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ABSTRACT

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This study explores Myanmar/Burma’s “independent” “exile media’s” counter-hegemonic potential and relationship to public sphere formation amid their transition toward commercial models of organization. Employing a comparative content analysis of these media’s and mainstream American news media’s framing of Myanmar/Burma’s democratic reforms, this inquiry correspondingly seeks to gain insight into the nature news frame construction by Burmese exile and U.S. media. As this pursuit necessitates an understanding of the historical, economic, cultural, and technological contextual forces shaping such patterns (Mody, 1978; 1987; 1989; 2010), analysis of data was understood relative to an examination of Myanmar/Burma’s socio-historical context, prevailing public sphere, news framing, and political economy scholarship, participant observation of the country’s current media landscape, and interviews with the co-founders and senior editors of Myanmar/Burma’s exile media.

Incorporating the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and culminating in President Barack Obama’s “landmark” visit to Myanmar/Burma, 2003-2012 was selected as the overarching timeframe for investigation. The headlines, by-lines, and dates of 323 New York Times and 24 USA Today articles were examined through qualitative content analysis. Furthermore, January 2011 through December 2012 was selected as a sub-sample timeframe for an in-depth qualitative analysis of relevant frames. Eighty-nine (New York Times = 83; USA Today = 6) “mainstream U.S. media” and 90 “exile media” articles (The Irrawaddy = 37; Mizzima News = 30; Democratic Voice of
Burma = 23) were analyzed through a deductive application of a coding instrument constructed through an initial pilot study.

This investigation finds that Myanmar/Burma’s exile media have long been predicated on “bottom-up” and “horizontal flows” of communication, in turn embodying the tenants of “alternative media” and “participatory” and “development journalism”. While not occupying the unique location between state and market personified by Habermas’ ideal public sphere, these media have nonetheless cultivated discursive terrains that may be said to represent “alternative public spheres”. Despite their recent transition toward commercial models of organization, their history of success in bypassing the state’s monopoly over information and their current role within the country’s media reforms demonstrates that these media have and continue to possess counter-hegemonic influence. Furthermore, this study revealed the longstanding presence of a “War on Terror frame” inherently connected to a “human rights frame” within American media’s coverage of Myanmar/Burma. These two interconnected frames were in turn found to have been supplanted by a “China conflict frame” following the country’s democratic reforms, one that served to reposition the United States within a “Cold War” narrative surrounding an ideological confrontation between two global superpowers.
This dissertation is dedicated to the people of Myanmar/Burma. I would like to express my gratitude to my former advisor Dr. Bella Mody, whose guidance and encouragement allowed me to begin this journey. I would also like to express my appreciation to my advisor Dr. Boyd-Barrett, whose continued wisdom and guidance has proved invaluable. Thank you to my parents Linda and Ronald, my sister Michelle, and my brother-in-law Jeremy, without your unwavering support this dissertation would not have been possible. Thank you to my Amherst friends who taught me how to dream an impossible dream. Thank you SangHee for making this journey a beautiful one.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statement of the Problem &amp; Rational of Study</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organization of Study</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I: BACKGROUND OF STUDY</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar/Burma</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dynastic Era: 1044-1855</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Colonial Era: 1885-1948</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Democratic Republic: 1948-1962</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Military Rule: 1988-2010</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Democratic Reforms: 2010-Present</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Media Landscape</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Media Reforms</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transnational Activism</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Myanmar/Burma’s ‘Exile Media’</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Democratic Voice of Burma</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Irrawaddy News Magazine</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mizzima News</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE</td>
<td></td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Page</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Political Economy of the Media</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Change &amp; Historical Transformation</td>
<td>66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totality of Social Relations</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Philosophy</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Praxis</td>
<td>70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry Processes</td>
<td>70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commodification</td>
<td>70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spatialization</td>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structuration</td>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Studies</td>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Hegemony</td>
<td>73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base/Superstructure</td>
<td>73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Orientation</td>
<td>75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Sphere Theory</td>
<td>77</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Public Spheres</td>
<td>77</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Media</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Alternative Media</td>
<td>85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Internet</td>
<td>86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neoliberalism</td>
<td>88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modernization &amp; Development</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Democratization & the Media ................................................................. 93
U.S. Foreign Affairs News Frames ....................................................... 96
Discussion .......................................................................................... 103
Theoretical Framework ....................................................................... 105
Research Questions ........................................................................... 107
CHAPTER III: RESEARCH DESIGN ....................................................... 108
Introduction ...................................................................................... 108
Philosophical Foundation .................................................................. 108
Research Strategy ............................................................................ 110
Data Collection ................................................................................ 112
Pilot Study ....................................................................................... 121
Frames .............................................................................................. 123
Conflict Frame .................................................................................. 123
Human Interest Frame ...................................................................... 124
Morality Frame ................................................................................ 124
Economic Consequence Frame ........................................................ 124
Responsibility Frame ....................................................................... 124
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS ......................................................................... 126
Introduction ..................................................................................... 126
‘The Lady’ Under Attack ................................................................... 129
Military ‘Junta’ .................................................................................. 130
U.S., Global Defender of Freedom & Democracy ................................. 132
Analysis............................................................................................................. 134


Conflict Frame................................................................................................... 136

Ethnic Conflict................................................................................................. 137

China Conflict................................................................................................. 139

U.S.-China Conflict.......................................................................................... 141

Attribution of Responsibility Frame................................................................. 145

Catchphrases..................................................................................................... 146

Human Interest Frame...................................................................................... 147

President Thein Sein....................................................................................... 148

Cosmopolitan Democracy................................................................................ 153

Aung San Suu Kyi.............................................................................................. 162

Morality Frame.................................................................................................. 168

Economic Consequence Frame......................................................................... 169

Exile Media Coverage: 2010-2012................................................................. 171

Conflict Frame................................................................................................... 172

Armed Ethnic Conflict...................................................................................... 173

Ethnic Persecution............................................................................................ 176

Government-Population................................................................................... 177

China Conflict.................................................................................................. 181

Attribution of Responsibility Frame................................................................. 182

Human Interest Frame...................................................................................... 184

Aung San Suu Kyi.............................................................................................. 184
### LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>“An Iron Fist has Unclenched”: Presidents Obama meets President Thein Sein</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>President Obama’s “Landmark” Visit to Myanmar/Burma</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The “Ladies” Meet: Clinton meets Suu Kyi in Yangon</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>“Sisters” in Arms: Clinton meets Suu Kyi in Yangon</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>“Damsel in Distress”: President Obama meets Suu Kyi in Yangon</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>U.S., the “Protector” of Freedom: President Obama meets Suu Kyi in Yangon</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>“Mother Suu”: Suu Kyi Greets her Supporters in Yangon</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>“Mother Suu: Suu Kyi Speaks to Supporters</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Yangon Newspaper Vendor</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Bookstore in Yangon</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Myanmar Times, Yangon</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>The Global New Light of Myanmar, Yangon</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Newspaper Attract Young Readership on Yangon Ferry</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2007, just three weeks into my Master program at the University of Colorado, I was tasked with finding and presenting a foreign media-related news article for my Global Media course, taught by my former advisor, Dr. Bella Mody. The story I presented was ultimately an *Economist* publication entitled “The Saffron Revolution” (27 September, 2007). The article described the non-violent demonstrations undertaken by “hundreds of thousands” of Burmese citizens who, shepherded by thousands of Buddhist monks, rose up in protest against their authoritarian military government. Within this context, the demonstrations were presented as an extension of the broader “wave of ‘people-power’ revolutions that have swept aside tyrannies around the world” “since the 1980’s”, one facilitated by the global proliferation of Internet-based communication technologies.

Growing up in Amherst, MA, among my earliest and enduring friendships have been with members of my community’s Cambodian diaspora refugee population. Exposing me to a rich cultural heritage beyond the boundaries mainstream American culture, as well as to both the capacity for violence and the enduring spirit found within the human condition, these relationships foregrounded in me an orientation and passion for social justice. Consequently, I was inspired by the ‘Saffron Revolution’, notably by the capacity of non-violence to stand up to tyranny. Accordingly, I subscribed myself to writing my Master’s thesis on the role and significance communication technologies in Myanmar/Burma’s pro-democracy struggle.

Diving this endeavor was an early recognition of an overwhelming absence of the population’s “voice”. Most significantly, I was immediately struck by the scarcity of news media and scholarly resources pertaining to the nation. Due to decades of censorship, and relative international isolation, coupled with an underdeveloped telecommunications infrastructure,
information on Myanmar/Burma has long remained notably absent. Furthermore, what information does exist has largely arisen within a human rights-based narrative driven by a well-defined set of political prerogatives. As a result, as Englehart (2012) notes, “scholars of Burma/Myanmar [have] long [been] accustomed to trying to infer the meaning of events from a handful of highly politicized sources” (2012, p. 682).

Alcoff (2010) draws our attention to the problematic nature of “speaking for others,” noting that while social theorists are commonly authorized to advance theories that articulate and embed various needs, ideas and goals of others, there arises growing acknowledgement that the position from which one speaks inevitably affects the meaning and truth of what one says. Consequently, speaking for others entails the embedded risk of negating or misrepresenting identities and affirming or reaffirming social hierarchies (Sorrels & Nakagawa). Similarly, Hall (1997) also addresses the ‘politics of representation,’ noting that all cultural representation is built on structures of knowledge production that emerge alongside meaning construction. Asymmetrical cultural representations thus serve to maintain and reproduce asymmetrical configurations of power. Spivak (1988) in turn contends that representation in the form of cultural depiction/portrayal necessitates consideration of representation in the political sense, the act of agency on behalf of the will of another. In this regard, scholars undertaking investigations into marginalized populations must necessarily be weary of misconstruing two alternative forms of representation, “speaking for” others (in a political sense) and “speaking about” others (in the delineative sense).

Proceeding through an acknowledgment of such concerns, although my Master’s thesis served to construct a framework for understanding the historical evolution of the ways in which communication technologies have arisen as tools for socio-political empowerment within
Myanmar/Burma’s prodemocracy movement (both exogenously and endogenously), this instigation’s findings were significantly limited by unsurmountable barriers regarding access. Moreover, this study revealed an overwhelming propensity for understanding the 2007 demonstrations within a highly technologically deterministic narrative that eclipsed the revolutionary actions and potential of the country’s population, a population embedded within a unique socio-political historical context. As exemplified by among the lowest Internet and mobile phone penetration rates in the world, Myanmar/Burma has long sat on the periphery of globalization. However, since 2011, political reforms have led to the nation’s re-integration into the global community. Consequently, a renewed analysis of the country’s media landscape, and its relationship broader global media patterns, seemingly affords a particularly unique capacity for interrogating prevailing theorizations of globalization and associated conceptualizations surrounding media, democratization, and empowerment.

**Statement of the Problem & Rational of Study**

Common within prevailing news framing literature is an emphasis on how political elites and journalists exert influence over each other and the public through the selection and highlighting of particular events, issues and actors in a manner that encourages certain perceptions and interpretations (Entman, 2003). In doing so, it is readily acknowledged that frames serve to define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies (Entman, 1993). Such processes are arguably best epitomized by the “Cold War frame” that served to structure how foreign affairs was presented in mainstream American news media prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Within this context, attention is frequently paid to the way in which international coverage was depicted within a binary, ideological frame where issues,
events, and actors were understood relative to the broader conflict between the two opposing superpowers.

As exemplified by Giffard (2000), initial post-Cold War news frame literature often addressed how the eventual erosion of this East-West conflict frame in the early 1990s gave rise to one positioning the North against the South. As he contends, this new dominant foreign affairs frame centralized around “a clash of ideologies and economic interests between the have and the have nots,” one that defined developing nations “in terms of their support for or opposition to Western policies and values” (p. 406). Such an assertion is seemingly reinforced by both Huntington’s (1993; 1998) infamous “Clash of Civilizations” thesis, and an increasing body of scholarship pertaining to the moralistic and ideological framing of the post-9/11 “War on Terror.” In this regard, scholars frequently draw attention to the manner in which the Bush administration framed its foreign policy strategy within an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ dichotomy in which America was positioned against an “axis of evil” threatening freedom and democracy worldwide. Such a framework has in turn widely been seen as serving as a moral foundation for post-9/11 U.S unilateral intervention abroad, a narrative overwhelmingly uncritically adopted by mainstream U.S. media.

However, in response to the negative reverberations caused by the United States’ involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the longevity of the “Global War on Terror”, the Obama administration has demonstrated a concerted effort to reframe both U.S. foreign policy and America’s perceived role within the international community (Wilson & Kamen, 2009). Relatedly, echoing the so-called “third-wave” of democracy that proceeded the collapse of the Soviet Union, much attention was paid to various Arab countries’ apparent steps toward democratic governance in 2011. While substantive change has seemingly failed to take hold in
these states, following Myanmar/Burma’s 2010 national election, the government has embarked on a series of “unprecedented reforms” widely heralded within the international community as signs of measurable steps toward democratization.

Representing his first overseas trip following his re-election, in 2012 President Obama became the first sitting president to visit Myanmar/Burma. This move has commonly been seen as symbolic of the President’s broader “pivot” to Asia, a strategy intended to “rebalance” China’s rising geopolitical influence. In this regard, the administration’s support of a “fledgling” democracy located at the “crossroads of Asia” (Myint-U, 2012) may reflect a notable shift in the framing of U.S. foreign policy, one indicative of a turn away from the post-9/11 “War on Terror” frame, toward a return to the more tested binary ideological conflict frame between two opposing superpowers. Given the degree of scholarship indicating U.S. media’s support for the long prevailing “War on Terror” frame, an examination of mainstream U.S. media’s framing of Myanmar/Burma’s socio-political context amid its political reforms suggests a unique capacity for both deconstructing elite efforts to reframe American foreign policy, and for advancing scholarship pertaining to the relationship between elite interests and the construction of foreign affairs news frames.

Myanmar/Burma’s former exile media has long existed outside of the traditional nexus between state and market forces. Consequently, a comparative analysis of mainstream U.S. media’s and exile media’s coverage of the country holds a particularly valuable potential for denaturalizing and deconstructing the forces shaping these media’s coverage. Moreover, long located outside of traditional state influences, Myanmar/Burma’s predominant exile media institutions have demonstrated notable success in circumventing the military’s monopoly on information. Previously solely dependent on external donor funding, these media have cultivated
“alternative” organizational practices outside of traditional commercial pressures. While such external funding may be viewed as possessing its own underlying interests, following the government’s initial series of reforms in 2011, this funding has dried up. Accordingly, since 2012 these media have embarked on a transformation entailing both an integration into the country, and a transition to a commercially driven model of organization.

According to Habermas (1962/1989), the “public sphere” can be conceptualized as a cultural domain of social interaction whereby political participation is attained through the deliberation of matters of common concern. Located apart from both state and market influences, this sphere serves as a discursive foundation for the production and dissemination of discourses capable of challenging political and state authority. While heralding the “ideal” public spheres’ democratic potential, Habermas nonetheless admonished the media’s gradual commodification and mass dissemination. In this regard, through their grip over political power and social resources, the state, political parties, and commercial interests increasingly extend their influence over public communication, part of a process described by Habermas as “colonization of the life world.” Consequently, an examination of Myanmar/Burma’s construction of news frames, and the potential interests underpinning them, also seemingly affords a unique capacity for advancing theoretical insight into the nature of the relationship between media and reigning conceptualizations of the “public sphere”. Furthermore, as the public sphere is widely seen as among the central cornerstones of democracy, such an inquiry also holds a particularly valuable potential for gaining insight into the nature of Myanmar/Burma’s democratic reforms.

**Organization of Study**

This study seeks to explore the relationship between Myanmar/Burma’s “independent” exile media’s potential relationship to public sphere formation, and the relationship between
these media’s counter-hegemonic potential and their transition toward commercial models of organization. In doing so, this study employs a comparative content analysis of mainstream American news media’s and Myanmar/Burma’s exile media’s framing of the political reforms implemented by Myanmar/Burma’s Thein Sein government in an attempt at understanding the nature of the relationship between the construction of news frames within the two highly variant socio-political-economic landscapes. As this pursuit necessitates an understanding of the historical, economic, cultural, and technological contextual forces shaping such patterns (Mody, 1978; 1987; 1989; 2010), analysis of this data was understood relative to prevailing U.S. foreign affairs framing scholarship and a qualitative content analysis of Myanmar/Burma’s domestic English language newspapers, participant-observation of the country’s news media landscape, interviews with senior exile media editors, and relevant government documents, NGO reports, academic journals, books, and newspapers.

Accordingly, the initial section of this inquiry provides a contextual background for the study, including an overview of Myanmar/Burma’s colonial and post-colonial history, an account of nation’s present media landscape, and the role and significance of the nation’s exile media within it. The subsequent section then lays out an overview of relevant literature, including prevailing scholarship surrounding democratization and the media, U.S. foreign affairs news frames, public sphere theory, and alternative media. This is in turn followed by a discussion of the study’s research design, including an overview of the inquiry’s theoretical framework, its philosophical foundation, its research questions, research strategy, and data collection. The fifth section then documents the results from the analyses of U.S. media coverage, exile media coverage, interviews with senior exile media editors, and participant observation of the country’s media landscape. The final, interview section will focus exclusively
on Myanmar/Burma’s exile media’s process of “returning” to the country and their lessening dependence on donor funding.
CHAPTER I: BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Myanmar/Burma

Introduction

This study seeks to explore Myanmar/Burma’s exile media’s counter-hegemonic potential and these media’s relationship to public sphere formation. In doing so, it also seeks to deconstruct the nature of the frames employed in coverage of Myanmar/Burma’s political transition in both exile media and mainstream U.S. media. In an attempt at foregrounding this investigation within an appropriate historical, economic, cultural, and technological context, the following chapter provides a background of Myanmar/Burma’s socio-political history in relation to both the evolution of the country’s current media landscape, and its relationship to the nation’s exile media. Following an overview of the role of media within the country’s colonial and post-colonial history, a preliminary analysis of Myanmar/Burma’s exile media’s origins and journalistic practices is provided.

Located in Southeast Asia, Myanmar (a.k.a. Burma) borders the Andaman Sea, the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh, China, India, Laos, and Thailand. While the majority of the population is comprised of ethnic Burmans, 135 distinct ethnic populations are indigenous to the region (Clapp, 2007). Beginning in 1044 AD, the various ethnicities were unified under a succession of Buddhist dynasties. In 1886, the country’s Theravada Buddhist dynastic era ended when it was conquered by the British and subsequently incorporated into British India. Following the Second World War, an escalating independence movement, led by the revolutionary nationalist Aung San, coupled with declining British imperial resources, led to the country’s sovereignty in 1948. From 1948-1962, Burma’s political government was characterized by a bicameral parliament determined by nationwide multi-party elections. During that period, escalating ethnic and
political divisions, in part a legacy of the hierarchical social divisions fostered by colonial rule, destabilized the legitimacy of the democratically elected government.

In 1962, seizing on the political instability, General Ne Win, leader of the country’s armed forces (a.k.a. the Tatmadaw), overthrew the government in a military coup d’état. Following his ascension to power, Ne Win consolidated military power over all realms of society. Over the ensuing decades, the country was ruled by a succession of military governments that significantly inhibited freedom of expression and exogenous, namely Western, cultural influences as a means of political legitimation. Over this time, longstanding inward political-economic policies, coupled with pervasive corruption and the subsequent decades-long imposition of Western economic sanctions, crippled the national economy and effectively eliminated the country’s middle class (Charney, 2009).

In 1988, the deteriorating economic climate and pervasive political suppression culminated in nation-wide, student-led, nonviolent demonstrations seeking to bring about economic and political reform. The military government responded to the protests with brutal force that left thousands dead (Fink, 2009). As social unrest continued to escalate, power was ultimately ceded to another military general, General Saw Maung who, in an effort to quell the dissent, called for democratic national elections and implemented an ‘open-door policy’ of economic liberalization. In 1990, Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of Burma’s independence leader, and her main opposition party the National League for Democracy (NLD), emerged as the overwhelming victors of the election. However, the military junta refused to relinquish power and subsequently placed Suu Kyi under house arrest for 15 of the next 21 years. Seen as largely derived from the efforts of the country’s transnational advocacy movement, Western
international bodies responded with the imposition of a series of economic sanctions (Danitz & Strobel, 1999; 2000).

On 15 August, 2007, the Burmese government unexpectedly cut all subsidies from diesel and natural gas. The price of fuel instantly doubled and the cost of gas increased 500 fold, resulting in immense inflation in essential commodities (Clapp, 2007). In September 2007, an estimated 100,000 Burmese citizens, shepherded by thousands of Buddhist monks, took to the streets to decry the declining living standards and to demand the existing government’s (the State Peace and Development Council) re-engagement with the NLD. Just as the government had done in response to the so-called “8.8.88 Demonstrations,” the SPDC reacted with “mass arrests, torture and murder” (Chowdhury, 2008). During the unrest, many activists and clandestine journalists were able to document state violence on mobile phones and concealed video cameras and either upload the images and videos onto the Web, or physically smuggle them across the border to be uploaded (Chowdhury, 2008). The images, which were in turn circulated by dominant global media institutions, brought about harsh condemnation of the SPDC by the international community. To prevent the continued circulation of these images, and to mitigate the backlash that they provoked, the government terminated the country’s cellular phone service and severed the nation’s Internet connection (Wang & Nagaraja, 2007).

In November 2010, nationwide democratic elections were held in Myanmar/Burma as part of a broader transition to democratic governance. The elections were widely criticized in the international arena for their lack of transparency and allegations of voter fraud and intimidation (BBC News, 27 April, 2010). In response the adverse political climate in the run-up to the polls, the country’s main political opposition party, the NLD, boycotted the elections. Ultimately, the
military-backed party received 80% of votes, with Thein Sein, a former military official, emerging as president (BBC News, 9 November, 2010).

Beginning in late 2011, the Thein Sein government embarked on a series of reforms that have come to signify that substantive political change is currently underway. Such measures included: a ceasefire with ethnic rebels; the release of political prisoners; the adoption of laws allowing political protest, labor unions, and strikes (all previously banned); media reforms (in a country that has long ranked among the most censored in the world); and electoral reforms that led to the ascension of the then newly freed Aung San Suu Kyi into the country’s parliament. Such actions were met with praise among the international community, specifically Western nations and governing bodies who subsequently dropped economic sanctions and reinstituted diplomatic relations with the government. As a result, Western corporate interests have ‘lined up’ to enter the nation, hitherto devoid of Western commercial investment (BBC News, 12 July, 2012).

In November 2013, President Barack Obama traveled to Myanmar/Burma, marking the first time a sitting American president had visited the Southeast Asian nation. Following the 2012 election, the Obama administration announced that its foreign policy strategy would be undergoing a strategic ‘pivot’ to Asia. The strategy, emerging in response to China’s growing economic influence, is essentially one of enhancing the United States’ geopolitical role in Southeast Asia, and one that entails balancing greater engagement with both Southeast Asian nations and China. Abundantly rich in natural resources, notably natural gas, and situated between China and India (the second most influential nation in the region), Myanmar/Burma has been regarded as standing at the “crossroads” of Asia’s geopolitical future and, as noted by
President Obama, will likely “help determine the destiny of the fastest growing region in the world” (Myint-U, 2011; Obama, 2012).

Representing the nation’s first national election since the seating of the nominally civilian government in 2011, on 8 November 2015, the NLD achieved a landslide victory, gaining 52.5% of the national vote and winning 392 of 492 available parliamentary seats. While various safeguards within the constitution continue to ensure that the military will maintain a degree of political influence, such as their guaranteed retention of 25% of parliamentary seats, the NLD will control the next parliament, thus allowing the party to select the next president (BBC News, 3 December, 2015). Although, constitutionally banned from the presidency, Aung San Suu Kyi has publically stated that, as leader of the NLD, she will remain “above the president”, who “will be told exactly what he can do” (Peck, 2015). Reflecting the U.S. government’s legacy of ties and commitment to Aung San Suu Kyi (Pedersen, 2007), the Obama administration was quick to personally congratulate Suu Kyi and endorse both her and her party amid their success within the unfolding elections, touting the elections as both “free and fair” and an “important step forward in Burma’s democratic transition” (Tun & Stokowski, 2015; Holmes, 2015).

Dynastic Era: 1044-1855

Myanmar/Burma is comprised of centric plains surrounded by mountainous regions in the north, east and west, and the Andaman Sea to the south. The country is divided by the Irrawaddy, Chindwin and Salween rivers, with notably fertile soil for rice production located in the Irrawaddy delta in the lower portion of the nation. Along the plains, the predominant populations are ethnic Burmans, Mons, and Rakhinies (a.k.a. Arakanese). Bountiful rice-growing areas are also found within the northeastern valleys, where the Shans population developed in economic relation with, though largely politically independent from, the Burman kingdoms that
evolved in the fertile plains. The eastern mountains along the border of Thailand is home to hundreds of thousands of ethnic Karens who, due to limited agricultural production capacities, have long remained dispersed, with loose affiliations to Karen political centers. Also found within the mountains are Kachins, Chins, Karennis (a.k.a. Kayah), Pa’os, Nagas, Was and Palaungs, in addition to numerous smaller ethnic populations. British colonial rule led to the migration of the Rohingya people to Burma from India, what is now Bangladesh, and China, 600,000 of whom currently reside in the country, predominantly along the border of Thailand. While the country remains largely Buddhist, Rohingyas are mainly Muslim and Christianity is practiced by various highland minority groups (Fink, 2009).

Unreflective of its eastern neighbor India, Myanmar/Burma has never held definitive class structures. Rather, socio-political relationships were ordained by considerations of status that privileged age seniority, Buddhist monks, and royally appointed positions. Closely connected to the religious sphere, the political sphere was in turn predicated on a patronage system in which goods and services were exchanged for protection. Theravada Buddhism has long been Myanmar/Burma’s dominant religion, and during the country’s dynastic era Buddhism represented a powerful socio-cultural institution. Throughout this period, all communal activities were centered around Buddhist monasteries and, as Winfield (2010) notes, “Buddhism was so intertwined with all areas of life – language, law, art, and architecture – that it was no longer possible for most Burmese to conceive of their national identity as being distinct from Buddhism” (p. 367). Moreover, as the king’s existence and legitimacy was derived from his role as protector of the Buddhist faith, church and state were largely intertwined, with obedience to the monarch largely resting on the approval of the Sangha, a community of senior Buddhist...
monks. Consequently, monasteries represented not only the epicenter of religious life, but cultural life as well.

In an effort to deepen the population’s understanding of Buddhist philosophy, monks taught Burmese citizens how to read and write throughout the country (Charney, 2006). As a result, during Myanmar/Burma’s pre-colonial period, literacy and education were held as sources of national pride and the country maintained one of the highest literacy rates in the region (Lintner, 2001; Charney, 2006; Fink, 2009). Accordingly, the development of the country’s press during this pre-colonial period became of notable significance to its future social, cultural and political evolution.

Modeled after those found in the West and India, the British first introduced modern-style newspapers to Burma during its gradual colonization of the country in the 19th century. In 1836, the first English-language newspaper, the *Naulmain Chronicle*, was published by a British officer in Tenasserium, located in British-controlled Southern Burma. In 1842, the first ethnic language (Karen) newspaper, the *Has-tu-gaw* (a.k.a. the *Morning Star*) was launched by the Baptist mission. In 1843, the Baptist mission reportedly published the first Burmese language periodical, the *Dhamma Thadinsa* (a.k.a. the *Religious Herald*). Between 1846 and 1874, numerous periodicals, both English and Burmese, emerged throughout British-controlled Southern Burma, most notably in Rangoon (a.k.a. Yangon) (The Irrawaddy, 1 May, 2004).

However, it was not until 1874 that the first well circulated, modern-style Burmese-language paper, the *Yadana-bon Nay-pyi-daw* (with the English masterhead the “*Mandalay Gazette*”) was introduced in independent Burma in Mandalay by the reigning monarch, King Mindon Min (Lintner, 2001; The Irrawaddy, 1 May, 2004). Following the paper’s launch, the King subsequently set up the *Burma Herald* in order to challenge Rangoon-based pro-British
newspapers (The Irrawaddy, 1 May, 2004). Regarded as an advocate for press freedoms, Mindon Min formally “bestowed immunity on the local press corps” at an official royal meeting, stating:

“If I do wrong, write about me. If the Queens do wrong, write about them. If my sons and daughters do wrong, write about them. If the judges do wrong, write about them. No one shall take action against the journalists for writing the truth. They shall go in and out of the palace freely” (Lintner, 2001, p. 3).

Free expression and freedom of the press were further assured by the King with the passage of a legal statute stating that the press was for the interest of the population and should serve as a tool for enhancing education, communication and trade. Not only did the Act represent Southeast Asia’s first indigenous press-freedom laws, it established Burma as one of the least press restricted nations in Asia (Allcott, 1993; Lintner, 2001; The Irrawaddy, 1 May, 2004;)

When Burma was conquered and subsequently annexed into British India in 1885, such realities inevitably served to influence both the development of the country’s ‘modern’ mass circulation press, and the evolution of the nation’s colonial independence movement.

**Colonial Era: 1885-1948**

In 1824, the British initiated their conquest of the country. In 1885, after three British-Burmese wars, Burma officially fell to Britain and was annexed into British India. Despite the colonial occupation, the nation’s independent press continued to evolve and thrive. Alongside the proliferation of the press came its diversification. With incorporation of Burma into British India came a rapid influx of immigrants from India and China. As the country’s capital Rangoon (later renamed Yangon) increasingly became a commercial center, this migration grew significantly, leading J.S. Furnevell to coin the term “plural society” to describe the diversity of Burma’s urban areas under colonial rule (Coppel, 1997). A product of this increasingly diverse population was the emergence of dozens of periodicals in Burmese, English, Chinese and various Indian languages. Additionally, alongside predominantly Burman-papers arose dozens of newspapers
printed in various ethnic minority languages (Lintner, 2001). Consequently, Burma’s colonial-press was marked by high levels of “political parallelism” and “external pluralism,” with a multiplicity of newspapers advocating a number of distinct, competing political orientations (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; 2012).

Following British colonization, church and state were separated and the monastery’s role as the nation’s educational institution was supplanted with a British system. As a result, much of the Sangha’s cultural and political authority was displaced. In the early 1900’s, indignation over the British refusal to respect the Buddhist custom of removing one’s shoes before entering a pagoda “became the first major source of public anger that galvanized almost the entire Burmese nation against the British colonial rulers” (Human Rights Watch, 2009, p. 29). Within this context, prominent Sangha monks began using the press as a platform for calls for independence and nonviolence resistance. This religious and cultural leadership in turn helped to inspire Burmese activists and student activists to follow suit (Zaw, 2007).

In response to such forces, the British enacted several laws attempting to curb the press’ growing societal influence. However, the statutes failed to inhibit the institution’s continued growth, and Burma soon came to be regarded as being home to one of the most sophisticated and least restricted press environments in Asia (Lintner, 2001; Allcott, 1993; Chowdhury, 2008). In the 1920s and 1930s, the press increasingly became oriented to the growing demands for independence, and “played a crucial role in radicalizing the nationalist movement” (Lintner, 2001, p. 4). Numerous outspoken anti-colonial and nationalist newspapers started to emerge, often run by or employing figures who would later become prominent political leaders in the country’s independent government.
“Among the most outspoken” of these periodicals were the *Thuriya* (a.k.a. The Sun), edited and owned by the leading rightest politician and leader of the *Myochit* (“Love Country”) party, U Saw, and the *Myanma Alin* (a.k.a. The New Light of Myanmar), a Burmese-language publication long managed by U Tin, a future minister in Myanmar/Burma’s independent government (Litner, 2001, p. 3). Another notable figure in this regard was U Thant, both a future Minister of Information in the country’s democratic government, and future Secretary General of the United Nations. In the 1930’s, U Thant was a journalism student at the University of Rangoon, writing for the English-language journal *New Burma*, multiple Burmese-language magazines, and the outspoken nationalist newspaper, *The Sun* (Myint-U, 2006, p. 217).

Similarly, reflecting the anti-colonial sentiment being cultivated at Rangoon University (later renamed Yangon University) at the time, other outspoken students included U Nu and Aung San. U Nu, future Prime Minister of Burma’s independent government, was the acting President of Rangoon University’s Student Union (RUSU) (Charney, 2009). Aung San, future leader of Burma’s independence movement, and father to NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi, was on the executive committee of RUSU and editor of the organization’s official magazine *Oway* (a term denoting a peacock’s call) (Smith, 1999; Litner, 2001; Charney, 2009). Together, U Thant, U Nu and Aung San published numerous articles in newspapers defaming British authorities, made anti-imperial speeches to mass rallies, and turned RUSU into formidable political force (Charney, 2009).

In 1936, U Nu and Aung San were expelled from Rangoon University for their anti-British publications (Charney, 2009; Lintner, 2001). In direct response to their expulsion, a nationwide student strike ensued. The strike was loudly championed by the anti-colonial press, which played a pivotal role in mobilizing public support for the movement throughout the
country (Fink, 2009). As solidarity with the strikers grew among the population, so did the notoriety and political legitimacy of the student leaders and nationalist movement in general (Charney, 2009). In 1941, Aung San, the now recognized leader of the independence movement, went to Japan to seek assistance for armed resistance against British imperial rule. In 1942, Aung San returned with Japanese forces and successfully expelled the British from Burma.

However, in 1945, the now General Aung San, disillusioned by the Japanese occupation, turned to Allied forces for assistance in freeing the nation from Japanese colonial control. By the end of World War II, Japanese troops had been driven out of the country and the British were once again attempting to establish their authority over Burma. However, their attempts were met with harsh criticism in Burma’s now flourishing independent press, and strong resistance by a newly politically invigorated population. With insufficient military forces to quell the escalating unrest, the British negotiated the terms of independence with Aung San (Fink, 2009). However, just prior to the transition to an independent Union of Burma, Aung San and six of his cabinet members were assassinated by political rival U Saw, who had formally ascended to the position of Prime Minister under British colonial occupation (Charney, 2009).

According to Charney (2009), U Saw’s opposition to the Aung San government “was not mainly ideological, but grew out of personal jealousy of Aung San” (p. 68). Following an investigation by British officials, U Saw was found guilty of assassinating Aung San and subsequently sentenced to death. However, “the existence of an orgy of evidence that too clearly identified Saw as the killer has led to speculation that the assassination was carried out by the British government”, who continued to view Aung San as a “Japanese collaborator” and “traitor rebel leader” after the war. Following the death of Aung San, the move toward independence
TOWARDS A RE-DISCOVERY OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

proceeded rapidly and U Nu, who was unsuccessfully targeted for assassination the same day as Aung San, was elected as Provisional President (Charney, 2009, p. 68-70).

Democratic Republic: 1948-1962

From 1948-1962, Burma’s independent government was characterized by a bicameral parliament determined multi-party elections in 1951, 1956 and 1960. When Burma officially declared its independence in 1948, with U Nu emerging as the nation’s Prime Minister, democracy in the now Union of Burma appeared to flourish and optimism about the country’s future was high. Burmese citizens were capable of electing representatives of their own, the new constitution guaranteed the right to free expression and opinion, and there were widespread, open discussions of public policy in parliament, public arenas, and newspapers (Neuman, 2002; Fink, 2009). Around 70 new newspapers arose alongside many literary journals and mass market dailies (Neumann, 2002). As a result, Burma’s independent press continued to build a reputation as being one of the freest in Asia (Allcott, 1993; Lintner, 2001; Irrawaddy News Magazine, 1 May, 2004; Chowdhury, 2008).

However, despite this media landscape and the existence of regular elections, as Englehart (2012) notes, “the quality of this democracy was poor, and the exercise of civil rights for most voters, particularly in rural areas, was severely curtailed” (p. 673). Consequently, aspirations about the direction of the nation’s future soon began to erode. The country’s deep ethnic and political divisions that Aung San had somewhat successfully managed to contain began to re-erupt and threatened the legitimacy of the new government, namely armed insurrections by Communists, rightists, Mons, Karens and various other groups that inevitably threw the country into civil war (Charney, 2009). Ultimately, U Nu failed to maintain the sense
of national identity and common purpose among the population that Aung San had seemingly instilled (Clapp, 2007).

In the 1950’s, amid the escalating unrest, Burma’s armed forces, the Tatmadaw, was widely respected, viewed as largely responsible for both Burma’s independence and saving the country from destabilizing insurgent forces (Fink, 2009). In 1958, General Ne Win, leader of the Tatmadaw, assumed power alongside two senior officials under a ‘caretaker government.’ Following various successes, including an engagement and agreements with Shan and Karenni opposition leaders, Ne Win bowed to increasing pressure to restore democracy, implementing national elections in 1960. Nevertheless, in 1962 Ne Win again seized power, undertaking a military coup d'état under the justification that the Union of Burma’s parliamentary democracy was incapable of maintaining national social cohesion, and that the military could more effectively manage the affairs and interest of the country (Charney, 2009).

**Military Rule: 1962-1988**

Following the 1962 coup, General Ne Win appointed himself as head of a 24-member ‘Revolutionary Council’ comprised of ranking military elite and established the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP). He subsequently expanded power of the military into politics, the economy, and bureaucratic administration. All political parties were banned, property and businesses were nationalized, and an inward political-economic policy, known as ‘the Burmese Way to Socialism’ was implemented. Initially, the Ne Win government appeared to demonstrate surprising tolerance of the country’s independent press. Ne Win assured Burma’s Journalist Association that the Council would “‘honor the freedom of the press,’” including government criticism, and journals were permitted to continue publishing relatively free of restrictions for nearly a year after the coup (Charney, 2009, p. 111; Allott, 1993; Lintner, 2001). Moreover, in
August 1962, the newly instilled Ministry of Information provided an intensive prestigious journalism course for 700 correspondents from across the country. Within this context, leading journalists and editors lectured “on various substantial matters regarding historical, technical, legal, and terminological aspects of journalism and publishing” (Charney, 2009, p. 11).

According to Charney (2009), the logic behind such moves was the belief that by advancing the professionalism of the press corps, and by fostering a positive relationship between the government and the press, newspapers would reflect the new government in a positive light. However, the Council’s attention to the press was not solely derived from a political interest, but also arose out of a “nationalist and puritanical view of Burmese culture that viewed Western influence, both colonial and postcolonial, as damning to the national spirit” (p. 111). Such ideological sentiment in turn began to be reflected in BSPP actions as early as three months into the coup when, in an attempt at rooting out the country’s perceived moral decay, such “‘superfluous activities’” as horse racing, dance halls, and ballet schools were all banned (Charney, 2009, p. 11). The underlying ideology behind such actions, largely predicated on the elimination of external, namely Western, socio-cultural forces, ultimately came to permeate the logic and scope of both the political-economic policy and the state media censorship that ensued over the following five decades (Skidmore, 2004; Zaw, 2004; Fink, 2009; MacLachlan, 2010). Inevitably, while the Ne Win Government initially realized that “the symptoms of Western influence could be treated,” in doing so it also came to understand that “its future eradication depended upon the control of the press” (Charney, 2009, p. 111).

Consequently, the pretext of the military government’s adherence to press freedoms proved short lived. Soon after consolidating power, the Council implemented the *Printers and Publishers Registration Act* (1962). The Act, which was only recently replaced by the 2013
Press Law Bill, required all printers and publishers to register with the government and submit all publications to the Press Security Board (PSB) for scrutiny (Aung, 2013; Printers and Publishers Registration, 1962). In May of 1963, the BSPP first shut down the Nation, an “influential” paper noted for advocating press freedom, arresting its editor three months later (Allott, 1993, p. 4; Lintner, 2001). In July 1963, the government began establishing its own periodicals to compete with remaining private newspapers, including the Loktha Pyithu Nezi and its English language version the Working People’s Daily, both of which were proclaimed to function as “‘a beacon of light to the working people,’” with a neutral stance to foreign policy (Lintner, 2001; Charney, 2009, p. 112).

At the same time, in an effort to sever the connection between foreign news services and private Burmese newspapers, the Council founded the News Agency Burma (NAB). NAB took control of all news distribution from private wire services and served as a filter for all information flowing in and out of Burma (Charney, 2009, p. 112). To further ensure a state monopoly on information, all foreign correspondents were deported from the nation in 1963 (Lintner, 2001). Later the same year, the Council began the dissolution of Burma’s independent press all together. Editors and publishers were arbitrarily arrested and all private papers were either shutdown or nationalized (Allott, 1993; Charney, 2009; Lintner, 2001). In nationalizing the press, the BSPP formally maintained that it was affording the “‘full freedom of expression within the accepted limits of the Burmese Way to Socialism’” (Allott, 1993, p. 4). Such events were in turn met with the subsequent establishment of the Policy Direction Board for Newspapers, Journals and Publications in late 1964, a state-organ tasked with ensuring that nothing would be printed contradicting state policy (Charney, 2009). Accordingly, as epitomized by Allott (1993), “Thus ended Burma’s free press, a press which in the parliamentary era of the
1950’s had been regarded as one of the most free and lively in Asia, with more than thirty daily papers, including six in Chinese and three in English” (p. 4).

Within this context, the Revolutionary Council had come to perceive the inherent biases of journalists as derived from Western imperialism, viewing the press corps as “hopelessly riddled with anti-socialist elements.” As a result, it was determined that “a new breed of journalists would have to be trained in the socialist spirit” (Charney, 2009, p. 114). Initially, this consisted of sending aspiring journalists to training in East Germany. However, such professionalization soon came to occur locally with the founding of the Burmese School of Journalism in 1967. In addition to technical training in various journalistic production practices, including both print and radio administration, this educational program centered on the study of the Burmese Way to Socialism philosophy. Coupled with such indoctrination, the BSPP moved to consolidate journalists into a single self-administering organ predicated on the foundations of the Burmese Way to Socialism (Charney, 2009, p. 114)

While the Revolutionary Council had long managed to instill relatively high levels of social stability, in August of 1988, in the wake of severe deterioration of the country’s economy, student-led protests escalated into nation-wide demands for an end to the military dictatorship, a return to democracy, and the restoration of a free-market system. In an effort to voice their discontent, hundreds of thousands of citizens took to the streets in a series of anti-government protests. As the momentum of this so-called “8.8.88 Uprising” continued to escalate throughout the country, the BSPP’s control over the nation began to erode (Steinberg, 2001; 2010).

During this power vacuum, Burma’s dormant independent press abruptly re-awoke. According to Lintner (2001), “For about a month, the creativity of the Burmese psyche flourished again after 26 years of silence,” with 40 independent magazines and newspapers
emerging in Ragoon alone. Both Burmese and English language-based, these new periodicals were “Full of political commentaries, biting satires and witty cartoons ridiculing the BSPP and the ruling military elite” (p. 6). While exploding in the midst of the social upheaval, this independent press growth seemingly began to take hold in the beginning of 1988, when the Press Security Board showed various signs that it had become “more relaxed about [its] responsibilities” (Allott, 1992, p. 4). Exemplifying this is the PSB’s permitting of various articles critical of governmental political-economic policies, and the allocation of numerous licenses for new monthly magazines to private individuals earlier that year (Allott, 1992).

As a result, coinciding with the implementation of the Glasnost and Perestroika policies in the Soviet Union, by mid-1988, throughout the country “over ninety different magazines covering literature, fiction, the film world, pop music, home and family, religion, foreign news, and technical and scientific matters were being published” (Allott, 1992, p. 5). Consequently, many of the publications that thrived during Burma’s so-called “Rangoon Spring” were derived from professional printing presses, though many others were photocopied, handwritten, or mimeographed, commonly disseminated free of charge out of support of the pro-democracy movement (Lintner, 2001). Ultimately, the multitude of independent newspapers and magazines that emerged virtually overnight helped energize the growing popular movement that inevitably culminated in the collapse of the Win government (Charney, 2009; Litner, 2001; Committee to Protect Journalists, 2 February, 2002).

**Military Rule: 1988-2010**

As Charney (2009) notes, although Burmese citizens had long been dissatisfied with the Ne Win government, “the state had successfully managed its international image, convincing the world not that it was a good government, but rather that domestic opposition was largely a
problem of ethnic polarization (the ethnic insurgencies) and foreign intervention (the Communists)” (p. 148). However, the government could not withstand the social unrest brought about by the articulation of built-up frustrations in the August of 1988. Nevertheless, although the 8888 Uprising led to the resignation of Ne Win and the disintegration of the Revolutionary Council, power was merely seeded to another military leader, Commander Sein Lwin. When the appointment only served to fuel tensions, Ne Win helped organize a group of high ranking military officials to consolidate power and implemented the formation of the State Law and Order Restoration Committee (SLORC), renamed the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in 1997 (Ure, 2008). The SLORC, led by General Saw Maung, subsequently imposed martial law, successfully quelling the demonstrations with military force that left an estimated three thousand dead and thousands arrested (Fink, 2009).

As soon as the SLORC was established in 1988, the government moved to reaffirm its control over the press. All newspapers and periodicals that had arisen in the wake of the demonstrations were shut down, the state press that remained was strictly censored, and numerous journalists were imprisoned (Lintner, 2001). Yet, as a direct result of the protests, the new military government proclaimed the abandonment of central tenants of the Burmese Way to Socialism, in turn implementing an “Open Door” policy of economic liberalization (Ure, 2008).

According to Ure (2008), the policy, specifically targeting foreign trade, was a move largely viewed as “designed to lessen international criticism of the regime.” Such measures, which included tax incentives and foreign investment laws, were effective in attracting an influx in foreign investment and ultimately “created a new business class tied to the generals” (p. 355). Similar to actions undertaken by the Marcos Government in the Philippines, coupled with such initiatives, the SLORC attempted to increase its international legitimacy, cement its rule, and
obtain foreign aid by calling for 1990 democratic national elections (Schock, 2005; Ure, 2008). However, despite widespread government harassment and state-support for the government-backed National Unity Party (NUP), the NLD, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, unexpectedly won 80% of parliamentary seats. In response, the SLORC refused to acknowledge the results and held Suu Kyi under house arrest for 15 of the following 21 years (Charney, 2009).

The events provoked intense backlash from the international community and ultimately led to a wave of Western disinvestment. Such corporate retreat has largely been attributed to the efforts of grassroots, online-based, transnational advocacy campaigns, initially tied to the Free Burma Coalition (FBC), in the early 1990s (Danitz & Stobel, 1999; 2000; Chowdhury, 2008). Following the success of such early activism, a vast array of largely transnational advocacy networks dedicated to human rights and political reform in Myanmar/Burma have continued to exert pressure on international actors in an attempt to compel action against the country’s government (Bob, 2005; Pedersen, 2008; Holiday, 2011). The culmination of such actions are in turn commonly held as leading to the imposition and maintenance of a plethora of economic sanctions by the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Switzerland, Norway and the European Union beginning the mid-1990’s (Pedersen, 2008; Holiday, 2011; Martin, 2012).

Nevertheless, in the absence of Western investment Myanmar/Burma’s regional neighbors, most notably China and India, stepped in to fill the void (Hariharan, 2007; Ure, 2008; Pedersen, 2008; Myint-U, 2011). As Ure (2008) notes, despite nearly no financial assistance from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank due to the U.S.-led economic embargo, the former military government became “adept at ‘resource diplomacy,’ giving its Asian neighbors a slice of its natural wealth in return for political, financial and military support”
Within this geopolitical context, China has emerged as Myanmar/Burma’s most significant economic and political supporter, long shielding the former government from international forces and backing it with loans while Chinese companies provided foreign investment in the country’s national infrastructure, notably with regards to telecommunications development (Hariharan, 2007; Ure, 2008; Myint-U, 2011).

Reflecting the nation’s “Look East” policy of economic liberalization implemented in the early 1990’s, and suggesting an attempt at mitigating China’s growing geopolitical significance in the Southeast Asian region, India has also emerged as an increasingly significant economic partner to Myanmar/Burma. In the aftermath of the country’s 1988 demonstrations, the Indian government took a hardline stance, formally condemning the actions of the military government. However, beginning in the mid-1990’s, Delhi reversed course, replacing its hardline position with one of engagement with the SLORC (Hariharan, 2007; Myint-U, 2011). Following this policy shift, like China, India has devoted billions of dollars in aid and investment to the country, including millions in funding for Internet infrastructure projects (Ure, 2008; Myint-U, 2011). Such telecommunication investment can be seen as particularly valuable to Delhi’s own attempts at Internet development as it holds the promise of providing sea communication options to India’s northwestern landlocked states (Hariharan, 2007).

In addition to leading to the development of a tightly state-controlled Internet infrastructure, the rapid capital accumulation arising from increasing regional economic investment has in turn fostered significant cronyism within the state apparatus (Ure, 2008). Coupled with decades of Western economic sanctions, such cronyism, corruption and economic mismanagement by the military elite, their family and associates ultimately led to the decimation of Myanmar/Burma’s once relatively vibrant economy (Charney, 2009; Fink, 2009; Central
Intelligence Agency, 2014). Seen by some (Harvey, 2007) as an attempt at courting IMF and World Bank investment, on 15 August, such socio-economic conditions were further exacerbated by the government’s unexpected termination of all subsidies from imported diesel and natural gas.

Following the subsidy removal, the price of fuel instantly doubled and the cost of gas increased 500 fold, resulting in immense inflation in essential commodities (Clapp, 2007). In September 2007, an estimated 100,000 Burmese citizens, led by thousands of Buddhist monks, took to the streets to decry the declining living standards and to demand the existing government’s (re-labeled the SPDC in 1997) re-engagement with the NLD. Just as the government had done in response to the 8888 Uprising, the SPDC responded with a military crackdown characterized by “mass arrests, torture, and murder” (Chowdhury, 2008; Downing, 2011; U.S. Committee on Foreign Relations, 2007). During the unrest, numerous clandestine journalists working for various exile media outlets were able to document government violence and subsequently upload stories and images to the Web. These accounts and images, disseminated by exile-based news outlets, and ultimately carried by mainstream international news media, galvanized international condemnation of the SPDC. Responding to the increasing international criticism brought about by the images, the military government used its control over Internet gateways to completely sever the country’s Internet and mobile phone connectivity (Wang & Nagaraja, 2007; Chowdhury, 2008).

**Democratic Reforms: 2010-Present**

In November 2010, nationwide ‘democratic’ elections were held in Myanmar/Burma as part of the SPDC’s purported broader transition to democratic governance. The polls were widely criticized within the international community for their lack of transparency and
allegations of voter fraud and intimidation (BBC News, 29 March, 2010; BBC News, 8 November, 2010; Burma Fund, 2011). Moreover, the elections laws governing the process have also been highly chastised, particularly in light of the fact they served to exclude main opposition candidates from taking part, reserved one quarter of parliamentary seats for military officials, and mandated a 75% approval for constitutional changes (BBC News, 7 November, 2010). In response to such regulations, the country’s main political opposition party, the NLD, boycotted the elections. Ultimately, the military-backed party, the newly created Union of Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), received 80% of the votes with Thein Sein, a former military commander, emerging as President (BBC News, 9 November, 2010).

While the elections have widely been perceived as inherently undemocratic (Englehart, 2012), since late 2011 the government has embarked on a series of unprecedented (and unforeseen) reforms that seem to indicate that substantive political change is currently underway, including: a ceasefire with ethnic rebels (signaling an end to one of the world’s longest running conflicts); the freeing of hundreds of political prisoners; the adoption of laws allowing political protest, labor unions, and strikes (all previously banned); media reforms (in a country that has long ranked among the most censored in the world); and electoral reforms that led to the ascension of the then newly freed Aung San Suu Kyi into the country’s parliament (BBC News, 12 July, 2012; Reporters Without Borders, 2011). Such actions have been met with praise among the international community, specifically Western nations and governing bodies who have subsequently dropped economic sanctions and reinstituted diplomatic relations with the government (BBC News, 12 July, 2012). As a result, Myanmar/Burma is experiencing a rapid influx of Western economic investment that is forecasted to bring “tens of millions online for the first time” (Fuller, 2013). Coupled with historic media reforms, such developments in turn allude
to the dramatic reconfiguration of Myanmar/Burma’s media environment (Routray, 2012; Crispin, 13 June, 2013).

**Media Landscape**

Until recently, every aspect of traditional forms of media in Myanmar/Burma were under the complete control of the SPDC (Chowdhury, 2008). Prior to 2012 media reforms, the 1962 *Printers’ and Publishers Registration Act* continued to mandate that nothing could be published without first being submitted for approval by the Press Security Board (PSB). Within this context, “Any story, poem, cartoon, passage or word found unacceptable by the PSB [had] to be eliminated before the publication [could] be sold to the public” (Lintner, 2001, p. 7). With the exception of books on economics, religion and politics, which were submitted prior to printing, submission for all literary material occurred *after* the work had already been printed and the board commonly rejected and censored material that did not conform to its stringent standards (Allott, 1992; Lintner, 2001; Fink, 2009).

In the case of magazines, publishers were often required to delete particular paragraphs or entire articles. In such instances, the publisher would be forced to tear out or ink-over the section(s) in question from all issues, ultimately leaving the reader aware of the censorship. In some instances a book was outright banned, mandating that the entirety of a print run be discarded. As a result, publishers have long engaged in heavy self-censorship to avoid the financial loss associated with the rejection of a text. Consequently, the regulations have also long served to compel publishers to work with writers who do not push government boundaries. Those writers who do attempt to push the margins have routinely faced being blacklisted or jailed (Allott, 1993; Lintner, 2001; Fink, 2009).
Accordingly, censorship in Myanmar/Burma has been considered to be both unique and among the most extensive in the world (Reporters Without Borders, 2011; Freedom House, 2011; Committee to Protect Journalists, 2011; OpenNet Initiative, 2012). Nevertheless, as Fink (2009) asserts, there remain writers who “are committed to the idea that they should act as the moral conscience of the nation, and they try to convey their messages through the use of metaphors and symbols” (Fink, 2009, p. 210). However, these writers have been faced with the inherent challenge of balancing the risk of invoking censorship through the use of obvious metaphors with the use of symbolism too vague for the audience to make the desired connection (Allcott, 1993; Fink, 2009).

However, such state intervention has not been limited to print media. In addition to exerting control over the press, following his ascension to power in 1962, Ne Win nationalized all radio service in the country, circumscribing the medium and turning it into an ideological apparatus of the state (Lintner, 2001; Zaw 2004; Htun & Lwin, 2014; Fink, 2009). Although Myanmar/Burma has a historical legacy of high literacy rates, illiteracy and poverty steadily grew under military rule. Consequently, radio, along with the later introduction of television in 1980, gradually became the “primary media of mass communication” in the country (U.S. Department of State, 2010, Section 2a). Radio was first introduced to Burma in 1936 under British colonial rule and in 1946 Burma Broadcasting Service (BBS) became the first consistent programing in the country with content that included “national and foreign news and musical entertainment, knowledge reply and school lessons” (Zaw, 2004; Htun & Lwin, 2014).

Following the country’s independence in 1948, the service was renamed Myanma Athan (a.k.a. “Voice of Myanmar”). Prior to the 2001 introduction of Yangon City FM, this service (renamed Myanmar Radio in 1988) remained the only domestically broadcasted radio station (Zaw, 2004).
To date, domestic radio in Myanmar/Burma consists of one state-run station along with nine joint state-private FM stations (Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook, 2014). However, over the years, the heavily censored and ideologically saturated state-controlled broadcast services have driven a significant portion of the population to turn to external radio services available in various parts of the country (Brooten, 2008; Fink, 2009). Transmitting via shortwave radio in neighboring countries, the most notable of these international broadcasters have included: The British Broadcasting Company (BBC-Burmese), The Voice of America (VOA), Radio Free Asia (RFA), Radio Australia, and the The Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) (Fink, 2009).

Founded in 1940, in 2010, BBC-Burmese alone was estimated to reach 22.9% of the adult population, and significantly greater numbers during times of national crises According one senior editor of the BBC Burmese, Soe Win Than, “The BBC plays a massive role in bringing accurate, impartial information to the people of Burma…We are a lifeline service”. Similarly, according to another editor of the organization, “Every journalists in Burma wants to work for the BBC, nobody can compete in terms of audience or reputation” (Jinkinson, 2010). According to Lintner (2001), “Thanks to the military’s restrictive policies, the BBC’s Burmese service especially became almost a national institution to which everyone listened” (p. 5). This popularity is derived not only from the broadcasting services’ coverage of international news, but for its capacity for English language teaching (Jinkins, 2010; Fink, 2009).

While DVB and RFA are also valued for their provision of political and international news, their popularity also extends from their facilitation of political education and cultural programing in a variety of ethnic languages, including Shan, Karen, Kachin and Mon. Such populations gravitate toward these stations particularly due to content that addresses local ethnic
issues in native languages not spoken on state-run broadcasting (Fink, 2008). Similar content has also been found within radio stations operated by various ethnic-opposition groups who, in addition to publishing underground ethnic-language newsletters and magazines, have and continue to clandestinely broadcast along the country’s border regions. Launched in 1949, the earliest and among the most notable of such radio transmissions is the Karen-operated Radio Kawthoolei (Smith, 1999; Lintner, 2001; Brooten, 2008). Moreover, in addition to the radio station, which continued broadcasting into the 1980s, the political faction of the Karen armed insurrection, the Karenni National Progress Party (KNPP), regularly published and circulated newsletters (Ferguson, 2006; Humphries, 2008).

Similarly, such politically-based organizations as the China-backed Communist Party of Burma (CPB) also have a long history of disseminating externally-operated radio content into the country. In 1971, the CPB began transmitting the People’s Voice of Burma (PVOB) into Burma from Southern China, with daily broadcasts that featured “news from the civil war, party propaganda, and revolutionary music in Burmese, Shan, Kachin, Karen, Wa, and occasionally other tribal languages” (Lintner, 2001, p. 5). Moreover, both nonviolent and militant opposition groups have often employed domestic radio communications in order to achieve their objectives, notably with regard to the documentation of government human rights violations, collected internally and subsequently distributed via radio to Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) located externally in neighboring border regions (Brooten, 2008; ND-Burma, 2014; Martus Case Studies, 2014).

While both the Ne Win and SLORC governments occasionally jammed international and resistant groups’ broadcasts, the primary method used to limit their reach among the population has been the use of the threat of arrest (Lintner, 2001; Fink, 2009). Consequently, most listening
to foreign broadcast services takes place in the privacy of individuals’ homes (Fink, 2009). As Fink (2008) notes, despite inherent risks, the size of these various audiences increases substantially during “periods of political activity, when people want to find out what really happened that day and what activists are planning for the days ahead” (p. 207).

Myanmar/Burma did not obtain television until 1980, and it was not until 1985 that TV broadcasts were capable of being received throughout the country (Lintner, 2001; Zaw, 2004). Since that time, all broadcasting has been under the control of the state (Lintner, 2001; Zaw, 2004; U.S. Department of State, 2010). Under the 1996 Television and Video Act, owners of televisions, videocassette recorders and satellite television must be allocated licenses from the Ministry of Communications, Posts and Telegraphs. Anyone found guilty of unauthorized use or possession of such equipment faces up to five years in prison. Additionally, the law established the formation of the Video Business Supervisory Central Committee, a government board in charge of censoring and regulating the country’s video and television industry (Television and Video Law, 1996).

In the decade and a half following its inception, Myanmar/Burma television carried only one government-run station, Myanmar TV (MRTV-3), operating under its parent division Myanmar Radio and Television (METV), formally the Burmese British Broadcasting Service (BBS) (Zaw, 2004; Fink, 2009; Htun & Lwin, 2014). Commonly viewed as a propaganda tool of the military elite, the television channel has long contained government edited news reports and images of high ranking generals intended to evoke nationalist sentiment. In 1995, the state-run Myawaddy TV was launched, reportedly as a government attempt at reaching a younger audience (Fink, 2009). From 1993-2001, and from 2005-2011, the government suspended the allocation of licenses for satellite television receivers (Democratic Voice of Burma, 20 October, 2011).
Nevertheless, satellite hook-ups have and continue to exist, mostly without permits, and mainly among restaurants and wealthier private residents (Democratic Voice of Burma, 20 October, 2011; Fink, 2009). In 2005, the Oslo-based Burmese-exile media institution the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) established its own satellite-based television station which, ultimately providing daily broadcasts, represented “the first alternative television programming.” According to Fink (2009), DVB’s satellite programming served “as a major source of information for Burmese citizens during the monks’ protests in 2007” (p. 207).

While the Internet was officially introduced in Myanmar/Burma in 1997 with the establishment of the country’s first data communication link, the first Internet Service Provider (ISP) was not operational until 1999, and it was not until 2000 that individual citizens were permitted to access the network (Ure, 2008, p. 10; Mizzima News, 24 December, 2009; Reporters Without Borders, 2009). To date, there are five ISP’s operating in the country, the two primary ISPs, the state-owned Myanmar Posts and Telecommunications (MPT) and the Ministry of Defense ISPs, and the privately-owned Naypyidaw and Yatanarpon Teleport ISPs, both operating under the umbrella Myanmar Post and Telecommunications ISP. The majority of Myanmar/Burma’s Internet users access the Internet through public access centers (PACs). However, government restrictions, prohibited costs and slow connection speeds have long kept penetration rates significantly low (OpenNet Initiative, 2007; 2012; The Irrawaddy, 12 May, 2009).

When the MPT was established in 1999 it was launched as a dial-up ISP, charging approximately $230 (USD) for annual service. At the time of its inception, service was restricted to business groups, travel agencies, and government ministries (Mizzima News, 24 December, 2009). Nevertheless, despite initial restrictions to the general public, the nation’s lack of an
adequate mainline telephone infrastructure, which in 2010 was described as “barely capable of providing basic service,” and the relatively high annual cost of Internet service in a nation in which two thirds of the population is estimated to reside below the poverty line, when Internet service subscriptions were ultimately afforded to private citizens it made negligible progress in the way of facilitating access (CIA World Factbook, 2010; International Telecommunications Union, 2014). While the current influx of foreign investment is forecasted to lead to a dramatic expansion of telecommunications access, to date, both Internet and mobile phone penetration in Myanmar/Burma remain among the lowest in the world, with the former standing at under 2% in 2012, and the latter at just over 10% the same year (Fuller, 2013; International Telecommunications Union, 2014). Moreover, in addition to barriers in the form of infrastructure and cost, like other forms of media, Internet access in the country has been further precluded by a legacy government censorship.

While current political reforms signify the beginning of a reversal of such policies, laws governing the use of the Internet in Myanmar/Burma have been considered to be among the most extensive in the world (OpenNet Initiative, 2010; 2012; Chowdhury, 2008). Under the former military government, a “patchwork” of vague legal regulations conferred upon the SPDC the power to prosecute citizens for any use of the Internet it deemed as a threat to the state (OpenNet Initiative, 2005). The Computer Science Development Law, established in 1996, requires individuals to apply and register with the government prior to the importation or purchase of computer technology. Additionally, the law prohibits any unsanctioned use of “a computer network or any information technology.” Until recently, anyone found in violation of the statute faced up to fifteen years in prison as well as a fine (Computer Science Development Law, 1996). Similarly, under the 2004 Electronic Transaction Act, any individual found to have used...
“electronic devices capable of receiving, transmitting, storing, processing or retrieving information and records,” to disseminate information detrimental to the state, faced a prison sentence of up to 15 years (Electronic Transaction Act, 2004).

Under SPDC rule, the Act was routinely used to crackdown on journalists working for Burmese exile-media organizations using the Internet to relay information from inside the country. One notable example of such government-action includes the arrest of Soe Naing Lin, who in June 2009 was charged under the Act and sentenced to 13 years in prison for sending information to the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) from an Internet café in Yangon (BBC News, 29 January, 2010; The Irrawaddy, 2 February, 2009). Similarly, in December 2009 Hla Hla Win, a video journalist for DVB was also arrested and convicted under the Act for sending information online to the news organization (Committee to Protect Journalists, 7 January, 2010). While the exact number of exile-media journalists imprisoned under the Electronic Transactions Act remains unclear, prior to 2011, 14 correspondents were imprisoned from DVB alone (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2 February, 2010; 7 January, 2010).

In addition to such laws as the Electronic Transaction Act, the country’s Internet has further been restricted by the SPDC’s significant regulation of Internet content. According to a 2005 report by the OpenNet Initiative, on their “high impact list of sites with content known to be sensitive to the Burmese state,” they found 80% of sites to be blocked, including “all political opposition groups and pro-democracy pages tested” (OpenNet Initiative, 2005). Such findings align with allegations of longstanding online surveillance efforts by the SPDC (OpenNet Initiative, 2005; 2007; 2012; Crispin, 2008). Accordingly, Internet content in Myanmar/Burma has traditionally been widely considered to be among the most heavily censored in the world.
Although activists have proved capable of circumventing such barriers through proxy servers, in addition to consistently blocking popular email, blog, and instant messaging sites, the former military government routinely blocked most major news services, all Burmese exile-run news services, video sharing sites such as YouTube, sites dedicated to human rights advocacy and democratic reform, sites using “Burma” to refer to the country instead of “Myanmar,” and many prominent NGO websites (OpenNet Initiative, 2005; Wang & Nagaraja, 2007; Crispin, 2008; U.S. Department of State, 2009). In recent years there has been a significant reduction in the level of Internet censorship. However, according to a 2011 report by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), censorship and surveillance mechanisms do persist and the government maintains complete control over the country’s Internet infrastructure (Reporters Without Borders, 2010; Crispin, 2011; OpenNet Initiative, 2012).

Media Reforms

Current political reforms have changed Myanmar/Burma’s media landscape considerably. However, as a 2013 report by the Committee to Protect Journalists asserts, “many threats and obstacles to truly unfettered reporting remain, including restrictive laws held over from the previous military regime” (Crispin, 13 June, 2013). Outspokenly heralding the country’s press as the nation’s “fourth estate,” President Thein Sein has routinely publically advocated for the need for greater press freedoms as a means of checking and balancing the country’s fledgling democracy. While such statements were initially met with skepticism by external observers, in October 2011 Thein Sein issued a presidential pardon that reportedly freed all journalists that remained imprisoned following a series of prisoner amnesties earlier that year.
Furthermore, on executive command of the President, the once pervasive online censorship, most notably the blocking of all international and exile news sites and foreign-based email and Internet-based communications services, has been lifted. This has been accompanied by the easing of restrictions on foreign news organizations, with the removal of thousands of reporters from an immigration black-list, the issuing of short-term visas to previously banned foreign journalists, and a relaxation of restrictions on coverage of sensitive issues. Furthermore, according to a 2013 report by the media watchdog organization Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), the once widespread surveillance of journalists and harassment of privately-owned Internet cafes has also diminished. Moreover, in August of 2012 the government abolished the pre-publication censorship brought about by the 1962 Printers’ and Publishers Registration Act, along with the country’s censorship organ, the Press Security Board (PSB) (Crispin, 13 June, 2013).

In Burmese, the term “gja ne” (journal) is used to refer to a weekly published newspaper or magazine, typically in tabloid form and around thirty-six to sixty pages long. As Pe Myint notes (2012), these journals have served as pivotal information sources for the population. Unlike either the propaganda saturated government media, or the opposition/exile media containing content critical of the government, these weekly papers “contain interesting local news that is closely related to the daily lives of the people” (p. 204). Consequently, the information contained in these journals has not only come to be regarded as credible, but is routinely read and circulated among the population. With the intrusive press regulation lifted, such papers have begun to extend their coverage into the arena of politics (Pe Myint, 2012).

Despite opposition to the constitution and election by many notable individuals and groups (such as the NLD), some believed that the country’s political deadlock could only be
surpassed by the polls. From this perspective, the military government should be perceived as “the sponsors of democracy”, and that those in opposition to the election were “politically naïve”. In August 2008, “a number of articles” supporting this view appeared in various weekly journals, including *The Modern, Market News, Yangon Times*, and *Weekly Eleven*. According to Pe Myint (2013), “This was the first time that political issues had been covered by any weekly news journal”. Prior to this, weekly news journals commonly printed political articles mandated by government officials. As readers recognized that these articles represented “propaganda pieces written by officials and pro-government writers under assumed names”, they “were not taken seriously”. Conversely, those political articles appearing in August 2008 were “written by well-known writers”, notably Maung Suu Sann, and, as a result, “evoked strong responses among the public”. While articles espousing views in opposition to these articles’ positions would have been precluded from being published by government censors, counter arguments began appearing on Internet websites. Accordingly, there emerged “hot debate between Maung Suu Sann in the pages of various journals and through their blogs” (p. 207).

While continuing to fail to reflect anti-government opinions throughout 2009, “in 2010 journalists seized the chance to report political news for the first time” (209). Despite opposition from both a significant proportion of the population and the major opposition party, the pre-election environment sparked significant interest, particularly from journalists unaccustomed to covering electoral politics. Consequently, “Reporters from about a dozen journals covered the general elections in all its aspects”. Despite remaining subjected to government censorship, coverage of the election spawned reader interest in politics, in turn leading to greater political coverage in those journals covering politics, as well a shift of previously non-political journals into the political terrain. Nevertheless, this burgeoning enthusiasm proved short-lived, after
seven weeklies were suspended following their coverage of the excitement following the release of Aung San Suu Kyi (p. 210).

The beginning of 2011 was marked by various significant occurrences within Myanmar/Burma’s media landscape. In the aftermath of the November 2010 elections, numerous privat journal editors and publishers joined together with personnel from the state-controlled writers and journalist association and the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division (PSRD) to form the Committee for Professional Conduct press council. While the aims and significance of this organization continues to be uncertain, according to interviews with senior exile media editors that I conducted in October 2014, the inclusion of editors and publishers of privat journals has arisen as an important and influential milestone (Myint, personal communication, 25 October, 2014; Latt, personal communication, 23 October, 2014). Furthermore, in March and April 2011, President Thein Sein delivered a series of public statements heralding the news media’s importance as a “fourth estate”, and its role in the country’s continued progress toward democracy (Crispin, 2013). These comments were in turn followed by the president’s announcement of the abolition of pre-publication censorship (BBC News, 20 August, 2012).

As a result of these events, domestic newspapers now devote regular coverage to a range of topics previously banned by the SDPC, including the NLD, its leader Aung San Suu Kyi, poverty, criticism of China, natural disasters and government land grabs. Nonetheless, according to interviews with CPJ, veteran domestic journalists remain cautious of the “false hope” promised by the recent reforms, citing their consistency with a broader cycle opening-up and closing that has occurred since 1962. Furthermore, domestic journalists have described an environment in which “officials still function under the psychology of military rule,” with the press largely shunned outside the office of the president (Crispin, 13 June, 2013).
Amid the country’s media reforms has also been the lifting of a ban on private daily newspapers established after Ne Win’s 1962 ascension to power. This has led to the proliferation of daily newspapers seeking to fulfill “pent-up demand.” However, as of November of 2013, of the twelve dailies that had emerged following the cessation of the ban, three had shut down due to a lack of profits. Competing with longstanding state-run newspapers “‘selling for a faction of the price,’” these new papers have failed to attract sufficient advertising, struggling with many of the problems confronting news media worldwide, namely diminishing audiences for print publications. Furthermore, with Internet connectivity on the rise, and “big foreign telecommunications companies poised to install mobile phone networks that could bring tens of millions of people online for the first time,” it is believed that Myanmar/Burma is likely to follow the global trend of people looking online for their news (Fuller, 25 November, 2013).

Transnational Activism

Following Burma’s independence in 1948, the Burman-dominated central authority pursued “Burmatization campaigns” which, increasing under military rule, led to the displacement of many Burmese ethnic minorities. The long running ethnic insurgencies along the country’s borderlands have further propelled such displacement, with numerous ethnic and religious minorities seeking to escape conflict areas by fleeing to neighboring boarder regions. Escalating poverty under the successive military governments has similarly resulted in the migration of hundreds of thousands of Burmese abroad in the search of greater economic and educational fortunes. Furthermore, in the wake of the SLORC’s crackdown on Burma’s 1988 protests, many Burmese dissidents (regardless of ethnicity) fled military rule into exile. Ultimately, such trends have culminated in 2 to 3 million individuals of Burmese origin currently
residing outside their homeland, predominantly throughout Asia, and to a lesser degree in various Western nations (Egreteau, 2012).

In recent years, increasing scholarship has addressed how this diasporic population has brought about to the growth of transnational activism dedicated to both ethno-nationalist activism, and dissident exile-led pro-democracy efforts aimed at influencing both the actions of the international community and Myanmar/Burma’s domestic politics (Danitz & Strobel, 1999; 2000; Zarni, 2000; Aung-Thwin, 2001; McLean, 2004; Thawnghmung, 2005; Zaw Oo, 2006; Brees, 2009; Beatty, 2010; Dale, 2011; Williams, 2012). In the case of the later, such transnational advocacy, largely predicated on the ascension and proliferation of Internet-based technologies, has been regarded as highly influential in the implementation and maintenance of economic sanctions by Western actors (Danitz & Strobel, 1999; 2000; Free Burma Coalition, 2014). Inherently tied to this transnational advocacy is Myanmar/Burma’s so-called “exile media”.

Myanmar/Burma’s ‘Exile Media’

Like Myanmar/Burma’s transnational advocacy, the country’s exile media has also attracted a noteworthy degree of scholarship, similarly with regard to its influence on both Myanmar/Burma’s domestic politics, and its impact on the international community (Brooten, 2006, 2008; 2011; Humphries, 2008; Chowdhury, 2008; Pidduck, 2010; 2012). Following the 8888 Uprising, thousands of Burmese political dissidents fled to neighboring and Western countries. One result of such migration has been the emergence of news organizations founded and run by Burmese activist exiles, predominantly along the nation’s boarder region. According to Brooten (2006), these media institutions can be classified into two distinct categories, “ethnic” and “unmarked” (p. 362).
“Ethnic media” refer to publications that identify with a specific ethnic-Burmese identity. While predominantly composed of ethnic Burmans, the country is home to 135 distinct indigenous populations (Clapp, 2007). A number of these groups, particularly along the country’s border region, have been involved in longstanding struggles with the government for autonomy and independence. Such conflicts have led to widespread allegations of human rights violations perpetrated by the military government, in turn leading to the formation of groups predicated on the documentation of such abuse (Brooten, 2008; Martus, 2014; ND-Burma, 2014). Many of these NGO’s subsequently evolved into externally-based, indigenous-operated news organizations that disseminate information both abroad and back into the country through print, radio and Internet technologies (Brooten, 2006; 2008; Humphries, 2008).

As Brooten (2006) notes, “several of these media have become significant voices for ethnic nationalities, putting them ‘on the map’ for outsiders interested in Burma and for groups in opposition” (p. 362). Such an assessment is reinforced by Cho’s (2009; 2011) explorations of new media use among Burmese diaspora in New Zealand. According to Cho, access to Internet-based ‘ethnic media’ has afforded globally dispersed Burmese ethnic minorities with the capacity for the maintenance of social, cultural, political, national and ethnic identities. However, despite their cultural resonance, as many of these so-called ‘ethnic media’ remain closely affiliated with ongoing ethnic struggles for autonomy, the media content they produce is highly partisan. Correspondingly, these media have long remained underfunded and less “professionalized” compared to their “unmarked” exile media counterparts.

Myanmar/Burma’s “unmarked” exile media, the second exile media category identified by Brooten (2008), are the highly circulated, well-funded media outlets, media that has been described as the “largest shadow-state media empire in recent mainland Southeast Asian history”
TOWARDS A RE-DISCOVERY OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

(Humphries, 2008, p. 239). Formed and led by “8888” Burmese student activists in exile, these “independent” exile media organizations increasingly embody Western notions of journalistic professionalism and remain “unmarked” in terms of ethnic affiliation. The most notable of these are the *The Democratic Voice of Burma* (DVB), *The Irrawaddy News Magazine* and *Mizzima News* (Buck, 2007; Humphries, 2008; Pidduck, 2012). As various scholars have observed, since their inception, these organizations have employed on-the-ground, clandestine Burmese reporters in order to circumvent state censorship, serve as a voice for the population, and as a vehicle for public deliberation (Brooten, 2004; 2005; 2009; 2011; Humphries, 2008; Chowdhury, 2008; Pidduck, 2010; 2012).

By the end of 1988, the exodus of Burmese citizens escaping the military crackdown had led to the convergence of various groups, including students, ethnic insurgents, refugees, migrants, displaced peoples and other opponents of the military government in both the Thai-Myanmar/Burma border area and in ethnic rebel-controlled regions in Myanmar/Burma. Formally home to “locally-based refugee committees” and ethnic minority women and youth organizations, “new groups formed, split, and coalesced in a highly volatile political environment.” Within this context, Western foreigners that included Gene Sharp, founder of the Albert Einstein Institution, a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing the study of nonviolent action, and retired U.S. Army Colonel, then U.S. military attaché, and current International Republican Institute affiliate, Robert Helvey “conducted training seminars and wrote materials on how to engage in non-violent resistance against the regime that were translated into local languages” (Humphries, 2008, p. 243; Bacher, 2003). Amid such efforts, there arose an influx of aid from foreign donors seeking to “bring relief to the distressed, help opponents of the regime organize, and eventually foster the elements of a multiethnic Burmese
civil society, albeit one in exile” (Humphries, 2008, p. 243). Various advocacy organizations, including women and relief groups, created several reports and print publications which began appearing in mainstream media institutions. However, it was not until the early 1990’s that significant Burmese-exile run media organizations focused on the pan-Myanmar/Burma region began to emerge (Humphries, 2008).

The Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB). Among the most prominent of these media outlets was The Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), which began broadcasting in 1992 through shortwave radio transmission. Started by four Burmese-exile activists, for a decade following its inception the organization was considered to represent “the voice” of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), “a self-proclaimed government in exile,” then located in the Thai-Myanmar/Burma boarder region (Humphries, 2008, p. 244; Pidduck, 2012). However, in 2002 the DVB began positioning itself as more independent, in turn distancing itself from the NCGUB (Biener, 2007; Humphries, 2008). Failing to receive permission for “political reasons,” the DVB was not initially allowed to transmit from Myanmar/Burma’s neighboring states, instead broadcasting a transmission from an island off the Norwegian coast (Pidduck, 2012, p. 539).

Originally, the DVB represented a cooperative enterprise by the NCGUB, the Norwegian Burma Committee, and the Norwegian World View International Foundation, one that has since received “important support from the Norwegian government and the U.S. National Endowment for Democracy (NED)” (Humphries, 2008, p. 244; Joseph, 2003; Pidduck, 2012). In addition to such support, the DVB (along with Irrawaddy and Mizzima News) has also long relied on donor funding from a variety of actors that include governments, privet individuals, and church groups. These groups’ dependency on donor funding has in turn drawn criticism on a number of grounds,
including the marginalization of minority ethnic populations through an unequal allocation of resources (Brooten, 2003), and concerns regarding the underlying interests of Western government backers (Engdahl, 2007; Humphries, 2008). Challenging the concerns of the latter, Humphries (2008) maintains that “the sheer number and variety of small aid organizations are too numerous to mention and indicate that the movement is not manipulated by Washington” (p. 245). Nonetheless, according to Lawrence & Nance (2002), at a Foreign Correspondents Club in May 2002, the reigning Charge d’Affaires at the US Embassy, the then highest ranking US official in Myanmar/Burma, Priscilla Clap, implied a threat to NED funding over the editor of the *Irrawaddy*’s position on American foreign policy and its relationship to the 9/11 attacks.

Over the course of its formation, the *DVB* has been successful in building a “transnational media network”. With a studio in Chiang Mai, Thailand and its headquarters in Oslo, Norway, in 2012 the *DVB* reached an estimated 5-10 million individuals across its various platforms (Pidduck, 2012, p. 543; Latt, personal communication, 23 October, 2014). As of 2007, in addition to its Oslo-based transmitter, the *DVB* was broadcasting from transmitters in Germany, New Zealand and Madagascar, transmitting in both Burmese and various minority languages (T.Z. Latt, personal communication, 23 October, 2014). In the late 1990’s, the *DVB* launched a website containing content in both English and Burmese, and in 2005 it established its own satellite-based television station, representing Myanmar/Burma’s “first alternative television programing” (Fink, 2009, p. 207; Pidduck, 2012).

The organization’s media content is largely derived from *DVB*-trained journalists who operated clandestinely in Myanmar/Burma until the media outlet’s integration into the country in 2012. These journalists have long delivered on-the-ground reports from inside the country, relaying coverage to Chiang Mai and Oslo where audio and video content is edited and
rebroadcasted back into Myanmar/Burma (Wang & Nagaraja, 2007; Østergaard, 2008; Pidduck, 2012; Latt, personal communication, 23 October, 2014). As described by the organization, such reporting is ultimately facilitated by the use of video and new media technologies, and undertaken at great risk to DVB journalists:

Video journalists now fill an important gap, replacing a news vacuum behind the iron curtain of dictatorship. DVB trains video journalists before they go into the field undetected and unrecognized, even by their colleagues. To do their jobs, they are armed with mini video cameras, satellite phones and other new media technology. In addition they are also trained to service hostile environments. However, even minor carelessness could put one’s own life and those of others in jeopardy (Democratic Voice of Burma, 3 May, 2010).

Examining the role of the DVB in Myanmar/Burma’s 2010 elections, Pidduck (2012) maintains that “In a context where state-run media is widely considered as pro-junta propaganda and where privat print media are subject to drastic prior censorship, transnational information flows are crucial to Burma’s pro-democracy movement” (p. 539). Such an assertion is also made apparent in the context of Myanmar/Burma’s “Saffron Revolution” where, according to Fink (2009), the DVB served “as a major source of information for Burmese citizens” (p. 207). During the events, non-state media both mitigated military-violence by alerting citizens to emerging dangers and served as a mobilizing force by informing protesters where demonstrations were occurring. In addition to the DVB’s satellite television station, such information was obtained through externally-based radio broadcasts. Nevertheless, with over 30 undercover journalists on-the-ground, the content of both was largely facilitated by the DVB (Crispin, 7 May, 2007; Østergaard, 2008; Fink, 2009; Jinkins, 2010).

Despite significant barriers, including a limited telecommunications infrastructure and strict government controls and regulations, DVB journalists were able to transmit coverage of the
events to the media outlet’s bases of operations in Chiang Mai and Oslo, often using proxy servers to circumvent state-firewalls. The DVB subsequently employed its various media platforms to disseminate the information both back into the country and around the world. DVB coverage was then rebroadcasted by such mainstream international media as Al-Jazeera and CNN, content viewed as pivotal in the government’s subsequent termination of Internet and mobile phone connectivity (Crispin, 7 May, 2007; Wang & Nagaraja, 2007). The actions undertaken by undercover DVB journalists during the September 2007 events have since gained notoriety, most particularly through their documentation in the 2008 Academy Award nominee film Burma VJ: Reporting from a Closed Country (Østergaard, 2008).

However, in response to such journalism, in the wake of the “Saffron Revolution” the DVB journalists became a target of the SPDC, with many subsequently imprisoned under the country’s Electronic Transitions Law (The Irrawaddy, 2 February, 2009; BBC News, 29 January, 2010; Committee to Protect Journalists, 7 January, 2010). Prior to a series of prisoner amnesties in 2011, 17 DVB correspondents remained jailed under the statute for using the Internet to relay information to the media outlet (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2 February, 2010; 7 January, 2010; 13 June, 2013). Ultimately, the pattern of such information flows, which according to Pidduck (2012) also played significant role in the country’s 2010 elections, does not appear unique to the ascension of Internet-based technologies, but rather mirrors that which has long defined the organization’s basic informational structure.

According to Humphries (2008), since its inception, opposition groups have taken advantage of the DVB’s broadcasting capabilities. In 1993, the All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSF), an armed anti-government insurgent group comprised of former Burmese students in exile, composed short programs from a studio in their base located in the Thai-
Myanmar/Burma border region, which were subsequently sent to the DVB’s base of operations in Oslo for broadcasting. Located near the frontlines of the Myanmar/Burma government-insurgent conflict, the relay of such dissident media from a secure location abroad, despite the time delay derived from the use of international mail, was undertaken as a means of preventing the ABSF’s “immediate censure” had the group attempted transmission from their position across the border (Humphries, 2008). This suggests that much of the success of The Democratic Voice of Burma has resulted directly from its strategic stateless position vis-à-vis the state, a positioned shared by other prominent Burmese exile media outlets, notably The Irrawaddy News Magazine and Mizzima News.

**The Irrawaddy News Magazine.** Apart from the DVB, The Irrawaddy News Magazine has also emerged as among Myanmar/Burma’s most prominent exile-run media outlets (Brooten, 2006; Buck, 2007; Humphries, 2008, Pidduck, 2012; Crispin, 2013), an organization that according to Brooten (2006) is “arguably the most professional independent Burmese print and online source by Western standards” (p. 263). Aung Zaw, current Irrawaddy director, who also served as journalist for Radio Free Asia between 1997 and 2005 (Zaw, 2005; Humphries, 2008), established the Burma Information Group (BIG) in 1992 in Bangkok, Thailand in order “to document the human rights violations in Burma/Myanmar, including the unlawful detention of members of the democratic opposition, other dissidents and ethnic groups.” Transforming BIG, in 1993 Aung Zaw and a group of fellow 1988 student exile activists based in Chiang Mai, Thailand launched the monthly English language publication The Irrawaddy News Magazine, reportedly the “first independent news publication unaffiliated with Burmese political dissident groups in exile and in Burma” (Irrawaddy.org, “About Us,” 2014).
Following its inception, the former military government banned the publication, with those found in possession of it facing “arrest and imprisonment.” In 1999, the magazine’s coverage was expanded to incorporate democratic reforms within Southeast Asian countries more broadly, though it continued to maintain an overriding emphasis on Myanmar/Burma. In addition to its print publication, which now includes a Burmese language version, in 2000 the media outlet began publishing an English language website, followed by the launch of a Burmese-language news site in 2001 (Irrawaddy.org, “About Us,” 2014; Humphries, 2008). Despite being banned by the government and blocked by government censors for the ensuing twelve years, the outlet’s websites were nonetheless accessible to a domestic audience through the use of proxy servers (OpenNet, 2005; Wang & Nagaraja, 2007; Poetranto, 2012). Amid such restrictions, according to the organization, *The Irrawaddy* nevertheless “[became] the most popular Burmese online news-site worldwide” (Irrawaddy.org, “About Us,” 2014). Such an assertion is seemingly supported by Humphries (2008) who maintains that “the magazine and its website enjoy considerable popularity and Aung Zaw is often quoted in mainstream media” (p. 245).

Reflecting a departure from the initially outspokenly political DVB, *The Irrawaddy’s* long stated commitment to journalistic ‘independence’ is embodied by the organization’s mission statement:

*From its inception, *Irrawaddy* has been an independent news media group, unaffiliated with any political party, organization or government. The *Irrawaddy* is neither an advocacy group nor an NGO campaigning for particular causes. We believe that media must be free and independent and we strive to preserve press freedom. (Irrawaddy.org, “About Us,” 2012)*

Nevertheless, while embracing an ‘independent’ stance, as articulated in the organization’s website, the *Irrawaddy* itself maintains that “Critical and independent media cannot sit idly and
report without detachment.” Consequently, “We believe that media is part of the solution and not part of the problem. Thus, we are not slaves to neutrality – our duty is to search for the truth and inform our readers.”

Presenting itself as predicated on ‘inclusivity,’ the news outlet outspokenly highlights the diversity of its personnel, “a team of Burmese and ethnic nationality reporters from Burma/Myanmar and areas bordering Thailand,” including those from Mon, Karen, Kachin and Shan backgrounds. While the *Irrawaddy* is “not yet a commercially viable enterprise,” but rather a non-profit body dependent on funding from individuals, NGO’s, private organizations, and governments, donor funding remains “crucial to [their] mission.” While maintaining that “Donor partners are not responsible for and do not influence or endorse any of the content and opinions in any media product published by the *Irrawaddy*,” like the *DVB*, the media outlet receives notable funding from the NED and has faced the same concerns over the influence and interests of Western backers (Lawrence & Nance, 2002; Engdahl, 2007).

**Mizzima News.** Such reconfiguration of organizational economic structure is also mirrored by Myanmar/Burma’s arguably third most prominent ‘independent’ exile-run media organization, *Mizzima News* (Buck, 2007; Crispin, 13 July, 2013). The word “mizzima,” a Pali term meaning middle or moderate, was “chosen for its inference of an unbiased and independent media” when the organization was founded by three Burmese student exile activists in New Delhi, India in 1998. Until recently, the media outlet was primarily online-based, with bases of operations in both Chiang Mai and New Delhi. However, in the wake of Myanmar/Burma’s political reforms, in 2012 *Mizzima* began a commercial transformation, setting up operations in Yangon and officially registering as a Myanmar/Burma company (Mizzima Media Co. Ltd.). Currently, the organization produces a daily news publication in Burmese, a weekly English
language business journal (www.mzineplus.com), weekly television sports and business programing, distributed by Myanmar Radio & Television (MRTV), along with its longer running news websites in both Burmese (www.mizzimaburmese.com) and English (www.mizzima.com). Furthermore, Mizzima has also recently launched products on such media platforms as iPhones and Androids (Mizzima.com, “About Us,” 2014).

When the media outlet first went online in 2002, the primary function of the then Mizzima News Group was “the collection and dissemination of news and information on Burma and Burma-related issues via Internet and fax.” Based in New Delhi, initial efforts often focused on India-Burma relations, namely the role of India in the prodemocracy struggle in Myanmar/Burma. Within this context, the organization provided internships in journalism and independent media to India-based Burmese refugees. In 2002, Mizzima became a founding member of Burma News International (BNI), a media group initially comprised of Mizzima and four other, ethnic Burmese exile news outlets located along Myanmar/Burma’s western border in India and Bangladesh, a group subsequently expanded to incorporate various other Burmese news outlets located along Thai-Myanmar/Burma border in Thailand (Mizzima, 8 October, 2013).

According to the organization’s website, it was only in 2003 that “Mizzima commenced in terming itself a true independent media organization.” After completing a professional journalism course, Sein Win emerged as the news outlet’s first managing editor with the launch of a monthly print publication, Mizzima Monthly Journal, published in both English and Burmese. In an explicit attempt at “strengthening the flow of and access to information between those inside Burma and those outside,” it was at this time that the organization established “Mizzima Units inside Burma,” the formation of clandestine journalistic operations. As this
occurred, additional *Mizzima* activities took the form of daily Internet news and email services, internships in journalism for Burmese located in Thailand and India, Internet podcasting on Myanmar through [www.mizzima.tv](http://www.mizzima.tv), and Burma Media Alert, “monitoring violations of free expression, freedom of information and media freedom, for which timely alerts are sent to the international community when such infractions occur” (Mizzima, 8 October, 2013).

According to a 2013 statement by the organization, *Mizzima’s* websites average “15,000 unique visitors a day,” with an additional daily news email service reaching more than 500 individual subscribers. *Mizzima’s* audience outside Myanmar is reportedly largely comprised of members of Myanmar/Burma’s diaspora community, predominantly located in Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia and the United States. The organization gained prominence in the wake of Myanmar/Burma’s disastrous 2008 Cyclone Nargis when, bypassing the state’s information blockade, it sold photos and videos of the devastation to such international media outlets as the London-based Sky News, European News Pressphoto Agency (EPA) and Portugal’s Expresso. Amid the aftermath of the Cyclone, between May 1st and May 8th of 2008, *Mizzima’s* website reportedly received five million hits on its English language site alone, with total hits for both sites averaging three million per day. Following an initial circulation of 500 copies at its onset, by 2013 *Mizzima Monthly Journal* had a monthly circulation rate of over four thousand for its Burmese language version, and 800 for its English language version, both of which are now downloadable in pdf form (Mizzima, 8 October, 2013).

In the past, the Journal’s distribution remained “a complex enterprise,” with print copies reaching domestic Burmese citizens through such means as “cross border traffic and human couriers,” a network whose maintenance the organization has stated to be “vital to ensure a continued strengthening of the information flow between inside and outside Burma.” According
to *Mizzima*, with respect to the Burmese version, the Journal’s primary target audience was Burmese located inside the country and Burmese diaspora, “especially Burmese refugees and migrant workers in India, Thailand and Bangladesh,” as “these are also populations that are less likely to have regular, or any, access to the Internet.” The English language version of the Journal has in turn traditionally been primarily targeted to Indian communities, predominantly to those residing in states bordering Myanmar/Burma,

Within Indian society, readers include policy makers, journalists, politicians, intellectuals, lawyers and students as well as NGO and foreign embassy staff. By means of building on this readership base, *Mizzima* aims to raise awareness on Burma and also gain solidarity for the Burmese democracy movement.

(Mizzima, 8 October, 2013)

Illustrative of the media outlet’s reach, in 2007 the International Press Institute awarded *Mizzima* its Free Media Pioneer award for its efforts at disseminating information on Myanmar/Burma despite government barriers (International Press Institute, 2 May, 2007).

Following the initial growth of its operations, *Mizzima* began receiving increasing support from international donors, including becoming the recipient of “core financial support from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED)” in 2004. As of 2013, major donors to the organization included NED, the London-based Open Society Institute’s Network Media Program, the Netherlands-based Free Voice, and the Demark-based International Media Support. However, as the outlet’s website notes, “it remains a challenge to line up donors for more than a single year at a time” (Mizzima, 8 October, 2013). Accordingly, reflective of both the *DVB* and the *Irrawaddy*, *Mizzima News’* 2012 entrance into Myanmar/Burma has also marked a broader shift toward a commercial model of organization (Crispin, 13 July, 2013).

However, despite their touted successes, the *DVB*, the *Irrawaddy*, and *Mizzima News* have been criticized on a number of grounds. According Brooten (2005), these media’s
overemphasis on narrowly interpreted human rights discourses has served to foster and perpetuate stereotypes that victimize and depoliticize minority populations, in turn reinforcing prevailing inequalities. Furthermore, in addition to asserting that abrupt steps toward journalistic professionalism have often served to alienate women in terms of job opportunity, placement and training, Brooten (2003) has identified problems regarding segmentation and the overreliance on funding. Similarly, as addressed above, various scholars have highlighted criticisms arising from the potential influence of these organizations’ donor sources. Citing the significance of NED and Open Society Institute funding, and these media’s corresponding relationship to U.S. foreign policy and interests, Engdahl (2007) has maintained the existence of State Department attempts at wielding Myanmar/Burma’s exile media (in addition to the country’s pro-democracy movement) toward regime change.

Criticisms have also arisen over what has been seen as Western media’s narrow focus on Aung San Suu Kyi and Yangon at the expense of ethnic minorities and wider, alternative societal concerns (Brooten, 2004; Humphries, 2008). Relatedly, both Humphries (2008) and Brooten (2004) site accusations on behalf of ethnic minority populations that Burmans have long received a disproportionate amount of aid from donor agencies due to disparate levels in both education and organizational experience. Furthermore, some scholars (Humphries, 2008) have also pointed to accusations of “parachute journalism,” one-dimensional coverage arising from journalists who “fly in” from abroad, composing superficial coverage from short term experiences which, reflecting organizational biases, reinforce the negation of marginalize communities. In this regard,

Initially, news written by some of their writers tended to focus solely on politics and human rights and was lengthy, unclear and propagandistic in style. There were few if any features and little coverage of cultural and other community topics (Humphries, 2008, p. 246).
While Humphries alludes to the manner in which networking and training programs between exile media and such international organizations as *The Voice of America*, *Radio Free Asia*, and *BBC News* have since helped alleviate some of these problems, the particular organizational practices and underling interests of these organizations may conversely be seen as potentially detrimental to the values underpinning exile media operations.

However, in recent years Myanmar/Burma’s media landscape has been transformed alongside its political landscape, thus radically reconfiguring both the organizational structure of the country’s ‘independent’ exile media, and their relationship to the nation’s political and public spheres. Such transformation has been particularly significant with regards to donor funding, the traditional environment of which is summed up by a 2013 report by the *Committee to Protect Journalists* (CPJ),

> Most exile-run media groups have been funded by Western government and non-governmental donors, including the Free Voice of the Netherlands, Sweden’s SIDA, and the U.S. Congress-funded National Endowment for Democracy, among others. Many Western governments were keen to fiancé exile media’s critical reporting while they maintained punitive economic sanctions against the previous military regime. (Committee to Protect Journalists, 13 June, 2013)

Nevertheless, as CPJ notes, following the lifting of Western economic sanctions in the face of recent political reforms, “Western donors have started to pull back their funding of exile media.” In response, in early 2013, following over two decades of donor funding, the *DVB*, the *Irrawaddy* and *Mizzima News* have all begun a shift toward a commercial model of operations. This transition has in turn occurred on the heels of the organizations’ seminal, formal entrance into Myanmar/Burma’s media sphere, a move not mirrored by these ‘independent,’ ‘unmarked’ media’s ‘ethnic’ counterparts, many of whom remain affiliated with ongoing ethnic struggles for autonomy (Yan Naing, 3 October, 2013; Committee to Protect Journalists, 13 June, 2013).
Consequently, while Myanmar/Burma’s “unmarked” exile media is currently amid steps toward mainstreaming commercially, the country’s ethnic media are not, instead attempting to maintain a donor funded model of organization.

**Discussion**

Clearly, despite a seeming relative absence within the country’s social landscape, media has nonetheless played a significant role in Myanmar/Burma’s historic socio-political development. Fostered by the relatively high levels of literacy and press freedoms imparted by the country’s pre-colonial period, the press arose as pivotal in the country’s independence movement. This revolutionary, oppositional press in turn served as the foundation for the nation’s independence leaders’ elevation to political prominence, individuals among whom would create the Tatmadaw, the body that subsequently came to dominant Myanmar/Burma’s political sphere for half a century. As illustrated by the actions of General Ne Win, the censorship that ensued may be seen as a response to recognition of the historic role of the press within the nation’s public sphere. Nevertheless, despite pervasive state-censorship, the reawakening of an underground oppositional press played a significant role in mobilizing and articulating public dissent in 1988. Although this press was subsequently suppressed, the government’s monopoly on media also came to be challenged by transnational information flows derived from externally-based broadcasters.

While such international broadcasting has gained popularity amid a state-saturated media climate, many of these media are guided by formal and/or informal ties to governments and government interests. *People’s Voice of Burma* (PVOB) represented an arm of China’s Communist Party, espousing propaganda connected to party interests. *Voice of America* (VoA) is the official broadcast organ of the U.S. government and has been considered to be a propaganda
instrument serving U.S. interest (Shulman, 1990). Similarly, VoA is the largest network within the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), a U.S. government agency responsible for the supervision of American government-supported international media, a body that in turn funds Radio Free Asia (RFA). Furthermore, operating under a British Royal Charter, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) is formally independent of the British government with a mandate to report impartially. Nevertheless, the institution has been accused of political biases on a number of grounds, with some alluding to its complex ties to British interests (Hampton, 2006).

Long working hand-in-hand with domestically-based actors in an attempt at facilitating a two way flow of communication between their media content and the population, and including a relative diversity of ‘voices’ through the incorporation of content in multiple languages, these media organizations have achieved significant success in building a space for deliberative discourse outside of state channels. Nonetheless, like PVOB, VoA, RFA, and the BBC, their formal and informal connections to governments raises concerns over the potential influence of external interests. However, the unique nature of these media’s journalistic production processes, and their unique relationship to their target population, of whom they ultimately see themselves a part of, suggests that Myanmar/Burma’s ‘independent’ exile media may fall into a distinct classification of journalism that distinguishes them from those media outline above.

According to Lievrouw (2011), participatory journalism can be conceived of as journalistic practices that attempt to build community identities and challenge mainstream news narratives through the direct involvement of the populations they seek to represent. This is often characterized by news content where opinions of both author and reader are included and openly debated. Additionally, the reporters of media outlets embracing such practices often have “a
personal or political interest in the stories and issues they cover.” As such, they attempt to “cultivate connectivity and interactivity within their communities, and seek to break down the distinctions between news providers, on the one hand, and readers/citizens, on the other” (p.25).

Such media practices are similarly encapsulated by Atton’s (2000) definition of “native journalism”, “the activities of alternative journalists working within communities of interest to present news that is relevant to those communities’ interests, in a manner that is meaningful to them and with their collaboration and support (Atton, 2000, p. 112). For Atton, such journalistic practices represent attempts to build identities and counter narratives oppositional to reigning oppressive power structures. Similarly, Ramono (2010) identifies “deliberative development journalism” as a dominant model of international journalism that relies on the news media to actively foster economic, political, and social development in the Third World. While various strands of “development journalism” exist, deliberative development journalism is “interactive, advocative and educational, and aims to build community self-reliance” (p. 24). Providing “a voice to the voiceless”, it promotes engaged interaction with communities. “Rather than merely top-down communications, it also seeks a bottom-up flow and, most importantly, horizontal flows where citizens share information with fellow citizens” (p. 25).

Circumventing state communication barriers through clandestine networks of Burmese journalists, since their inception, Myanmar/Burma’s “unmarked” exile media practices have entailed the direct involvement of the population they seek to represent and have opened up new avenues for the identification and deliberation of matters of concern among communities throughout the country. Founded by political activists in exile, and employing reporters who risked imprisonment for their efforts, the personnel of these organizations have both a personal and political interest in the issues and stories they report on. Nonetheless, while bringing “voice
to the voiceless”, the country’s legacy of state censorship and these organizations’ ‘exile’ location has also greatly inhibited avenues for horizontal communication, alienated them from some domestic audiences who feel that they have not endured the same struggles (Myint, personal communication, 25 October, 2014), and has led to concerns over their victimization of the country’s ethnic populations.

Consequently, while seemingly epitomizing examples of media practices invoked in theorizations of participant journalism, native journalism, and deliberative development journalism, the unique challenges posed by Myanmar/Burma’s media landscape and technological infrastructure have also served to define these media outlet’s organizational structure and journalistic practices in distinct ways. Accordingly, any adequate understanding of the various ways in which these institutions’ media practices contribute to Myanmar/Burma’s political and public sphere(s), or addressing the potential existence of the influence of external interests on their production processes, seemingly necessitates a theoretically-grounded appreciation of the relationships between Myanmar/Burma’s socio-political and media landscape, and the global social, technological, economic and political context in which they are embedded.

While potentially deviating from reigning “deliberative journalism” discourses, these media’s journalistic practices also appear to epitomize predominant interpretations of “alternative media,” in turn suggesting that they lend themselves to the creation of what has been conceptualized as “alternative public spheres.” However, amidst a radically transforming domestic political and media climate, and the corresponding evaporation of essential donor funding, Myanmar/Burma’s ‘independent’ media are undergoing both a pivotal integration into the country, and a restructuration towards a commercially driven model of organization.
Consequently, an exploration of the changing nature of these media outlets’ relationship to both the state and Myanmar/Burma’s public sphere(s), as well as their potentially evolving counter-hegemonic potential, seemingly affords unique insight into theorizations of ‘alternative media’ practices, their emancipatory potential, and the corresponding significance of market forces and commercially-driven organizational configurations.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The preceding chapter provided a contextual background for the study, including an overview of Myanmar/Burma’s colonial and post-colonial history, an account of the nation’s present media landscape, and a preliminary analysis of the role and significance of the nation’s exile media within it. In order to build an appropriate theoretical lens for subsequent inquiry, the following chapter outlines dominant scholarship pertaining to the political economy of the media, public sphere theory, neoliberalism and international development, and U.S. foreign affairs news framing. This in turn will provide the foundation for a discussion of this study’s theoretical trajectory and research questions in the proceeding section.

The Political Economy of the Media

This in turn laid the foundation for a discussion of this study’s theoretical trajectory and research questions. Mosco (2009) provides us with two definitions of political economy. In a narrow sense, it may be seen as “the study of social relations, particularly power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources, particularly communication resources.” However, as he contends, a more “ambitious definition” can be said to be “the study of control and survival in social life” (p. 2). As such, research pertaining to the political economy of the media tends to be associated with critical, macro perspectives concerning issues of ownership, production, distribution, and consumption of media, often in relation to broader processes of commercialization, consolidation, convergence, internationalization and globalization.

While rooted in classical economics, modern applications of political economy stand apart from those of ‘orthodox’ or neo-classical economics. Specifically, contemporary
economics invokes a reductionist approach, applying economic laws in order to explain the causal relationships between individuals and markets while avoiding broader social and historical contextual forces (Boyd-Barrett, 1995). Conversely, political economy proceeds from a realist, inclusive, constitutive, and critical epistemological perspective. Dismissing linear causality, political economy instead “approaches social life as a set of mutually constitutive processes, acting on one another in various stages of formation, and with a direction and impact that can only be comprehended in specific research” (Mosco, 2009, p. 10). Finally, political economy’s epistemology is critical in that it perceives knowledge as being derived from a consideration of research findings in relation to both social values and alternative bodies of knowledge, including cultural studies, neoclassical economics, and pluralist political science. Ontologically speaking, the political economy approach embeds itself in social processes and social relations rather than placing an overriding emphasis on structures and institutions.

Contemporary political economy is ultimately rooted in the classical economics (or classical political economy) that emerged in the 19th century, a product of the era of Enlightenment. Founded on the principles of empiricism and reason, the tradition’s founding fathers, notably Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill, sought to explain the underlying forces driving an historic world-wide economic transformation. Governed by the belief that science, mathematics, and morality could determine the conditions under which production and consumption were organized within nation-states, this model dismissed the prevailing view holding land as the ultimate source of value. Instead, value would be determined by the countervailing productive forces of land, labor, and capital. Mosco identifies four tenets of this approach – concern for social change and history, inclusive embrace of the social totality, direction of moral philosophy, and ultimate commitment to change or praxis (Mosco, 2010).
Social Change & Historical Transformation

Above all political economy is the attempt to understand social change and historical transformation. Smith and Mill ultimately sought to explain the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Situating capitalism within an historical perspective of transformation was also a primary concern for Marx, though he rejected the classical theoretical assumption that the forces driving capitalism were natural (Mosco, 2010). Likewise, those addressing the political economy of the media are concerned with historical transformations of the mass media and their relationship to broader political-economic trends. As Golding and Murdock (1973) note, media companies are intrinsically tied to the general economic structure of society. As a result, transformations in mass media cannot be sufficiently addressed without considering broader economic transformations. This necessitates an historical perspective that places developments in mass media within the broader context of industrialization and the ascension of capitalism.

In order to demonstrate this process of legitimation that underpins capitalist society, the authors explore the historical processes that have shaped the media industry in Britain. Through their historical account of publishing, the press, broadcasting, cinema, and recording industries, they attempt to illustrate that all media go through similar organizational cycles. This process begins with the small-scale expansion of a cultural product, until it reaches a point where production, selling and distribution become differentiated and commercialized. The introduction of new technologies to the medium leads to the industrialization of production, whereby consumption becomes “large-scale and impersonal.” The growth of the industry inevitably leads to challenges of market saturation, rising costs, declining revenue, and changing patterns of demand and consumption, at which point concentration of ownership ensues.
This concentration of ownership, Golding and Murdock argue, where a limited number of large companies exert disproportionate influence and control over a given market, results from the processes of integration and internationalization. The process of integration is typified by both horizontal and vertical integration. \textit{Horizontal integration}, corporate consolidation at the same level of production, allows companies to maximize economies of scale and provides them the capacity to extend their influence over a particular media sector. \textit{Vertical integration}, the acquisition of ownership at various stages of the supply chain, greatly minimizes corporate vulnerability to volatility in costs associated with the supply of necessary goods and services. Moreover, regulation over the site of production serves to enhance market domination.

Expanding on this component of concentration, other scholars in the field have subsequently addressed the increasing proliferation of conglomeration, the expansion of a firm across various unrelated market sectors in the pursuit of profits, diversification of risk and synergies (Murdock, 1982; Herman & McChesney, 1998; Bagdikian, 2000; Wasko, 2003; McChesney, 2004; Epstein, 2005; Rice, 2008). Ultimately, the result of horizontal integration, vertical integration, and conglomeration is the seemingly ever-expanding reach of a shrinking number of companies over an increasingly homogenized market.

In addition to integration, concentration is achieved through the process of \textit{internationalization}, the overseas export of media products, and investment in and ownership of foreign media. The acquisition of greater market influence by a limited number of companies inevitably results in expanding transnational flows of capital, where new markets are sought out and integrated into existing ones. As Harvey (2010) notes, throughout the history of capitalism there has been a general trend toward the reduction of special barriers to the flows of global capital. As state borders have become increasingly open to commerce and finance, the process of
the internationalization of media ownership has inevitably accelerated. Golding and Murdock assert that this export, foreign investment, and foreign media ownership serves to “further consolidate the monolithic character of the media.”

This processes of concentration, internationalization, and homogenization have implications for the configuration and legitimation of power in capitalist society. The ways in which individuals come to make sense of and interact with the world around them is largely determined by the information at their disposal. Much of this information, consisting of cultural narratives and frameworks, including opinions, ideas, facts, concepts, and entertainment narratives is derived from the media. Thus, the media plays an important role in the production of culture (Siad, 1978; Siad, 1993; Thussu, 1998; Calabrese & Sparks, 2004; Straubhaar, 2007; Innis, 2004; 2007; Chakravartty & Zhao, 2008). Within this context, where narratives and frameworks purveyed by the media are derived from corporate interest in profit, information not only becomes a commodity, but comes to perform an ideological function on behalf of capital accumulation. In this regard, the role of the news media is of particular significance to the construction of consensus, and in turn, the legitimation of the capitalist system in which it resides, for without such consensus capitalism loses the overriding structural stability that enables it to endure with maximum efficiency (Tuckman, 1978; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen, 1998; McChesney, 2004; Boyd-Barrett, 2010; Paterson, 2011; Williams, 2011).

News becomes a means of handling social change, a comforting reaffirmation of the existing order. Any threat is explained away at temporary, deviant or inconsequential. Underlying conflicts of interests and political process are reduced to necessary concentration on arresting mythologies of the superficial drama of legislative life. These limitations are part of the demands of commercial information production in a situation of economic pressures (Golding & Murdock, 1977, p. 227).
Totality of Social Relations

Another fundamental component of political economy is the advancement of an understanding of the *totality of social relations*, the economic, social, political, and cultural dimensions of life that comprise the social whole. Through his application of abstract “laws” to all dimensions of industry and trade, Smith rejected the perspective that land constituted the ultimate source of value. For Smith, an understanding of the capitalist transformation required an exploration into the relationships between all components of political, economic, cultural and moral life. The political economists that have followed Smith have sought to explain the relationship between wealth and power, and how that relationship in turn influences the construction of cultural and social life. Political economy of the media attempts to illustrate how this process affects, and is affected by, the mass media.

Moral Philosophy

Political economy is also concerned with *moral philosophy*, the values embedded within societal behaviors and appropriate moral standards driving social change. For Smith, in order to understand the social forces propelling capitalism, it was essential to understand the values inherent within them, such as self-interest, materialism, and individual freedom (Smith, 2003). Marx was concerned with the moral contradictions inherent in the values placed on labor, specifically how the appropriation of “surplus value” by capitalists, which serves as the basis of capitalism, is analogous to exploitation (Marx, 1990). Political economy of communications scholars focus on the role of the mass media in the production and reproduction of values, and the relationship of that process to moral questions of power, justice, equity, and the public good (Golding and Murdock, 1991; Splichal & Wasko, 1993; Murdock, 1995; Mansell, 2002; Hackett & Carroll, 2006; Hackett & Zhao, 2005; McChesney, 2008).
Social Praxis

*Social Praxis* constitutes a fourth and final cornerstone of political economy. Gramsci (1971/2010) describes the philosophy of praxis as “the unity of theory and practice.” For him, this theory-practice nexus is conceived as both “the conceptual and philosophical elaboration of ideas” and their “diffusion in the world” through “the development of a cultural movement” (p. 334). However, Gramsci takes issue with what he sees as the “philosopher’s philosophy”, which he describes as “the ideological initiatives undertaken by a specific class of people to change, correct or perfect conceptions of the world that exist in any particular age and thus to change the norms of conduct that go with them; in other words, to change practical activity as a whole”. Rather than “devoted to creating a specialized culture among restricted intellectual groups”, Gramsci sees the goal of “a philosophical movement” as one that bridges the gulf between the intellectual and the masses (p. 344). In this regard, the ambition is not an idealized structure of rule, but the organic cultivation of a detrimental critique of hegemonic formations of rule while cultivating the foundations for popular self-government. Thus, the philosophy of praxis rests on the capacity of the intellectuals to establish an organic nexus or unity by drawing upon the innate world perspective of the masses.

**Entry Processes**

Based on this philosophical foundation, Mosco (2009) provides three “entry processes” that allow for the application of political economy to the media, *commodification*, *spatialization*, and *structuration*.

**Commodification.** *Commodification* refers to the processes by which the use value of goods and services are transformed into marketable, exchange values. Such processes have been greatly accelerated by the proliferation of communication technologies, as they have equipped
companies with greater control over the processes of production, distribution, and exchange. Media researchers within the political economy tradition often seek to address the ways in which media content, audiences, and labor are turned into marketable commodities (Smythe, 1981; Jhally, 1990; Meehan, 1999; Leiss, Kline & Jhally, 1997; Meehan, 2002; Rosati, 2007).

**Spatialization.** Spatialization refers to the processes of “overcoming the constraints of space in social life” (Mosco, 2009, p.14). It proceeds from the understanding that the unprecedented growth of communication technologies in the latter half of the 20th century has helped create a more “networked society,” and have fundamentally altered traditional “time-space distinctions” (Giddens, 1990; Mattelart, 2000; Murdock, 2006; Innis, 2007; Castells, 2009; 2010). In a society increasingly characterized by information exchange, the significance of physical space recedes. This has in turn fostered enhanced capacity for flexibility and control within industries which has served to promote such processes as globalization, commercialization, privatization, liberalization, and internationalization. Political economy of the media research often addresses how these processes have influenced media and communication industries, notably in regards to such trends as media concentration, conglomeration, convergence, homogenization, and hybridization (Golding & Murdock, 1973; Mody, 1987, 1989; Pelton, 2004; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Epstein, 2005; Straubhaar, 2007; McChesney, 2008; Rice, 2008; Wasko & Erickson, 2008).

**Structuration.** Structuration refers to “a process by which structures are constituted out of human agency, even as they provide the very ‘medium’ of that constitution” (Mosco, 2009, p. 185). Accordingly, social action does not shape society, nor society social action. Rather, society (structure) and social action (agency) shape one another. Structuration serves to force a re-conceptualization of social class from a structural, categorical perspective, where class is
something “some have but others do not,” to one that encompasses both the “relational and formational sense of the term.” Various political economy of the media scholars have addressed structuration as it pertains to inequalities inherent in communication systems, notably in terms of access (Schiller, 1996; Qui, 1999; Meehan & Riordan, 2002; Mansell, 2002; Hackett & Zhao, 2005; Hamelink, 2011). Schiller (1996) provides us with examination of the increasing gulf in communications access in the United States. While reflective of the popular, broader narrative of “the digital divide”, rather than a failure of provision (an argument reminiscent of the dominant development paradigm), Schiller contends that such discrepancies in access are a product of deeply entrenched social and racial divisions that perpetuate unequal access to political and economic resources.

**Cultural Studies**

Taken as a whole, the knowledge and theories developed by these various terrains have advanced empirically-grounded measurements and evaluations of existing, frequently inequitable, global power structures. In doing so, they have fostered greater insight into the political, social, and economic forces governing society and have helped provide a basis for mechanisms of accountability within the prevailing global political-economic system (Boyd-Barrett, 1998). However, the basic theoretical foundations of the field’s conceptualization of power, and its relation to the media, has long existed in tension with another, closely related field, *cultural studies*. Nevertheless, as various scholars have indicated (Meehan, 1999; Garnham, 1995; Peck, 2006) this longstanding antagonism may be overcome by various means to the advantage of advancing both scholarly trajectories.

Cultural studies, emerging through the work of Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart, was at its onset an attempt to reposition the British working class (popular culture) against the
dominant culture of the ruling elite. In this regard, cultural studies was located within a broader class structure brought about through capitalist industrialization and the “commercial system of cultural production, distribution, and consumption” that it produced (Garnham, 1995, p. 62). As such, cultural studies arose as an oppositional movement that viewed cultural struggle as a site for challenging the reigning “capitalist social relations” serving as a force for the domination and subordination of the working class.

Cultural Hegemony

Over time, cultural studies increasingly became concerned with alternative systems of domination and subordination that stood apart from class, specifically patriarchic and ethnic structures. Drawing on the work of Antonio Gramsci, cultural theorists perceive the governing forces within capitalist societies as a form of *cultural hegemony*. Hegemony in this regard is viewed as the legitimation of the ruling class’ domination over subordinate groups through ideology that embeds dominant meanings and values into everyday discourse and taken-for-granted, commonsense understandings. Thus, for Williams (1965), culture is conceived as a historically situated “way of life” articulating various values and meanings embedded in a range of social realities, including institutions, behavior and art. Consequently, rendering transparent the “common sense” dominant meanings and values maintaining and reproducing domination of subordinate groups requires the “interrogation” of “maps of meaning,” the signs and connotative codes in which ideology is embedded (Hall, 1977).

Base/Superstructure

Accordingly, while cultural studies begins from Marx’s conception of *base/superstructure*, whereby domination of subordinate groups is maintained and reproduced through ideological means, it rejects any theorization perceived as economically deterministic,
that which prioritizes the economy and issues of transmission at the exclusion of reception.

Cultural theorists in turn “bracket off the economic” in their exploration of culture and power, instead turning to language as the primary unit of analysis (Garnham, 1995; Grossberg, 1995; Meehan, 1999; Peck, 2006). The concern therefore regards the relationship between audiences and media text, and the significance of that relationship to social and class relations (McChesney, 2010).

For Marx and Engels (1978), “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time the ruling intellectual force” (p. 31). As such, culture arises as the ruling intellectual force of society, dominant meanings and values represent both ruling class ideas and the means with which to foster the ideological mechanisms necessary for the legitimation of class domination. In their materialist theory of history, the class struggles and material interests embedded in such processes constitute the governing forces of history, superseding the actions of individuals, cultural forces, ideas or particular events in the construction socio-historical change.

For them, the economic foundation of society, constituted by the relations of production, serves as the site where the subordination of social groups is attained through the construction of culture and ideology. Thus, arising out of this economic base is a “superstructure” consisting of various forms of social life, including religious, political, legal and cultural, that act as mechanisms for the base’s continued reproduction. Consequently, culture, in addition to the various other social forms comprising the superstructure, is ultimately determined by the economic base of society. Thus, economic relations of production arise as the driving force of history, negating the actions of individuals, ideas, events or cultural forces in the determination of socio-historical, political change.
Power

Founded in such a conceptualization, political economy thus deviates from cultural studies centrally over the conception of power. From a political economy perspective, class arises as the central component in the system of domination and subordination and is conceived as the unequal allocation of economic surplus and ability to access the means of production. For cultural studies, ethnic and patriarchal structures of domination superseded capitalist forms of production and, as such, are not determined through class (Garnham, 1995). As a result, cultural theorists continually maintain that political economy’s failure to “bracket the economic” renders it incapable of addressing central issues of power in society (Grossberg, 1995). Conversely, political economists argue that cultural studies’ exaggerated emphasis on texts, identity and audience reception blinds it to the institutional, structural contexts which serve to maintain and reproduce the relations of production (Garnham, 1995; Meehan, 1999).

Critical Orientation

Ultimately, both traditions are fundamentally concerned with the composition and employment of power. Furthermore, as Golding and Murdock (2000) assert, both share a critical orientation as their analyses derive from a critique, a “theoretically informed understanding of the social order in which communication and cultural phenomenon are being studied.” However, cultural studies centers on “the moment of exchange,” the intersection between the meanings embodied in texts and the interpretations brought to them by readers (p. 61). Such a “micro” object of inquiry inevitably facilitates an adequate understanding of how individuals construct identities, maintain social relations, and incorporate meaning into their lives. Nevertheless, it fails to address the broader structures in which everyday action is embedded, specifically “how the economic organization of media industries impinges on the production and circulation of
meaning and the ways in which people’s options for consumption and use are structured by their position within general economic formation” (Golding & Murdock, 2000, p. 61).

As Golding and Murdock (1991) note, the critical political media perspective proceeds from a realist notion of the phenomenon under investigation. Rather than merely phenomenal, the theoretical constructs addressed exist in the real world. Consequently, it concerns itself with questions of structure and action as means to expose the forces inhibiting and defining the lives and opportunities of real world actors. As such, critical analysis in this regard is also materialist, it prioritizes people’s interaction with their material environment, the unequal allocation and control over material resources, and “the consequences of such inequality for the nature of the symbolic environment” (p. 17). Furthermore, as such critical theory is historically grounded, it rejects essentialist approaches detached from a historically specific time and place.

**Discussion**

Based on such epistemology, the critical theory from which both traditions proceed cannot be said to be inherently dichotomistic. Consequently, political economy seemingly presents itself as valid opportunity to place “micro” cultural studies’ inquiries within a “macro” context where ‘moment(s) of exchange’ may be understood in relation to the structures in which they are embedded. Nevertheless, cultural studies’ ability to facilitate a better understanding of how individuals construct identities, maintain social relations, and incorporate meaning into their lives suggests that political economy often prioritizes the macro at the expense of seemingly significant micro processes. As a result, inquiries proceeding from a political economy perspective may best be supplemented by the “micro” interpretations of meaning afforded by cultural studies. Such an application would ultimately recognize the duality existing between
“politico-economic structure” and “sociocultural agency,” thus promoting greater dialogue between micro and macro processes.

**Public Sphere Theory**

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962/1989), Habermas sets out to document the historic evolution of the growth of open public exchanges and discussions of matters of societal importance between private individuals. In this regard, “the public sphere” is conceptualized as a cultural practice, the domain of social interaction in which political participation is achieved through the deliberation of issues of common concern. Located apart from state and market, this sphere arises as a discursive terrain that facilitates the production and dissemination of discourses capable of being critical of political authority and the state itself. Highlighting the face-to-face meetings and circulation of newspapers and journals in eighteenth century European coffee houses as the “ideal type of bourgeois public sphere,” Habermas maintains that such an arena facilitated the emergence of an autonomous ‘public,’ thus signifying the differentiation between public and privat realms. While initially largely predicated on the role of small scale media negotiating at close quarters the perspectives of publishers, writers and consumers, the media’s gradual commercialization and mass dissemination, whereby mass audiences were sold to advertisers, is seen as ultimately leading to the media’s de-differentiation from this domain. Through their grip over political power and social resources, the state, political parties, and commercial organizations increasingly came to extend their influence over public communication, part of what Habermas calls the “colonization of the life world.”

**Alternative Public Spheres**

Although garnering much scholarly attention, Habermas’ theory of ‘the public sphere’ has nevertheless drawn notable criticism. As Boyd-Barrett (1995) contends, not only does
Habermas’ theory fail to take into account the historical evolution of the radical working-class press, it casts too negative a light on the development of the mass media. As he notes, it is evident that there are times when mass media continue to provide an arena for the expression and deliberation of public interests among those who possess the appropriate interest and knowledge, who are capable of talking on behalf of wider societal concerns, and whose discursive engagement holds the capacity for political influence. Although contemporary media do not directly inject themselves into the face-to-face deliberations of public matters in the same manner outlined by Habermas, they have nonetheless culminated in rise of their own publics and public venues for expression and deliberation.

Furthermore, while the initial political economy model proposed by Golding and Murdock (1973) asserted that the media described by Habermas merely served to “consolidate consensus,” such an argument has since been dismissed for it’s over simplification. The commodification of the media beginning in the nineteenth century undoubtedly represented a dramatic, engulfing force. However, the smaller newspapers and journals circulating the bourgeois public sphere were similarly influenced by the interest of an elite who determined what issues were deemed worth discussing. Relatedly, according to Boyd-Barrett (1995), in his account of the bourgeois public sphere Habermas places an overemphasis on political news while overstating the ‘corruption’ inherent to the nineteenth and twentieth century commercial media. However, in facilitating a conception of “the formation of a sense of the ‘public,’ not as an abstract principle, but as a culturally-embedded social practice,” Boyd-Barrett nonetheless maintains that discourses of the “public sphere” continue to afford themselves as valuable within the context of inquiries into relationships between the state, business, the people, and the media.
As Fraser (1990) asserts, while presuming inclusivity, Habermas’ bourgeois public sphere was predicated on a “number of significant exclusions,” namely with regard to women and various historically marginalized groups (p. 59). Such barriers ultimately fostered a “training ground” where an elite group of men came to perceive themselves as a “universal class” looking to proclaim their ability to govern, in turn inhibiting the ability of alternative groups to voice their public concerns (p. 60). Additionally, according to Fraser, while resting on “bracketing” of status inequalities, discursive interactions within this arena were governed by particular procedures and etiquette that functioned as indicators of status (p. 63). These markers operated informally to relegate women and minority groups, thereby precluding their entrance as peers. Furthermore, Fraser has also taken issue with the relative boundaries between public and privat realms, asserting the existence of “no naturally given, a priori boundaries” between that which is generally understood as “private,” and that which is regarded “public” (p. 71).

Given the inherent lack of ‘inclusivity’ within Habermas’ bourgeois public sphere, Fraser maintains that marginalized groups have in turn routinely sought to formulate “alternative,” “subaltern counterpublics,” “parallel discursive arenas” where those within the ranks of marginalized groups are capable of producing and disseminating “counter discourses” that facilitate the formulation of “oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs.” Consequently, given the perpetuation of societal inequalities arising from the dominant public sphere’s embedded deliberative processes, Fraser asserts that, within societies defined by social stratification, a “plurality of competing publics” inevitably better facilitates the ideal of participatory equality than a universal “overarching public” (p. 67).
Alternative Media

Reflective of Fraser’s ‘alternative public sphere’, Atton (2002) draws attention to the historical evolution of theorizations of ‘alternative.’ As he notes, the Royal Commission on the Press (1977) contended that an “alternative press” is defined by three criteria: (1) publications comprised of the opinions of small minorities; (2) the expression of “attitudes hostile to widely-held beliefs” (p. 40); and (3) the espousing of views or coverage of social actors typically not addressed by newsagents. Representing another early attempt at delineating the concept, the editors of Alternative in Print (1980) held that a publisher could be conceived as ‘alternative’ if it adhered to at least one of the following: (1) the non-commercial position of publisher; (2) subject matter focused on “social responsibility of creative expression”; and/or (3) publishers choosing to identify themselves as “alternative publishers” (p. vii).

However, Atton (2002) contends that (other deficiencies aside), such early operationalizations are illustrative of the broader overemphasis on content inherent in much of alternative media scholarship. Consequently, he proposes a model where production, process, and relation are privileged. In focusing on the processes of production, and the relationships between audience and producer, Atton facilitates an expanded definition of ‘media,’ one that allows for the various products, activities, institutions, movements, moments, and cultural formations inherently intertwined with “alternative media.” He thus defines “alternative media” as the following:

By [alternative media] I mean a range of media projects, interventions and networks that work against, or seek to develop different forms of, the dominant, expected (and broadly accepted) ways of ‘doing’ media.

(Atton, 2004, p. iv)

Based on an analysis of prevailing definitions and theories, he further proposes a typology for alternative media comprised of the following characteristics:
(1) Content that is “radical” in nature (political, social, or cultural).

(2) Aesthetic form (i.e. graphics, visual language, etc.).

(3) “Reprographic innovations/adaptations,” namely the integration of state-of-the art technology (p. 27).

(4) “Distributive use”; alternative distribution sites and “clandestine” networks that embody anti-copyright ethics (2004, p. 27).

(5) A transformation of social roles, relations and responsibilities into collective-based organization and the de-professionalization of printing, publishing, and journalistic practices.

(6) A transformation of communication processes, namely “horizontal linkages” and networks.

While the first three dimensions represent ‘products,’ the remaining three indicate ‘processes.’ As Dowmunt and Coyer (2007) note, while it is unlikely that any given example of alternative media will exhibit all of the various dimensions, the typology provides a useful demonstration of the dual nature of the role of alternative media: the provision of socio-cultural and/or political content different from dominant media, and the facilitation of examples of alternative, horizontally-organized “modes of production” that afford greater democratic and participatory potential (p. 3).

In a similar conceptualization, Traber (1985) maintains that ‘alternative media’ emerges where “the aim is change towards a more equitable social, cultural and economic whole in which the individual is not reduced to an object (of the media or the political powers) but is able to find fulfillment as a total human being” (Traber, 1985, p. 3). In this regard, Traber asserts that the role of the “simple man and woman” is marginalized by the practices of the mass media, instead
elevating the rich and powerful. He in turn heralds “grassroots media” for affording the most embracive form of “alternative media values” (Atton, 2002, p. 33). Such media are seen as produced by those same individuals whose interests and concerns the media speaks on behalf of, thus proceeding from a stance of direct engagement and participation. While this does not necessarily prohibit the inclusion of traditional journalistic professionals, any inclusion comes in the form of an advisory role, facilitating “ordinary people’s” production capabilities free from editors and professional journalists (Traber, 1985, p. 3).

Proceeding from a perspective based on his engagement as a journalist in Zambia, Zimbabwe, and India, Traber’s attention extends to news and information production in an environment in which the mass media is largely absent, where limited news channels exist and where there is often a need for an alternative to state-run media. He contends that such an alternative is most adequately achieved by endeavors made on behalf of the local population, frequently working in tandem with a small number of media professionals who assist in the development of news-gathering networks and who support the advancement of journalistic practices. Traber thus asserts that media production arising from ordinary people will be more “useful,” appropriate and relevant for the communities in which the news is created.

Similarly touting such journalistic practices as “the truest, most thorough version of alternative media values,” Atton (2002) has alternatively described Traber’s “grassroots media” as “community” or “native journalism” (p. 33), defining it as the following:

The activities of alternative journalists working within communities of interest to present news that is relevant to those communities’ interests, in a manner that is meaningful to them and with their collaboration and support (Atton, 2000, p. 112).

Ultimately, this definition is highly reminiscent of Lievrouw’s (2011) participatory journalism, which she defines as the journalistic practices that attempt to build community
identities and challenge mainstream news narratives through the direct involvement of the populations they seek to represent. Such journalistic aims and processes are similarly echoed within Ramono’s (2010) conception of deliberative development journalism, which he sees as “interactive, advocative and educational, and aims to build community self-reliance” (p. 24). “Rather than merely top-down communications, it also seeks a bottom-up flow and, most importantly, horizontal flows where citizens share information with fellow citizens” (p. 25).

For both Traber and Atton, such a stance is held up against commercially driven media that proceed from a position of “distance” from those individuals the news is concerned with. However, countering such an assertion, Comedia (1984) contends that there is an inherent failure to this form of ‘alterative media,’ a failure produced by its opposition to procedures of economic organization that would otherwise provide it with the capacity to sustain itself in the marketplace.

Consequently, Comedia argues for a mainstreaming of financial organizational planning, thereby facilitating the capacity for greater development of alternative media. While supporting Comedia’s assertions regarding the alternative press’ “cavalier approach to finances” which, alongside horizontal organizational structures, has epitomized the historical evolution of alternative media, Atton (2001) nonetheless takes issue with Comedia’s contention that such positions necessarily cause the “failure” of alternative media, its relegation to “an existence so marginal as to be irrelevant.” From Comedia’s perspective, only those publications that “have broken out of the ghetto and have attracted significant parts of the mainstream audience may be deemed successful (p. 34). As Atton notes,

Comedia held that such non-hierarchical, collective methods can only disadvantage the alternative press, because they are always adopted for political, never for economic, ends. Success can only be judged against increased circulation and increased market penetration. (Atton, 2001, p. 34)
Accordingly, those proceeding from Comedia’s position have tended to describe alternative media as characterized by the perpetual confrontation of financial crises, brought about by diminished market visibility resulting from inherent limitations in the realm of distribution. However, according to Atton, while Comedia provides us with an “alternative ghetto,” one may nonetheless supplant such a conceptualization with that of an ‘alternative public sphere.’ Held as representing such an assertion, and foregrounded in an examination of West German anti-nuclear media, Downing (1988, p. 168) defines the German anti-nuclear movement as an “alternative public realm” of deliberation, a “seedbed of many alternative media” representing what Boyd-Barrett (1995, p. 230) has described as “a culturally embedded social practice.” Characterized by an “alternative scene” comprised of “bookstores, bars, coffee-shops, restaurants and food stores,” this is in turn viewed as facilitating a landscape upon which deliberation over the issues expressed within anti-nuclear publications could take place. For Downey, this “experience of exchange inside a flourishing public realm” ultimately represented “an autonomous sphere in which experiences, critiques and alternatives could be freely developed” (Downey, 1988, p. 168).

According to Atton, this theoretical formulation holds particular validity within such a context as it denotes a “nexus of institutions” engaging with each other outside the influence of the state, affording the public with the means with which to express and deliberate matters of public concern. As he notes, this nexus inescapably includes media,

The alternative public sphere treats its media and the constituencies they serve and inform (and are in turn informed by) as inseparable. It is thus an appropriate model of contextualizing a theory of the alternative press and the grassroots movements that it supports and reports. Indeed, the emergence of many alternative media is inseparable from their social and political actualization (as movements). (Atton, 2001, p.35)
TOWARDS A RE-DISCOVERY OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Such discussion of matters of public concern, located outside the influence of the state in a realm, while perhaps not indicative of a universal public arena, but one nonetheless manifesting itself as emblematic of an ‘alternative’ body of public discursive interaction, may similarly be seen within the historical evolution of the Western alternative press more broadly.

International Alternative Media. As Downing (2001) notes, “examples of clandestine radical media operating across frontiers are numerous” (p. 83). Instances of such efforts include Algeria’s anti-colonial insurgency’s use of radio, the smuggling of cassettes and books into countries in the former Soviet Union, and the smuggling of audiocassettes into Iran in support of the anti-Shah movement (Downing, 2001). Nevertheless, such activities emerge as only one component of alternative media’s international context. However, according to Jakubowicz (1993), the ability for attaining democratic communication systems within countries has been made all the more difficult by the proliferation of transnational media conglomerates. While this assertion is reinforced by McChesney (2013), such logic seemingly runs counter to the broader narrative regarding the democratic potential afforded by newly emerging communication technologies, their proliferation of which is commonly understood within the context of prevailing discourses of globalization.

This is perhaps made most readily apparent with regards to recent events within the Arab world, the ‘success’ of which has widely been seen as resting on the increasing ubiquity of Internet-based technologies. However, aside from Tunisia, to date, the protests seem to have been relatively inconsequential in inciting substantive social justice and democratic reform. Consequently, it would seemingly be misguided to presume that such ‘new’ technologies are representative of some essential quality brought into being by the ‘digital age’ rather than the reconfiguration of the same functions facilitated and fulfilled by preceding media (though at an
TOWARDS A RE-DISCOVERY OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

accelerated pace). Such a cycle was perhaps best illustrated by the role of the photocopier in the 1979 Iranian revolution (Green, 1980), the role of the ‘democracy wall’ in China’s 1978 democracy movement (Brodsgaard, 1981; Wright, 2002), the role of graffiti in the Soviet Union’s pro-democracy movement (Downing, 2001), and the role of email and electronic mailing list servers in South Africa’s anti-Apartheid movement (Henderson, 1997; Motumi, 1994; Williams, 2000). Nevertheless, such acceleration of communicative processes has undoubtedly demonstrated the various useful functions of such media, notably with regards to the mobilization of the protests, the broadcasting of injustices, and the sharing of information. Illustrative of this is a growing body of scholarship pertaining to the use of the Internet as a medium for alternative media production.

**Alternative Internet.** For Downey (2001), the potential of the Internet to serve as a source of alternative media is derived from its capacity for facilitating the emergence of “new spheres of communicative action by people’s movements,” arenas where a democratic, autonomous civil society possesses the means of expressing itself independently from both the state and formal commercial structures (p. 201). Accordingly, representing a “new era for alternative media,” Downey asserts that “the Internet is potentially our first global public sphere” (p. 202). Fostering ever-greater production capacities, computer networks are seen as augmenting long prevailing organizational forms, including face-to-face communication, underground newspapers, radio programs, alternative television and oppositional music and art (Downing, 2001).

Coupled with such processes has been the opening up of possibilities for the dissemination and exchange of information. Nevertheless, as McChesney (2013) illustrates, despite its perceived democratic potential, as with the ascension of other past communication
technologies, including electricity, the telegraph, telephone, etc., the Internet is increasingly being colonized by corporate interest and by the new “surveillance State” of ubiquitous, intrusive and permanent monitoring of citizens (Mattelart, 2010). Moreover, as Downey (2001) notes, disproportionate access to the Internet and emerging media technologies have made these resources “subject to hierarchies of access,” with enduring underrepresentations of traditionally marginalized groups. Furthermore, alternative media continually tend to reside in the possession of “media literate professionals” who in turn dictate the manner of its production (p. 204).

Moreover, prevailing discrepancies with regards to telecommunications access between and within countries continue to remain a formidable obstacle (Quin, 2009). Additional criticisms have also emerged over the credibility, reliability and biases of Internet content. However, in response, Downey points to the often one-dimensional, a-contextual news circulated by mainstream media, consequently arguing for the seemingly increasing essential need of an alternative approach to the Internet. Accordingly, despite the challenges, he asserts that the Internet “is proving to be a power medium for global civil society” (p. 205). While access remains uneven, he notes that penetration rates continue to grow worldwide. Additionally, as much of the world continues to rely on traditional channels of communication, the Internet’s merger with those channels makes it a notable resource for those lacking direct access. The Internet has also given rise to the proliferation of alternative media activists operating as reporters, “mediating news and analysis of current events and social movements (Downey, 2001). However, as Hamelink (1995) suggests, this in turn raises the question of “whether we can move from strategies of giving voice to the voiceless to strategies by which people speak for themselves (p. 141).
Neoliberalism

In the late 1970s and 1980s, brought about through policies implemented by President Ronald Reagan and British Prime Minister Margret Thatcher, orthodox liberalism reemerged as the dominant ideology for global governance (Stiglitz, 2003; Cohn, 2012). As Harvey (2005) notes, this ‘neoliberalism’ is predicated on “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (p. 2). Following this logic, the primary role of the state is seen as facilitating the mechanisms necessary for market functioning.

As such, the economic problems of developing nations are seen as derived from obstructive and inefficient state policies that preclude economic integration into the global economy. ‘Development’ is thus perceived as being predicated on the disintegration of such barriers, thereby allowing for the pursuit and maximization of a state’s ‘comparative advantage’ in the global market, whereby efficiencies of production lead to sustained economic growth. This model has in turn served as the foundation for the so-called ‘Washington Consensus’ in the 1990’s, seen by many as the personification of the ascension of the ‘neoliberal doctrine’ into the “new economic orthodoxy” governing international political-economic policy (Harvey, 2005).

Emerging in parallel with the global rise of this doctrine was another political movement closely aligned to neoliberal logic, neoconservatism. Influenced by the work of German-American political philosopher Leo Strauss, another scholar at the University of Chicago, beginning in the 1960’s ‘neocons’ also began fostering their particular social order perspective at universities, “well-funded think tanks,” and through “influential publications.” Embracing the ideals of “elite governance, mistrust of democracy, and the maintenance of market freedoms,”
neoconservatism reflects many of the principals inherent to neoliberalism. However, according to Harvey, it deviates from neoliberalism’s foundational tenants in two regards: firstly, with respect to its concern for “order as an answer to the chaos of individual interests”; and secondly, in regards to its “concern for an overweening morality as the necessary social glue to keep the body politic secure in the face of external and internal dangers,” even though this morality need not be taken seriously by the ruling elites (p. 82).

As Thatcher famously noted, if ‘there is no such thing as society but only individuals,’ then the chaos brought about by individual interest may readily be capable of prevailing over order. In this regard, the “anarchy of the market,” of “unbridled individualism” and competition, is seen as capable of producing a climate that becomes gradually ungovernable. This in turn may even foster “a breakdown of all bonds of solidarity and a condition verging on social anarchy and nihilism.” Confronted with such an environment, some level of intervention is seemingly required to restore order. In an attempt to resolve this “central contradiction of neoliberalism,” neoconservatism privileges militarism as a solution to the chaos of individual self-interest. Consequently, as Harvey notes, “For this reason, [neoconservatives] are far more likely to highlight threats, real or imagined, both home and abroad, to the integrity and stability of the nation” (p. 82). Within the American context, this involves what Hofstadter (1996) calls “the paranoid style of American politics” where the nation is portrayed as endangered and besieged by enemies, both foreign and domestic.

Far from new, this brand of politics dates back to World War II when it resided in “a powerful military industrial complex that has a vested interest in permanent militarism” (Harvey, 2005, p. 82). However, following the end of the Cold War, the question emerged as to where threats to the U.S. emerged from. The two top external contenders were that of China and radical
Islam. However, the ascendance of the concrete danger of radical Islam in the 1990s, which climaxed in the September 2011 attacks, ultimately arrived at the forefront as the principal focus for the pronouncement of a permanent ‘War on Terror’ that necessitated militarization both internally and abroad in order to assure the nation’s security.

**Modernization & Development**

Modernization was the dominant development paradigm that emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War. Rooted in both neoclassical economics and liberal political theory foregrounding Western Enlightenment principles of reasoning, rationality, and objectivity, the paradigm was predicated on a belief in patterned laws of economic and social change. Inherent to this model was a social Darwinian perspective that saw modern human societies as evolving toward advanced, industrial forms of social organization (Lerner, 1958; Parsons, 1964; Inkeles, 1966; McClelland, 1967; Rogers, 1969). As a result, modernization theorists saw the goal of development as one of transitioning ‘traditional’ (backward, rural, agricultural) societies to a ‘modern’ (advanced, industrial) society. Established Western nations were seen as having the ability to adapt from the various social, cultural, technological, and economic issues that stemmed from processes of social change. Conversely, Third World nations, lacking the “sociological characteristics of industrial societies,” were seen as “limited in their capacity to cope with problems or crises or even master their environment” (Melkote, 2002, p. 421). Thus, within this linear conception of “progress,” developed nations in the North were taken as an ‘ideal type’ by which developing nations were measured. And as all nations were assumed to ultimately proceed down the same path, the role of development agencies was the acceleration of such process.
Among the earliest areas of scholarship within international media studies was development communication. Emerging within this era of the modernization theories, development communication inevitably inherited the epistemological foundations of the paradigm. Coupled with the biases inherent to prevailing propaganda research being conducted within U.S. communication studies, mass communication came to be viewed as a powerful tool for the manipulation of opinions, attitudes and behaviors, and was subsequently incorporated into theories and strategies for development. However, in the 1960’s and 1970’s such strategies began to be challenged for their failure to promote desired social change; inability to reach intended recipients; and tendency to exacerbate existing socio-economic conditions (Melkote, 2012).

Among the most vocal criticisms stemmed from dependency theorists who, grounded in Marxism and Latin American structuralism, contended that advanced capitalist countries either underdeveloped developing nations or prevented them from achieving autonomous development. Emerging from this broader theoretical trajectory were communication scholars seeking to address imbalances in power distributions between nations. Theorists such as Herbert Schiller (1992) contended that the sovereignty of the nation-state did not protect national economies from exploitation by external interests. As such, the fragility of emerging postcolonial economies was viewed to a measurable degree to be the product of the commercial and political imperatives of first world nations who imposed socio-cultural values through the exportation of cultural products (Schiller, 1992). Within this ‘cultural dependency’ process, configurations of media systems were seen as ultimately determined by macro-economic trends.

However, Oliver Boyd-Barrett (1982, p. 175) contends that the “totalistic” nature of this model failed to adequately address “countervailing indigenous influences,” notably through its
uncritically discounting of the role of the state. Western, particularly United States’, media dominance was viewed as omnipotent, an “uncompromisingly negative,” “one way process” that negated the prospects for consequential resistance and change (Boyd-Barrett, 1982, p. 182). Conversely, he cites the potential for situations in which American media exportation has liberating consequences, such as within totalitarian societies where media is severely circumscribed by the state. In response, Boyd-Barrett (1998) offers an alternative, “generic” model of media imperialism that provides for the recognition of both relative gains and losses (p. 159). Such a model, he contends, provides for “the multidimensionality of media forms and degrees of dependence/imperialism,” thereby allowing for high as well as low degrees of dependence (Boyd-Barrett, 1998, p. 159). As he notes, the forces of neoliberalism are “promoting an increasing hybridity of global culture, ever more complex and more commodified, but everywhere more complex and commodified in the same sort of way” (Boyd-Barrett, 1998, p. 174).

Early challenges to the dominant paradigm in the 1960’s and 1970’s also led to the cultivation of a wide body of literature examining participatory communication approaches to development (Melkote & Steeves, 2001; Huesca, 2003; Melkote, 2003; 2010; 2012). While various participatory development trajectories exist (some more equitable than others), receiving significant support from both administrators and scholars, the participation-as-an-end approach argues for the recognition of participation as a basic human right that should be embraced as an end on to itself rather than for its results in the implementation of development practices. According to Melkote (2001), this approach ranges from “attempts at mobilizing of the populace to co-operation in development activities, to empowering people so that they may articulate and manage their own development” (p. 337). Reflecting the underlying values inherent to
participatory or deliberative development journalism, ultimately, participation-as-an-end entails local populations’ active participation in development processes and programs, in which individuals articulate their own problems and needs and affirm their autonomy.

**Democratization & the Media**

The rapid, worldwide ascension of democratic governance in the last quarter of the twentieth century, often encapsulated by Huntington’s “third wave democracy,” has provoked a significant body of literature addressing the nature of change in transitions away from authoritarianism (Huntington, 1991; Linz & Stepan, 1996; Haggard & Kaufman, 1995; Conteh-Morgan, 1997; Colomer, 2000). In political science, the dominant theoretical trajectory asserts that societies move in a linear direction away from dictatorship, towards democracy (Schmitter & Karl, 1994). Central to such lines of inquiry are attempts to understand the nature of the processes involved in political “transitions,” defined as “the interval between one political regime and another” (O’Donnell & Schmitter, 1986, p. 2). In this regard, considerable attention is given to addressing the factors that facilitate a democratic government’s stable consolidation (Przeworski, 1992).

Within this context, established Western states are taken as an ideal type for conceptions regarding democracy, invoked as criteria by which political transformations should be judged. In doing so, there arises a presumed ‘organic’ relationship between democracy and the neoliberal free market (Linz & Stepan, 1996). Change, therefore, is conceived here as being determined by the dual processes of democratization and marketization. Furthermore, there is an uncontested underlying rationality regarding the configuration of the media being a determining indicator in the assessment of political change. The existence of a ‘free press,’ heralded as a cornerstone of
democracy, is often unquestionably invoked in accounting for the degree to which democratization has taken place (O’Neal, 1996).

However, this theoretical perspective can be challenged on a number of grounds. For example, Couldry (2010) calls our attention to the “paradoxical nature of neoliberal politics,” specifically as it pertains to the presumed inherent relationship between neoliberalism and democracy. As he notes, rather than purely economic or technical, this ‘unity’ is both social and political. While the tenets of the neoliberal doctrine preach deregulation, it paradoxically seems to expand and extend regulation, serving to “organize how governments, [and] indeed [how] all modes of social organization, must operate” (p. 48). As a state undergoes marketization into the global economy, the sovereignty of the state is diminished, thereby reducing its capacity to mediate in the order of society. Alongside such state disintegration, market forces increasingly inhibit avenues for public deliberation and articulation of a society’s ‘public good’ (Habermas, 1989).

Accordingly, such processes can be said to be most readily apparent with regard to media. The neoliberal doctrine maintains that market functioning serves as the priority for social organization, where market forces are not beholden to the state or the society that comprises them (Harvey, 2004). As such, media institutions are innately driven by financial interests that take precedence over policy determination and processes of public deliberation (Herman & McChesney, 1997; McChesney, 2004). This would seemingly contradict prevailing assumptions regarding the significance of a ‘free press’ and its importance to both the attainment and subsequent articulation of democracy. Moreover, it appears to contradict the underlying rationality regarding the presumed ‘organic’ relationship between democratization and marketization.
Studies into media structures have a unique capacity to yield insight into the processes underlying transitions from dictatorship to democracy, as the media are commonly seated at the nexus of economic, political, and social forces within a given society (Downing, 1996; Giddens, 1997; McQuail, 2000; Jakubowicz, 2007). In this respect, an increasing body of empirical evidence appears to allude to the lack of uniformity in the manner in which change is occurring in post-authoritarian societies (O’Neil, 1996). Investigations into the media structures of the former Communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe in particular reveal that the political and economic processes involved in such transformations are more complex than those found within prevailing theoretical discourses.

While emerging from nearly identical political and economic systems, the nations within the post-Soviet bloc exhibit vastly different political, economic, and media structures. Great degrees of variation exist between the levels of economic and political dependence of the media of particular countries in relation to the state (Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen, 1998; Paletz & Jakubowicz, 2002; Jakubowicz, 2007; Hallin & Mancini, 2012). Furthermore, the stability of each varies greatly, and while some are recognized as ‘democratic’, others are not. Seemingly reflective of the socio-political developments that have taken place following the 2011 demonstrations in the Arab world, Russia in particular has appears to demonstrate that the process of marketization does not have a linear relationship to democratization and that the latter in itself is by no means linear (Mickiewicz, 1999; Rosenholm et al., 2010; Rantanen, 2002; Koltsova, 2008). Moreover, investigations into China’s media landscape (Zhao, 2008) suggest that while the marketization of the economy has taken place in the country, it has not been accompanied by substantive democratic reform. Consequently, reigning theoretical convictions surrounding the nature of socio-political transformation in the twenty-first century arguably arise
as highly suspect. In addition, these discourses pose questions as to the meaningfulness of the concept of “democracy” in countries which on many criteria appear to be “plutocracies,” and whose media appear to be subservient to wealth and power.

**U.S. Foreign Affairs News Frames**

According to Entman (1993), “to frame” is to “select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal inference, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (p. 52). In doing so, frames draw attention to particular elements of reality while excluding others. Goffman (1974), commonly credited with pioneering framing research, defined frames as “schemata interpretation” that equip individuals with the ability to identify, locate and classify events, issues and topics.

It is widely acknowledged that, due to constraints on individuals of both space and time, the mass media serve as the primary vehicle for the dissemination of information and public knowledge about particular issues, events, countries, and cultural forms. As such, framing research has frequently addressed the presence and frequency of particular frames within news and the ways in which particular issues are framed (Edelman, 1993; Graber, 1988, Norris, 1995). Underlying such research is the presumption that journalists unavoidably structure or frame how they present news in order to make stories accessible to a broad audience. Journalists necessarily contend with time and space limitations. As such, they draw on particular frames as a means of simplifying and bestowing meaning to events and maintaining audience interest (Valkenburg et al., 1999).

Among the first to address framing within an American media context, Gitlin (1980) defined such media frames as “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation of
discourse, whether verbal or visual” (p. 7). As he contends, media frames serve as a means of organizing the world for both journalists and audiences. Proceeding Gitlin, Entman (1993) posited that frames have at least four distinct locations within the communication process. First, communicators make judgments, both conscious and unconscious, when making decisions about what to say. Such decisions are ultimately guided by frames, or “schemata,” that serve to organize their belief systems. Second, embedded within the text are frames which arise through the presence or absence of keywords, phrases, images and sources that provide “thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments” (p. 52). Third, a receiver’s thoughts and assumptions are guided by frames, which may or may not be reflective of frames found in the text and/or the framing intention of the communicator. Finally, the culture can be conceived of as “the stock of commonly invoked frames” and defined as “the empirically demonstrable set of common frames exhibited on the discourse and thinking of most people in a social grouping” (p. 53). According to Entman, within all four locations framing functions to select and highlight particular elements of reality and use the highlighted elements to define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies (p. 52).

Edelman (1993) draws attention to the significance of such processes to the political sphere. According to him, because “alternative categorizations win support for specific political beliefs and policies, classification schemes are central to political maneuver and persuasion” (p. 232). Similarly, Entman (1993) maintains that politicians necessarily compete with both each other and reporters over the construction of news frames. “Framing in this light plays a major role on the exertion of political power, and the frame in the news text is really the imprint of power – it registers the identity of actors or interests that competed to dominate the text” (p. 55).
interests on journalists and journalistic practices. According to Entman (2003), by selecting and highlighting particular events, issues and actors in ways that promote certain perceptions and interpretations, framing emerges as “the central process by which government officials and journalists exercise influence over each other and over the public” (p. 417).

Exemplifying such processes, much research has arisen addressing the rise, decline, and significance of a “Cold War frame” that played a predominant role in the presentation of foreign affairs within mainstream American news media until the early 1990s (Hallin, 1986, 1987; Hanson, 1995; Norris, 1995; Giffard, 2000). Within this body of scholarship, emphasis is often placed on the manner in which foreign affairs coverage prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union was presented within a binary frame that positioned events, issues, and actors in relation to the rivalry between the two global superpowers. In this regard, much attention has been paid to the degree to which political elite interests exerted significant influence over the news media agenda. Entman (1993) draws attention to the specific manner in which this frame served to problematize particular events (such as civil wars), attributed responsibility of those problems to communist influences, and prescribed moral judgments and solutions in manner consistent with the dominant U.S. ideology and foreign policy interests.

As Hallin (1986) notes, the Cold War frame explained “all international conflict in essentially the same, familiar terms, sparing the public of mastering a new set of political intricacies each time a crisis erupted” (p. 110). Reflecting such tendencies, Larson’s (1984) examination of American news broadcasts between 1972 and 1981 revealed that the Soviet Union was the most frequently mentioned foreign country within U.S. news media. Such findings were consistent with those of scholars who continue to reveal that international news
coverage within mainstream American media tends to feature powerful “core” countries more prominently than those on the periphery (Gatling & Ruge, 1965; Schramm, 1964).

However, as Giffard (2000) argues, following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and the global ascension of Western liberal capitalism, there arose a shift away from framing international reporting in terms of East-West tensions. According to him, in the 1990s attention shifted to particular troubled areas afflicted by political and armed conflicts or by natural disasters such as famine or flood. Through his exploration of news agencies coverage of international affairs, he found an increasing erosion of the Cold War frame. In its place arose a new dominant, North-South international conflict frame, centralized around “a clash of ideologies and economic interests between the have and the have nots.” Although this frame suggested greater attention to developing nations, these nations were “often defined in terms of their support for or opposition to Western policies and values” (p. 406). Furthermore, this relationship was predominantly presented as conflictual, depicting developing nations as “chainsaw wielding despoilers of the rainforests, exploiters of child labor who deny women equal rights and allow their populations to spiral unchecked (or worse, enforce abortion), as undeserving supplicants for debt relief or bigger handouts” (p. 406).

Focus on the receding Cold War frame has also arisen with respect to scholarship pertaining to Western media coverage of the 1999 Kosovo crisis. According to Hammond (2000), Kosovo can be said to represent the “latest stage in a process of re-framing international relations in the post-Cold War era” (p. 19). He found that NATO leaders can override all other considerations, including national sovereignty and international law.” Such narratives were in turn adopted by Western journalists who “played an important role in developing and disseminating influential interpretations of the post-Cold War world” (p. 19). Similarly, Thussu’s
(2000) analysis of CNN coverage of the Kosovo conflict found that the news organization uncritically reported NATO’s intervention in the crisis, framing it in terms of a ‘humanitarian intervention.’ Such coverage primarily followed the news agenda set by the U.S. military and, given CNN’s global reach, served to shape the broader perception of the crisis.

Echoing such findings, and reflecting another prominent body of scholarship addressing the dissolution of the Cold War fame, has been ongoing research into American news media’s framing of the “War on Terror” (Entman, 2003, 2004; Norris et al. 2003; Kull et al. 2003; Hess & Kalb, 2003; Lule, 2003; Kavoori & Fraley, 2006; Melkote, 2009; Reese, 2010). The ‘War on Terror’ was a term invoked by the Bush administration for the national security policy it launched in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. Scholars within this terrain frequently draw attention to the way in which the administration and the mainstream U.S. media framed the war within an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ dichotomy in which the United States and its leader were positioned against an “evil” threatening American “freedom” and the American “way of life” (White House, 2003, p. 1; White House, 2006, p. 14). Such a framework, predicated on the prevalence of rhetoric constructing a moralistic imperative for U.S. unilateralism, served to define rogue nations and Islam as purveyors of terrorism, an “enemy” locked in a “good versus evil” battle with the global defender of freedom and democracy (Merskin, 2004; Spielvogel, 2005; Thussu, 2006; Rogan, 2010).

In his account of his “cascading activation model,” Entman (2003) described how the Bush administration’s interpretive frame of the 9/11 attacks spread from the White House to networks of elite actors, to “news organizations, their texts, and the public” (p. 415). Such “frame dominance” in turn served to drown out viable alternative narratives and demonstrated a substantive degree of political elite influence over mainstream news content. Similarly, based on
an exploration of news coverage within the *USA Today*, Reese and Lewis (2009) found that this War on Terror frame was “internalized” and “naturalized” by the U.S. media, in turn suggesting that American journalists “accepted its use as a way of describing a prevailing condition of modern life.” In so doing, the authors contend that American media coverage “created a favorable news discourse climate for military action in Iraq” (p. 792).

Kumar (2010) addressed how such converge led to a “resurgence of Orientalist and Islamaphobic rhetoric” (p. 272). According to her, U.S. media framing of the War on Terror resulted in the presence of prevailing frames that depicted Islam and Muslims as inherently sexist, irrational and purveyors of terrorism against the West. Alternatively, the U.S. and the West were depicted as the defender and disseminator of democracy abroad. Similarly, according to Cloud (2004), verbal and visual mainstream American news content in the aftermath of September 11th tended to rest on the construction of a binary opposition between Americans and “Others,” where a paternalistic stance toward Afghan women was evoked in order justify military intervention in the country. Within this context, the U.S. (and modernity) was positioned as liberators of a female population subjugated by their oppressive, ‘uncivilized’ male counterparts.

Both Kumar and Cloud contend that such frames are ultimately embedded within a broader “clash of civilizations” frame that was adopted and disseminated by the Bush administration following the events on 9/11. The phrase “clash of civilization” derives from Huntington’s (1993; 1998) thesis maintaining that in the post-Cold War era, the fundamental source of conflict has become primarily ideological rather than economic. Within this context, global divisions driving conflict are inherently cultural, occurring between civilizations comprised of groups bound by shared religious and cultural identities rather than politically
defined nation states or biologically defined races. Such developments are ultimately seen as representing the “latest phase in the evolution of conflict in the modern world” (p. 22).

According to Kumar (2010), the premise that the U.S. and the American people are engulfed in a direct conflict with oppositional civilizations, comprised of irrational, uncivilized Others seeking to undermine western values, is one that served as “a central framing mechanism under the Bush administration” (p. 255). Resembling the findings of Entman (2003) and Reese and Lewis (2009), she contends that, as a “primary definer of news” within a “climate of fear and intimidation,” the administration’s articulation of this ideological shift became an “unopposed dominant political logic” to the degree that it “acquired the status of commonsense” (p. 254).

While noting a longstanding history of “clash of civilizations” rhetoric in U.S. political discourse, Cloud (2004) suggests that images within mainstream American news media constructed a “clash of civilizations” ideograph during the Afghanistan war between 2001-2002 which served to “veil the threat of terrorism with explanations of irrational hatred between superior and inferior civilizations” (p. 299).

Echoing Mishra, Kumar, and Cloud’s assertions regarding the role of representations of Muslim women within the context of the War on Terror frame, Del Zotto’s (2002) investigation into coverage of women during the Kosovo crisis found that the “mainstream global media constructed a gendered interpretation of [the] war” that depicted women as “passive victims” (p. 141). This is seemingly supported by Thussu’s (2000) findings regarding the role of mainstream media in the construction of a “humanitarian intervention” frame that served to legitimize U.S. and NATO intervention in the crisis. Such moralization of U.S. foreign policy is also addressed by Thussu (2006) who, in an analysis of the mythical and “highly moralistic” discourses
embedded in the War on Terror frame, alludes to how such frames can be understood in relation to “a wider pattern of military interventions in the post-Cold War era” (p. 3).

**Discussion**

Entman’s work and that of the other framing scholarship addressed above provide insight into the manner in which frames emerge as a broad ideological resource that can be selectively invoked for the construction of pretexts for war in highly specific instances that are of service to US foreign policy goals (and the interests that these serve), in turn retailed by the mainstream media. However, even while such inquiries often emerge as quite Gramscian in nature, directing attention to the role of the news media in hegemonic processes, they are nonetheless fundamentally pluralist, suggesting that different frames represent different interests and sources of power. Conversely, a Marxist perspective would likely counter such a view by arguing that the media are inevitably situated within the class relations of a capitalist society, in which the ruling ideas are inevitably the ideas of the ruling classes, even allowing for some element of dissensus within the ruling classes that afford some discretion to journalists.

Pointing to the US media’s seemingly uniform support of American foreign policy, Herman and Chomsky (1988) maintain that persistent inequalities in wealth and power results in “the elite domination of the media and marginalization of dissents” (p. 2). In an attempt at explaining how the publics’ consent for particular social, economic, and political prescriptions are “manufactured” through the news media, the authors’ set forth a “propaganda model” for understanding the nature and structure of the US news industry. According to this conceptual framework, US news necessarily proceed through five sequential “filters”, ultimately determining the presence and form of particular stories: (1) due to the commercial structure of the US media industry, increasingly defined by the concentration of ownership, stories cannot
threaten the underlying economic and political interests of the dominant media firms that control the majority of the US media landscape; (2) stories cannot threaten the advertising revenue upon which media firms depend for survival, and as such, cannot be unfavorable to advertiser interests or the logic of consumer capitalism that underpin them; (3) stories must rely on particular routinized journalistic standards that lead to an overwhelming reliance on government and business “experts”; (4) stories must guard against the “flak” of influential actors who possess the potential to interfere with the viability of news media processes; and (5) during the Cold-War, stories needed to embody the anti-communist prerogative that defined US foreign policy.

Inherent to much “Cold-War-frame” media analysis is a problematic, taken-for-granted assumption that the “Cold War” actually did represent, as both sides claimed, a clash of ideologies between capitalism and communism. Alternatively, it can be argued that this was just a cover, and that “Cold War” discourse served to obscure what was really going on – namely, a battle by Western capitalism for the resources of the Third World that was only weakly contested by a much less well-resourced or savvy State capitalist Soviet Union. Reflecting this assertion, according to Boyd-Barrett (2015), U.S. military intervention in the post-Cold War world has been justified on the basis of four central pretexts: (1) “the ‘war’ on drugs”; (2) “humanitarian’ intervention”; (3) “the ‘war’ on terror (which also incorporates pretexts relating to ‘weapons of mass destruction’)”; and (4) “the promotion of ‘democracy’”. Frequently invoked simultaneously, the underlying values of these pretexts are “almost universally and uncritically” adopted by mainstream media (p. 29).

Boyd-Barret argues that such patterns are ultimately best understood “as a continuation of classic imperialism in relatively new (but also some quite old) forms”. Rejecting reigning conceptions of imperialism that privilege “territorial acquisition” (which may or may not be
present), he argues that the goal of these interventions instead pertains to “securing – by any means possible, including violent coercion, provocation, bribery, threat, subterfuge – the foreign policy goals of the USA and of those parties or interests that have had most access to the shaping of these goals”. Within this context, due to the substantial gulf between the stated motives offered in the justification for interventions, and “‘real aims”, interventions necessitate “significant manipulation of public opinion through the control of or influence over the media” (p. 7).

Similarly, revising this fifth and final filter following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Chomsky (1996) points to the manner in which anti-Communist ideology has been supplanted with another predicated on support for the “War on Terror” and neoliberal principals touting “free” trade and the deregulation of global markets. In doing so, Chomsky directs our attention to the manner in which the discourses of “Cold War” and “War on Terror” serve as a cover to obscure a continuing battle for the domination over the resources of the “South” in parallel with neoconservative “free” market ideologies that reinforce the power of the already-powerful economies. Ultimately, although Herman and Chomsky (1988) do not write from an explicitly Marxist perspective, their logic, one may argue, is intrinsically Marxist because it says in effect that if we are to understand how media operate to support capitalism, we have to move beyond framing to how media institutions connect with capitalism generally, in their ownership and political networks, in their practical – via advertising – and ideological support for capitalism, and in their very mode of business operation.

**Theoretical Framework**

While seemingly long located outside of the influence of traditional state and market forces, since 2012 Myanmar/Burma’s “exile media” has been undergoing a transition to both an
integration into the country, and a corresponding transformation toward commercial models of organization. As this has occurred, the Obama administration’s framing of its engagement with Myanmar/Burma’s ‘civilian’ government suggests a broader attempt toward reframing post-9/11 U.S. foreign policy after a decade of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (Baker, 18 November, 2012). Consequently, given the well documented propensity of U.S. foreign coverage to legitimize national foreign policy prerogatives, a comparative analysis of American and exile media’s coverage of Myanmar/Burma’s socio-political context appears to hold a valuable potential for advancing understandings of the current nature of the relationship between government interests and the construction of dominant news frames in both American and Burmese contexts. Moreover, in doing so, such an inquiry also affords the capacity for drawing insight into contemporary theorizations regarding news media’s role in facilitating the realization of democratic ideals.

As illustrated above, the political economy approach demonstrates a unique capacity for fostering insight into socio-historical transformations and the nature of mass media within them. Nevertheless, this necessitates an historical perspective that places developments in mass media within the broader context of the global capitalist economy, the totality of social, cultural, political, economic, and technological contextual forces (Mody, 1978; 1987; 1989; 2010), and the moral philosophy and values driving social change. Accordingly, foregrounding literature surrounding the ‘structural transformation of the public sphere’, a related appreciation for the historical evolution of capitalist modes of production, and the corresponding moral underpinnings driving international socio-economic development, this study embraces a political economy of the media approach as its theoretical framework.
Research Questions

With a view to the original exploration of the links between the mass media, news framing, alternative media, and public sphere formation, this research considers:

1. What is the relationship between Myanmar/Burma’s formerly exiled media and public sphere formation?

2. What is the relationship between Myanmar/Burma’s formerly exiled media’s shift toward commercially-driven models of organization and their counter-hegemonic potential?

3. How is Myanmar/Burma’s political transition framed in exile media and mainstream U.S. news media?
   a.) How does a comparative analysis of these frames inform an understanding of Myanmar/Burma’s exile media’s counter-hegemonic potential?
   b.) How does a comparative analysis of these frames inform existing theorizations about the nature of U.S. foreign affairs news frames?
CHAPTER III: RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

Following a historically-grounded overview of Myanmar/Burma’s socio-political context in relation to both the evolution of the country’s current media landscape, and the role of exile media within it, a foundation for this study’s theoretical framework was laid through an account of prevailing political economy, public sphere, international development, and framing theory scholarship. With concern to this study’s research questions, the proceeding chapter describes this investigation’s research design, including its philosophical foundation, an outline of the procedures guiding data collection, and the pilot study used in the analysis of the two data sets.

Philosophical Foundation

As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggest, “all qualitative researchers are philosophers in that ‘universal sense in which all human beings…are guided by highly abstract principals’” (p. 22,). It is these abstract principles that form our beliefs about the nature of the structure of reality (ontology), the relationship between the investigator and the known (epistemology), and in turn, the inquirer’s “practical technologies,” the tools through which one comes to “know the world, or gain knowledge of it” (research methods) (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 7; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 22). This web of ontological, epistemological, and methodological premises ultimately emerge as one’s interpretive framework (paradigm), the “basic set of beliefs that guide action” (Guba, 1990, p. 17).

“All research is interpretive” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 22); it is directed by an investigator’s belief system and feelings toward the world and the appropriate way in which it should be studied and understood. While certain beliefs are merely assumed, taken-for-granted, and invisible, others may be problematic or controversial. As such, every paradigm evokes
particular demands on the inquirer, namely what are the questions to be asked and what interpretations should be brought to bear upon them. While inquiries into the media are often approached by researchers from a variety of paradigms, this investigation foregrounds itself within a *critical-interpretivist* framework.

Critically, it embraces historical realism, the view that reality is socially constructed by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values, “crystalized over time” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 195). As a result, it necessarily proceeds from an axiology that deviates starkly from that of positivism, arguing for the inclusion of values in the service of advocacy and the promotion of social justice. Further, it invokes an epistemology that is transactional and intersubjective, holding that findings are unavoidably value-mediated. Nonetheless, it also adopts the ‘interpretivist’ paradigm assertion that attempts toward meaning may be achieved through social negotiation, manifested through such means as ethnography, participant observation, in-depth interviews, and qualitative content analysis.

Reflecting both critical and interpretivist paradigmatic principals, methodologically it is also dialogical and dialectical, privileging interaction and dialogue among diverse perspectives embedded within socio-historical contexts. Ultimately, such a standpoint perceives the aim of inquiry as one of both meaning creation, and critique, opposition, transformation, and emancipation. Critically, the voice of the researcher in this regard is one of a “transformative intellectual” serving as an activist and advocate. Nonetheless, this investigation also strives to wed such a role with that of the “passionate participant,” “the facilitator of multivehicle reconstruction” reflected in the interpretivist vantage point (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).
Research Strategy

This investigation will invoke qualitative content analysis as a methodological approach in order to investigate the organizational structures underlying mainstream U.S. and exile media’s framing of Myanmar/Burma’s political reforms. In doing so, coverage will be analyzed alongside interviews with senior exile media editors, a participant observation of the country’s evolving media landscape, relevant literature, and analysis of pertinent government documents, NGO reports, academic journals, books, and newspaper articles. Krippendorff (2004) defines content analysis as a “research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the context of their use” (p. 18). According to Mayring (2000) “qualitative content analysis defines itself within this framework as approach of empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytical rules and step models, without rash quantification” (p. 2).

Following this orientation, qualitative content analysis, also described as qualitative media analysis (Altheide & Schneider, 2013), may be generally understood as a systematic method for uncovering latent meaning of a text through an illustration of themes inherent within it (Krippendorff, 2004; Atkinson & Berg, 2012; Schreier, 2012). Themes are in turn derived through an inductive process of category development constructed on the basis of the researcher’s theoretical framework and the text being analyzed. Through a subsequent deductive application of those categories within the text, the researcher then explores the manner in which they emerge (Mayring, 2000). In this regard, “fieldwork” manifests itself as a deep embeddedness with the content relevant to the research question. Thus, any product of social action, including documents, can be examined reflexively, through a constant comparison
method that explores a characteristic in the context of what is known about the other characteristics (Schreier, 2012; Altheide & Schneider, 2013)

Ultimately, for Altheide and Schneider (2013), within qualitative content analysis “communication and media formats enable us to recognize various frames that give a general definition of what is before us” (p. 54). In this regard, while themes emerge as reoccurring categories of meaning, frames represent broader ‘schemas’ of interpretation that frequently hold those themes together. Nevertheless, as central to qualitative content analysis is the focus on capturing “the meanings, emphasis, and themes of messages and to understand the organization and processes of how they are presented,” while identifying inherent dominant frames facilitates an entrance into categorical development, such frames may not encapsulate the range of relevant themes within a given text (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). This in turn alludes to the need for both including “the widest range of relevant messages in our sample,” and identifying thematic categories not readily encapsulated by emergent frames (p. 55). Consequently, as Altheide and Schneider contend, instead of “trapping” analyses within too numerous predetermined categories resulting from “a rigid sampling strategy,” it is more beneficial to employ “progressive theoretical sampling,” a selection technique based on theoretical relevance within an unfolding understanding of the topic under inquiry, one often entailing the inclusion of materials with dissimilar dimensions (p. 55).

Accordingly, in an attempt at fostering greater theoretical insight into this study’s area of inquiry, this investigation has employ a qualitative content analysis of a range of ‘documents’, including newspaper articles, government documents, NGO reports, participant observation, and in-depth interviews. In doing so, guided by relevant literature and this study’s theoretical framework, an initial pilot study of Myanmar/Burma’s mainstream U.S. and exile media’s
English language content was conducted in order to identify relevant frames and an accompanying preliminary set of relevant categories, questions, and issues to be subsequently applied (and potentially modified) to data collected in this study. Ultimately, broader interpretation derived from an analysis of the various ‘texts’ under investigation proceeding from a constant comparison of both emerging relevant frames and themes, understood within the wider socio-politico-historical context in which they are embedded.

**Data Collection**

This study employed a comparative content analysis of mainstream U.S. news media’s and Myanmar/Burma’s exile media’s framing of the political reforms implemented by Myanmar/Burma’s Thein Sein government in an attempt at understanding the nature of the relationship between dominant elite interests and the construction of news frames within the two highly variant socio-political-economic landscapes. As this pursuit necessitates an understanding of the historical, economic, cultural, and technological contextual forces shaping such patterns (Mody, 1978; 1987; 1989; 2010), analysis of this data was understood relative to prevailing U.S. foreign affairs framing scholarship and a qualitative content analysis of Myanmar/Burma’s domestic English language newspapers, participant-observation of the country’s news media landscape, interviews with senior exile media editors, and relevant government documents, NGO reports, academic journals, books, and newspapers. This in turn laid a foundation for an exploration of Myanmar/Burma’s exile media’s potential role in public sphere formation. Consequently, collection and analysis of data was also driven by the implicit aim of advancing existing alternative public sphere scholarship and theorizations surrounding the relationship between media and historical patterns of socio-political-economic ‘development’.
The New York Times and the USA Today were selected as representative of mainstream U.S. news media. The newspapers were chosen on the basis of their circulation and their representation as prestige U.S. newspapers (Merril & Fisher, 1980; Merril, 1983) with content similar to other leading elite papers (Zelizer, Park & Gudelunas, 2002). Underpinning this rationale is the dominant presumption that the agendas of non-elite sources are influenced by elite media sources, in turn amplifying the generalizability of using data from such news institutions (Kiousis, 2004). In order to encapsulate any variance in the nature of U.S media coverage between recent, significant socio-political events within the country (including the 2007 “Saffron Revolution” and “Cyclone Nargis” in 2008), and the political reforms proceeding Myanmar/Burma’s 2010 national election, a ten year overarching time frame was identified for analysis. Culminating in President Obama’s “landmark” visit to Myanmar/Burma in November 2012, the sample time frame selected for investigation was January 1st, 2003 through December 31st, 2012.

The unit of analysis within this overarching sample frame was the headline of individual news articles. The study’s sample was identified through a LexisNexis search of all New York Times and USA Today articles containing the terms “Myanmar” and/or “Burma.” Only news stories directly pertaining to the country were selected for inclusion and all editorials, op-eds, and articles under 250 words were excluded. This search resulted in a sample size of 347 articles, including 323 New York Times and 24 USA Today publications. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of these articles’ underlying frames, an additional sub-sample set was selected for a closer, in-depth qualitative reading. The unit of analysis within this sub-sample set was the individual news article, January 1, 2011 through December 31, 2012 was identified as the sub-sample time frame due to its inclusion of the start of the political reforms implemented by the
Thein Sein government in 2011, the subsequent lifting of Western economic sanctions, and the corresponding U.S. engagement with the Burmese government (epitomized by then Secretary of State Hilary Clinton’s visit to the country in December 2011 and President Obama’s visit in November 2012). Ninety-eight *New York Times* and 6 *USA Today* articles were identified in this sub-sample. Coding proceeded through an in-depth reading of articles and was guided by a deductive application of an initial coding frame (see Appendix A), determined by this investigation’s research questions, relevant scholarship, and a pilot study discussed in further detail in the proceeding section.

Established in 1994 by Burmese exiles, *BurmaNet* is an online database sponsored by Global Communications that “collates all newspaper articles published on the Burmese political situation” (Deighton & Garkawe, 2000). With a longstanding legacy of providing “up-to-date information” on the country’s socio-political context (Studemeister, 1998; Troester, 2001; White, 2004), as Danitz and Strobel (2000) note, the emergence of *BurmaNet* represented the “ending of the international drought on news about Burma” (2000, p. 136). Given *BurmaNet*’s record as the primary archival resource for international news coverage of Myanmar/Burma (Danitz & Strobel, 1999), identifying patterns in news source frequency within the database provided a foundation for understanding the *New York Times*, *USA Today*’s, the *Irrawaddy*’s, the *Democratic Voice of Burma*’s, and *Mizzima News*’ relative significance within international news coverage of Myanmar/Burma. Accordingly, a content analysis of *BurmaNet* was undertaken. January 1, 2011 through December 31, 2011 was selected as a subset sample frame based on the time period’s incorporation of the initial series of democratic reforms undertaken by the Thein Sein government.
All articles contained on the website’s archives from this sample time frame were coded for their source. This coding revealed 2,823 articles from 320 separate organizations. Among these 320 organizations, the three previously identified “independent” exile media organizations were overwhelmingly the most cited news sources. Sixteen percent of the articles were *Irrawaddy* news publications, 11% were *Mizzima News* publications, and 10% were *Democratic Voice of Burma* publications. By contrast, the following three most prevalent sources were *Agence France-Presse* (4%), the *Associated Press* (3%), and *Reuters* (2%). *New York Times* articles represented 0.81% of the sample and *USA Today* articles represented 0.07%.

Myanmar/Burma’s state-controlled media, the *New Light of Myanmar*, had a frequency of 1.52%, the Yangon-based weekly newspaper *Myanmar Times* had a frequency of 2.05%, and the domestically-based, privately owned *Eleven Media Group* had a frequency of 0.32%. The only other Myanmar/Burma news organizations present in the sample were what Brooten (2006) has defined as the country’s “ethnic media” (p. 362). These included: the *Shan Herald Agency for News* (1.38%); the *Kachin News Group* (1.06%); the *Kaladan Press Network* (0.57%); the *Independent Mon News Agency* (0.39%); the *Karen Information Center* (0.35%); *Khonumthung News* (0.18%); and the *Kantarawaddy Times* (0.07%). However, the sample also included press releases by the *National League for Democracy* (0.07%) and various Myanmar/Burma-centered NGO’s, including: Burma Campaign UK (0.39%); Kachin Women’s Association Thailand (0.14%); Burma Rivers Network (0.11%); Canadian Friends of Burma (0.07%); Assistance Association for Political Prisoners-Burma (0.07%); Shan Women’s Action Network and Shan Human Rights Foundation (0.07%); European Burma Network (0.07%); Shwe Gas Movement (0.07%); Austrian Burma Center (0.04%); Women’s League of Burma (0.04%); Paulang Women’s Organization (0.04%); Ta’ang (Palaung) Working Group (0.04%); ALTSEAN-Burma...
Towards a Re-Discovery of the Public Sphere

(0.04%); Burma Partnership (0.04%); Burma Lawyer’s Council (0.04%); Thailand Burma Border Consortium (0.04%); and the U.S. Campaign for Burma (0.04%).

While established with the intent of providing access to all international news coverage on Myanmar/Burma, a comparative analysis of this study’s LexisNexis and BurmaNet searchers indicated an absence of *USA Today* and *New York Times* articles on the BurmaNet database. This in turn suggested that BurmaNet does not offer a completely comprehensive collection of international news stories. Nevertheless, given the underlying mission of the database, its longstanding reputation as the preeminent source of news coverage of Myanmar/Burma’s socio-political context, the size of the sample, and the range of media organizations within it, BurmaNet undoubtedly represents a snapshot of existing patterns within international news coverage of Myanmar/Burma. Accordingly, congruent with relevant literature on Myanmar/Burma’s media landscape (Brooten, 2006; Humphries, 2008; Pidduck, 2012), this coding suggests that the three formerly ‘exiled’ media outlets are a significant source of coverage of the country’s socio-politico-economic context within the international arena, particularly in light of the nation’s legacy of domestic media censorship.

Furthermore, while various so-called “ethnic” Myanmarese media were present within the sample, news organizations which have similarly long existed outside of formal state controls, both these media’s, domestic state and privately owned newspapers’, and Myanmar/Burma-centered NGO’s frequency were negligible compared with those of the *Democratic Voice of Burma*, the *Irrawaddy*, and *Mizzima News*. This preliminary analysis thus reinforced the rationale for these outlets’ inclusion within this study and their representativeness of a distinct genre of Burmese media, one with a unique relation to Myanmar/Burma’s ‘state’ and the particular, commercially-driven market forces that underpin mainstream western media.
Encapsulating this unique location, I argue that the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), the Irrawaddy, and Mizzima News are capable of being described under a broader, inclusive banner. Moreover, these media are in fact not “unmarked”, as they remain marked by a particular ethnic hierarchy, as the editors of these media outlets are ethnic Burmans who employ ethnic minorities as reporters for articles on ethnic groups. Consequently modifying Brooten’s (2006, p. 362) terminology for the “well-funded, widely read, and increasingly independent media that are ‘unmarked’ in terms of ethnic identification”, of which she included the Irrawaddy and New Era Journal, within this study the terminology “unmarked” will henceforth not be used. Rather the three media will either be referred to as Myanmar/Burma’s “independent exile media”, or simply Myanmar/Burma’s “exile media” (with the appreciation and awareness that this terminology includes the country’s various “ethnic” exile media).

In alluding to these media’s significance to international news framing of Myanmar/Burma, and their position vis-à-vis state and market forces, this preliminary inquiry also reinforced the contention that a comparative analysis of “independent exile media” and mainstream U.S. news framing of the country affords a unique ability for deconstructing the various forces and interests shaping these frames. Accordingly, four, one week long sample time frames were purposely selected for their proximity to significant socio-political-economic events occurring within Myanmar/Burma between the broader January 1, 2011 through December 31, 2012 time frame. Individual exile media news articles appearing within these four time frames arose as the unit of analysis and were subsequently analyzed through an in-depth, qualitative reading of articles that included a deductive application of the aforementioned coding frame (see Appendix A). Of the three exile media’s websites, only one (the Irrawaddy) provided access to a comprehensive archive of past publications, but was itself relegated to articles published prior to
April, 2012. Consequently, articles included in this sample were identified through an analysis of all articles within BurmaNet’s archives during the various time frames.

September 28, 2011 through October 12, 2011 was selected as the first sample frame for its incorporation of the Thein Sein government’s announcement of the suspension of the Myitsone damn, a bi-lateral development project between Myanmar/Burma and China that was scheduled to produce one of the world’s largest hydroelectric power stations (Sun, 2014). Controversial for its forecasted environmental imprint on Myanmar/Burma’s culturally significant Irrawaddy River, the suspension has been interpreted as the first substantial signs of the Burmese government’s steps away from China’s political orbit toward engagement with the west (particularly the U.S.) (Chang, 2014). Reflecting the détente between Myanmar/Burma and U.S. governments, November 29, 2011 through December 6, 2011 was chosen as the second frame as it encompassed the then U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton’s visit to the country. The third time-frame, May 1, 2012 through May 8, 2012, sought to incorporate the country’s symbolic 2012 parliamentary elections, personified by Aung San Suu Kyi’s ascension into parliament. The fourth and final frame, November 11, 2012 through November 25, 2012, encapsulated President Obama’s “landmark” visit to the country immediately following his 2012 re-election, a move commonly framed as symbolic of the administration’s strategic “pivot to Asia” within American foreign policy (Parameswaran, 2012).

Ninety articles were identified and coded (Irrawaddy = 37; Mizzima News = 30; Democratic Voice of Burma = 23). Predominant frames and themes were then subsequently qualitatively analyzed alongside the frequency of the initial frames and themes identified in the coding instrument and examined in relation to data derived from the two U.S. media sample sets. This data was in turn understood relative to predominant U.S. foreign affairs news framing
literature and a content analysis of local English language newspapers, participant-observation of the nation’s contemporary national media landscape, interviews with the co-founders and senior editors of two of the three exile media, and relevant government documents, NGO reports, academic journals, books, and newspapers.

Participant observation of Myanmar/Burma’s domestic media landscape was undertaken from October 15, 2014 through November 2, 2014. Within this context, the former capital of Yangon was selected as the unit of analysis due to its long-held reputation as the epicenter of the country’s media environment. Determined through the recommendations of a hired local interpreter, the commercial/market patterns and media content of preeminent book, magazine, and newspaper stores and street vendors were analyzed. The number of individual publications, their format, language and national origin served as the focus of this inquiry. Additionally, particular attention was paid to the demographics of distributors and customers, the frequency of commercial exchanges, and these sites’ perceived significance to notable, highly trafficked urban centers. A preliminary analysis revealed the predominance of weekly publications and a seeming scarcity of daily newspapers. Consequently, a convenience sample of both English and Burmese-language newspapers and magazines were collected on two separate occasions purposely separated by a seven-day interval (October 16th and October 23rd). Congruent with analyses of U.S. media and exile media content, each article within these publications was coded and analyzed through a close reading and a deductive application of the study’s coding frame. In addition to the examination of these current periodicals, this study’s observation of local book stores facilitated access to a bounded, comprehensive collection of all of the country’s English-language Guardian Magazine issues published from January 1, 1994 through December 31, 1994. Given the implied capacity to facilitate insight into the changing nature of the country’s
media environment, this collection was also analyzed and coded under the methodological procedures expressed above.

Complementing this participant observation, this investigation also undertook in-depth, open-ended interviews with the co-founders and senior editors of two of the three exile media under investigation, the Democratic Voice of Burma and Mizzima News. Determined through purposeful sampling, an email requesting participation in the study was sent to the senior editors of all three organizations. Bowling Green State University’s Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) approved all forms and correspondence (See Appendix D). This email briefly explained my academic standings, institutional affiliation, and general research interest in Myanmar/Burma’s journalistic practices. No response to this request was provided by the Irrawaddy or its senior editor Aung Zaw. Both the co-founder and senior editor of the Democratic Voice of Burma, Toe Zaw Latt, and the co-founder and senior editor of Mizzima News, Soe Myint, agreed to participate in this study. The interview with Democratic Voice of Burma’s Toe Zaw Latt took place on October 23, 2014. The interview with Mizzima News’ Soe Myint took place on October 25, 2014.

The interviews themselves were semi-structured with open-ended questions. A broad interview schedule (see Appendices B & C) was used in order to provide a basis to cover comparable ground among these interviews. Questions, issues and topics were determined by this study’s research questions and a preliminary categorical coding frame developed from relevant literature and the initial pilot study discussed above (see Appendix A). These questions were thus consistent with the conceptual methodological framework guiding analysis of U.S. media and exile media news content. Given the legacy of censorship and associated risks to journalists under Myanmar/Burma’s successive military governments, all possible measures
were taken to protect the security of the two participants. The content of each interview (in the form of notes/transcripts) were kept confidential and contained no identity markers. Similarly, all notes were encoded to protect the identity of the respondents. A corresponding code list was kept in a secure location and destroyed once no longer needed.

**Pilot Study**

Guided by this study’s research questions and relevant news framing literature, a pilot study of *New York Times, USA Today, Democratic Voice of Burma, Irrawaddy*, and *Mizzima News*, coverage of Myanmar/Burma was undertaken in order to build a preliminary coding instrument (see Appendix A). September 28, 2011 was purposely selected as the starting point of the sample due to its relationship to the Thein Sein government’s suspension of the Myitsone dam, an event that received notable international media attention. The first five articles within each of the two media groups (U.S. media and exile media) were chosen for inclusion based on convenience sampling. Complementing the systematic thematic analysis outlined by Altheide and Schneider (2013) and Schreier (2012), methodological considerations were guided by a constructivist perspective of news framing analysis (Gamson, 1988; D’Angelo, 2002; Reese, 2009) which deconstructs and reconstructs news stories into elemental frames.

Analysis proceeded from an inductive approach that composed an inventory of frames on the basis of a comprehensive review of news framing scholarship, theoretical and contextual literature pertinent to this investigation, and a preliminary reading of the stories in question. This inventory was then subsequently narrowed through a deductive process based on the presence or absence of these frames within the sample data set. A close reading of the 10 articles included in the sample resulted in an early classification of a key set of five appropriate frames: *attribution of responsibility, human interest, economic consequences, morality, and conflict*. While
emerging through inductive procedures, these first five frames are consistent with those found within predominant framing scholarship (Neuman et al., 1992).

In undertaking this pilot study, various reoccurring thematic categories arose within or outside the parameters of these eight dominant frames. These themes were consequently incorporated into the coding instrument. Thematic categories identified within this pilot study included: *Critical of Government; Critical of President Thein Sein; President Thein Sein-Human Interest; Aung San Suu Kyi-Human Interest; U.S. Solution/Protector Metaphor; Economic Sanctions; UN Solution/Protector Metaphor; Human Rights; US-China Relationship; China’s Economic Interest in Myanmar/Burma; China Geopolitical; ‘Regime’ Vocabulary; Light Metaphors;* and *Family Metaphors.*

In addition to attention to the presence of particular themes, an initial effort toward source cataloging was made. In this regard, consideration was paid to both the frequency and manner in which sources emerged, as well as to any notable absence of relevant sources. Accordingly, the coding instrument produced through this pilot study also incorporated a preliminary classification framework for source coding. These categorical groups included:

*President Obama/Administration Spokesman; U.S. Official (non-Obama); Secretary of State Hilary Clinton; UN Official/Body; Human Rights NGO (non-Myanmar/Burma); Myanmar/Burma Human Rights NGO; Ethnic Group/Party/NGO; Western Think Tank; Western Scholar; Burmese Scholar; State Media; Privet Media; China Media; China Official; Chinese Company; Neighboring Government Official (non-China); Neighboring Country Media (non-China); Western Company; 8888 Students; Aung San Suu Kyi; NLD; President Thein Sein/Administration Spokesman; USDP; Political Party (non-NLD/USDP); Myanmar/Burma Government Body/Official (non-Thein Sein/Military); Myanmar/Burma Military Official;*
Myanmar/Burma Political Activist (local); Myanmar/Burma Citizen (local); and
Myanmar/Burma Citizen (diaspora).

While data within this pilot inquiry revealed the reoccurring presence of an Ethnic Tensions frame through which issues, individuals, and events were understood, the deductive application of this frame exposed its inadequacy for capturing its underlying complexities. Specifically, content within this sample set contained a multitude of various different ethnic groups with divergent (and at times competing) interests and relationships to both the state and the country’s predominant Buddhist population. Consequently, mechanisms for coding for Myanmar/Burma’s different ethnic populations was built into the initial coding instrument in order to facilitate a foundation for a more comprehensive understanding of the Ethnic Tensions frame. Based on both an inductive analysis of the sample and a review of relevant literature, these ethnic categories incorporated into the instrument included: Rohingya; Rakhine; Kachin; Karen; Shan; Mon; Chin; Arakanese; Phalon-Sawaw; and Kokang.

Frames

A close reading of the 10 articles included in the sample resulted in an early classification of a key set of five appropriate frames: attribution of responsibility, human interest, economic consequences, morality, and conflict. While emerging through inductive procedures, these first five frames are consistent with those found within predominant framing scholarship (Neuman et al., 1992):

Conflict Frame. Neuman et al. (1992) contend that the news media draw upon four central frames in their coverage of issues, conflict, human interest, morality and economics. Such common frames in turn serve to organize the presentation of a story in terms of which dimensions of an issue to emphasize. Among these, they found the conflict frame to be most
prevalent. This frame attempts to capture audience attention by emphasizing conflict between groups, individuals, and institutions.

**Human Interest Frame.** According to Neuman et al. (1992), next to conflict, the human interest (or “human impact”) frame arises as the most commonly invoked frame within news media. By putting a human face or emotional dimension on an issue, event, or problem, such frames are efforts to personalize and dramatize news stories.

**Morality Frame.** This frame puts the problem, issues, or event in the context of religious principles or moral prescriptions. Neuman et al. (1992) contend that the prevailing norm regarding journalistic objectivity frequently inhibits direct reference to these frames. Instead, the morality frame often arises indirectly through inferences and quotations.

**Economic Consequence Frame.** This frame addresses an event, problem, or issue in regards to the prospective economic consequences it will impose on relative actors. According to de Vreese (2009), the frame is primarily focused on “economic implications, considerations, and prospects” (p. 190).

**Responsibility Frame.** This frame attributes responsibility for causes and solutions to problems to either the government, individuals, or groups. Iyengar’s (1991) study on poverty coverage suggests that the American news media plays a substantive role in the shaping of public perceptions about who is responsible for the cause and solution to social problems. He distinguished between two distinct frames in this regard, episodic and thematic. While episodic frames depict issues and problems in terms of individuals, events, and occurrences, thematic frames place them within a broader socio-historical context. According to Iyengar, because the news media overwhelmingly relies on episodic frames, there exists a greater public tendency to attribute responsibility at the individual, rather than societal level.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Introduction

In seeking to explore Myanmar/Burma’s exile media’s role in public sphere formation, their counter hegemonic potential, and the relationships between these media’s and U.S. news media’s framing of Myanmar/Burma’s political transition, this study begun by situating such concerns within an appropriate, historically-grounded context. After laying the groundwork for a theoretical framework through a discussion of relevant literature, an outline of this investigation’s research questions and research design were provided. The following chapter provides an analysis of the results of this study, including an examination of the U.S. media data set, the exile media data set, and interviews with the co-founders and senior editors of the Democratic Voice of Burma and Mizzima News.

The first section in this chapter provides a preliminary, foundational analysis of USA Today and New York Times coverage of Myanmar/Burma by examining the headlines, dates, and by-lines of all articles appearing between 2003 and 2010. Within this context, three dominant frames were identified and discussed in detail: ‘The Lady’ ‘Under Attack’, Military ‘Junta’, and United States, Global Defender of Freedom & Democracy. The subsequent section provides an in-depth examination of all USA Today and New York Times coverage appearing during the first two years of Myanmar/Burma’s political transition, January 1, 2011 through December 31, 2012. In this regard, five dominant frames were identified and analyzed: conflict; attribution of responsibility; human interest; morality frame; and economic consequence. The following sections then provides an in-depth analysis of a sub-sample of exile media coverage between the January 2011 and December 2012 time frame, with attention to the five dominant frames described above. The final section of this chapter provides an examination of in-depth interviews
with the co-founders and senior editors-in-chiefs of *Mizzima News* and the *Democratic Voice of Burma*, respectively.


In this section, *New York Times* and *USA Today* coverage of Myanmar/Burma was analyzed within a ten year overarching time frame: January 1, 2003 through December 31, 2012. A LexisNexis search resulted in a sample size of 347 articles that included 323 *New York Times* stories and 24 *USA Today* stories. The headlines and dates of these articles were subsequently examined through qualitative content analysis. This examination revealed significant discrepancies in the frequency of annual coverage devoted to Myanmar/Burma in the *New York Times*. In 2003, the average number of *New York Times* articles was 19. Between 2004 and 2006, the average number of stories per year was 2.6, representing a 530% decrease from 2003. This average then jumped to 49 articles from 2007-2012, representing a 1715% increase.

The negligible amount of *New York Times* coverage of Myanmar/Burma from 2004-2006 is consistent with existing foreign affairs framing scholarship that suggests an overriding propensity for U.S. media to feature “core” nations more frequently than those on the “periphery” (Gatling & Ruge, 1965; Schramm, 1964). This assertion is seemingly supported by the notably small overall size of the *USA Today* sample, in which only 24 articles were identified within the ten year time frame. Within this sample, only 1 article appeared between 2004 and 2006, down from 3 in 2003. From 2007-2012 the average number of articles per year stood at only 3.33.

As addressed above, a growing body of scholarship has pointed to the manner in which both the Bush administration and the U.S. news media framed the “War on Terror” within an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ dichotomy whereby the U.S. and U.S. interests were positioned against an
“evil” threatening American “freedom” and the American “way of life”. Encapsulated by his “cascading activation model”, Entman (2003) illustrates how this interpretive frame flowed from the White House to networks of elite actors, to “news organizations, their texts, and the public” (p. 415). Similarly, in their examination of *USA Today* coverage, Reese and Lewis (2009) found that this so-called “War on Terror” frame was “naturalized” and “internalized” by U.S. news media, in turn creating a “favorable news discourse climate for military action in Iraq” (p. 792). Ultimately, such findings reflect a wide body of scholarship pointing to similar patterns of elite influence during the Cold War, within which foreign affairs coverage reaffirmed reigning U.S. ideology and foreign policy interests in the manner with which it positioned events, issues, and actors in relation to the rivalry between the two superpowers.

This study’s qualitative content analysis of the 347 articles revealed that *New York Times* and *USA Today* coverage of Myanmar/Burma was largely consistent with such patterns. Specifically, data indicated that coverage of Myanmar/Burma from 2003-2010 depicted the country’s former military government as a ‘rogue’, authoritarian ‘regime’ positioned in direct opposition to the United States. This conflict was in turn predominantly understood relative to Aung San Suu Kyi’s personal and political struggle, itself embodying the country’s pro-democracy struggle more broadly, and in turn casting Aung San Suu Kyi as the personification of democracy itself. Portrayed as a “Lady” under constant threat from an irrational, masculine, ‘Other’ (i.e. Neuharth, 7 February, 2003), consistent with Brooten’s (2006) findings, this frame served to position the U.S. as the protector of freedom and democracy worldwide, in turn serving as a basis for the legitimation of U.S. foreign policy.

While the *New York Times* has an established reputation for foreign news coverage, the absence of coverage of Myanmar/Burma in the *USA Today* can be explained by the general
decline in foreign correspondents and foreign coverage within mainstream U.S. media organizations more broadly (Hamilton & Jenner, 2004), trends driven in part by changing commercial pressures within the “turbulent era of the Internet” (Boyd-Barrett, 2010). Moreover, this lack of coverage can also be seen as reflective of mainstream U.S. news media’s tendency to focus attention on “core” nations at the expense of those on the periphery (Gatling & Ruge, 1965; Schramm, 1964). Nevertheless, despite the variance in the two samples, analysis of the overarching ten year time frame ultimately revealed that, from 2003-2007, both the New York Times and the USA Today invoked three broad frames in their coverage of Myanmar/Burma: (1) ‘The Lady’ ‘Under Attack’; (2) Military ‘Junta’; (3) United States, Global Defender of Freedom & Democracy.

‘The Lady’ ‘Under Attack’

Inherent to New York Times and USA Today coverage is an overwhelming tendency to understand issues and events relative to Aung San Suu Kyi’s personal and political struggles. This frame in turn serves to feminize both her and Myanmar/Burma’s pro-democracy movement, positioning them against Myanmar/Burma’s ‘irrational’, masculine military generals. Within this context, Suu Kyi’s identity as Myanmar/Burma’s “first ‘Lady’”, the daughter of the country’s independence leader, invokes a damsel in distress metaphor that implicitly calls forth the need for a savior. Burma ‘First Lady’ Defies Military Thugs (Neuharth, 7 February, 2003); Burmese Opposition Leader Taken Into Custody after Clashes (Mydans, 31 May, 2003); Burmese Officials Deny Dissident Was Injured (Mydans, 4 June, 2003); A Nobel Peace Laureate Under Attack (New York Times, 6 June, 2003); U.N. Envoy Will Try to Visit Burmese Dissident Held by Junta (Mydans, 6 June, 2003); Britain Says Democracy Advocate Is Held in Burmese Jail (Lyall,
The narrative revolving around Aung San Suu Kyi’s struggle is itself representative of a broader frame depicting women as under constant threat from an ‘irrational’ ‘Other’, one that similarly invokes the ‘Damsel/Princes in Distress” metaphor. This frame is consistent with research pointing to the initial transition away from the “Cold War” frame toward one reflecting a North-South binary in which the problems confronting developing nations are understood relative to “exploiters of child labor who deny women equal rights” (Giffard, 2000, p. 406): *Burmese Women Are Reporting Systematic Rapes by Military* (Mydans, 12 May, 2003). These two overlapping frames are ultimately consistent with research findings suggesting a propensity for the news media to construct gendered interpretations of military conflicts that depict women as passive victims, in turn serving as a moralization for U.S. military intervention abroad (Thussu, 2000; Del Zotto, 2002; Cloud, 2004). Such findings can also be seen as providing a foundation for explaining the discrepancies in the frequency of *New York Times* coverage. While analysis revealed that the sustained uptake in coverage beginning in 2007 was directly related to Myanmar/Burma’s so-called 2007 “Saffron Revolution”, Cyclone Nargis in 2008, and the country’s national elections and subsequent political reforms beginning in 2010, the high frequency of coverage in 2003 can be explained by the mainstream media’s broader use of a highly gendered, moralizing frame in the run-up and immediate wake of the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq.

**Military ‘Junta’**

In Spanish, “junta” (comité, comisión) refers to a board or committee (Oxford Dictionary, 2015). In English, a “junta” has come to denote “a military group controlling a
government after taking control of it by force” (Merriam Webster, 2015). Historically, “junta” was the name chosen by various administrations formed in Spain amid the Peninsular War. In recent history, “junta” was commonly invoked to refer to military dictatorships of South America, notably with regard to the CIA-backed Pinochet government (1973-1990). Consequently, based on both its Spanish roots and Latin American application, contemporary English-language uses of the term can be seen as embodying an “Othering” inherently tied to an authoritarian connotation that positions a particular government as a villain to democratic principles.

Analysis of the data revealed that “junta” was commonly evoked by both the New York Times and the USA Today to refer to the former military government. While this pattern persisted until the country’s 2010 national elections, it was particularly present in 2003 coverage: A Year After Vowing Change, Burmese Junta Hardens Line (Mydans, 30 May, 2003); Burmese Rulers Close More Offices of Pro-Democracy Party (Mydans, 1 June, 2003); Burmese Junta’s Remedy: Crackdown (New York Times, 10 June, 2003); Britain Says Democracy Advocate Is Held in Burmese Jail (Lyall, 19 June, 2003). Analysis also revealed that the USA Today readily described the former government as a “regime”, particularly amid its 2008 coverage of Cyclone Nargis in which the organization published 5 articles in May alone, an over 250% increase from its yearly average of 1.4 the previous five years. This particular uptake in USA Today coverage is consistent with scholarship pointing to an increasing tendency among mainstream U.S. news organizations to focus on crisis reporting as a means of retaining audience readership.

“Axis of evil” was a term employed by the Bush administration to refer to states he accused of aiding terrorism and seeking weapons of mass destruction. According to the administration, the so-called “rogue regimes” within this “axis” included North Korea, Iran, and
Iraq. Given the frequency to which “junta” was used to denote Myanmar/Burma’s former military government in 2003, and the common use of “regime” by the USA Today, this study’s analysis suggests that these organizations’ use of such terminology served not only to construct the former government as an authoritarian “Other”, but as a “rogue nation” and member of the “axis of evil”. This is seemingly reinforced by the following section’s close reading of a subsection of this coverage that found repeated implications of Myanmar’s cooperation with North Korea on nuclear matters (Myers, 1 December, 2011; Myers, 30 November, 2011; Myers, 2 December, 2011; New York Times, 10 December, 2011; New York Times, 16 May, 2012).

Ultimately, such findings reflect those of prevailing “War on Terror” framing scholarship, and suggests that coverage of Myanmar/Burma, particularly following the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq constructs a moral foundation for U.S. foreign policy.

**United States, Global Defender of Freedom & Democracy**

In constructing the former military “junta” as a “rogue regime” within the “axis of evil”, coverage of Myanmar/Burma from 2003 until the national elections in 2010 ultimately positions the former government as an explicit enemy within the Global War on Terror.

Myanmar/Burma’s military government is thus positioned in direct opposition to the United States. This dichotomous relationship is continually reinforced within the coverage through the way in which the U.S. is cast as the sole defender of the country’s pro-democracy movement, predominantly through its implementation of U.S.-led western sanctions. In doing so, the U.S. is in turn framed as the defender of freedom and democracy worldwide.

As Aung San Suu Kyi emerges as the personification of the country’s pro-democracy movement, under perpetual threat from an evil “Other”, inherent to this narrative is also an underlying morality frame casting America as the global protector of women under constant
threat from totalitarian, oriental “Others”. Such frames are largely consistent with framing scholarship pertaining to the moralization of U.S. military intervention (Del Zotto, 2002; Cloud, 2004; Kumar, 2010; Mishra, 2010; Thussu, 2000; 2006), further suggesting that mainstream U.S. Myanmar/Burma coverage serves to moralize U.S. foreign policy interests. Within this context, U.S.-led sanctions are uncritically presented as the overriding force for freedom and democracy in Myanmar/Burma: i.e. U.S. Steps Up Pressure on Burmese Junta (Mydans, 13 June, 2003); Burmese Defy U.S. Demands For Release Of Activist (Bonner, 13 September, 2003); Despite U.S. Penalties, Burmese Junta Refuses to Budge (Perlez, 1 August, 2004); Bush Imposes New Sanctions on Myanmar (Cloud, 20 October, 2007); U.S. Freezes Assets of 2 Burmese Businessmen Who Backed Military Junta (McDonald, 17 January, 2009).

In 2003, stories were overwhelmingly presented through the conflict between Myanmar/Burma’s military generals and the population, a frame centered on the narrative of human rights. This frame was in turn commonly invoked under the broader lens surrounding the conflict between the U.S. government and Myanmar/Burma’s military “junta”, one largely predicated on what this study defines as a damsel in distress metaphor. Despite a significant drop in coverage between 2004 and 2007, this overarching conflict frame persisted: i.e. Despite U.S. Penalties, Burmese Junta Refuses to Budge (Perlez, 1 August, 2004). This frame was also highly prevalent in the wake of Burma/Myanmar’s popular demonstrations in September 2007 which was accompanied by a significant uptake in New York Times coverage.

In 2006, only three articles on Myanmar/Burma were published by the New York Times. Between September and October 2007 alone, 38 articles pertaining to Myanmar/Burma were published in the New York Times. Analysis of this sub-sample supported the continued existence of the aforementioned conflict frame: i.e. Monks’ Protest Is Challenging Burmese Junta
TOWARDS A RE-DISCOVERY OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

(Mydans, 24 September, 2007); Bush, at U.N., Announces Stricter Burmese Sanctions (Myers, 26 September, 2007); U.S. Steps Up Confrontation With Myanmar's Rulers (Myers, 29 September, 2007); Myanmar Junta Admits Mass Arrests (Fuller, 5 October, 2007); More Than Just a Fighting Force, Myanmar's Military Is the Nation's Driving Force (Fuller, 7 October, 2007); Myanmar Arrests 4 Top Dissidents, Human Rights Group Says (Mydans, 14 October, 2007); Bush Imposes New Sanctions on Myanmar (Cloud, 20 October, 2007).

Analysis

The above four frames were constructed through an analysis of New York Times and USA Today coverage of Myanmar/Burma from January 1, 2003 through December, 31, 2012. Attention to this sub-sample arose through an inductive analysis of the data relative to relevant framing literature. Consistent with prevailing foreign affairs new framing literature, this analysis revealed that coverage of the country following the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq was presented within a broader “War On Terror” interpretive frame, defined by the constructing of a moralistic imperative for U.S. foreign policy, one depicting Myanmar/Burma’s former military “junta” as a “rogue regime” “locked in a “good versus evil” battle with the global defender of freedom and democracy (Merskin, 2004; Spielvogel, 2005; Thussu, 2006; Rogan, 2010). Such findings correspond with those of Brooten (2005), whose analysis of mainstream U.S. news coverage of Aung San Suu Kyi from 1988 to 2004 found that American media evoked a “protectionist” scenario frame that, coupled with a gendered Orientalist lens, positioned the U.S. as the defender of a “besieged democracy” while feminizing and depoliticizing Myanmar/Burma and its democratic movement.

Consequently, this study’s analysis also supports research (Del Zotto, 2002; Cloud, 2004; Kumar, 2010; Mishra, 2010; Thussu, 2000; 2006) indicating that U.S. media framing of foreign
affairs often rely on the construction of a “clash of civilizations” frame which serves to justify and moralizes U.S. intervention abroad. However, while the above analysis revealed the overriding presence of a U.S.-Myanmar/Burma conflict frame, it also revealed the dissolution of this frame following the country’s 2010 national elections. In an attempt at explaining this shift, its relationship to prevailing framing literature, and its potential relationship to dominant elite interests, the subsequent sections undertake an in-depth qualitative analysis of *New York Times* and *USA Today* coverage of Myanmar/Burma from 2010 through 2012.


The preceding section provided a foundational analysis of *USA Today* and *New York Times* coverage of Myanmar/Burma by examining the headlines, dates, and by-lines of all articles appearing between 2003 and 2010. In order to gain a more holistic understanding of U.S. media coverage of Myanmar/Burma, prevailing framing scholarship, and its potential relationship to elite interests, a sub-sample set of *New York Times* and *USA Today* coverage was selected for a closer, in-depth qualitative reading. January 1, 2011 through December 31, 2012 was chosen for this sub-sample time frame based on its incorporation of the initial political reforms implemented by the Thein Sein Government, the corresponding suspension of Western economic sanctions, and the Obama administration’s subsequent engagement with the Thein Sein government. Ninety-eight *New York Times* and 6 *USA Today* articles were identified in this sub-sample. Stories were coded based on an in-depth reading of each article, in turn guided by a deductive application of the coding instrument described in the previous chapter (see Appendix A). Analysis of the five dominant frames identified in the coding instrument (*conflict; economic; morality; human interest; and responsibility*) are discussed below.
Conflict Frame

This frame attempts to capture audience attention by emphasizing conflict between groups, individuals, and institutions.

All of the five overarching frames (conflict; economic; morality; human interest; responsibility) were highly present within U.S media coverage of Myanmar/Burma, commonly overlapping with regard to specific reoccurring themes. However, as illustrated by its presence within 98% of the coverage, the conflict frame overwhelmingly served as the underlying foundation for the other four frames. As indicated by the preceding section’s analysis, this frame predominantly positioned the former military government in opposition to the country’s population, Aung San Suu Kyi (herself emblematic of pro-democracy movement), the country’s various ethnic populations, and the United States.

However, a comparative analysis between this sample and the broader sample-set revealed a gradual erosion of many of these frames following the 2010 national elections, and the corresponding ascension of a Myanmar/Burma-China conflict frame. This frame was in turn commonly invoked within a broader U.S.-China conflict frame, personified by the Obama administration’s strategic “pivot” to Asia. Serving to eclipse the formerly dominant Myanmar/Burma-U.S. conflict frame, this frame cast the U.S. and the Obama administration as “nursemaid” to Myanmar/Burma’s steps toward democratization and liberalization, and the nation’s sole defense against “Beijing's rapacious exploitation of natural resources” (Fuller & Lander, 19 November, 2011). Consequently, this frame reflects the endurance of the U.S. as the global defender of freedom and democracy narrative, whereby America emerges as a geopolitical “counterbalance” to the “imposing” threat of “authoritarian China” (Baker, 19 November, 2012).
Ethnic Conflict. While frequently intersecting with the human interest and morality frames, the *ethnic conflict* frame inevitably manifests itself under the broader conflict frame. Within this frame, events, problems, or issues are addressed in relation one or more of the country’s many ethnic populations. This frame unavoidably presents itself as conflictual within the manner in which “ethnic” identities are inherently understood through a dichotomous lens that positions them against the country’s ethnic-Burman, Buddhist majority and definitions of “Burmese” “nationality” and “citizenship”. Underlying this frame is a multitude of distinct, yet highly complex overlapping and/or competing interests and issues, predominantly framed through struggles surrounding religious identity or political autonomy. While this frame pertains to Myanmar/Burma’s “long-repressed ethnic minority groups” more broadly, it nonetheless manifests itself in two distinct ways: (1) with regard to military conflicts between the government and autonomy-seeking “ethnic rebels”, characterized by “some of the world's longest civil conflicts” (Myers, 2 December, 2011); and (2) the persecution of the country’s Rohingya Muslim minority.

Since 1949 the Karen National Union has sought self-determination for Myanmar/Burma’s Karen population through armed conflict. Similarly, representing the political body of the country’s Kachin population, the Kachin Independence Organization has been engaged in armed struggles for autonomy with Myanmar/Burma’s military on and off since 1960 (Steinberg, 2001). Representing the two most frequently cited ethnic military conflicts, reference to the Karen conflict appeared within 7% of the coverage, and reference to the Kachin conflict appeared within 11% of the coverage. Within this context, human rights organization sources, notably Human Rights Watch, were frequently cited. Responsibility for the conflict was initially overwhelmingly attributed to the country’s military: “Military abuses continue with impunity in
ethnic areas”; “accusations of war crimes in putting down ethnic strife” (Myers, 30 November, 2011); “[government] brutality shown toward ethnic minorities” (Fuller, 18 November, 2011); “violent repression of minority ethnic groups in some of the world's longest civil conflicts” (Myers, 2 December, 2011).

However, analysis revealed a notable shift over time in this coverage, including with regards to attribution of responsibility. This shift coincided with both the increasing presence of a Thein Sein human interest frame (discussed below) that emphasized Thein Sein-led cease-fire and peace resolution efforts, and the country’s increasing engagement with the United States. Alongside a significant reduction in the frequency of this particular ethnic conflict frame, in part explained by the relative success of President Thein Sein’s cease fire efforts, attribution of responsibility for the conflict became increasingly notably absent, or attributed to ethnic “rebels”: i.e. *Myanmar: Rebel Attack Prison Convey* (New York Times, 17 November, 2012).

Interestingly, despite the fact that Myanmar/Burma’s northern, ethnic conflict region represents “the largest base of drug production in Southeast Asia”, and the recent “rebounding” of opium production in this region, analysis revealed that only 6% of coverage addressed drug production, and 1% the so-called Golden Triangle (Fuller, 22 May, 2012).

In addition to the ethnic military conflict, the *ethnic conflict* frame also arose with regard to the persecution of the nation’s estimated 800,000 Rohingya, “a Muslim minority widely reviled in Myanmar” (Fuller, 6 November, 2012). These representations centered on the group’s religious persecution by the ethnic-Burman, Buddhist majority, the government’s failure to recognize their citizenship status and secure their safety, the government’s restrictions of their movement, and their increasing hardships as refugees. Predominantly relying on UN statements, this particular conflict frame consequently arose through a human rights and human interest
frame that evoked sympathy and compassion for their plight: “‘virtually friendless’ among other ethnic groups in Myanmar”; “denied citizenship and are subjected to ”forced labor, extortion, restriction on freedom of movement, the absence of residence rights, inequitable marriage regulations and land confiscation”; “800,000 Rohingya, who live in desperate conditions that resemble refugee camps and make up one of the largest groups of stateless people in Asia”; “They are not allowed to own land, suffer frequent food shortages and are technically restricted from travel outside Rakhine” (Fuller, 16 June, 2012; Fuller, 11 June, 2012).

Although attribution of responsibility for the Rohingya situation was often associated with government policies toward the ethnic group, coverage was predominantly centrally framed around the violence inflicted by “radical Buddhist groups” (Fuller, 6 November, 2012; New York Times, 27 October, 2012). Furthermore, while Aung San Suu Kyi has drawn notable criticism from the international community for her silence on the Rohingya’s plight (Perria, 19 May, 2015), criticism of Aung San Suu Kyi on the issue was largely absent in the coverage. While this coverage frequently mentioned international criticism of President Thein Sein, this was largely referenced alongside Thein Sein’s national reconciliation efforts. Moreover, while reference to Aung San Suu Kyi was notably absent, coverage often drew attention to Thein Sein’s recognition of the severity of the conflict, including official statements declaring that “sectarian violence” against Rohingya had "a great impact on the national integrity” (Fuller, 27 October, 2012).

**China Conflict.** Along with the ethnic conflict frame, two other dominant conflict frames included a *Myanmar/Burma-China conflict* frame and a *U.S.-China conflict frame*. While highlighting China’s longstanding political and economic support of the former military government, the framing of particular issues and events was increasingly understood relative to
Myanmar/Burma’s perceived steps away from China’s influence and shift toward U.S.
engagement. In this regard, coverage increasingly contrasted the negative implications of
Beijing’s “imposing” economic interests with the country’s moves toward political-economic
reform and the Obama administration’s geopolitical “pivot” toward Southeast Asia.
Representative of such trends, 33% of stories made reference to China’s economic interest in
Myanmar/Burma, 17% made reference to rising anti-Chinese sentiment derived from China’s
increasing commercial presence, and 18% directly referred to the political and/or economic
relationship between the United States and China.

Most significantly, the government’s suspension of the Myitsone hydroelectric dam
project on 30 September 2011 was depicted as a pivotal break in Myanmar/Burma-China
relations, one framed as the catalyst for subsequent U.S. engagement with the Thein Sein
government: i.e. “Detecting a Thaw in Myanmar, U.S. Aims to Encourage Change” (Fuller, 1
October, 2011). Portrayed as sowing the “seeds of backlash against Chinese interests in
Myanmar”, coverage underscored the population’s fears of being in “China’s orbit,” i.e.
“[Burmese citizen:] If we don’t take action, Burma will become a satellite state of China”
(Fuller, 1 October, 2011). Within this context, emphasis was placed on the dam’s negative
environmental impact on Myanmar/Burma’s culturally significant Irrawaddy River, portrayed as
Myanmar/Burma’s "grand natural highway”; “a mythic waterway that has given life to centuries
of Burmese civilization””; “the supporter of traditional modes of life, the muse that has inspired
countless works of prose and poetry” (New York Times, 29 September, 2011).

This frame was commonly employed in relation to then Secretary of State Hilary
Clinton’s visit to the country in December 2011 and the ensuing suspension of U.S.-led western
economic sanctions. Consequently, the dam suspension was framed not only as the start of a
broad conflict arising between Myanmar/Burma and China, but as the catalyst for U.S. engagement and the country’s entrance back into the international community. Corresponding to this frame was the escalation of “anti-Chinese sentiment” (Fuller, 1 October, 2011) derived from the “imposing” threat or “Beijing's rapacious exploitation of natural resources” (Baker, 19 November, 2012; Fuller & Lander, 19 November, 2011).

**U.S.-China Conflict.** The ascension of the *Myanmar/Burma-China conflict frame* in 2011 coincided with the gradual erosion of the *Myanmar/Burma-U.S. conflict frame*. As illustrated by the broader analysis of U.S. media coverage of Myanmar/Burma described above, the country’s socio-political context has long been framed within a perceptual lens positioning the United States in ideological opposition with the former Burmese military “junta”, one in which the U.S. emerged as the protector of the country’s pro-democracy struggle. Underlying this particular conflict frame was a depiction of U.S.-led sanctions as the preeminent force confronting the country’s totalitarian forces. While the nation’s socio-political context continued to be understood in relation to U.S.-led sanctions, analysis of the data revealed that the presence of conflict subsided with the onset of President Theon Sein’s reforms in 2011. In this regard, Myanmar/Burma’s transformation was attributed to the success of sanctions, in turn implicitly projecting an inevitable moral triumph of neoliberal values over those of its binary, ideological opposite, authoritarianism. Accordingly, Myanmar/Burma’s steps toward democratization ultimately arose within two preeminent frames.

While no longer embodying a conflict between the U.S. and the Burmese government, an *economic sanctions frame* continued to function as the organizational structure defining emerging issues, people, and events. Discussed in greater detail in the proceeding section, the second dominant frame was a *human interest frame* surrounding the humanization of the former
military general, President Thein Sein. As the former was presented as the catalyst for the latter, these frames were not only non-mutually exclusive, but served to implicitly invoke one another. Within this context, Thein Sein’s suspension of China’s Myitsone Damn project was not only presented as a radical political and ideological shift in Burmese foreign policy, but one that stood as the centerpiece for the detente and subsequent engagement between Myanmar/Burma and the United States. Accordingly, this narrative was necessarily predicated on the ascension of a new conflict frame, an ideological confrontation between China and the U.S., a frame that henceforth both implicitly and explicitly served as the organizational framework for understanding the reforms and the United States’ relationship to them. Reminiscent of South Africa’s transition in the 1990’s, these overlapping frames were highly individualized.

Personified by President Obama and Secretary Clinton’s direct support for President Thein Sein and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, this frame was itself employed within a broader frame that defined Myanmar/Burma’s democratic reforms as a product of U.S.-led economic sanctions and American political support of both Aung San Suu Kyi and President Thein Sein’s reform efforts: i.e. “[Clinton] called for American sanctions to be eased, saying that they had served their purpose” (Landler, 20 September, 2012); “With the promise of more financial assistance, Mr. Obama vowed to ”support you every step of the way’….encouraging additional progress toward a more democratic system” (Baker, 19 November, 2012); and ”[Clinton:] today we say to American business: Invest in Burma” (Myers, 18 May, 2012).

Within this context, there has been a dramatic shift away from the longstanding “us versus them”, “War on Terror” frame. Personified by coverage of President Obama’s “landmark” visit to the country in 2012, analysis revealed that this shift may be understood as part of the President’s attempt at reframing of American foreign policy more broadly. In March 2009, the
Obama Administration undertook explicit steps to re-brand the “Global War on Terror” (seen as increasingly embodying negative connotations associated with perceptions of an “enduring”, “winless” war), instead supplanting it with the term “oversees contingency operations” (Wilson & Kamen, 2009). Correspondingly, less than two weeks after his re-election, President Obama’s November 2012 “historic visit” to Myanmar/Burma was framed as “the political centerpiece” of his “first postelection overseas trip”, intended to symbolize the administration’s so-called “pivot to Asia”, a “reorienting American foreign policy after a decade of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan toward the economic and political future of the Pacific”. Within the *New York Times* and *USA Today* coverage analyzed, this was framed as an attempt toward “counterbalancing” Myanmar/Burma’s “imposing neighbor”, China (Baker & Perlez, 18 November, 2012).

According to one *New York Times* article, (Myers & Mydans, 14 January, 2012),

A renewed relationship between the two countries has the potential to remake American diplomacy in Asia, where the Obama administration says it hopes to refocus its foreign policy at a time when China’s influence is expanding. The closer ties could enhance trade and help integrate Myanmar into regional alliances sympathetic to the West.

Ultimately, the roots of the achievement of this “renewed relationship” is framed as the culmination of an engagement that began with Hilary Clinton’s visit to the country in December 2011, itself cast as “a historic milestone” signifying a “new chapter in relations” with “one of the world’s most isolated and repressive nations” (Myers, 2 December, 2011). A central theme portrayed in Clinton’s visit was this engagement’s ability to lead to Myanmar/Burma’s severing of “illicit ties to North Korea” (Myers, 2 December, 2011; Myers, 3 December, 2011). This alludes not only to the manner in which Myanmar/Burma has long been implicitly framed within the “axis of evil”, but to an American victory over totalitarianism through U.S. support for the country’s pro-democracy movement and the implementation of U.S.-led wester economic
sanctions”, i.e. "[President Obama:] ‘As an iron fist has unclenched in Burma, we have extended our hand” (Myers, 18 May, 2012).

As the administration’s explicit efforts to re-frame and re-orient American policy suggests, the President’s 2012 Myanmar/Burma visit, occurring on the heels of Obama’s re-election, assassination of Osama bin Laden in May 2011, and promised removal of all American troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, can be seen as an attempt to frame Myanmar/Burma’s
political reforms as the capstone of the American victory in the “Global War on Terror”. As the corresponding ascension of a *U.S.-China conflict* frame suggests, analysis of U.S. media coverage of Myanmar/Burma revealed the presence of a shift back to a pre-War on Terror ideological Cold War frame, one not mired by the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts, and one shaped by U.S. elite interests.

Accordingly, the *New York Times* and the *USA Today’s* emphasis on President Obama’s support for Myanmar/Burma can be understood as proceeding directly from shifting U.S. foreign policy prerogatives. The ascension of the *China conflict frame* in the coverage of Myanmar/Burma thus reinforces existing literature alluding to the framing dominance of the White House. Correspondingly, data reveals the presence of an explicit shift away from the increasingly problematic War on Terror preeminent foreign affairs frame, toward a return to the tested East vs. West conflict frame defined by the capitalist-communist duality between two superpowers.

**Attribution of Responsibility Frame**

This frame attributes responsibility for causes and solutions to problems to either the government, individuals, or groups.

Like the conflict frame (and frequently arising alongside it), the *attribution of responsibility* frame was highly present within U.S. media coverage of Myanmar/Burma. Invoked within 94% of the stories, this frame was almost universally inseparable from an explicit or implicit positioning of issues, problems, and events relative to the actions of the former military government. In doing so, this frame necessarily invoked a *conflict frame*, whereby all of Myanmar/Burma’s socio-political-economic problems arose as a direct product of the former military elite’s pursuit of political legitimation and self-preservation. Authoritarian in nature,
government actions and policies thus inescapably arose in direct conflict with the interest of the population and the ‘public good’. As such actions emerged as antithetical to democratic principles and those surrounding ‘human rights’, the attribution of responsibility frame thus regularly emerged alongside a moralization frame, itself tied to a particular prescription regarding the correct path toward socio-economic development and political organization. This logic similarly served as the guiding impetus for understanding Myanmar/Burma’s economic challenges, portrayed not only as a product of the corruption and economic mismanagement of the regime, but for the former governments’ attempts toward economic development outside the boundaries of the global economic ‘world order’.

In invoking this attribution of responsibility frame, no responsibility is ever ascribed to either the legacy of colonialism, its influence on the country’s prevailing socio-economic difficulties, or the role of U.S. led-sanctions in cultivating the “impoverished” conditions faced by the population. This can in turn be seen as representative of the highly decontextualized way in which the frame was employed. Application of the attribution of responsibility frame to coverage of Myanmar/Burma can consequently be said to be overwhelmingly episodic in nature (Iyengar, 1991).

**Catchphrases.** An in-depth analysis of U.S. media coverage within the two year time frame revealed that the attribution of responsibility frame frequently entailed connotative (often disparaging) language that either implicitly or explicitly attributed blame to the former military government. Within this context, archetypical metaphors highly associated with prevailing political conceptions of “open” and “closed” societies are readily invoked (i.e. “isolation” vs. “community”; “authoritarian” vs. “democracy”, etc.). The following are examples of connotatively loaded language contained within the coverage that implicitly or explicitly ascribes
blame to the former regime: “decades of oppression”; “paranoid isolation”; “isolated, dictatorial military junta”; “one of the world's most repressive countries”; “one of the world's most isolated and repressive nations”; “autocratic, military-dominated government”; “decades of military dictatorship”; “years of military dictatorship”; “country's repressive history”; “five decades of iron-fisted military rule”; “a country scarred by one of the world's most repressive governments”; “years of military rule and diplomatic isolation”; “one of the most repressive countries in Asia”; “Years of mismanagement by a corrupt military leadership”; “As Myanmar loosens the grip of decades of military dictatorship”; “military junta's reign”; “prolonged era of dictatorship”; “decades of totalitarian rule”; “The scars of military rule run deep”; “decades of overt military dictatorship”; “one of the world's most isolated and repressive nations”; “eccentric autocracy and military rule”; “hermetic military government”; “former socialist military dictatorship”; “legacy of its military and socialist era”; “one of the most brutal dictatorships in Asia”; “highly repressive junta”; “century of dictatorship and self-imposed isolation”; “harsh authoritarian government”; “authoritarian past”; “Not Free” (Freedom House); "Military abuses continue with impunity in ethnic areas”; “denial of basic human rights for the Burmese people”; “brutality shown toward ethnic minorities”; “accusations of war crimes in putting down ethnic strife”; “long-repressed ethnic minority groups”; “violent repression of minority ethnic groups in some of the world's longest civil conflicts”; “accusations of war crimes”; “Intensifying clashes between ethnic rebels and Myanmar's army”; “forced tens of thousands of villagers into refugee camps”.

**Human Interest Frame**

By putting a human face or emotional dimension on an issue, event, or problem, these frames are efforts to personalize and dramatize news stories.
Like both the conflict and attribution of responsibility frames, the human interest frame was highly present (89%) throughout the coverage. As discussed above, this frame has long predominantly surrounded the conflict between the government and the country’s population, specifically with regards to the military’s denial of citizens’ basic “human rights”. Within this context, two major themes have been government oppression against the country’s ethnic populations, and the suppression of Myanmar/Burma’s pro-democracy movement, personified by Aung San Suu Kyi’s personal and political struggle with the military. While this study found these various underlying frames to be highly present within coverage between 2003 and 2010, it also found a significant reduction of these frames from 2010 to 2012. While these frames did persist, following the 2010 election there was a notable shift away from attention to human rights issues toward an overwhelming tendency to understand issues, actors, and events relative to the country’s democratic reforms. This frame was in turn invoked within a broader morality frame (discussed below) surrounding particular philosophical prescriptions for social, political, and economic development. The ascension of this morality/democracy frame in turn coincided with the rise of a human interest frame centered on President Thein Sein.

**President Thein Sein.** Myanmar/Burma’s political and economic reforms were nearly universally framed as the outcome of President Thein Sein’s individual actions. This narrative not only served to humanize the former military general, but largely eclipsed the political role of all other government officials, in turn obfuscating any potential influence of the former military elite on the unfolding reform process. Epitomizing this narrative, according to one *New York Times* article,

> The new president, U Thein Sein, a former general who was part of the military junta that ruled the country for two decades, has in six months in office signaled a sharp break from the highly centralized and erratic policies of the past. (Myers & Fuller, 7 October, 2011).
In ‘breaking’ the connection between the policies pursued by Thein Sein’s new ‘civilian’ government and those undertaken by the State Peace and Development Council, the ascension of this *Thein Sein human interest frame* thus functioned to absolve the new government of any and all responsibility for the nation’s immense socio-political problems, problems framed as universally derived from “the highly centralized and erratic policies of the past”. Consequently, this frame was also accompanied by the gradual erosion of the aforementioned longstanding predominant human rights conflict frame in which government actions were nearly universally positioned against the interests of Myanmar/Burma’s population.

Coinciding with the rise of this particular human interest frame was Aung Suu Kyi’s ascension into parliament following the country’s 2012 by-elections, a development that further served to legitimize the new government. Nevertheless, while Thein Sein emerged as the driver of the country’s reform process, such actions were framed as an explicit attempt toward encouraging the removal of Western economic sanctions. Accordingly, in heralding the success of these “unprecedented” reform measures, this coverage also framed them as a product of U.S. economic sanctions and the Obama administration’s “support” of both Thein Sein’s “efforts” and Aung San Suu Kyi (Baker, 19 November, 2012).

Arising within 67% of news stories, the *President Thein Sein human interest frame* ultimately emerged in tandem with a *democracy/morality frame* in which all actions undertaken by the President were measured by specific moral prescriptions regarding the appropriate path toward socio-political-economic national development. Illustrative of the degree to which government policies were individually ascribed to the President, reference to the Thein Sein’s ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) arose within only 5% of the coverage. Seemingly unbound by the country’s cumbersome bureaucratic structure, Thein Sein thus stood
as the sole personification of the government, capable of dictating and successfully implementing radical reformations of a highly “underdeveloped” political system with little to no political opposition from a well-entrenched, “paranoid” ruling class that those policies propose undermining (The New York Times, 26 August, 2011; Fuller, 20 November, 2012).

In this regard, coverage commonly referenced Thein Sein’s role in the abolition of the state’s extensive censorship mechanisms, the legalization of labor unions, ceasefires with ethnic rebels, the rewriting of laws in taxes and property ownership, and the releasing of the country’s political prisoners (Myers & Fuller, 7 October, 2011; New York Times, 30 November, 2011). Particular emphasis was placed on the President’s overseeing of the “largest single release of political prisoners in Asia's history” (i.e. Myers & Mydans, 14 January, 2012), and his repeated pronouncement of the news media’s role as “the fourth estate”, outspokenly described as a vehicle for “ensure[ing] liberty and accountability” (i.e. Fuller, 4 April, 2012). Analysis of data also revealed that coverage of notable reform measures corresponded to subsequent Obama administration pronouncements of U.S. steps toward greater engagement with the Burmese government (i.e. Myers & Fuller, 6 October, 2011; Fuller & Landler 18 November, 2011; New York Times, 13 January, 2012; Myers & Mydans, 13 January, 2012; Myers & Fuller, 4 April, 2012; Myers, 17 May, 2012; Landler, 19 September, 2012). Such correlations accordingly served to position Thein Sein’s unilateral actions as a direct product of President Obama’s foreign policy prerogatives.

In individualizing Thein Sein’s political reform efforts, U.S. media coverage also necessarily evoked compassion for the President. In this regard, coverage of Myanmar/Burma’s political reforms largely rested on the cultivation of an overarching humanization framework, an organizational structure representing a radical departure from the traditional frames of meaning
within which coverage of the country had traditionally arisen. Not only was Thein Sein the acting prime minister during the nation’s 2007 demonstrations, he was a leading military commander amid the crackdown against the ‘8888’ demonstrators. Nevertheless, despite representing the embodiment of the same military elite long demonized by the West, he is uncritically iconized and heroicized in mainstream U.S. news coverage.

While merely negating the contradiction by disassociating him from his military past, a singular, explicit attempt toward resolving this inherent conflict can be seen in the New York Times article “As Myanmar Changes, So Does Its Leader” (Fuller, 4 April, 2012). Within this context, the “catalyst” for Thein Sein’s metamorphosis “from the right-hand man of a much-feared dictator to a campaigner for democratic change” is Myanmar/Burma’s worst humanitarian natural disaster in recorded history, Cyclone Nargis. According to United Nation figures, 2.4 million people were “affected” by the storm and nearly 140,000 were either killed or remain missing (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2008). “Bookish and considered softer -- or at least less ruthless -- than the other members of the junta that took power after a popular uprising in 1988”, “Mr. Thein Sein grew up in poverty”, the son of a “former Buddhist monk, whom villagers described as…‘a great teacher [with] respected moral values…[and] the main reason for [the president’s] success””. Following the cyclone, Thein Sein reportedly saw firsthand how “woefully unprepared his impoverished country was for the catastrophe”. Consequently, influenced by his humble roots, “the cyclone became a ‘mental trigger…it made him realize the limitations of the old regime’” (Fuller, 4 April, 2012).

While analysis revealed that coverage of Myanmar/Burma was nearly non-existent within the USA Today relative to such “prestige” papers as the New York Times, a publication whose prominence has in part extended from its emphasis on international coverage, in the immediate
aftermath of Cyclone Nargis the paper contained an over 250% increase in stories pertaining to Myanmar/Burma. Similarly, between January and April 2008, only two articles on the country appeared in the *New York Times*. However, following the landing of Cyclone Nargis in May 2008, that number rose by 1700%, with 36 articles published in May alone. As discussed above, such patterns can be seen as indicative of a trend within mainstream Western journalism toward increasingly sensational and human interest-driven news coverage (Moeller, 1999). However, while seemingly reinforcing such arguments, analysis also alluded to the manner in which these patterns can be seen as reflecting the “humanitarian discourses” inherent within the global ascension of a ‘cosmopolitan democracy’ narrative. Understanding the manner in which this overarching human interest frame serves as the organizational structure upon which all other human interest frames are built in turn facilitates greater insight into both the nature of the *Thein Sein human interest frame*, and its relationship to mainstream American media coverage of the country more broadly.

Most notably, the changing nature of an overarching human interest frame amid an increasingly unrecognizable socio-political landscape is seemingly incongruent with prevailing organizational frameworks within which the nation has traditionally been understood. Long lacking contextual depth, readers of mainstream U.S. media arguably lack the capacity for understanding the seemingly more complex political climate that has arisen since the implementation of reforms in 2011. While initially written off as yet another attempt by the military elite to rebrand themselves in front of the international community (BBC News, 27 April, 2010), the Obama administration’s steps toward engagement have seemingly forced an interpretive restructuring. Most reflective of this changing narrative is the proliferation of the *Thein Sein human interest frame*. 
Reconciling the dichotomy between the “personality-driven [reform] process” (Fuller, 4 June, 2012) and the continued attribution of responsibility for the nation’s socio-political economic problems on the former military elite, Myanmar/Burma’s worst natural disaster in recorded history emerges as the catalyst for the President’s metamorphosis from authoritarian general to democratic reform leader. In doing so, this narrative serves to construct interpretive continuity between two radically different emotional frameworks surrounding the Burmese government without reconciling the disappearance of those individuals and interests that until recently comprised “one of the world's most repressive governments” (Wong, 23 January, 2012).

**Cosmopolitan Democracy.** In the wake of the cyclone, the government was initially reluctant to accept international aid, only reluctantly doing so as the crises worsened. Furthermore, the State Peace and Development Council went to great lengths to suppress information about the affected areas. The government imposed a travel ban on journalists, both foreign and domestic, restricting reporters from entering disaster regions. Foreign journalists were barred from entering the country for the duration of the crisis and at least one BBC News reporter was deported (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2008; Asia Times, 15 May, 2008). The only images of the catastrophe permitted to be released were those channeled through state media outlets, images consisting of military authorities “distributing aid and comforting survivors”. Moreover, the stories that were allowed to circulate portrayed a government in complete control of relief efforts and made no mention of death toll estimates or the escalating problems regarding foreign aid (Irrawaddy, 13 May, 2008). In the face of this media blackout, only clandestine Burmese reporters working for exile media organizations (notably Mizzima News) were able to eventually bypass the government’s information blockade,
relaying accounts to the outside world and successfully challenging state reports on the extent of
the destruction (Committee to Protect Journalists, 7 May, 2008; Mizzima, 8 October, 2013).

Nevertheless, despite the success achieved by this relatively small group of undercover
journalists, the political and media landscape in the wake of Cyclone Nargis can unquestionably
be characterized as highly conducive to international media coverage. Analogous to the
country’s political and media climate prior to the onset of reforms in 2011 more broadly, the
significant uptake in coverage within both newspapers can arguably be interpreted as the
epitomization of mainstream U.S. news media’s unquenchable thirst for issues and events
amenable to the application of formulaic coverage capable of evoking strong emotional
responses from audiences. Such an argument appears to extend itself to similar patterns
underpinning coverage of the ‘Saffron Revolution’, coverage also representing a finite,
phenomenal shift in the country’s relationship to the mainstream international news media.

However, drawing upon Hoijer (2004), the presence of these patterns can also be seen as
reflective of a broader “global discourse of compassion” arising at the nexus of media,
audiences, politics, and humanitarian intervention. Following the cessation of the Cold War, this
frame has come to organize everyday thinking regarding journalism and politics. Within both
Western media and political discourses, conflicts and violence have increasingly been
understood within the context of a global moral conscience, conceived as the ethical integrity
inherent to cosmopolitan democracy. Accompanying such a narrative has been the increasing
prevalence of humanitarian aid and intervention on the world stage (Del Zotto, 2002; Cloud,
2004; Thussu, 2000; 2006; Kumar, 2010; Mishra, 2010), ultimately intertwined with the political
ascension of NGOs as integral actors within the international order (Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Bob,
Yet, as Hoijer asserts, the proliferation of this humanitarian concern is also increasingly accompanied by audience tendencies toward “distantiation from compassion,” strategies whereby audiences dehumanize victims as a means of dulling or developing immunities against distant human suffering. Within this context there arises the formation of distance through the development of “us-versus-them” perceptions of the culture, values, ways of life, and the mentality of others. This in turn serves to promote the dehumanization of the suffering of remote populations by understanding people as uncivilized or primitive compared to those in advanced industrial economies.

As discussed above, coverage of Myanmar/Burma has long largely been predicated on a government-population conflict frame. Within this context, the country arises as “one of the world's most isolated and repressive nations” (Myers, 2 December, 2011) whose “impoverished population” (Fuller, 17 November, 2012) is “denied basic human rights” (Fuller, 18. 2011), “victims” of “five decades of iron-fisted military rule” (Wong, 23 January, 2012) by a “paranoid” (Fuller, 20 November, 2012), “ruthless” (Fuller, 4 April, 2012), “authoritarian” (Perlez, 31 March, 2012) “highly repressive junta” (Fuller, 17 November, 2012) whose "abysmal failures" (Myers, 1 December, 2011) have “driven the country to near economic collapse and dysfunction” (Myers & Gladstone, 27 September, 2012). Exemplified by these stories headlines, New York Times and USA Today’s coverage of Cyclone Nargis relied heavily on a victims frame evoking compassion and sympathy for the population: “Myanmar reels as cyclone toll hits thousands” (Mydans & Cooper, 7 May, 2008); “Myanmar’s main city remains crippled” (The New York Times, 9 May, 2008); “In flooded delta, a want as persuasive as death” (The New York Times, 10 May, 2008); “Bodies flow into delta area of Myanmar” (The New York Times, 11 May, 2008); “Amid Myanmar secrecy, harrowing tales of survival and devastation” (The
New York Times, 15 May, 2008); “Ruined Burmese farmers may miss vital fall harvest” (The New York Times, 16 May, 2008); “Myanmar’s children face new risks, aid groups say” (Mydans, 18 May, 2008); “Weeks after cyclone in Myanmar, even farmers wait for food” (Mydans, 26 May, 2008). This victim frame in turn emerged alongside a highly visible government-population conflict frame in which the “paranoid”, “reclusive” policies and self-interests of Myanmar/Burma’s “evil” “military junta” were depicted as greatly exacerbating the extent of the devastation. While such narratives are congruent with those underlying pre-2010 coverage more broadly, the coverage of Cyclone Nargis was centered around a particular ‘global discourse of compassion’ inherently tied to the legitimacy and moral necessity of international humanitarian aid: “Trying to put a name to the face of evil” (Williams, 4 May, 2008); “Cyclone aid hurt by Burma regime; Junta asks for U.N. help, hasn’t OK’d U.S. team” (Bazar, 6 May, 2008); “Aid for Myanmar mobilizes, mixed with criticism” (Mydans & Cooper, 7 May, 2008); “Myanmar junta accused of delay in storm relief” (Mydans, 8 May, 2008); “A reclusive government forced to ask for help” (Mydans, 8 May, 2008); “U.S. Burmese community ready to help; Fundraisers planned to send cash, supplies to homeland” (Bello, 8 May, 2008); “Sluggish junta fails in natural disaster” (USA Today, 9 May, 2008); “U.N. pressuring Myanmar to end barriers to aid” (Newman, 9 May, 2008); “Regime's paranoia worsens cyclone tragedy in Burma” (USA Today, 9 May, 2008); “Myanmar seizes U.N. food for cyclone victims and blocks foreign experts” Mydans, 10 May, 2008); “Fearing for many at home, city’s Burmese unite to aid cyclone victims” (Santos, 11 May, 2008); “Rulers keep tight grip on aid as Burmese cast votes” (The New York Times, 11 May, 2008); “When Burmese offer a hand, rulers slap it” (The New York Times, 12 May, 2008); “U.S. leader tells Myanmar’s regime there’s ‘no more time to lose’” (Hodge & Mydans, 13 May, 2008); “Myanmar government still blocking large-scale
TOWARDS A RE-DISCOVERY OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

relief; death toll rises again” (The New York Times, 14 May, 2008); “Aid group says some Myanmar food aid is stolen or diverted by the military” (The New York Times, 15 May, 2008); “U.S. frustrated by Myanmar military junta’s limits on aid in wake of cyclone” (Cooper & Shanker, 17 May, 2008); “International pressure on Myanmar junta is building” (The New York Times, 18 May, 2008); “Myanmar widens neighbor’s aid role” (Mydans & Cowell, 20 May, 2008); “U.N. leader aims to get more aid in Myanmar” (Mydans, 22 May, 2008); “More held trickles in as U.N. chief visits Myanmar” (Mydans, 23 May, 2008); “Myanmar camps for survivors seem to be for headlines only” (The New York Times, 23 May, 2008); “Myanmar is said to relent on aid” (Mydans, 24 May, 2008); “Donors press Myanmar to let in aid workers” (Mydans, 26 May, 2008); “A few aid workers reach into Myanmar” (Mydans, 28 May, 2008); “Burmese economy is an obstacle to aid” (The New York Times, 29 May, 2008); “In cyclone relief, monks succeed where generals falter” (The New York Times, 31 May, 2008); “Gates accuses Myanmar of ‘criminal neglect’ over aid” (Schmitt, 2 June, 2008); “Myanmar rulers still impede access, relief groups say” (Mydans, 3 June, 2008); “Myanmar detains comedian offering aid” (The New York Times, 6 June, 2008); “Myanmar junta begins evicting cyclone victims from shelters” (The New York Times, 7 June, 2008); “Burmese endure in spite of junta, aid workers say” (The New York Times, 18 June, 2008).

As exhibited by references to the country’s “illicit ties to North Korea” (Myers, 2 December, 2011), and implications that the former government pursued nuclear weapons technology (i.e. Myers, 30 November, 2011), analysis of 2003-2012 New York Times and USA Today coverage revealed that reporting of the conflict between the Burmese military government and the population was structured by a broader ‘War on Terror’ interpretive framework. In doing so, Myanmar/Burma’s military elite were framed within an ‘us versus them’ dichotomy that
positioned their actions against the U.S. and ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ more broadly. Within this context, the “hermetic”, “paranoid”, “repressive”, “authoritarian”, “superstitious”, and unpredictable policies pursued by the nation’s generals are cast as leading to the “denial of basic human rights”, and the “impoverishment” and “isolation” of the population.

Accordingly, not only does mainstream American news media present Myanmar/Burma as among the most socially, politically, and economically “underdeveloped” nations in the world (Myers, 30 November, 2011; Myers, 2 December, 2011; Wong, 23 January, 2012; Fuller, 4 April, 2012; Myers, 18 May, 2012; Fuller, 17 November, 2012), it cultivates an image of both the government and the population as highly primitive and uncivilized relative to the Western world. Embodying these frames, coverage of Cyclone Nargis not only reinforces a tendency to dehumanize the population, but constructs an ‘us-versus-them’ cultural perception that promotes a distancing from compassion’. However, at the same time, this coverage also reinforces a particular, broader ‘global discourse of compassion’ that serves as the moral impetus for both cosmopolitan democracy and humanitarian intervention in the post-Cold War world.

Reflecting broader arguments suggesting the rise of a ‘global civil society’ following the collapse of the Soviet Union, some scholars (Falk, 1995; Giugni & Passy, 2001) have contended that the emergence and proliferation of a ‘global moral conscience’ has lent itself to the formation of “a cosmopolitan democracy of ‘human governance’ and human solidarity” (Bob, 2005, p. 3) where the implementation of democratic values and international norms can be achieved through global governance. Heralded not only as the “iconic” leader of Myanmar/Burma’s pro-democracy movement, but as a world-renewed “global champion of democracy” (Fuller, 8 March, 2012), within U.S. media, Aung San Suu Kyi can be seen as the
personification of cosmopolitan democracy. Built around the narrative of human rights, this frame reinforces a ‘compassionate’-driven moral justification for humanitarian intervention.

According to Douzines, rather than being predicated on distinctions over good and bad, right and wrong, early humanitarianism efforts took a neutral position in their commitment to the alleviation of human suffering. However, following the cessation of the Cold War, there emerged growing Western engagement in the domestic affairs of the developing world, and in turn the employment of force and economic sanctions for humanitarian objectives (i.e. claimed humanitarian objectives often obscuring other motives). As humanitarian efforts increasingly became forced to make calculated choices regarding their aims and priorities, the principal of neutrality was broken, thus paving the way for the advancement of calls for humanitarian-driven Western military intervention. As this politicization of humanitarian aid work emerges in opposition to the “apolitical profile on which the public appreciation for NGO’s depends,” NGO’s have since become increasingly concerned with reaffirming their perceived non-political, neutral position. In order to accomplish this, NGO’s have steadily sought to present themselves “in a language of ethics and morality instead of that of politics.” Consequently, according to Douzines, “Human rights have become the preferred vocabulary of this new type of humanitarianism and are often used to disguise complex and contentious decisions.” As he notes, such events have thus subsequently “led to a convergence between humanitarian work and governmental rhetoric and policies” (p. 59).

Much like the discourses surrounding the “protectionist” framing of Aung San Suu Kyi, *New York Times* and *USA Today* coverage of Cyclone Nargis was structured around a human rights-based ‘global compassion’ narrative. In the case of the former, U.S. support for Aung San Suu Kyi and economic sanctions against the Burmese government served to legitimize the moral
foundation underlying the “War on Terror”, and in turn, U.S.-led humanitarian intervention in the post-9/11 world. Similarly, the degree to which Cyclone Nargis was framed as a battle between good vs. evil provides a powerful archetype for the moral rationalization of the prevailing international political structure through which humanitarian intervention proceeds.

Pursuing “isolationist” political-economic policies, and defiant to pressures to conform to international norms surrounding appropriate state behavior, Myanmar/Burma’s government is framed as the antithesis of cosmopolitan democracy. Given the degree to which the anti-cosmopolitan actions of the generals appears to have exacerbated the crisis, successfully overcoming the military’s resistance to international aid seemingly held the capacity of not only alleviating significant human suffering, but demonstrating the degree to which the political logic structuring such actions was driven by a necessary, and inherently moral framework privileging a positive-sum solution to the problem of the human condition.

Following the SPDC’s initial rejection of international aid, President Bush emerged as among the most vocal critics of the military government’s actions. According to statements made by the president, “Here they are with a major catastrophe on their hands, and (they) do not allow there to be the full kind of might of a compassionate world to help… the world ought to be angry and condemn the government (Associated Press, 13 May, 2008). As analysis of the data sample revealed, this proposed mantra, one of outspoken anger and condemnation of the ‘junta’ by the international community was reflective of the underling coverage of Cyclone Nargis as a whole. Moreover, such sentiments mirrored those embedded within New York Times and USA Today coverage of the 2007 ‘Saffron Revolution’ the preceding year, coverage also centering on a human rights narrative and the U.S. and U.N.’s role in alleviating the crisis: “First Lady makes issue of Myanmar's junta” (Myers, 6 September, 2007); “Bush, at U.N., announces stricter
Burmese sanctions” (Myers, 26 September, 2007); “Myanmar attacks protesters, arresting monks” (Mydans, 27 September, 2007); “More deaths in Myanmar, and defiance” (Mydans, 28 September, 2007); “U.N. envoy brings appeal for restraint to Myanmar” (Mydans, 29 September, 2007); “U.S. steps up confrontation with Myanmar’s rulers” (Sanger & Myers, 29 September, 2007); “U.N. envoy tries to ease tensions in Myanmar” (Mydans, 1 October, 2007); “After delays, U.N. envoy is to meet Myanmar leader” (Mydans, 2 October, 2007); “U.N. envoy in Myanmar meets junta and opposition leaders” (Mydans, 3 October, 2007); “U.N. chief says envoy gave Myanmar ‘strong message’ but trip wasn’t a ‘success’” (Fuller, 4 October, 2007); “Monks are silenced, and for now, the Web is, too” (Mydans, 4 October, 2007); “Myanmar junta admits mass arrests” (Fuller, 5 October, 2007); “U.N. chief calls crackdown in Myanmar ‘abhorrent’” (Hodge & Mydans, 6 October, 2007); “First lady: Burma has ’days’ to act; Uses her role to warn of sanctions” (Jackson, 10 October, 2007); “Bush imposes new sanctions on Myanmar” (Cloud, 20 October, 2007); “On quiet streets of Myanmar fear is a constant companion” (Sang-Hun, 21 October, 2007); “A Monk’s tale of protest and escape from Myanmar” (Fuller, 26 October, 2007); “Burmese Monks march again ahead of visit by U.N. envoy” (Fuller, 1 November, 2007); “Myanmar junta orders top U.N. official in the country to leave” (Fuller, 3 November, 2007); “U.N. envoy in Myanmar to try to tally dead” (Fuller, 12 November, 2007); “U.N. envoy to Myanmar calls junta responsive” (Hoge, 14 November, 2007).

Ultimately, a comparative analysis of coverage of the two crises reveals the presence of a common organizational frame within which the events were understood, one reinforcing the human rights-based discourses upon which post-9/11 humanitarian intervention is founded. Presented within a binary moral framework, within both events, the military government’s actions emerge in fundamental opposition to the ‘universally’ guaranteed rights of the population
and the appropriate norms and principals underlying the “international community”. In doing so, the political legitimacy of the SPDC is negated, correspondingly reinforcing the moral and political mandate foregrounding the international community’s authority to militarily mediate in particular socio-political formations around the world.

**Aung Sun Suu Kyi.** As the analysis in the previous section reveals, Aung San Suu Kyi has commonly arisen within a particular human interest frame, one that has embodied the country’s pro-democracy struggle more broadly. The daughter of independent Burma’s “founding father”, Aung San, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has long been crowned the “first Lady” of Myanmar/Burma (Neuharth, 7 February, 2003). After returning to the country in 1988, Suu Kyi gave birth to the National League for Democracy (NLD), co-founding the organization and becoming the party’s general secretary. While the NLD won landslide victories in the 1990 elections, both her and her party’s freedom was subsequently suppressed for the better part of the ensuing two decades. Aung San Suu Kyi’s personal narrative has in turn come to mirror that of the population, themselves dispossessed by the “isolation” imposed by “decades of iron-fisted military rule” (Wong, 23 January, 2012).

As one New York Times article notes, “hope” has become the “word used so often in the context of Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi’s years of campaigning for democracy” (Fuller, 31 May, 2012). Willfully sacrificing her relationships with her late husband and two children in order to embody the nation’s struggle, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi emerges not only as the nation’s spiritual leader and moral conscience, but as a “mother figure” to the population (New York Times, 20 November, 2011; Fuller, 8 March, 2012; Fuller, 31 May, 2012). This mother frame is epitomized in New York Time’s coverage of a group of Burmese diaspora’s response to the democracy leader’s first trip abroad following her most recent release from house arrest.
"Being here is the best thing that has ever happened to me in my life... said Pyae Sone Nyein, a 23-year-old woman who works in the family business, importing squid from Myanmar. "I never dreamed I would see Mother Suu." Unbothered by the searing sun, the crowd welcomed her with loud cheers, chants and song. Some carried bouquets; others clutched single roses. Some carried signs that said, "We want to be cradled in your arms, Mother Suu." (Fuller, 31 May, 2012)

Commonly drawing comparisons to Nelson Mandela in the coverage (Erlanger, 16 June, 2012; Erlanger, 17 June, 2012), Aung San Suu Kyi has come to be iconized in much the same way as the late South African leader. Notably, analysis of mainstream media framing of Myanmar/Burma appeared to indicate that the broader narrative surrounding Nelson Mandela and South Africa’s struggle against Apartheid was re-invoked within American news coverage of Myanmar/Burma. Given the nation’s legacy of censorship, the employment of this binary, good versus evil organizational framework can be seen as a means of conveying a particular frame of understanding to an audience lacking the proper contextual knowledge for interpreting unfolding socio-political events within the country.

Analysis of the data consequently revealed a strong propensity for decontextualizing issues, actors, and events in a manner that appears to foster significant potential for distorting emerging realities. Notably, an over reliance on an Aung San Suu Kyi’s human interest frame serves to eclipses other acts of socio-political agency, particularly with respect to both the nation’s rural population, and the increasingly significant but largely ignored youth generation. Ominously indicative of those patterns underlying the reinforcement of a one-party state in South Africa, these frames promote the construction of binary, positive-sum interpretations, whereby political struggles are either won or lost. As the latter negates the essentiality for the continued cultivation of an atmosphere conducive to the fostering of dialogue among diverse, and often
highly divergent interests, such frames ultimately possess the inherent risk of creating and/or exacerbating social, cultural, and economic inequalities.

Illustrative of such arguments, the presence of an *Aung San Suu Kyi human interest frame* was found within 70% of all U.S. media articles. This frame was represented by the existence of reference to Suu Kyi’s politically-bound personal struggles and associated, heavily connotative language evoking compassion and sympathy for both her and the population. Within this context, the pro-democracy leader is highly iconized, largely standing above criticism (only 6% of coverage mentioned anything critical of Suu Kyi). Furthermore, like President Thein Sein, her political role is highly individualized. This is perhaps made most evident by the notable absence of reference to the NLD, the country’s main political opposition party, referenced in only 17% of the stories. Within this highly individualized framing of Myanmar/Burma’s political environment, the two political figures’ relationship is cast as “crucial” to the reforms. “Most of the improvements in Burma these days are because of the relationship between Thein Sein and Aung San Suu Kyi” (Fuller, 4 June, 2012). Drawing comparisons to Nelson Mandela and Frederik Klerck (Erlanger, 16 June, 2012; Erlanger, 17 June, 2012), much of this success has been attributed to Aung San Suu Kyi’s influence over economic sanctions and corresponding close relationship to the United States: “And the government has started a charm offensive with Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi, who has great leverage on the issue of sanctions” (New York Times, 26 August, 2011).

Aung San Suu Kyi’s warm relationship with the U.S. is exemplified in coverage of Clinton’s December 2011 visit to the country. Within this highly gendered coverage, the “two iconic women in world affairs” appeared “as if they'd known each other a long time” (Myers, 3 December, 2011). According to one *New York Times* article, the seemingly familial relationship
between America’s former first lady and Myanmar/Burma’s “first ‘Lady’” was widely embraced by the country’s population: “Photographs of [Clinton] shaking hands with the revered opposition leader, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, women of similar age in white jackets, their hair drawn back in ponytails, radiant smiles on their faces, now hang in cafes and homes” (Perlez, 31 March, 2012).

This coverage can ultimately be seen as cultivating a highly visual-based sisterhood frame, one that seemingly arises as an extension of the “protector” and damsels in distress metaphors discussed above (see Figures 3 & 4). Moreover, at the time, Secretary Clinton represented the highest ranking Obama administration official. As coverage of her visit clearly reinforced her presence as representing an extension of the President’s, such symbolism also served to cast Barack Obama as Aung San Suu Kyi and Myanmar/Burma’s personal protector and savior, a “nursemaid” to Myanmar/Burma’s “transformation from military dictatorship to embryonic democracy” (Baker, 19 November, 2012). Within such symbolism, Obama and the U.S. emerge as Aung San Suu Kyi and Myanmar/Burma’s supportive older brother (see Figure 5). The U.S., a more mature democracy, is framed as defending its adolescent sibling from the harms posed by the country’s “corrupt, inept, brutal” ‘uncles’, the nation’s military generals, themselves children of the Tatmadaw’s founding father, Aung San (The Economist, 27 September, 2007). However, despite rescuing the country from both its oppressive foster parents, and the corrupting negative influences posed by members of the “axis of evil”, America’s nurturing of its younger sister’s development also necessitates shielding her from the “imposing”, self-serving interests of her other “big brother”, communist China (Baker, 19, November, 2012; Fuller, 4 June, 2012).
Figure 3: The “Ladies” Meet: Suu Kyi meets Clinton in Yangon (Carroll, 13 January, 2012).

Figure 4: “Sisters” in Arms: Suu Kyi meets Clinton in Yangon (Neuharth, 2 December, 2011).
Figure 5: “Damsel in Distress”: President Obama meets Suu Kyi in Yangon (Hassen & Shannon, 14 November, 2014).

Figure 6: U.S., the “Protector” of Freedom: President Obama meets Suu Kyi in Yangon (Landler, 14 November, 2014).
Morality Frame

This frame puts the problem, issues, or event in the context of religious principles or moral prescriptions.

As alluded to in the previous section’s analysis of the broader 2003-2012 time frame, the morality frame invoked in coverage of Myanmar/Burma has long pertained to the presentation of issues and events within a ‘human rights’ narrative, one that positioned the ‘rights of the population as under perpetual threat by the former military “regime”. In this regard, all discussion of democratic efforts invoked a dichotomy between the population and the authoritarian military government. This most commonly manifested itself within presentations of Aung San Suu Kyi. Highly present throughout the sample, representations of Suu Kyi were iconized, portraying the “pro-democracy” leader as the personification of democracy itself. The
use of this frame in turn perpetuated a metaphor of freedom and democracy eternally under threat by authoritarian forces. As this was commonly evoked aside a U.S.-Burmese “junta” conflict frame, this frame served as a moral foundation for American foreign policy more broadly.

However, following Myanmar/Burma’s 2010 national election, the ‘human rights’ morality frame increasingly eroded. Coinciding with the ascension of a human interest frame centered on President Thein Sein’s reform efforts, in its place emerged a democracy morality frame that framed the country’s reform efforts relative to a specific set of prescriptions regarding the correct path toward socio-economic development. Ultimately, 96% of the coverage framed a problem, issue, or event in the context of moral prescriptions. This largely arose with regard to reference to democratic ideals (92%). While initially emerging within a conflict frame positioning these ideals against authoritarian forces, this frame increasingly surrounded the parallel efforts toward democratization and liberalization implemented by the Thein Sein government.

**Economic Consequence Frame**

*This frame addresses an event, problem, or issue in regards to the prospective economic consequences it will impose on relative actors. According to de Vreese (2009), the frame is primarily focused on “economic implications, considerations, and prospects’” (p. 190).*

Analysis of the overarching 2003-2012 sample frame revealed that the predominant economic consequence frame employed in coverage of Myanmar/Burma was one largely inseparable from the attribution of responsibility frame described above. In this regard, the country’s “impoverishment” is universally understood as a product of the former military’s economic mismanagement, corruption, and isolationist economic policies. Such attribution is
evident in the language commonly invoked within the coverage: “two decades of dictatorship and isolation that had driven the country to near economic collapse and dysfunction”; “an economy eroded by decades of inept leadership and corruption”; "centralized system"; “the country that lacks the most basic institutions”; “one of Asia's most impoverished countries”; “impoverished population”; “authoritarian country”; “rebuild a dysfunctional economy”; “Myanmar's financial system remains one of the most rudimentary in Asia”; "abysmal failures"; “old-style cronyism”; “poverty stricken country”; “the country's sheltered and dysfunctional economy”; “deeply impoverished Asian nation”; “abject poverty and stunning gaps between rich and poor”.

As illustrated in the preceding section, the U.S.-led economic sanctions imposed on the former government is attributed to the former military’s failure to guarantee the “human rights” of the population. Within this context, U.S.-led sanctions are uncritically presented as the overriding force for freedom and democracy in Myanmar/Burma. In invoking this attribution of responsibility frame, no responsibility is ever ascribed to either the legacy of colonialism, its influence on the country’s prevailing socio-economic difficulties, or the role of U.S. led-sanctions in cultivating the “impoverished” conditions faced by the population.

As described within the context of the conflict frame, the success of Thein Sein’s democratic reforms is commonly framed relative to the Obama administration’s engagement with the government, whereby initial steps toward reform were met with U.S. steps toward engagement, in turn fostering additional reforms: “With the promise of more financial assistance, Mr. Obama vowed to ‘support you every step of the way’…encouraging additional progress toward a more democratic system”…”The flickers of progress that we have seen must not be extinguished -- they must become a shining north star for all this nation's people” (Baker, 19
November, 2012). In this regard, Myanmar/Burma’s steps toward democratization are framed as inseparable from privatization, liberalization and entrance into the global economy: “[Clinton] called for American sanctions to be eased, saying that they had served their purpose” (Landler, 20 September, 2012); “[Clinton:] today we say to American business: Invest in Burma” (Myers, 18 May, 2012). “Progress” here is thus conceived through a deterministic morality frame, with open, free markets as the path toward the struggle for development and survival in the international system. Myanmar/Burma’s representation in turn suggests a particular symbolic significance within the context of the Obama administration’s “pivot” to Asia, as the country emerges as a “north star” to guide those nations still in the shadow of China.

**Exile Media Coverage: 2010-2012**

Given Myanmar/Burma’s exile media’s historically unique position relative to state and market forces, a comparative analysis of the different frames evoked by these and U.S. media in the coverage of Myanmar/Burma’s initial reform process seemingly affords a distinct capacity for drawing insight into the relationship between these media’s coverage and government and commercial interests. Accordingly, four, one week long sample time frames were purposely selected for their proximity to significant socio-political-economic events occurring within Myanmar/Burma between the broader January 1, 2011 through December 31, 2012 time frame. Individual exile media news articles appearing within these four time sets arose as the unit of analysis and were subsequently analyzed through an in-depth, qualitative reading of articles that included a deductive application of the aforementioned coding frame (see Appendix A).

September 28, 2011 through October 12, 2011 was chosen as the first sample frame for its incorporation of the Thein Sein government’s announcement of the suspension of the Myitsone Damn. Encompassing Hilary Clinton’s 2011 visit to the nation, November 29, 2011
through December 6, 2011 was selected as the second frame. Incorporating the country’s 2012 parliamentary elections, May 1, 2012 through May 8, 2012 arose as the third time frame. November 11, 2012 through November 25, 2012 arose as the fourth and final time frame as it encompassed President Obama’s 2012 “historic” visit to the country. The Myitsone Dam suspension was selected for both the relatively widespread global media attention it received, and correspondingly, its repetitiveness of a pivotal and unforeseen shift in Myanmar/Burma foreign relations. Similarly, the latter three events were selected for their representativeness of a seemingly pivotal shift in country’s foreign policy, Myanmar/Burma’ re-engagement with the United States. As these events garnered notable global media attention, they also provided a foundation for assessing the potential contrasts between the two samples.

Ninety articles were identified and coded (Irrawaddy = 37; Mizzima News = 30; Democratic Voice of Burma = 23). Predominant frames and themes were then subsequently qualitatively analyzed alongside the frequency of the initial frames and themes identified in the coding instrument and examined in relation to data derived from the two U.S. media sample sets. This data was in turn understood relative to predominant U.S. foreign affairs news framing literature and a content analysis of local English language newspapers, participant-observation of the nation’s contemporary national media landscape, interviews with the co-founders and senior editors of two of the three exile media, and relevant government documents, NGO reports, academic journals, books, and newspapers.

Conflict Frame

This frame attempts to capture audience attention by emphasizing conflict between groups, individuals, and institutions.
Armed Ethnic Conflict. A comparative analysis of the two data sets revealed significant discrepancies in the frequencies with which mainstream U.S. media and exile media invoked the five predominant frames. Specifically, while all five frames were overwhelmingly present in the former’s coverage, their presence varied significantly in the latter’s. Reflecting this pattern, the most frequent of the five frames, the conflict frame, was employed in only 63% of exile media coverage, compared with 98% in U.S. media coverage. Within this context, an ethnic conflict frame was again highly present, employed in 29% of all stories. While this frame arose in 51% of all U.S. media coverage, such coverage tended to be highly decontextualized, lacking both differentiation between particular ethnic groups and conflicts, and the socio-historical circumstances surrounding them. Conversely, exile media’s employment of the ethnic conflict frame arose in tandem with historically grounded discussions of relevant actors and events (i.e. Kaung, 20 September, 2011). Unlike their American counterparts, this contextual grounding frequently addressed both the influence of Myanmar/Burma’s colonial legacy, and the significance of the initial policies invoked by the Ne Win government following the 1962 military coup d’état. Additionally, while on-the-ground sources were notably absent in U.S. coverage of ‘ethnic conflicts’, they were highly present in exile media coverage. However, in this regard, while civilian and “official” “rebel” sources were readily cited, the coverage contained relatively few government and/or army sources outside of the Thein Sein cabinet. However, such findings were not surprising as domestic journalists have described an environment in which “officials still function under the psychology of military rule,” with the press largely shunned outside the office of the president (Crispin, 13 June, 2013).

Similar to mainstream U.S. media coverage, the ethnic conflict frame also emerged in two distinct manners, one focusing on armed conflict and the other on ethnic persecution. The
first, armed ethnic conflict frame, again primarily revolved around the armed struggles for autonomy between the government and Karen and Kachin “rebel” groups (i.e. Kaung, 28 September, 2011; Naing, 5 October, 2011; Phanida, 30 November, 2011; Irrawaddy, 4 May, 2012). Both conflicts appeared in 7% of the coverage. In this regard, particular attention was paid to continued human rights abuses by the military. Citing both officials from international human rights organizations and civilians, such frames were in turn embedded within a human interest frame built around a human rights narrative: i.e. “Kachin IDPs ‘Suffering Food Shortage, Disease’”; “‘compelling evidence’ of human rights violations committed by the Burmese military”; “Kachin and other groups continue to endure heinous human rights violations at the hands of the Burmese army”; “Various NGOs and some government aid agencies are concerned that the Burmese army is fueling a humanitarian catastrophe”; “BA [Burma Army] units continue to debilitate Karen villages through forced relocations and the supply cutoff”” (Allchin, 30 November, 2011). However, while coverage continually centered on armed struggle in the case of the Kachin conflict, coverage of the Karen conflict increasingly emphasized government “ceasefire agreements with key ethnic armed groups including Karen, Shan, Mon, Karenni and Chin rebels” (Irrawaddy, 8 May, 2012).

The Kachin conflict was in turn framed around the escalation of fighting between the Burmese Army and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) following “the collapse of a 17-year ceasefire agreement between the two sides in June when fighting broke out near Chinese-built hydropower plants in Bhamo Township of Kachin State” (Kaung, 28 September, 2011). This renewed violence followed the Karen Independence Organization’s rejection of the Thein Sein administration’s “Border Guard Force” proposal, which seeks to incorporate the nation’s numerous armed ethnic groups into a unified border guard force. These events were
consequently understood relative to the Myitsone Dam project and corresponding political-economic relationship between Myanmar/Burma’s and China’s governments.

According to the *Irrawaddy* (Htut, 30 September, 2011), the origins of the Myitsone Dam project derived from a 2005 meeting between former Burmese Senior General Than Shwe and Chinese President Hu Jintao in which Than Shwe agreed to sell the electricity produced by the hydro-power plant to China. While “many top generals” were reportedly unsatisfied with the agreement and the forecasted negative impacts of the dam, the former military government faced mounting pressure from the Chinese government to begin construction of the project. Then in 2009, Than Shwe “had to allow a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the implementation of the dam project to be signed following the regime’s military offensive against the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDA), the Kokang group led by Peng Jiasheng”.

According to Htut (30 September, 2011), “Chinese authorities frequently requested the regime not to use violent means in dealing with the ethnic armed groups based on the Sino-Burmese border, but it attacked the MNDA for not agreeing to its proposed Border Guard Force plan.” The attack, which “resulted in the exodus of tens of thousands of refugees from Burma to China”, “caused serious tension between the two countries, as Beijing was reportedly furious with the regime for not respecting its request and informally suggested that it would reconsider its support for Naypyidaw in the international arena”. In order “to ease the situation”, the former Burmese government signed MoUs on three projects, including an oil and gas pipeline project with China National Petroleum Corporation, and the Myitsone Dam project. Protesting the forced resettlement of dozens of villages in the Kachin state, the KIO reportedly urged the Chinese government to withdraw investment in the project, threatening Beijing with the onset of civil war (Kaung, 28 September, 2011). Consequently, coverage of the resurgence of the Kachin
conflict in 2011 was understood relative to the Border Guard Force Plan and the Myitsone Dam project, both of which emerged within a broader China-Myanmar/Burma economic consequence and conflict frame.

**Ethnic Persecution.** Also emerging within the broader ethnic conflict frame was an *ethnic persecution* frame surrounding an escalation of conflict between Myanmar/Burma’s Buddhist majority and the country’s Rohingya Muslim minority. Appearing within 8% of the coverage, this particular conflict frame also arose alongside a human rights, human interest frame (Mann, 1 May, 2011; Hindstrom, 8 May, 2012; Democratic Voice of Burma, 19 November, 2012). Like U.S. media coverage, vocabulary used to describe the “plight” of Myanmar/Burma’s Rohingya population routinely evoked compassion and sympathy (i.e. “urgent humanitarian needs”; “critical assistance… urgently required”; “victims of the sectarian violence” (Mizzima News, 20 November, 2012). While U.S. media coverage also invoked a human rights-based frame in their coverage of the Rohingya conflict, exile media coverage had greater inclusion of both historical context and on-the-ground civilian sources from both sides of the conflict.

Furthermore, while *New York Times* and *USA Today* coverage attributed responsibility for the conflict primarily to “Buddhist extremists”, and to a lesser extent to governmental policies towards Rohingya, within exile media coverage responsibility for the conflict was also placed on the United Nations and Aung San Suu Kyi. Notably, drawing upon interviews with Rohingya “protesters”, coverage highlighted the UN’s failure to acknowledge Rohingyas as refugees: “Rohingyas in India Demand Full Refugee Status” (Mann, 1 May, 2012). Furthermore, while Aung San Suu Kyi was rarely mentioned or criticized in relation to the Rohingya situation in mainstream U.S. media, exile media coverage contained both explicit and implicit criticism of
the Nobel laureate: i.e. “Bangladesh Slams Suu Kyi’s Comments on Rohingya” (Democratic Voice of Burma, 19 November, 2012); “Nobel Laureates Call for End to Rakhine Violence” (Mizzima News, 19 November, 2012).

**Government-Population.** As discussed in the preceding sections, while there existed a longstanding tendency within mainstream U.S. media to understand Myanmar/Burma’s socio-political context within a broader human rights-based conflict frame positioning the population against the government, the prevalence of this frame eroded with the onset of American engagement. Conversely, analysis of exile media coverage revealed an enduring tendency to understand issues, actors, and events within a broader *government-population conflict*, though one not centered on U.S. foreign policy. Reflecting this pattern, 43% of all exile media stories contained criticism of the current government. In addition to military and government actions toward ethnic minorities, this criticism predominantly surrounded *political prisoners, censorship*, and *land confiscation*.

Criticism surrounding *political prisoners* primarily revolved around the Thein Sein government’s release of around 20,000 prisoners in May, 2011. In this regard, citing human rights NGOs, activists, and NLD spokesmen, attention was paid to arguments that, of the 20,000 released, “only a few political prisoners were among them” (Te, 30 September, 2011; Jha, 28 September, 2011; Noreen, 5 October, 2011; Hindstrom, 19 November, 2012). Such criticism was particularly present leading up to Hillary Clinton’s visit to the country in November 2011 (Allchin, 30 November, 2011) and Obama’s visit in November 2012 (Hindstrom, 19 November, 2012). Furthermore, while discussion of amnesty for Myanmar/Burma’s political prisoners was embedded within human interest frames surrounding President Thein Sein, Aung San Suu Kyi, Secretary Clinton, and President Obama within American media, exile media coverage of
political prisoners more frequently arose through human interest frames centered on the prisoners themselves: i.e. “The family of imprisoned comedian Zarganar is allowed once more to pay him visits following a lengthy ban…Zarganar, who had been publicly critical of the former junta, particularly its lax response to Cyclone Nargis in 2008, has not been allowed to receive visitors for nearly 18 months” (Forbes, 28 September, 2011). Relative to mainstream U.S. media, such framing suggests that Myanmar/Burma’s former exile media may serve as a more notable and enduring force for government accountability.

This argument gains particular traction when analyzing the exile media data set more broadly. Analysis revealed a persistent pattern of positioning American engagement in relation to evidence of persisting patterns of human rights abuses by the current government. Exemplifying such tendencies is coverage of criticism of the International Crisis Group (ICG) by the Global Justice Center amid the government’s initial steps toward the West: “the Global Justice Center called on the ICG to stop supporting unconditional engagement with Burma’s military rulers”; “the new Burmese government’ is illegal because it is based on a constitution mandating a bifurcated sovereignty, a fundamental breach of the law of nations”; “Burma’s civil war continues and is marked by heinous crimes of genocide by the military against the Kachin, Karen, Shan and other ethnic groups”; “The military’s war crimes, in particular the use of child soldiers and rape as a weapon of war, remain unabated, in spite of the UN Security Council’s denouncement thereof” (Naing, 29 September, 2011). While such coverage predates a number of significant reforms implemented by the Thein Sein government, unlike USA Today and New York Times coverage, similar criticisms are consistently present throughout the reform process that led up to President Obama’s November 2012 visit,

NGOs and international rights groups such as Human Rights Watch have, however, accused Burma’s security forces of involvement in a litany of human rights abuses in Rakhine State—primarily against
Rohingyas and other Muslims—including killings, torture, sexual violence against women, and looting (Mizzima News, 20 November, 2012).

In addition to political prisoners, employment of the government-population conflict frame also reveals similar patterns with regard to media censorship and land confiscation. While highlighting the relaxation of traditional censorship mechanisms following Hillary’s 2012 visit, coverage of the onset of such media freedoms was nonetheless framed in relation to media rights groups’ reports “that Burma still holds journalists and bloggers, including 17 video journalists, in prison” (Democratic Voice of Burma, 6 December, 2011). Similarly, throughout the initial implementation of media reforms beginning in 2011, and corresponding promises regarding the abolition of media censorship, unlike their American media counterparts, exile media continued to place emphasis on the necessity for continued and enduring media reform: i.e. “Burma Still among World’s Worst for Press Freedom” (Campbell, 2 May, 2012); “Censor bans reports of VP’s Resignation” (The Irrawaddy, 8 May, 2012).

Similar efforts toward government accountability can also be seen as arising within exile media’s coverage of governmental land seizures (Thar, 4 May, 2012; Schearf, 7 May, 2012; Nai, 7 May, 2012; The Irrawaddy, 21 November, 2012). As Schearf (7 May, 2012) notes, “one of the most lucrative foreign-funded development projects in the country’s history” is the construction of an oil and gas pipeline that “will stretch from Burma’s west coast to its northeast border and into energy-hungry China”, a project that has raised numerous “complaints” among local citizens. While touted as bringing “several million dollars to build new health clinics, wells, and schools”, the economic interests driving this development were also presented as pushing out Burmese commercial competition and leading to the government confiscation of local farmer’s land. Although in part blamed on growing Chinese commercial interests, in turn culminating in
growing anti-Chinese sentiment, much like political prisoners and media censorship, emphasis on responsibility for the infringement of such ‘rights’ was largely placed on the government,

The government will take their land and continue pipeline construction whether they agree to it or not,” he said. “That is why they try to be content with the compensation. Nobody wants to give up their land.”

(Schearf, 7 May, 2012)

Ultimately, such attribution underpinned coverage of land confiscation more broadly, i.e.

“Massive Land Confiscation for Copper Mine” (Thar, 4 May, 2012),

Over 7,800 acres of farmland in Salingyi Township, Sagaing Division, has been confiscated for a copper mine project with landowners forced out of their villages, according to local sources…Farmers also said that they were only given a small amount of compensation for their property as, according to company officials and local authorities, their lands are actually owned by the state and the confiscation was carried out by presidential order.

Similarly, in “About 30,000 Acres Lost to Shweli Dam Projects” (Kha, 30 November, 2011), attention was paid to the “displacement of 30,000 acres of arable lands” by two hydropower dam projects. Sponsored by both Chinese and Swiss companies, concerns surrounding such projects may be seen as reflecting broader concerns regarding Myanmar/Burma’s steps toward privatization, including fears that the benefits derived from liberalization processes will not only fail to reach Myanmar/Burma’s citizens (particularly in rural areas), but may exacerbate existing inequalities.

This land seizure conflict frame ultimately emerges alongside an economic consequence frame. However, unlike the economic consequence frames addressed in the preceding section, which positioned adverse Chinese commercial economic interests against the unfettered benefits of liberalization brought about through steps toward the West, coverage of land confiscation frequently employed an economic consequence frame criticizing unbridled investment more broadly. Within this context, while coverage contained a notable degree of criticism of Chinese
economic interests (Schearf, 7 May, 2012), this corresponded to a greater emphasis on the government’s failure to ensure the rights of the population amid a growing influx of international capital more generally (Kha, 30 November, 2011; Thar, 4 May, 2012; The Irrawaddy, 21 November, 2012). Inevitably, like the ethnic conflict frame, analysis of the economic consequence frames underlying land confiscation coverage alludes to the presence of a Myanmar/Burma-China conflict frame, one pertaining to the adverse environmental imprint and growing anti-Chinese sentiment brought about by the growing commercial presence of “energy-hungry China”.

**China Conflict.** As discussed above, reflecting similar patterns found within the U.S. media data set, analysis of exile media coverage revealed the presence of a Myanmar/Burma-China conflict frame. Furthermore, like American media coverage, this frame was found to be significantly tied to an economic consequence frame. Most notably, while the Myitsone Dam was presented as a source for an escalation in armed ethnic conflict between government and KIA forces, it was also presented as a significant source of anti-Chinese sentiment, raising outspoken public protests over the negative environmental impacts of increasing Chinese commercial investment (Forbes, 28 September, 2011; Mizzima News, 30 September, 2011).

Such a frame is reflective of that found in mainstream U.S. media coverage. However, analysis revealed that relative to *New York Times* and *USA Today* coverage, exile media coverage of the Myitsone Dam suspension was negligible. Furthermore, while notable attention was paid to the negative implications resulting from expanding Chinese economic interests, unlike mainstream U.S. media coverage, such coverage was not positioned in relation to the socio-economic benefits derived from liberalization and engagement with the West. Rather, the
loci of concern pertained to the government’s failures to ensure the ‘rights’ of citizens and guarantee the relationship between government’s reform efforts and the ‘public good’.

**Attribution of Responsibility Frame**

*This frame attributes responsibility for causes and solutions to problems to either the government, individuals, or groups.*

As indicated above, reflecting a similar pattern revealed by the analysis of the American media data set, all of the four other dominant frames overwhelmingly emerged alongside the conflict frame. Most notably, as in the case of political prisoners, media censorship, and land confiscation, responsibility for conflicts (present in 53% of the coverage) was predominantly attributed to the government. However, a comparative analysis of the two data sets revealed a stark contrast in the manner in which this frame was employed. Specifically, within *USA Today* and *New York Times* coverage, the longstanding dominant *government-population conflict frame* increasingly eroded in the aftermath of the 2010 elections, in turn giving rise to both a *China conflict frame* and a *Thein Sein human interest frame* centered around a *democratization-liberalization morality frame*. In contrast, exile media coverage continued to attribute responsibility for arising conflicts to the current government. As reflected by the frequent use of such terminology as “nominally civilian government”, “nominally civilian rulers” and “newly ‘elected’ Burmese president”, the Thein Sein government was not framed as entirely inseparable from the previous military government.

Furthermore, while analysis of both mainstream U.S. media and exile media revealed the presence of a *China conflict frame* inherently tied to the Myitsone Dam project, this frame also manifested itself in two significantly different ways. Within *New York Times* and *USA Today* coverage, Thein Sein’s suspension of the Myitsone Dam was framed as both the onset of a rift
between Myanmar/Burma and China, and the catalyst for subsequent U.S. engagement. In this regard, the suspension of the dam served to position Myanmar/Burma in the middle of a broader geopolitical, ideological conflict between the U.S. and China. Conversely, while the suspension of the Myitsone dam was presented as signifying a notable break in the political-economic relationship between Myanmar/Burma and China in exile media coverage, it was not depicted as the driving force behind the détente between Washington and Naypyidaw. Rather, increasing U.S. and western engagement was framed as the product of a series of reforms implemented by the Thein Sein government, reforms described by western actors as facilitating the human rights conditions necessary for the ensuing suspension of economic sanctions. While such reforms, notably amnesty for political prisoners and the easing of media censorship, were largely uncritically heralded in American media, exile media coverage continued to exert pressure on the government in these areas.

Consequently, where Myanmar/Burma’s political transformation was inherently linked to an economic consequence frame embedded within a broader China-U.S. conflict frame in U.S. media, in exile media coverage, such processes continued to be understood within a government-population conflict frame that continued to attribute responsibility for the country’s unfolding conflicts to the current and former political elite. This frame was in turn embedded in a broader human rights, human interest frame. However, as evident by both the notable absence of discussion of western economic sanctions within the coverage, and the enduring government responsibility frame amid the government’s engagement with the West, the “protector” narrative long inherent to American media coverage of Myanmar/Burma remained notably absent.

**Human Interest Frame**
By putting a human face or emotional dimension on an issue, event, or problem, such frames are efforts to personalize and dramatize news stories.

Aung San Suu Kyi. Examination of mainstream U.S. media coverage of Myanmar/Burma from 2003-2012 found the persisting presence of an Aung San Suu Kyi human interest frame. As discussed above, long emerging alongside a government-population conflict frame, a human rights human interest frame, and a U.S. “protectionist” frame inherently tied an economic consequence frame, this particular human interest frame was built around rhetoric iconizing the political opposition leader. Following the 2010 election, there was a notable shift away from attention to human rights issues toward an overwhelming tendency to understand issues, actors, and events relative to the nation’s political reforms. This frame was in turn invoked within a broader morality frame surrounding particular prescriptions regarding appropriate social, political, and economic development. The ascension of this morality/democracy frame in turn coincided with the rise of a human interest frame centered on President Thein Sein.

However, while a human interest frame was used within 89% of USA Today and New York Times stories, it was only employed in 47% of exile media coverage. This can in turn be seen as indicative of the significant difference in the manner in which the human interest frame arose within the two data sets. Specifically, the human interest frames surrounding President Thein Sein and Aung San Suu Kyi were notably absent in exile media coverage. Alluding to the widespread presence of an Aung San Suu Kyi human interest frame, 70% of U.S. media articles referenced the political opposition leader, overwhelmingly alongside iconizing language and a personal narrative evoking sympathy and compassion. Conversely, only 17% of exile media stories made reference to Aung San Suu Kyi. Whereas Suu Kyi’s personal narrative was
routinely evoked as a way in which to contextualize Myanmar/Burma’s broader struggle for democracy, exile media coverage of the opposition party leader predominantly focused on specific actions undertaken by her within the country’s political arena, such as ethnic peace negotiations and her outspoken opposition to the Myitsone Dam project. Furthermore, unlike American coverage, the National League for Democracy was referenced (15%) nearly as frequently as Aung San Suu Kyi, thus suggesting that this coverage did not serve to eclipse the main opposition party as it did in the other data sample.

Then Sein Frame. Similarly, while Thein Sein was referenced in 64% of American media coverage, he was only mentioned in 30% of exile media stories. However, reflecting a pattern found in U.S. media, where Thein Sein’s Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) was referred to in just 6% of coverage, the USDP was referenced in only 3% of exile media stories. As the USDP is the military-backed ruling party comprised of many former military officials, its absence in exile coverage may derive from popular perceptions that it merely represents an extension of military elite interests (Lewis, 13 August, 2015). Nevertheless, unlike U.S. media, the 30% of stories referencing the President (and party leader) did not do so within a human interest framework. Rather, coverage of the president and/or his administration mainly pertained to government policies and government statements surrounding pertinent issues and events.

Such patterns can in part be attributed to the media’s over emphasis on administration sources due to a lack of access to many government officials who remain wary of the news media’s transforming role within the country (Crispin, 13 June, 2013). Statements made by Thein Sein and/or an administration spokesman were cited in 17% of coverage. While Burmese government sources (including Thein Sein’s administration) were present within 32% of all
stories, a significant proportion of these sources represented statements made by Aung San Suu Kyi, NLD officials, or ethnic political party officials following their entrance into parliament after the country’s by-elections in 2012. Ultimately, analysis of exile media coverage of the president found that such media held a significantly greater propensity to be critical of the reform process than U.S. media. Within this context, unlike coverage in the latter, exile coverage of the reforms were not framed as a product of the president’s moral transformation, but as concerted government efforts seeking the removal of economic sanctions.

‘Impoverished’ Population Frame. Although often present with respect to coverage of the country’s ethnic populations, also relatively absent in the coverage was the “impoverished” population frame, a frame so readily invoked in U.S. coverage. In this regard, unlike U.S. media that tended to frame Myanmar/Burma’s population as ‘victims’ of a highly oppressive government, thus in need of ‘protection’ by a U.S.-led international ‘community’, the human interest frames employed by exile media generally surrounded narratives of personal agency and struggles of defiance against undemocratic governmental policies (Kaung, 20 September, 2011; Forbes, 28 September, 2011; Noreen, 5 October, 2011; Thar, 4 May, 2012; Nai, 7 May, 2012; Weng, 8 May, 2012). As discussed above, within this context, common human rights-based human interest themes included those pertaining to political prisoners, land confiscation, and ethnic persecution. To a lesser extent, additional themes also included personalized stories pertaining to child soldiers (i.e. “Teenager Seeks Protection after Deserting Army”), pro-democracy leaders (“Ageing Tin Oo Bows Out of Elections”), corruption (“Tay Za’s Son Wins EU Sanctions Appeal”), adverse health conditions faced by the country’s ethnic populations (“Hundreds Hit by Dysentery in Mandalay”), a November 2012 earthquake (“Quake Clean-up Operation Begins”), and remembrance of the 2007 ‘Saffron Revolution’ (“Marchers in Thailand
remember the ‘Saffron Revolution’”) (Nyi, 8 May, 2012; Aung, 6 December, 2011; Roughneen 5 December, 2011; Aung, 29 September, 2011; Weng, 14 November, 2012; Forbes, 28 September, 2011).

**President Obama & Secretary Clinton Frames.** While former exile coverage of both Secretary Clinton’s and President Obama’s visits emerged within personalized human interest frames, i.e. (“Clinton Fever Hits Burmese Readers”; “Amid Euphoria, Ethnic MPs Slam Obama’s Speech”), this coverage also arose alongside criticism of both the degree and sustainability of the government’s ongoing reform efforts, and a critique of rapid western engagement (and the motivations and interests underlying them) (Irrawaddy, 6 December, 2011; Irrawaddy, 21 November, 2012). Exemplifying such criticisms is coverage of Obama’s “landmark” 2012 speech at Yangon University:

Zo Zam, the chairman of the Chin National Party, said that he expected so much more from Obama’s speech but was left bored and disappointed. He concluded that the president’s visit was only about American interests and not helping Burma’s ethnic groups gain greater autonomy...In his public remarks, he praised the work of one political party. But now our country is using a multi-party system. Why does he praise one party? He gave us a general democracy lecture. Finally, I know why Obama came to Burma,” he added. (Irrawaddy, 21 November, 2012)

The absence of the Aung San Suu Kyi and Thein Sein human interest frames within exile media coverage ultimately reflects the degree to which these media were far more likely to be critical of the reform process than U.S. media. Specifically, U.S. media coverage cultivated and perpetuated familial, heroic, and ‘damsel in distress’ narratives that both negated the complexity of socio-political realities, and served to reinforce U.S. foreign policy interests. Notably, unlike American media, exile media coverage did not frame Myanmar/Burma’s political-economic
reforms as a product of the president’s moral transformation, but as concerted government efforts seeking the removal of economic sanctions.

Conversely, U.S. coverage of the country’s socio-political context frequently arose alongside Aung San Suu Kyi’s personal and political narrative, serving as a symbolic representation of the population’s struggle for democracy. Suu Kyi (and the besieged population) in turn emerged as a ‘damsel in distress’, and the personification of freedom and democracy more broadly, beset by irrational, authoritarian forces. This narrative ultimately perpetuated a “protectionist metaphor” that positioned the U.S. as the global defender of democracy and freedom. Such “protection” was ultimately predicated on U.S.-led sanctions. As analysis of exile media coverage revealed, rather than embodying an overriding concern for political reform, sanctions against Myanmar/Burma were predicated on an attempt at fostering economic liberalization and privatization. Consequently, a comparative analysis of the two sample sets revealed that the framing of U.S. support for Myanmar/Burma’s democracy movement served to obscure the perpetuation of neoliberal principals touting “free” trade and the deregulation of global markets.

Archetype Metaphor. According to Osborn (1967), due to their “persuasive potency” resulting from their embodiment of primitive human motivation, the invocation of “archetypal metaphors” is frequently employed as a means of reaching the greatest part of an audience. Archetypal metaphors are foregrounded in the salient, essential features of human experience consciousness. The “universality of their appeal” derives not merely from their seemingly limitless capacity for “figurative association,” but from their cross-cultural and timeless immunity (p. 116). Proceedingly, the use of Aung San Suu Kyi’s personal narrative in
mainstream U.S. media coverage is perhaps best understood as an “architype metaphor” for the country’s wider socio—political context.

Osborn identifies four sources of archetypal metaphor “related by their affinity in nature and by their sharing of a basic motivational grounding”: light and darkness, the sun, heat and cold, and the cycle of the seasons. “Light (and the day) relates to the fundamental struggle for survival and development.” Light serves as a condition seeing, that vital sensory capability that provides humans with the very possibility for processing their environment and the dangers and rewards inherent within it. Sight allows for the potential to exert influence over nature. Light also embodies the warmth and nurturing power of the sun, that which lends most vitally to physical development. By contrast, darkness (and night) serves as the personification of fear of the unknown, the absence of sight, and thus ignorance to one’s environment. Darkness renders one vulnerable to dangers and blind to potential rewards. “Darkness is cold, suggesting stagnation and thoughts of the grave” (p. 117).

Within the Aung San Suu Kyi human interest frame, the “leader of the country’s pro-democracy movement’s” “better part of two decades under house arrest” following the former military government’s nullification of “her party’s” “landslide election victory in 1990” is readily referenced. In this regard, Suu Kyi’s isolation by the hands of the country’s military generals serves as a symbolic representation of the country’s own “decades of isolation” under years of “the junta’s oppressive policies and hermetic attitudes towards the outside world” (Myers & Fuller, 7 October, 2011). As illustrated by the language used in such descriptions, both narratives invoke a light-dark metaphor. This is perhaps most evident with respect to the latter, in which language describing the country’s successive military governments mirrors language
commonly invoked to denote state ideologies emerging in opposition to those of advanced western democracies.

At the dawn of the Cold War, Winston Churchill forever engrained the “iron curtain” metaphor into the mental frames employed by Americans in their understandings of the binary ideological struggle that would ensue over the following four decades. Since that time, this metaphor has permeated itself within the frames employed by political elites and news media to structure public interpretations of all subsequent ideological conflicts. Most notably, contemporary rhetoric used to describe authoritarian governments commonly embodies a container analogy, whereby a society is understood as either “open” or “closed”. Such an analogy is highly apparent in coverage of Myanmar/Burma amid the country’s reform process (i.e. Mydans, 13 October, 2011; Fuller, 18 November, 2011; Fuller & Landler, 19 November, 2011; 2 December, 2011). According to President Obama, “after years of darkness, we’ve seen flickers of progress in these last several weeks” (Fuller, 19 November, 2011). Epitomizing this analogy is the manner in which Thein Sein’s policies were framed as a product of his personal moral transformation,

According to one of the president's advisers…Thein Sein realized that the country could no longer ignore the world around it. "The president was convinced about the global situation; he saw where the global stream was heading," (New York Times, 30 November, 2011)

This narrative, in which Thein Sein is framed as ‘seeing the light’ brought about by membership within the international community, ultimately arises as a metaphor for the country’s military-elite’s moral transformation broadly. In doing so, this morality frame serves to disassociate the current government from the ‘sins of its past’ despite the “elite continuity” (Sparks, 2007) between governments. Readily embraced by the Obama administration as a foundation for American engagement, this frame also served to alleviate the U.S. of moral
responsibility for supporting a government that includes many of those same individuals readily characterized as formerly comprising “one of the world's most repressive governments”. Instead, as Baker (19 November, 2012) describes, “Mr. Obama was eager to claim a measure of credit. He has played nursemaid to the opening of Myanmar…noting that in his inaugural address he had vowed to reach out to those 'willing to unclench your fist.”’ Correspondingly, statements made by then Secretary of State Hilary Clinton allude to the framing of the United States’ as the torchbearer of freedom worldwide,

"There are no guarantees about what lies ahead for the people of Burma, but after a day responding to a brutal dictator in Syria, who would rather destroy his own country than let it move toward freedom, it is heartening to be reminded that even the most repressive regime can reform and even the most closed society can open.” (Fuller, 2 April, 2012)

**Morality Frame**

*This frame puts the problem, issues, or event in the context of religious principles or moral prescriptions.*

As noted above, proceeding the country’s 2010 national election, a long prevalent *human rights morality* frame gradually eroded in *New York Times* and *USA Today* coverage. Coinciding with the rise of a human interest frame centered on President Thein Sein and his reform efforts, in its place emerged a *liberalization morality frame* that framed the country’s reform efforts relative to a specific set of prescriptions regarding the correct path toward socio-economic development. In this regard, 96% of mainstream U.S. media coverage of Myanmar/Burma framed a problem, issue, or event in the context of moral prescriptions. This largely emerged with regard to reference to democratic principles (92%). While initially arising within a conflict frame positioning these ideals against authoritarian forces, this frame increasingly surrounded parallel processes of democratization and economic liberalization.
Alternatively, only 64% of exile media stories invoked a *morality frame*. Largely consistent throughout the coverage, this frame principally pertained to *human rights* (present in 47% of the coverage). While such frames were often inherently tied to *democratic principles* (present in 34% of the coverage), notably media freedoms (Irrawaddy, 6 December, 2011; Campbell, 2 May, 2012; Lwin, 4 May, 2012; The Irrawaddy, 8 May, 2012), political activism, and political prisoners (Forbes, 28 September, 2011; Noreen, 5 October, 2011; Hindstrom, 19 November, 2012), these themes did not generally emerge within an economic consequence frame. Exceptions to this included coverage of Aung San Suu Kyi’s calls for “‘sustainable aid’ as [the country] embarks on a tentative transition to democracy” (Democratic Voice of Burma, 7 May, 2012), and the allocation of economic aid by the EU for “poverty reduction” (Htwe, 2 May, 2012).

Furthermore, as discussed in the preceding section, analysis of U.S. media coverage revealed the presence of an underlying morality frame tied to the “War on Terror”. Within this context, Myanmar/Burma’s former military “junta” was positioned within the “axis of evil”, in turn reinforcing a prevailing moral foundation underpinning U.S. foreign policy prerogatives. This narrative was in part built around White House accusations that the former government was pursuing the development of nuclear technologies through its ties with North Korea (Myers, 1 December, 2011; Myers, 30 November, 2011; Myers, 2 December, 2011; New York Times, 10 December, 2011; New York Times, 16 May, 2012). While exile media coverage surrounding Secretary Clinton’s and President Obama’s visits to the country reflected these assertions (Kelley, 29 September, 2011; Tun Tun, 5 December, 2011; Democratic Voice of Burma, 19 November, 2012; Mizzima News, 21 November, 2012), this coverage also served to cast doubt on such claims, i.e. “*U.S. Welcomes Burma’s Decision to Cut Military Ties with North Korea*”: 
Lower House speaker and former military leader No. 3, Thura Shwe Mann, said Burma had military ties with North Korea, but he denied it had tried to get North Korean nuclear technology. “Some allegations said that some officials including me went there and signed an agreement regarding nuclear aid. That’s not true,” Thura Shwe Mann said in a press conference in Naypyitaw on Thursday. He said that to promote Burma’s defense system, Burma signed a military cooperation agreement with North Korea, and he observed North Korea’s defense systems against air attacks, its ammunition plants and air force and navy operations. “The U.S. has a very good intelligence system. It has not only people intelligence but also intelligence satellites. When I went to North Korea as a general in the past, the U.S. knew about it. It knows what we were doing,” he said. (Tun Tun, 5 December, 2011)

Based on analysis of the preceding three frames, exile media coverage appears to demonstrate a much higher propensity to criticize governmental policies following the 2010 election than the American media examined in this investigation. However, while the validity of the Obama administration’s claims that the former government was pursuing ‘weapons of mass destruction’ is unchallenged in U.S. media, the invalidity of the claim is alluded to in exile coverage. Consequently, a comparative analysis of the manner in which Myanmar/Burma’s ‘nuclear issue’ was framed in the two data sets reinforces existing evidence that mainstream U.S. media aligned themselves with the dominant narrative that propelled post-9/11 U.S. foreign policy, just as they had, mistakenly, with respect to WMD claims in Iraq and Iran, while ignoring or downplaying the dangers of a nuclear India and Pakistan.

As discussed above, the Obama administration has embarked on a conscious effort to redefine America’s role within the ‘international community’. Part of this shift was an explicit attempt to rebrand the “Global War on Terror” (Wilson & Kamen, 2009). Consequently, heralding the role of U.S. support for Myanmar/Burma’s “fledgling democracy” (Fuller, 22 May, 2012) as the source of the government’s termination of both ties to North Korea and its pursuit of nuclear technology can be seen as an attempt by the Obama administration to re-frame the “War
on Terror” as a victory. Remarks made by President Obama during his “historic” speech at Yangon University on 19 November, 2012 seemingly reflect such an assertion,

When I took office as President, I sent a message to those governments who ruled by fear. I said, in my inauguration address, “We will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist.” And over the last year and a half, a dramatic transition has begun, as a dictatorship of five decades has loosened its grip. A civilian now leads the government, and a parliament is asserting itself. The once-outlawed National League for Democracy stood in an election, and Aung San Suu Kyi is a Member of Parliament. Hundreds of prisoners of conscience have been released, and forced labor has been banned. Preliminary cease-fires have been reached with ethnic armies, and new laws allow for a more open economy. So today, I’ve come to keep my promise and extend the hand of friendship. America now has an Ambassador in Rangoon, sanctions have been eased, and we will help rebuild an economy that can offer opportunity for its people, and serve as an engine of growth for the world.

As the repeated reference to Obama’s metaphorical description of Myanmar/Burma as a symbol of light frame (Fuller, 18 November, 2011; Fuller, 19 November, 2011; Fuller & Landler, 19 November, 2011; Myers, 30 November, 2011; Myers, 1 December, 2011), “a shining north star” (Baker, 19 November, 2012) indicates, this frame was in turn adopted by mainstream U.S. media. As this frame serves to vindicate post-9/11 U.S. unilateral action abroad, it may be seen as a construction of a broader morality frame, one not present in exile media coverage.

**Economic Consequence Frame**

*This frame addresses an event, problem, or issue in regards to the prospective economic consequences it will impose on relative actors.*

As illustrated in the preceding section, mainstream U.S. media uncritically presented U.S.-led sanctions against Myanmar/Burma as the driving force for political change in the country. While the emergence of a Thein Sein human interest frame served to individualize and personalize the reform efforts, his actions were principally presented as an attempt toward the
removal of western sanctions. As the suspension of the Myitsone Dam project, and the corresponding break in relations between Naypyidaw and Beijing, was largely framed as the catalyst for U.S. engagement, within the context of American coverage, democratization did not arise as the driving motivation behind Myanmar/Burma’s political transformation. Furthermore, given the “nascent” stage of the nation’s reforms (Fuller, 1 October, 2011; Myers & Fuller, 7 October, 2011; Myers, 2 December, 2011; Myers, 3 December, 2011; Myers & Mydans, 14 January, 2012; Myers, 18 May, 2012; Fuller, 28 August, 2012), and the persisting evidence of human rights violations by the government (Naing, 29 September, 2011), the presence of democracy cannot be said to be the preeminent measure of assessment for the rapid lifting of the sanctions following the initial reforms. Rather, analysis of the overall sample revealed that the changing political processes underway were presented within an economic consequence frame in which privatization and economic liberalization arose as democracy’s prerequisite.

I’m very fond of the army because I’ve always thought of it as my father’s army…people criticize me for saying that but I have to say that this is the truth, I am fond of the army…this is something entrenched in my being. I was taught that my father was the father of the army and that all soldiers were his sons and that they were part of my family….It’s terrible what they’ve done, and I don’t like what they’ve done at all, but if you love somebody I think you love her or him in spite of not because of and you always look forward to a time when they will be able to redeem themselves (Young, 2013).

Alternatively, analysis of the exile media data set did not reveal the presence of an overriding economic consequence frame. While 80% of U.S. media stories directly invoked an economic consequence frame, the frame was found in only 36% of exile media stories. Furthermore, as alluded to above, the framing of economic sanctions played a significant role in the construction of all five frames within the American news coverage. However, whereas 45% of all American media stories referred to economic sanctions against the Burmese government,
they were referenced in just 7% of exile media coverage (Te Te, 30 September, 2011; Tun Tun, 5 December, 2011; Roughneed, 5 December; Htwe, 2 May, 2011; Thar, 4 May, 2012; Mizzima News, 8 May, 2012). Nevertheless, analysis of the previous four frames did reveal various reoccurring themes within the 36% of articles evoking the economic consequence frame including, *Chinese economic interest, international investment, regional trade,* and *humanitarian aid.*

In terms of Chinese economic interests, while 16% of *New York Times* and *USA Today* articles referenced the coverage of the Myitsone Dam, it was mentioned in only 4% of exile media stories, all of which appeared following the government’s announcement of the project’s suspension (Forbes, 28 September, 2011; Kaung, 28 September, 2011; Htut, 30 September, 2011; Mizzima News, 30 September). Such discrepancies indicate the different manner in which the economic consequence frame emerged in the two sample sets. Specifically, the high degree of reference to the dam reinforces findings of a U.S.-China conflict frame foregrounding such coverage. Correspondingly, while 30% of U.S. coverage directly referred to Chinese economic investment, it was discussed in only 13% of exile media stories.

Within this context, while notable attention was paid to the negative implications resulting from expanding Chinese economic interests, unlike mainstream U.S. media coverage, such coverage was not positioned in direct relation to the socio-economic benefits derived from liberalization and engagement with the West. Rather, the loci of concern pertained to the government’s failures to ensure adequate environmental protections, the ‘rights’ of the population, and protection against the potential exacerbation of inequalities brought about by an influx of international investment (Htut, 30 September, 2011; Forbes, 28 September, 2011; Kha,
TOWARDS A RE-DISCOVERY OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE


Interviews with Myanmar/Burma’s Exile Media

In August 2012 Myanmar/Burma’s government abolished the pre-publication censorship brought about by the 1962 Printers’ and Publishers Registration Act, along with the country’s censorship organ, the Press Security Board (PSB) (Crispin, 13 June, 2013). According to an interview with Democratic Voice of Burma’s (DVB) senior bureau chief Toe Zaw Latt, since that time “Myanmar/Burma’s media landscape has changed very rapidly” (Latt, personal communication, 23 October, 2014). In the wake of these media reforms, which have included the lifting of a longstanding ban on daily papers, there has been a dramatic proliferation of print publications (Fuller, 25 November, 2013).

Based on participant observation and interviews with Burmese journalists, as of October 2014, alongside numerous magazines, there were at least 20 daily or weekly papers readily available in Burma/Myanmar’s urban centers, including the Irrawaddy and Mizzima (see Figures 1 & 2). Furthermore, interviews and participant observation indicated that these vendors attracted a steady stream of customers throughout the day and that newspaper readership was high and on the rise in such metropolitan areas as Yangon and Mandalay (See Figure 3 & 4). While vendors of weeklies have long been present, the above analysis indicated a dramatic escalation of political content espousing a range of perspective in these media.
Figure 9: Yangon Newspaper Vender (Source: Labbé, 28 October, 2014)

Figure 10: Bookstore in Yangon (Source: Labbé, 25 October, 2014)
TOWARDS A RE-DISCOVERY OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Figure 11: Myanmar Times, Yangon (Source: Labbé, 23 October, 2014)

Figure 12: The Global New Light of Myanmar, Yangon (Source: Labbé, 23 October, 2014)
Figure 13: Newspaper Attract Young Readership on Yangon Ferry (Source: Labbé, 23 October, 2014)

However, despite the apparent flourishing of print media, as Fuller (25 November, 2013) notes, as of 2013, of the numerous papers that had sprung up following the lifting of the ban, many have subsequently shut down due to a lack of profits. Competing with longstanding state-run newspapers “‘selling for a faction of the price,’” these new papers have failed to attract sufficient advertising. Coupled with such limitations, according to DVB editor-in-chief Toe Zaw Latt, the reforms have yet to yield a broadcasting law that would establish a board responsible for the allocation of licenses. Consequently, aside from satellite programming and externally-based short wave radio, broadcasting remains largely within the province of the state, with only three government TV stations and eight FM stations, of which only two are private (Latt, personal communication, 23 October, 2014). Moreover, despite the promised cessation of censorship, various external media watchdogs have drawn attention to a seeming regression towards the
“repression” of the country’s media (Committee to Protect Journalists, 10 July, 2014; 2 March, 2015; 31 May, 2015; Reporters Without Borders, 10 July, 2014; 25 July, 2015; 5 August, 2014).

It is within this turbulent environment that Myanmar/Burma’s exile media began their respective integrations into the country. Following his ascension to the presidency in November 2010, Thein Sein began outspokenly heralding the role of the country’s press as the nation’s “fourth estate,” routinely publically advocating for the need for greater press freedoms as a means of checking and balancing the country’s ‘fledgling’ democracy. Correspondingly, in 2011 the government extended invitations to both the Democratic Voice of Burma and the Irrawaddy to relocate into the country and be part of the ongoing media reform process, an invitation that served as the catalyst for their subsequent transition into the nation.

For instance, The Irrawaddy has established operations inside Myanmar/Burma, slowly redirecting resources from its former bureaus in order to solidify its presence in the country. However, unlike Mizzima, and the DVB, Irrawaddy’s editor in chief, Kyaw Zwa Moe, has attempted to maintain an “inside-outside” strategy, maintaining operations in Thailand until 2015 in case of a reversal in the current media reforms. Also unlike Mizzima, Irrawaddy continues to rely on donor funding to support a large part of its work. However, like the DVB, the organization is under increasing pressure to commercialize. Long relying on funding from Western governments and non-governmental organizations, following the lifting of economic sanctions against Myanmar/Burma’s government, the organizations’ donor support is increasingly in jeopardy (Crispin, 13 June, 2013). Consequently, while the Irrawaddy is “not yet a commercial enterprise,” the outlet is currently planning a shift toward a commercial model of organization (Irrawaddy.org, About Us, 2014). In terms of editorial independence with regards to
operating from Myanmar/Burma, according to Kyaw Zwa Moe, “We have more space, but it
doesn’t mean we have total freedom” (Crispin, 13 June, 2013).

Mizzima News

Although not initially invited by the government, proceeding from a 2011 presidential
statement welcoming exiles, in 2011 Mizzima became the first exile media to move its base-of-
operations to the country. In an interview with Mizzima’s founder, Soe Myint, the editor-in-chief
reiterated the organization’s longstanding objective of integrating itself into the country when the
situation arose. Nevertheless, despite this overarching goal, the outlet “didn’t know how to move
back”, foreseeing formidable challenges to such a transition. Nonetheless, Mizzima ultimately
undertook the decision for two central reasons: (1) “to do media business in the country” and (2)
“to contribute to the media reforms” (Myint, personal communication, 25 October, 2014).

Accordingly, Soe Myint wrote a letter to both the President and the Ministry of
Information expressing Mizzima’s desire to enter the country, and outlining the organization’s
objectives. In the words of Soe Myint, “We were not invited. We got ourselves invited…We got
ourselves invited saying that we want to contribute, and we got the invitation from the ministry
of information”. Thus, with “strategies in place” as early as 2011, Mizzima had established itself
within the country by January 2012, in time for “the first ever media conference”, “a small one
compared to other later conferences”. Personally invited by the Ministry of Information, Mizzima
spoke alongside other invited exile media (namely the DVB and the Irrawaddy) at this forum that
consisted of “a series of discussions with the ministry of information, with other stakeholders,
including privet media, including civil society groups, including political parties, and the
government, the ministry of information” (Myint, personal communication, 25 October, 2014).
When asked about the stakeholders, Soe Myint described “the main stakeholders for the media reforms” as Mizzima sees it. “One is the Ministry of Information, government”. Another is “the privet media houses, including print”. Additionally, there is the “international community, that is the international media support groups”. According to Soe Myint, Mizzima has long worked with and coordinated with this particular stakeholder, one consisting of the “Denmark embassy notably”, “the British embassy notably”, and the Swedish and Norway embassies,

We came with them. We are going back. And this is what the situation looks like we think. We were very clear that transition is, transition, where there are risks and there are challenges. There are risks…and also opportunities. So we took those risks and challenges and took the opportunities coming back, very early, very early, very early coming back”. (Myint, personal communication, 25 October, 2014).

Comprised of “230 plus human resources”, Mizzima currently operates offices in Yangon, Mandalay, and Naypyidaw. While originally maintaining its bureaus in New Deli and Chiang Mai for the first year after its entrance into the country, and continuing to maintain reporters and stingers in these areas, in 2013 Mizzima “shut down operations” in these locations in order to focus on its operations within Myanmar/Burma. In setting up operations in Yangon in 2012 and officially registering as a Myanmar company, Mizzima also began a corresponding transition to a commercial model of organization. While such a dramatic reconfiguration of Mizzima’s organizational structure may appear to be driven by the erosion of donor funding brought about by international responses to Myanmar/Burma’s transforming political landscape, Soe Myint maintains that such forces were not the driving impetus for shifting to an alternative economic model. “We decided, it’s not the donors that decided, we decided, we are not going to depend on the donors when we moved in, we are going to be based on the business model”.

According to the editor-in-chief, as “refugees in exile” support from donors was essential. However, “because media in the country is the business model”, when “back in our own country
we should not depend on the donors”. Consequently, despite recognizing that “there would be no fair play, no fair ground for play in the industry”, *Mizzima* undertook the “very difficult, very drastic decision” to shift to a commercial model and “not to take money from the donors”.

However, as Soe Myint notes,

*Mizzima* didn’t know about the business model, because it is a very new ground for us in terms of advertisements, in terms of marketing, in terms of distribution. But we faced all these challenges, and at many times we were not sure whether we would survive or not. But we kept trying and trying and we are here now. (Myint, personal communication, 25 October, 2014)

Nevertheless, while *Mizzima*’s particular structural reconfiguration was ultimately predicated on the organization’s long-held pursuit of “contributing” to the country’s socio-political development, specifically within the realm of the nation’s inchoate media market, Soe Myint does not see external support for Myanmar/Burma’s independent media as incongruent with these media’s role and significance within the country. While confirming that donor funding for “independent media” was indeed at risk, given the underdevelopment of the country’s media industry, and the nature of the country’s privat sphere, personified by the continued predominance of the state and “big stakeholders” brought into being by years of cronyism, he suggested that donor funding helped balance enduring inequalities in resource distribution,

Yes [donor funding is at risk], but I still believe, think that there should be support for the independent media. There should be support because, in the business model, it is not normal business model, normal media market that we know of. Or, like in other countries, here, still it is dominated by the state and there are big stakeholders who have already been there, many of them are linked with the previous regime, so it’s not normal. And this is not the developed media industry. There’s a long way to go for the developed market industry or distribution network. So, for an independent media it is still a big struggle just to survive, for an independent media. So I will still think that there should be support for the independent media. But for us, we decided. It was our decision, to be based on the business model and we would take the challenges. (Myint, personal communication, 25 October, 2014)
Ultimately, Soe Myint attributes much of the success of *Mizzima’s* survival in Myanmar/Burma’s media industry to his “partnership” with two important investors tied to the country’s business community. According to Soe Myint, “I would not call them investors actually…I would call them partners, to be able to put the money together”. The first of these “partners” was “a big business person with international standards”, described as “not a crony”. Like Soe Myint, he spent time in exile in China in the late 1980’s, sharing “the similar feeling” that ultimately served as the catalyst for *Mizzima’s* founding. However, unlike Soe Myint, “He came back. And he had, he still has, lots of problems trying to survive”. In addition to this initial partnership, Soe Myint “took on another partner who was quite successful in doing his own pervious media”, Sonny Swe, co-founder of *The Myanmar Times*. “The only thing was that [Sonny Swe’s] father was in the military intelligence”, before being imprisoned and only recently released (Myint, personal communication, 25 October, 2014).

Consequently, *Mizzima Media* is currently owned by three partners with three equal shares. For Soe Myint, in providing the financial investment for *Mizzima’s* operations, his partners are working together with him in support of *Mizzima’s* brand of media during a precarious time in the history of the organization’s operations. This is particularly evident within the context of the media outlet’s daily newspaper, which, according to Soe Myint, “has a long way to go”. “We have to really invest the money. I think it will take another two years to break even for the daily newspaper”. In addition to print, which includes both the daily newspaper and weekly newspapers, *Mizzima* is also continuing to produce online and television content. With “about five programs”, *Mizzima* produces and sells television content to the national broadcaster, a significant source of the organization’s revenue. Additionally, *Mizzima* creates news content for mobile phones, recently “signing an agreement with all three telecommunication companies
in the country”. Consequently, while currently “bleeding”, “especially from newspapers and print”, the organization “gets money from other platforms”, platforms that it is continuing to invest in (Myint, personal communication, 25 October, 2014).

When asked about the future of print in Myanmar/Burma, Soe Myint maintained that print would “not die”, “but will go down slowly, gradually”. “For the print media, not many will survive, maybe one or three will survive”. Within this context, “in the next five years”, he foresees “five big media houses” dominating the national media environment, each with their “own niche”. Reflecting similar journalistic patterns taking hold worldwide, despite the country’s currently exceedingly low mobile phone and Internet penetration rates, Soe Myint believes that “definitely the future is digital, online broadcast, and smart phones…that is the way of the future”. Consequently, while maintaining it’s various, and so far un lucrative, print publications, the “way forward for [Mizzima] is digital” (Myint, personal communication, 25 October, 2014).

Such an organizational model arises as particularly applicable to the media outlet as it “started online” and “was known in the country as an online, website news agency”. However, while in exile, Mizzima also extended operations into both print and broadcast, serving as the content producer for the Democratic Voice of Burma’s radio and television broadcasting. Additionally, while in exile Mizzima produced a monthly magazine that was distributed both abroad and clandestinely within the country through underground networks. As Soe Myint notes, “at one point we were sending these [print publications] through Korea”. However, “the Korea company was blocked and kicked out of the country”. Consequently, because of distribution barriers, Mizzima’s level of print publication was “very limited” (Myint, personal communication, 25 October, 2014).
Like print, Soe Myint also foresees a transforming radio landscape. With the entrance of exile media into the country, coupled with a bourgeoning domestic media, “shortwave radio is decreasing in importance” while “FM radio, and community radio is increasing”. Nevertheless, he seems to suggest that the importance of digital technologies will outpace that of radio,

Radio, short radio is decreasing in importance. FM is increasing. I see the increase in mobile phones, what we are doing, we are on mobile phones now. Two times a day. Very short headline news. That will increase in importance. Maybe it will take time. I think maybe it will take two years with infrastructure. But definitely shortwave is decreasing. FM radio, community radio definitely be increasing. (Myint, personal communication, 25 October, 2014)

Describing how the organization’s journalistic practices have changed following *Mizzima’s* formal entrance into the country, Soe Myint explained that the consequences have been both “positive and negative”. Formerly operating an “underground office” office in Yangon until 2012, now all of the media outlet’s offices, reporters, and networks are “above ground”. While this has ensured the safety of these networks and journalists, and has helped establish “a legal presence in the country”, it has nonetheless eroded some of the strength of *Mizzima’s* investigative reporting capabilities,

All our underground reporters and networks [have become] above ground. Which is good, they all are legal, and none of them now get arrested, that’s how we build the legal presence in the country. But in terms of other consequences, we were used to doing investigative reporting, because we were underground. Now all are above ground. So we are still weak in terms of doing investigative reporting, in terms of getting the details, because all are above. So in the above, legal is really everything…everyone is known. So we are building now to fill up this weakness.

Given the changing national media landscape, Soe Myint was asked about the role of mainstream international media coverage of Myanmar/Burma. According to the editor-in-chief, there has long remained a “very clear division” between international and domestic news
coverage of the country, with the former at times lacking knowledge of local, on-the-ground issues, and the latter at times reflecting biases. Currently, he sees the new media climate as leading to “stronger” local coverage, in turn reducing the role of international media, at least until the media market is opened to foreign investors and a new broadcast law is implemented,

I think that now, slowly and more and more the importance of international media coverage is not the same as it was. It is gradually going down. It is decreasing. Because we are having more and more local media coverage. Very strongly. Stronger than international media coverage. There are divisions between international media and local media. In terms of some coverage. There is a division, a very clear division. Some of the local media were biased. Some of the international media didn’t know the issues of the local ground, so there were divisions. But the role of international media in the country in Myanmar, in the last two years is decreasing. Why? The local media’s presence increased. I don’t know what will happen five years from now. Maybe with the broadcasters, when the broadcasters are opened up for foreign investment, the broadcast law, maybe they will come back…but for now the role of international media is decreasing while the role of local media are increasing.

Within this currently contained domestic media market, media companies like Mizzima are attempting to carve out “spaces” for editorial independence. Despite “equal ownership” among the three partners, the “shareholders agreement specifically mentioned editorial independence with [Soe Myint] as editor in chief”. Nevertheless, editorial independence remains elusive within Myanmar/Burma itself. According to Soe Myint, editorial independence operates at “two levels”. The first is the “political level” which is “based on the president’s welcome, statement that exile are welcome back”. However, two years after Thein Sein’s initial statements, “the government, or the state, is not ready with how this will be accommodated”. Consequently, Mizzima has to “fight [its] way out” of the existing confines of the country’s domestic media industry in order to find the “space” to exert its editorial independence,
So we are to fight our way out. To get integrated into the domestic industry, the domestic media industry. But that is the political level. In terms of the political level, in terms of registration, of our industry, in terms of what we produce, we have to follow whatever rules or regulations which are present in the country. Which…which…space, which gives some space…only not favorable to exile media. So at the end it is up to the exile media, up to each exile media, or up to each media to try and find ways out of whatever…space…and fight for that. Until now, it is…I’m talking of more than two years now, until now it is up to each media, each exile media or media to find ways out. To find the space and use the space for whatever you want to do. (Myint, personal communication, 25 October, 2014)

For Soe Myint, while “the state, the establishment is giving some space”, it remains “state administered”, “a state managed process which necessarily will not be in-line with what [exile media] want”. The challenge thus remains to “find ways out”, including in relation to existing competitors who were not welcoming of exile media like Mizzima’s entrance into the country, particularly given their established organizational structure, resource capacity, and existing domestic and international exposure. Nevertheless, it is those same “qualities” that affords Mizzima greater avenues for editorial independence,

There are many, many obstacles when we came back. There are competitors, there are competitors who that say, ‘oh you were in exile, you were in luxury’, which is not true, because we were refugees. But they didn’t welcome us. Because as are competitors, they didn’t welcome us. So we had to find ways out. The only thing is that we were very clear. First of all we have capacity. We have more capacity than many of those who are in the country. We have exposure. We have networks with international and regional media groups, and we have mission. We have commitment. So these are what are qualities are. That is how we found the ways out. (Myint, personal communication, 25 October, 2014)

Despite existing challenges in the form of competition, Soe Myint believes that “media has a role”, that among the media’s role is professionalism, something he sees to be of vital importance amid the country’s transition, and that Mizzima is affecting professionalization within the country,
We do [influence professionalism]. We do. For us, especially in the transition, I think professionalism matters quite a lot. I mean, I know that in normal circumstances as well, but especially in the transition. There are biases, there are prejudices in the society, and there are weaknesses because the country was under the tight control of censorship. So in the transition, especially professionalism. Just sticking to ethics, just sticking to skills, just sticking to what media should do…really matters a lot. (Myint, personal communication, 25 October, 2014)

As Soe Myint notes, under the nation’s successive military governments, there was a significant absence of “professional training”, “especially of journalism”. As a result, what Mizzima “took to the country was skills, professionalism, and capacity building”. “When we were in exile as refugees we trained refugees to become editors to become reporters and journalists and managers. So we brought this capacity into the country and now that is what we are doing” (Myint, personal communication, 25 October, 2014).

Ultimately, Soe Myint credits Mizzima’s successful efforts in this regard to “the international community’s support, and the governments, and the communities around the world that supported [Mizzima]”. He highlights the significance of regional support in particular, notably on behalf of India and the ASEAN region. According to Soe Myint, although beginning operations in Deli, it was not the Indian government but the people of India who initially supported the exiled media organization. Such support in turn appears to have fostered a limited “space” in-between public and privat realms, one that cultivated particular, necessary organizational strategies not entirely unconducive to the limited space that the media outlet now occupies.

Legally and officially the Indian government didn’t recognize us. But it was Indian democracy which recognized us to operate. There are laws still that doesn’t give us work permission to be a journalist be we are refugees…but Indian democracy gave us space to do that. So that, we used this space, and we got a lot of support from the community, the media community, the civil society community, from the human rights
community. That really helped a lot. And there were issues, there were problems, our office was raided. And our office was closed…But still, that space is very difficult. I must say, very difficult. But, of course, we learned a lot from the limited space where we could work. And now there is a limited space in Myanmar, where we are working. (Myint, personal communication, 25 October, 2014)

This particular “space” is in turn contrasted with the “space” the organization occupied in Thailand. While Mizzima was able to carve out “space to work” in Thailand, rather than the Thai democracy, this terrain was facilitated by both individual “human personal relationships” and a Thai government who, through the influence of Western actors, had in place policy relations with Myanmar/Burma that were amenable to the country’s democracy movement,

Thai for me is not democratic space. It is give and take. Either you bribe, you give money, or you work with military intelligence. But still Thai, because of human personal relationships…Plus, the Thai government in many Burma/Myanmar relation policies is influenced by the western countries which are in support of the democracy movement in Myanmar/Burma. So that is how we could have space to work. But it is not Thai democracy, in India it was democracy. (Myint, personal communication, 25 October, 2014)

When asked if Mizzima received direct support from the United States, Soe Myint replied: “No. Because we were living in India we did not have direct support from the U.S.”, although he noted that “India has a working relationship with the United States”. Nevertheless, according to Soe Myint, “now, in the transition, we have a very good relationship with the United States because Asia was, it is, also a part of the U.S. strategy for the region and for Burma/Myanmar”. Moreover, he goes on to say that while perhaps not coordinating per say, Mizzima stays “in rhythm” with the U.S. and other Western actors in an attempt to build a stable democracy within the country,

We work with Western countries, especially the United States, the UK, the EU, very closely, so that we are coordinated for this transition to be successful. And so that we reach a stable democratic objective sooner or later. And we work…sort of…we look at what others, the United States is doing, what others are doing. Not really coordination but looking at each other and work in rhythm.
When prompted to look toward the future, Soe Myint responds by turning towards the past, reiterating that Mizzima “new from the beginning that it would not be easy”. Likewise, he asserts that the road ahead “will not be easy”. Nevertheless, despite significant risks and challenges, from the onset Mizzima was “optimistic”, “optimistic in the fact that stakeholders have to work”. According to Soe Myint, “We were pushed together for the transition to be successful”. While foreseeing both highs and lows, he advocates for “patience”, “focus”, and “commitment”, noting that Mizzima’s role within the country ultimately represents a unwavering commitment to Burma/Myanmar’s continued pursuit of democracy,

It will not be easy. We knew from the beginning that it would not be easy. But we were optimistic. And we were optimistic in the fact that stakeholders have to work. We were pushed to work together for the transition to be successful. For me this transition will take long and there will be ups and downs and the only thing is that we have to be patient but very committed and very focused. That's what we need to do. Very committed and very focused. Whatever I do as a media is also committing for the democratic transition. (Myint, personal communication, 25 October, 2014)

The Democratic Voice of Burma

Unlike Mizzima, who “got themselves invited”, the Democratic Voice of Burma moved its base of operations to the country in 2012 at the direct behest of the government. Like Mizzima, since its inception, the DVB has operated with the overriding objective of formally moving into the country when the opportunity presented itself. Similarly, in addition to the pursuit of engaging in open, on-the-ground reporting, like Mizzima, the DVB sought to bring the skills, knowledge, and experience it had cultivated during its twenty years in exile to the media reform process. Consequently, on the condition that the organization’s 17 imprisoned journalists would be released, in 2012 the DVB moved its base of operations to Yangon, a process summed-up by DVB co-founder and editor-in-chief, Toe Zaw Latt,
The government engaged the exile media to come back and operate. They said that Burma is changing and we can operate. The reason we are exile is because we are not allowed to operate inside Burma. So we agreed to come back on the one condition that our editorial independence would be the same. Also you know that reporting from the ground is the best. Because we were not allowed in the old days. We negotiated the release of all [our imprisoned journalists]. And also, we like to be part of the reform process. The media reform is very unique…in need of expertise knowledge. The DVB has been operating for more than 22 years. We’ve got that kind of knowledge, also operating outside in exile we have kind of an understanding of media industry, something to bring to the transition as well. (Latt, personal communication, 23 October, 2014)

However, while negotiating for editorial independence, the DVB was ultimately given no explicit assurances. Nevertheless, according to Toe Zaw Latt, “We are not going to conform to any form of censorship anyway.” Ultimately he sees “lots of areas that need to be improved in this area,” notably the new daft broadcasting law that would create a government controlled board in charge of license allocations. However, despite being “heavily critical about this new draft law”, Zaw Latt admits that “many things need to change” in Burma/Myanmar, which itself “changed only three years ago”. While concerned that time is running out before the next presidential election, “at the same time [DVB] understands about the capacity of the government, lawmakers, media professionals from the control side, and also from the practitioner side (Latt, personal communication, 23 October, 2014).

Although the DVB closed its Norway bureau following its entrance into the country, it has kept its Chiang Mai operation in order to maintain its relay uplink. The DVB thus continues to broadcast via shortwave radio and satellite, the latter requiring a KU banner to receive it. While the DVB “does not do print”, it broadcasts radio programming in multiples ethnic languages and will soon expand its television programming to include ethnic language broadcasts. Consequently, as such broadcasting remains external, according to Zaw Latt, “We don’t have
any pressure from what we do...[however] once we have a license that will be a different thing” (Latt, personal communication, 23 October, 2014).

When asked about the organization’s journalistic techniques when the DVB was still operating clandestinely within the country, Zaw Latt described the danger inherent in being an undercover DVB journalist, and the additional challenges posed by inadequate infrastructure, government surveillance, and censorship. As Zaw Latt notes, within this context, the DVB was forced to develop a complex network consisting of both human and technological resources,

In the old days it’s about journalists being deliberately targeted. If you have a camera, recorder, you know some equipment then you are targeted. Then you have to be undercover when you report. In the old days the Internet is heavily censored and scrutinized. Once you have the footage you need to find a way to send it out. So we’ve been hiding all kinds of equipment. Also we have a very complicated network. Some urgent things you use a satellite facility to send it out. So in the old days we have very secretive very heavily security concerns, very professional network.

In addition to using satellites and physically smuggling footage out of the country, reporters also used proxy servers at great risk. According to Zaw Latt, “They would sentence you to the death penalty in the old days and we could go to jail for fifty years” (Latt, personal communication, 23 October, 2014).

Under the former government’s extensive censorship mechanisms, Zaw Latt asserts that “radio played a vital role. Especially shortwave radio”. Nevertheless, it wasn’t until the DVB began broadcasting television that “everyone knew there were human rights violations, abuses”. Illustrating the precedence of pictures over sound, Zaw Latt points to the ascension of TV as the catalyst for the decreasing importance of radio within the country,

It is an absolute totalitarian, but nobody really sees it, you already know through sound files. But once we ran the TV, and people were shocked, they visualize it, you know, the power of pictures. How abusive, Saffron, you know, then shortwave is slowly fading out these days because its more…television, also its
free, only one time cost. Then you have real news with the pictures, sound. The future trend is television it’s everywhere.

Zaw Latt goes on to note that while “everywhere print is dying”, because “Burma just started print”, the population in currently drawn to it. While he contends that “there will be a digital age, digital era”, he believes that “in Burma the role of radio will be less and there will be more TV”. Nevertheless, he also foresees radio remaining a present medium, particularly in rural areas, as it will continue to be inexpensive to receive. However, he sees a declining audience for such radio broadcasting as *BBC Burmese* and *Voice of America*, both of which he contends are perceived as “government” broadcasters, with “content reflecting governments’ point of view”. Conversely, *DVB’s* co-founder suggests that the current hardships faced by Myanmar/Burma’s new daily papers is a product of radio’s long-held dominance in their absence, and the new print medium’s lack of distribution channels. (Latt, personal communication, 23 October, 2014).

Questioned about the *DVB’s* target audience, Zaw Latt replied that “We never target for global audience, we always do are programing in Burmese for Burmese people…always get Burmese news in the Burmese language, which then on the same day we send back”. According to Zaw Latt, this has long been the structure and cycle of *DVB’s* production process, “news and information from Burma packaged and sent back, that is our aim”. Nonetheless, in addition to its Burmese language website, the *DVB* also maintains an English language website. However, this website does not contain “every story”, rather “only a few select stories” (Latt, personal communication, 23 October, 2014).

Ultimately, Zaw Latt sees “three key challenges” ahead for *DVB*: namely “legal issues”, “technical issues”, and “political issues”. Most notably, with regard to political issues, “Nobody knows what will happen after the election in 2015”. In terms of legal issues, many new media laws have arisen since the onset of the transition, with many more likely in the near future. These
laws remain “vague” and ill defined. In terms of technical issues, the DVB continues to be concerned with infrastructure, particularly as the organization prepares to operate domestically. Lacking any foreseeable knowledge of what “what kind of facilities” they will have, DVB also lacks knowledge of what kinds of controls they will have, itself a political issue tied to post-election certainty (Latt, personal communication, 23 October, 2014).

Currently, with Norway arising as the media outlet’s “main donor”, and the Norwegian foreign minister as a supporter, the DVB remains the only former exile media that continues to be completely reliant on donor funding. According to Toe Zaw Latt, as a result, the DVB is “the only independent media, the rest is state or commercial interest”. However, as he notes, “There is quite a lot of pressure to start doing some kind of marketing or income generation,” and the organization is “not sure if [it] will be able to maintain its donor funding situation”. Furthermore, the DVB foresees increasing challenges arising from competition with other, more well-funded and more politically networked local media that have arisen while the DVB remained in exile. (Latt, personal communication, 23 October, 2014).

Asked if he saw DVB’s journalistic practices influencing media abroad, the editor-in-chief said that he did not see an influence in a general sense, but “in terms of exile media”. Specifically, he mentioned connections the organization had with North Korea and Zimbabwe’s exile media. However, Zaw Latt also noted that the DVB remained “the biggest one”. According to him, “We’ve become one of the moral mouths”. Moreover, given the distinctive nature of Myanmar/Burma’s media landscape, many are watching the DVB’s presence amid the country’s unfolding transition. “Burma’s media market is very unique, and also doing business and technology, everything is challenging, this is a new terrain, its never been tested” (Latt, personal communication, 23 October, 2014).
Zaw Latt goes on to describe a changing journalistic landscape as it intersects with Myanmar/Burma’s younger generation who is not faced with the same perils,

Journalism was regarded as a very dangerous job in the old days, you go to jail. Now suddenly it opened up. The new, younger generation, wanting to be very tough journalists. Also you look at the average editor age in Burma/Myanmar they are around 35, 30, they have to be very old.

Within this context, there is a growing “general readership for news”. According to Zaw Latt, “Now everything is political”. “In our news we produce not only political but economics, social, technical. We make sure our coverage is mixed. There is a demand for political news. It is embedded in our daily life” (Latt, personal communication, 23 October, 2014).

Recognizing the increasing importance of mobile phones in the nation, Zaw Latt recalled paying 500,000 kyat (roughly over $400) for a phone when he came to the country in 2012. Since that time, this cost has gone down to 500 kyat. Consequently, the DVB foresees SMS as a future platform for distributing media, particularly as more and more citizens gain access to the Internet through their cell phones. According to Zaw Latt, like cars and houses within Myanmar/Burma, this changing price structure is inherently “linked to politics”, noting that “politics is our daily life”.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

Introduction

Foregrounding an appreciation of Myanmar/Burma’s historical, economic, cultural, and technological context, analysis of data was examined in relation to predominant political economy of the media, public sphere theory, democratization and the media, and U.S. foreign affairs news framing scholarship. This was in turn undertaken alongside a qualitative content analysis of Myanmar/Burma’s domestic English language newspapers, participant-observation of the nation’s changing news media environment, interviews with co-founders and senior editors of exile organizations, and relevant government documents, NGO reports, academic journals, books, and newspapers. Given Myanmar/Burma’s exile media’s transforming relationship to the state, and corresponding transition toward a commercial model of organization, such an analysis afforded a unique opportunity to interrogate reigning theorizations regarding the nature of the relationships between the media and the state within the contemporary stage of global capitalism. In order to facilitate such an inquiry, this investigation embodied the underlying goal of assessing Myanmar/Burma’s exile media’s potential relationship to public sphere formation, and their counter-hegemonic potential amid their transition to commercial organizational models.

Accordingly, Chapter 2 first provided a historically-grounded background of Myanmar/Burma’s socio-political context in relation to both the evolution of the country’s current media landscape, and its relationship to the nation’s three predominant formerly exiled news organizations, The Irrawaddy, Mizzima News, and the Democratic Voice of Burma. In order to build an appropriate theoretical lens, Chapter 3 outlined dominant scholarship pertaining to the political economy of the media, public sphere theory, neoliberalism and international development, and U.S. foreign affairs news framing. This in turn laid the foundation for a
discussion of this study’s theoretical trajectory and research questions. *Chapter 4* subsequently provided an overview of the investigation’s research design, including the research strategy invoked and the procedures guiding data collection and the pilot study. Finally, *Chapter 5* contained the results from analyses of exile media and US media coverage, as well those derived from interviews with exile media editors and participant observation of the country’s news media environment.

**Public Sphere Formation**

The first research question posed by this investigation sought to determine *the relationship between the country’s formerly exiled media and public sphere formation in Myanmar/Burma.*

Myanmar/Burma’s socio-political history is deeply intertwined with the history of the country’s press. During the nation’s dynastic era, monks taught Burmese citizens how to read and write throughout the country in an effort to deepen the population’s understanding of Buddhist philosophy. Consequently, Burma’s pre-colonial period was defined by one of the highest literacy rates in Southeast Asia. This legacy likely served as a central catalyst for the development of colonial Burma’s independent press, and in turn, the political ascension of the nation’s revolutionary leaders, notably Aung San. However, when Ne Win and his Revolutionary council rose to power in 1962 they adopted a “nationalist and puritanical view of Burmese culture that viewed Western influence, both colonial and postcolonial, as damning to the national spirit”. Inevitably, Ne Win believed that “the symptoms of Western influence could be treated,” and that “its future eradication depended upon the control of the press” (Charney, 2009, p. 111). As a result, over the ensuing five decades Myanmar/Burma became one of the most censored nations in the world.
Following the military’s suppression of the 8888 Uprising, an exodus of Burmese citizens escaping the military crackdown led to the convergence student activists, ethnic insurgents, refugees, migrants, displaced peoples and other opponents of the military government in both the Thai-Myanmar/Burma border area and in ethnic rebel-controlled regions of the country. Amid such efforts, there arose an influx of aid from foreign donors seeking to “bring relief to the distressed, help opponents of the regime organize, and eventually foster the elements of a multiethnic Burmese civil society” (Humphries, 2008, p. 243). This socio-political context ultimately led to the emergence of donor-funded Burmese-exile run media organizations focused on the pan-Myanmar/Burma region.

Since their inception, these organizations, most notably the Democratic Voice of Burma, Mizzima, and the Irrawaddy, have been successful at employing innovative techniques to transmit coverage into and out of the country, in turn bypassing the state’s monopoly on information and providing a vehicle for public deliberation. This investigation’s interviews with co-founders and senior editor-in-chiefs of both Mizzima and the Democratic Voice of Burma revealed that under the former military regime, these media outlets successfully employed “very complicated”, “very secretive”, “professional network[s]” to circumvent inadequate infrastructure, government surveillance, and heavy media censorship. Risking the death penalty and fifty year prison sentences, “underground” journalists working for these media routinely clandestinely conducted on-the-ground reporting, physically smuggling content out of the country, and/or using satellite phones and proxy servers to bypass the state’s information blockade (Latt, personal communication, 23 October, 2014; Myint, personal communication, 25 October, 2014).
In addition to the organization’s news website, while in exile Mizzima produced both news content for the DVB, and a monthly print publication that employed a Korean company as a front for distribution (Myint, personal communication, 25 October, 2014). For the DVB, both satellite and shortwave radio have played a “vital role” in their own network. Often forced to hide equipment throughout the country while in exile, the DVB routinely obtains on-the-ground news and information from Myanmar/Burma, packages it, and then sends it back via shortwave radio and satellite in both Burmese and a variety of ethnic languages. According to DVB’s editor-in-chief, while the DVB has long used sound files, their integration of television broadcasts had a significant effect on the international community’s perceptions of the human rights situation in Myanmar/Burma, particularly amid the so-called Saffron Revolution (Latt, personal communication, 23 October, 2014).

In 2012, the DVB alone was reaching an estimated audience of 5-10 million through its various platforms, transmitting in both Burmese and various minority languages (Pidduck, 2012, p. 543; Latt, personal communication, 23 October, 2014). In 2014, the Irrawaddy represented “the most popular Burmese online news-site worldwide”, “regularly quoted in the mainstream media” (Irrawaddy.org, “About Us,” 2014; Humphries, 2008). In 2013, Mizzima was reaching an estimated “15,000 unique visitors a day”. Following the destruction of Cyclone Nargis in 2008, between May 1st and May 8th, Mizzima’s website reportedly received five million hits on its English language site alone, with total hits for both sites averaging three million per day (Mizzima, 8 October, 2013). In 2007 the International Press Institute awarded Mizzima its Free Media Pioneer award for its efforts at disseminating information on Myanmar/Burma despite government barriers (International Press Institute, 2 May, 2007)
Habermas’ (1962/1989) provides us with a historic evolution of the growth of open public exchanges and discussions of matters of societal importance between private individuals. Accordingly, he conceptualizes “the public sphere” as a cultural practice, the domain of social interaction in which political participation is achieved through the deliberation of issues of common concern. Arising apart from the market and the state, this discursive terrain provides the foundation for the articulation of autonomous ‘public’ discourse capable of being critical of ‘private’ interests and the state. Rather than monolithic, Fraser draws attention to the manner in which marginalized groups have routinely relied on the formation of “alternative,” “subaltern counterpublics,” “parallel discursive arenas” where those within the ranks of marginalized groups are capable of producing and disseminating “counter discourses” that facilitate the formulation of “oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs.” Theorists such as Atton and Downing have similarly frequently highlighted the significance of ‘alternative’ or ‘radical media’ within this “plurality of competing publics”, those “range of media projects, interventions and networks that work against, or seek to develop different forms of, the dominant, expected (and broadly accepted) ways of ‘doing’ media” (p. iv).

Undoubtedly, The Irrawaddy, The Democratic Voice of Burma and Mizzima can be said to have long embodied the tenants of ‘alternative media’ and, in doing so, have lent themselves to the formation of an ‘alternative public sphere’. Since the 1990’s these organizations have espoused content critical of and oppositional to the state. They have adopted and integrated state-of-the-art technology both to facilitate their communication networks and for the distribution of their content. They have also historically been predicated on alternative distribution sites and clandestine networks and in doing so have transformed communication processes and fostered ‘horizontal linkages’. Thus, they may indeed be said to have done much in the way of
challenging dominant, accepted ‘ways of doing media’. In circumventing the government’s information blockade, such actions have in turn played a fundamental role in Burma/Myanmar’s broader transnational advocacy network, one that has facilitated the inclusion of a multitude of dispossessed voices and has allowed for space to be critical of Burma/Myanmar’s former military government.

Furthermore, from their inception, these media have sought to incorporate the direct involvement of the population they speak to and on behalf of. In doing so, they provide “a voice to the voiceless” and promote engaged interaction with communities. Consequently, “rather than merely top-down”, they seek to cultivate “bottom-up” and “horizontal flows” of communication “where citizens share information with fellow citizens” (Ramono, 2010, p. 25). In this regard, Myanmar/Burma’s exile media’s journalistic practices also may be said to reflect the underlying values and tenets of theorizations of deliberative development journalism, participatory journalism, native journalism, and grassroots journalism. Nevertheless, due to language barriers, insufficient infrastructure, restrictive costs, and other associated barriers to telecommunications access among the Burmese population, particularly in rural areas, inclusion in the deliberation facilitated by these organizations lacks genuine inclusivity, thus negating the potential for an “ideal public sphere” in the Habermasean sense.

According to the dominant development paradigm, the goal of development was seen as one of transitioning ‘traditional’ (backward, rural, agricultural) societies to a ‘modern’ (advanced, industrial) society. Within this context, mass communication came to be viewed as a powerful tool for the manipulation of opinions, attitudes and behaviors, and was subsequently incorporated into theories and strategies for development. Challenged for its failure to promote desired social change; inability to reach intended recipients; and tendency to exacerbate existing
socio-economic conditions, in the 1960’s and 1970’s Marxism and Latin American structuralist contended that advanced capitalist countries either underdeveloped developing nations or prevented them from achieving autonomous development.

In response to such criticism, a growing body of scholarship has examined participatory communication approaches to development. In this regard, the participation-as-an-end model has received notable support from both theorists and administrators. Conceiving participation as a basic human right, participation-as-an-end privileges participation as an end on to itself, ultimately attempting to “empower people so that they may articulate and manage their own development” (Melkote, 2001, p. 331). Undoubtedly, in embodying participatory and deliberative development journalism practices, the DVB, the Irrawaddy, and Mizzima News, have lent themselves to the cultivation of participation-as-an-end mode of socio-economic development at a pivotal time in the country’s socio-political-economic history.

According to prevailing orthodoxy, the economic problems of developing nations are seen as derived from obstructive and inefficient state policies that preclude economic integration into the global economy. ‘Development’ is thus perceived as being predicated on the disintegration of such barriers, thereby allowing for the pursuit and maximization of a state’s ‘comparative advantage’ in the global market. This in turn served as the cornerstone for the ascension of the so-called ‘Washington Consensus’ in the 1990’s, viewed by many as the embodiment of the rise of the ‘neoliberal doctrine’ into the dominant logic governing international political-economic policy.

Amid the decades of a state-saturated media climate, externally-based international broadcasters transmitting via shortwave radio gained a notable foothold in Myanmar/Burma. In addition to the country’s exile media, the People’s Voice of Burma (PVOB), Voice of America
(VoA), Radio Free Asia (RFA), and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) all have a history of broadcasting into the country. Voice of America (VoA) is the official broadcast organ of the U.S. government and has been considered to be a propaganda instrument serving U.S. interest (Latt, personal communication, 23 October, 2014; Shulman, 1990). Similarly, VoA is the largest network within the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), a U.S. government agency responsible for the supervision of American government-supported international media, a body that in turn funds Radio Free Asia (RFA). Furthermore, the BBC has been accused of political biases on a number of grounds, with some alluding to its complex ties to British interests. For example according to DVB’s editor-in-chief, while historically reaching a wide audience with its radio broadcasts, like VoA, in Myanmar/Burma BBC Burmese is viewed as a “government broadcaster”, with “content reflecting governments’ point of view” (Latt, personal communication, 23 October, 2014). Consequently, these organizations’ direct and indirect government ties have raised particular concerns regarding their underlying goals, namely the promotion of neoliberal economic policies that support Western interests.

Built on a donor-funded organizational model, the DVB, the Irrawaddy, and Mizzima News have long relied on donor funding from a variety of actors that include governments, private individuals, and church groups. This organizational structure has in turn provided these organizations with immunity against traditional market pressures, correspondingly allowing them to exist outside of traditional national boundaries. Echoing the central tenets of Habermas’ public sphere, these media outlets’ appear to arise outside of both state and market, thus providing a foundation for the articulation of autonomous ‘public’ discourse capable of being critical of ‘privet’ interests and the state.
However, like PVOB, VoA, RFA, and the BBC, from their origins, Myanmar/Burma’s exile media has relied on formal and informal funding from Western governments, notably the U.S. National Endowment for Democracy, the OpenSociety Institute, and the Norwegian government. This has in turn raised concerns regarding the potential influence of donor funding. Humphries (2008) challenges such concerns, maintaining that “the sheer number and variety of small aid organizations are too numerous to mention and indicate that the movement is not manipulated by Washington” (p. 245). Nevertheless, others have pointed to instances of threats to NED funding by senior U.S. officials over content incongruent with U.S. foreign policy. This in turn suggests that while these media may not occupy a traditional location between state and market, they nonetheless cannot be said to personify an ideal public sphere in the Habermassian sense.

Moreover, despite their notable success in facilitating deliberative discourses, these media have received criticism over their perpetuation of social and ethnic divisions that have long served to cultivate and reinforce unequal access to political and economic resources. Such criticism includes an overemphasis on narrowly interpreted human rights discourses, seen as reinforcing ethnic stereotypes that victimize and depoliticize minority populations. Furthermore, some have asserted that these organizations’ abrupt steps toward journalistic professionalism have led to the alienation of women in terms of job opportunity, placement and training. As Fraser (1990) asserts, while presuming inclusivity, Habermas’ bourgeois public sphere was foregrounded on a “number of significant exclusions,” particularly with regard to women and marginalized groups (p. 59). Accordingly, while Myanmar/Burma’s “independent” exile media may proclaim the “bracketing” of status inequalities, the discursive interactions produced by
these media may nonetheless produce particular procedures and etiquette that functioned as indicators of status.

Undoubtedly, *The Irrawaddy*, *The Democratic Voice of Burma* and *Mizzima* can be said to have long embodied the tenants of *alternative media* and *participatory* and *deliberative development journalism*, in turn cultivating “bottom-up” and “horizontal flows” of communication. In doing so, these organizations have helped cultivate a *participation-as-an-end* mode of socio-economic development at a pivotal time in Myanmar/Burma’s history. In successfully circumventing the former military government’s information blockade, they also created a discursive terrain whereby formerly disposed voices could deliberate matters of public concern. Accordingly, these media can indeed be seen as lending themselves to the formation of an ‘alternative public sphere(s)’. Nevertheless, while seemingly formerly occupying a privileged position outside of state and market forces, their former reliance on donor funding raises notable concerns regarding the potential influence of external, namely Western interests. Furthermore, in providing avenues for deliberation significant attention should be given to the potential ways in which these arena’s may perpetuate existing social inequalities that reinforce barriers to political, economic, and communication resources, particularly as the nation stands at its current crossroads.

**Exile Media’s Commercial Transition**

The second research question posed by this investigation sought to determine the relationship between Myanmar/Burma’s formerly exiled media’s shift toward commercially-driven models of organization and their counter-hegemonic potential.

Following the abolishment of pre-publication censorship in August 2012, “Myanmar/Burma’s media landscape has changed very rapidly” (Latt, personal communication,
23 October, 2014). Media reforms implemented by the Thein Sein government, which have included the lifting of a longstanding ban on daily papers, has led to a dramatic proliferation of print publications. Nonetheless, the abrupt emergence of these private magazines and daily and weekly papers has created an increasingly competitive commercial climate that has led numerous publications to shut down due to lack of profits and failure to attract sufficient advertising. Currently, a significant hurdle remains competition with longstanding state-run papers selling for a fraction of the price. Moreover, the media reforms have yet to produce a broadcasting law that would establish a board responsible for the allocation of licenses. As a result, apart from satellite programming and externally-based short wave radio, broadcasting remains within the domain of the state.

Amid the broader political reforms that proceeded the 2010 elections, Myanmar/Burma’s “independent” exile media’s donor funding is gradually evaporating. As this was occurring, Thein Sein extended invitations to the exile media, asking them to relocate into the country in order to be part of the ongoing media reform process. The three media outlet’s integration into the country would thus seemingly arise as a product of the convergence of these forces. However, according to interviews with the co-founders and senior editors of the DVB and Mizzima, rather than driven by market pressures, the exile media’s entrance into Myanmar/Burma’s media market represented both their long-held overarching objective of entering the country when the opportunity presented itself, and their desire to be part of the country’s ongoing media reform process.

According to Soe Myint, the senior editor of Mizzima News, the move towards a business model alongside its integration into the country was a “very drastic, difficult decision”, particularly as the organization believed that if would receive “no fair play, or fair ground in the
industry” (Myint, personal communication, 25 October, 2014). Despite the organization’s uncertain future, according to Soe Myint, *Mizzima’s* organizational transformation was ultimately based on the belief that the organization’s greatest potential to influence the country’s evolving media landscape, and participate in the country’s public sphere, lay in aligning itself with existing, domestic models of media ownership.

While *Mizzima* was the first to enter the nation in 2011, both the *Irrawaddy* and the *DVB* have followed suit. However, unlike *Mizzima*, for the time being, the *Irrawaddy* has been able to continue to rely on partial donor support and has attempted to maintain an “inside-outside” strategy, maintaining operations in Thailand until 2015 in case of a reversal in the current media reforms. However, since the lifting of economic sanctions, the organizations’ donor support is increasingly in jeopardy. As a result, while the *Irrawaddy* is “not yet a commercial enterprise,” the outlet is in the process of transition toward a commercial model of organization. According to the *Irrawaddy’s* senior editor, Kyaw Zwa Moe, while the organization’s integration into the country has provided the organization with “more space”, “it doesn’t mean that [they] have total freedom” (Crispin, 13 June, 2013).

Following the invitation by the President, in 2012 the *DVB* also moved its base of operations to the country. To date, the *DVB* is the only former exile media that continues to remain completely dependent on donor support, which, according to *DVB’s* senior editor Toe Zaw Latt, makes the *DVB* “the only independent media” in Myanmar/Burma, as “the rest is state or commercial interest”. However, faced with the same pressures as *Mizzima* and the *Irrawaddy*, Toe Zaw Latt doubts that the *DVB* “will be able to maintain its donor funding situation” (Latt, personal communication, 23 October, 2014). Consequently, the organization is also amid a transition toward a marketing model. However, in this regard, the *DVB* foresees increasing
challenges arising from competition with other, more well-funded and more politically networked local media that have arisen while the \textit{DVB} remained in exile.

Since relocating into the country, through various media conferences and ongoing discussions \textit{Mizzima}, \textit{The Irrawaddy}, and the \textit{DVB} have worked alongside various stakeholders, including other private media, civil society groups, political parties and the government’s Ministry of Information in moving the media reforms forward. Given the longstanding structural barriers to media and journalism in Myanmar/Burma, the country’s formerly exiled media sees itself as offering significant benefits to the country’s ongoing negotiation of the media landscape. Most prominently, the institutions’ long legacy of professional journalism cultivation, coupled with their existing journalist networks and experience with multiple media platforms compared to recent, domestically arisen media means that the professional development of media in the country is likely to be significantly influenced by the journalistic presence of these formerly exiled media, particularly as SMS and cellular technologies continue to proliferate exponentially.

Although Habermas’ public sphere was seen as initially largely facilitated by the media, the gradual commercialization and mass dissemination of the media is seen as ultimately leading to its de-differentiation from the autonomous public realm. In this regard, through their control over political and social resources, the state, political parties, and private commercial interests increasingly came to extend their influence over public communication, part of a process described by Habermas “colonization of the life world.” As noted above, the \textit{Irrawaddy}, the \textit{DVB} and \textit{Mizzima News} can be said to have long embodied the tenants of ‘alternative media’ and, in doing so, have lent themselves to the formation of an ‘alternative public sphere(s)’. Since their inception, they have seemingly occupied a unique space apart from both state and market forces. Within this context, they have fostered a discursive terrain in which discourses capable of
being critical of the state could emerge. Consequently, the emergence of these media appear to resemble the differentiation between public and private realms embodied in Habermas’ “ideal type of bourgeois public sphere”. With the erosion of donor funding, these media’s transition toward commercial models of organization in turn seemingly suggest the onset of similar “colonization” processes described by Habermas.

However, although seemingly occupying an autonomous public realm, from the start, these organizations were reliant on donor funding. As the evaporation of funding following the initial wave of political reforms suggests, this funding was ultimately driven by particular interests. As noted above, among the most prominent of these sources were the National Endowment for Democracy and the Open Society Institute, organizations with significant relationships to U.S. foreign policy and interests. Consequently, Myanmar/Burma’s “independent” exile media’s reliance on donor funding casts doubt on the degree to which these organizations inhabited an autonomous public domain. For Marx and Engels (1978), “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time the ruling intellectual force” (p. 31). While not bound to traditional market forces, Myanmar/Burma’s exile media’s donor dependency can nonetheless be seen as situating them within the class relations of capitalist society.

**Comparing U.S. & Exile News Frames**

The third research question posed by this inquiry sought to ascertain how Myanmar/Burma’s political transition was framed within exile media and mainstream U.S. media. Moreover, in doing so, it sought to reveal how a comparative analysis of these frames informs understandings of both Myanmar/Burma’s exile media’s counter-hegemonic potential, and existing theorizations about the nature of U.S. foreign affairs news frames.
Given Burma/Myanmar’s exile media’s historically unique position relative to state and market forces, a comparative analysis of the different frames evoked by exile media and mainstream U.S. media in their coverage of the country’s initial reform process seemingly affords a valuable opportunity for assessing the potential similarities and discrepancies in their respective frames, and in turn these media’s respective relationships to the country’s unfolding socio-political-economic realities. Moreover, framing scholarship has revealed that frames frequently emerge as a broad ideological resources that can be selectively invoked in the service of U.S. foreign policy goals. Consequently, a comparative analysis of these frames also offers an opportunity for drawing insight into reigning conceptualizations regarding the ideological nature of U.S. foreign affairs news frames.

Ultimately, a comparative analysis of the frames invoked by exile media and mainstream U.S. media revealed significant discrepancies in the frequencies with which these media invoked the five predominant frames. Specifically, while all five frames were overwhelmingly present in U.S. media coverage, their presence varied significantly within exile media’s. Reflecting this pattern, the most frequently invoked of the five frames, the conflict frame, was employed in only 63% of exile media coverage, compared with 98% in U.S. media coverage. In this regard, an ethnic conflict frame was highly present, employed in 29% of all stories. While this frame emerged in 51% of all U.S. media coverage, such coverage tended to be highly decontextualized, lacking both differentiation between particular ethnic groups and conflicts, and the socio-historical circumstances surrounding them. Alternatively, exile media’s employment of the ethnic conflict frame emerged alongside historically grounded discussions of relevant actors and events (i.e. Kaung, 20 September, 2011).
Ultimately, in both U.S. media and exile media data sets, all remaining four dominant frames overwhelmingly arose alongside the conflict frame. Most notably, there was a significant tendency for both media to attribute responsibility for conflicts to the former military government. However, a comparative analysis of the two data sets exposed a notable contrast within the manner in which this frame was invoked. Specifically, within The New York Times and USA Today coverage, the long prevailing government-population conflict frame gradually eroded following the 2010 elections, in turn leading to the ascension of a Thein Sein human interest frame and a China conflict frame, frames centered on a democratization-liberalization morality frame. Conversely, within exile media coverage, responsibility for emerging conflicts continued to be attributed the existing government in post-election coverage. As indicated by the highly present use of the language “nominally civilian”, the framing of the Thein Sein government was reflective of the framing of the previous military government.

Consequently, while Myanmar/Burma’s political transition was ultimately tied to an economic consequence frame rooted in a broader China-U.S. conflict frame in American media coverage, within exile media’s coverage, these processes continued to be presented in a government-population conflict frame that attribute responsibility for the nation’s persisting conflicts to Burma/Myanmar’s existing and former political elite. This particular frame was in turn rooted within a broader human interest frame centered on human rights. Nevertheless, as made evident by the absence of any discussion of western-imposed economic sanctions, and the persisting government attribution of responsibility frame throughout coverage of Thein Sein’s engagement with the West, the “protector” narrative that remained highly present throughout U.S. media coverage of Myanmar/Burma was notably absent in exile media coverage.
With regard to the human interest frame, analysis of U.S. media coverage of Myanmar/Burma from 2003 through 2012 revealed the persisting existence of an Aung San Suu Kyi human interest frame. Embedded within a government-population conflict frame, a human rights human interest frame, and a United States “protectionist” frame tied an economic consequence frame, this specific human interest frame was constructed around the use of language iconizing the political opposition leader. However, in the aftermath of the 2010 election, there was a highly recognizable shift away from focus on human rights issues toward an escalating tendency to present actors, issues, and events relative to the country’s political reform process. Accordingly, this frame was evoked within a broader morality frame centered on specific prescriptions pertaining to appropriate forms of political, economic, and social development. The rise of this morality/democracy frame in turn coincided with the ascension of a Thein Sein human interest frame.

Conversely, although a human interest frame was invoked within 89% of U.S. media coverage, the frame appeared in only 47% of exile media coverage. This in turn reveals the degree to which notable differences arose in the manner in which this frame was evoked within the respective data sets. Specifically, the human interest frames surrounding Aung San Suu Kyi and President Thein Sein and were noticeably absent in exile media coverage. Signifying the ubiquity of an Aung San Suu Kyi human interest frame, 70% of USA Today and New York Times articles made referenced the political opposition leader, overwhelmingly in conjunction with iconizing language and personal narratives that invoked compassion and sympathy.

Alternatively, Aung San Suu Kyi was referenced in only 17% of exile media stories. While narratives of Aung San Suu Kyi’s personal struggles was readily invoked as a means of contextualizing the country’s broader democratic struggle, exile media coverage of the
opposition party leader largely pertained to particular actions undertaken by Suu Kyi within the
country’s political arena, most notably her role in ethnic peace negotiations and her vocal
opposition to the Myitsone Dam. Moreover, unlike U.S. media coverage, the NLD was
referenced in 15% of all exile media articles, nearly as frequently as Aung San Suu Kyi. This in
turn suggests that coverage of Suu Kyi did not eclipse the main political opposition party, as it
undoubtedly did within American media coverage.

Similarly, while reference to Thein Sein appeared in 64% of U.S. media stories, the
president was only mentioned in 30% of exile media coverage. Nevertheless, reflecting a similar
pattern arising in American media coverage, although President Thein Sein’s Union Solidarity
and Development Party (USDP) was referenced in only 6% of coverage, the USDP was referred
to in just 3% of exile media stories. As the USDP is the military-backed ruling party comprised
of many former military officials, its absence in exile coverage is arguably explained by an
underlying perception of the party as an extension of military elite interests. Nonetheless, unlike
the USA Today and the New York Times, the 30% of stories referring to the President and party
leader did not entail a corresponding human interest frame. Rather, coverage of the Thein Sein
largely surrounded government policies and government statements pertaining to pertinent issues
and events.

While present within coverage of the nation’s ethnic populations, also of notable absence
in exile media coverage was the impoverished population frame, a frame highly present within
U.S. media coverage. Within this context, as opposed to the New York Times and the USA Today,
which tended frame Myanmar/Burma’s civilian population as ‘victims’ of an oppressive,
totalitarian government, thus requiring the ‘protection’ of a U.S.-led international ‘community’,
the human interest frames employed by the exile media largely pertained to narratives
surrounding personal agency and struggles of defiance against undemocratic governmental policies. Moreover, although exile media coverage of both Secretary Clinton’s and President Obama’s visits arose alongside personalized human interest frames, this coverage was also critical of both the sustainability and degree of the Thein Sein government’s ongoing political reform efforts, and the pace of western engagement (as well as the interests and motives underlying them).

Ultimately, the absence of the Thein Sein and Aung San Suu Kyi human interest frames within exile media coverage demonstrates the degree to which this coverage contained a significantly higher frequency of criticism of Myanmar/Burma’s reform process than U.S. media coverage. Specifically, *USA Today* and *New York Times* coverage cultivated and perpetuated familial, heroic, and ‘damsel in distress’ narratives that both negated the complexity of socio-political realities, and served to reinforce American foreign policy interests. Significantly, unlike U.S. media, exile media coverage present Myanmar/Burma’s political-economic reforms as a product of President Thein Sein’s moral transformation, but rather as a concerted attempt at national economic development through removal of economic sanctions. Alternatively, American media coverage of Myanmar/Burma’s socio-political context largely emerged in tandem with Aung San Suu Kyi’s personal and political narrative, in turn serving as a symbolic, contextual que representing the civilian population’s democracy struggle. In this regard, Suu Kyi, and in turn Myanmar/Burma’s “besieged population”, commonly arose within a ‘damsel in distress’ metaphor, itself embodying a narrative personifying the enduring struggle between freedom and democracy and the ever-present threat of irrational, authoritarian forces. This narrative inevitably served to perpetuate a “protectionist metaphor”, one in which the U.S. is
positioned as the global defender of freedom and democracy. Within this context, “protection” is inevitably predicated on U.S.-led sanctions.

Alternatively, analysis of the *conflict, responsibility* and *human interest* frames within exile media coverage revealed that, rather than embodying an overarching concern for political and human rights reform, U.S.-led sanctions against Myanmar/Burma were largely foregrounded on the ultimate goal of fostering economic privatization and liberalization. As a result, the comparative analysis of the manner in which the *conflict, responsibility,* and *human interest* frames were invoked within the two sample sets demonstrated that the *USA Today* and *New York Times* framing of Myanmar/Burma’s political transition highlighted the United States’ support for (and role in facilitating) the pursuit for democracy and human rights in Myanmar/Burma while serving to obscure the uncritical perpetuation of neoliberal “free market” principals.

As a comparative analysis between the ten year overarching U.S. media sample set, and the two year in-depth analysis of U.S. media set revealed, after Myanmar/Burma’s November 2010 national election, a long prevailing *human rights morality frame* was replaced by both the rise of a human interest frame centered on President Thein Sein and his reform efforts, and the emergence of a *liberalization morality frame* that framed the nation’s reform efforts in relation to a particular set of prescriptions pertaining to the perceived appropriate path toward socio-economic development. In this regard, 96% of American news media articles framed a problem, issue, or event in the context of moral prescriptions. This predominantly arose in relation to reference to democratic ideal (92%). Although initially emerging within a *conflict frame* that positioned these principals against totalitarian forces, this frame increasingly surrounded parallel processes of democratization and economic liberalization. Conversely, within exile media coverage, only 64% of the stories employed a *morality framework*. Consistent throughout the
coverage, this frame largely regarded *human rights*, present in 47% of the coverage. Although such frames readily tied to *democratic principles*, present in 34% of the coverage, particularly media freedoms, political activism, and political prisoners, these themes did not generally emerge within an *economic consequence frame*.

Moreover, examination of U.S. media coverage revealed the existence of an overlying *morality frame* tied to the “War on Terror”. In this regard, the country’s former military “junta” was positioned within the “axis of evil”, in turn reinforcing a prevailing moral foundation underpinning United States foreign policy prerogatives. This narrative was in part cultivated around Obama Administration assertions that Myanmar/Burma’s former military government was developing nuclear technologies through its ties with the North Korean government. Although exile media coverage surrounding President Obama’s and Secretary Clinton’s visits to the nation alluded to these accusations, this coverage largely appeared to put such claims into question. Consequently, a comparative analysis of the manner in which Myanmar/Burma’s ‘nuclear issue’ was framed reinforces evidence that mainstream American news media aligned themselves with the dominant narrative that propelled post-9/11 U.S. foreign policy.

Analysis of *New York Times* and *USA Today* coverage also revealed that the Obama Administration has made a concerted effort to redefine the United States’ role within the global community. Part of this shift has been an explicit attempt to rebrand the “Global War on Terror”. Accordingly, trumpeting U.S. support for Myanmar/Burma’s “fledgling democracy” as the catalyst for Myanmar/Burma’s severing of ties to North Korea, and its pursuit of nuclear technology, arguably represents an attempt by the Obama administration to re-frame the “War on Terror” as a victory.
With regard to the *economic consequence frame*, analysis of the data revealed that the *USA Today* and the *New York Times* uncritically presented U.S.-led sanctions against Myanmar/Burma as the driving force behind the political reform process. Although the ascension of a *Thein Sein human interest frame* functioned to personalize and individualize the reform efforts, the president’s actions were also largely presented as an effort directed at the removal of Western sanctions. As the termination of the Myitsone Dam project, and the corresponding break in relations between Naypyidaw and Beijing, was predominantly framed as the catalyst for Naypyidaw’s subsequent engagement with the United States, within U.S. media coverage, democratization did not emerge as the driving impetus behind Myanmar/Burma’s ensuing political transformation. Moreover, given the “nascent” stage of the country’s political reforms, and the persisting evidence of human rights abuses committed under the Thein Sein government, the presence of democracy cannot be said to be the preeminent measure of assessment for the rapid lifting of the sanctions following the initial reforms. Rather, analysis of the overall sample revealed that the changing political processes underway were presented within an *economic consequence frame* in which privatization and economic liberalization arose as democracy’s prerequisite.

Conversely, examination of exile media coverage did not indicate the existence of an overarching *economic consequence frame*. Although 80% of *USA Today* and *New York Times* articles directly invoked an *economic consequence frame*, the frame was found to be present in just 36% of exile media articles. Moreover, as addressed above, the framing of economic sanctions played a significant role in the construction of all five frames within the U.S. news coverage. However, whereas 45% of all U.S. media stories referenced economic sanctions against the Burmese government, they were referenced in just 7% of exile media coverage.
Dissuasion

News framing analysis may be seen as providing insight into the manner in which frames emerge as a broad ideological resource that can be selectively invoked in the service of US foreign policy goals (and the interests that these serve). Due to the superficial and often ethnocentric nature of much of the literature pertaining to the media, many important dimensions of media systems are often conceived of as ‘natural,’ or become so familiarized that they are rendered indiscernible (Siebert et al., 1956; Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Systematic comparisons of cases and their underlying components can serve to ‘denaturalize’ such aspects of the media in order to force their reconceptualization, thus further aiding in both the identification of common causal relationships and conceptual development. Pointing to the US media’s seemingly uniform support of American foreign policy, Herman and Chomsky (1988) maintain that persistent inequalities in wealth and power results in “the elite domination of the media and marginalization of dissents” (p. 2). Consequently, a comparative analysis of mainstream U.S. and Myanmar/Burma “independent” exile media framing of Myanmar/Burma’s 2011 political transition suggests the ability to provide unique insight into the nature of both exile news coverage and these organizations’ journalistic practices.

Ultimately, a comparative analysis of the construction of frames within the two data sets revealed that, unlike their exile counterparts, U.S. media coverage of Myanmar/Burma cultivated and perpetuated familial, heroic, and ‘damsel in distress’ narratives that both negated the complexity of socio-political realities, and served to reinforce U.S. foreign policy interests. Most notably, American news media framed Myanmar/Burma’s political transformation as a product of both the United States’ enduring support for Aung San Suu Kyi and the country’s prodemocracy movement, and President’s Thein Sein’s moral awakening.
In this regard, prior to her release from house arrest, Aung San Suu Kyi emerged within a “damsel in distress” narrative. Within this context, Suu Kyi, the heir to her father’s legacy, and ‘mother’ of Myanmar/Burma’s prodemocracy movement, arose as the personification of freedom and democracy itself. The United States’ unwavering support for both Suu Kyi and economic sanctions against Myanmar/Burma’s former military government, thus functioned to position America as the global defender of freedom and democracy. Such a narrative appears of particular interest given Myanmar/Burma’s military elite’s longstanding resolve in the face of decades of economic sanctions, and the degree to which the country’s substantive turn toward political reform surprised many of even the most fervent political analysts of the country.

When President Obama visited Myanmar/Burma in 2012, less than two weeks after his re-election, it was framed by both the administration and U.S. media as a symbolic “centerpiece” within the administration’s “pivot to Asia”, in essence reflecting a reorientation of U.S. foreign policy away from the insoluble wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Widely heralded as a “counterbalancing” of China, analysis of the U.S. media sample set revealed this so-called “pivot” coincided with the ascension of a shift back to a pre-War on Terror ideological Cold War frame. As previously addressed, much attention has been paid to the rise and fall of this so-called “Cold War frame” in media analysis. However, inherent to much of this scholarship is a problematic, taken-for-granted assumption that the “Cold War” actually did represent a clash of ideologies between capitalism and communism. Conversely, it may be argued that such discourse served to obscure a battle for Third World resources by Western capitalism and the much less well-resourced or savvy State capitalist Soviet Union.

Examination of American news framing revealed that in positioning Obama’s support for a “fledgling democracy” located at “the crossroads Asia” and in the shadow of “imposing” China
as the centerpiece of the administration’s strategic “pivot”, coverage in turn positioned the U.S. and American foreign policy as a global defender against Beijing’s resource exploitation of the Global South. Such findings were reinforced by analysis of U.S. news media’s framing of the administration’s engagement with the Thein Sein government more broadly, a government whose own foreign policy shift was framed ‘pivot’ away from China, and a reaction to encroaching Chinese interests.

Invoking the same light/dark archetypal metaphor readily used in both U.S. media’s highly connotative descriptions of Myanmar/Burma, and wider, orthodox language revolving around “open” and “closed” societies, Obama’s statement that "The flickers of progress that we have seen must not be extinguished – [Myanmar/Burma] must become a shining north star for all this nation's people", received notable attention (Baker, 19 November, 2012). While these statements were seemingly predicated on the progress of democratic reforms within the country, examination of exile media news coverage suggested that such reform was far less substantive than depicted in American coverage. Rather exile media coverage suggested that the degree to which democratic reform had taken hold at the time was in fact only to the extent that it facilitated the lifting of Western economic sanctions. Consequently, Myanmar/Burma’s “shining light” of “progress” may be seen as not representing the “freedom” of “democracy” as much as the “freedom” of trade brought about by the adoption of neoliberal policies. It is in this regard that Myanmar/Burma is invoked as a “north star” for all the “closed societies” in the Global South to see.

Conversely, U.S. coverage of the country’s socio-political context frequently arose alongside Aung San Suu Kyi’s personal and political narrative, serving as a symbolic representation of the population’s struggle for democracy. Suu Kyi (and the besieged population)
in turn emerged as a ‘damsel in distress’, and the personification of freedom and democracy more broadly, beset by irrational, authoritarian forces. This narrative ultimately perpetuated a “protectionist metaphor” that positioned the U.S. as the global defender of democracy and freedom. Such “protection” was ultimately predicated on U.S.-led sanctions. As analysis of exile media coverage revealed, rather than embodying an overriding concern for political reform, sanctions against Myanmar/Burma were predicated on an attempt at fostering economic liberalization and privatization. Consequently, a comparative analysis of the two sample sets revealed that the framing of U.S. support for Myanmar/Burma’s democracy movement served to obscure the perpetuation of neoliberal principals touting “free” trade and the deregulation of global markets.

The absence of the Aung San Suu Kyi and Thein Sein human interest frames within exile media coverage ultimately reflects the degree to which these media were far more likely to be critical of the reform process than U.S. media. As alluded to above, exile media’s framing of Myanmar/Burma’s political transition was much more skeptical of the degree to which substantive democratic and human rights reform had taken hold amid the Obama Administration’s engagement with the Thein Sein government. Moreover, in the absence of the human interest narratives found within U.S. media, this coverage was significantly more substantive, dealing with a much broader array of issues relevant to local communities around the country. Such a finding is largely expected given these organizations long entrenched networks among the country’s population. This in turn highlights these media’s enduring participant, and deliberative development journalism function within the country, and suggests their future importance to the inevitable rapid development processes soon to come. Moreover, given their established networks and professionalization, the DVB, Mizzima News, and the
Irrawaddy will likely provide much in the way of challenging and molding dominant, accepted ‘ways of doing media’ in the country.

For Gramsci (1971), rather than mere domination, ideological and cultural relations between dominant and subordinate classes represent a struggle over hegemony, consent to intellectual, moral, cultural and political governance by the ruling class. Consequently, hegemony is neither static nor universal. Rather it must be achieved, reproduced and maintained. Such processes, Gramsci argues, only arise if the ruling ideology is able to incorporate the culture and values of the subordinate class. Thus, hegemony is not attained through the eradication of subordinate class culture, but by means of its fusion to ruling class ideology and culture where embedded political allegiances are subsumed and transformed. Within such processes, propagated by the media, educational institutions, and other mechanisms of information and cultural transmission, inherent dialectical tensions and adaptation to emerging conditional imperatives lead to a negotiated reproduction of ruling class values by the subordinate class. Within this context, dissident values are absorbed and modified, thus negating their capacity to be fully articulated.

In this regard, the state emerges as the realization of this “historical unity of the ruling class” and ideology arises as the “social cement” solidifying the prevailing social structure (Gramsci, 1971, p. 52). The social structure, characterized by various civil society institutions (political, educational, religious, etc), serves to embed this ideology into taken-for-granted, commonsense understandings which renders it indiscernible, in turn ‘naturalizing’ existing power relations.

The history of modern Myanmar/Burma is a history that draws quite clear the boundaries and tensions over cultural hegemony. Since General Ne Win rose to power in 1962, the state’s
circumscription of the country’s media has stood at the fault line of a struggle for hegemonic control. Over the decades of military rule, the state’s monopoly over information can undoubtedly be seen as an explicit attempt at cultivating consent to ruling class ideology, with all official mechanisms of information and cultural transmission attempting to fuse Burmese culture and cultural values with those of the political and economic elite. Nevertheless, while attempting to subsume and transform political allegiances to ruling class ideology, the totality of the control over the country’s cultural institutions, coupled with the ever-present latent necessity of force, made apparent by the existence of a ‘repressive-state apparatus’ (Althusser, 1970), appears to have long rendered attempts toward consent to dominant ideology discernable and ultimately void in form. Nevertheless, despite the apparent cracks in Myanmar/Burma’s former military government’s cultural hegemony, it remains clear that over that last half century, the nation’s socio-political realities have been defined by struggles revolving around consent to prevailing power structures.

Believing that the “subaltern class”, the social groups of dispossessed peoples located outside the margins of the hegemonic power structure (Spivak, 1988; Chakrabarty, 2002; Ludden, 2002; Gajjalla, 2011; Mingnolo 2012), was capable of overcoming capitalism’s hegemony, Gramsci (1971) perceived civil society to be the location where oppositional forces could formulate their “war of position” against consent to “naturalized” power configurations. Consequently, civil society both represents the terrain where hegemony is disseminated, and the sphere where opposition to the hegemonic power structure can be articulated. Within this context, Gramsci maintained that intellectuals “organically” emerging from the ranks of the working class possessed the necessary language and ability to express the experiences and sentiment of the ‘subaltern,’ labor class (Gramsci, 1971, p. 229-238). According to Gramsci’s
notion of hegemony, dominant ideology, and in turn consent to prevailing power relations, is achieved through the various institutions that make-up civil society, such as the media, the educational system and voluntary associations. Foregrounded in civil society, and frequently highlighted by the embedded significance intellectuals, actions undertaken by social movements that are perceived as “disorganizing consent” have in turn often been conceptualized as “a disruption of hegemonic discourses and practices,” in turn suggesting these movements’ capacity to arise as “agencies of counter-hegemony” (Carroll & Ratner, 1994, p. 6).

In successfully circumventing the former military government’s censorship and monopoly over the country’s cultural apparatuses while in exile, Mizzima, DVB, and the Irrawaddy fostered alternative public spheres, discursive terrains whereby formerly disposed voices could deliberate matters of public concern. In so doing, they may be seen as cultivating a “war of position” that has allowed them to “disorganize consent” to “naturalized” power formations. Consequently, these media undoubtedly may be said to have arisen as “agencies of counter-hegemony”. Accordingly, given their unwavering ethos centered around facilitating “space” for critiquing and challenging the state and state policies, within the initial stages of their integration into the country, these organizations can, for now, also undoubtedly be said to be maintaining their counter-hegemonic potential. Nevertheless, given the competitive, and arguably hostile, nature of Myanmar/Burma’s media climate, coupled with the continued erosion of donor funding, Myanmar/Burma’s exile media’s future remains uncertain.

Gramsci sees the goal of “a philosophical movement” as one that bridges the gulf between the intellectual and the masses (p. 344). In this regard, the ambition is not an idealized structure of rule, but the organic cultivation of a detrimental critique of hegemonic formations of rule while cultivating the foundations for popular self-government. Thus, the philosophy of
praxis rests on the capacity of the intellectuals to establish an organic nexus or unity by drawing upon the innate world perspective of the masses. While the horizontal, counter-hegemonic journalistic practices of these organizations suggest that Myanmar/Burma’s exile media represent the embodiment of the “organic intellectuals” called for by Gramsci, their reliance on donor funding inevitably locates them within the class relations of capitalist society. According to Marx and Engels (1978), “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time the ruling intellectual force”. As such, dominant meanings and values represent both ruling class ideas and the means with which to foster the ideological mechanisms necessary for the legitimation of class domination. For them, the economic foundation of society, constituted by the relations of production, serves as the site where the subordination of social groups is attained through the construction of culture and ideology.

Inevitably, such processes allow for, and even necessitate a level of dissent, thus affording some level of discretion to journalist. Examination of exile media coverage demonstrated a significant degree of skepticism of both Thein Sein’s government reforms and U.S. engagement, particularly in relation to American media. Nevertheless, despite significant, longstanding discord within both the National League for Democracy and Myanmar/Burma’s prodemocracy movement more broadly over the validity and impact of Western sanctions, Myanmar/Burma’s “independent” media was largely uncritical of the sanctions or their socio-economic impact. Moreover, analysis revealed little discussion of the neoliberal economic policies driving those sanctions and underlying the dramatic socio-economic changes occurring throughout the country. Despite not being fully integrated into a commercial model of organization, this alludes to the presence of Herman and Chomsky (1988) second filter that
maintains that stories cannot be unfavorable to advertiser interests or the logic of consumer capitalism that underpin them. Consequently, while undoubtedly possessing counter-hegemonic potential Myanmar/Burma’s exile media nonetheless appear to occupy the same location as other “alternative media’, one that inhibits their revolutionary potential.
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### APPENDIX A: CODING INSTRUMENT

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<tr>
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<td>Frames:</td>
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<td>Frames:</td>
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</table>

[Mark each question as yes (1) or no (0)]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Attribution of Responsibility</strong></th>
<th>Did the article suggest that some level of government has the ability to alleviate the problem?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did the article suggest that some level of the government is responsible for the issue/problem?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did the article suggest solution(s) to the problem/issue?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did the article suggest that an individual or group is responsible for the issue/problem?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Did the article suggest the problem requires urgent action?</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Human Interest</strong></th>
<th>Did the article provide a human example or “human face”?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did the article employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy, caring, sympathy or compassion?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did the article emphasize how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did the article go into the personal or private lives of the actors?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did the article contain visual information that might generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy or compassion?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Economic Consequences</strong></th>
<th>Did the article of financial losses or gains now or in the future?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is there a reference to economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of action?</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Morality</strong></th>
<th>Did the article contain any moral message?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did the article offer specific social prescriptions about how to behave?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Did the article make reference to morality, God and other religious tenets?</td>
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</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Conflict</strong></th>
<th>Did the article reflect disagreement between parties/individuals-groups-countries?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does one party-individual-group-county criticize another?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Did the article refer to two sides or to more than two sides of the problem or issue?

## Did the article refer to winners and losers?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Communities</th>
<th>Did the article address an issue/problem in relation to political, economic cooperation, influence or conflict between Southeast Asian countries?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did the article address an issue/problem in relation to the political or economic influence of India?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did the article address an issue/problem in relation to the political or economic influence of Bangladesh?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did the article address an issue/problem in relation to the political or economic influence of Japan?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did the article address an issue/problem in relation to the political or economic influence of Thailand?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did the article address an issue/problem in relation to the political or economic influence of Malaysia?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Did the article address conflict between Myanmar’s Buddhist and Muslim populations? |
| Did the article make reference to Myanmar’s Rohingya population? |
| Did the article make reference to Myanmar’s Rakhine population? |
| Did the article make reference to Myanmar’s Kokang population? |
| Did the article make reference to Myanmar’s Phalon-Sawaw population? |
| Did the article make reference to Myanmar’s Arakanese population? |
| Did the article make reference to Myanmar’s Chin population? |
| Did the article make reference to Myanmar’s Mon population? |
| Did the article make reference to Myanmar’s Shan population? |
| Did the article make reference to Myanmar’s Karen population? |
| Did the article make reference to Myanmar’s Kachin population? |
| Did the article address an issue/problem in relation to the political or economic influence of Singapore? |
| Did the article address an issue/problem in relation to the political or economic influence of Laos? |
| Did the article address an issue/problem in relation to the political or economic influence of South Korea? |
| Did the article address an issue/problem in relation to the political or economic influence of North Korea? |
| Did the article address an issue/problem in relation to the political or economic influence of China? |
| Democracy | Did the article addresses an event, problem, or issue in the context of democratic ideals or the prescription of policy in pursuit of those ideals? |
| NGO (non-human rights/think tank)? |
| Human Rights NGO (non-Myanmar/Burma)? |
| Myanmar/Burma NGO (non-domestic)? |
| Myanmar/Burma NGO (domestic/non-ethnic)? |
| Myanmarese Ethnic Group/NGO? |
| Domestic NGO (labor, legal, etc)? |
| Think Tank? |
| Western Media? |
| Privet/Non-Western Media? |
| Burmese Media (Domestic)? |
| Burmese State-Media? |
| Exile Press (Irrawaddy/DVB/Mizzima)? |
| Exile Press (Ethnic Minority)? |
| Secretary of State Hilary Clinton? |
| President Obama/Administration Spokesman? |
| US Government Official? (non-Obama/Clinton) |
| UN Official/UN Body? |
| Western Scholar? |
### Themes/Categories

[Mark each question as yes (1) or no (2)]]

| Non-western Scholar? |  
| Neighboring Government Official? *(non-China)* |  
| China Government Official? |  
| China Media? |  
| Regional Neighbor Media? |  
| Domestic/Burmese Company? |  
| Non-Domestic Company? |  
| 888 Students? |  
| Burmese Political Party *(Non-NLD/USDP)*? |  
| National League for Democracy *(non-Suu Kyi)*? |  
| Aung San Suu Kyi/Spokesman? |  
| President Thein Sein/Administration Spokesman? |  
| Union Solidarity & Development Party *(USDP)* |  
| Myanmar/Burma Military Official |  
| Myanmar/Burma Government Body/Official *(non-Thein Sein/Military)* |  
| Myanmar/Burma Political Activist *(domestic)*? |  
| Myanmar/Burma Citizen *(diaspora)* |  
| Burmese Citizen *(non-political/activist/NGO)* |  

| Critical of Government |
| Did the article suggest that some level of the government is responsible for a problem? |  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Critical of President Thein Sein</strong></th>
<th>Did the article suggest that the President Thein Sein was responsible for a problem?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>President Thein Sein-Human Interest</strong></td>
<td>Did the article employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of empathy, caring, sympathy or compassion for President Thein Sein?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reference to President Thein Sein</strong></td>
<td>Did the article make reference to President Thein Sein?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reference to USDP</strong></td>
<td>Did the article make reference to the Union of Solidarity and Development party (USDP)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critical of Aung San Suu Kyi</strong></td>
<td>Did the article suggest that Aung San Suu Kyi was responsible for a problem?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aung San Suu Kyi-Human Interest</strong></td>
<td>Did the article employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of empathy, caring, sympathy, or compassion for Aung San Suu Kyi?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reference to Aung San Suu Kyi</strong></td>
<td>Did the article make reference to Aung San Suu Kyi?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reference to NLD</strong></td>
<td>Did the article make reference to the National League for Democracy Party (NLD)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critical of U.S.</strong></td>
<td>Did the article suggest that the United States government was responsible for a problem?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>U.S. Solution/Protector Metaphor</strong></td>
<td>Did the article suggest the ability of the U.S. to alleviate a problem or make mention to a U.S prescription to a problem?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economic Sanctions?</strong></td>
<td>Did the article mention U.S. or western economic sanctions against Myanmar/Burma’s government?</td>
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<td>Category</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Critical of UN</strong></td>
<td>Did the article suggest that the United Nations was responsible for a problem?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>UN Solution/Protector Metaphor</strong></td>
<td>Did the article suggest the ability of the UN to alleviate a problem or make mention to a UN prescription to a problem?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political Activism</strong></td>
<td>Did the article make reference to political activism by a group or individual (protests, demonstration, etc.)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Censorship</strong></td>
<td>Did the article make reference to media censorship or media freedoms in Myanmar?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Journalistic Professionalism</strong></td>
<td>Did the article make reference to standards of journalistic professionalism (i.e. objectivity, independence, or training)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Democracy</strong></td>
<td>Did the article discuss an issue/problem/event in relation to Burma/Myanmar’s democratic reforms?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Human Rights</strong></td>
<td>Did the article make reference to human rights (assembly/demonstrate; union/labor; free speech/censorship; forced/child labor; religious/sexual violence/persecution); political prisoners/persecution, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political Prisoners</strong></td>
<td>Did the article make reference to “political prisoners” in Myanmar?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>NGO’s</strong></td>
<td>Did the article make reference to one or more nongovernmental organizations?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Colonialism</strong></td>
<td>Did the article make reference to the country’s colonial history?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>“Myanmar”</strong></td>
<td>Was “Myanmar” the primary designation?</td>
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<td>Question</td>
<td>Answer</td>
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<td>“Burma”</td>
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<td>Was “Burma” the primary designation?</td>
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<td>Was “Burma” used to refer to the country?</td>
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<td>IMF/World Bank</td>
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<td>Did the article make reference to the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank</td>
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<td>US-China Relationship?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did the article mention the political/economic relationship between China and the U.S.?</td>
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<tr>
<td>China’s Economic Interest?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did the article mention China’s economic cooperation/interest in Myanmar/Burma?</td>
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<tr>
<td>China’s Political Support?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did the article mention China’s political support of Myanmar’s government?</td>
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<tr>
<td>China Conflict?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did the article mention any political conflict between China-Myanmar?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anti-Chinese sentiment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does the article make reference to anti-Chinese sentiment in Myanmar?</td>
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<td>US-India Relationship?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did the article mention the political/economic relationship between India and the U.S.?</td>
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<td>India Economic Interest?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>India Political Support?</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Internet/Mobile Phones?</strong></td>
<td>Does the article make reference to Internet or mobile phone use in Myanmar?</td>
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<td><strong>Drug Trade?</strong></td>
<td>Does the article make reference to the drug trade along Myanmar’s borders?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Regime” Vocabulary?</strong></td>
<td>Did the article use descriptive terminology when referencing Myanmar’s government (i.e. dictatorship, regime, junta, pariah, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tourism?</strong></td>
<td>Did the article mention Myanmar’s tourism industry?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Corruption?</strong></td>
<td>Did the article mention economic or political corruption within the country?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Refugees</strong></td>
<td>Did the article make reference to Myanmar’s “refugee” situation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Buddhist-Muslim Violence</strong></td>
<td>Did the article mention violence/conflict between Myanmar’s Buddhist and Muslim populations?</td>
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**Additional Notes:**

**Additional Frames/Themes/Categories**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metaphor(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Metaphor(s)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exemplar(s)</td>
<td>(i.e. headlines illustrative of frames)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Catch-Phrase(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visual Image(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Principle(s)</td>
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APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

PREAMBLE

a. Personal introduction

b. Overview of study

c. Permission to transcribe/consent form

SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

Alternative Media

a. What, to you, is the significance of your organization’s efforts on journalistic practices in Myanmar? On the country’s media landscape more broadly?

b. How would you define the values that underlie your organization?

c. What, to you, does professional journalistic independence mean? And do you consider that this is something that you have to have? If not, in what ways does the degree of your professional independence fall short?

d. How would you describe the ownership, funding and organizational structure of your organization? How has this changed in recent years?

e. What challenges has your organization traditionally faced with regard to donor funding? Has this shaped your production processes or content?

f. Your organization is currently beginning a transition to a commercial model of organization. What would you say is the driving force behind this transformation? What is the significance of donor funding? Of market forces?

g. What benefits do you foresee as arising from your organization’s recent commercial transition? Difficulties?

h. How would you describe the relationship between your organization and other prominent ‘independent’ exile media, namely [X and Y]? Do you see any substantive differences in your underlying values, definition of professional independence, production processes or organization?

a. How would you describe the relationship between your organization and the various so-called ‘ethnic’ exile media, those exile media representing specific ethnic community interests? Do you see a historical relationship between predominant
‘independent’ and ‘ethnic’ exile media? How would you describe the differences between your organization and these media’s values, definition of professional independence, production processes or organization?

b. Prior to your organization’s entrance into the country, what was the role of the Internet and related technologies in both your own and your organization’s production processes? What is the relationship of such processes to traditional forms of media? How do you foresee this relationship changing in the future?

c. How is your work and that of your organization affected by the unfolding online/digital revolution? What is the significance of your organization’s history as a web-based publisher in this regard? Do you see particular advantages or disadvantages to Internet-based versus print-based publishing?

Public Sphere

a. Prior to its formal integration into Myanmar, how did your organization circumvent government censorship barriers? How has this changed amid both your organization’s domestic integration and the country’s unfolding political reforms?

b. What are the current obstacles to practicing journalism in Myanmar? How are domestic journalists dealing with these challenges?

a. How would you describe mainstream Western media coverage of Myanmar? Do you see any problems or limitations with such coverage? If so, where do these problems arise from?

b. How would you describe the relationship between your organization and mainstream international media? The relationship between mainstream international media and Myanmar’s ‘independent’ exile media more broadly?

c. What do you see as the relationship between your organization and Myanmar’s transnational advocacy movement? Has this relationship changed over time? What do you see as the role and significance of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Myanmar’s transnational advocacy movement?

d. What is the relationship between your organization and Myanmar’s global diaspora community? The significance of this diaspora community to the country’s political context more broadly?

e. How would you describe your organization’s current relationship with Myanmar’s government? How has this relationship changed in recent years? Do you foresee it changing in the future?
f. How would you describe your organization’s relationship with the Thai government? The Thai government’s relationship with Myanmar’s exile media and diaspora more broadly? Has this relationship changed over time?

g. What is the significance of your English language news content versus your Burmese language content relative to the facilitation of public discussion and deliberation?

h. What is your perception of possible opportunities for public deliberation in the future?

SECTION III: WRAP-UP

a. Appreciation

b. Follow-ups for questions/concerns

c. Contact information
APPENDIX C: HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

DATE: October 3, 2014
TO: Brett Labbe, MA
FROM: Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board
PROJECT TITLE: [652227-3] Myanmar’s Exile Media in Transition
SUBMISSION TYPE: Revision
ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: October 1, 2014
EXPIRATION DATE: September 8, 2015
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review
REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # 7

Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this project. The Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is available as a published Board Document in the Review Details page. You must use the approved version of the consent document when obtaining consent from participants. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that you are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures, those modifications must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the modification request form for this procedure.

You have been approved to enroll 15 participants. If you wish to enroll additional participants you must seek approval from the HSRB.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must also be reported promptly to this office.

This approval expires on September 8, 2015. You will receive a continuing review notice before your project expires. If you wish to continue your work after the expiration date, your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Good luck with your work. If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bgus.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence regarding this project.
Dear Irrawaddy News Magazine Editors,

My name is Brett Labbé, I am a doctoral student at Bowling Green State University within the School of Media and Communication. My advisor is Dr. Oliver Boyd-Barrett. I am currently writing my doctoral dissertation on "Burma/Myanmar’s Independent Media in Transition."

The purpose of this research is to examine the role of The Irrawaddy News Magazine, The Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), and Mizzima News within Burma/Myanmar’s public sphere, and the related significance of the organizations’ recent entrance into the country. In doing so, this study will benefit the scholarly community by enhancing theoretical understandings of the role of ‘alternative’ journalistic practices in enabling public deliberation. An overriding goal of all three exile-run media organizations is raising global awareness of Burma/Myanmar’s socio-economic and political developments. As this research investigation shares such a commitment, it will also benefit your organization by furthering this goal.

I was wondering if someone from your organization would be willing to meet with me in Yangon sometime between the dates of October 15th and November 3rd, and/or in Chiang Mai between the dates of November 4th and November 13th, to discuss you and your organization’s journalistic practices and role within Burma/Myanmar. As I recognize the potential existence of concerns with regard to safety, please let me know of any necessary considerations you may have in this regard. Please also note that all possible measures will be taken to protect the confidentiality of any participants who may decide to participate in this research. If helpful, I have been recommended the name of a local Burmese translator by fellow American Burmese studies scholar Dr. Heather MacLachlan. Participation in this study will take 45 minutes, although interviews may be extended on the basis your schedule and willingness.

If you are interested in participating in this research, you may contact me either by email (blabbe@bgsu.edu), or by telephone (011) 419-322-9583. Please find my curriculum vitae attached. Thank you for your time and consideration,

Sincerely,

Brett R. Labbé
Doctoral Candidate
School of Media and Communication
Bowling Green State University
Bowling Green, Ohio 43403
blabbe@bgsu.edu
(419) 322-9583