential saviors than does the coverage in the NYT.

By maintaining an emotional edge to their coverage through the construction of a helpless, brutalized community of Rohingya victims, the NYT, and its *corporate politics of immediation* has ideological implications. Most obvious is its economic function in highlighting the sensational to attract the attention of the audience. But when taken as a whole, and especially within the context of a source as esteemed as the NYT, the detailed victimization of the Rohingya reinforces their helplessness and the need for external intervention. As constructed here, the *violence threatens progress* on development, whereas the IPS coverage incorporates a broader structural critique in which the *violence is a result of structural problems*. Directly contrary to the IPS constructions of the Burmese people's agency in solving their own problems, the NYT discourse ultimately reinforces the dominant role of the United States and its allies by engaging a *corporate politics of immediation* that evokes our common humanity within a corporate framework that offers a very specific savior to the brutal violence and its aftermath. This savior takes both concrete and conceptual forms in the shape of the father figure of the US and of foreign investment and its resultant economic growth, the ultimate savior figure in this coverage.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. Violence has continued sporadically since, in October 2012, March 2013, and January 2014. In March 2014, the offices of the United Nations and more than a dozen other nongovernmental organizations in Sittwe, the capital of Rakhine state, were looted and damaged by armed mobs accusing them of bias toward the Rohingyas, displacing more than 300 humanitarian workers and hampering health services for hundreds of thousands of vulnerable and displaced Rohingyas.

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2. Yet this naturalization of rights discourse, Allen (2009) argues, 'obfuscates the mechanisms of sovereign states through which rights actually are secured' and makes a direct call to the international community rather than the state, which has done nothing to improve the situation (p. 167). Allen (2009) arrives in the end at a query about what 'the future holds when political interaction revolves around the production of immediacy' (p. 173).

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