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Beyond naming and shaming: New modalities of information politics in human rights

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ABSTRACT

How and why does information become currency in human rights advocacy? Human rights organizations (HROs) produce media content in an increasingly diverse manner today across multiple platforms, for divergent purposes, and for distinct audiences. Advocacy practices are no longer confined to fact-based reporting aimed at exposing abuse. The sheer magnitude of resources expended in communication evidences the early stages of a shift in which HROs widen their broadcast and target mass audiences. However, human rights scholarship has not adequately addressed this new trend, which has the capacity to radically alter the advocacy landscape. Moving beyond the traditionally narrow focus on “naming and shaming,” we contend that a critical, detailed approach to understanding the strategic use of information will reveal a more complete image of how HROs build influence through their communications strategies. Expanding upon Keck and Sikkink’s concept of “information politics,” we develop a theoretical framework that distinguishes a set of practices we call *media advocacy*. Three unique modalities of media advocacy (juridical, revelatory, and activating) capture a robust portrait of information politics in twenty-first century human rights advocacy. Our innovative tools disclose specific operational and pragmatic implications for HROs, as well as help structure future research in this area.

Introduction

In 2012, Invisible Children launched KONY2012, a campaign designed to make Lord’s Resistance Army commander Joseph Kony a household name. With this ambitious objective, the communication strategy centered on a 30-minute film and an action plan consciously executed to maximize mass dissemination and impact by targeting celebrities, politicians, and cultural figures. The film was produced for \$140,698 and the campaign cost nearly \$3.5 million (“Invisible Children - 2012 Annual Report” 2013: 37). This investment reaped hundreds of millions of YouTube views, nearly four million pledges of support delivered to the United Nations, and \$100 million authorized in humanitarian aid for impacted countries and allegedly initiated a US military mission in Central Africa (“Invisible Children - 2012 Annual Report” 2013: 28–31). Finally, from the sale of merchandise, action kits, and outright donations,

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KONY2012 netted over \$12.5 million for Invisible Children—all from the production of a sleek video, clever marketing, and opportune resonance across social media. While financial gain and Internet sensation are potentially two measures of success, the actual impact of the campaign on the security of civilians in the affected regions remains suspect. This snapshot captures one extreme story within the contemporary landscape of human rights advocacy that is increasingly focused on fostering and wielding media clout as a means to an end, as well as an end in itself. The strategic logic that catapulted KONY2012 forecasts a sea change in the practice of human rights advocacy, in which traditional strategies are subverted for the promise of publicity and popularity.

Since the 1970s, human rights organizations (HROs) have been integral in elevating human rights as priorities within international society and, with the end of the Cold War, they experienced a considerable boost in prominence and expanded reach. But HRO communications tools were limited, relying on the discursive power of “naming and shaming” to build political influence through the combinations of public exposure campaigns and elite lobbying efforts. In the past two decades, the communications tools available to human rights organizations have expanded and have grown more sophisticated. Engaging diverse but selective audiences—from college students and journalists to elected officials and philanthropists—demands that organizations manipulate information to serve broader purposes. Beyond “naming and shaming,” today’s HROs provide critical fact-finding, hold direct consultations with power brokers, operate with daunting balance sheets, amass wide followings and command impressive media attention. Conversations with HRO staff reveal new priorities for mobilization and action. Meanwhile, advances in technology make it possible to cultivate fresh constituencies as the human rights community constructs and enlists an informed, activated, and empowered citizenry. As the number of HROs increases, a rich but competitive field opens where audiences become valuable commodities. Accessing, capturing, and mobilizing public attention requires a more nuanced approach to information politics, the contours of which are only now being explored. Why do HROs mobilize mass audiences and what can we learn about human rights by focusing on this new emphasis in media advocacy?

Even Amnesty International (AI)—the originator of naming and shaming—has outgrown its original formula. Diligent research produces influential reporting that exposes abuse and attributes blame, yet the full scope of AI media scaffolding raised around the research department supports its core work but also branches out in new directions: social media, photography, music, film, celebrities, contests, and merchandise. Each of these examples bears an ambiguous relationship to the human rights mission of advancing norms and holding perpetrators accountable, of which the naming and shaming method has always been the cornerstone. The puzzle remains: What function does mobilizing a wider public play in human rights advocacy? How does mass mobilization support or deviate from the core human rights agenda?

While commentary from observers and thinkpieces from pundits provide immediate reactions to changes in the human rights universe, scholars arrive fashionably late to the party. Until now, literature that studies human rights advocacy fails to parse the shifting ways that HROs use information by commonly lumping every strategy as some variation of “naming and shaming.” We maintain that this traditional mode of information politics is only a sliver of the action. Advocacy targets are diverse. Media platforms are evolving. Audiences are fractured. For instance, states, corporations, diplomats, and high school students

occupy distinct corners of the market for human rights and demand unique attention for HRO communications personnel. From the research side, if we intend to meaningfully assess the social practice of human rights (Pruce 2015a), scholars must furnish new tools that better study the work of today's HROs.

The task of this article is to document the expanded scope of HRO communication strategies and explore the logics informing what we call the *practice of media advocacy*. We aim to deepen our understanding of "information politics" by unpacking three modalities for communication strategies that identify the following features: social relations among actors, packaging of information for specific audiences and purposes, and assumptions that guide HRO decision-making in this area. To underscore the implications of this shift for the social practice of human rights, we pay special attention to the changing role of the victim or stakeholder, charting the changing nature of "witness" across these logics. We sketch out the architecture of the *practice of media advocacy*: how information is collected and deployed, against whom, by whom, on whose behalf, to what effect, at what cost. This continuum of activity marks a fundamental transformation in the way HROs operate and is linked to broad political, technological, and social trends in the landscape of advocacy. We critically assess this shift by demonstrating how recent uses of information have a weaker relationship to directly impacting political disputes or threats to human dignity. Overall, we show how communication strategies serve multiple purposes beyond achieving accountability from perpetrators.

This research makes significant contributions to our understanding of HROs. First, we revisit the concept of "information politics" and describe *how* information has come to be assembled and deployed by HROs in the past decade. Since Keck and Sikkink (1998), there has been little research that systematically explores the evolution of communications strategies in light of the shifting nature of human rights advocacy and the expansive and constitutive roles that information plays in HRO operations. Recent work from Alison Brysk (2013) is one notable exception and perhaps signals a new direction. Second, this article contributes to our understanding of the function of information in transnational advocacy by exploring *why* communications take the form they do. This includes explaining why HROs design campaigns that might have only an auxiliary relationship to their core objectives, for instance, using films, celebrity endorsement, or viral marketing. Third, we propose theoretical tools for drawing critical insights from this productive diversity in human rights advocacy and lay the path for future research.

Our investigation takes the following form. We anchor our analysis in the study of transnational human rights advocacy: identifying the centrality of information, problematizing the representative status of witness, and tracking the strategic use of media products. Following a survey of the literature, we propose a theoretical framework that distills the main variations in media advocacy based on a broad review of the field and our own observations from research, including interviews with HRO staff members and an analysis of campaign materials. The framework captures heterogeneity in media advocacy practices with three modes of information politics: juridical, revelatory, and activating. Across these modes, we propose hypotheses to prompt and guide future research in this area. We offer concluding thoughts on facilitating future research and the normative implications of the changing communications strategies of HROs.

Studying human rights advocacy

Fifteen years ago, scholars of International Relations (IR) began to focus attention on a set of human rights actors that had risen to prominence particularly in the years following the fall of the Soviet Union. As an outgrowth of the broader study of nonstate actors in global governance, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the networks they comprise attracted attention due to their ascendance in world politics. By studying HROs as actors and advocacy as social practice, constructivist scholars of IR developed their analytical tools with respect to the role and power of norms. These scholars work to test, to validate, and to enrich the core principle of constructivism in IR: Ideas matter in global politics. The assumption was that human rights, formed on the basis of common values to accomplish shared goals, could confront material power and emerge victorious. Commonly cited campaigns promoting international norms include women's suffrage, antislavery, anti-apartheid, antilandmine, and the treatment of war wounded as neutrals (Klotz 1995; Price 1998; Cameron, Tomlin, and Lawson 1998). These campaigns offer empirical evidence of norm emergence and influence; HROs crafted communications strategies that promoted the wider acceptance of a norm among key constituencies and thus shaped policy and effected wider societal change. The framework developed below can be applied to any historical case study in order to determine the origins of contemporary practices.

Emerging from this stream of work, Keck and Sikkink distinguish the workings of transnational advocacy networks (TANs), which have the goal to “change the behavior of states and international organizations” (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 2). As originally conceived, the TAN “boomerang” is a set of linkages sparked by domestic organizations that “bypass their state and directly search out international allies to try to bring pressure on their states from outside” (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 12). These global allies might include international and domestic HRO research and advocacy organizations, local social movements, foundations, media, churches, regional and intergovernmental organizations, and sympathetic governments. In a campaign, the alliances between the domestic organization and international allies are, at a glance, mutually beneficial: “for less powerful third world actors, networks provide access, leverage, and information (and often money) they could not expect to have on their own; for northern groups, they make credible the assertion that they are struggling with, and not only for, their southern partners” (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 12–13). Information is a key form of exchange here: Northern advocates obtain first-rate intelligence while stakeholders in the South gain a platform for sharing their stories and building influence. But we argue that this information becomes more valuable currency as it is framed and packaged for different audiences and purposes.

Underwriting this early period of scholarship on advocacy was the implicit (and at times explicit) belief that network actors were forces for moral good in a world dominated by arbitrary state power (i.e., actors without “real” power banding together to overwhelm elites). Because David-versus-Goliath stories are compelling and generally rare, providing explanation of how these battles are fought and won is both intellectually interesting and instrumentally useful from an activist's standpoint. Over time, however, researchers built on this foundation and began to push in new directions to fill in gaps and add context—layers of texture that problematize the notion of NGOs as do-gooders. Clifford Bob has highlighted *which* victim groups gain attention (2002a) in the competitive global marketplace for moral movements (2002b). As well, Bob has enlarged the scope of inquiry by focusing on illiberal

global advocacy movements, countering the traditional stress on “feel good,” liberal HROs (2012). Charli Carpenter has identified the role played by “gatekeeper” network organizations in providing recognition to peripheral movements (2007) and, more recently, has turned her attention to explore why certain movements fail to gain traction (2014). Also, scholars have peered within organizations (Hopgood 2006) to investigate variables such as structure (Wong 2012) and national origin (Stroup 2012; Stroup and Murdie 2012) to provide instructive explanations for why the world of advocacy looks as it does. This body of work also begins to address the social dynamics across actors within networks (Murdie and Davis 2012), revealing power relationships and privileged roles.

Yet, there is a distinct thread in the literature that has begun to strip away the impetus of moral action and of the centrality of ideas altogether by reasserting the rationalist position. Aseem Prakash and Mary Kay Gugerty have pushed scholars to regard HRO activities as pragmatic and instrumental, as actors that adjust their strategies to gain influence on national and international bodies (Prakash and Gugerty 2010: 13). These authors apply the “theory of the firm” to decision-making and propose that HROs are just like corporations in that they exist to lower collective action costs and operate in an environment of resource scarcity. While certainly provocative, reducing the social practice of advocacy to its rationalist essentials seems, to us, to dilute what is interesting and unique about the role of HROs in global politics: groups of individuals organically constituted to collectively articulate a set of norms and work to see their deeply held values realized even and, especially, when antithetical to the material interests of powerful actors. This perspective on HROs as entities with interests configures the landscape of human rights advocacy as a field of contestation for scarce resources of attention, donations, and influence.

Throughout these diverse approaches, methods, and investigations, a consistent refrain sustains the argument that HROs engage in a politics of information as they collect evidence, identify culpable parties, frame their issues, target audiences and broadcast demands. Political and technological trends contextualize and incite shifts in HRO priorities, made visible through communications strategies. We aim to further explore the landscape of human rights advocacy and the contestation implied in such a “politics” by distinguishing communications strategies as modes and interrogating the logics underpinning the various uses of information. Secondly, we explore the effect of this repurposing of information as currency on the nature of representation, interrogating how the status of the victim or stakeholder changes within these different modes.

Information politics

In their reading of human rights advocacy, Keck and Sikkink’s full “typology of tactics” includes information politics, symbolic politics, leverage politics, and accountability politics (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 16–25). Collectively, each phrase relates directly to an HRO’s use of information in some form or another: framing, agenda-setting, labeling, categorizing, exposing, researching, reporting, monitoring, explaining, or persuading. Each of these verbs identifies a range of ways in which advocacy groups utilize information and knowledge to their advantage. Whether symbolically, as a lever, or to hold accountable, the political deployment of information remains central to each type. We utilize “information politics” as a catch-all: Each of Keck and Sikkink’s types—and those introduced here as well—revolve around

information. In our usage, “information politics” subsumes the other categories (symbolic, leverage, accountability) because, in our view, they blur too often to merit distinction.

We aim to expand and deepen the category of “information politics” as an umbrella term that captures the ways in which HROs create, collect, manipulate and implement resources in campaigns and organizational operations. This is precisely the kind of issue that can be addressed when a scholar’s gaze turns from the relationship between institutions, or between institutions and states, to examine the social bond forged between HROs and their audiences in the practice of media advocacy. We are especially interested in investigating how and why HROs represent stakeholders and frame human rights claims to facilitate mass mobilization campaigns and the grassroots diffusion of human rights norms through media. Thinking about information politics as a “social practice” in this sense opens new space for conceptualizing and understanding actors, strategies, and the real micro-level work that takes place in the world of human rights advocacy (Pruce 2015b).

Critically, the suffix “politics” conveys a sense of the contestation and power dynamics in the collection and deployment of information. Following Barnett and Duvall’s breakdown of forms of power in global governance, advocacy groups flex “productive power” in their ability to shape and control the discursive realm (2005). But HROs are also operating on somewhat illusory grounds; as Wade suggests, advocacy HROs can “derive power from the perception that they supply accurate but suppressed or overlooked information. [...] Not only have such groups become powerful, but they have also, as a category, come to command more trust among the public in industrialized countries than governments, companies and the media” (Wade 2009: 26). We claim that the maintenance of this “perception” of accuracy and the building of this “trust” are hallmarks of HRO advocacy practices that aim to gain legitimation and credibility through their strategic use of information (Gourevitch et al. 2012).

Relevant for our work are the implications of the outsider–insider formation and its consequences for the basic act of representation: groups coming from elsewhere seeking to assist victims or oppressed groups in distant lands. To begin to tease out questions of power dynamics and perception, we must characterize how the nature of *representation* affects messaging and communication. By and large, a domestic group of victims and stakeholders plays a key role in contributing to a network’s success by furnishing technical data and witness testimony to support a human rights claim. Representing the claims of one actor by another is a cornerstone of human rights advocacy but is fraught with controversy. We are primarily interested in the mediation of the victim group’s claims on their behalf that occurs across distances; “the prefix ‘re’ in the word ‘representation’ implies an absence, presenting anew that which is no longer present” (Spence and Navarro 2011: 14).

Essentially, the HRO records and researches the claim of a victim group and then “translates” these claims for an outside audience of political actors, allies, mass publics, or media. The transmission of these claims is customarily directed by the transnational HRO in light of external contexts without much input from the domestic group; “for if [NGOs] have their own ideas of what should be done and how it should be done, ordinary human beings who have experienced, say, injustice in their daily lives are denied the opportunity to frame their responses in their own terms” (Chandhoke 2002: 46). We contend that one of the major gaps in the existing literature—especially around TANs and HROs—is that it inadequately addresses the existing unequal relationships constituted and consolidated through networks. Research around NGO gatekeepers

begins to approach such issues but does not do so from a perspective interested in representation as such. Here, in thinking about media advocacy, we propose a typology based on the social relationships underlying dynamics across these modes that are revealed under a close examination of HRO communication strategies.

A new generation of media advocacy

Recent decades have seen rapid technological advancements that have shifted the nature of human rights advocacy. Human rights research into the relationship between media and information politics has thus far attempted to describe how HROs choose their casework (Ron et al. 2005), how HROs shape media coverage (Ramos et al. 2007), and how effective they are (Hafner-Burton 2008). Examining press releases and country reports, scholars test hypotheses that correspond to commonly held expectations about advocacy, for instance, that media focuses on the “worst” crises. More recently, Hendrix and Wong focus our attention on the issues of targeting and audience as they inform the strategic choices HROs make (2014). By using quantitative methods and discourse analysis tools, this research is effective in penetrating certain myths about human rights advocacy but remains limited by its own framework (for a critique, see Rodio and Schmitz 2010). We seek to direct attention to the way that contemporary HROs attract media attention and pressure target actors using a mobilized public. This requires looking at the practices and strategies themselves, not only at their output and expression. Important for us is the ability to explore beneath the surface of institutions and their conduct and expose the psychic glue that gives HRO advocacy campaigns meaning.

How HROs negotiate the “telling of the story” to mobilize the public for the purposes of global campaigns and appeals is one area of inquiry. Keck and Sikkink allude that activists communicate with an audience by building associations of meaning with labels and categories. But, information and media are amorphous and contestable subjects that extend beyond stories we tell and filters we apply. While attention has been paid to the discursive processes of framing through speech and written communication (Benford and Snow 2000), we seek to direct attention to the representations of human rights claims through today’s media advocacy that relies on photographs, videos, and visual culture broadly construed. From important work by Susan Sontag (1977, 2003), Jonathan Benthall (1993), Susan Moeller (1999), and Lilie Chouliaraki (2006), notions of distant suffering have impacted the literature by focusing on the role visual media plays in shaping the audience’s consciousness of global crises, for better or for worse. More recently, Barbie Zelizer (1998, 2010), Sharon Sliwinski (2011), and Joel R. Pruce (2012) remind us how mediated public events relate to action and memory, as well as influence popular conceptions of human rights. The expansion of media platforms and technological tools has inevitably altered and increased the frames available for representing human rights claims.

To capture these seismic shifts in the use of information by human rights HROs, we need new tools. Counting newspaper mentions or analyzing word usage in HRO reporting no longer suffices as analytically meaningful in a fluid and ever-evolving media environment. In order to grasp the power, pressure, and perception of media advocacy, categories must dissect the social constitution of networks and organizations. HROs must be reassessed as entities with interests operating in a competitive field where information becomes currency for

garnering attention, for establishing a reputation, and for building influence. Driving logics must be exposed and held up to scrutiny in order for scholars to determine impact and efficacy.

A framework for media advocacy

In an effort to transcend assumption and opinion, we propose the following framework for examining the practice of media advocacy. The framework introduces categories and distinguishes relationships, outlining the manner in which HROs relate to stakeholder groups, mass publics, media outlets, and states. Establishing guidelines with which to describe the use of information by advocacy organizations builds on existing research with analytically sophisticated devices and enables further work in this area around different aspects and actors in human rights work (see, for example, Budabin 2015).

We insist on the centrality of representation as a key variable because human rights advocates must prioritize the autonomy and dignity of the individuals for whom they purport to work. Failure to do so threatens to severely undercut the credibility of human rights organizations and to further perpetuate the historical legacy of paternalism and imperialism of which Western actors in particular are constantly accused. Focusing attention on how questions of representation factor into media advocacy also bears on the construction of solidarity in transnational human rights practice. The human rights community has begun to think more deeply about what it would mean to constitute a global movement of solidaristic engagement—rather than fleeting expressions of charity and one-off gestures. Communication plays a crucial role in projecting the values of advocates to all of their audiences and, we believe, has a direct role in the political impact of advocacy strategies.

That being said, stripping out representation from the framework produces a more broadly applicable taxonomy of information politics with implications for advocacy in sectors apart from human rights: consider environmentalism or the treatment of animals. The way in which information is uniquely packaged for multiple purposes and is driven by distinct strategic rationales remains constant irrespective of the advocate's issue area. Representation continues to matter for human rights but for advocacy around nonanthropocentric subjects it is not obvious that the relationship with the "stakeholder" (Mother Earth or dairy cows, for instance) is as important, although we admit there are important philosophical concepts to explore here. Norms that address environmental protection and animal welfare rely on the stewardship of advocates in a way that the defense of human dignity does not and should not. Despite the fact that the current framework was developed through observation of the practices of human rights organizations, we can extrapolate the consequences and applications of these categories and extend them across advocacy networks.

We make a deliberate choice to omit what may appear to be an unmistakably important aspect of the media programs of contemporary human rights organizations. In addition to the functions associated with executing specific advocacy initiatives, organizations also operate in a fierce environment in which they must contend with public image, persona, and brand. These issues create a presence for the organization within the culture and society in which it is situated—global and local, terrestrial and digital—but bear at best an ancillary relationship to the HRO's traditional mission. Film festivals, gala events, award shows, photo exhibits, and social-media accounts may serve an ancillary role to draw in fundraising dollars or to "raise awareness" of an issue. However, we believe, these pursuits seek to position

HROs in the media sphere in such a way as to magnify their “real” work. An HRO’s reputation amplifies its research, demands, and calls for mobilization. Its brand projects an impression of the organization as cool, hip, current, youthful, edgy, serious, elite, cosmopolitan, or caring and these qualities in turn create associations with the audience. Outright publicity and marketing of the organization itself is not included in our taxonomy. This topic will be the subject of future research for the way in which it is ultimately inseparable from information politics but demands its own investigation.

Table 1 schematizes the currency of information constituted by human rights advocacy by examining representation, packaging, and strategic logics. The rows capture three modes or functions of information utilized in media advocacy campaigns. The typology below captures trends in the use of information and media by HROs and lays bare a robust illustration of the constitution of transnational human rights networks.

The examples of each mode stand in as model organizations that traffic in that particular modality more overtly than the others. Although these categories are not mutually exclusive, the examples listed in the final column are included for the way they each represent the mode. Some campaigns contain each mode. Most organizations participate in multiple modes.

We can imagine tactical considerations that suggest sequencing these modes: Perhaps juridical information establishes the foundation for those that come thereafter, while revelatory and activating information utilize distilled versions of the original in their own manifestations. There may be an additional temporal consideration with respect to the stage of the crisis in which we currently find ourselves. If the event has ended, the juridical mode assesses the damage and preserves the record. If circumstances are still fluid, then revelatory and activating modes may be more useful in applying pressure to intervene or for belligerents to cease hostilities. There may also be a distribution of use of information based on the sensational nature of violation; for instance, media advocacy around a mundane crime (like voter suppression or infringement of due process) may take a different form than more graphic abuse like torture or even more dramatic subject matter like sexual violence. Also, we would expect to observe younger organizations relying less on the juridical modality and skipping ahead to shaming and mobilization. On the other hand, a traditional organization like the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is more likely to remain steadfast in its commitment to juridical advocacy and to keep a safe distance from the spotlight. How an HRO deploys juridical, revelatory, and activating information sends signals about what audiences it intends to reach and what targets it hopes to influence. For instance, dry textual

Table 1. Modalities of information politics in human rights.

	Representation	Packaging	Logic	Examples
Juridical Mode	HRO documents violations on behalf of stakeholder group	Fact-finding; Collecting witness testimony	Information as legitimacy and objectivity	International Committee of the Red Cross
Revelatory Mode	HRO communicates the stakeholders’ experiences to media and global public	Bearing witness; Naming and shaming	Information to expose and hold accountable	Médicins sans Frontières
Activating Mode	HRO mobilizes global public to learn and take action	Raising awareness; Storytelling	Information as moral force	Save Darfur Coalition

reporting may be effective for communicating with elected officials, while online videos with flashy editing and dance music are carefully engineered for high school students.

The next section lays out each mode and provides a brief sketch of an ideal-type HRO. The final section that follows wades into the future by considering hypotheses to inform next stages of this research program.

Juridical mode

Filling the chasm between the lofty rhetoric of human rights norms and facts is the modus operandi of human rights organizations. The foundation for waging “information politics” lies in the efforts of human rights HROs to act on behalf of the victim or distant other in need of protection. This representation begins with the documentation of human rights violations through the collection of evidence to assess the nature, scale, and verity of human rights claims. The 1970s and 1980s saw an explosion of onsite investigations by human rights organizations (Thoolen and Verstappen 1986). This practice arises simply from the roots of human rights as legal rights and the traditional role of legal defense to seek redress for criminal abuse. In order to prosecute a case in court, evidence must be solid and beyond reproach, and there must be a clear claim of culpability made against an alleged perpetrator. Because perpetrators will go to tremendous lengths to obscure their abuse, evidence gathering can be complex and require support from forensic scientists, for instance (Claude 2002). When human rights claims are underwritten by factual evidence, HROs (legal and political) can assert themselves as objective interveners.

The collection of information in the “juridical mode” maintains a legal tenor: HROs engage in the practice of “documenting,” “fact-finding,” “collecting evidence,” and “reporting.” In this scenario, the “objectivity” of information is nonbiased, neutral, and apolitical. Allegations are made not out of any pursuit of narrow self-interest but in the name of *universal* rights: those rights that reflect values that transcend particularities. For example, in the classic formulation of fact-finding, “In order to inspire corrective efforts by governments, human rights organizations must demonstrate that their factual statements are true and thus constitute a reliable basis for remedial governmental policy. Human rights organizations—as with any finder of fact—must pursue reliability through the use of generally accepted procedures and by establishing a reputation for fairness and impartiality” (Weissbrodt and McCarthy 1981: 5–6). Human rights organizations maintain integrity due to their “appropriate expectations of rigor” (Orentlicher 1990: 106) in research and evidence collection. Scrupulous methods provide defense against charges of impropriety and expose abusers accustomed to hiding in closed societies that lack transparency. Objective facts provide grounding for human rights norms and bring vague language into focus.

The packaging of information in the juridical mode sustains an aura of scientific research and legal practice. HROs that conduct their own investigations publish their findings as “reports,” “memorandums,” “briefs,” and “fact sheets.” From these origins in legal evidentiary procedures, organizations evolved to publish routinized country reports and meticulous research on complex crises in progress, from gender-based violence to counterinsurgency. Amnesty International’s work particularly in Latin America during the 1970s is often highlighted as ground zero in this regard (see Guest 1990 regarding Amnesty’s 1977 report on Argentina’s “dirty war” for which it was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize). The

professional documentation of violations begins a representation of victim groups that serves the strategic logic of maintaining credibility and integrity for human rights organizations.

The strategic logic of HRO representation of information in the juridical mode hinges on the manner of its collection *as well as* the manner of its use. The majority of HROs engaged in collecting information in the juridical mode move onto revealing their reports and mobilizing the larger public to gain greater influence. However, there remains one prime example focused on collecting and deploying information about human rights without publicly targeting perpetrators or raising mass awareness: the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Permitted into prisons and other detention centers, the ICRC delivers relief and conducts fact-finding missions. But the information collected is not broadcast; indeed, the ICRC has for over a century strived to maintain a high standard of neutrality and impartiality by refusing to broadcast its findings. The Red Cross is famous (and notorious) for its traits of “discretion and reluctance to publicly confront state wrong-doing” (Forsythe 2005: 14). Instead, the ICRC prefers the avenue of “quiet advocacy,” meeting in private with government officials to press human rights claims. Staying in the juridical mode serves ICRC’s status as an HRO whose use of information is acclaimed as strictly objective and neutral.

Revelatory mode

Central to the strategic logic of the revelatory mode is the principle that secrecy breeds impunity and exposing abuse is the enemy of its persistence. As Orentlicher explains, the so-called “human rights methodology” rests on this assumption that “human rights professionals believe that no action is more effective in promoting governments to curb human rights violations than aiming the spotlight of public scrutiny on the depredations themselves” (1990: 84). Summed up more simply as “promoting change by reporting facts,” this strategy has been the hallmark of HROs (Orentlicher 1990: 84). Here, the HRO represents the interests of the stakeholders by publicizing information about human rights violations; the tactic commonly referred to as “naming and shaming.” Perpetrators are held to account as the HROs expose the gap between human rights obligations and the actual policies of abusive regimes, between rhetoric and reality.

The revelatory mode flows directly from the information gathered in the juridical mode to shape a climate of intolerance. HROs “name” the human rights violations and the responsible actors, citing collected evidence and reports. But in this case, information is packaged to gain the maximum effect of “shaming.” This includes the use of time-sensitive press releases, news alerts, and bulletins. Shorter than reports, information about human rights violations loses nuance, accentuating victims and perpetrators in a generalized manner.

Amnesty International pioneered “naming and shaming” as an overtly political methodology for manipulating information into actionable demands against perpetrators. By exposing abusers and publicizing their wrongdoings, the organization invites embarrassment on the regime. Amnesty members and supporters participate in letter-writing campaigns aimed at letting both violators and victims that the world is aware *and committed to seeing the problem resolved*. Médecins sans Frontières (MSF, or Doctors without Borders), however, distinguishes its own relationship to information politics manifested in the priority of “bearing witness.” Health care professionals that operate with a coherent system of ethics are uniquely positioned to bear witness and attest to crimes due to their neutral stance and humanitarian outlook (Tanguy and Terry 1999). Witnessing is closely tied to humanitarianism and the

Red Cross tradition that predates MSF. Emerging as a foil to the Red Cross, MSF's doctrine of "*témoignage*" is a weaponized version of witnessing.

In this case, witnessing means to observe and speak out, thus, bearing direct connection to advocacy and driving humanitarianism in the direction of human rights. Bearing witness depends on the assumption that being present will act as a deterrent to abuse by virtue of the threat posed by publicity—and any consequences that would follow from that publicity (which is itself another assumption worth unpacking). In this case, MSF professionals translate the claims of the victims as an interlocutor. By utilizing an interlocutor to transport and transmit the information to the outside world, "bearing witness" has come to serve an important function. However, not all interlocutors carry the same reputation as MSF health professionals nor possess the classic background and expertise in development and human rights issues.

The practice of media advocacy in the revelatory mode takes shape when HROs aim to broadcast their information widely and with a normative tone. Audiences for these revealing stories of violence and brutality in detail include journalists, experts, and laypeople. Platforms for broadcasting the information about human rights violations might run from e-mail alerts to press conferences to publication of a country report. As intended audiences shift, so do expectations: The mass public is frequently asked to take action in response to an urgent notice of abuse. Or, at the very least, concerned citizens should share the news broadly, promoting a sphere of public knowledge that, theoretically, becomes an independent moral and political force.

The strategic logic behind the revelatory mode hinges on leveraging this publicity of human rights crimes to raise the costs of violation. With the external attention, actors appear center stage in the global court of public opinion. This "court" is a departure from the juridical mode of media advocacy because it operationalizes information in a distinctly social manner and places one's reputation on trial. The standing threat posed by human rights HROs, to uncover hidden tales of suffering, relies on an assumption that abusive actors fear exposure and therefore restrain their behavior or at least go to greater lengths to evade identification. As AI's slogan declares, it is "better to light a candle than curse the darkness."

Activating mode

This final modality of media advocacy scales up representation of human rights claims to global audiences. The driving impetus in the activating mode is the necessity to not only *reach* large numbers of people but also to *mobilize* them to take action. An HRO must communicate its objectives to the public in a way that galvanizes their support and transforms their moral consciousness into tangible action. "Raising awareness" is a generalized charge to spread information of human rights issues to the masses. It is a trope as commonly heard among our idealistic students engaged in campus activism as it is on the tax forms of major human rights organizations as a task justifying six- and seven-figure expenses.

Politically, the field of advocacy has shifted to the perceived need for volume capitalization. We believe this approach is a generational response popularized by hindsight thinking following the Rwandan genocide of 1994. In the aftermath, the late US Senator Paul Simon provided a poignant quote subsequently published in Samantha Power's opus, "*A Problem from Hell*": *America in the Age of Genocide*: "If every member of the House and Senate had received one hundred letters from people back home saying we have to do something about

Rwanda, when the crisis was first developing, then I think the response would have been different” (2007: 377). The human rights community learned a central lesson from the failure in Rwanda and from Power’s reporting in this influential book (Hamilton 2011; Budabin 2012). Political leaders could not hide behind the excuse that they did not know about the genocide; they could not blame information deficit. Instead they blamed lack of collective will, which is best motivated from below. In order to do so, we believe that HROs have pivoted toward raising awareness and mobilizing a mass public as a central objective in their work.

The audience for the activating mode is imagined as less knowledgeable, globally constructed, and with limited time resources. Rather than the literate audience of the revelatory mode, the public does not possess intimate knowledge of human rights norms, country context, and legal obligations. For this reason, activating media advocacy revolves around emotional pleas wrapped in clever catch phrases. Graphic imagery of suffering reels in the audience, while the campaigns demand very little in terms of action. These messages rely on base connections and weak ties. Narratives are constructed without history in order to retain the attention of the audience before their eyes gloss over with unfamiliar and complex details. The trouble is that human rights crises are inherently composed of unfamiliar and complex details.

Supporters are not activists in the traditional sense, but merely a list of names and e-mail addresses that the HRO can reference in order to validate its own relevance. Central to the activating mode is “you”: the engaged activist attuned to global issues and hopeful about the future. In order to cultivate hordes of “you’s,” the rationale driving this strategy rests on the correlation between the consciousness of the public on an issue and the way in which this consciousness exerts moral force on decision makers to act.

Storytelling, as a variety of content produced through the practice of media advocacy, relies on “the transnational moral and empathetic discourse of solidarity that underlies the modern-day practice of mass-mobilized human rights activism” (Gregory 2006: 195). In order to capitalize on the potential for empathy and solidarity among the audience, HROs must craft a message of what is going on and why the public should care enough to act. In certain circumstances, the story can be succinct, especially in a discrete case of a political prisoner. However, the more complex the circumstances are, the more complicated it is to communicate a narrative to a lay audience, as in a civil war. HRO storytelling must paint a picture of the causes of the crisis, categorize the actors involved and propose a resolution that requires citizen engagement. Historical context and geopolitical implications certainly add a robust dimension to any story and a degree of legitimacy but are often avoided so as not to present a convoluted narrative.

As an example, when the specter of genocide was raised regarding conflict in Darfur, Sudan, in 2004, groups in the United States quickly coalesced into a social movement called the Save Darfur Coalition. At its formation, Save Darfur decided to pursue a strategy of mass mobilization to build pressure on US political actors, as well as the United Nations, influenced by Power’s mantra and a related argument about political will: “[T]he battle to stop genocide has thus been repeatedly lost in the realm of domestic politics” (2002: xviii). Save Darfur amassed over a million members and initiated campaigns that called for an ambitious scale of mobilization. For example, “Million Voices for Darfur” delivered post-cards to President George W. Bush in April 2006. Save Darfur also launched a number of

million dollar advertising campaigns that spread its message through newspaper, television, billboards, lawn signs, and green wristbands.

Indeed, the ultimate impact of the tens of millions of dollars spent by the Save Darfur Coalition fostering a mass response to the Darfur conflict is open to debate (Just 2008).¹ In this case, mobilization on a wider scale also resulted in a simplification of the conflict (Mamdani 2010), relied on US activists and celebrities rather than witnesses and stakeholders (Budabin 2014) and pursued misguided policy asks (Lanz 2009). The experience of the Save Darfur Coalition signals the viability of an activating mode for raising money and driving awareness but presents obstacles toward accomplishing goals. Indeed, activating strategies risk elevating publicity as a substitute for political action.

Taken together, juridical, revelatory, and activating modes constitute a robust portrait of information politics in twenty-first-century human rights advocacy. They each deserve articulation and investigation in order for scholars to approximate having a working knowledge of the communication strategies of HROs.

Five hypotheses for studying media advocacy

We propose the following hypotheses that emerge from the framework to inform future research, and encourage readers to discover useful ways to apply the framework well beyond this list:

1. *Advances in information and communications technology shape the practice of media advocacy.*

In the early 1990s, Human Rights Watch press releases went out over fax machine, in black ink on white paper, and today Human Rights Watch is likely to publicize its reports over Instagram and Twitter. With the advent of mobile and social digital networks, information is increasingly packaged for visual consumption. As well, there is heightened sense of personalization of communication strategies, given the capabilities for data mining in information technologies. Are these penetrating media platforms useful? How has technological capacity changed media advocacy strategies? How do shifts in technology permit outreach with new and different audiences and demographics?

2. *Media advocacy is currently undergoing a period of transition that is best understood in historical context.*

Our inclination is that the example set by #KONY2012 may have a deep influence on the field and may signal a diminished reliance on traditional juridical information in favor of activating media content. But only a more precise conceptualization of human rights history can prepare us to understand current events. If the ICRC and AI carry the torch of a previous generation, how have their uses of media changed and to what effect? Furthermore, do younger organizations like Invisible Children signal a marked departure or are they old wine in new, viral bottles? Historicizing media advocacy demands making connections between primordial glimmers from the Cold War era, for instance, with practices we observe today.

3. *The commodification of the audience negatively affects the potential for human rights movement building.*

As HROs compete for viewers, readers, and supporters, the audience is transformed into a commodity. Commodification suggests placing a value on individuals for their ability to serve the interests of the organization. How does this impact sustainability of the human rights movement? Is there a trade-off between short-term support and attention and

long-term solidarity? The desire to produce resonant and compelling media content may provide a spark for a campaign but fails to engage the audience on more profound issues of injustice and power. Furthermore, does the pursuit of an audience compel HROs to cut corners and dumb-down narratives—and if so, what is the political impact?

4. *Stakeholder groups (victims/survivors) are marginalized and exploited in the process of informational packaging and HRO translation of their voices for a global audience.*

Taking representation seriously requires scholars to expose the relationship between the pictures of refugees and the claims and policy asks that HROs make in their names. Transnational NGOs remain headquartered in the West and North, despite their best efforts to shift the center. As well, most HRO leadership does not look or sound like the populations they purport to represent. What happens when stakeholder groups become marginalized or even exploited for the sake of a campaign? What are the ethical constraints that govern representation of stakeholders by powerful, global organizations?

5. *“Raising awareness,” for all the pomp surrounding this lofty goal, is a weak substitute for direct action and little more than an optical tactic to leverage in elite lobbying efforts.*

In the parlance of our times, raising awareness refers to the mass mobilization of private citizens for the purpose of bringing grassroots pressure against elected officials. As an outgrowth of Samantha Power’s book, HROs presume that if the public can be made aware of a certain situation and feel outrage or grief for the suffering of others, then public policy can shift in favor of human rights protection. For this purpose, advocacy organizations have directed a significant degree of their resources toward raising awareness of human rights issues as broadly as possible so as to embolden themselves to represent the domestic victim/oppressed group. But does this strategy actually work in politics? Linked to issues of commodification, do large “aware” audiences merely provide the appearance of a mass movement, when one does not actually exist? If so, does this matter?

Pursuing these and other research questions demands specific empirical studies that utilize multidisciplinary methods of inquiry to explore images and video, as well as text and testimony. Our objective in building theory is to set the stage for future research that can deploy the framework and contribute critical case studies to deepen our understanding of the social practice of media advocacy for human rights.

Conclusion

Promoting human rights causes through media has become an increasingly visible part of the human rights landscape. We intend for this framework to create space for investigating crucial dimensions in advocacy studies that have thus far eluded inquiry. We believe this new direction in scholarship on human rights advocacy is appropriate because it penetrates beneath the institutional level and examines the ideational sphere in which important human rights work takes place. In this arena, ordinary laypeople come into contact with international human rights norms and cultural shifts in human rights consciousness can occur. The exploration above unpacks common assumptions both in the study and practice of human rights advocacy and points toward potential new avenues of research. Many presumed truths about the power of raising awareness, for instance, demand investigation. Furthermore, exploring the instantiation of these categories and modes in particular media platforms will be necessary.

KONY2012 may indeed be the future of human rights advocacy. The public resonance and social penetration of the campaign is beyond doubt, even if its political impact and sustainability are questionable. We have proposed a set of tools with which future research on the impact and efficacy of media advocacy can be undertaken. At the crux of the design sits a desire to understand the impacts of this social practice on prevailing notions of cosmopolitanism, distant suffering, and human dignity. At the very least, we strive to pose provocative questions and to stimulate some second-guessing among scholars and practitioners alike.

Note

1. It bears mentioning that Invisible Children's KONY2012 campaign received similar critiques in the aftermath of its own media blitz: Was the information presented accurate? Did the campaign have the support of Ugandans? Why were the "white saviors" the heroes of the video, instead of highlighting local efforts? Were the funds raised being effectively spent? Why focus on a military response? Both Save Darfur and KONY2012 demonstrate the potential penetration of human rights advocacy into the mainstream but also exhibit the pitfalls of mass mobilization. For discussion of these critiques and others, see Edmonson (2012), Gregory (2012), Herman (2014) Kagumire (2012), Mackey (2012), and de Waal (2012).

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