To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Christopher Todd Minnix entitled “Professional Publics/Private Citizens: Human Rights NGOs and the Sponsoring of Public Activism.” I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

Mary Jo Reiff
Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Janet Atwill

Michael Keene

Rosalind Hackett

Accepted for the Council:

Linda Painter
Interim Dean of Graduate Studies

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)
PROFESSIONAL PUBLICS/PRIVATE CITIZENS: HUMAN RIGHTS NGOS AND THE SPONSORING OF PUBLIC DISCURSIVE ACTIVISM

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Christopher Todd Minnix
May 2007
DEDICATION

To Jay, who has shared with me her beautiful spirit and profound intellect, and who is the reason for my sincerest happiness in work and in life.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

During this project, I have been fortunate enough to benefit from the guidance of a stellar committee and from the support of a wonderful community of friends, family, and colleagues. Without the contributions of each of these individuals, this project would have not been possible, and each of these individuals have played an important role in teaching me how to conduct my work with professionalism and passion.

The support that I have received for my research through the University of Tennessee has been formative to this work. I would like thank the University for awarding me a John B. Emperor Fellowship in the Fall of 2005, which gave me the time necessary to research and draft this project. The initial research for this project was also funded by a generous summer research grant from the Scholarly Activities Research and Incentives Fund, a grant I shared with Dr. Janet Atwill. Lastly, I would like to specifically thank the University of Tennessee’s department of English, which provided me with an excellent teaching fellowship, as well as several research fellowships that furthered my understanding of the field of Rhetoric and Composition.

The grace and generosity shown to me by my dissertation committee is rivaled only by the depth of their expertise and the insightfulness of their commentary. Dr. Janet Atwill has worked with me on this project for the past three years and has been a true mentor, guiding me through the steps necessary to place my work in the context of the field of Rhetoric and Composition. The expert advice I have received from her has been crucial to this project and to my professionalization. I have also been fortunate enough to work with Dr. Michael Keene, whose attentive advice and commentary have helped me more fully understand the audience of this work and the steps necessary to publish this
work. Dr. Rosalind Hackett has been a source of inspiration and guidance throughout the reading of this dissertation, and I am especially grateful for her insightful analysis of this project’s discussion of visual rhetoric, which has helped me more fully comprehend the relationship of this project to the increasingly visual nature of human rights advocacy.

There is no amount of gratitude that can repay Dr. Mary Jo Reiff for her role as advisor, mentor, and advocate. Without Dr. Reiff’s expert guidance this dissertation would have not been possible. Dr. Reiff’s expert command of the field of Rhetoric and Composition, along with the care and generosity with which she approaches her colleagues and students make her a model of excellence that I only hope to someday aspire to. You have been a true mentor and model for me Dr. Reiff, and I am a better scholar from having had the chance to work with you.

I have been blessed with an amazing group of family and friends who have made this project possible. My parents, Don and Emily Minnix, have been a true source of support and have believed in my potential from a young age, and I will forever be indebted to them for the love that they have shown me. I am also indebted to Jan and Dick Jessee, who have been a constant source of support, advice, and humor over the past four years. Thank you so much for believing in me and for the continual love that you have shown me throughout this process.

Lastly, Jay Jessee, my beautiful wife and intellectual partner, provided me with a brilliant and supportive audience for the ideas in this dissertation, and has continually shown me the joy in considering the possibilities that life has to offer. Thank you for the
beautiful life that you have given me, and for the way that you have enriched my mind and spirit. I love you.
ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the role of human rights Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in sponsoring public deliberation and activism. Activists who take part in an NGO’s campaigns encounter a system of genres that aligns their human rights literacies and discourse with the NGO’s ideological and organizational structure. The genres that activists use thus play a powerful socializing role, placing the discourse of activists within a complex context of organizational discourse that not only embodies specific human rights exigencies, but also specific organizational rationales for addressing those exigencies. Human rights NGOs, while often reflecting an ideology of a common, unified voice for human rights, are in fact heterogeneous networks of discursive agents that are linked together through complex interdiscursive exchanges. I argue that these rhetorical exchanges reflect a set of mediating rhetorical strategies that NGOs employ to translate their professional advocacy into terms and genres accessible to their membership and to their public activists. This analysis is developed from a case study of the organizational structure and discursive communities of Amnesty International (AI) and the influence of Amnesty’s advocacy structures and techniques on the NGOs and social movements that lobby for human rights. Chapters one and two analyze the problem of discursive agency in discussions of global and transnational civil society, aligning critical discussions of the development of global public opinion with critiques of the growing professionalism of human rights NGOs. In chapter three, I trace the relationship of AI’s professional genres to the international institutions of human rights policy and law. Chapter four examines the activist genre system of Amnesty International and the
role of professional discourse plays in framing opportunities for the activism of
Amnesty’s members. I then turn in chapter five to an analysis of the multi-modal genres
and web genres that AI has utilized to construct public awareness of its campaigns.
Chapter six concludes the study by tracing out the implications of this analysis for
theories of the public sphere and global civil society. I argue that genre analysis provides
a means for understanding the social contexts, discursive agencies, and embodied
literacies of contemporary public discourse.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>INTRODUCTION</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rhetorical Studies of Human Rights NGOs</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overview of Chapters</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>DISCURSIVE AGENCY IN TRANSNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY: HUMAN RIGHTS NGOS, PROFESSIONALISM, AND THE PROBLEM OF PUBLIC DISCOURSE ON HUMAN RIGHTS</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Human Rights NGOs, Discursive Agency and the Rhetoric of Global Civil Society</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Professionalization of Human Rights NGOs and the Technical Rationality of Human Rights Discourse</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Genre, Intertextuality, and the Multiple Agencies of Professional Publics</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Texts and Genres Analyzed</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>“BEARING WITNESS” IN THE TECHNICAL SPHERE: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL’S PROFESSIONAL GENRES AND THE INTERTEXTUAL COORDINATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Amnesty International’s Professional Research Paradigm and the Dangers of Human Rights Professionalism</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AI’s Professional Genres in the Human Rights Technical Sphere</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusion: AI and the Contentious Politics of the United Nations</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td>PROFESSIONALLY MEDIATED ACTIVISM: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL’S ACTIVIST GENRE SYSTEM</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organizational Context: AI and AIUSA’s Membership Based Integrated Research Paradigm, and the Framing of Activist Literacy</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Activist Discursive Forums: Urgent Actions, Online Actions, and the Online Action Center</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sponsoring Activist Discourse: Bridging Genres and the Discursive Mediation Between Professional and Activist Discourse</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discursive Activism in Amnesty International USA’s Sudan Crisis Campaign. ................................................. 149
Conclusion: AI and the Expansion of Transnational Activism. ...............155

V. “MAKE SOME NOISE!”: INTERNET COMMUNICATIONS, MULTIMODAL GENRES AND THE MULTI-MEDIA RHETORIC OF AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL’S ONLINE CAMPAIGNS .............................................................. 157
NGOs and the Framing of Cyberactivist Communities. ..................162
Amnesty International’s Organizational Homepage and the Visual Presence of Campaigning. ..................................................167
Amnesty International’s Multi-modal Action Genres and the Power of Human Rights Testimony. ..................180
Conclusion. .......................................................................... 187

VI. CONCLUSION: PROFESSIONAL PUBLICS, TECHNICAL RATIONALITY, AND THE PUBLIC ACCESSIBILITY OF HUMAN RIGHTS DISCOURSE .......................................................... 190
Normative Models of Human Rights Discourse and Discursive Agency. ..................................................................195
Communicative Rationality, Rhetoric, and the Problem of Agency in Human Rights Activism. .........................................204
Reconceptualizing Human Rights Publics Through the Study of Genre: Directions for Further Research. ......................212
Conclusion: Activist Research Methodologies. ..............................231

BIBLIOGRAPHY. ....................................................................237

VITA .......................................................................................256
LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Human Rights NGO Professional Written Genre Repertoire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Intertextual References to International Human Rights Law and Sudanese Domestic Policy in AI’s Sudan Country Reports and Memorandums 2003-2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Activist Bridging Genres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Comparison of Genre Hierarchies of Twenty-Five Amnesty International and Twenty Five Human Rights Watch Organizational Home Pages: 2000-2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>AIUSA Online Action Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>AIUSA Online Action Center: Read-Write Format Sample Letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Amnesty International’s Organizational Homepage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Human Rights Watch Organizational Homepage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Amnesty International Multimodal Activist Genre Segment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>Amnesty International Multimodal Petition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter One: Introduction

“Civil society organizations, through their web sites and other channels, are informing citizens about policy choices. Global networks of activists, parliamentarians, journalists, social movement leaders and others are also influencing policy debates, especially on international issues. All this is reinforced by the impact of the mass media on current affairs — and by the diverse sources that most people can turn to for information. And all this is creating a new phenomenon — global public opinion — that is shaping the political agenda and generating a cosmopolitan set of norms and citizen demands that transcend national boundaries. Civil society and citizen action have contributed to the opening up of a global public space for debate. In this sense, civil society is as much part of today’s global governance as are Governments”( “We the Peoples: Civil society, the United Nations and Global Governance: Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations–Civil Society Relations,” UN Document A/58/817).

On May 28, 1961, Peter Beneson’s article “The Forgotten Prisoners” appeared in the London paper The Observer and Weekend Review and marked the public debut of the Amnesty movement. Chronicling the cases of six political prisoners, Beneson’s article set out both the difficulty and potential of public discourse and action on human rights. He observed,

Open your newspaper any day of the week and you will find a report from somewhere in the world of someone being imprisoned, tortured or executed because his opinions or religion are unacceptable to his government. . . . The newspaper reader feels a sickening sense of impotence. Yet if these feelings of disgust all over the world could be united into common action, something effective could be done. (21)

Beneson noted what would come to be two interrelated and ongoing concerns of many human rights Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs): the role of private citizens in the
public discourse of human rights and the strategies needed to galvanize common, public action on human rights abuses. Translating international rights issues into exigencies that galvanize public concern and action has continued to be a driving force of the work of Amnesty International (AI) and many other human rights NGOs. Acting as facilitators of public discourse on human rights, human rights NGOs have carved out a public space for the role of grassroots discourse in the legitimation of human rights policies and practices. At the same time, many human rights NGOs have established reputations as experts in the provision of human rights information and as valuable advisory bodies in the drafting of human rights policy. NGOs, and Amnesty in particular, have played a central role in shaping the policies, agendas, and discourses of the United Nations through their participation in the UN Human Rights Commission and their continued role in the new UN Human Rights Committee. The reputation for timely, objective, and expert human rights documentation that many NGOs have gained in high-level intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) like the UN has been significant in extending their influence as lobbying organizations and in endowing their grassroots campaigns with an ethos of credibility.

Human rights NGOs have played an increasingly important role in discussions of international human rights since the drafting and ratification of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in 1948. Despite the contested relationship between states and NGOs during that arose as a result of the Cold War politics during the nineteen sixties, NGO’s access to the high-level institutions of human rights policy has increased markedly.\(^1\) In

---

\(^1\) International NGOs like Amnesty International can apply for consultative status through the UN Economic and Security Council. This status, the formal arrangements of which were finalized in 1950,
the 1970s, organizations like Amnesty International launched highly successful public campaigns (such as AI’s campaign against torture), which shaped the agendas and the formal treaty monitoring mechanisms of the UN Human Rights Commission. During this period, the role of NGOs as providers of impartial, accurate information on human rights abuses led many UN member-states to argue that “the UN is almost totally dependent on NGOs to provide expertise in many areas” (Otto 115). The interdependency forged between NGOs like AI and the UN during this period extended NGO influence beyond the role initially carved out for them as “consultative” organizations that are excluded from the realm of decision-making and policy formation. Following the 1993 Vienna Conference, the role of NGOs in information provision, policy development, and policy monitoring at the UN was extended to include professional and legal assistance to major UN organs, such as the Human Rights Committee and the UN Security Council.

Scholars of human rights NGOs have pointed towards the increasing role of NGOs as “insiders” in IGOs like the UN, lending professional staff and resources to provide assistance and counsel to UN missions and policy-making groups (Goer 401-2). Many analysts have pointed to the challenge posed to state-sovereignty through the increase in NGO access and influence in international institutions, citing the rise of NGOs as an indication of a rapidly developing global civil society (Ahheier, Glasius,

grants NGOs access to make public statements to the UN Human Rights Commission (now Human Rights Committee), as well as access to place items on the agenda of the Economic and Security Council (see Peter Willett’s “Consultative Status for NGOs at the United Nations” for a complete history of consultative status at the UN. In 1968, due to the uncovering of the United States funding of several anti-communist NGOs with consultative status, UN Resolution 1296 was passed. This resolution “forced NGOs to be financially transparent as well as developing procedures for withdrawal of consultative status” (Otto 110). Since the waning of the Cold War, the number of consultative NGOs has increased and the role of NGOs in the UN system has been lauded and extended through several key UN Documents, such as the 1993 Vienna Declaration, the 1994 5th Coordinating Meeting of Chairpersons of All Human Rights Treaty Committees, and the 2004 “We the Peoples: Civil Society, the United Nations and Global Governance: Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations—Civil Society Relations.”
and Kaldor 4). As institutions that challenge realist conceptions of state-power in international politics, human rights NGOs are often characterized as manifestations of a global political will powerful enough to legitimate the human rights practices of states towards their citizens (Myer et al. “World Society and the Nation State” 165).

As discussions of the role of NGOs in global civil society have evolved and the role of NGOs in international political institutions has increased, the roles of individual and collective agency in human rights NGOs have become increasingly complicated. Membership-based NGOs like Amnesty International, which has a membership base of 1.1 million international members, often balance their professional influence and technical assistance in high-level human rights institutions with their public campaigns, which engage a mass-membership that often lacks the legal/political expertise and institutional access utilized by AI’s professionals researchers and advocates. NGOs like AI have actively sought to coordinate their professional advocacy and grassroots activism through a range of discursive strategies that translate the complex exigencies of human rights into opportunities for individual and collective activism. As discussions of global civil society and global public opinion continue to shape both organizational and academic discussions of NGOs, the discursive, social relationships between NGO professionals and grassroots NGO activists needs to be more thoroughly analyzed.

In his comparative study of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (HRW), Claude Welch has asked a question of fundamental importance to the study of agency and public discourse within NGOs’ organizational structures: “Given that NGOs rely heavily on volunteers, what balance should be achieved between professionals and supporters?” (85). The role of human rights NGOs in civil society illustrates a dynamic
tension between professional and public discourses and the heterogeneous rhetorical contexts and audiences that they address. This dissertation examines this tension by looking at the mediated relationship between the discourse of professional human rights advocates in NGOs and the discourse of the citizen activists that take part in their public campaigns. While many scholars have addressed the role of human rights NGOs in developing forums for international activism, the discursive relationship between the professionals who construct these forums and the activists who engage in them has gone largely unanalyzed. Drawing on contemporary analyses of genre, I argue that this relationship can best be illuminated by looking at the systems of genre that professional advocates and member activists utilize, and the mediated, intertextual relationship between them. As “dynamic rhetorical forms that are developed from actor’s responses to recurrent situations and that serve to stabilize experience and give it coherence and meaning,” genres are constructed and construct organizational hierarchies of meaning within specific communicative environments (Berkenkotter and Huckin (4). Agents within communicative environments often encounter a range of genres, or genre systems that frame their discursive practices and that shape their agency and socialization within communicative hierarchies. As human rights NGOs have balanced their professional reporting and advocacy in high-level institutions with their grassroots campaign work, they have developed complex genre systems that bridge between the various agencies of their professional advocates and their member activists.

Activists who take part in an NGO’s campaigns encounter a system of genres that aligns their human rights literacies and discourse with the NGO’s ideological and organizational structure. As the work of Carol Berkenkotter and Thomas Huckin has
shown, “genre conventions signal a discourse community’s norms, epistemology, ideology, and social ontology” (21). The genres that activists use thus play a powerful, socializing role, placing the discourse of activists within a complex context of organizational discourse that not only embodies specific human rights exigencies, but also specific organizational rationales for addressing those exigencies. Human rights NGOs, while often reflecting an ideology of a common, unified voice for human rights, are in fact heterogeneous networks of discursive agents that are linked together through complex interdiscursive2 exchanges. As Anis Bawarshi has argued, genres, “not only constitute particular participant positions and language practices; they also regulate how participants recognize and interact with one another. As such, any typified social activity is mediated by a range of genres, each of which frames its own situated genre identities and actions. . .” (38). I argue that these rhetorical exchanges reflect a set of mediating rhetorical strategies that NGOs employ to translate their professional advocacy into terms and genres accessible to their membership and to their public activists.

The need for NGOs to mobilize public discourse on systematic human rights abuses has been established thoroughly in the field of international relations, in the internal review documents of NGOs, in academic studies and theoretical elaborations of the public legitimation of human rights policy, and in critical media studies of the public

---

2 I draw this term from Norman Fairclough, who argues that “orders of discourse have primacy over particular types of discourse, and that the latter are constituted as configurations of diverse elements or orders of discourse” (Discourse and Social Change 124). Fairclough defines discourse as “language as social practice determined by social structures” (Language and Power 17). For Fairclough, types or genres of discourse are configured to larger orders of discourse that are embedded in power structures. Interdiscursivity is thus different from intertextuality in that interdiscursive relationships are between two or more discourses, while intertextual relationships draw from two or more texts or genres. In terms of this project, interdiscursive will be used to refer to the relationship between the discourses of professional advocates and the discourses of grassroots activists.
reception of human rights news. However, little work has been done on the rhetorical structures that make the mobilization of human rights activists possible. The present analysis is developed from a case study of the organizational structure and discursive communities of Amnesty International (AI) and the influence of Amnesty’s advocacy structures and techniques on the NGOs and social movements that lobby for human rights. I outline the reciprocal relationship between the stable repertoire of rhetorical practices, or genres, that shape AI’s professional NGO discourse, tracing how this professional discourse is utilized to frame opportunities for grassroots discursive action. The construction of citizen activist networks is achieved through dynamic, interdiscursive exchanges between this professional discourse and the discourse of grassroots activists. Understanding these exchanges is vital to understanding the organization, power relationships, and discourses of human rights NGOs as they seek to expand international human rights advocacy to larger publics. I argue that these discourses are dynamically related to the organizational structures of NGOs, and that analyses of human rights discourse must be more concretely grounded in the practices and micro-politics of specific NGOs. I place this analysis in dialogue with scholarly discussions of “international civil society” that have stemmed from discussions of economic globalization and the globalizing technologies. By doing so, I hope to reveal that such discussions largely omit questions of power, institutional access, and rhetorical practice in human rights discourse that are essential to understanding the how an activist discourse that promotes political action for human rights atrocities can be mobilized.
Rhetorical Studies of Human Rights NGOs

The rhetoric of human rights NGOs is a rich field for rhetorical scholars and discourse analysts, and rhetorical analyses can play a significant role in helping scholars of international relations and scholars of public discourse understand the various agencies, rhetorical competencies, and literacies of human rights discourse. However, while contemporary rhetorical scholars have addressed the rhetoric of the social movements of the past several decades, NGOs have received only slight attention from rhetorical scholars. To date, Katherine Dwyer’s unpublished dissertation, a theoretical analysis of the rhetoric of Amnesty International’s human rights discourse, and D. Robert DeChaine’s recent *Global Humanitarianism: NGOs and the Crafting of Community* are the only extended rhetorical analyses of human rights NGOs. While my study is indebted to Dwyer and DeChaine’s work, it differs from their works in its analysis of the interdiscursive relationship between the genres of professional advocates and citizen activists. Dwyer and DeChaine’s works focus on the role of NGOs in the framing forums for international deliberation, and therefore emphasize the institutional rhetoric of NGOs and its impact on the global community. Dwyer’s work examines the effects of Amnesty International’s rhetoric on institutional discourses of international human rights. Dwyer argues that Amnesty International has developed an “oppositional rhetoric” that challenges governmental and international institutions (71), overcome the differend between victim testimony and international discourse (11) and fostered forums for the public deliberation of human rights (114). Amnesty’s discourse has, according to Dwyer, “been extremely effective in naming and defining human rights concerns and in moving
them into the international mainstream” (114). In this sense, Amnesty’s rhetoric has helped frame the forums and language of the public deliberation of human rights.

D. Robert DeChaine presents a rhetorical analysis of the role of NGOs in fostering a “global rhetorical culture” for human rights (153). Drawing on the work of Thomas Farrell, DeChaine argues that, “the influence of rhetoric can be seen--and felt--in the form of an emergent ethos of community that bridges global actors, such as the United Nations and humanitarian-based NGOs, and an electronically wired media-savvy global public. This burgeoning ethos of community is representative of a ’global rhetorical culture,’ a term I suggest is more accurate and useful than the term ’global civil society.’” (18). DeChaine argues that human rights NGO discourse utilizes its “symbolic resources” to “’conjure’ a global humanitarian community into existence as a collective or ’people’ united in the furthering of humanitarian goals--in other words, to identify the particular rhetoric that defines ’the people’ of a particular global rhetorical culture” (20). DeChaine roots this discussion in Michael Calvin McGee’s description of the “ideograph”: “a culturally biased abstract word or phrase, drawn from ordinary language, which serves as a constitutional value for a historically situated collectivity. . . Ideographs represent in condensed form the normative, collective commitments of the members of a public” (20). He then utilizes this concept to examine the work of the Médecins Sans Frontières and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, arguing that they embody the ideographic framing of a global rhetorical culture where NGOs utilize their symbolic resources in order to affect social change.

This dissertation builds on the work of Dwyer and Dechaine through its attentiveness to role of NGO rhetoric in reframing the terms of international politics. The
focus of my analysis differs, however, in its foregrounding of the rhetorical genres that structure human rights advocacy and activism. A central premise of this dissertation is that critical debates over the classification of NGOs, social movements, and transnational advocacy networks reflect an underlying need for an analysis of the differing discourses and genre systems that constitute them. I argue that the micro-politics of human rights NGOs or “transnational advocacy networks” must also include an analysis of the discursive relationship between human rights professionals and their member and citizen activists. I read descriptions of transnational civil society as macro-level descriptions that do not specify the power relationships between specific NGOs, social movements, and actors. While an NGO such as Amnesty International can be said to play a role in the expansion of transnational civil society, the distinctiveness of the roles that its professional advocates and member activists play cannot be fully understood at this macro-level. Discursive exchanges between grassroots activists and NGO professionals have increased rapidly due to internet communications technologies (ICTs), and NGO websites have become key forums for activist education, networking, and discursive action. However, there has been relatively little discussion of the orders of discourses that define and differentiate the activities of professionals and citizen activists. I will attempt to show that, as activists engage in the discursive opportunities constructed by professional NGO advocates and researchers, they take part in interdiscursive exchanges between their own activist discourse and the discourses of NGO professionalism, adapting, reinforcing, and transforming their roles within the organizational structures of NGOs. The professional mediation of grassroots activism in NGOs like Amnesty
International deepens our understanding of the organizational systems that increasingly shape contemporary civic rhetoric and public discourse.

**Overview of Chapters**

Chapter two analyzes the problem of discursive agency in discussions of global and transnational civil society, aligning critical discussions of the development of global public opinion with critiques of the growing professionalism of human rights NGOs. I argue that discussions of transnational civil society often level out differences in rhetorical agency that exist within NGOs like Amnesty International and ignore the micro-political structures that frame agency within them. I outline the genre methodology utilized in this study, paying special attention to the role of genre in structuring social communities, collectives, and networks within NGOs, as well as the varying levels of literacy and rhetorical agency characterize them. NGOs like Amnesty International function as *professional publics*, membership-based institutions that align their professional advocacy with the rhetorical agencies of their non-professional activists. I argue that discussions of transnational civil society must include analyses of the differing literacies and rhetorical capacities that separate human rights professionals and grassroots activists and the discursive tactics NGOs utilize to coordinate the work of these groups for their human rights campaigns.

In chapter three, I trace the relationship of AI’s professional genres to the high-level institutions of human rights policy and international law. Drawing on the work of Keck and Sikkink, I trace the system of professional genres AI employs as it carries out its *information, symbolic, leverage, and accountability politics* in the high-level
intergovernmental institutions of human rights. I frame the analysis of this chapter in a
discussion of the technical and legal discourses of these institutions and the extent of their impact on the genres of AI’s professional reporting, lobbying, and advocacy. As a professional public, AI must present its research and advocacy within genres that reflect the discourses of nation-states and intergovernmental institutions, while maintaining its ethos as a credible, impartial, and timely provider of human rights documentation.
Amnesty plays an important role in these institutions through its ability to interpret its research and reporting within the framework of international human rights law, and the role of international legal discourse within AI’s professional discourse is significant. As this role has expanded, it has created significant tension within AI over its identity as a campaigning organization, and AI’s internal discourse has reflected many of the major concerns voiced concerning human rights professionalism. I explore Amnesty’s *rhetoric of integration* by outlining the role that professional human rights reports play in framing the human rights exigencies of member activism.

Chapter four examines the activist genre system of Amnesty International and the role of professional discourse plays in framing opportunities for the activism of Amnesty’s members. The genres that are utilized within Amnesty’s campaigns reflect a highly intertextual relationship to Amnesty’s professional genre system, and I focus in this chapter on the discursive strategies necessary to frame opportunities for human rights activism in discourses accessible to Amnesty’s non-professional membership. I introduce the term *bridging genres*—a set of genres intended to mediate between the specialized knowledge and rhetorical competency of professional discourse and the situated cognition of non-professionals—in order to characterize AI’s attempt to align the
activist discourses with the objectives, outcomes, and audiences of their professional reporting and advocacy. Through an intertextual analysis of AI’s activist genres, I argue that the discursive agency of AI’s activists is both facilitated and governed through its relationship to AI’s professional discourse. As bridging genres frame human rights exigencies for AI activists, they often align the objectives of activist discourse with the legal and technical recommendations developed in AI’s professional reporting genres.

From this discussion of bridging and activist genres, I then turn in chapter five to an analysis of the multi-modal genres and web genres that AI has utilized to construct public awareness of its campaigns. Following the work of Gunther Kress, I analyze AI’s highly influential website and the multiple modes of communication that AI blends in order to encourage public activism. I argue that AI’s website hierarchically arranges and categorizes AI’s various genres in a way that reflects the organization’s emphasis upon human rights campaigning and public activism. The success and influence of AI’s website has been substantial, and I examine the visual and textual modalities that construct AI’s public face in this virtual community. Drawing on an analysis of the development of Amnesty’s website and a comparison of AI’s site with the visual modalities of Human Rights Watch’s website, I argue that AI’s identity as a campaigning organization is reflected in the hierarchy of genres that its website constructs. I then turn my attention to the multi-modal genres that AI has developed to frame its cyber-activism, looking closely at the rhetorical strategies and ethos embodied in the interwoven visual and verbal structures of these genres. Amnesty’s work on the crisis in Darfur, Sudan has utilized a range of video clips, photo-montage, flash-media, and other graphic techniques to symbolically frame opportunities for public letter-writing and public petition
campaigns. I look specifically at the multi-modal genres utilized for this campaign and argue that AI’s development of multi-modal action genres extends the organization’s long-standing tactic of symbolically framing human rights crises through identification with their individual victims.

Chapter six concludes the study by tracing out the implications of this analysis for theories of the public sphere and global civil society. I argue that genre analysis provides a means for understanding the concrete social contexts, discursive agencies, and embodied literacies of contemporary public discourse. Genre theory expands current notions of public rhetoric or public discourse through its focus on the concrete forms that public rhetoric takes in specific public groups. As scholars continue to elaborate the social function of genre, more work needs to be done on the role of genre as a nexus between private citizens and public discourse. I argue that genre analysis is helpful in avoiding the underspecified terms of civil society and the public sphere, challenging the model of human rights discourse set out by Jürgen Habermas in *Between Facts and Norms*. From this discussion, I then trace out the broad implications of this study for the fields of public sphere theory, international relations, and social movement theory. Genre analysis and rhetorical analysis, I argue, deepen the theoretical and methodological paradigms developed in these fields by illuminating the concrete discursive and social relationships that link social agents across national and organizational boundaries. I argue that analyzing these concrete forms is a crucial step in understanding the varying levels of agency that make up contemporary public discourse. Genre analysis allows us to move beyond loosely formed conceptions of the public in order to understand the
literacies and rhetorical competencies necessary to facilitate a more active, international civil society.
Chapter One: Discursive Agency in Transnational Civil Society: Human Rights

NGOs, Professionalism, and the Problem of Public Discourse on Human Rights

“Insofar as questions of human rights will remain one of the major transnational themes of the twenty-first century, agency will continue to be among this century’s most central concerns. And insofar as agency is a performed concept, any mature philosophical understanding of questions of voice, power, and rights must necessarily include analysis of agency’s rhetorical dimensions” (Gerard Hauser, “Editor’s Introduction” 181).

“As forms of decisionmaking proliferate, questions of public significance themselves become increasingly difficult to recognize, much less address, because of the intricate rules, procedures and terminologies of the specialized forums. These complications of argument hardly invite the public to share actively in the knowledge necessary for wise and timely decisions. Given the increasing tendency of political rhetoricians to produce a string of ‘ideographs,’ untrammeled by warrants or inferences, and given the tendency of government to proceed by relying upon the dictates of instrumental reason, the realm of public knowledge, identified by Dewey and later addressed by Bitzer, may be disappearing” (G. Thomas Goodnight, “The Personal, Technical, and Public Spheres of Argument”).

“If every member of the House and Senate had received 100 letters from the people back home saying we have to do something about Rwanda, when the crisis was first developing, then I think the response would have been different” (Senator Paul Simon).

The number of human rights NGOs has expanded rapidly since the inception of the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, reflecting the emergence of NGOs as major political force in international politics. Michellene Ishay’s recent history of human rights reports that, “In 1956 . . . there were 973 transnational nongovernmental organizations, whereas in 1996 there were over 5,000. One may now [2003] count over 200 NGOs associated with human rights issues in the United States” (346, brackets mine). The increased involvement of human rights NGOs in UN conferences in the 1990s has simultaneously raised public awareness and public expectations of human rights NGOs. Since the 1990s, NGOs have taken an active role in international conferences such as the Rio Conference of 1992 and the Vienna Human Rights Conference of 1993,
which rapidly expanded international awareness of their organizations (DeChaine 52).

This increased visibility, however, has often brought increased public expectations of the ability of NGO’s to enact social change. William Fisher has observed, “At least since the Rio Conference of 1992 (and the parallel Global Forum at which gathered representatives from over 9000 organizations from 171 countries), nothing short of miracles has been expected from NGOs” (441). However, while this period saw increased visibility and more efficient advocacy for NGOs, it also witnessed a crisis in NGO advocacy brought about by genocides in Bosnia and Rwanda. William Korey, in his definitive study of human rights NGOs, reports that, “The horrors of genocide were certain to prompt some human rights critics to question the effectiveness, if not usefulness of human rights organizations” (308). Korey cites a 1996 article from the Index on Censorship, which states that “‘no other generation has ever known so much, as quickly, so graphically about human rights violations, and yet the knowledge has had ‘so little effect’”(308).

Thus, while the potential of NGOs to disseminate information has increased, it has also reflected the increasing trend of critics and governmental organizations to look at NGOs’ ability to mobilize public discourse and political will as criteria of their effectiveness.

This chapter takes part in a lively discussion of the development of a transnational civil society for human rights and the influence global moral discourse on the human

---

3 See Samantha Power’s Pulitzer Prize winning “A Problem from Hell”: America and the Age of Genocide for an account of the genocides in Bosnia and Rwanda. Power’s conclusion sets forth the moral paradox of the lack of international intervention into these genocides in a political climate that has a high level of human rights awareness: “Despite broad public consensus that genocide should ‘never again’ be allowed, and a good deal of triumphalism about the ascent of liberal democratic values, the last decade of the twentieth century was one of the most deadly in the grimmest century on record. Rwandan Hutus in 1994 could freely, joyfully, and systematically slaughter 8,000 Tutsi a day for 100 days without any foreign interference. Genocide occurred after the Cold War; after the growth of human rights groups; after the advent of technology that allowed for instant communication; after the erection of the Holocaust Museum on the Mall in Washington, D.C.” (503).
rights movement. I argue that the study of rhetoric offers an important contribution to these discussions, through its ability to more fully account for the agencies, literacies, and ideologies of the heterogeneous discursive networks that animate transnational civil society. I suggest that the genres of these communities, the dynamic forms of discourse through which agents discursively act, need to be more fully analyzed in order to foster a more concrete understanding of discursive networks that link the various agents of human rights advocacy and activism. Utilizing the analytical methodologies of genre analysis, I examine the rhetorical construction of non-professional, citizen activist networks and the discourse genres that structure their activities within NGOs. Conceptualizations of global civil society (Ahheier, Glasius, and Kaldor 2001) and global public opinion (Barber 120) attempt to capture or distill the complicated discursive terrain that NGOs and social movement organizations (SMOs) have opened up for the role of public discourse in the legitimation or contestation of human rights policies4. Such discussions often collapse the varying levels of discursive agency that exist within these organizations into these terms and neglect the complex discursive networks that many NGOs and SMOs have developed to link their professional advocacy and their grassroots activism. It is in this sense that rhetorical analyses of human rights NGOs and SMOs can offer tangible benefits to both academic analyses of the structure of transnational civil society and to specific human rights organizations, as they document the discursive practices used to link professionals and activists across organizational networks.

---

4 Barber, in his, “Democratic Alternatives to the Mullahs and the Malls: Citizenship in an Age of Global Anarchy” has called NGOs like Amnesty International “‘generic’ international NGOs that help to forge global public opinion” and has cited these NGOs as part of a “a significant movement in the direction of constructive interdependence, democratic transnationalism, and global justice” (120).
Many human rights NGOs are poised between the technical contexts of high-level governmental and intergovernmental institutions and their member activists, who often lack access to the technical expertise and rhetorical competencies necessary for deliberation on human rights policy and international law. It is in this sense that I shall refer to membership-based human rights NGOs as professional publics: membership-based, non-governmental or civil society networks that mediate between the high-level discourses of professional advocacy and the activist discourses of their grassroots campaigns. Professional publics like Amnesty International balance their expert reporting, legal commentary, and advocacy in high-level forums such as the United Nations with the framing of human rights campaigns that resonate with their democratically structured memberships. This process entails a variety of textual mediations that frame the complex exigencies of human rights law and policy within terms, genres, and values that are accessible to activists. Professional publics are publics that seek to strategically link the aims, outcomes, and strategies of their professional advocacy with the literacies and rhetorical competencies of their members and the broader public.

Central to this analysis is the problem of human rights professionalism and the expansion of a technical and legal human rights rationality that limits public access to

---

5 I take this term from Hauser’s *Vernacular Voices*, where he describes *rhetorical competence* as “a capacity to participate in rhetorical experiences” (33). This capacity includes, for Hauser, the ability to “be receptive to alternative modes of expression, engage in active interpretation to understand what is being said and how it relates to them, and be open to change” (33). This definition can be extended through a focus on rhetorical genre. Catherine Schryer, in her essay “Genre and Power: A Chronotopic Analysis” has described rhetorical competence in terms of “linguistic capital”: “We are socialized through genres and we acquire our linguistic capital through our exposure to various genres. It is through the genres associated with different fields that agents acquire the ‘habitus’ or practical logics that they need in order to negotiate their way through the various fields or linguistic markets.” (95). As the field of international human rights is often one that is dominated by expert level discourse and policy, the engagement of non-experts in human rights activism requires activists to develop these practical logics or rhetorical competencies.
human rights discourse. Critics of human rights professionalism have argued that as human rights has become a specialized field of policy and analysis and has become more distanced from the language of activists and citizen publics. These claims parallel the contemporary rhetorical readings of the technical spheres of communication, and rhetorical scholars and have clearly documented the need for a strong deliberative democracy that would challenge the growing divide between the bureaucratic and technical discourses of states and the discourses of public deliberation. The work of G. Thomas Goodnight is particularly applicable to this discussion, as it points to the dominance of the “technical sphere” of discourse over the discourses of deliberative democracy. Contemporary discourse, as Goodnight documents, has created a context in which “issues of significant public consequence, what should present live possibilities for argumentation and public choice, disappear into the government technocracy or private hands” (259). Developing Goodnight’s work, Gerard Hauser has argued that the dominance of the technical character of political discourse is a key factor in making contemporary public discourse “moribund” (30). Hauser portrays contemporary political rhetoric as an environment in which “those with the power to make decisions reserve policy deliberations for technically trained or officially empowered elites while excluding the more general populace” (29) Garnering public support of the decisions made by these technical elites becomes thus less a process of citizen deliberation over public norms and policies and more of a process of manufacturing citizen consent. Hauser argues that, “Since the terms of technical discussions exceed the typical person’s capacity to understand, much less critically evaluate what is being proposed, those who seek citizen support now must find a way to secure it. Having defined the problem and the terms for
its resolution that obviates critical deliberation in the public realm, policy makers focus their rhetorical efforts on bringing public sentiment into line” (29-30). Throughout this project, I shall document how Goodnight and Hauser’s critiques are reflected in discussions of the high-level institutions and discourses of human rights, where the deliberation of human rights norms often takes on a technical character that is inaccessible to many activists and concerned citizens.

**Human Rights NGOs, Discursive Agency, and the Rhetoric of Global Civil Society**

A substantial body of interdisciplinary scholarship has argued that the proliferation of human rights NGOs is indicative of a growing *transnational civil society* or *global civil society* for international human rights.6 A lively debate in the fields of international relations, political science, and human rights has tested the validity of these concepts for descriptions of NGO practices. These discussions are often constructed in the context of economic globalization and the rapidly developing advocacy networks made possible by informational communications technologies (ICTs). While this

---

6 These terms have been the subject of many debates in scholarly discussions of political science and international relations and have spawned both theoretical discussions of their accuracy and analytical and empirical studies of their validity in international advocacy and politics. While their are many facets to this debate, two major camps can be discerned: scholars who argue that economic globalization is bringing about a truly global civil society, and scholars who favor the term transnational civil society because it more accurately reflects the existing structures of international institutions. Ahheier, Glasius, and Kaldor’s 2001 *Global Civil Society Yearbook* seeks to document the emergence of global civil society during the period of 1990-2000. They seek to show that “the spread of the term ‘global civil society’ reflects an underlying social reality” (4). They argue that “while ‘global civil society’ may overstate what is really out there, ‘transnational civil society’ understates it. All one needs to be transnational is a single border-crossing. . . . ‘Transnational’ does nothing to capture the revolution in travel and communications but also the opening up of many formerly closed societies that has really made civil society much more global in the last ten years than it has ever been before” (16). However, Clark, Friedman, and Hochstetler argue that this judgment is somewhat premature: “At the international level, it is yet unclear whether the increase in the number of NGOs with shared transnational goals be equated with an emerging global civil society” (2). Fiorini, citing the lack of representation for regions like sub-Saharan Africa in “nongovernmental coalitions,” argues that rarely are these ties truly global, in the sense of involving groups and individuals from every part of the world” (7).
discussion is expansive, the analysis below will focus on three important elements for the present study: (1) definitions of the scope of global or transnational civil society, (2) the role NGO communication strategies and institutional rhetorics play in inculcating a transnational civil society or human rights community, and (3) the organizational structures of transnational organizations and their dynamic structuring through the communicative actions of their agents. I will argue that while discussions of transnational civil society rightly characterize the role of NGOs in challenging sovereignty-based conceptions of human rights, they do not account for the various communicative spaces and rhetorical agencies of human rights advocacy and activism. By ignoring these spaces and levels of agency, discussions of global civil society, world polity, and international norms have often emphasized the organizational rhetoric of NGOs (the rhetoric of public statements, policy statements, human rights reports, etc.), while neglecting the various networks of agents who animate them. The role of NGOs in challenging traditional conceptions of state-sovereignty in international politics makes theorizations of global or transnational civil society both tenable and necessary.

However, the tendency of these theorizations to collapse the agencies of the various agents who make up NGO communities must be counterbalanced by analyses of the various discursive communities, collectives, and networks that work across NGOs’ organizational structures.

Definitions of civil society have varied based upon the organizations and movements that have been utilized to describe them. These definitions are often broken into the categories of global civil society, international civil society, and transnational
civil society. Clark, Friedman, and Hochstetler provide a useful summary of these differences:

To describe the social relations among nongovernmental actors as *global* is to assume that the ’complex network of economic, social, and cultural practices’ forming global civil society is widespread enough that actors from all over the world are involved in the interactions. The term *international* would only suggest increasing interactions among states, while the term *transnational* is used to characterize regular activity crossing national borders that involves at least one nonstate actor. (2-3)

Given these definitions, the authors argue that the description of NGOs as part of a *global civil society* is at this time premature and places unrealistic expectations on NGOs (2). In contrast, the term *international civil society*, emphasizing a civil discourse among states, is not reflective of the expanding role of non-state actors such as NGOs in international politics. Many scholars utilize the term transnational civil society to resist the fuzzy rhetoric of economic globalization, while carving out a space for the political influence of non-state actors such as human rights NGOs and social movements. Anne Fiorini, in the introduction to her collection *The Third Force: The Rise of Transnational Civil Society*, argues that the work of NGOs, social movements, and other non-governmental associations is best described as forming an emerging *transnational civil society*. This term is used “to emphasize the border-crossing nature of the links and the fact that rarely are these ties truly global, in the sense of involving groups and individuals from every part of the world” (7). Fiorini defines transnational civil society by three characteristics: “First, like all civil society, it includes only groups that are not governments or profit
seeking private entities. Second, it is transnational—that is it involves linkages across national borders. Third . . . it takes a variety of forms”(7). As Fiorini’s definition implies, the role of NGOs as a third force opens up a discursive space for non-governmental, international actors to challenge state claims to sovereignty with internationally recognized norms.

The extent to which third force actors like NGOs have altered the traditional power structures of state sovereignty has been a central topic of debate among scholars of international governance. From these debates, two important theses are relevant to discussions of rhetorical agency and the role of public discourse in transnational civil society: “strong globalization” theses, which argue for the emergence of a “world polity” or global civil society through the diffusion of organizational models of statehood and governance (Keck and Sikkink 33); and transnational theses, which argue that international political structures reflect a more modest claim of a “modified sovereignty,” where the public force of international NGOs is acknowledge by states as a legitimating factor in their domestic policies (Sikkink 414, emphasis mine). The theoretical conflict between these approaches characterizes a central problem in the discussion of human rights and civil society: the inability of theoretical models of civil society to adequately account for the various levels of agency, discursive competence, and power that structure contemporary discourse on human rights. While strong globalization theses, or world polity theories, have accounted for the spread of democratic governmental and procedural systems across the international political institutions, they have characterized this development as the product of “cultural processes” (Myer et al. 143) that often fail to specify the roles of specific agents in diffusing these cultural models across national
borders. In contrast, modified sovereignty approaches more fully account for the varying agencies and socio-political structures that have dynamically formed through the discursive practices of agents working together across organizations in transnational human rights networks.

Strong globalization theses such as the work of sociologist John Myer have sought to document the role of transnational civil society in fostering the emergence of a world society or world polity. Myer and his colleagues have documented the remarkable similarities among constitutional and governmental administrative structures across nation-states that often share fundamental differences in economic development and national traditions. From their expansive analysis, they have argued that the contemporary nation-state has been significantly shaped through the diffusion of normative models of state-hood in global culture. Myer et al., in “World Society and the Nation State,” have advanced the proposition that “Many features of the contemporary nation-state derive from worldwide models constructed and propagated through global cultural and associational processes” (143-44). Myer points to the remarkable similarity of national constitutions, even among politically and economically diverse and unequal states, as an example of “isomorphism” in international governance (“Globalization, National Culture, and the Future of World Polity” 3). This isomorphism can be seen as a material instantiation of world models, or “models of the proper national state and society which have great impact on policy and action in areas like human equality or economic policy or education” (“Globalization” 1). For Myer, the historical, the structural alignment of nation-states with democratic institutions and administrative structures is reflective of the diffusion of these world models through cultural globalization. As these
models are instantiated in state policy, but do not constitute in themselves a world state, states construct their international and domestic legitimation through recognitions of their conformance to these models (165). NGOs and civil society organizations play a central role in the diffusion and expansion of world models by drawing attention to “gaps or failures in the implementation of world-cultural principles in particular locales and demanding corrective action by states and other actors. Agents of social problems, they generate further structuration of rationalized systems” (“World Society” 165). The perspective that emerges from this expansive and thorough analysis of world systems is one in which the various associations of global civil society have emerged to disseminate normative world-models of statehood to world governments. The existence of this global civil society or world polity can be verified, for Myer, through an empirical analysis of the conformance of governmental administrations to these world-models.

*Modified sovereignty* perspectives recognize the emergence of non-governmental actors as central to forging a powerful role for civil society in international politics, but often question both the extent to which a global civil society can be claimed and the limited conceptualizations of agency that world polity theories advance in their discussion of *world-models* and global culture. More than perhaps any other analytical approach, the work of Margaret Keck and Katherine Sikkink has defined the modified sovereignty approach to international relations through its emphasis on networks and the agents that take part in their campaigns. In their *Activists Beyond Borders: Non-State Actors and Authority in the Global System*, Keck and Sikkink have argued that while the transnational advocacy of NGOs has altered the terrain of international politics, the term “civil society” is not adequate to describe the dynamic relationship between the agents of
NGOs, social movements, and international institutions. Accounts of civil society also often fail to address the reciprocal relationship between these agents and the organizational structures of transnational advocacy networks (6). They refer to these structures as “networks,” arguing that this concept has been named and developed through the practices of various transnational advocates and institutions (4). These networks are defined as “transnational advocacy networks”: “A transnational advocacy network includes those relevant actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services” (2). In contrast to discussions of transnational civil society, Keck and Sikkink argue that transnational advocacy networks are, “political spaces, in which differently situated actors negotiate--formally or informally--the social, cultural, and political meanings of their joint enterprise. We refer to transnational networks (rather than coalitions, movements, or civil society) to evoke the structured and structuring dimension in the actions of these complex agents, who not only participate in new areas of politics but also shape them.” (4). Transnational advocacy networks are thus a nexus between a variety of social actors--NGOs, social movements, foundations, media, churches, government officials, intellectuals, among others--and the domestic and international institutions that they are addressing (9). NGOs “play a central role in all advocacy networks, usually initiating actions and pressuring more powerful actors to take positions. NGOs introduce new ideas, provide information, and lobby for policy changes” (9). Keck and Sikkink focus on the communicative structures of these networks. They argue that transnational advocacy networks have the ability to frame
international issues in ways that “make them fit into particular institutional venues and that make them resonate with broader publics” (201).

Keck and Sikkink’s analysis of NGOs and transnational advocacy networks reveals them to be dynamically structured, communicative spaces, which translate the issues and exigencies of human rights into recognizable and effective opportunities for advocacy and activism. In translating the exigencies of human rights issues into opportunities for international advocacy and “persuasion,” human rights NGOs face the task of framing their discourse within the context of the discourses, ideologies, and structures of political power that shape the human rights policies and actions of both nations states and intergovernmental institutions. This process is one in which NGOs or transnational advocacy networks “use the power of their information, ideas, and strategies to alter the information and value contexts within which states make policies” (Keck and Sikkink 16). Their focus on the “framing” of international human rights issues is a useful starting point for rhetorical analyses of NGO discourse. For Keck and Sikkink, “activists interpret facts and testimony, usually framing issues simply, in terms of right and wrong, because their purpose is to persuade people and stimulate them to act” (19). Keck and Sikkink’s emphasis on the framing of NGO discourse reveals NGOs to be dynamic rhetorical spaces that shape their interpretations of human rights exigencies for a wide range of audiences and within a wide range of discourses.

From their broad analysis of human rights NGOs and civil society organizations, Keck and Sikkink have argued that NGOs utilize a broad “typology of tactics,” which constitute the forms of persuasion and pressure NGOs bring to bear on governments and groups that violate human rights and on international governing bodies (16). Broadly
described, these tactics include:

(1) *information politics*, or the ability to quickly and credibly generate politically usable information and move it to where it will have the most impact; (2) *symbolic politics*, or the ability to call upon symbols, actions, or stories that makes sense of a situation for an audience that is frequently far away; (3) *leverage politics*, or the ability to call upon powerful actors to affect a situation where weaker members of a network are unlikely to have influence; and (4) *accountability politics*, or the effort to hold actors to their previously stated policies or principles. (16)

This typology of tactics clearly illustrates the dynamic rhetorical relationship that human rights NGOs have with their various target audiences and also broadly outlines some of the key discursive strategies that motivate the rhetorical invention of these NGOs. Throughout this study, I will draw upon Keck and Sikkink’s discussion of these tactics. I will argue, however, that these tactical purposes are achieved through a complex, interrelated system of rhetorical genres that needs to be more fully analyzed. Information is presented, symbolic references are embedded, leverage is constructed, and accountability is framed within specific genres that reflect the established rhetorical practices of human rights NGOs. Further, in professional publics with a large activist base these tactical purposes are achieved through agents who occupy varying levels of access to the technical and legal discourses of human rights. For NGOs like Amnesty International, this requires a densely intertextual process of aligning the tactics and discourses of their professional reporting and advocacy with the discourses and genres that foster the discursive activism of their members. The genres of both professional
advocates and grassroots activists overlap across these tactics, often with professionals and activists engaging the same audience for the same tactical purpose.

Understanding agency in the networks of associations that make up human rights NGOs is, I will argue, a key step in understanding the social relationships that govern contemporary public discourse. Discussions of human rights NGOs as impersonal forces of global civil society often collapse these relationships and ignore the various levels of agency that make up NGO’s organizational structures. William Fisher, in “Doing Good?: The Politics and Antipolitics of NGO Practices,” argues that much of the literature on the role of NGOs in civil society does not transcend the level of theory and is often “replete with sweeping generalizations” (3). Fisher argues that the growing literature on NGOs “as a whole is based more on faith than fact. There are relatively few detailed studies of what is happening in particular places or within specific organizations, few analyses of the impact of NGO practices on relations of power among individuals, communities and the state” (3). Fisher, a professor of anthropology, calls for his field to develop “innovative research methodologies” that are able to more concretely analyze the political relationship between the communities, movements, and actors that make up NGOs (16). He notes that, “NGOs cannot be understood as a forum in which real people are social and political actors without attention to the micropolitics of these groups,” but that “most contemporary studies of the ’thickening of civil society’ (Fox 1992) do not include systematic analyses of power relationships within the groups and associations of civil society and the forms and channels of participation that affect power relationships” (13). Fisher’s call for an analysis of the micropolitics of NGOs highlights the generalizations that often proceed from theoretical discussions of a rapidly expanding
global civil society and grounds analysis of NGOs in the political and discursive
conditions of their practices. Fisher’s article sets up a clear need for the analysis of the
organizational structures of NGOs, the levels of discourse and agency that separate actors
in these structures, and the relationship of these structures to those of the political
institutions and discourses NGOs seek to influence.

**The Professionalization of Human Rights NGOs and the Technical Rationality of
Human Rights Discourse**

Despite recent discussions of human rights of the role of NGOs in the expansion
of international civil society, the growing professionalization of human rights NGOs has
often been highlighted as an obstacle to public participation in the human rights
movement. Marie Tornquist-Chesnier, in her discussion of NGOs and international
human rights law, has noted that many human rights NGOs (including Amnesty
International) have simultaneous identities as advocacy organizations and as professional
associations of experts in human rights law and policy. She summarizes that,

The first image one gets of NGOs is that of advocacy and lobbying associations.
However, a certain number of these organizations have a second profile, that of
professional associations, which may also be understood as associations of
professionals. ‘Professionalization’ implies that NGOs have a growing number of
experts (or professionals) at their disposal. Indeed, in order for knowledge to have
an impact it needs to be dispensed by agents or spokespersons. Knowledge partly
derives from the characteristics of these agents (Freidson 1986). The latter
exercise a profession, which means that they are no longer amateurs: they
possess credentials that distinguish them from amateurs. Even if these
‘technicians’ (Ellul 1954) or experts are not those who make the final decisions
because state actors have the last word in international negotiations, they
nonetheless exert a great influence over such negotiations. (254-55)

The degree of emphasis that is placed upon the force and efficacy of professional
discourse raises important questions about the participation of non-professional activists
in human rights campaigns and the level of access that activists have to human rights
discourse. The high-level institutional contexts of human rights demand a high degree of
expertise in international law and policy, and NGOs like Amnesty International have
drawn on their expertise in order to shape, monitor, and defend the framework of
international law that has developed from these institutions. However, non-expert human
rights activists, like Amnesty’s 1 million members, often do not possess access to these
institutional contexts or the requisite legal and political literacies and rhetorical
competencies that shape the discourses of these institutions. This limited access of
activists and the general public to human rights discourse points, for many scholars, to
the growing technical rationality of the human rights movement.

David Kennedy in, “The International Human Rights Movement: Part of the
Problem?,” has argued that the professional organization of human rights groups often
obscures the social struggle of human rights victims by placing them in professional and
legal discourse (120). Kennedy argues that, “the result of such initiatives to reframe
emancipatory objectives in human rights terms is often more growth for the field--more
conferences, legal documents, legal analysis, opposition and response--than decrease in
violence against women, poverty, mass slaughter and so forth. This has bad effects when
it discourages political engagement or encourages reliance on human rights for results it cannot achieve“ (118). Kennedy makes a clear distinction between the work of professional human rights advocates and the work of social movements that share in common struggles for emancipation from human rights abuses. Professional human rights advocates and human rights victims are thus separated by their differing access to professional discourses. Larry Cox, in a short article written for the Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs, has also questioned the difficult relationship between the languages of human rights professionalism and the broader public. Like Kennedy, Cox argues that contemporary human rights discourse has become more reflective of a legalistic professionalism than a moral activism. Human rights professionalism, for Cox, undermines both public awareness of human rights and active social movements: “as the human rights effort has moved from a cause to a professional career, it has increasingly employed an exclusive, legalistic language that fails to resonate with people’s lives and daily struggles. Its link to what is human and universal has been diminished, if not lost, and correspondingly, so has its power and appeal” (1). For Cox and Kennedy, the moral force of the human rights movement has been overshadowed by the growing bureaucracy of human rights institutions, which employ powerful,

---

7 Paul Nelson, in his study of NGOs and the WTO protests, has argued that critiques of NGO elitism need to be mitigated through NGO linkages with social movement organizations. He states, “The tension between NGO professionalism and populist protest is not new, but it is an intensified challenge for the former. Nongovernmental organizations benefit from mass support in advancing their international financial policy agenda. But NGOs’ credibility with international authorities—officials of major industrial countries and international organizations—depends as well on their ability to participate in substantive policy debates with these agencies. . . .But if these NGOs fail to forge successful coalitions with the emerging social movements, they will continue to be the targets of such attacks from the populist left, and will be increasingly identified as an elite, professional wing of the NGO movement, with limited claim to mass political support and legitimacy” (388).

specialized discourses that separate human rights concerns from the language and activism of the public.

Nevertheless, technical and legal discourses dominate governmental and intergovernmental decision-making procedures on human rights policy, and NGOs face the necessity of articulating their concerns and advocacy within these discourses. As Richard Wilson has argued in his “Representing Human Rights Violations: Social Contexts and Subjectivities,” the necessity of addressing the high-level contexts of nation-states and intergovernmental institutions must be tempered with the accessibility of human rights discourse for a broad range of audiences (154). Focusing on human rights reporting, Wilson outlines the need for reporting genres to address the conventions of technical discourse: “The language of human rights reports mirrors the language of the modern nation-state, and the texts must engage in that discourse to influence state policy. Thus the effectiveness of human rights agencies’ legalistic language lies in the fact that it speaks the language that state agents understand. Were it to speak outside that discourse, then it presumably would have no effect” (154). However, this technical discourse is directed at a small body of high-level policy-makers and is often not shared by the wide range groups, individuals, and organizations that make up the diverse audiences of NGO discourse. Wilson explains that “there is a tension here in aims, since human rights texts are directed at a heterogeneous audience, made up of other professional campaigners, local groups of non-professional activists, journalists, development workers and the general public, as well as politicians, bureaucrats and official state/UN policy makers. This variegated community of end users could conceivably merit a differentiated body of publications of different styles” (154-5). Wilson’s analysis of human rights reporting
reveals that the dominance of the technical and legal discourses of human rights often strips the ethical dimension from the human rights movement, dehumanizing those whose human rights have been violated and rendering human rights as “universal abstractions” (155).

Concerns over professionalization often warn against the dominance of human rights discourse by the “knowledge class” (Glendon 177) of human rights institutions. Claude Welch, in his analysis of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, has argued that even Amnesty International, long the exemplar of public activism, faces difficulty balancing its professional reporting and advocacy with its activist base. He argues that, “the longer an organization survives, the greater the likelihood that its permanent employees rather than its members determine the goals. Amnesty International puts a rhetorical premium on participation, but copes with the realities of relatively high fund-raising costs and of limited involvement by members apart from letter writing. (109). Critiques of human rights professionalism reflect a growing concern with the dominance of technical rationality within the discourse of human rights, and are (as those referenced above) predicated on deeper concerns about the accessibility of the public language of human rights. Public participation in human rights campaigns involves the alignment of human rights activists with complex human rights exigencies that most often stem from human rights research and advocacy within high-level intergovernmental institutions. As these documents often reflect the legal discourse of human rights law, they must be translated into discourses and genres that reflect the literacies and rhetorical competencies of activists. The alignment of these two discourses is a difficult task and requires the mediating activities of professional advocates, who frame the expert
discourses of human rights reporting and high-level advocacy in genres accessible to their members.

A central premise of this dissertation is that critical debates over the classification of NGOs, social movements, and transnational advocacy networks reflect an underlying need for an analysis of the differing discourses and genre systems that constitute them. Rhetorical genre theory has much to offer to this analysis through its focus on the relationship of genres to the organizational structures of disciplines and institutions. I argue that the micro-politics of human rights NGOs or “transnational advocacy networks” must also include an analysis of the discursive relationship between human rights professionals and their member and citizen activists. I read descriptions of transnational civil society as macro-level descriptions that do not specify the power relationships between specific NGOs, social movements, and actors. While an NGO such as Amnesty International can be said to play a role in the expansion of transnational civil society, the distinctiveness of the roles that its professional advocates and member activists play cannot be fully understood at this macro-level. Discursive exchanges between grassroots activists and NGO professionals have increased rapidly due to internet communications technologies (ICTs), and NGO websites have become key forums for activist education, networking, and discursive action. However, there has been relatively little discussion of the orders of discourses that define and differentiate the activities of professionals and citizen activists. I will attempt to show that, as activists engage in the discursive opportunities constructed by professional NGO advocates and researchers, they take part in interdiscursive exchanges between their own activist discourse and the discourses of NGO professionalism, adapting, reinforcing, and
transforming their roles within the organizational structures of NGOs. The professional mediation of grassroots activism in NGOs like Amnesty International deepens our understanding of the organizational systems that increasingly shape contemporary civic rhetoric and public discourse.

**Genre, Intertextuality, and the Multiple Agencies of Professional Publics**

Membership-based human rights NGOs like Amnesty International face the difficult task of bridging between the technical discourses of high-level institutions and the more accessible discourses of public activism. While the activities of human rights reporting and high-level advocacy employ different genres and registers than those of public activism, AI’s public activism not only often stems from these professional activities but is also aligned with their discursive tactics. Amnesty members regularly utilize the genres of activist letter writing and public petitions to show strong public support for the specific recommendations made in Amnesty reports, public statements, or press releases. The relationship between professional reporting and advocacy and the discursive activism of members reflects a highly intertextual exchange of information across AI’s professional and grassroots communities, and reveals the intensive textual process of translating complex human rights exigencies into recognizable and accessible opportunities for member activism. As Peter Willetts has argued, “[NGO] personnel, particularly at the leadership level, become professionals in the use of information. . . . Processing of information is always a major activity of pressure groups and is overwhelmingly the most important activity” (qtd. in Metzl 707). AI’s strategic use of information is coordinated through its utilization of a series of genres that link the
activities of its various agents to common discursive goals (such as the public shaming of rights-violating states, the call for UN intervention in human rights crises, etc.). This textual linkage reflects Amnesty’s well-established organizational structures and the division of labor that is structured by differing levels of professional expertise, rhetorical competence, and institutional access.

Human rights advocacy and activism, though often described in terms of universal moral persuasion, are more accurately conceived as context bound activities that embody the social distribution of knowledge that takes place in specific organizational forms, such as NGOs or social movement organizations (SMOs). Genres, as “a nexus between an individual’s actions and a socially defined context” serve as textual forms that shape and define the activities of their users, as well as the level of agency available to them within such contexts (Devitt, *Writing Genres* 31). As Bazerman, Little and Chavkin have argued, “Texts mediate human activity at a distance and help enlist and align people to larger social institutions and practices, and text genres provide means of recognizing social relations, obligations, and interactions embodied within communications” (456).

Professional publics like Amnesty International align the discursive aims of high-level activities such as human rights reporting and advocacy in high-level institutions with forms of discursive activism that lie within the rhetorical competencies of their members. As organizations poised between the high-level institutional contexts of international law and the grassroots contexts of citizen campaigning, professional publics must bridge the differing levels of literacy and institutional access that define these discursive contexts. Professional publics like AI must struggle against the increasingly technical and bureaucratic discourses of human rights institutions as they coordinate public activism.
Understanding this struggle entails an understanding of the specific discursive forms, or genres, that organizations like AI utilize to achieve their aims in both high-level institutions and on the level of grassroots campaigning, and the textual and intertextual processes through which these textual forms are aligned.

Studies of rhetorical genre have contributed much to contemporary understandings of the textual systems that structure agency in organizational structures. Throughout this study, I will draw specifically on three lines of inquiry that are relevant to studies of genre and discursive agency in professional publics: (1) the role of specific sets of genres in defining the work, agency, and social relationships of organizational contexts; (2) the role of genres as boundary markers in specific discursive activities and the literacies and rhetorical competencies that these genres structure and reinforce; and (3) the intertextual coordination and alignment of agents across these boundaries in order to pursue common discursive goals. Following contemporary discussions of genre, I will regard AI’s genres as discursive technologies that define and structure the activities of human rights advocacy and activism, as well as the levels of agency necessary to these activities. Understanding the genres through which agents within NGOs like Amnesty act is central to understanding the concrete forms that public activism takes within specific organizational contexts. Such analysis provides “a ‘thicker’ description of the textured, situated activities that reflect and generate complex forms of social organization” (Bawarshi 37). Genre analysis, in this sense, is central to the larger project of analyzing the various groups and subgroups that make up what is often loosely described as the public or civil society and to mapping out the textually constructed social networks that exist between these groups as they strategically engage in public campaigns.
Professional publics are heterogeneous organizational structures that contain diverse groups of professionals and activists whose collective agency is shaped by the genres that they use to accomplish their work. Contemporary discussions of genre have documented the role of genres in the social organization of professional fields and have drawn attention to the ways in which the genres utilized by these fields inculcate the ideologies, epistemologies, and values of the field in the agents that utilize the genres. As a theory of “situated cognition,” contemporary genre analysis draws attention to the disciplinary contexts in which agents act and how they construct both their knowledge of the disciplinary field and their identities within it through genres (Berkenkotter and Huckin 4). Genre analysis, as Carolyn Miller’s seminal essay “Genre as Social Action” has argued, highlights the performative aspect of discourse within social contexts. Miller’s definition of genres as “typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations” emphasizes the performative agency of genres as “action” recognizes the interplay between the rhetorical situation the genre addresses and the social context that shapes agents understanding of that situation (159). Genre, often regarded as a set of formal conventions for the production of texts, becomes in Miller’s redefinition a means by which individuals recognize meaningful opportunities for discursive action and their discursive roles within the social structures and cultures they inhabit.

Since Miller’s formative conceptualization of genre, the relationship between genre, agency, and situation has been expanded through continued scholarly exploration of the sets or systems of genres that are utilized to carry out the work of specific communities (Devitt, 1991, 1993, 2003; Bazerman 1994; Swales 1990, 1998, Freadman 1994, 2002; Yates and Orlikowski 1994; Russell 1997). The role that genre plays in
aligning the discursive practices of agents within specific contexts has led to an ongoing discussion of the terms used to specify the social relationships established through genre use. John Swales work on genre in professional contexts has utilized the term “discourse communities” to describe the social relationships engendered through genre use.

Discourse communities are, in Swales conception, ”sociorhetorical networks that form in order to work towards sets of common goals,” that utilize a number of genres to fulfill their purposes, and that include “a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discoursal expertise” (qtd. in Devitt 37). Swales analytical methodology or “textography” focuses on the “form and formation of written texts” within specific discourse communities, highlighting the “contextually embedded discursive practices” of agents within specific discourse communities (Swales, “Textography” 112). Communities, in this conception, are defined by the discourses they utilize for their specific purposes, and community identity can be observed through the regular patterns of textual activity produced by specific communities.

David R. Russell, drawing on Cole and Engstrom’s development of activity theory from Vygotskian linguistics and Bazerman’s description of genre systems, has expanded this notion of community by locating genres in “activity systems,”: “ongoing, object-directed, historically conditioned, dialectically structured, tool-mediated human interaction”8 (“Rethinking Genre and Society”). Activity theory frames the social relationships coordinated through genres by focusing on the motivations or goals that a group of genre users share, rather than making their shared discursive forms the basis of

---

8 Bazerman’s definition of genre system is more expansive in scope than Devitt’s: “The system of genres would be the full set of genres that instantiate the participation of all the parties. . . .It embodies the full history of speech events as intertextual occurrences, but attending to the way that all the intertext is instantiated in generic form, establishing the current act in relation to prior acts” (“Genre Systems” 99).
analysis. Russell’s theorization of activity systems complicates Swales conception of discourse community by highlighting the interpenetration of various activity systems (professional, public, educational, etc.) in social networks and by foregrounding the varying levels of agency and literacy that structure the power relationships of activity systems. As agents act across various activity systems, genres help orient them to the types of “tools” (both discursive and material) that are necessary to action within the activity system (“Rethinking Genre and Society”).

As Amy Devitt has recently pointed out, however, discourse community and activity system are both problematic terms in regards to agency. Discourse community, following Swales description, cannot account for the varying levels of agency that often exists in social groups, and as a result often privileges the role of experts who define the discursive norms of the community. Devitt has argued that the term “discourse community,” centers on expert discourse and “disguises the heterogeneity of actual communities, with members at various stages of expertise, some on the periphery of the community, and all with different degrees and kinds of power within the community” (Writing Genres 38). Activity theory, while recognizing the multiple agencies and motives of the various agents involved in specific processes, is problematic in its discussion of genre as a tool. Devitt argues that “To include genres as ‘choices of tools’ and to define genre as the routinized use of tools is to remove genre from the level of social action, especially from motives and outcomes, which are separate components of activity systems” (48). Genres, instead of being mere tools, structure both the exigencies of social action and the recognized, typified forms of social action available to agents within specific contexts. In addition, genres structure and are structured by varying
forms of collectivity and interaction that cannot be subsumed under the concepts of *discourse community* and *activity system*.

In response to Swales’s *discourse community* and Russell’s *activity theory*, Devitt has argued that genre analysts are perhaps better served by beginning with a looser set of categories: “communities, collectives and networks” (42). Genres are utilized across disciplinary boundaries by “Communities (people who share substantial amounts of time together in common endeavors) to collectives (people who gather around a single repeated interest, without the frequency or intensity of contact of a community) to social networks (people who are connected . . . through contact with another person or organization” (46). These groups are marked by both proximity and the intensity of the discursive activities they engage in. Agents within these groups are often connected through the sets of genres that they utilize to complete their work, and the proximity and intensity of their contact is often reflected in the complexity and scope of the sets of genres they utilize. Communities, which Devitt often uses to refer to professional groups, often possess a complete *genre repertoire*: “a set of genres that a group owns, acting through which a group achieves all of its purposes, not just those connected to a particular activity.”⁹ (Devitt 57). Genre repertoires are the complete sets of genres utilized across the multiple sub-groups or particular organizational structures, such as

---

⁹ This term originates in the work of M.M. Bakhtin, who argues that “The wealth and diversity of speech genres are boundless because the various possibilities of human activity are inexhaustible, and because each sphere of activity contains an entire repertoire of speech genres that differentiate and grow as the particular sphere develops and becomes more complex” (“The Problem of Speech Genres” 60). Wanda J. Orlikowski and JoAnne Yates have defined *genre repertoires* along similar lines as “the set of genres enacted by groups, organizations, or communities to accomplish their work” (4). This definition reflects their definition of genre as a “typified communicative act having a *socially defined and recognized communicative purpose* with regard to its audience” (5).
(Devitt’s example) the complete set of genres used by a legal practice. In this sense, genre repertoires often contain genre systems, which are connected to specific tasks of the community. Collectives, which normally focus on a single task, often employ a genre system—“a genre set identifiable by those who use it that has clearly linked genres with a common purpose” (Devitt 56). The most loosely connected of these social categories, networks often employ a genre set, which are “more loosely defined” groupings of genres that are often focused on a “limited range of action” within a specific context (Devitt 58).

Throughout this study, I will utilize Devitt’s loose taxonomy of social groups and her description of the various genre sets that coordinate them as starting points for a broader understanding of how AI’s professional community frames opportunities for discursive activism for their collective of member activists. Professional publics like Amnesty International possess a comprehensive genre repertoire that crosses the multiple agencies of its organizational structure and reflects the scope of its organizational objectives. Within this larger set of purposes, members of different organizational subsets often utilize genre systems in order to carry out the work of human rights reporting, advocacy, and activism. In addition, specific genre sets often structure calls to activism by non-members, as they offer limited opportunities for activism and employ a small range of genres designed to be accessible to those outside of AI’s membership. Devitt’s categorizations of social groups and genre sets are useful to this study because they allow for a more concrete description of the multiple social structures that large NGOs and social movement organizations contain, and for a more thorough analysis of the textual processes used to coordinate these groups for work on a common campaign. As member activists take part in Amnesty International’s letter-writing, public petitions, and editorial
writing campaigns, they encounter a range of genres that both coordinate and frame their discursive activity within the larger genre repertoire of human rights advocacy. These genres overlap across a range of Amnesty International’s organizational objectives and discursive tactics and reflect the intertextual relationship that is formed as professional advocates frame opportunities for grassroots activism in genres and discourses accessible to AI’s members.

Genre scholars and discourse analysts have noted the social and ideological role of intertextuality in genre sets, noting the hierarchical role that specific genres and discourses play in shaping the discourse of specific groups. Norman Fairclough has argued that intertextuality specifies power relationships among genre users: “The concept of intertextuality points to the productivity of texts, to how texts can transform prior texts and restructure existing conventions (genres, discourses) to generate new ones. But this productivity is not in practice available to people as a limitless space for textual innovation and play: it is socially limited and constrained, and conditional upon relations of power” (102-3). Genres, through their typifications of communicative praxis in specific organizational contexts, reflect not only the recognizable forms of participation that agents encounter, but also the social roles and organizational ideologies that this participation entails. Devitt’s influential study of genre intertextuality in the texts of tax accountants has illustrated the implicit organizational values within a community’s genres. Analyzing the genres utilized in three accounting firms, she argues that the genres utilized in the firms “form a complex network of interaction, a structured set of relationships among texts, so that any text is best understood within the context of other texts. . . . The texts and their interaction are so integral to the community’s work that they
essentially constitute and govern the tax accounting community, defining and reflecting
the community’s epistemology and values” (“Intertextuality in Tax Accounting” 337). In
addition, studies of organizational communication (Berkenkotter and Huckin 1995;
Berkenkotter 2001; Yates and Olinkowski 1992; Schryer 1994; Pare´ and Smart 1994;
Pare´ 1997; Smart 1993; Winsor 1999, 2000) have also noted the role of genres as
structuring the professional ideologies and epistemologies of specific organizational
contexts. Intertextuality in sets of genres thus implies not merely a relationship among
texts, but a structured set of social relationships that participants enact, challenge, and
reproduce.

Catherine Schryer, both in her study of lab reports (1994) and her study of
“negative messages” in the genres of an insurance company (1997), has documented that
genres configure both subjective agency and logics of practice that embody ideologies:
“They create gnoseological systems--systems where commonsense visions of time/space
and the possibility of human action exist. Consequently, they are profoundly ideological”
(95). Anthony Pare´, drawing upon critical discourse analyst Norman Fairclough’s
description of genres as “ideological-discursive formations,” has also observed that the
instantiation of ideologies and norms can often be observed in the textual conventions of
specific genres (59). Like Schryer, Pare´ argues that these genres distinguish levels of
discursive competence and agency within institutions, embodying the relationship
between individual agents and institutional power structures: “their status as historical
practice within institutions or disciplines makes them appear immutable and certainly
beyond the influence of the transitory individuals who participate in them, and who
become implicated in the subtle ideologies they enact” (59). Genres foster and reproduce
commonsense social structures enacted in discursive practices and as agents encounter these genres they develop literacies that embody not only a knowledge of a genre’s textual conventions, but also knowledge of the organizational ideologies that embed the genre is a socially stratified system of knowledge and power.

As genres embody the epistemologies, ideologies, and social hierarchies of organizational fields, they are reflective of the situated literacies of these fields and the processes of socialization that occur as agents learn genres in specific contexts. Bazerman, in *Constructing Experience*, has argued that “Insofar as many social fields are permeated with literacy . . . social participation is deeply influenced by individual’s range of literate abilities. . . .Success and satisfactory identification within various social fields require not only a general literacy but a literacy appropriate to each kind of endeavor and one’s actual and desired social position within it” (36). As forms of situated cognition, genres are structured by and structure the epistemologies and organizational ideologies of their users. Learning genres thus requires the development of literacies that align agents with an organization’s ideologies, epistemologies, and structures of power. In broad ranging organizational contexts like NGOs, the development of literacies is complicated through the lack of direct contact and physical proximity with the organization’s representatives. As the specialized literacies needed for human rights activism are often not directly taught, more research into the textual processes that stand in for direct instruction and training is needed.

Aviva Freedman’s work on genre and learning is particularly helpful to understanding how NGOs facilitate the genre literacies of their activists with little direct contact or explicit instruction. Freedman has argued that genres are learned as agents
actively engage in their production for specific activities. Drawing on the work of Hanks (1991), Freedman characterizes the process of learning genres as “performance in context” (197), noting that teaching the conventions of a genre is useful only “when such discussions are presented while students are engaged in authentic reading and writing tasks, involving the targeted genre” (205). While this perspective has been critiqued in discussions of writing pedagogy\textsuperscript{10}, it is helpful in explaining the ways that literacy is structured across broad networks or organizations. Professional publics like Amnesty International have developed complex, strategic systems of genres that facilitate activists’ specialized literacies while activists engage in human rights campaigns.

The relationship between genre, intertextuality, and literacy is a vital component of this dissertation, as the agency of grassroots activists in NGO campaigns is often constructed through a series of intertextually related genres that frame the exigencies of NGO campaigns in accessible discourse. As AI’s membership often has limited contact with AI’s professional communities, the textual framing of activist discourse is a particularly complex task, involving the need to develop accessible genres of activism that translate often complex legal and technical exigencies into recognizable opportunities for grassroots activism. Membership based human rights NGOs such as Amnesty International often function as what Deborah Brandt has termed “sponsors of literacy” for their members and also for individual citizens that take part in their campaigns (555). Brandt defines literacy sponsors as “any agents, local or distant,

\textsuperscript{10} Amy Devitt has argued for a critical pedagogy approach to teaching “genre awareness” (Writing Genres 197), and has responded to Freedman by stating that “by the time one has learned to perform genre, one is already inducted into its ideology. If teachers are to help minimize the ideological effects of genres, they must help students perceive the ideology while they are encountering the ideology” (196). See also Joseph Williams’s and Gregory Colomb’s “The Case for Explicit Teaching: What You Don’t Know Won’t Hurt You.”
concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress or withhold literacy— and gain advantage by it in some way” (556). The participation of hundreds of thousands of activists in Amnesty International’s campaigns lends authority to AI’s claims to be an international community. Given the complexity of the field of human rights, however, human rights activism often requires professional mediation and coordination, which leads to the relationship between institutional sponsorship and activist literacies. As Brandt has argued, “Most of the time... literacy takes its shape from the interests of its sponsors. And... obligations towards one’s sponsors run deep, affecting what, why, and how people write and read” (558). Grassroots activist genres are often framed by professional discourse that has been re-accentuated for an audience of non-experts, such as summary reports that abridge human rights reports and place them in non-technical language.

Generic intertextuality in Amnesty International’s written activist genre system crosses a wide range of audiences, levels of human rights expertise, and rhetorical capacities. Member activists engaging in Amnesty’s campaigns encounter genres and rhetorical situations that require not only specific background knowledge, but knowledge of the linguistic and rhetorical conventions of the genres that they are asked to utilize. As member activists respond to calls for discursive activism framed by professional advocates, they encounter a range of generic conventions that both assist and cue them to adapt their discourse to the rhetorical situation that these genres embody. The professional framing of activist genres bridges the gap between the specialized knowledge of human rights exigences and the resources of AI’s membership, while at the same time limiting the range of rhetorical invention and response through the role of
professionals in both choosing and framing the genres activists utilize. Within the written activist genre system of Amnesty International, the regulation of activist discourse can often be observed within the same genres that frame or facilitate this discourse and is reflected in the premium that Amnesty International places on the integration of professional and activist discourse.

The written activist genre system of AI is coordinated by its intertextual relationship to professional discourse genres such as human rights reporting genres, press releases, public statements (open letters to IGOs and offending governments), and background reports (including those utilized to frame Urgent Actions and Online Actions). Activists take discursive action through various letter-writing genres, public petitions, and public campaigns, each of which is intertextually related to the professionally produced genres that frame their activism. Urgent Action or Online Action letter writing campaigns are often (but not exclusively) coordinated around the publication of AI’s annual reports, country reports, or thematic issue reports, with larger campaigns--such as AI’s Sudan Crisis campaign--also receiving professionally produced campaign kits or Action Guides. Both Urgent Action and Online Action alerts include short, professionally researched background reports that often reference professional reporting and advocacy discourse, such as country reports, public statements, and the background reports of previous Urgent Action alerts. In addition, the development of AI’s website has allowed for most Online Action alerts and some Urgent Action alerts to be accompanied by sample letters that model the appropriate rhetorical and generic conventions of the form. In this sense, the interdiscursive relationship between professional and member genres reflects both the necessity of mediating often complex
human rights exigencies for members, while establishing opportunities for discursive activism that draw upon the ethos of accurate human rights reporting that AI has established in the international political field through its high-level advocacy.

**Texts and Genres Analyzed**

Amnesty’s internal reviews of its research, advocacy, and activism reflect an organization that is intimately concerned with the role of its rhetoric in international politics, and the accessibility of this rhetoric for its membership base. Policy and review documents from AI’s International Secretariat, as well as campaigning manuals and guides, clearly name and outline the major discourse genres that AI uses to accomplish its tactical purposes. Throughout this study, I refer to AI’s genres by the classifications given to them in Amnesty’s policy documents, classifications recognizable to both Amnesty professionals and member activists\(^ {11} \). The documents collected for the genre and textual analysis presented in this study can be broadly categorized in five interrelated groupings: (1) *policy texts* (mandates; internal research, membership and development reviews; operational plans; etc.), (2) *public relations texts* (websites, flyers, mission statements, membership calls, etc.), (3) *professional reporting and advocacy genres* (country reports, thematic reports, annual reports, public statements, press releases, media briefings, high-level advocacy letters), (4) *member activist genres* (Urgent Action Letter Writing Genres, Online Action Genres, public petitions, and public action genres), and (5) *multimodal genres* (genres that simultaneously utilize textual commentary with video

---

\(^ {11} \) This practice reflects the research methodologies of contemporary genre studies. As Amy Devitt has recently argued, “Most current rhetorical scholars base their analyses of genre not on the classifications of critics and analysts but on the ways people classify texts into genres as they use them” (8).
presentations, audio transcripts, photo montages, flash media presentations, and other technological modes).\textsuperscript{12}

In order to illustrate the intertextual, mediating relationship between professional and activist discourse, I have chosen to ground my discussion of Amnesty’s genre system in a case study of a specific, ongoing human rights campaign. In addition to a broad analysis of the historical development of Amnesty’s professional and activist genres, I draw upon an analysis of over 500 documents from the period 2003 until the present that represent AI’s ongoing response to the human rights atrocities in the Darfur region of Western Sudan. Amnesty’s Sudan Crisis Campaign is analyzed in order to document the intertextual relationship between AI’s professional and activist discourses in action. The documents analyzed are representative of the full range of AI’s professional reporting and advocacy genres, the framing genres used to facilitate member activism, and the genres members utilize to engage in human rights activism. There are several advantages to drawing on the work of a single campaign in analyzing Amnesty International’s genre system. First, AI’s genre system is highly intertextual and this intertextuality is reflected in the organization’s emphasis on the integration of professional research and advocacy with member activism. Focusing on a single campaign gives this study the benefit of being able to document the intertextual relationship between professional and activist discourse on a specific human rights exigency and to chart how this exigency is framed and reframed for the different audiences of these discourses. Second, AI has continually

\textsuperscript{12} The relatively open archives that these NGOs have established on the internet made the acquisition of documents such as human rights reports, press releases, advocacy manuals, mandates, and policy statements relatively easy to obtain. The home page of Amnesty International’s International Secretariat has a vast amount of materials published after 1994 that can be accessed online by region, subject, or by the document’s index number.
regarded Sudan as a *crisis campaign*, which requires the rapid coordination of its membership and which requires AI to frame the exigencies of Darfur across its broad range of well-established campaigns (such as AI’s Stop Violence Against Women Campaign) and across its various networks of activists (such as Freedom Writers, and Urgent Action Network members). AI’s Sudan Crisis Campaign thus reveals an intensive process of discursive coordination and effectively demonstrates the dynamic intertextuality that governs the work of AI’s genre system. Third, the severity of the abuses in Darfur has placed pressure on AI to call for public activism and support that expands beyond the boundaries of its membership. Finally, the crisis in Darfur has implicated AI in a difficult symbolic struggle over the application of the term “genocide” to the conflict, and this struggle has created internal contention within the AI movement. AI, despite objections from several of its national sections, has argued that the term “crimes against humanity” is applicable to the conflict in Darfur, but has not utilized the term genocide to describe the conflict in any of its public documents13 (“Sudan Crisis Q&A”, AFR 54/089/2004). On this issue, AI has remained steadfast in its support of a UN sponsored International Commission of Inquiry that would determine if genocidal acts had been committed in Darfur. This decision, I will argue, reflects the dynamic relationship between Amnesty’s organizational expertise and credibility in international

---

13 In an editorial in *Connect*, AIUSA’s monthly activist newsletter, William Schultz, AIUSA’s executive director, brought AIUSA’s Darfur Resolution to the awareness of the organization’s membership. Schultz stated that “Much debate has raged as to whether we are witnessing another genocide in Darfur, like that in Rwanda in 1994; because the *Janjaweed* are largely Arab and their victims largely black African. Amnesty International USA has urged Amnesty's International Secretariat to declare what is happening "genocide," thus triggering an international obligation to intervene. Most major human rights groups, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty, have not yet declared the war in Darfur "genocide" because it requires the establishment of intent to eliminate a group because of its ethnicity and not for other reasons“ (Schultz, Connect 9/2004).
human rights institutions and power relationships and discursive politics that shape the discourse of its human rights campaigns.

Conclusion

As the human rights movement expands and the influence of NGOs continues to increase in international politics, human rights crises, like the crimes against humanity in Darfur, will serve as tests for the success of human rights NGOs as professional reporting and lobbying institutions, as well as institutions capable of galvanizing public discourse and outrage. Throughout this study, I will draw on AI’s Sudan Crisis Campaign as an example of the networks of agents that are coordinated in the various activity systems of human rights advocacy. The relationship between NGO professionals and grassroots activists is crucial to understanding the varying levels of agency, literacy, and rhetorical competence that structure the contemporary human rights movement. Campaigns like AI’s Sudan Crisis Campaign reveal the necessity of networks of NGO professionals, high-level officials from nation-states and IGOs, and grassroots activists in placing continued pressure on the international community to intervene in human rights atrocities. These networks include diverse, heterogeneous, but often dialogic, and interdependent, communicative spaces that link agents of varying rhetorical competencies and human rights literacies together in producing public pressure for action. This process of discursive coordination is central to the following chapters; and, I argue, reflective of the political necessities of the contentious field of human rights politics. Human rights networks are dynamic, communicative spaces that have evolved out of the procedural limitations of human rights institutions like the United Nations. IGOs like the UN, which
serves as the legal and political cornerstone of the human rights movement, depend on the compliance of their member states, and NGOs must often tactically pressure them into concrete condemnations of and tangible action on human rights issues. The analysis of Amnesty International presented in the following chapters will, I hope, illustrate the interdependence of professional and grassroots agents as they tactically engage the contested, institutional field of human rights activism and advocacy. Professional publics like Amnesty International serve as literacy sponsoring advocacy networks that frame the exigencies of human rights in genres that facilitate the discursive activism of their members. AI’s genre repertoires and genre systems structure the deeply intertextual social relationships between AI’s professional staff and activist collectives and instantiate AI’s organizational hierarchy, ideology, and methodology across a wide range of international actors. Understanding this relationship is essential to understanding the intersection between individual and collective agency in the emerging transnational civil society of human rights and the role of public discourse in fostering and sustaining it.

“Amnesty researchers see research as action, Amnesty as a whole talks of ‘research and action,’ but the reality has been research, then action . . . .This is the crucial division of labor. Despite numerous efforts at integration, this essentially linear relationship has never been overcome. It is not just about the temporal priority of research (i.e. that it must come first); it is about the key role research plays as Amnesty’s foundational practice, that of bearing witness. It has a special moral authority. Research practice embodies the ethos” (Stephen Hopgood, Keepers of the Flame: Understanding Amnesty International 26).

“Networks strive to uncover and investigate problems, and alert the press and policy makers. One activist described this as the ‘human rights methodology’—promoting change by reporting facts.’ To be credible, the information produced by networks must be reliable and well-documented. To gain attention, the information must be timely and dramatic. Sometimes these multiple goals of information politics conflict, but both credibility and drama seem to be essential components of a strategy aimed at persuading publics and policymakers to change their minds” (Keck and Sikkink, Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics 19).

“The basic truth, which knowledgeable officials at the UN clearly understood, was that without NGOs, the entire human rights implementation system at the UN would come to a halt” (William Korey, NGOs and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 9).

Since its founding in 1961, Amnesty International has seen raising public awareness of human rights issues and fostering forums for public discussion of human rights as central organizational priorities. Early in the organization’s history, Peter Beneson stated that, “the important thing is to mobilize public opinion quickly and widely before a government is caught up in the vicious spiral caused by its own...”

---

The force of opinion, to be effective, should be broadly based, international, non-sectarian, and all party” (qtd. in Welch 91-2). In this sense, Amnesty’s mission is to prevent further human rights abuses through the mobilization of public opinion, as well as to document human rights abuses and atrocities previously committed by governments. Under its statute, Amnesty International describes itself as “a global community of human rights defenders with the principles of international solidarity, effective action for the individual victim, global coverage, the universality and indivisibility of human rights, impartiality and independence, and democracy and human respect” (“Statute of Amnesty International“). The “Methods” section of AI’s Statute describes the integration of the research and the publicity or advocacy functions of its discourse: “AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL seeks to disclose human rights abuses accurately, quickly and persistently. It systematically and impartially researches the facts of individual cases and patterns of human rights abuses. These findings are publicized, and members, supporters and staff mobilize public pressure on governments and others to stop the abuses” (“Statute of Amnesty International“). These processes and their integration involve complex flows of information between multiple audiences and dense chains of textual distribution that seek to adapt information to the varying levels of human rights literacy that these audiences possess.

This chapter documents the high-level institutional context of Amnesty International’s professional human rights reporting and advocacy. Focusing specifically on Amnesty’s human rights reporting genres, I analyze the reciprocal relationship between these genres and the discourses of international law and policy that structure the creation and enforcement of human rights norms at the United Nations. AI has played a
major role in shaping new human rights policies and procedures, monitoring the compliance of states to human rights conventions, raising critical publicity for human rights issues, and applying the abstract texts of human rights declarations, covenants, and conventions to specific human rights cases. These institutional roles have necessitated AI’s increasing professionalization, and the development of professional genre systems that are utilized to carry out AI’s strategic work at the UN. AI’s human rights reporting genres play a central role in the supplying various UN treaty bodies, rapporteurs, and independent experts with objective documentation of human rights abuses. As these genres draw upon the context of genres utilized by the UN Human Rights Committee, they reflect the legal registers and technical rationality of the high-level institutions of human rights, aligning the findings of their reports with the application of relevant international law and placing these findings in generic conventions recognizable within this context.

The tactical relationship that the genres of Amnesty’s professional human rights reporting bear to the high-level and technical contexts of human rights institutions is examined alongside the system of media genres and high-level advocacy genres that publicize AI’s research. Drawing on Keck and Sikkink’s typology of information, symbolic, leverage, and accountability politics, I trace the overlapping systems of reporting genres, high-level advocacy genres, and media genres that are coordinated to strategically leverage high-level human rights institutions and individual nations for intervention in human rights crises. I analyze how Amnesty’s professional reporting and advocacy genres reflect the technical discourses of governmental and intergovernmental institutions, while tactically publicizing and framing human rights exigencies in the
context of public accountability. Human rights NGOs like Amnesty utilize a broad range of genres across various networks of high-level actors within these institutions and employ a system of genres that is adaptive to the political fields of intergovernmental organizations like the UN. The complex and politically charged environments of these institutions, as well as their often slow-moving bureaucratic structures, necessitates the coordination of Amnesty’s research and reporting with media genres and the genres of grassroots campaigns. I analyze the generic intertextuality that takes place between these genres and the shaping effect of public opinion on these institutions. I argue that Amnesty’s professional genres shape the discursive contexts of high-level institutions by granting public presence to human rights exigencies, reframing human rights exigencies within the public rhetoric of moral obligation, and highlighting the role of public discourse and advocacy in the legitimation of international human rights law.

**Amnesty International’s Professional Research Paradigm and the Dangers of Human Rights Professionalism**

Amnesty International’s democratic structure and grassroots advocacy distinguish it from many other human rights NGOs. However, while AI’s organizational *ideograph* of *international community* emphasizes the equal agency of AI members and professionals, Amnesty’s reputation for expert human rights reporting, its agenda setting work at the United Nations, and its high level lobbying with members of the international community require differing levels of institutional access, rhetorical competency, and
Anne Marie Clark, in her study of Amnesty International’s role in shaping human rights norms, has argued that human rights norms and action are often fostered through a combination of the work of human rights experts as well as public opinion (128). For Clark, it is Amnesty’s linkage of the work of experts with grassroots advocacy that uniquely contributes to its presence in the field of human rights: “Meetings of experts often help to advance common understanding of the issues and build consensus about the best path for the advancement of normative goals; Amnesty International uniquely linked these expert meetings with the development of new techniques in support of human rights that could also draw in nonexperts” (128). Clark’s analysis points towards the idea that the ideology of international community that characterizes much of Amnesty’s public rhetoric is grounded in the processes of coordinating expert or professional discourse and the discourse of member activists. Examples of this coordination are numerous in Amnesty International and AI’s policy and review documents.

As many scholars have observed, the rise of non-membership based NGOs within the UN system challenged AI’s reputation as the major provider of human rights information. Human Rights Watch, in particular, was able to exert great influence within the UN and within the international media through its timely and accurate reporting of human rights abuses around the world. As Stephen Hopgood’s recent ethnography, *Keepers of the Flame: Understanding Amnesty International*, has documented, HRW has been able to respond more creatively and rapidly with human rights reports and high-

---

15 I borrow the term “ideograph” from the work of Michael Calvin McGee, especially “The ‘Ideograph’: A Link Between Rhetoric and Ideology,” where he defines the ideograph as “ideology in practice . . . a political language preserved in rhetorical documents, with the capacity to dictate public belief and behavior” (427) and as “a political language composed of slogan like terms signifying collective commitment” (435). See Dechaine’s *Global Humanitarianism: NGOs and the Crafting of Community* for an ideographic analysis of contemporary humanitarian NGOs.
level advocacy precisely because it does not have the burden of linking these activities with mass-membership campaigns (140-1). HRW is thus “in effect, the Research Department the modern Amnesty wishes it had—separate from the running of the organization and the membership, flexible and yet skilled in terms of country expertise and research” (142). HRW has underlined its organizational distinctiveness from AI on its official web-page, citing its lack of a mass-membership with its ability to focus on broader set of human rights concerns and with its employment of a different set of discursive tactics. On the “Frequently Asked Questions” section of this page, HRW describes AI and itself as playing “complementary roles, reflecting a healthy division of labor” (“Frequently Asked Questions”). AI’s membership activism is contrasted, on this page, to HRW’s media tactics and high-level advocacy: “Amnesty International is a mass-membership organization. Mobilization of those members is the organization's central advocacy tool. Human Rights Watch’s principal advocacy strategy is to shame offenders by generating press attention and to exert diplomatic and economic pressure on them by enlisting influential governments and institutions” (“Frequently Asked Questions”). While HRW does lack the membership base of AI, this characterization neglects AI’s continued emphasis on the activities of human rights reporting, publicity, and advocacy in high-level human rights institutions. Regardless, the growing competition that AI has faced from non-membership NGOs at the UN has been reflected in major discussions of AI’s organizational identity, discussions that have had a direct bearing on the discursive tactics and genres that shape AI’s work.

As human rights NGOs have taken on the institutional role of information professionals in high-level IGOs like the United Nations, their human rights reporting
and high-level advocacy and publicity genres have come to reflect the discourses and generic conventions of these professional spaces. The expansion of NGO professionalism has created immense opportunities for NGOs to play major roles in the agenda setting and policy monitoring of these institutions, as well as opportunities for the legitimation of their activist campaigns through the influence of their professional credibility. NGOs such as AI have been cited as existing within a “symbiotic relationship” with the United Nations, working within its structure for the “establishment of new human rights standards and the implementation of old ones” (Thakur, The United Nations Peace and Security 111). The increasing role that consultative NGOs like Amnesty International have played within the UN system has also NGO professionalism has also brought with it increased difficulties in translating and coordinating the professional discourses of NGOs into tangible forms of grassroots activism. The emphasis of many human rights NGOs on information provision and high-level advocacy in high-level institutions has brought with it critiques of dominance of human rights professionalism, with many scholars observing the stifling effect that professional discourse has had on public deliberation of human rights. While these critiques clearly document the slow-moving, state-centered context of human rights discourse within the United Nations, the role of NGOs like Amnesty within these institutions is at once facilitative (through its research and legal analysis) and adversarial (through its utilization of media pressure to leverage political action and intervention). Analyzing the complex genre systems that are utilized within this context complicates critiques of NGO professionalism, while raising important questions about the role of public discourse—through both mass media and activist campaigns—in creating political will for action on
human rights issues within international institutions.

In addition to the organizational pressures AI faces to compete with the professional reporting and advocacy of NGOs like HRW, AI also faces the pressure to translate these activities into opportunities for activism accessible to its membership. Critiques of NGO professionalism often proceed from a juxtaposition of the discourses of professional reporting, lobbying, and high-level advocacy with the discourses of international public opinion or domestic, emancipatory social movements. On this perspective, the discourses of human rights professionals constitute the expansion of an impersonal, slow-moving, often ineffectual bureaucratic context, while the discourses of grassroots activists are relegated to mere indicators of public opinion with little legitimating force. This juxtaposition is also constructed along the lines of two competing human rights discourses: the bureaucratic and exclusive discourse of human rights institutions and the grassroots discourse of social collectives and movements. Richard Wilson, in his discussion of Amnesty International’s use of human rights testimony, has suggested that the expansion of human rights professionalism has been marked by the expansion and dominance of the technical and legal discourses of human rights. For Wilson, contemporary human rights discourse is “saturated” with “‘technocratic consciousness’” (155). Wilson has questioned the “technocratic language”

---

16 David Kennedy has argued, for instance, that “the human rights bureaucracy is itself part of the problem” (119). For Kennedy, “Professionalization strengthens lawyers at the expense of priests, engineers, politicians, soothsayers, and citizens who might otherwise play a more central role in emancipatory efforts” (120). Kennedy draws upon the human rights bureaucracy’s response to the events in East Timor as an example: “We need only think of the bureaucratization of human rights in places like East Timor that have come within the orbit of international governance—suddenly an elaborate presence pulling local elites away from their base, or consigning them to the status of local informants, attention turning like sunflowers to Geneva, New York, to the Commission to the work of resolutions and reports” (120).
of human rights reporting and research (citing the country reports and Urgent Actions of Amnesty International directly) and has argued that, “by embracing a technocratic language, human rights reporting lays itself open to the same critique as could be made of the devalued, dehumanized language of abusive forms of governance” (155). Wilson’s critique sets out the stakes of perpetuating the dominance of human rights professionalism and highlights the role of high-level, professional genres in constructing the social reality of the human rights exigencies. Critiques of human rights professionalism such as Wilson’s can thus be read as critiques of the dominance of the professional genres of human rights discourse.

These critiques of the bureaucratic professionalism of human rights share an important perspective with genre analysis: an understanding of the role of discourse and genre as being shaped by and as shaping social, political, and organizational contexts. The genres of professional human rights discourse can be seen as being shaped by the high-level and technical discursive contexts of human rights institutions and as reflecting the discursive conventions of these institutions. To this extent, even while giving voice to human rights exigencies within high-level institutions such as the United Nations, these genres could potentially reconstitute the abstract and technical rationality of these institutions and potentially limit public access to human rights discourse. Genres, as Bazerman has argued, become “typified linguistic or representational forms” through their continued use and structure not only the social network of discourse within a given field of activity and construct “relevant realities to be considered within the forum and the form in which those realities are to be considered” (Constructing Experience 33). In terms of human rights professionalism, this means that the dominance of the professional
genres of human rights can structure the reality of the human rights movement within a narrow technical and legal rationality that is exclusive of the discourses of public deliberation. The role of human rights reporting has been significant in the development of NGO influence at the United Nations and other international forums, and the genres of human rights reporting not only reflect the conventions and registers of these institutions, but reconfigure the discursive terrain of IGOs like the UN, opening up a legitimate space for the influence of civil society in matters of state policy.

As I have argued in chapter two, however, the genre repertoires of human rights professionals entail a wide range of audiences and objectives and are not simply confined to the high-level forums of human rights institutions and the activities of professional reporting, lobbying, and advocacy. When viewed in isolation, human rights reporting genres reflect the audiences, discourses, and context of genres that shape high-level intergovernmental institutions like the United Nations. AI’s human rights reporting genres are centered on recommendations for action and intervention that are specifically addressed to high-level actors or strong publics—specific nation-states, the various bodies of the United Nations, and other intergovernmental bodies. As I shall show, legal registers and the legal interpretation of human rights exigencies are a central aspect of this genre, and most of AI’s country or thematic issue reports contain a clearly marked section that outlines and applies the international and domestic laws that bear on individual exigencies. Reporting genres fulfill an important aspect of AI’s information politics by coordinating the objective documentation of human rights violations with specific violations of international law and concrete recommendations for national and international action. In cases such as the Darfur crisis, the role of human rights reporting
and high-level advocacy is a vital one, as it clearly traces the causes of the conflict, names the perpetrators of the conflict, and maps out the concrete legal obligations and political/legal solutions to the conflict. These functions of human rights reporting are crucial to international conflicts like Darfur, as they serve as counter-statements to the statements and reports of offending governments like Khartoum and as authoritative documents that publicize both the obligation for international intervention and the legal framework through which intervention can be achieved.

Human rights law and human rights policy are, however, relatively weak in terms of enforcement and often require the added force of public pressure in order to promote action or intervention. Human rights reporting and high-level advocacy take place in a contentious context among nation-states who, despite the force of transnational civil society, still view their human rights records as being a matter of their own state sovereignty. Reporting a state’s human rights violations in the sovereignty-bound context of high-level intergovernmental institutions like the UN is more than often not enough to ensure the compliance of its member states with recommendations for intervention. NGOs like Amnesty International must strategically publicize their human rights reports in order to produce leverage on states and the international community to act in accordance with their obligations within international institutions and international law. This process of strategic publicity requires the utilization of a range of media genres that are coordinated with the release of AI’s reports or draw on the authority of Amnesty’s reports to address specific acts or statements made by offending or intervening governments or institutions. These media genres play a central role in the professional genre system AI uses to perform the work of human rights advocacy,
framing the specific human rights abuses, the culpability of rights-violating states and groups, and the obligations of the international community for broader publics.

**Institutional Context: Amnesty International’s Professional Reporting, High-Level Advocacy, and Media Genres in the Technical Sphere of the United Nations**

The discursive practices of international NGOs such as Amnesty International form a dense network of information exchange between professional human rights researchers and advocates, the various members of the United Nations Human Rights Commission, members of the UN Security Council, other intergovernmental bodies such as the European Union and African Union, and the representatives of individual nation-states. The work of professional researchers within Amnesty International’s International Secretariat in London and the lobbying efforts of professional advocates at the UN in Geneva and New York have played a key role in shaping the framework of international human rights law. AI’s *Campaign Manual* states the importance of this legal framework: “Much of AI’s campaigning focuses on holding governments accountable to the standards they have themselves agreed to through the UN and regional intergovernmental bodies. This framework of international law and human rights standards is of fundamental importance to AI’s campaigning” (7). Within these contexts, Amnesty not only provides objective human rights reporting, but also interprets its findings within the domestic and international laws to which offending governments and groups are signatories. Korey documents that AI’s role and influence at the UN has grown out of its participation in the creation of various instruments of human rights law: “As the number of UN instruments and mechanisms increased, the organization’s activity as an NGO
with consultative status grew. A UN Amnesty office was established in 1977 and a permanent representation was established by 1988” (300). Amnesty’s organizational prestige within the United Nations system has been established through both its presentation and interpretation of the facts of human rights issues. In this section, I outline the institutional context of the United Nations, charting AI’s role within this high-level context and the procedural forums through which AI presents its information. The UN, rather than being a homogenous discursive forum, is structured by varying levels of organizational access, and the strength of AI’s human rights reporting and advocacy has been central to forging links across these institutional levels. The reputation of human rights NGOs as credible, objective, and current sources of human rights information, as well as their professional roles as policy advisors and lobbying organizations, bears a direct relationship to their organizational legitimation. AI reports are cited regularly in the reports of United Nations experts and often play a key role in informing the reports of UN Special Rapporteurs, Commissions of Inquiry, and Special Working Groups. In this section, I analyze the strategic audiences of AI’s professional discourse, outlining the discursive relationships through which AI exerts its influence as a leading NGO in the UN system.

17 Hugo Slim’s study of NGO accountability and legitimacy has documented this relationship: “An organisation’s legitimacy is also generated from its knowledge and its relationships. What an organisation knows and whom it knows is a major source of its legitimacy. That a human rights group knows certain facts about human rights law and patterns of human rights violation is extremely important, giving it a legitimate expertise. Because NGOs know people who experience human rights violation, poverty and extreme suffering (like IDPs in protracted war), or people who are in a position to do something about it (like politicians, military leaders and TNCs) also gives these organisations legitimate contacts. The fact that an NGO has relationships with people at some or all levels of a problem of human rights violation means that it generates legitimacy from knowing such people directly. In this way, precise knowledge and the right relationships are an important and quite tangible source of legitimacy. These legitimacy assets might be summed up as valuable expertise and connections” (Slim “By What Authority?: The Legitimacy and Accountability of Non-governmental Organisations” (<http://www.jha.ac/articles/a082.htm>)).
As Korey has noted, AI’s role as a NGO with special consultative status is central to its increasing access to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, but also increasingly to the once impenetrable UN Security Council. As a NGO with special consultative status at the United Nations, AI has played important agenda setting and information disseminating roles at the United Nations. Consultative status is granted via an NGOs application and approval granted by the NGO committee of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, and grants NGOs access to the Human Rights Committee, including the ability to make oral statements, provide human rights reports to UN diplomats and experts, and to give council on the drafting of human rights legislation. Kirsten Martens’s study of Amnesty International’s work in Geneva has documented that, “Today, NGOs have manifold possibilities to work with the UN. They assist UN institutions and provide them with information on issues of concern to them, they regularly advise UN commissions and committees, and they collaborate with operational UN agencies to implement projects together. In fact, even the main UN organs take the opinions and contributions of NGOs into account” (1051). Martens further notes that, “Most striking, since 1997, Security Council members meet regularly with NGO representatives, often even on a weekly basis, and get briefed on current affairs by NGO representatives” (1051). International NGOs have established reputations as experts in

18 See Peter Willetts “Consultative Status for NGOs at the United Nations” for the history and development of these categories. For current formal regulations regarding the consultative status of NGOs in the U.N. system please see the United Nations ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31: Consultative Relationship Between the United Nations and Non-governmental Organizations.

19 Martens is referencing what has come to be known as the Arria Formula, which was defined in a recent report of the UN High Commission on Human Rights as follows: “Under the Arria formula, special procedures mandate-holders may be invited by the President of the Security Council in order to provide informal briefings to interested Security Council members in relation to thematic and specific country.
human rights documentation and in the interpretation of international human rights law, functioning as “unofficial researchers” to members of UN human rights committees and, by doing so, playing a direct role in framing human rights issues for the international community (Goer 394). This interdependent ethos is central to the influence of NGOs like Amnesty International, whose reputation as an accurate source of human rights documentation has lead to increased access in the UN system.

AI’s role at the United Nations as a human rights reporting and high-level advocacy organization requires the networking of AI researchers and advocates with a several specialized audiences. While many scholars have discussed how human rights NGOs use their insider ethos to distribute their reports and lobby at the U.N. and to lobby U.S. policy makers, their has been relatively little discussion of the diversity of the audiences of human rights reporting and advocacy. Most of the limited discussions of NGO audiences have tended to divide the recipients of NGO information into specialized audiences and the general public. Claude Welch has sketched out the broad outline of Amnesty’s “major target audiences” as, “Governments (esp. abusers), AI members, IGOs, and Public Opinion Globally” (103). James Ron, Howard Ramos, and Kathleen Rodgers, in their quantitative and qualitative study of Amnesty International’s human rights reporting from 1986-2000, differentiate AI’s audiences by genre: “The lengthier background reports are sent to human rights professionals, UN officials, academics, and feature journalists, while shorter press releases aim more at the general public and non-situations” (Enhancing and strengthening the effectiveness of the special procedures of the Commission on Human Rights: An open-ended seminar in consultation with the Expanded Bureau of the Commission, as part of the effort to enhance and strengthen the effectiveness of the special procedures Reference: CHR Dec. 2005/113). Amnesty International, as an NGO with special consultative status, falls under the category of special mandate holder and has briefed the UN Security Council on a variety of country situations and issues.
specialized media” (561). While these general distinctions reflect AI’s balance of expert-level, professional discourse with the discourses and genres of media publicity and public campaigning, AI’s reporting and high-level advocacy genres target specific, strategic audiences in order to exert the maximum amount of pressure to act. Differences across these audiences also suggest that the tactics of information, symbolic, leverage, and accountability politics often require the utilization of differing genres and registers in order to fulfill their purpose.

The high-level advocacy of Amnesty International on the governmental and IGO level has been well-documented through a range of multi-disciplinary studies. Martens’s study of Amnesty International’s work at the United Nations has documented the adaptation of AI’s discourse for UN audiences. Martens states, “AI has always employed a mix of different methods at the UN level that respond to the demands of specifics when working with the IGO“ (1054). Martens cites an interview with an AI representative: “As one AI representative at the UN expressed it, ’obviously the methods used at the UN are different from the methods used when campaigning at street level, and have to be tailored expressly for the UN fora and audience and have to maximize opportunities that are unique to the UN.’” (1054). The same representative described these tailoring methods as “extremely varied, ranging from reading out oral statements at meetings, widely distributed specific documents, ad hoc lobbying of the diplomatic community, either through UN meetings or through formal representation by the AI UN representatives at the respective permanent missions’” (1054). AI representatives at the United Nations play an important role not only in adapting their discourse but also in disseminating it, supplying the UN Human Rights Commission with documented
evidence of human rights abuses and also disseminating human rights reports to UN delegates. As Peter Willetts has documented in his discussion of NGO consultative status, the accuracy and usefulness of the human rights reports Amnesty International presents in U.N. forums is one of the key means by which the organization gains prestige and trustworthiness in international politics. Willett’s cites Amnesty’s fact-checking procedure as evidence, stating “There is no value in possessing information or experience if that information is not believed or the judgment of the NGO is not respected. On the other hand, when a reputation is well-established, officials may take action solely in response to a word from the NGO” (45). Developing prestige, or the reputation for reliability, is, as Willetts argues, a key reason that specific NGOs such as AI are given more access to the agenda-setting, policy formulation, and policy implementation procedures of the U.N. As a NGO with consultative status at the United Nations, Amnesty’s reputation for accurate and useful human rights reporting and high-level advocacy has allowed AI representatives to play key roles in shaping the human rights agenda, policies, and norms of the United Nations High Commission on Human Rights and the recent Human Rights Committee.

Martens also draws attention to these functions of Amnesty International to illustrate the changing nature of AI’s work since the early 1990s. After establishing a reputation for disseminating information and lobbying for specific UN policies in the 1970s, AI has, according to Martens, shifted its primary role as an agenda-setting NGO at the UN to the role of policy implementation. She states, “In recent years, AI has shifted in its approach towards working as formulator and advisor to the UN. Today, AI is a regular member of working groups and committees and advises UN officials openly. And, even more essentially, AI also became more involved in policy implementing practices and, as a result, presently maintains links to a variety of UN agencies, including the operational agencies. In brief, AI now maintains a broader range of activities with the UN and has shifted its priorities in the 1990s; it extended its spectrum of UN activities by adding activities in implementing policies and, at the same time, reduced its traditional approach as an agenda setter” (1070).
The legitimation of Amnesty International through its reputation for disseminating credible, accurate, and useful human rights information to IGOs and policy makers has resulted in the ability of AI to expand the role and force of its voice in international human rights policy. AI’s role as a membership based campaigning organization is also balanced by the important role of high-level advocacy in legitimating AI as a trusted international institution. Clark, in *Diplomacy of Conscience*, has also argued that Amnesty’s “ability to do important legal work in its interactions with states has been significant. It’s interpretive clout has required knowledge of the diplomatic language of states, although its campaigns have been built on concern over the concrete practices of governments” (140). As a NGO that operates as a third force or an external observer in international politics, AI is able to openly criticize, pressure, and guide governments and IGOs in addressing human rights abuses while maintaining impartiality towards state sovereignty and ideological partisanship. In his comparison of Amnesty International and the United Nations, Ramesh Thakur has distinguished AI from the UN by arguing that the UN is a “sovereignty-bound actor” (subject to the compliance and agreement of nation-states), while AI is a “sovereignty-free actor” (possessing freedom from governmental control and sponsorship that allows for a more objective critique of national policies) (“Human Rights” 153). In regards to UN human rights policy, “The powers of NGOs like AI, although no more extensive [than those of the UN], can be utilized more effectively because they are free of some of the types of inhibitions that

---

21 See also the “Strategic Campaigning” section of the *Amnesty International Campaigning Manual*: “AI’s credibility means that its information is generally believed. It is widely referred to – by journalists, academics, policy advisers, other campaigning organizations, diplomats and government departments. Other individuals or organizations could be making the same claims and calling for the same action, but they will often find it harder to be believed or to have an impact” (19)
impede the functioning of IGOs which are subject to ‘capture’ by member governments” (153, brackets mine). The relationship between AI and the UN, for Thakur, is one of interdependence: “AI’s impeccable record has helped it to establish the principle that stats are responsible for the protection of the human rights of their citizens and internationally accountable for the any failures to do so. Conversely, AI has also set the standard against which the UN’s own efforts at censuring and preventing human rights abuses are measured. In other words, there is now a symbiotic relationship between the United Nations and Amnesty International” (157). As Thakur’s analysis highlights, AI has an important and dynamic relationship to the framework of international law, and as a sovereignty free actor AI plays a key role in the UN by framing the policies of nation-states within the framework of international law and within the context of public accountability.

The professional reporting, lobbying, and advocacy genres of human rights NGOs are thus central to the project of creating public accountability for human rights policies and the relevance and applicability of international human rights law. The professional reporting of Amnesty International works strategically to check the human rights reports and claims of UN member nations (Thakur, “Human Rights” 157), and the ability of Amnesty’s reporting to frame national policies within the specific precedents of international law holds the UN itself accountable for its role in admonishing and condemning the rights-violating policies of its member nations. The lack of enforcement of human rights norms and international law within the UN reflects the long-standing tradition of state sovereignty and national self-interest that has been dominant among member-states. As Jack Donnelly has argued, “The global human rights regime involves
widely accepted substantive norms, authoritative multilateral standard setting procedures, considerable promotional activity, but very little international implementation that rarely goes beyond mandatory reporting procedures. There is no international enforcement. Such normative strength and procedural weakness is not accidental but the result of conscious political decisions” (135). Amnesty’s professional reporting, lobbying, and advocacy serve to combat the procedural weakness of international human rights treaty monitoring by framing human rights violations within the specific covenants, conventions, and declarations of international human rights law, while also framing these violations within public discourses that exist outside of the UN and that raise public awareness. These processes exercise strategic, public pressure on governments that can force responses to offending policies or that can influence both the UN system and member states to exercise diplomatic pressure on offending governments. In systematic cases of human rights abuses like Darfur, the adversarial role that NGOs like Amnesty play in the UN and in the international community is often heightened due to the necessity of holding the international community accountable for intervention. The tactics that NGOs such as Amnesty employ to exert this pressure overlap across a variety of their professional genres, and entail the coordination of a system of genres that are designed to simultaneously exert strategic pressure on offending governments and on the UN and its member states for intervention into the conflict.

**AI’s Professional Genres in the Human Rights Technical Sphere**

As a professional public, Amnesty International has sought to coordinate the reputation that it has developed as a credible source of human rights documentation and
policy monitoring within the United Nations with human rights campaigns that strategically and effectively bring the force of public discourse to bear on international and domestic human rights policies. Amnesty’s ethos as a provider or expert and impartial human rights information has been historically a key reason for the organization’s expanding influence at the United Nations and with other high-level human rights forums. AI’s ethos of credible professionalism has also been central to the legitimation of its grassroots human rights campaigns, which have drawn upon AI’s the institutional credibility of AI’s professional research and AI’s international recognition in mass media as a leading human rights NGO. Within the technical sphere of high-level human rights institutions like the United Nations, Amnesty’s organizational credibility has allowed it to play an influential role in shaping and interpreting the exigencies of specific conflicts and in framing effective recommendations for their remedy. However, the relatively limited enforcement of the international covenants, conventions, and declarations of international law requires AI to strategically invoke the tactics of media shaming and international public opinion in order to produce moral leverage on states to comply with these recommendations. Such strategic use of information is coordinated through the intertextual relationship of a range of reporting, lobbying, and advocacy genres that embody the discursive tactics that Keck and Sikkink have identified. The discussion below looks at these genres in light of these tactics and seeks to outline the intertextual professional genre system through which AI accomplishes the work of transnational advocacy. Amnesty International’s professional reporting genres are coordinated with both AI’s media campaigns and with AI’s high-level advocacy work,
and serve a variety of discursive tactics as they are cited, referenced, and publicized in AI press releases, public statements, and open letters.

AI’s professional genre repertoire is outlined in Table 3.1 below. The genres in this table were taken catalogued from Amnesty International’s online library, which collects all public AI documents from 1996 to the present. These genre classifications are well known throughout Amnesty’s international network and reflect AI’s organizational designation for each genre. These stable terms are reflected across a wide range of AI publications, and are described throughout the *Amnesty International Handbook*. While this list of genres is not exhaustive, it is representative of the major written genres utilized by AI’s human rights professionals to report, lobby, and publicize human rights abuses. An exhaustive list of the genres utilized by AI’s professional community would include the conversational genres that professional advocates utilize in informal meetings with high-level officials and the intra-office genres (such as emails, phone calls to other sections and regional offices, and interoffice memos) that are used to coordinate AI’s various departments.

Instead, the genres listed above reflect two important strands of analysis: (1) they reflect the vital relationship between the technical genres of human rights reporting and high-level advocacy and AI’s press genres, which seek to frame the findings of reports and AI’s lobbying activities for a public audience; (2) they represent a system of genres readily accessible and identifiable to a broad range of AI’s professionals and activists. In order to hold government’s accountable for their human rights records, AI faces the twin necessity of framing governmental human rights violations in the context of international law and intergovernmental responsibility and of publicizing its research in order to utilize
Table 3.1
Human Rights NGO Professional Written Genre Repertoire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genres</th>
<th>Samples Analyzed from Sudan Crisis Campaign: 2003-2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reporting Genres</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country Reports</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Reports</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thematic Reports</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memorandums</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-Level Advocacy Written Genres</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral Statements</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Letters</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint Letters</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Genres</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Statements</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press Releases</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Briefings and Advisories</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Samples of Professional Genres</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the force of public pressure to galvanize an international response. The genres of AI’s human rights reporting and AI’s media genres reflect a high degree of generic intertextuality that is reflected in the overlapping purposes that they serve across the discursive tactics of information, symbolic, leverage, and accountability politics. AI’s human rights reports endow its public advocacy with an ethos of authority and credibility, while AI’s high-level advocacy genres draw the attention of governing bodies to the findings of these reports and AI’s media genres seek to draw public attention to both the human rights violations they document and the responsibility of offending governments and IGOs such as the UN to stop these violations. AI’s Public Statements regarding human rights serve as powerful public leverage on IGOs like the UN, framing both the severity of human rights exigencies and the necessity of IGOs and individual nations to intervene. In addition, these media genres make AI’s concerns and recommendations a matter of public record, which plays a key role in developing the public accountability of the international community and fosters the necessary pressure for international condemnation and action.

In the sections below, I analyze the role AI’s human rights reporting, high-level advocacy genre systems, and media genre systems play in AI’s information, symbolic, leverage, and accountability politics. While these tactics have played an important role in discussions of transnational advocacy, they are, I suggest, achieved through a variety of overlapping genres that are intertextually coordinated to produce both internal and external pressure on international institutions and their member states. AI’s human rights report “Rape as a Weapon of War: Sexual Violence and its Consequences” and the high-level advocacy, media campaign, and activist campaign that were developed from it
exemplify the genres systems necessary to produce the tactics of transnational advocacy. AI’s continued work on the Darfur crisis has been significant to the passage of UN resolutions, the media publicity afforded to the crisis, and the steps towards UN intervention that are coming into place at the present. AI, along with other NGOs like Human Rights Watch and the International Crisis Group, called for the establishment of an international commission of inquiry, the strengthening of African Union peacekeepers, a strengthened arms embargo in Darfur, the establishment of a UN force in Darfur, and the referral of the Darfur crisis to the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. AI’s human rights reporting, high-level advocacy, and media campaigns have been innovative in their scope, and have not only documented the atrocities in Darfur, but have also engaged the Government of Sudan through suggestions for the reform of their domestic policy, lobbied for a stronger arms embargo on Sudan and publicly documented and criticized nations transferring arms to Sudan, outlined suggestions for donor nations attempting to assist humanitarian intervention in the region, and outlined a set of objectives for the establishment of a UN peacekeeping force in Darfur. AI’s reputation as a consultative, credible, and politically neutral NGO has also allowed AI to provide key information and advocacy during the drafting of UN resolutions on Darfur. In an April 2005 media release, AI praised the UN Resolutions passed on Darfur in March of

---

22 These resolutions are summarized in a 2005 press release: “During the last week of March three separate resolutions were passed by the UN Security Council: resolution 1590, establishing the United Nations Mission in Sudan on 24 March; resolution 1591, strengthening the arms embargo on Sudan and imposing sanctions on individual Sudanese on 29 March; and resolution 1593, referring suspected perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) on 31 March 2005” (“Sudan: UN Resolutions Provide an Opportunity to Build Human Rights and End Impunity in Sudan” 1). In addition, UN Security Council Resolution 1706, passed on August 31, 2006 established a UN peacekeeping mission in Sudan, a mission that AI had actively lobbied for since 2005.
2005, while outlining AI’s role as a source of documentation and as a high-level advocacy network at the UN. The media release states, “The long negotiations, accompanied by pressure from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), helped to strengthen the resolutions, in particular the originally weak human rights provisions” (“Sudan: UN Resolutions Provide an Opportunity to Build Human Rights and End Impunity in Sudan” 1). The pressure generated by AI on the UN and its member states has been significant in pushing through UN resolutions that adequately protect the human rights of Sudanese civilians caught up in the Darfur conflict. While AI’s role in the UN has been significant to these resolutions, the discursive tactics AI has utilized throughout the campaign analyzed below reflects the necessity of coordinating the activities of human rights information provision with genres capable of producing pressure both internal and external pressures on international institutions.

Information Politics

Information politics, as outlined by Keck and Sikkink, relies on both the provision of accurate, technical documentation of human rights abuses and the dramatic presentation of the human suffering that accompanies human rights violations. They argue that “The notion of ‘reporting facts’ does not fully express the way networks strategically use information to frame issues. Networks call attention to issues, or even create issues by using language that dramatizes and draws attention to their concerns” (19-20). Keck and Sikkink refer to the use human rights testimony as a primary example of this element of information politics, arguing that the use of testimony often enables activists to define human rights violations as moral issues of “right and wrong, because
their purpose is to persuade people and stimulate them to act” (19). While the provision of information cuts across a wide range of genres, reporting genres and media genres are central to AI’s information politics. AI’s country reports are an important example of this style of information politics, as they draw on human rights testimony to document human rights abuses and assign culpability to the perpetrators of human rights abuses, while lending a human voice to the often detailed and technical discussions of human rights law and policy that frame the reports’ recommendations. AI’s media genres, while often employed for accountability and leverage politics, play a central role in the documenting human rights violations for mass media audiences, raising public awareness and concern for human rights exigencies. For Keck and Sikkink, information politics requires the ability of human rights documentation and fact-finding to be translated from expert discourse into “clear, powerful messages that appeal to shared principles, which often have more impact on state policy than advice of technical experts” (19). This translation is necessary because “An important part of the political struggle over information is precisely whether an issue is defined primarily as technical—and thus subject to consideration by ‘qualified experts’—or as something that concerns a broader global constituency” (19). As I have documented above, professional publics like Amnesty International have played major roles as providers of expert, technical human rights reporting within high-level bodies like the United Nation, while aligning its activists constituencies with opportunities to directly address offending and intervening governments. In this sense, AI clearly reflects the information politics Keck and Sikkink have outlined. As I shall document below, however, the broad “framing” perspective that Keck and Sikkink have employed in describing information politics can be more
concretely described by looking at the intertextual genre systems necessary to mediate between the tasks of expert information provision and the framing of human rights exigencies in terms of shared principles.

Most major human rights reports of Amnesty International are still issued from professional researchers and country experts at the organization’s International Secretariat. AI’s reporting genres reflect their information politics, documenting a clear pattern of the culpability of human rights offenders, contextualizing human rights violations in the context of international humanitarian law, and framing the obligation of the United Nations and its member states to intervene to stop the violations. AI’s information politics within the United Nations also reflects the organization’s historical ability to adapt its discourse to the conventions and discursive aims of the UN, as well as its ability to seize upon human rights issues that offer the maximum opportunity for AI to exert its influence. The utilization of these reports by UN special rapporteurs and expert bodies reflects the stature of AI as an “insider” within the UN’s Human Rights Committee (Goer 402). However, the objective and accurate documentation of human rights abuses in NGO reports also increases the strategic pressure on the UN to take action to stop the abuses through international action. Human rights reports, like Amnesty’s country reports, document human rights abuses within a complex legal narrative that contextualizes violations of human rights simultaneously within the standards of international law and the standards of domestic law that obligate offending governments to secure the rights of their citizens. Human rights reports, in this sense, serve as both narratives of culpability—attributing the causes of human rights violations to specific actors, documenting the specific patterns of abuse, and naming the specific
victims of human rights violations—*narratives of concrete responsibility*—setting forth the obligation of national or international intervention within specific recommendations for intervention that are rooted in the framework of international law.

As narratives of culpability, human rights reports must gather first-hand evidence of human rights violations and governmental culpability and contextualize this evidence within the international standards of human rights law. The technical sphere of human rights reports is one in human rights professionals navigate the procedural norms of information provision and advocacy through a high level of background knowledge and experience in the interpretation of international human rights and humanitarian law. As Gérard Prunier has argued in his study of the Darfur crisis, “Aggressive labeling and primary guilt attribution are part and parcel of a realistic response” (147). AI’s human rights reports directly name the perpetrators of human rights abuses, as well as naming their victims, and thoroughly document patterns of human rights violations and the culpability of both governments in committing human rights violations. A central aspect of this process is the alignment of human rights abuses with the relevant human rights and humanitarian law to which the offending government is party. The basic documents of international human rights and humanitarian law such as human rights conventions, covenants, and declarations serve as what Devitt has described in her study of tax accountants as *supergenres* (*Writing Genres* 58). Supergenres provide “the basis and reference point for other genres, as tax regulations operate for other tax genres, scriptures for religious genres, laws for legal genres” (58). In addition, AI’s country reports draw heavily on the domestic law and policy of offending governments, holding governments accountable for the human rights protections granted through their constitutions, as well
as documenting governmental policies that are in violation of international human rights law. This process of legal interpretation is crucial to AI’s country reports in that it not only establishes legal accountability, but also serves as the basis for the recommendations for action and intervention that the reports make to various bodies of the UN and the international community.

As illustrated in Table 3.2, AI’s human rights reporting genres draw heavily on the supergenres of international law and on the legal interpretation and application of these standards to specific human rights exigencies. This table represents the average number of specific intertextual references to specific articles of international human rights and humanitarian law and reflects central role of legal interpretation and argument in Amnesty’s human rights reports. These citations reflect specific references of international human rights law and the domestic policies of the Government of Sudan only, omitting general references to terms such as international human rights law, humanitarian law, international standards, and the Government of Sudan’s Policy.

As V.K. Bhatia has argued in his study of legal discourse, legislative writing—like that of international human rights law—is characterized by its “highly impersonal and decontextualized” conventions, which are structured in response to the necessity of their being “all-inclusive” (137). Human rights and humanitarian law, as it is often grounded in the rhetoric of universality, presents an especially difficult task of legal interpretation, as it requires claimants like NGOs to apply international legislation to specific violations that occur within the local contexts of domestic law and politics. As Thakur has suggested, “sovereignty-bound” institutions such as the UN, despite challenging
Table 3.2. Intertextual References to International Human Rights Law and Sudanese Domestic Policy in AI’s Sudan Country Reports and Memorandums 2003-6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>No. of Texts</th>
<th>Average No. of References</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific Citation of International Human Rights Law</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country Reports</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13.08</td>
<td>0/26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memorandums</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>6.05</td>
<td>3/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Citations of Sudanese Domestic Law</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country Reports</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9.01</td>
<td>0/51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memorandums</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>20/45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*As AI’s Thematic Reports are often focused on specific violations of human rights law that are occurring in multiple nations, I have omitted them from this table. These genres normally employ a general section that outlines and discusses the legal standard being violated, followed by specific sections that document the abuse in each country. As they often do not directly cite international law within discussions of specific countries, they are not relevant samples for this discussion. In addition, the international scope of AI’s annual reports, as well their being designed for a broad audience, makes references to specific international human rights laws and policies rare. These reports were also omitted from the sample used in this table. As AI’s country reports often contain specific sub-sections on international law or the international legal framework, the references calculated reflect the average and median number of references in the complete report rather than by number of words or T-units. The only report with zero specific citations of international law was Amnesty International’s 2004 “At the Mercy of Killers—Destruction of Villages in Darfur,” which reported the results of an analysis of satellite imagery of burned villages and was not specifically linked to standards of international human rights law.
traditional, realist conceptions of state sovereignty, are contentious forums, where member-nations submit their own human rights reports and often publicly disclaim AI’s research (“Human Rights” 157). The political objectivity and methodological soundness of AI’s reports has, in this context, been crucial to its ability to push through UN resolutions that authorize sanctions of interventions in situations where governments deny their involvement in systematic human rights abuses. AI’s sustained reporting on specific countries and issues often serves to keep specific violations of international law on the agenda of the UN Human Rights Committee and the UN Security Council.

In constructing narratives of culpability under international and national standards, NGO reports must often embody the legal discourse of high-level IGOs. While the UN does not mandate a specific generic form for NGO reporting, NGO reports have developed clear generic conventions for framing narratives of legal culpability that reflect the context of genres recognizable to the high-level audiences of IGOs like the UN. Sociologist Stanley Cohen, in one of the few analyses of the human rights report as a genre, has argued that while no standard procedures exist for human rights reports, “the genre has developed a recognizable, standard style and format of its own. Most organizations feel constrained to follow certain rules, cover certain subjects and use particular terminology” (519). Surveying a range of human rights reports from various organizations, Cohen argues that most human rights reports contain seven major aspects: (1) “expressing concern,” (2) “stating the problem,” (3) “setting the context,” (4) “sources and methods,” (5) “detailed allegations,” (6) “international and domestic law”

---

23 Specific examples of government denials of AI’s claims are many throughout the organization’s forty-five year history. In regards to the current discussion, see the Government of Sudan’s repeated denials of AI’s reports that they are funding and arming the Janjiweed militias (cf. “Sudan Envoy Denies Any Link to Darfur Militias,” Reuters. 7/10/2004).
and (7) “required action” (520-1). These aspects are often reflected in the individual subsections of human rights country reports. The length, conventions, and intertextuality of human rights reports varies and human rights reporting entails the production of several different genres, but Cohen’s outline of the genre conventions of human rights reports reflects the structure of country reports from AI, HRW, and the UN. AI’s country reports express concern and state the problem in their “Introduction” sections, set the context in their “Background sections,” review their sources and methods in sections on “AI’s Work,” make specific allegations in subsections on specific abuses, frame the context of international and domestic law in “International Standards” sections, and state the required actions in their “Recommendations Sections.” The stability of these conventions can vary slightly from report to report, but these conventions are often isomorphic across the reports of the UN Special Rapporteurs, the reports of the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights, and across the country reports of Human Rights Watch.

The high level of referential intertextuality in AI’s human rights reports and the genre conventions that these reports share with UN and HRW reports reflects the institutional role of AI within high-level human rights institutions. However, as Cohen has argued, the stability of the genre conventions of human rights reporting may be a central element in the cycle of allegation and denial that often slows or deters UN intervention into human rights crises. Cohen argues that “Informative and intellectually convincing as they might be, standard human rights reports and counter-responses—whether anticipating or following official reactions—can do little to undermine the cruder

---

24 In a survey of 14 AI country reports on Sudan, 7 HRW Country Reports, 3 Reports of the UN Special Rapporteur on Sudan, and 4 Reports of the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights on Sudan, 100% of the country reports explicitly utilized these genre conventions.
forms of denial and rationalization” (541). As standardized forms of human rights documentation, the genres of human rights reporting become, in this conception, predictable statements that engender a “circuit of claims and counterclaims” that often spiral into political dead-lock and inaction (543). Cohen’s call for NGOs and scholars to reconceptualize the conventions of the human rights report is important and potentially opens up an important interdisciplinary conversation among scholars of rhetoric and discourse and human rights NGOs25. While this claim accurately reflects the rhetorical deflection of NGO reports by sovereign nations within the UN and the role that offending nations have played in seizing or gridlocking the UN Human Rights Commission, it ignores the range of tactics and genres that are employed to generate public pressure on the UN and its member-states. Often, as the analysis below of AI’s campaign on gender based violence in Darfur reveals, the counter-claims of offending governments are circumvented by NGOs like AI through their network politics, which draw on genres of public pressure, leverage, and accountability that go beyond merely reporting the facts.

AI’s widely-cited country report, “Darfur: Rape as a Weapon of War: Sexual Violence and Its Consequences,” exemplifies and extends the concerns raised by Cohen, while also pointing to the need to read the reporting genres of professional publics in the larger context of genres that they utilize to leverage international institutions like the UN. Drawing on BBC media reports of mass rape in the Darfur region by Janjiweed militias,

25 I take up Cohen’s claim again in chapter five of this study, where I argue for the development of interdisciplinary conversations among NGOs and scholars of public discourse who develop “activist research methodologies” (Cushman “The Public Intellectual” 824). Scholars of public rhetoric and civic discourse, I argue, should complicate their discussions of the public with through studies of local sites of discursive practice (like NGOs) in order to more fully and concretely understand the range of discursive practices, power structures, and agencies that shape contemporary, international public discourse. In addition, this interdisciplinary dialogue could provide NGOs with rhetorical and discursive criteria (such as the accessibility of their discourse to the public) for the effectiveness of their discourse.
on MSF’s report “Sudan: No Relief in Site,” and on the UN High Commission on Human Rights April 2004 situation report on Darfur, Amnesty International delegates traveled to Chad to conduct investigations into the use of rape as a weapon of war. This report coincided with the Government of Sudan’s establishment of “Rape Committees” to investigate sexual violence against Sudanese civilians in Darfur on July 17, 2004 (Amnesty International “Sudan: Who Will Answer for the Crimes” 6). The resulting report, played an important role in documenting the sexual violence enacted by the government supported Janjiweed militias on women and children living in the internally displaced person (IDP) camps along the Chad-Sudan border. As a narrative of culpability, this report drew on over one hundred testimonies of Sudanese women raped in and around these camps, as well as interviews with various informants that documented a total of 250 rapes (4). The report clearly assigned responsibility for these rapes to the Janjiweed militias and implicated the Government of Sudan in supporting these militias. Central to the report’s information politics is the framing of violence against women within the context of the systematic human rights violations perpetrated by the Sudanese Government and as “a weapon of war” and an “integral part of the conflict” (5). The testimonies given in the report documented the ethic-based, systematic purposes of the rapes, linking them to the oppressive policies of the Sudanese government against civilians of the Fur, Zaghawa, and Masalit ethnic groups and gave them the powerful symbolic designation of “war crimes and crimes against humanity” (4). Perhaps, most powerfully, the reports documented the social, economic, and physical consequences of the rapes in Sudanese culture, documenting the legal position of raped women under Sudanese law, their social exile and shame, and the long-term
health risks associated with these rapes in a region that has little access to adequate medical care.

AI’s report contextualized these violations within the framework of international law, implicating the government in the perpetration of war crimes and crimes against humanity and forming specific policy recommendations for the Government of Sudan, the United Nations Security Council, UN Member States, the African Union, and the Government of Chad. Under the sub-section “International Legal Standards,” AI clearly documented the various treaties to which Sudan is party to, such as the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, as well as the customary standards of international law that apply to the wide-scale human rights violations in Darfur. This sub-section also clearly defines “war crimes” and “crimes against humanity” under the *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court*, which Sudan would be referred to on March 31, 2005 by the UN Security Council. Central to the report’s recommendations was the establishment of an independent commission of inquiry into the allegations of genocide in Darfur, a commission that would later be convened in October of 2004. While Amnesty’s report concluded that “Amnesty International has not been in a position to date to judge that there was a genocide,” it argued that “Amnesty International believes that rape and other forms of sexual violence, as well as the wide-spread and systematic attacks against civilians and the massive forced displacement in Darfur, are war crimes and crimes against humanity” (30). As this report illustrates, NGO reports function not only to document human rights abuses, but to frame these abuses within the framework of international law, thus obligating offending governments to address the abuses and obligating the UN to consider action. By drawing on the supergenres of international law.
and constructing a legal framework for the interpretation of human rights violations in Darfur as “war crimes” or “crimes against humanity,” AI’s report seeks to obligate both the Government of Sudan and the UN to investigate the nature and scope of the crimes and to determine those responsible for them\textsuperscript{26}. Personal testimonies of the victims of graphically document and dramatize the rape of Sudanese citizens, while the contextual background of this report aligns these rapes with the government-sponsored attacks on civilian populations by the Janjiweed, and the legal interpretation of these human rights violations within international human rights law creates both a clear sense of domestic and international obligation for intervention.

The Government of Sudan’s response to this report illustrates the “cycle of claims and counter-claims” that Cohen has referred to, while also illustrating the range of genres and tactics AI has developed to circumvent the counter-claims to its reports (543). AI strategically released “Rape as a Weapon of War” in Beirut, Lebanon and in Nairobi, Kenya in order to draw both the attention of the African Union and the Arab League to the scale of the systematic rapes. The government of Sudan’s initial response to the report was filtered through the Sudanese embassy in Beirut and denied the claims in the report. According to a July 20, 2004 Reuters news feed, “The Sudan embassy in Beirut said in a statement that the Amnesty report was aimed at defaming the government, distorting

\textsuperscript{26} See, specifically, the \textit{Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court} cited by Amnesty in this report. The Rome Statute clearly defines systematic rape during conflict as a “crime against humanity” and sets out the legal mechanisms necessary for jurisdiction of the court to be exercised in cases where a country, like Sudan, has not ratified the \textit{Rome Statute}: “The Court may exercise its jurisdiction with respect to a crime referred to in article 5 in accordance with the provisions of this Statute if: (a) A situation in which one or more of such crimes appears to have been committed is referred to the Prosecutor by a State Party in accordance with article 14; (b) A situation in which one or more of such crimes appears to have been committed is referred to the Prosecutor by the Security Council acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations; or (c) The Prosecutor has initiated an investigation in respect of such a crime in accordance with article 15” (\textit{The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court} <http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/criminalcourt.htm>).
Arab culture, and driving a wedge between Sudan’s ethnic groups” (“Amnesty Condemns Sudan Rapes”)27. While the Government of Sudan denied the scale of systematic rape in AI’s report, it responded to the pressure of NGOs, the media, and Jan Pronk, the UN Under-Secretary of humanitarian affairs in creating “rape committees” to investigate the allegations of rape being used as a weapon by the Janjiwee. Sudan’s rape committees reported, according to AI, “50 cases of rape in the whole of Darfur” (“Sudan: Who Will Answer for the Crimes?” 6). In addition, these committees “were supposed to continue investigations, but nothing seems to have been done since the first report to the government, which was not made public” (6). The government of Sudan, in response to increasing inquiries about the systematic rapes in Darfur, admitted that the Janjaweed militias were responsible for rapes in the Darfur region in August, 2004, but continued to deny that these rapes were part of a systematic attempt to “ethnically cleanse” and denied government culpability. (Agence France Presse “Sudan Admits Human Rights Abuses, Including Rape, by Allies in Darfur”).

In September of 2004, Amnesty International sent a delegation to Sudan and met with high-ranking officials in the Sudanese government to discuss the human rights violations in Darfur. In its “Sudan: Civilians Still Under Threat in Darfur: An Agenda for Human Rights Protection,” AI documented the Sudanese government’s denial of the charges levied in “Rape as a Weapon of War”: “The government of Sudan did not accept the extent of rape and other sexual violence described by Amnesty International in its July 2004 report, Sudan: Darfur: Rape as a weapon of war – sexual violence and its

27 For the US publication of this article, see CNN.com: <http://www.buzztracker.org/2004/07/19/cache/278192.html>.
consequences” (4). Following pressure by AI and other NGOs, as well as pressure from
UN member-states, the UN Security Council established an International Commission of
Inquiry on October 8, 2004 to investigate allegations of genocide and crimes against
humanity. The role of AI’s report in helping to frame the human rights violations in
Sudan as gross violations of international law was central to the findings of the
commission and the subsequent Security Council referral of Sudan to the special
prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. The report of the UN Independent
Commission of Inquiry cited Amnesty’s “Rape as a Weapon of War” directly and
concurred with AI’s description of the crimes in Darfur as crimes against humanity and
war crimes. The legitimacy given to AI’s report in the commission’s findings underscores
the role of NGO information politics in framing human rights issues at the UN. AI’s
response to these denials illustrates the strategic shift from tactics of information politics
to the tactics of leverage politics and accountability politics necessary to engender public
awareness of the violations and exert pressure on the UN and the international
community to act. In the case of this report, AI utilized its high-level advocacy genre
system and media genre system to provoke international action.

While human rights reports often do result in typical counter-responses, they are
often part of a larger context of genres that seek to create the public accountability and
leverage necessary to motivate states and IGOs to act. As narratives of concrete
responsibility, human rights reports are linked to the media and campaigning genres of
professional publics like AI in order to raise public awareness of the international
political and legal responsibility of the UN and its member states, other IGOs, and the
international community to act on systematic human rights abuses. AI’s definition of its
“research product” underlines this crucial link between reporting and AI’s reporting, media, and campaigning genres: “the full spectrum of action-related materials running from Urgent Actions (UAs), Action Files (AFs) and media statements through to substantial country or thematic reports” (Strategic Research for Global Action 9). The generic intertextuality among AI’s reports and these “action-related” genres illustrates the necessity of utilizing discursive pressure tactics that go far beyond the provision of information to form international leverage and accountability for action. Human rights reports play a central role in AI’s information politics and provide AI’s high-level advocacy, media campaigns, and activism with an ethos of objectivity and authority. Human rights reporting is crucial to the establishment of culpability in human rights crises and the application of the legal framework through which the international community can bring human rights violations to judgment. However, critics of traditional human rights information politics such as Cohen have pointed out that information provision, while vital to IGOs like the UN, is often shrouded in idealistic expectations of its effects. Cohen argues that, “Techniques of collecting information might be modern and sophisticated, but human rights organizations are motivated by the old-fashioned Enlightenment faith in the power of knowledge: If only people knew, they would act accordingly” (541). Cohen’s critique, while not addressing the media and high-level advocacy genres that accompany reports, nevertheless clearly illustrates the necessity of supplementing the information politics of human rights reporting with a range of media genres and advocacy genres that publicly leverage and commit the support of the UN and its member-states. This point underscores the discursive necessity underlying AI’s intertextual, coordinated professional genre system, which overlaps
across a range of symbolic, leverage, and accountability tactics to place international pressure on both offending governments and IGOs for action.

Human rights reports function within the discursive context of the high-level institutions like the United Nations, but the extent to which human rights reporting is successful often depends upon the strategic ways in which it can be used to leverage the action of powerful institutions and states. As Keck and Sikkink have argued, “the media is an essential partner in network information politics,” and the role of press attention to human rights exigencies is central to forming international pressure for action and to portraying NGOs as active institutions (22). The AI Country Reports, Thematic Issue Reports, and Annual Reports utilized for this chapter were each accompanied by a press release that framed their information and timeliness for a broader readership. AI’s work on the Sudan crisis illustrates the strong relationship that AI has established with North American and European mass media. The Lexis/Nexis Academic database lists a total of 392 articles that directly referenced Amnesty’s statements and work on Sudan alone between 2003 and 2006, illustrating AI’s high profile as a NGO in the mass media28.

AI’s press releases were especially crucial during the beginnings of the Darfur conflict in 2003; when, according to Hugo Slim, the media were “editorially diverted by Iraq and

------------------

28 To conduct this analysis, I utilized the “Guided News” Function of Lexis/Nexis Academic. I searched “Major Papers” using the search terms “Amnesty International” and “Sudan,” and searching major news dailies published within the past five years. This search produced 538 hits in both North American and International dailies. These sources were then analyzed, and articles that mentioned Amnesty International and Sudan in separate contexts were omitted from the results as well as multiple postings across differing publications. The resulting 392 articles all cite Amnesty officials or reports directly and all constitute separately published articles. This rate of publication is comparable to that documented by Ron, Ramos, and Rodgers, who utilized Lexis/Nexis to document 117 references to AI in the New York Times for the year 2000, “suggesting that the group is a credible news source for this publication” (565).
physically prevented from entering Darfur by Khartoum’s news blackout\(^{29\ast}\) (814). AI’s media campaign on Darfur illustrates the necessity of NGOs as providers of accurate accounts of human rights crises for mass audiences and in raising public awareness of human rights atrocities in countries where dissenting media is often silenced through force. While Amnesty’s press releases and public statements play the role of information politics, they are also vital to AI’s efforts to produce public pressure on as well as mobilizing shame against the Sudanese government and creating public pressure on the UN to intervene in the crisis. In the following sections, I will argue that AI’s media genre system is a key means through which AI produces pressure on offending governments and IGOs to act on human rights abuses.

*Symbolic Politics*

As human rights NGOs leverage nation-states and IGOs for intervention into human rights crises, they often frame their advocacy in the context of significant symbolic events in the history of the human rights movement. Symbolic politics often cut across reporting, media, and high-level advocacy genres that frame human rights exigencies for a variety of professional, mass media, and activist audiences. For Keck and Sikkink, networks engage in symbolic politics when they construct, “convincing explanations for powerful symbolic events, which in turn become catalysts for the growth of networks” (Keck and Sikkink 22). These explanations are often constructed from analogical links between prior human rights crises or success and current human rights

\(^{29}\text{See also Amnesty’s 2004 Report “Intimidation and Denial: Attacks on Freedom of Expression in Darfur,” which chronicles the difficulties of media access to Sudan and attacks on Sudanese journalists (AFR 54/101/2004).}\)
issues: “Often it is not one event but the juxtaposition of disparate events that makes people change their minds and act” (22). In addition to Keck and Sikkink’s description, two specific examples of symbolic politics often occur in the rhetoric of human rights NGOs like AI: (1) commemorations of specific UN policy decisions and anniversaries of human rights conferences, (2) specific human rights crises and large scale human rights violations. Human rights conferences such as the 1998 Rome Conference that created the *Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court* have been important staging grounds for NGO platforms. AI has often coordinated press releases, public statements, and oral statements around specific meetings of the United Nations and on UN commemorative days such as World Refugee Day.30 Human rights crises, such as the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, are also employed symbolically to exert rhetorical pressure for major policy decisions by UN bodies and their member states. The Rwandan genocide, for example, has been utilized by AI (and many other NGO campaigns) as a powerful symbol of international inaction on human rights crises and has been linked to AI’s campaigns for an International Criminal Court and (more recently) to AI’s campaign for UN intervention into the Darfur crisis.

AI’s campaign for the ICC is an important example of its utilization of symbolic politics. Often, as Amnesty’s work as a member of the Coalition for the International Criminal Court (CICC) shows, these events are utilized simultaneously across both human rights reporting genres, media genres, and campaign genres. AI’s work as a

30 See Amnesty International’s June 20, 2004 Press Release “Sudan: Government Responsible for Human Devastation in Darfur but Still in Denial,” which was submitted on the fourth anniversary of World Refugee Day (AFR 54/067/2004).
network actor in the CICC, for example, has been significant in providing legal
experience and expertise in human rights policy for the development of the ICC, while
creating media awareness of the necessity of the ICC and public campaigns that call on
activists to pressure individual countries to ratify the Rome Statute. AI’s advocacy for
the ICC, which began well before the conference in 1994, utilized the powerful events of
the Rwandan genocide and the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia to symbolically frame the
necessity of the ICC across a wide range of genres and audiences. The Rwandan
genocide has been framed by NGOs and IGOs as a symbol of international inaction and
the failure of international civil society to intervene in human rights crises and has served
as a powerful catalyst for the formation of new human rights mechanisms.31 AI’s
utilization of the Rwandan genocide in its campaign for the ICC has drawn on the
weakness of the ad hoc tribunal system in bringing justice to the Rwandan genocidaires,
while mobilizing the political and moral guilt associated with the inaction of the
international community. In addition, AI has utilized the symbol of the Rwandan
genocide tactically in its campaign for intervention into systematic human rights crises
like Darfur. As I will argue in the section below, though AI (following the UN
Commission of Inquiry) has classified the atrocities in Darfur as “crimes against
humanity” under the Geneva Conventions and Rome Statute, the organization has drawn

31 See Kofi Annan’s statement on the 10th Anniversary of the Rwandan Genocide and his recommendation
of sending a high-level investigative team to Darfur. Annan, while introducing his Action Plan to End
Genocide, stated that despite the abundance of information “Too often, even when there is abundant
warning, we lack the political will to act” and, referring to Darfur, he stated that “I propose to send a high-
level team to Darfur to gain a fuller understanding of the extent and nature of this crisis, and to seek
improved access to those in need of assistance and protection. It is vital that international humanitarian
workers and human rights experts be given full access to the region, and to the victims, without further
delay. If that is denied, the international community must be prepared to take swift and appropriate action”
(UN Press Release SG/SM/917 AFR/893 HR/CN/1077).
upon international inaction in the face of the Rwandan genocide as an important symbol of its campaign.

AI’s tactics of symbolic politics are often utilized through its media genres, analogically linking current human rights exigencies to the symbolic capital of powerful human rights events. While Amnesty professionals have provided expert advice on the construction of the legal and procedural mechanisms of the ICC, AI has utilized the specters of genocide and crimes against humanity to symbolically frame the ICC as a check against the impunity of human rights violators. In a public statement released on May 1, 1998 (one month before the Rome Conference), for example, AI utilized the genocidal acts in Rwanda, Iraq, Cambodia, El Salvador, and Bosnia-Herzegovina to frame the necessity of the ICC. Juxtaposing the slow-moving ad hoc tribunal system in Rwanda to the ICC, this public statement argues that, “Had a permanent international criminal court existed when the perpetrators planned their crimes, they might have been deterred. Had they carried on regardless, they would have had few places to hide. . . . Justice would have been swift. There would have been no lengthy wait to establish the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda” (“International Justice Now!” 2). Utilizing the power of the well-worn slogan “never again,”—a slogan made popular by Presidents Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan (Power xxi)—Amnesty framed the ICC as a legal means for deterring future acts of genocide and crimes against humanity: “NEVER AGAIN. To prevent atrocities like these happening again, we need a permanent international criminal courts to guarantee justice and deter potential criminals” (2, emphasis in original). As this document illustrates, while AI’s professional staff was working with the CICC in providing technical assistance and legal expertise to the UN
General Assembly (GA) and to the states that lobbied for the ICC, AI’s media departments worked to symbolically frame the necessity of the ICC. In addition to this public statement, AI issued press releases surrounding the drafting of the Rome Statute that brought AI’s campaign for the ICC to international media attention and allowed AI to publicly critique aspects of the statute that weakened its effectiveness\(^{32}\).

The utilization of the Rwandan crisis in AI’s symbolic politics is an important example of AI’s role as a sovereignty free network actor within the United Nations. Though there is a symbiosis between AI’s human rights reporting and high-level advocacy and the UN’s own reporting procedures and policy drafting, AI has utilized the symbolic power of the lack of international intervention in the crisis to politically leverage the UN and its member states to implement the ICC. While playing a symbiotic role as a network actor at the UN, AI is free from the capture or gridlock produced by sovereign nations that deny human rights claims brought against them or that refuse to comply with UN demands (Thakur, “Human Rights” 153). AI’s sovereignty free status has allowed it to utilize the symbolic politics of UN inaction into crises like Rwanda to publicly critique and pressure the UN to take more swift action on crises like Darfur. In April 2004, the UN Commission on Human Rights issued a resolution of concern on the Darfur crisis that avoided assigning blame to the Government of Sudan for sponsoring

\(^{32}\) See Amnesty’s July 17, 1998 press release, unfortunately titled, “The International Criminal Court—‘Crippled at Birth?’,” in which the current AI Secretary General Pierre Sane stated that “This court should be aimed at one single purpose - protecting the victims of genocide, crimes against humanity and serious war crimes. . . .Instead, victims looking for justice are faced with a court which could let these horrendous crimes go unpunished. This court requires the permission of criminals to face trial. Deliberate, forced starvation of civilians - such as we have seen in Southern Sudan - will not be a war crime under the jurisdiction of the court. Gassing innocent civilians - in the way that Saddam did to thousands of Kurdish women, children and men - will not be a war crime under the jurisdiction of this court.” (1, IOR 40/020/1998).
the human rights violations carried out by the Janjiweed militias. AI issued an immediate public statement, which characterized this resolution as “bland words in response to a deepening human rights crisis” and drew on the symbolic power of the Rwandan genocide: “Ten years after the genocide in Rwanda, the Commission on Human Rights has shown itself to be incapable of taking strong and decisive action on this human rights crisis” (“Sudan: UN Commission Statement on Darfur” 1). Rwanda, in this example, serves as a powerful symbol of international inaction into massive, systematic human rights abuses. Significantly, during the time of this press release Sudan served as a member of the Human Rights Commission, a status which (according to several scholars) played an important role in the lack “naming and shaming of Khartoum” (Odombana 1180). Public statements such as these reflect the necessity of AI’s neutrality. Though NGOs like AI have become insiders within IGOs like the UN through their information provision and through their legal and policy expertise, they must also balance this facilitative role with an adversarial stance towards the UN, which utilizes the symbolic power of previous UN inaction to create public pressure for current UN intervention.

33 Odombana cites Michael Dennis’s statement that “many UN member states, where human rights are not properly accepted and implemented, have realized that the best way to protect oneself from scrutiny is to be elected to the Commission and divert attention from implementation” (1180). It is important to note that since the publication of this article in 2005, the establishment of a new Human Rights Council has sought to address the manipulation and seizure of the UN Human Rights bodies by offending governments. See UN General Assembly Resolution 60/251: Establishing the Human Rights Council Membership for a description of these new guiding principles for membership. In light of this resolution, Sudan decided not to seek a seat on the new Human Rights Council.
Leverage Politics

While clearly and accurately documented human rights reports often play a key role in producing leverage within the UN for acknowledgement and action on human rights violations, the highly politicized and sovereignty-based atmosphere of international politics requires strategies of leverage politics that coordinate this documentation with media campaigns, high-level advocacy, and grassroots activist campaigns. Leverage politics underscore the necessity of “political effectiveness” in transnational advocacy and illustrates the need for strategic, discursive pressure to be applied to “more powerful institutions” such as states and IGOs (Keck and Sikkink 23). Keck and Sikkink argue that leverage politics often takes two forms: material and moral leverage (23). Material leverage—often linked to “money, trade, or prestige”—has played an important role in the development of the human rights movement: “The human rights issue became negotiable because governments or financial institutions connected human rights practices to military and economic aid, or to bilateral diplomatic relations” (23). This leverage takes on a local component as local NGOs mobilize their domestic members to lobby their home governments for international action: “In democracies the potential to influence votes gives large membership organizations an advantage over nonmembership organizations in lobbying for policy change” (23). The attentiveness of legislators to the demands of their constituents becomes a strong source of material leverage for professional publics like AI and directly aligns the role of AI’s member activists with the leverage produced by AI’s professional reporting and media campaigns. Moral leverage, while at times having material consequences, is produced through “‘mobilization of shame,’ where the behavior of target actors is held up to the light of international
scrutiny” (23). Press releases, public statements, and media alerts publicize not only the abuses of target governments, but also hold intervening institutions like the UN and powerful states up to international scrutiny for their failure to intervene or for blocking a key means of intervention 34. High-level advocacy genres, such as Open Letters to the UN Security Council, are, like human rights reports, often coordinated with Press Releases that publicize AI’s call for actions and recommendations. AI’s press releases thus not only mobilize the shame of offending governments across a wide, international audience, but also utilize “moral leverage” against the United Nations and its member governments by holding their record of action up to international scrutiny as well (Keck and Sikkink 23). Often published simultaneously, press releases illustrate the necessity of generic intertextuality in the coordination of human rights advocacy through their ability to bridge between the exclusive institutional contexts of human rights reporting and the broader audiences of mass media.

In order to offset the continued denials of the Government of Sudan of wide-scale, systematic rape by the Janjiweeda militia, AI has utilized its high-level advocacy genres and media genres to produce leverage on the UN Security Council, UN member states, the African Commission on Human Rights, and the African Union to publicly condemn and address gender-based violence in Sudan. In a press release coinciding with AI’s “Rape as a Weapon of War,” AI called for an Independent Commission of Inquiry, stating that, “Given the broad provisions of the UN Charter, especially those requiring

34 For a current example, see Amnesty International’s press releases on the United State’s government’s refusal to support the referral of the human rights crisis in Darfur to the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. The US refusal to support the referral drew sharp criticism from AI, who referred to the US decision as potentially occlude justice for Sudanese victims (See especially, “Sudan: The United States of America must not block justice for the Sudanese people,” AI Press Release, 2/15/05, AFR 54/021/2005).
member states to cooperate in the promotion and protection of human rights, each one of the country members of the council has not only a moral, but also a legal responsibility, towards those suffering in Sudan” (“Sudan: Security Council Must Assume its Responsibilities”). In September 2004, after delegates from Amnesty’s mission to Sudan returned, AI continued to leverage the UN Security Council to launch an independent commission of inquiry to investigate the systematic rapes in Darfur as well as the many other human rights violations that AI had documented. In a press release from this period, AI utilized its symbolic politics to frame the UN Security council’s obligation to take action: “the UN Security Council, as the embodiment of the will of the international community, should now uphold its responsibility to save the lives of the people of Darfur” (“Darfur, Sudan: UN Security Council Must Challenge Human Rights Violations”1). In addition, Amnesty made oral statements to the African Commission on Human and People’s Right in Dakar, Senegal in November 2004 that repeated the findings of its report and called on the African Commission publicly condemn these human rights violations and to pressure the government of Sudan to end the attacks. AI also used the monthly briefings of the UN Security Council by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sudan to issue Open Letters and Press Releases that called for UN intervention and for referral of the war crimes committed in Sudan to the International Criminal Court. This continued pressure was remarkably successful in leveraging powerful western governments to pressure the Government of Sudan and the UN to address this exigency.

In addition to AI’s international campaigns, AI national sections submitted “Rape as a Weapon of War” to their home governments, released press releases publicizing the
report, lobbied their home governments, and launched activist campaigns designed to leverage the action of high-level government officials. AIUSA, AI’s largest national section, directed high-level advocacy campaigns and activist campaigns at key members of the Bush administration and members of the US Congress. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice addressed this issue in July 2005, pressuring “the Government of Sudan to address the problem of violence against women in Darfur” (Refugees International 2). Despite continued denials of rape being used as a weapon of war throughout 2003-4, the Government of Sudan responded to the pressure of the international community following this visit by creating a National Plan of Action on gender-based violence. In addition, the UN Mission in Sudan, established on June 11, 2004 instituted a Gender Unit in March 2005 capable of responding to gender based violence in Darfur. While the structure of network politics often makes it impossible to attribute success to a single actor or organization, AI’s contribution to the movement to document and halt gender-based violence in Darfur is significant. The Government of Sudan’s response to this pressure through the creation of rape committees and through its National Plan of Action on gender based violence are indicators of the pressure achieved through the joint action of NGOs like Amnesty, the UN, and individual nations. However, as I will argue below, concessions such as these on the parts of offending governments are often indications of the attempt to save face within the international community, and NGOs like AI play an important role in holding governments accountable to their public statements on human rights.
Accountability Politics

While human rights reports serve to document violations of human rights for IGOs like the UN, they also serve as documents of public record capable of producing international accountability among both offending governments and international institutions. In addition, NGOs like AI utilize the public commitments of the UN, individual nations, and other IGOs to construct public accountability for intervention into human rights crises. As Keck and Sikkink describe it, “Once a government has publicly committed itself to a principle—for example, in favor of human rights and democracy—networks can use those positions, and their command of information, to expose the distance between discourse and practice. This is embarrassing to many governments, which may try to save face by closing that distance” (24). AI’s human rights reports construct a legal narrative that contextualizes the human rights abuses of offending governments within the international human rights laws and treaties that they have ratified or signed. These legal narratives, as noted above, not only frame governmental violations of international human rights law, but also frame human rights violations within the context of domestic policies and law, holding governments accountable to their own constitutional guarantees and critiquing governmental policies that are in clear violation of international standards. AI’s media genres, in particular their public statements and press releases, extend this accountability across a wider range of audiences, and seek to mobilize international shame or scrutiny of offending governments while increasing public pressure on the international community for intervention. In this sense, AI’s accountability politics reflects both the framing of human rights atrocities within the context of international obligation and international law and the boomerang
pattern of transnational advocacy described by Keck and Sikkink, in which pressure is applied to both offending governments, international institutions like the UN, and governments who possess the power to intervene (13). Accountability politics, for NGOs like AI, underlines the necessity of NGO neutrality and sovereignty free action in that NGOs must remain tactically able to critique international action or inaction by the international community, while playing important roles as providers of human rights documentation and as experts in international human rights law.

AI utilized the power of accountability politics in its campaign on gender based violence in Darfur through its continued documentation of wide-scale systematic rape in reports that followed the July 2004 “Rape as a Weapon of War” and through its media genres, which sought to hold the UN Security Council accountable for responding to the Darfur crisis. In 2004, as the Government of Sudan simultaneously created rape committees and denied their involvement in sponsoring the Janjiwid militias, AI documented Sudan’s limited investigation of the systematic rapes and their intimidation of both victims and witnesses that sought legal recourse. AI’s “Sudan: Who Will Answer for the Crimes?” documented that, “The Sudanese authorities have denied their role and responsibility in the war crimes and crimes against humanity against civilians in Darfur.

Instead of admitting what has happened and addressing these abuses [. . .] they have intimidated those seeking to shed light on such abuses or trying to seek redress through the domestic legal system” (“Sudan: Who Will Answer for the Crimes?” 6)35. In

35 As the NGO Refugees International has documented, Sudanese policy dictated that “women who were raped suffered the double injustice of being denied, by law, post-trauma medical assistance unless they agreed to fill out a police report, or Form 8. As documented by Refugees International in November 2004, this requirement has meant that many women have decided not to seek life-saving treatment because of fear of reprisal; not only are the rapists often the Sudanese police themselves, but the Sudanese government has
addition, AI coordinated its media genres to hold the Government of Sudan responsible for the continued impunity of those responsible for committing rape against Sudanese civilians. In an AI press release timed to coincide with Secretary of State Colin Powell and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan’s visit to Khartoum, AI argued for accountability on both the part of the Government of Sudan and the international community:

“Responsibility for ensuring justice in Sudan rests primarily with the Sudanese government. However, the international community as a whole has a duty to fight impunity by bringing to justice perpetrators of crimes under international law through the exercise of universal jurisdiction” ("Sudan: Those Responsible for War Crimes Must Be Held Accountable" 1). Such statements reflect the dual role of accountability politics in AI’s rhetoric, framing the culpability of offending governments and their responsibilities under international law, and framing the obligation of the international community to intervene.

Drawing on the narratives of concrete responsibility that are developed in human rights reports, AI has utilized its media genre system to pressure the UN and key member nations—most specifically permanent members of the UN Security Council—for timely action on the Darfur crisis. Since the Rwandan genocide, the timely intervention of the United Nations and the international community into systematic human rights crises such as genocide and crimes against humanity has been held up to the light of international public accountability by NGOs like Amnesty International. In the years following the release of AI’s “Rape as a Weapon of War,” AI’s Darfur crisis campaign began to

been quick to equate rape with adultery (which is punishable under shari’a law)” (“Sudan: Inform Rape Survivors of Their Right to Seek Life-saving Treatment”).
publicly criticize the inaction of the UN on Darfur, linking their criticism to the
effectiveness of the UN as a human rights organization. On May 26, 2005, AI was quoted in the London newspaper *The Independent* as publicly chiding the UN for its failure to act in Darfur: “The brutality in Darfur was a critical test of the ability of the UN to respond effectively to major human rights crises . . . . The UN failed the test” (26). Statements such as these reveal the necessity of AI as a neutral actor in international politics, an actor capable of playing both the role of informational insider within high-level institutions like the UN, while also capable of mobilizing its media campaigns and activist base to hold such institutions publicly accountable for action.

A more recent example from AI’s Darfur campaign illustrates the network principle underlying AI’s accountability politics. AI’s ability to act as a sovereignty free actor at the UN allows the organization to utilize accountability politics at key junctures in human rights crises, such as the recent deadlock at the UN over UN Security Council Resolution 1706, which asks the Government of Sudan to accept a UN peacekeeping force in Darfur. In response to the Government of Sudan’s refusal to allow UN peacekeepers, AI launched a media campaign and high-level advocacy campaign, as well as an international activist campaign that utilized its national sections to lobby their governments to increase pressure on Sudan to accept UN peacekeepers. In a September 11, 2006 press release, AI stated that, “The people of Darfur are effectively being held hostage to the deadlock between the UN, the African Union and the Sudanese government -- in defiance of international revulsion at the suffering of ordinary Darfuris“ (“Sudan: Civilians in Darfur Held Hostage to Deadlock Between Sudan and the UN” 1). In addition to press releases and public statements urging strong UN pressure on Sudan
for the UN peacekeeping force, AI also utilized its high-level advocacy genres by submitting open letters to the UN Security Council. On May 25, 2006, AI, along with Human Rights Watch and the International Crisis Group, issued a joint letter to the UN Security Council that called for accountability to the recently passed resolution 1674, which “reaffirms the international responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity” (“Joint Letter to UN Security Council” 1). Framing the resolution within the context of its potential to protect the rights of “citizens around the world,” the letter argued that 1674 could possibly be “one of the most significant measures taken by the Security Council in decades to provide them with protection, but only if it is transformed from rhetoric into action” (1). Drawing on the accountability of the Security Council to this resolution, AI, HRW, and ICG then leveraged the Security Council to apply “targeted sanctions” against the Government of Sudan in order pressure them into admitting UN peacekeepers.

As these limited examples show, AI plays a dual role in accountability politics, one that holds both offending governments and international institutions accountable for their public commitments to human rights. Through its media genres and their coordination with activist campaigns, AI often coordinates its high-level advocacy and critical publicity to increase the public pressure on governments and IGOs for intervention into human rights crises. While the focus of this chapter has been on AI’s role in the high-level institutions of international politics, AI’s reporting, media campaigns, and high-level advocacy are often translated into activist campaigns, campaigns in which AI activist write letters, sign petitions, and call and lobby their national and local representatives. These campaigns, which will be the focus of the next
chapter, draw on AI’s vast network of national sections in order to create pressure on UN member states to exert their influence on the Security Council and the Human Rights Committee for international action.

Conclusion: AI and the Contentious Politics of the United Nations

AI’s use of critical publicity as a tool for human rights advocacy has been highly influential in the practices of human rights NGOs. As a mediating, professional public, Amnesty International utilizes a wide range of genres that coordinate its professional reporting and advocacy with opportunities for member activism, and a key aspect of AI’s genre repertoire is the framing genres that bridge between the literacies of professional and member discourse. Marie Tornquist-Chesnier, in her “NGOs and International Law,” has observed that NGOs must balance the role of their legal expertise with the engagement of their grassroots base. She notes that, “their grassroots, which are one of the bases of their legitimacy; are not exclusively composed of legal experts. NGOs need to be performing on the legal stage and able to explain their activities to their grassroots members in order for the latter to back up their action and publicize it” (256). Amnesty International is a heterogeneous public in which discursive agents and groups are linked and separated through the discursive genres that embody their work. As AI’s genre repertoire has developed, so to have the range of social roles, embedded knowledges, and institutional ideologies that structure its organizational practice. Critiques of NGO professionalism have cited the technical and professional discourses of NGOs as fostering the increasing bureaucratization of human rights. However, analyses of these professional discourses within the full context of genres utilized by specific
human rights NGOs are needed in order to adequately address the influence of these
discourses as a limiting and facilitating factor for public human rights discourse36.

In the next chapter, I analyze the systems of genres that frame Amnesty
International’s discursive activism and the relationship they bear to AI’s research, high-
level advocacy, and media genres. I argue that while AI’s membership endows it with a
strong ethos of democratic legitimacy (Slim “By What Authority”), the genres of
membership activism that AI has developed are also responsive to the political necessities
of transnational activism. Through an analysis of Amnesty International USA, AI’s
largest and most powerful section, I will document the role that activist genres play in
generating domestic and international pressure for international human rights exigencies.
I will look specifically at the bridging genres utilized by AI to translate complex,
institutional discussions of human rights exigencies into concrete, accessible
opportunities for membership activism. AI’s emphasis on the discursive activism of its
members reflects the necessity of galvanizing citizen support for human rights exigencies
within specific national contexts. As this chapter has shown, the procedural weakness of
human rights law opens up a discursive space in which public pressure must be utilized to
promote action on human rights crises. AI’s media campaigns are crucial in generating
this pressure and in leveraging international institutions to pressure offending
governments to respect human rights. Human rights activism is coordinated with these
media campaigns to illustrate the public knowledge of human rights atrocities to

36 More research is also needed into the interorganizational linkages among the genre systems of differing
human rights NGOs. I will discuss these linkages in chapter six, where I call for a comparative analysis of
NGO politics and tactics and analyze the appropriation of Amnesty International’s activist genres by other
human rights NGOs and advocacy networks. At this time, no work exists on the appropriation or
transference of genre sets across differing NGOs, so I will draw on Tarrow’s discussion of frame diffusion
in The New Transnational Activism.
offending governments and to galvanize the political power of public opinion to influence policy makers to pressure offending governments to comply with human rights law.
Chapter Four: Professionally Mediated Activism: Amnesty International’s Activist Genre System

“On the one hand, he deemed AI ‘a movement so strictly controlled by its participating membership’--while on the facing page, he stressed how the organization ‘applies to all its membership a very strict discipline in terms of its common actions, common voice, and the independence of its finances’” (Claude Welch, referring to remarks made by former AI Secretary General Martin Ennals, qtd. in Welch 91).

“Can we conceive of public discourse as (among other things) a form of social solidarity? Such a framing flies to some extent in the face of common usage. Solidarity or integration is treated as a question distinct from, and generally prior to, that of collective-decision making or legitimate action. The implication is that the collective subject is formed first, and activity in the public sphere is about steering it, not constituting it.” (Craig Calhoun, “Imagining Solidarity: Cosmopolitanism, Constitutional Patriotism, and the Public Sphere”158).

“The global public sphere in a broader sense, however, is not yet a ‘community,’ or even a coherently navigable discursive terrain. To address it is thus a performative act. It aims to bring about that which it presumes” (Susan Buck-Morss, Thinking Past Terror: Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left 22).

As NGOs engage the dynamic issues of human rights, they often face the challenge of mobilizing their members to discursively engage complex exigencies from political and social contexts that often lie outside of their realm of knowledge and experience. Amnesty International has carved out a unique niche for itself among human rights NGOs and transnational advocacy networks as an organization capable of producing large-scale public advocacy for international human rights. As Keck and Sikkink have documented, most transnational advocacy networks do not draw upon a membership base, but rather rely upon “advocacy pressure tactics,” in which an advocacy network publicizes and addresses human rights abuses at the governmental or intergovernmental level (204). The effectiveness of these tactics is one reason for their dominance; however, Keck and Sikkink point to the “difficulty of constituent.
mobilization” as another major reason for the lack of membership based or public appeals for human rights advocacy (204). Mobilizing the discursive activism of its members requires Amnesty International to undertake the enormous task of balancing its high-level advocacy and professional reporting with the varying levels of knowledge and rhetorical capacities that member activists bring to human rights exigencies. As a professional public that has established a reputation for the accuracy and usefulness of its professional research and reporting, as well as for the ability to energize and mobilize its membership, AI must adapt its discourse across a wide range of audiences and rhetorical situations.

The facilitation of discursive activism by human rights NGOs is an efficient but densely mediated discursive activity that is reflective of the varying levels of knowledge, power, and rhetorical competency that make up the international human rights movement. As the previous chapter has argued, human rights professionals engage a highly politicized field and a field that is often heavily entrenched in the technical discourse of international law, human rights mechanisms, and NGO organizational discourse. This growing professionalization of human rights NGOs has led many observers of NGOs and international discourse to create a dichotomy between technical and moral discourse in the human rights arena and to identify activist discourse as moral discourse. As Anne Marie Clark has argued, a key aspect of Amnesty’s success has been its ability to coordinate its expert interpretation and application of human rights norms in high-level institutions with “the pressure of international public opinion” (128).

“Expertise,” Clark continues, is important, but not the most critical problem for human rights advocates. The problem for the emergence of norms is the difficulty of creating an international
sense of obligation. A unique and important part of AI activity has involved the moral component. It enabled the organization to enlist public support for upholding standards of treatment of citizens that anyone can understand and identify, and to educate the public on technical issues in the process. (128-9)

Clark’s description of the moral component of Amnesty’s discourse speaks to role of professional publics in facilitating a broad public response on human rights exigencies. Such descriptions of the moral component of NGO discourse are often contextualized within NGO doctrines of political and ideological neutrality. Wendy Brown, a professor of political science, has recently characterized human rights activism as regarding “itself as something of an antipolitics—a pure defense of the innocent and the powerless against power. . . . More precisely, human rights take their shape as a moral discourse centered on pain and suffering rather than political discourse of comprehensive justice” (453).

However, as Keck and Sikkink have documented, while human rights issues are often framed in moral terms of “right and wrong” (26), transnational advocacy networks must still engage in the political, strategic use of information (29). While activism and advocacy is often framed in terms of moral discourse, the mobilization of NGO membership often constitutes a form of “material leverage,” where member-based NGOs draw on the power of activists as voting constituents in democratic states (23). Rather than simply a matter of moral persuasion, the discourse of transnational advocacy networks and professional publics seeks to maintain ideological or political non-partisanship, while utilizing a variety of political pressure strategies that draw on the political vulnerabilities of international institutions, offending governments, and activist’s home governments.
This chapter is framed around a central question concerning activist discourse in professional publics like Amnesty International: what discursive strategies are necessary to bridge between the technical genres and discourses of human rights professionals and the discourses and genres accessible to a broad range of grassroots activists? As I have argued earlier, many discussions of transnational civil society, NGOs, and human rights activism often collapse varying levels of discourse and agency onto monolithic descriptions of institutional NGO discourse. In response to these discussions, I will argue that more attention needs to be paid to the textual mediation necessary to bridge between professional and institutional NGO discourse and the literacies, agencies, and rhetorical competencies of grassroots activists. Activists working on issue campaigns must often engage a discursive field that is shaped by the highly specialized language of the relevant conventions or treaties pertaining to human rights exigencies, as well as by the national policies and laws of the nations their discourse addresses. Activists must also adapt their discourses to political audiences and rhetorical situations that often require levels of background knowledge and knowledge of generic conventions that are unfamiliar to them. The process of mobilizing activists is further complicated by the necessity of timely and rapid action for many human rights issues, as many calls for discursive action such as letter-writing or public petitions require timely attention and must be framed for activists through several additional genres such as web pages, background reports, and various campaign materials. The coordination and facilitation of grassroots activism thus creates a range of discursive problems and organizational pressures for human rights NGOs as they mediate between various levels of human rights and professional literacy. These pressures dynamically shape what I will refer to as Amnesty International’s written
**activist genre system**, an intertextual network of the various genres that accomplish the task of integrating AI’s professional reporting and lobbying with its strategies for mobilizing its members.

AI has referred to this integration as “translation capacity,” noting that, “While attention to length, style and timing of AI research documents are essential [sic], much is lost when key materials are not made available to the movement in its core languages. *The translation capacity of the movement* of its research products is a serious constraint to this objective” (“Strategic Research” 14, emphasis in original). This chapter documents how this translation capacity is achieved through a range of inter-generic coordination, which aligns grassroots activists with the rhetorical timing (kairos) and the organizational aims of Amnesty International’s professional advocacy. AI’s International Secretariat produces a range of activist and media genres that translate their research and advocacy into genres accessible to grassroots activists. However, the true translation capacity of the movement can be seen through the work of AI’s national sections, which frame AI’s international campaigns within specific domestic contexts and create strong networks of domestic pressure for international action. As Keck and Sikkink have argued, transnational activism engages domestic and international politics simultaneously.

---

37 One primary example of these genres in recent years has been the multi-modal action genres that AI has developed and utilized on its website. Video testimony of human rights victims and Amnesty experts has been powerfully linked with opportunities for sending activist letters and postcards to a variety of targets, such as the UN, high-ranking governmental officials, and other IGOs such as the African Union and European Union. Multi-modal genres often utilize the power of first-hand testimony and images of human rights violations to translate complex issues of policy and international law into moral, human obligations for action. These genres are the subject of the next chapter of this study.

38 See Anne Marie Clark’s citation of former Amnesty International UN Representative Margo Picken in *Diplomacy of Conscience*. Picken, in regards to policy changes at the UN, underscored the importance of the activism of national sections: “You can’t move the UN on serious issues unless you’ve got [national] sections working on the issue” (qtd. in Clark 128).
and in doing so create domestic pressure to leverage the action of states for human rights within the UN and other IGOs (4). Given this context, this chapter will focus specifically on the campaigning of AIUSA, Amnesty’s largest national section. This chapter will draw on samples from AIUSA’s Sudan crisis campaign, documenting the role of AIUSA as part of the larger transnational advocacy network that makes up AI. I will seek to outline the mediating role professional publics like AI play in framing activist discourse by analyzing two of AI’s and AIUSA’s most effective discursive forums: the Urgent Action Network and the Online Action Center.

AIUSA’s written activist genre system plays a central role in the organization’s tactics of leverage and accountability politics, drawing on the power of its membership as constituents of specific nations whose discourse has the potential to “influence votes” as a form of material leverage (Keck and Sikkink 23), while also naming individual human rights victims in an effort to hold offending governments publicly accountable for the treatment of their citizens. AI’s Urgent Action Network aligns its members with the cases of individuals who face potential human rights violations by offending governments, creating a “powerful signal that their actions are being witnessed by an international audience deeply concerned about the fate of those involved” (“Urgent Action Saves Lives” 1). Since the development of AIUSA’s website in 1994, the accountability politics of AI’s Urgent Action Network has been supplemented by the Online Actions that involve AIUSA’s member activists in leverage politics. Leverage politics call on activists to lobby members of their federal government and government representatives at the UN to pursue specific AI recommendations and to increase pressure on both offending governments and the UN for intervention into human rights crises.
Organizational Context: AI and AIUSA’s Membership Base, Integrated Research Paradigm, and the Framing of Activist Literacy

While current AI campaigns often integrate the professional genres of human rights reporting and human rights activism seamlessly, the division between professional research and human rights campaigning has been a source of organizational tension. The growing influence of non-membership based NGOs in the past two decades has sparked an important internal dialogue within Amnesty International regarding its dual identities as an organization dedicated to expert, impartial human rights research and lobbying and as an organization dedicated to grassroots campaigning. This dialogue has been synthesized, in recent years, in Amnesty’s rhetoric of integration, which reflects a major shift in AI’s discursive and organizational practices. Since the 1990s, Amnesty International has engaged in a continual dialogue about the primacy placed on human rights research and reports and the translation of research into opportunities for activism. As Hopgood has documented, the relationship between researchers and campaigners has often been a contentious one and resulted in major organizational changes in the 1990s. During the period of Amnesty’s growth from its founding until the late 1980s, Amnesty became known as “a dedicated and professional research operation backed up by members whose commitment to action was channeled by the central institutions to maintain a clear and consistent message” (Hopgood 104). This top-down relationship between professional researchers and members reflected the growing role of Amnesty International as a consultative NGO in the UN system and as a provider of expert human rights documentation to intergovernmental and governmental institutions. As a 2002 AI research review described it, research and human rights reporting were, within this
paradigm, “the driving force of action strategies, leaving AI’s campaigning as a ‘next step’ rather than an inherent component of an integrated strategy” (“Strategic Research for Global Action” 14). Major shifts in Amnesty’s organizational structure have followed, and increasingly AI has sought to frame their human rights research within a context of integrated action, in which its advocacy and activism shape both the nature of the research undertaken and strategically link this research to concrete human rights campaigns. This organizational shift, which paralleled the development of AI’s website and extended opportunities for human rights activism, has also shaped the genres that structure AI’s professional reporting, advocacy, and grassroots campaigning.

Amnesty International and the Integration of Professional and Activist Discourse

Beginning with Pierre Sane’s tenure as AI’s Secretary General, the relationship between researchers and campaigners was reformulated in order to emphasize the action and campaigning component of documenting human rights abuses. Sane’s tenure (1992-2001) marked a reorganization of Amnesty’s internal structure and drew the primacy of human rights research with AI into question. Sane, as William Korey has documented, sought to emphasize that “‘we [Amnesty International] are not a research organization, we are an action or campaigning organization’” (qtd. in Korey 305, brackets mine). In a 1997 interview at UC Berkeley’s Institute of International Studies, Sane clearly outlined AI’s recognition of international solidarity as preceding the technical and legal discourses of human rights policy. When asked to describe “what sort of organization Amnesty International is” (3), Sane stated that “Amnesty, from the very beginning, was set up on the principle of international solidarity. . . . When we talk about human rights, before
being a matter of law, before being an issue for experts, we’re talking about ordinary
people organizing to affect the lives of ordinary people” (3). Interestingly, Sane’s
characterization of AI masks the rhetorical processes necessary to facilitate the
organization of ordinary people that he marks as the heart of AI’s mission. While the
ordinariness of those who work within AI’s system may be debatable, the necessary and
dominant role that professional advocates play in framing the discursive activism of AI’s
members makes Sane’s claim problematic. As the analysis below will show, the
professional genres used by these advocates embody the human rights expertise and the
legal knowledge that Sane subordinates to the organization and action of the membership.
As AI’s policy and review papers illustrate, Amnesty’s discourse of international
solidarity is predicated on the efficacy of its action and this action requires the integration
of both expert and grassroots discourse.

The increased focus on campaigning that AI instituted in the 1990s is mentioned
because it has continued to shape the relationship between the discourses of professional
research and activist campaigning. Since Amnesty’s 1993 Research Review, integration
has been a core concept within Amnesty’s discourse and has shaped the definition and
direction of Amnesty’s research policies. The 1993 review sought to inculcate an
organizational discourse that bridges the gap between research and human rights
campaigning and action: “There is a strong agreement in the indivisibility of AI research
and action. We therefore propose that the movement replace the term ‘research’ with
‘research/action’ which we do in this report” (qtd. in Hopgood 128). Following this
report, AI put forth an Integrated Action Plan at their International Council Meeting in
1995 that advocated closer ties between Amnesty’s research and membership activism,
with “shorter, more timely and more lively, readable documents with more visual images” (qtd. in Korey 304). After this period, AI reports began to include photographs with captions that characterize the human rights issue being addressed, as well as a range of shorter background reports that summarize and adapt the findings of AI’s full-length country reports for specific forms of discursive activism. AI’s current reporting procedures and their integration with member activism is reflected in its most recent research review, the 2002 Research Review Summary Report. This report presents integration as an organizational priority: “By the year 2010, AI’s research, action and development work will be consistently integrated to promote effective interventions that make a measurable and substantial contribution to the global human rights movement, and comprise a significant force for change” (7). Such an integration requires, according to the same report, “strong organic links between AI’s research, campaigning and development work” (7). Integration, as mapped out here, is a necessary response to what AI has recognized as “an increasingly complex and sophisticated human rights environment” and reflects also AI’s move towards a reorganization of its research practices based upon specific campaign themes and specific human rights crises, rather than an emphasis upon researching specific countries (“Strategic Research for Global Action” 6).

In terms of AI’s discursive politics, this integration would be observable through more concrete links between the genres of professional research and the genres of membership activism. As Amnesty International seeks to integrate its professional research and advocacy with the discourses of its member activism, it faces the challenge of clearly and concretely aligning the expected outcomes of its member activism with the
objectives of its professional reporting and advocacy. This process of alignment requires not only the translation of technical discourse into accessible language but also the tactical alignment of professional and activist objectives. While the technical conventions, audiences, and registers of AI’s professional genres differ vastly from the genres of member activism, both professional and member genres share a focus on addressing human rights as violations of international law and international norms. The set of genres that make up AI’s Urgent Actions and Online Actions often reflect this alignment by cueing letter writers to cite human rights abuses as violations of specific international or domestic law, or to cite specific domestic policies as being in violations of human rights law. Activists within AI’s structures thus confront opportunities for discursive activism that share the strategic objectives of AI’s professional reporting and advocacy, but which require reframing within genres and registers that are accessible to a large range of non-expert members.

I use the term member activists to denote the large networks of volunteers and members of larger, consultative NGOs such as Amnesty International. Members of these organizations usually pay membership dues and are part of organizational campaigns, sub-groups within the NGO, and action networks. By terming the activism of these organizations individual activism, I am attempting to describe the largely unformed group of individual citizens who take part sporadically in NGO campaigns and activism. Individual activists have, for example, taken part in a variety of letter writing campaigns, signed public petitions, and participated in the protest rallies of various NGOs, while not applying for membership. Like member activists, their actions are coordinated through professional NGO advocates, but their participation is often less sustained. However, AI
has also issued mass appeals for individual activism during many of their public campaigns, such as their current campaign for intervention in the conflict in Darfur, Sudan. While non-membership NGOs like Human Rights Watch and The International Crisis Group provide opportunities for letter-writing and public petitioning, their lack of an integrated membership structure differentiates their letter-writing opportunities from those of AI. As HRW and ICG are not campaign-based NGOs, their opportunities for letter-writing and other forms of discursive activism cannot draw upon an already constituted collective of members and thus lack the textual relationships necessary to coordinate mass-movement activism.

Amnesty International USA and the Accessibility of Activism

While the work of Amnesty International’s International Secretariat in London is central to all of Amnesty’s national sections, the real work of public, grassroots activism is undertaken by the various national sections and their activists. As an international NGO, AI coordinates the research and high-level advocacy of the London Secretariat with the campaign work of its national sections. AIUSA’s review documents, policy documents, and developmental plans reveal a high degree of concern over the accessibility and efficiency of its discursive strategies. AIUSA undertakes periodic reviews of its membership strategies, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative analysis and outside reviewers to survey the organization’s effectiveness. A central conclusion of recent reviews has been AIUSA’s need for accessible human rights documents for the various audiences of its organization. AIUSA’s National Program Priorities for Fiscal Year 2005-2006 Consultation Review Paper surveyed the needs of AIUSA’s membership
and determined that more accessible and action-oriented documents were needed to guide member activism. The report identified the need for “clear outcome goals with corresponding actions,” as well as “background documents that are brief and accessible (literally and intellectually) to all members (including youth), which include useful statistics and examples with human faces (individual cases)” (21). This statement clearly reflects AIUSA’s recognition of the gap between the genres and discourses of its professional staff and the discourses accessible and engaging to its activist community.

In addition, the January 2005 Membership Mobilization Department Activist Growth and Development Blueprint argues that “new and innovative systems of sharing information in within the section” are necessary (26). The report outlines several difficult communications difficulties that AIUSA members have encounter when participating in activist campaigns. First, “It is frequently difficult for activists to understand AIUSA’s messages at a given time as well as to find and to use the resources and information needed for their activism. Ineffectiveness, inefficiency, and feelings of being frustrated and overwhelmed often result” (26). Second, “AIUSA does not always create resources with specific audiences’ needs in mind . . . . AIUSA also lacks a strategic approach to creating new resources and distributing existing resources for those with less common literacy and language abilities skills” (26). This statement clarifies the role of AIUSA in creating accessible documents for member activists and in intertextually framing existing documents within genres that are more accessible to grassroots members. Both of these processes involve processes of intertextuality and textual transformation that enable the
work of human rights advocacy to efficiently address these multiple audiences within the material and time restraints that are often placed on AIUSA’s work.

Activist Discursive Forums: Urgent Actions, Online Actions, and the Online Action Center

The relationship between NGO professionals and grassroots activists demonstrates the role of intertextuality in the activity system of human rights advocacy. I analyze the context of genres or orders of discourse that construct the intertextual activity system of Amnesty International USA’s professional human rights advocates and grassroots member activists. This intertextual activity system is constructed through the discursive relationships between the written advocacy and activists genres that professional human rights staff and human rights activists utilize to accomplish Amnesty International USA’s work (AIUSA). Amnesty International, as a grassroots based,

39 In addition to adapting organizational discourse to a wide range of audiences, Amnesty International and AIUSA’s mission to provide global human rights coverage reflects the need for the prioritization of human rights topics, countries, and issues. This process of prioritization involves a complex negotiation between the priorities set out by the International Secretariat and those issues of priority that are negotiated between AIUSA’s Board of Directors, Professional Staff, and members who represent the overall membership. The specific procedures of this process are laid out in Amnesty International USA’s annual National Program Priorities paper. The 2005-6 paper outlines “national program priorities” as “program areas on which AIUSA will concentrate action and resources to make a direct impact over a given two-year cycle” (4). AIUSA’s democratic membership structure allows members of each section to have a voice in deciding these priorities. This voice, however, is not utilized within a popular referendum, but as one element among many that must be balanced in the selection process. These elements reflect the integrated relationship between professional, organizational, and member discourse within AIUSA. Those listed in the 2005-6 Priorities Paper are as follows: “Key Global Trends, Amnesty International’s Integrated Strategic Plan (ISP) (2004-10), The International Secretariat’s Operational Plan (2004-6), The AIUSA Strategic Plan (2003-2006), Directions recommended by the Board of Directors, Input from members and staff about the gravest human rights concerns upon which AIUSA can have the greatest impact” (4). AIUSA’s priorities are coordinated with AI’s eight “global impact goals”: (1) “reform and strengthen the justice sector”, (2) “abolish the death penalty”, (3) protect the rights of human rights defenders,” (4) “resist abuses in the ‘War on terror,’” (5) “Uphold the rights of refugees and migrants,” (6) “Promote the economic, social and cultural rights (ESCR) or marginalized communities,” (7) “Stop violence against women,” and (8) “Close the taps that fuel abuses in conflict” (Pack 1-3). The paper reflects Welch’s description of AI’s democratic structure: “Amnesty International couples a patina of popular participation in establishing priorities with the reality of centralized authority” (91).
professional public, forms a dense web of informational exchange among its various sections, groups, and individual advocates. The tendency to read the human rights movement as part of the development of a global or transnational civil society needs to be balanced with discussions of the role of NGO professionalism in framing the exigencies and genres of human rights activism. As the member activists of NGOs such as AIUSA take discursive action, their action is framed by a context of genres that intertextually connects their letter-writing, signing of public petitions, editorial writing, and other activism to the professional discourse of professional advocates and staff. This context of genres is a central element of the activity system of human rights activism and advocacy, and the interaction of the genres in this context dynamically shapes the discursive practices, epistemologies, and ideologies of human rights professionals and grassroots activists.

Urgent Action Network and Urgent Action Letters

Amnesty International’s long-standing Urgent Action Program illustrates the discursive strategies that professional advocates employ to facilitate activist letter-writing, while attempting to frame activist discourse effectively within AI’s perspective on the issue. The Urgent Action letter-writing program has come to be the most recognizable form of membership activism associated with AI and boasts a current world-wide membership of 80,000 people in 80 countries, with 12,000 of those members coming from the US alone (Zaslow, “Interview with Ellen Moore and Scott Harrison”). Urgent Action appeals are written by professional researchers and country experts at Amnesty International’s International Secretariat and are distributed to national AI
sections, which then redistribute them to the members of their Urgent Action Network. As Korey has documented, the UA network became central to the organization’s campaigning strategies during AI’s 1973 campaign against torture and has grown in size with the expansion of AI’s mandate (302). Korey documents the growth of the Urgent Action Network, and its expansion from a letter-writing network that dealt specifically with prisoners of conscience to one that addressed a variety of human rights issues that fall under AI’s mandate. He states that, “The extent of volunteer involvement testifies to the popularity of Amnesty’s quick-response system to information on new or pending cases of torture or of prisoners of conscience. The 1977 Amnesty Annual Report cited 208 Urgent Actions issued for the previous year; the cases quadrupled by 1992, reaching 900, and then dropped slightly to 883 in 1996” (302). AIUSA, in its letter-writing guide, claims the Urgent Action Network to be the largest world-wide letter-writing network, and argues for the influence of the technique on other NGOs, such as Global Response (3).

National sections such as AIUSA distribute Urgent Actions selectively to individuals and local AI groups based upon the human rights issues that they have identified as their categories of interest. Prior to the development of AI’s website in 1994, Urgent Actions were distributed through standard mail to members of the network. AI and AIUSA have both developed online Urgent Action Network pages that feature specific urgent actions, information for letter-writers such as letter-writing guides and frequently asked questions, and personal stories that highlight the success of the UA program. Today, members of the Urgent Action network are most often forwarded Urgent Actions through their email account, which they provide when they register as a
member of the network. The Urgent Action Network remains AI’s central forum for
discursive activism on individual cases of human rights violations and serves an
important function in naming those imprisoned, tortured, or believed to be in danger or
extra-judicial execution. This program has been especially significant in engaging
systematic human rights abuses, such as those committed by the Government of Sudan in
Darfur, as Urgent Action letters on specific prisoners signify detailed international
knowledge of human rights violations and their victims.

Due to the success of this program, the genre conventions of Urgent Action alerts
have remained remarkably similar over the thirty-three year history of the program and
these alerts continue to accompany each Urgent Action that AI issues. AI’s Urgent
Actions reflect their construction by professional researchers, beginning with a statement
of the specific facts of the case, followed by a short, sub-headed “Background” section
that relates to the historical and political context of the conflict. After this background,
follows a section of recommendations for action by the target audience, entitled
“Recommended Action,” and the relevant contact information for the targets of the
Urgent Action. In addition, Urgent Actions featured on AI or AIUSA’s websites are often
accompanied with sample letters that can be modified, printed, or sent in email format
directly from the site. However, because the number of Urgent Actions AI issues is high,
relatively few UAs are accompanied by sample letters and require activists to synthesize

40 Drawing on AI’s description of its Urgent Action program, three major criteria for the program’s success
are often referenced: (1) the roughly 40% success rate of Urgent Actions in freeing political prisoners
(Zaslow “Interview with Ellen Moore and Scott Harrison”), (2) the recognition of the program by victims
it has aided (cf. Amnesty International’s Online Urgent Action Center for AI’s use of testimonies on the
effects of Urgent Actions), and (3) the recognition of the Urgent Action technique as a significant means of
generating public pressure on human rights and other issues. For a full discussion of these criteria see
Amnesty International’s Campaigning Manual, specifically Chapter Seven “Campaigning Techniques.”
elements of the case history with specific background information on the region in order to construct an effective case for the recommended actions of the letter. Due to the low amount of sample letters issued with Urgent Actions, Urgent Action letters require perhaps the most intensive process of rhetorical invention. This invention process has been facilitated through the development of meta-genres and generic sample letters that are designed to introduce and frame most of the human rights exigencies that fall under the mandate of the Urgent Action Network. In addition, as I will discuss specifically below, when read through the lens of these meta-genres, Urgent Action alerts are designed to facilitate a certain range of textual responses or uptakes that are reflective of the discursive registers and organizational ideologies of AI.

*Online Action Genres and AIUSA’s Online Action Center*

With the development of informational communications technologies like the Internet, AI and AIUSA’s Urgent Action Center has gained ability to facilitate rapid responses to requests for Urgent Action letters. In addition to Urgent Actions, AI has also expanded its activist genre system through the development of Online Actions, which most often take the form of emails to target governments, online petitions, and internet postcards. Online Actions, though they at times deal with individual cases, are often broader in scope than Urgent Actions and are designed to coordinate public pressure on governments concerning larger issues of national policy and international responsibility. While AI continues to utilize Online Actions on its main organizational website, AIUSA’s Online Action Center allows activists to create a *Personal Action Center*, in which they can select from a list of Amnesty’s thematic issues and regional
campaigns the Online Actions that they would like to receive. This interactive site also allows activists to keep an online record of the activist letters that they have sent and the Online Actions they have responded to. Activists entering these hyper-textual sites encounter a range of intertextual genres that frame the human rights exigency for them: the appropriate genre for activism, the audiences of the activist genres, the specific recommendations of the activism, the contextual background of the human rights exigency, and in many cases models of the specific content of the activist letters. Central to the development of these webgenres has been the necessity for the more rapid and efficient coordination of discursive activism. AIUSA developed its current Online Action Center from its 2000 Stop Torture Campaign, initially labeling this center FAST (Fast Action Stops Torture)\textsuperscript{41}. AIUSA had also developed opportunities for email letters and the signing of public petitions through both its “Special Focus Cases” and its “Government Action Center” during this time as well, finally synthesizing these programs into its Online Action Center in January of 2002. As described in AIUSA’s \textit{Letter Writing Guide}, the Online Action Center is a central clearinghouse for actions that come from the full range of AIUSA’s campaigns (3).

Activist letter-writing in AIUSA’s Online Action Center is coordinated through a range of online genres that interactively frame the background, audiences, and content of

\textsuperscript{41} AIUSA’s Stop Torture Campaign was initiated on October 18, 2000 and AIUSA launched its FAST program at this time. AIUSA’s original description of FAST is available from its archived website from this date: “On October 18th, Amnesty International will launch a new online network -- FAST (Fast Action Stops Torture) -- as part of its worldwide campaign to stop torture. As soon as Amnesty International hears about an imminent threat of torture, FAST will instantly send out an alarm to its network of activists around the globe. Cell phones will ring, pagers buzz and computers chime, instructing activists by the thousands to sign electronic letters of protest. Within hours, the threat of torture will be exposed. Once exposed, it is nearly impossible to carry out” (<http://web.archive.org/web/20010107192600/amnestyusa.org/stoptorture/fast/fastindex.html>).
the human rights exigency being addressed. AIUSA’s Online Action Center utilizes an interactive, hyper-textual format to frame human rights exigencies and facilitate the rapid response of its activists. This online forum plays an important role in bridging between the genres of professional human rights reports and advocacy and the genres of grassroots activism, distilling the wide range of AI’s information on specific human rights crises into short, approachable background reports and calls for action. In addition, the interactive structure of the Online Action Center aligns activists with the specific register and genre conventions of human rights activism through use of sample letters in a read-write (wiki) format. This format allows activists to modify and personalize the sample letters and send them directly via email from the site or to print off the letter and send it via regular post. As AIUSA does not keep specific copies of the actions submitted, it is (at this time) impossible to estimate the number sample letters that are modified or are just simply signed electronically and sent in their original format. However, the genres that frame both AI’s Urgent Action and Online Action Centers sponsor the literacies and rhetoric of activists in ways that effectively demonstrate the rhetorical strategies and generic conventions appropriate to AI’s organizational ideology.

**Sponsoring Activist Discourse: Bridging Genres and the Discursive Mediation Between Professional and Activist Discourse**

The international scope of Amnesty’s campaigns and the diversity of its forms of participation—from tight-knit local Amnesty chapters to individual letter-writers who may never meet an Amnesty representative or member—makes it necessary for AI and its national sections to frame opportunities for human rights activism in language
accessible to a large, non-professional audience. The audiences of Urgent Action Alerts described in AIUSA’s Urgent Action Letter Writing Guide have varying degrees of local participation: “While the largest portion of AIUSA’s Urgent Action Network is made up of individual letter-writers, all Amnesty International community groups and student chapters receive monthly Urgent Actions” (10). AIUSA, in its Membership Mobilization Department Activist Growth and Development Blueprint, refers to Online Actions and Urgent Actions as “individually tailored opportunities,” underlining the strong role that these programs play in bringing opportunities for activism to individuals not attached to AI local groups (15). In addition, as AIUSA’s Online Action Center and AI Public Actions are open to non-members, they must be framed in genres and language that are accessible to the widest range of potential activists. The expansion of AIUSA’s activist base through the coordinating potential of the internet has been significant, but has also meant that the human rights literacies and the rhetorical competencies of AIUSA activists must be sponsored from afar.

Professional publics like AI, because of the truly transnational scope of their network advocacy and activism, challenge scholars of rhetoric and discourse to rethink the way that activist literacies are sponsored and how the accessibility of specific genres to various audiences lends them to discursive activism. As Brandt has described it,

---

42 Another concern for AIUSA is making its activist campaigns accessible to differing student groups: “Students and youth are the largest single block of activists currently working within our organization” (13). Despite this, the Blueprint critiques AIUSA’s “one-size-fits-all approach to student groups, with no differentiation between high school, college, and other student groups” (13).

43 This document also argues for the need to bring Online Activists into closer contact with AIUSA groups and professional staff, calling for the creation of “an internet subcommittee to explore ways to increase online activism and to bring online activists and the rest of AIUSA closer together, such as through meet ups and salons planned online, traditional group structures, and other events” (32).
literacy sponsors, “help to organize and administer stratified systems of opportunity and access. . . .Sponsors enable and hinder literacy activity, often forcing the formation of new literacy requirements while decertifying older ones” (567). Literacy sponsors, for Brandt, can be “local or distant, concrete or abstract” and sponsor the literacy of initiates in order to “gain advantage by it in some way” (556). Activists entering into AI’s network of global activists encounter a dizzying range of information, genres, and organizational objectives that structure the professional and grassroots discourses that make up AI’s work. As the previous chapter documented, activists—as constituents of their national local governments—play a tangible role in AI’s leverage politics through utilizing their public discourse to pressure policy makers. However, both AI’s organizational credibility and the intended outcomes of its activist campaigns require the alignment of activists with genres of activism that reflect the register, background knowledge, and generic conventions necessary to the activist campaign. AI and its national sections thus face the difficult discursive task of framing opportunities for activism that reflect AI’s organizational ideology and campaign objectives, while also framing the complex human rights exigencies addressed by its human rights reports and high-level advocacy in accessible discourse and activist genres. AI’s activist genres embody both AI’s discursive norms and organizational mandate, discursively reproducing the micro-political, discursive relationships between AI professionals and

44 For a discussion of the concept of background knowledge and genre see Janet Giltrow’s “Genre and the Pragmatic Concept of Background Knowledge.” Giltrow defines background knowledge on two levels: “Background Knowledge operates at two levels in the life of a genre. The first is well known in genre study, although not necessarily identified as a matter of Background Knowledge: users of a genre share knowledge of the genres conventions. . . .At the second level of operation, writers assume on behalf of the reader some knowledge of the world which the reader can consult in order to interpret the utterance” (156).
grassroots activists.

AI Activist Metagenres

AI’s discursive norms are often implicit within the activist genres that members encounter. However, these discursive norms are perhaps most readily observable in the meta-genres that AI has developed to facilitate effective human rights activism. Activist letter writing campaigns place activists within AI’s well-established context of genres, as well as within AI’s organizational context, which is shaped by the professional principles of neutrality towards political ideology, accuracy in human rights reporting, and timeliness in responses to human rights crises. In order to align activists with these organizational goals, AI and AIUSA have developed general letter-writing guides as well as activist guides for specific actions. These genres serve as what Giltrow has termed “meta-genres,” or “written regulations for the production of a genre, ruling out some kinds of expression, endorsing others” (Giltrow 190). Meta-genres serve as “situated language about situated language,” initiating outsiders to the sanctioned rhetorical practices and genre conventions of professional fields (190). As genres generated by professional representatives, meta-genres occupy the space between the boundaries of an organization’s discourse: “meta-genres flourish at those boundaries, at thresholds of communities of discourse, patrolling or controlling individuals’ participation in the collective, foreseeing or suspecting their involvements elsewhere, differentiating, initiating, restricting, inducing forms of activity, rationalizing and representing the relations of the genre to the community that uses it” (203). AI and AIUSA’s meta-genres anticipate a range of human rights literacies, political affiliations and rhetorical
competencies among the activists who participate in them. The strong emphasis AI places on institutional credibility makes it necessary for these meta-genres to instruct activists in AI’s ideology of discourse, while illustrating the conventions of activist letter-writing genres. An analysis of these meta-genres illustrates the instantiation of this ideology through the genre conventions they explicitly highlight, as well as the intertextual relationship between AI’s human rights reporting and activist genres.

All members of AIUSA’s Urgent Action Network receive a twelve-page letter-writing guide that reinforces and models the appropriate generic conventions of Urgent Action letters. In addition, AI and AIUSA both utilize the Letter Writing Guide developed by the International Secretariat in framing their online actions. These guidelines seek to shape the discursive practice of letter writers by teaching them both macro and micro discursive issues, such as document design, methods of address, politeness and political and ideological neutrality. The political neutrality of AI’s mandate is emphasized in the prescriptive statements of this guide: “Be factual in your appeal. Relay the details of your case as you know them. Do not discuss ideology or politics. Your message must be for the benefit of the victim and not a vehicle for political opinions” (4-6). These meta-genres go beyond prescriptive rules to model the interpretation of Urgent Action alerts and the interpretive strategies for utilizing Urgent Action alerts and the discursive conventions of Urgent Action letters.

As all Urgent Action letter-writing campaigns are coordinated by specific national sections, I am going be referring primarily to two major letter-writing guides, AIUSA’s Letter Writing Guide for Amnesty International USA and the Urgent Action Network and Amnesty International’s Letter Writing Guide. Additional national sections have developed letter-writing guides based upon AI’s guidelines.
Literacy Bridging Genres

AI’s translation capacity can be linked to the an intertextual genre system of literacy bridging genres, which function as a bridge between the specialized, technical discourses and genres of human rights professionals and the background knowledge, human rights literacies, and rhetorical competencies of AI’s activist collectives. As AI professionals mediate between the complexities and expert-level discourses of human rights exigencies and the human rights literacies of AI’s membership, they utilize a set of genres that frames these exigencies within discursive contexts that are engaging and accessible to AI members. Urgent Action Alerts, Online Action Alerts, Campaign Webpages, Email Alerts and overlapping genres such as AIUSA magazine articles seek to align the resources and interests of members with opportunities for discursive action.

In addition, as an interview with one AIUSA professional confirmed, these press releases sometimes overlap in function, serving as background reports linked to Online Action alerts in AIUSA’s Online Action Center. These bridging genres are listed in table 4.1.

46 I refer to these genres as literacy bridging genres in order to distinguish them from a recent discussion of “bridging genres,” which has described how weblogs have bridged between two different modes of communication. In Herring, Scheidt, Wright, and Bonus’s “Weblogs as a Bridging Genre,” for example, bridging genre is utilized to refer to the ability of weblogs to bridge between HTML and text-based mediums of communication: “Specifically, it forms a de facto bridge between multimedia HTML documents and text-based computer-mediated communication, blurring the traditional distinction between these two dominant internet paradigms, and potentially contributing to its future breakdown” (143). I will be referring to this type of communication as multi-modal genres in Chapter Four, drawing from the work of Gunther Kress. Though more specific in its discussion of the textual strategies necessary to bridge between movements and activists, my definition is perhaps more closely aligned to David Snow’s and John Benford’s discussion of the “frame bridging” activities of social movements. Snow defines “frame bridging” as “the linkage of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem” (qtd. in Tarrow, The New Transnational Activism 62). Benford and Snow describe this process in terms that are representative of AI’s relationship to its member activists: “Bridging can occur between a movement and individuals, through the linkage of a movement organization with an unmobilized sentiment pool or public opinion cluster” (“Framing Processes and Social Movements 624).
Table 4.1
Activist Bridging Genres

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genres</th>
<th>Samples from AIUSA Sudan Crises Campaign 2003-2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urgent Action Alerts</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urgent Action Letter Writing Guide</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Action Alerts (20)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Action Postings</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Background Reports</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Sample Letters</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Guides (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Guide Background Report</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Guide Letter Writing Actions</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Guide Sample Letters</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Guide Public Petitions</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign Webpages</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazine/Newsletter Action Alerts</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email Action Alerts</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Samples</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The bridging genres utilized by Amnesty International facilitate discursive activism by framing human rights exigencies within activist genres that address the “recurring situations” of human rights activism (Miller 157). Following Miller’s description of genre, bridging genres frame human rights exigencies by mediating between the discursive/material situations of human rights as embodied in human rights reporting genres and the typified, structured activities of member activists. The need to mediate between the complexity of human rights exigencies and member resources can be clearly observed through Amnesty International’s letter-writing genres, which have come to be the hallmark of the organization’s public campaigning. Letter-writing campaigns are coordinated across a wide range of organizational structures (individuals, local Amnesty groups, members of the Urgent Action Network, among others) and across a wide range of organizational publications (being issued not only through Urgent Action and Online Action Alerts, but also through magazine articles, newsletters, and campaign webpages). These campaigns require professional advocates to provide accessible background information, recommendations, and contact information to member activists. However, in addition to providing activists with background on the issue, many letter writing opportunities reflect the intertextual relationship between activist letters and professional reporting and advocacy. This relationship is underscored in Amnesty’s description of Urgent Actions and other action oriented texts as being part of its overall research product.

The textual conventions of Urgent Action appeals have remained stable over the programs thirty-five year history, and each Urgent Action appeal shares these stable generic conventions. All Urgent Action Appeals share the same textual structure,
beginning with an overview of the human rights exigency to be addressed, which clearly states the details of each case and (when appropriate) names those whose human rights are in danger. This section is followed by a brief paragraph of “Background Information” on the immediate political and social context of the exigency, which contextualizes the Urgent Action with other continued human rights abuses in the target country and with AI’s previous work in the country. The description of “Recommended Action” is perhaps the most vital to the appeal, detailing not only the medium of the letter (letter, fax, etc.) but the specific issues or talking points that the letter should address. Often drawing upon specific recommendations traced out in AI’s country or issue reports, this section of the Urgent Action configures the human rights exigency in terms of the international and domestic laws and human rights mechanisms that apply to it. Each Urgent Action appeal also coordinates the dissemination Urgent Action letters by concluding with the contact information of the letter’s intended target as well as a clear cut-off time for sending appeals.

AIUSA’s Online Action Center allows for a more interactive and efficient letter-writing environment and for a more rapid coordination of AIUSA activists for urgent human rights exigencies. However, as Lebert has commented, the amount of information available on the websites of AI and its national sections raises problems for the facilitation of discursive activism, which can potentially become “sink holes of information” (213). The effectiveness discursive activism on this site thus requires AIUSA to frame human rights exigencies selectively, aligning activists with AIUSA’s campaign objectives and with accessible, immediate forms of activism. In addition to selectivity, AIUSA’s Online Action Center must also distill the vast amount of
information produced by AI professionals on the specific human rights issue into
manageable, concrete objectives for member activism.

The Online Action Center is produced in an interactive format that allows both
members and the general public to create a user profile, which users can utilize to select
the types of issues that they would like to be alerted to47. Users can log in to a “personal
action center,” where the actions specific to their profile are stored until they are acted
upon or until the period for action expires. The Online Action Center utilizes several
bridging genres to coordinate and facilitate letter-writing or petition-signing actions.
Each Online Action frames the human rights exigency for activists by providing short
background information, aligning activists with specific audiences, facilitating the
transmissal of the online action to the audience, and modeling the core content of the
letter in a read-write or wiki format. As seen in Figure 4.1, Online Actions are framed by
photographs and captions that symbolically link activists to human rights victims and the
specific human rights exigencies at hand. The Online Postings that are adjacent to these
visual images frame the human rights exigency to be addressed, the specific audience of
the action, and the recommended appeals for action. Beneath these postings is a
hypertext link “Learn More,” which directs AIUSA activists to a short background
reports on the human rights exigency. The read-write formatted letter allows AIUSA
activists to personalize, add to, and delete from most Online Actions. In many Online
Actions and Online Urgent Actions, AIUSA prefaces each sample letter with a statement
encouraging activists to base their letter on the sample, but to “personalize” the

47 These issues include the following: Arms Trade, Business and Human Rights, Children’s Rights,
Conflict Diamonds, Death Penalty, Health and Human Rights, Legal/International Justice, LGBT, Prisoners
Figure 4.1: AIUSA Online Action Center
Personalization is a discursive tactic carried over from Amnesty’s Urgent Action Program. In the Urgent Action Letter Writing Guide, AIUSA states “You may refer to Amnesty International in your letter, unless otherwise stated in the case sheet, however, appeals written in a personal or professional capacity will show the diversity of concern regarding particular individuals and human rights abuses” (4). The Letter Writing Guide on Amnesty International’s main organizational webpage underscores the role of personalized letters in presenting an authentic ethos in the letters: “If appropriate, please explain who you are and what you do. . . . This indicates that the letter is genuine, and also shows that people from varying walks of life are following events in the country concerned.” (Letter Writing Guide 1). These sample letters frame online activism by allowing online activists to model and draw upon the conventions of professional human rights discourse when framing their personal appeals. Sample letters in the Online Action Center go beyond mere modeling, however, by bridging the gap between the technical and legal discourse of human rights professionals and the human rights literacies of member activists. The sample letters often draw intertextually on references to Amnesty International reports, as well as referentially to appropriate U.N. human rights mechanisms and the domestic laws of the target country. In addition, they also model the generic conventions that AI and AIUSA have utilized in regulating the advocacy of their
members, including the impartiality towards ideology or politics that has become a hallmark of the Urgent Action Network.

Sample letters in the read-write format illustrated in Figure 4.2 below are perhaps the key example of the facilitation of human rights activism by informational technologies and have allowed AIUSA’s professional staff to assist activists in bridging between the specialized literacies of human rights law and politics and their own human rights literacies and rhetorical competencies. However, the framing of activist discourse in AIUSA’s Online Action Center is a labor-intensive process that requires AIUSA’s human rights professionals to create a broad range of genres that far exceeds the range of genres available to activists. In comparison to the range of genres produced by human rights professionals, the written member activist genre set is strikingly small. There are significantly more bridging genres than genres utilized for member activism, reflecting the high degree of professional framing necessary to sponsor members discursive activism and the need to frame member activism within a small range of genres and recognizable human rights exigencies. The genres utilized or member activism are Urgent Action Letters, Online Action Center Letters, First Appeal Letters, Internet Postcards, Public Petitions, and Newspaper Editorials. AI and AIUSA utilize other genres as they animate Amnesty’s campaigns, and the various posters, banners, public displays, public performances that make up many street-level campaigns are also coordinated through the various Action Guides and Activist Toolkits AI and AIUSA produce for specific campaigns. The genres listed above are therefore representative of the primary written genres that activists utilize as they engage in member activism. As genres that are heavily framed by literacy bridging genres, AI’s member activist genre
Figure 4.2 AIUSA Online Action Center: Read-Write Format Sample Letter
system can be characterized in terms similar to what Yates, Orlikowski, and Renneker have termed a “collaborative authoring genre system” (6). As activists engage in this online forum, they collaborate with AI professionals in creating activist letters that draw on the personal ethos of individual activists, while also drawing on the informed content and objectivity of AI’s human rights reporting and expertise.

This outline is not exhaustive, and grassroots collectives utilize other genres to raise public awareness of human rights atrocities such as genocide. Individual branches of Amnesty International’s national chapters use a variety of speech genres to organize rallies, protests, benefits that seek to promote public awareness of specific issues, and more research is needed into the conversational structures of these groups. However, among these groups and among the supporters of other NGOs, a relatively stable written genre system has emerged. Amnesty International has pioneered the development of several of these human rights genres such as letter writing campaigns, public petitions, and newspaper editorials, and these genre systems are now employed by many human rights NGOs and public advocacy groups. AI and sections such as AIUSA provide vast opportunities for the discursive action of their members. However, the need to both mediate between complicated human rights exigencies and member discourse and to assist members in following AI’s Statute and organizational objectives does reveal the high level of interactional control that professional advocates exercise when sponsoring the literacies of member activists.
Discursive Activism in Amnesty International USA’s Sudan Crisis Campaign

As I have argued earlier, human rights crises involving systematic human rights abuses are often read as tests of the ability of the international community and the UN to intervene effectively, as well as tests of NGOs to produce the moral and political pressure necessary to get states to lobby for intervention. The human rights and humanitarian crisis in Darfur, Sudan has been no exception to this trend. The role of public discourse in creating domestic political support for international intervention is often underscored, as in a recent discussion on the television program *Charlie Rose* between New York Times Reporter Nicholas Kristof, the UN Under-Secretary or Humanitarian Affairs Jan Engeland,, and U.S. Senator Barak Obama on the US response to Darfur. Kristof, referencing the late Senator Paul Simon’s observation that if every member of Congress received 100 letters concerning the Rwandan genocide then it could have been averted, asked “What is the equivalent calculus today for how many emails or whatever it would take to get Congress and the president to take a much more robust response to Darfur?” (14). Senator Obama’s response was reflective of the political role of public discourse that underlies many NGO campaigns: “You know, it doesn’t take that much. I mean, one of the things that I think people generally don’t realize is how sensitive elected representatives are to what their constituents are demanding” (14). The sensitivity of elected officials to their constituents is a major factor in the political logic and tactics of transnational advocacy networks and reflects the *boomerang pattern* of international politics outlined by Keck and Sikkink, in which activists often participate in domestic and international politics simultaneously in the scope of a single campaign.
Amnesty International’s designation of the atrocities in Darfur as a crisis issue has elevated its international campaign on Darfur to a priority issue for its national sections. Alongside Amnesty’s professional reporting, high-level advocacy, and media campaigns, member activists and local Amnesty chapters have participated in sustained Urgent Action and Online Action campaigns, conducted meetings with high-level officials in their local governments, conducted telephone and fax campaigns to their national governments, and participated in street-level rallies in major urban areas around the world, such as Amnesty’s three Global Day for Darfur events. The full range of AI and AIUSA’s campaign activities and materials on the Darfur crisis extends across each of the major exigencies documented in AI reports on the crisis and clearly reflects the intertextual coordination of AI activism with AI’s high-level advocacy and media campaigns. In addition, Urgent Action letter-writing campaigns played a vital role in revealing the international awareness of Sudanese civilians arrested, held incommunicado, tortured, or extra-judicially executed by the Government of Sudan. As AI’s Sudan researcher noted, “Urgent Actions have helped human rights organizations in Khartoum establish the names and background of those in detention, and have been important documents with which Amnesty International can use to hold the government to account” (“Urgent Action in Focus: Darfur: A Human Rights Crises” 1). Underlining the role Urgent Actions play in fostering international accountability for human rights violations, this same researcher argued, ”This is why it is so important for Amnesty International to list the detainee’s names—to put a face to the name—to show that they are individual human beings who have been arrested. By naming them, Amnesty International is trying to stop them from disappearing” (1). Activist letter-writing has
thus played a key role in constructing public accountability for the safety of individual
victims and has served as a stern reminder to the Government of Sudan of the
international audience for its human rights violations.

A central effort of AI’s Urgent Action Network’s work the Darfur Crises was the
role it played in freeing human rights defenders from their incarceration by the Sudanese
Government. These Urgent Actions were linked to AI’s human rights research and
reporting on the State of Emergency Laws and Specialized Courts system set up by the
Government of Sudan for the Darfur region in 2003. AI’s June 2004 report Sudan:
Darfur: Incommunicado Detention, Torture, and Special Courts documented the arrest
and detention of prisoner’s of conscience arrested under these laws and under the Sudan’s
National Security Act. As this report states, “Many of those arrested in Darfur have been
prisoners of conscience or possible prisoners of conscience arrested for trying to obtain or
spread information about the situation in Darfur, or even just to discuss the crisis and
ways to lobby the government” (10). This same report documented the arrest of
members of the Sudanese NGO SUDO (Sudan Social Development Organization), which
had delivered humanitarian aid to internally displaced people in Darfur (12). The
Director of SUDO, Dr. Mudawi Ibrahim Adam, was one of the detainees listed in AI’s
report and was the subject of several Urgent Action Alerts from 2004-5. According to
one Urgent Action Alert, Adam was charged in February of 2004 “with crimes against
the state that carried the death penalty. The ‘evidence’ against him included the fact that
he owned documents published by Amnesty International” (“Further Information on UA
02/04” 1). Members of AI’s Urgent Action Network responded by sending hundreds of
letters to Sudan’s First Vice President, Minister of Justice, and Minister of Foreign
Affairs, holding the Government of Sudan accountable for Dr. Adam’s safety and calling on the government to uphold the commitments it had made to international law.

A central feature of the accountability politics of AI’s Urgent Actions on prisoner’s of conscience and human rights defenders in Darfur, is the referential intertextuality to both the Government of Sudan’s domestic policy and standards of international law. An Urgent Action issued for Abib Abdel Rahman Yusuf, a regional director for SUDO, illustrates the accountability politics that Urgent Actions often employ as they contextualize governmental violations of individual’s rights in the obligations of the international laws that the government has ratified. Yusuf was arrested in 2004 without charge and interrogated about the activities of SUDO in Darfur; he was released on April 19 of the same year. The Urgent Action alert following his release called for “a final round of appeals . . . reminding the authorities that they have ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) of which Article 9 prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention” (“Further Information on UA 285/04” 1). Urgent Action alerts such as these utilize references to the supergenres of international human rights law in order to frame the legal obligation of offending governments to those they have detained and to make governments aware of the international audience of their violations.

While AI’s Urgent Action network has named the victims of human rights abuses in Darfur and held the Government of Sudan accountable for their safety, AIUSA’s Online Action center has allowed activists to engage in letter-writing campaigns and sign public petitions on the international policy issues surrounding international intervention into the crises. AIUSA’s campaign on Rape as a Weapon of War and its current
campaign for a UN peacekeeping force in Darfur clearly reflect the alignment of the activism of local sections with AI’s human rights reports, high-level advocacy, and media campaigns. AI’s development of its *Stop Violence Against Women* campaign in March of 2004 coincided with AI’s research on the systematic rapes of Darfuri women and children by Janjaweed militias. As one of AI’s Global Impact Goals, this campaign was integrated into AIUSA’s crisis response campaign on Darfur, coordinating AI women’s rights activists with letter-writing actions targeted to high-level audiences in the Government of Sudan, African Union, U.S legislature, and United Nations. AIUSA activists played an important role in leveraging the UN, African Union, and US government to place pressure on the Government of Sudan to ensure the safety of displaced women and children. AI has incorporated its concerns for the safety and physical integrity of Darfuri women and children into many of its Online Actions on Sudan. These actions have been directed towards high-level officials in the Government of Sudan, members of the American Congress, high-level officials in the Government of Chad, UN representatives, and high-ranking members of the African Union. Online Actions directed towards members of offending governments are often utilized as part of AIUSA’s accountability politics, while those directed at specific policy-makers employ the material leverage that comes with their role as a constituent in order to get policy-makers to lobby for specific action.

An Online Action from November 2005 directed to Sudanese President Omar Hassan al-Bashir illustrates the role of Online Actions in accountability politics. The action is framed by the Online Action Posting “Prevent Mass Death Among Internally Displaced People in Darfur” and the visual image of a child holding to his mother in an
IDP camp in Darfur. The Online Sample Letter in read-write format that accompanies the action illustrates the referential intertextuality of these letters with AI’s human rights reports and high-level advocacy. The letter references “Satellite images of the area between al-Jeneina and Zalingei, commissioned by Amnesty International” which “indicate that 44 percent of the villages and settlements had been burnt” (“Prevent Mass Death” 1). This evidence links the letter intertextually to AI’s June 2, 2004 report “Sudan-At the Mercy of Killers-Destruction of Villages in Darfur,” which documented the burning of 155 villages between al-Jeneina and Zalingei (3). In addition to this intertextual reference, the sample letter also draws on the victim-testimony collected by AI researchers and utilized in various AI reports and in one UN report from region: “In Mornay camp in March 2004, a shaikh told the UN that 16 women a day may be raped as they went to gather water in the riverbed” ( “Prevent Mass Death” 1). References to AI and UN reports reflect the level of technical background knowledge that goes into framing human rights activism. The sample also intertextually references Sudanese Domestic Policy, stating “I urge you, as President of Sudan, to act now to enforce Sudanese constitutional protections for your own citizens. Article 20 of your constitutions states, ‘Every human being shall have the right to life, freedom, safety of person and dignity of honor save by right in accordance with the law” (1). The level of background knowledge and technical knowledge necessary to compose this letter illustrates the role of professional discourse in framing opportunities for human rights activism.
Conclusion: AI and the Expansion of Transnational Activism

The development of letter-writing campaigns by consultative, non-membership NGOs like HRW and ICG is a significant indication of AI’s influential role in utilizing the power of public activism⁴⁹. Amnesty International’s advocacy techniques and strategies have been widely influential in the field of human rights NGOs and have been diffused across a variety of larger, non-membership, NGOs, as well as smaller single-interest NGOs and social movement organizations⁵⁰. Winston argues that this influence is key to understanding Amnesty International’s effect on the international human rights movement: “Amnesty International has functioned effectively as a training institute for human rights activists. . . . AI has become the world’s leading human rights organization, in larger part, because it serves this educational function more than any other international human rights NGO. This is AI’s most significant contribution to the human rights movement and to the development of the global human rights culture” (29). AI’s diverse network of national sections allows has been significant in the diffusion of activist strategies and genres across a wide range of local and international organizations and has played a significant role in the development of a transnational advocacy network.

⁴⁹ HRW has not only developed letter-writing techniques on its organizational web-site, but has been forthright in its acknowledgement of the significant role that AI has played in the human rights movement through the development of these techniques. In the 2004 HRW World Report, HRW cited these letter-writing techniques as “invented by Amnesty” (HRW World Report 2004).

⁵⁰ I draw the concept of diffusion from Sidney Tarrow’s discussion of global activism and the spread of activist strategies across governmentally, geographically and organizationally diverse contexts. Tarrow, in *The New Transnational Activism*, argues that “forms of contention” (138) often travel across these contexts and are shaped by the level of similarity between the contexts of their origin and the contexts of their application (103). See, specifically, the sixth chapter of this study for Tarrow’s complete discussion of this term. For a contemporary example of the diffusion of AI’s activist genres compare AI and AIUSA’s activist campaigns on the Darfur Crisis with the materials developed for the U.S. based Genocide Intervention Network, which was started as a student organization at Swathmore and has developed into a major activist forum on Darfur.
able to exercise domestic pressure for international human rights standards. AI’s activist genre system, in this sense, serves as a model for the sponsorship of public discourse on human rights.

In addition to sponsoring the literacies of their member activist and coordinating activist campaigns with the work of AI’s professional researchers and advocates, AI and AIUSA have utilized their websites to frame opportunities for citizen or non-membership based activism. This activism often utilizes read-write or wiki formats like Online Actions, and is dependant upon a range of information communications technologies for the coordination of member activism. AI’s use of these technologies is the subject of the next chapter, which looks at the role of AI’s organizational website in creating an online forum for human rights activism. In addition, I will look at the role that internet activism has played in the development of new, innovative forms for framing human rights activism. These genres link AI’s text-based activism with various rhetorical modes such as video of human rights victims in order to dramatically frame human rights exigencies. As innovative and cutting edge technologies of activism, these genres are an example of AI’s ability to adapt its traditionally text-based activism to the demands of an increasingly visual culture.

“The key is how to maximize the Internet’s potential for good as a tool to promote and protect human rights: its use for human rights education, as a means of organizing human rights defenders and getting information on human rights violations out to the world. This is a technology that is revolutionizing the world. It is changing the equations of power, challenging the conventional channels of communication, distributing and disseminating influence in the broadest possible fashion. It is democratizing the channels—and getting rid of the gatekeepers” (The Honourable Lloyd Axworthy “The Mouse is Mightier Than the Sword” 16).

“A priority goal . . . is the integration of web-content and delivery. The internet is seen as one of our most powerful tools for communications, membership growth and support and fundraising techniques” (Amnesty International’s “Summary of the International Secretariat’s Operational Plan” 20).

“The challenge for Amnesty has been to avoid turning its Web sites into sinkholes of information –where lengthy documents are stored and essentially forgotten. . . .AI materials must not only be available, but also must be easily accessible to a wide range of users from human rights professionals to lay persons. Both the IS and AI sections recognize that Amnesty’s content must be set within an interactive framework that anticipates user needs. ‘One stop surfers’ should be offered personally tailored means to deepen their commitments to, and understanding of, human rights” (Joanne Lebert, “Wiring Human Rights Activism” 213).

The development of global communications technologies has rapidly extended the range of resources NGOs can utilize to coordinate their membership base, publicize their human rights reporting and campaigns, and develop their memberships. AI’s member activism utilizes a broad range of technologies, from pre-scripted phone calls to officials of members’ home governments, faxes to offending governments, and standard mail letters, to emails, internet petitions, and internet post cards. Key to increasing the international scope and the speed of human rights advocacy has been the development of NGO websites, which serve as both coordinating sites for networks of activists and as
information clearinghouses for NGO reports, media, and campaign materials. International NGOs like AI have utilized their websites to publicly launch international campaigns, like their *Stop Violence Against Women* campaign, and to sustain and develop these long-running campaigns across international borders. As larger NGOs like AI have expanded their mandate to include a larger range of human rights issues, subgroups of activists have developed around key human rights issues. AI and its national sections have utilized their organizational websites to construct communicative spaces for these groups of activists and to coordinate activists working on issues as diverse as arms control to the expansion and reform of the international justice system.

This chapter analyzes the visual rhetoric of Amnesty International’s web genres and multi-modal genres, paying special attention to the rhetorical strategies and genre conventions that they utilize to frame human rights activism. Multi-modal genres utilize, according to Gunther Kress, “a new code at work which consists of both verbal and visual elements, which are utilized in specialized ways” (“Internationalisation and Globalisation” 194). For Kress, these genres are indicators of the necessity of utilizing visual elements in order to more rapidly disseminate large amounts of information in an increasingly global culture:

an economy based on information may in any case have much greater need of the different representational and communicational potentials of visual modes. The spatial semiotic of visual images may be able to deal with large amounts of information much more effectively than writing can do. Images are highly effective at displaying complex relations between elements of visually
represented information, quite likely more effective in aiding the handling of this information by reader/viewer. (194)

Central to this chapter’s argument is an analysis of AI’s organizational websites as a multi-modal genre that is structured to emphasize the rhetorical presence of AI as a campaign-based NGO. Following the rhetorical approach to website analysis utilized by Anne Frances Wysocki in her “The Multiple Media of Texts: How Onscreen and Paper Texts Incorporate Words, Images, and Other Media,” I analyze Amnesty International’s main organizational website, documenting how its generic form creates visual hierarchies of genres that emphasize AI’s public identity as a human rights campaigning organization. A comparative analysis of AI’s organizational website with that of its main US based competitor and collaborator Human Rights Watch emphasizes how the genre hierarchies of non-membership based human rights NGOs emphasize more readily their professional discourse and publications.

AI has also utilized expanding communications technologies to develop multi-modal, multi-media activist genres, which have been utilized for world wide-appeals on systematic human rights abuses like the Darfur crisis. Drawing on the seminal work of Kress on the role of multi-modal genres in facilitating the reading and writing process, I will look specifically at AI’s synthesis of verbally based activist genres with multi-media audio and visual modes, analyzing the role that these genres play in framing human rights exigencies and in facilitating human rights activism. These genres play an important role in aligning visitors to AI’s websites with the aims of its leverage and accountability politics, as well as in framing opportunities for non-members to join AI’s activist collective. The chapter concludes by looking at what Shayne Weyker has termed “the
ironies of information technology," which extend human rights activism and the human rights movement to a limited number of industrialized nations and problematize the role of western NGOs in representing human rights victims.

In addition to constructing virtual spaces for member activism, NGO websites have also increased the speed of membership mobilization and discursive activism.\(^\text{51}\) Informational Communications Technologies (ICTs) such as email have allowed NGOs like Amnesty to facilitate email letter-writing campaigns that are instantly distributed to officials of target governments, rapidly constructing the presence of international awareness of human rights violations. As chapter four has illustrated, the utilization of AI and AIUSA’s online actions has also altered the composing process of human rights letter-writers through the development of interactive sample letters that can be converted into collaborative genres that blend the personal appeals of AI’s members with organizational recommendations and legal/political background knowledge. The online action genres developed by AI and its sections have made it possible to send an appeal letter to an offending government, an IGO such as the United Nations, or to administrative officials of intervening governments within minutes of receiving an email.

---

\(^{51}\) Joanne Lebert in “Wiring Human Rights Activism: Amnesty International and the Challenges of Information and Communications Technology” cites Amnesty’s 2001 letter writing campaign to the Guatemalan government on behalf of the human rights organization Guatemalan Centro de Accion Legel in Derechos Humanos as an example of the rapid distribution of research and its impact on the rapid coordination of activism. The organization “informed Amnesty that it was planning to launch a lawsuit against officials of the former military government of General Rios Montt for the massacre of over twelve hundred indigenous people in thirteen separate incidents in the 1980s. Because of this advance notice, AI was able to prepare and circulate by email, an embargoed statement and accompanying urgent letter-writing action in anticipation of threats to the security of CALDH staff. Upon CALDH’s news release, sections were given the electronic ‘green light’ from the IS to release Amnesty’s press release and action. Within hours, members from around the world began to flood the offices of Guatemalan authorities with appeal letters urging them to guarantee the security of those involved in the lawsuit” (211).
action alert\textsuperscript{52}. As members join specific national sections of AI, sectional websites have also served as mobilizing technologies for AI’s street level campaigning and as information centers for various AI events, rallies, and protests.\textsuperscript{53} A central aspect of Amnesty’s work as a professional public has also been the development of online training materials that further facilitate the discursive activism of members who write, call, and meet with members of their local and federal governments. AIUSA, Amnesty’s largest national section, for example, has utilized its website to offer online training programs for activists lobbying their state officials and the federal government, utilizing local activists to lead delegations to members of Congress\textsuperscript{54}. Individual activists and AI groups who live in areas where access to AI regional coordinators is limited are able to receive training and campaign materials rapidly and consistently. As a coordinating technology, AI’s websites are vital to the organization’s campaigns, serving to link geographically distant actors together in common discursive action while also working to bridge this geographical distance through the organization and publication of street-level human rights rallies.

While the internet has been a central tool in the sponsoring of activist literacy and the framing of activist campaigns, it has constructed opportunities for AI to expand its

\textsuperscript{52} There are no firm figures on the rate of response to AI’s and AIUSA’s online actions at this time, as neither AI nor AIUSA archive copies of activist letters or their governmental responses. As Joanne Lebert has argued, “The problem stems from the fact that, to date, AI really does not know, in any great detail, how authorities respond to electronic messages” (216).

\textsuperscript{53} AIUSA, for example, coordinated two Global Day for Darfur rallies in Washington, D.C.: one on September 21, 2004 and a more recent rally on 17 September, 2006.

\textsuperscript{54} See AIUSA’s Grassroots Lobbying: Online Training for the Darfur crisis: <http://darfur.amnestyusa.org/site/c.ggLLYOHKrF/b.2062295/k.42E6/Training_for_AIUSA_Lobby_Visits.htm>. This excellent program utilizes internet slide-shows and audio commentary, training videos, and a host of print materials—such as talking points—to ready AIUSA activists to meet with their Congressmen on the U.S. response to the Darfur Crisis.
membership base and to bring non-members into its activist campaigns. AI’s main organizational website has also utilized various communications technologies to sponsor opportunities for public activism on human rights issues that are open to non-members. The organization’s use of visual presentation technologies like Flash Media as well as its utilization of video footage to frame opportunities for online actions such as email letters, online petitions, and internet postcards has been groundbreaking in the NGO community. AI’s longstanding emphasis on providing a voice for the individual victim of human rights abuses, and AI’s cataloguing and reporting of human rights testimony, are reflected in these presentations, which give a human voice and face to the individuals represented in Amnesty’s campaigns in an effort to increase the moral obligation for activism.

NGOs and the Framing of Cyberactivist Communities

The role of cyberactivism in the politics of human rights has been significant and has held great promise for the growth of transnational advocacy networks. Over the past twelve years, NGOs like Amnesty International have utilized these technologies to coordinate activists through email and listservs, construct digital campaign forums for international campaigns, attract new members and donors, and construct new forms of activism. AI’s credibility and publicity as a leading human rights NGO has resulted in millions of visitors each year to its main organizational website, and Amnesty’s reports and campaigns appear continually on the homepages of smaller, non-consultative NGOs.

55 This period spans the opening of the internet to public access and the development of human rights NGO websites in 1994. AI’s main organizational homepage was launched in 1994 and since then has attracted more than 8 million visitors annually (Lebert 230).
The diffusion of AI reports and campaign materials has extended the range of network actors that AI has worked with on specific campaigns. Information technologies like email have also benefited AI’s campaign networks, coordinating activist campaigns and activism on urgent human rights crises much more rapidly than AI’s traditional mailings and group structures. Patti Whaley, former Director of Information Technology at AI’s International Secretariat, has argued in “Human Rights NGOs: Our Love-Hate Relationship with the Internet” that human rights NGOs like AI can draw upon internet technologies to obtain and disseminate human rights information more rapidly to coordinate their campaigns and contact members more efficiently, and to develop innovative new forms of activism (32-3). However, Whaley and others have also warned that while “there is no question that access to information is a precondition of the human rights struggle and that the Net is a great advantage in this regard. It is less apparent that information will in itself give people the wisdom to make appropriate decisions or the political will to carry them out” (33). As NGOs utilize informational communications technologies (ICTs), they must play the important role of not only providing information, but framing it strategically, dramatically, and accessibly.

NGOs like AI receive and produce an enormous amount of information on human rights issues and can be both the victims and sources of what Sottas and Schonveld have called “information overload” (77). Sottas and Schonveld argue that the relatively low costs of producing information on the internet creates obstacles for NGOs, as this increase in information has to be filtered into recognizable opportunities for action. They state that, “As groups are flooded with information it becomes increasingly necessary to be able to weed out or edit lower quality documents, ensure that action is coordinated,
that the source is accurate, that follow-up is completed, and that processing is done
effectively” (79). Human rights NGOs and human rights professionals face the
enormously difficult task of translating the enormous amount of information on specific
human rights issues into effective and accessible opportunities for activism. Metzl, in
“Information Technology and Human Rights” has pointed to role of information
processing as one of the key activities of human rights NGOs: “One of the critical
functions of which international human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs)
like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch perform is collectors, filterers,
translators, and presenters of information regarding alleged violations” (706). These
textual processes are central to the framing of Amnesty’s online activism and campaigns,
which frame and selectively filter the vast amount of information from AI reports, IGOs,
human rights victims, and other NGOs in order to construct focused, accessible activist
campaigns and action. As I have argued in chapter four, this process of filtering is key to
AI’s ability to sponsor the literacy and discursive activism of activists, who must be
aligned with AI’s specific objectives for the action, the background of the conflict
specific to the action, the appropriate genres and generic conventions for the action, and
the specific audience of the action.

Since the development of most NGO websites in the mid-nineties, NGOs like AI
have developed integrated strategies for creating online environments capable of linking
member activists to campaign information, serving as research archives for human rights
researchers, fostering networks and coalitions between NGOs and other organizations,
and drawing in new members and activists. However, the impact of online human rights
campaigning and its role in fostering effective public discourse are often difficult to
measure and raise interesting questions about the types of communities and collectives possible in online environments. In particular, the role of the internet in framing information on human rights abuses in ways that galvanize broader public discourse and activism is still a matter for debate. Amnesty International has traditionally fostered the development of local groups that take part in the campaigns of their national sections and inform their local communities about Amnesty’s concerns. The growth of activist forums like AIUSA’s Online Action Center, while resulting in the growth of AIUSA’s activist community, raises questions about the role that cyberactivism could potentially play in undermining these local structures. As McCaughey and Ayers have argued, the formation of “collective identity” in online protest movements raises difficult questions about the formation of discursive communities that link activists to “common concerns, a common enemy, and, typically, a common space” (8). In addition, the sustained commitment of activists to NGO campaigns raises and the frequency with which activists act on campaigns is more difficult to discern online and raises difficulties in outlining the community structures of online activists.

Further complicating the role the internet plays in NGO campaigns are the difficulties in measuring the effects of online activism. The continuing occurrence of wide-scale human rights abuses and the lack of intervention by the international community have gone on despite the proliferation of human rights information. While scholars and NGO professionals have held out great hope for the use of internet technology to respond more rapidly and preventatively to human rights crises, crimes against humanity, genocide, and other wide-scale human rights abuses have challenged the causality between the presence of information and action. The Rwandan genocide has
become a touchstone in many critiques of the global communications revolution’s potential to galvanize international action through the provision of information. Metzl has argued that “as the Rwandan case demonstrates, the technology of satellite communications and electronic media can facilitate the provision and transfer of information, but can do less to determine what impact this information will have” (708). Whaley, also citing the Rwandan genocide as an example, argues that, “although information is a necessary tool in the basic struggle for justice, it may not be sufficient to inspire those in relative comfort to exert themselves on behalf of others” (33). NGOs play an important role in the provision of information to high-level human rights institutions and the internet has the potential to more rapidly disseminate this information to key audiences in these institutions. However, the information politics facilitated by the internet must also be translated into forms of political leverage and accountability that are capable of generating action.

Amnesty International’s web strategy has enabled it to address the issues of online community and the effectiveness of online protests by creating both virtual spaces for its campaigns and virtual forums for human rights activism, while fostering ties between these activities and national and local Amnesty groups. National sections like AIUSA have developed strategies such as online Member Forums, or discussion lists, that link local Amnesty activists to other activists in AIUSA’s national section, facilitating discussion and planning of human rights events and local activism. In addition, AIUSA has worked towards the creation of “an internet subcommittee to explore ways to increase online activism and to bring online activists and the rest of AIUSA closer together” (Membership Mobilization Blueprint 32). Organizational homepages are often key texts
in framing the public persona of human rights NGOs and in providing potential activists with opportunities to address pressing human rights concerns. The *Amnesty International Campaign Handbook* lists this as one the primary uses of electronic communication by AI: “Action appeals can be put on the Internet to generate a worldwide response and get people interested in joining AI” (52). The analysis below looks at the visual rhetoric of Amnesty International’s organizational homepage and the role it has in framing AI’s public ethos as a campaign based, international community of human rights activists. AI’s homepage is cybergenre that interactively frames AI’s organizational ideology while orienting users towards dynamic forms of human rights activism.

**Amnesty International’s Organizational Homepage and the Visual Presence of Campaigning**

Rhetorical studies of internet communications have documented the appearance of newer forms of web based textuality and have documented the formation of webgenres, arguing for the role that hypertext is playing in reshaping and expanding current conceptions of genre. In addition, studies of *cyber-activism* and *cyber-protest* have documented the role of the internet in fashioning virtual publics capable of quickly mobilizing national and transnational advocacy campaigns. In “Internet Protests, from

---

56 For more quantitative and qualitative approaches, see especially the work of Yates and Orlikowski, who develop a key distinction between communication medium and genre in their 1992 article “Genres of Organizational Communication: A Structurational Approach to Studying Communication and Media” and provide empirical studies of web-based genres in their “Explicit and Implicit Structuring of Genres in Electronic Communication: Reinforcement and Change of Social Interaction.” For current applications of this work, see Kevin Crowston and Marie William’s “Reproduced and Emergent Genres of Communication on the World Wide Web,” and Andrew Dillon and Barbara Gushrowski’s “Genres and the WEB: Is the Personal Home Page the First Uniquely Digital Genre?”.

57 See especially Martha McCaughey and Michael D. Ayer’s collection *Cyberactivism: Online Activism in*
Texts to Web,” Laura Gurak and John Logie have argued that speed and scope are major factors in the success of online campaigns: “‘Our review suggests that most online protests far outstrip their print counterparts in terms of speed and reach. Internet protest efforts are often measured in days and hours, whereas paper-based protest efforts move no faster than postal carriers or community activists” (45). Gurak and Logie warn, however, that “this speed is achieved at the expense of the kinds of verification and vetting that have often been applied in paper-based contexts. . . . Indeed, the nonhierarchical nature of the Internet often makes it difficult to establish what could or should constitute meaningful participation in a protest action” (45). As a professional public with a large online activist base, AI has intertextually coordinated its activist campaigns with the credibility of its professional human rights reporting and high-level advocacy, a textual practice which links campaigns to a high standard of verification. The criteria of “meaningful participation” in AI’s online campaigns, however, need to be more fully explored. As I argued in chapter four, AI’s activist genre system is framed through a set of bridging genres that align member activists with the specific audiences, genre conventions, organizational discourses, and recommended actions of Amnesty’s professional reporting and high-level advocacy. Activist genres embody and reproduce recognizable activist identities for the member activists who utilize them and underline Amnesty’s organizational ideology. Thus, the term “meaningful participation” takes on two layers of meaning: being meaningful in terms of an NGO’s mandate, organizational ideology, and objectives and being meaningful in terms of the activist identities available to potential activists.

Theory an Practice for an overview of the major trends in research on online activism.
While the role of genre in the structuring of AI activists’ agency and organizational identity has been documented in earlier chapters it is essential to also document the role of AI’s public ethos and organizational discourse in drawing non-members into its campaigns and into its membership. AI’s emphasis on campaigning and the innovative, multi-modal genres it has utilized to frame online actions available to the general public are central to increasing public awareness of and participation in the Amnesty movement. Amnesty’s public role as a mass-membership, campaign-based NGO rather than as an high-level, research-based NGO is reflected in the visual form of its organizational website. AI’s website creates a visual hierarchy of genres that creates a dominant rhetorical presence for its campaign genres, visually subordinating AI’s professional human rights reports to immediate opportunities for human rights activism. As Yates, Orlikowski, and Okamura have argued in their study of electronic genres, “A genre established within a particular community serves as an institutionalized form of social interaction—an organizing structure—that shapes the ongoing communicative action of members through their use of it for social interaction within the community” (84). Through a range of graphic and textual features, AI’s organizational homepage serves as a cybergenre that hyper-textually cues users towards AI campaign activities and visually reflects AI’s organizational vision of itself as a campaign-based NGO whose research is integrated into concrete opportunities for activism. The spatial relationship of the genres organized on AI’s central homepage shows striking differences to that of

---

58 I am drawing the term “rhetorical presence” from Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca. For Perelman and Tyteca, presence in rhetorical practice can be observed by the selective presentation of specific elements of argumentation: “By the very fact of selecting certain elements and presenting them to the audience, their importance and pertinency to the discussion are implied. Indeed, such a choice endows these elements with a presence” (116).
Human Rights Watch, which is not a mass-membership based NGOs and whose emphasis is more centrally focused on research and media shaming. The spatial-textual conventions of these websites create genre hierarchies that clearly reflect the organizational mission and ideology of each NGO. Figure 5.1 illustrates the visual AI’s organizational website is divided into four spatial fields: (1) the AI banner and links to organizational resources and publications that frame the topmost section of the page, (2) the text links to “Latest News” and “Latest Reports” that are framed in a blue text-box on the left side of the screen, (3) the center page, which utilizes visual icons and photographs to frame campaign news and online activist opportunities, and (4) the graphic links to AI campaigns that are framed on the right side of the screen. These spatial fields organize key genres of AI’s genre repertoire and create a visual hierarchy of genres that clearly emphasizes AI’s organizational ethos as a campaign-based NGO. This hierarchy can be observed through the visual presence created by AI’s hypertext links to campaigns and online activism. In the first spatial field, AI’s organizational resources have direct links to online action (“Act Now”) and AI’s human rights news (“News”), but contain no direct links to AI’s current human rights reports. Users wanting to access human rights reports and documents from AI’s high-level advocacy in this field must link to AI’s “Library” and then choose the country or theme from an interactive menu that then links to a full listing (usually from 1996 to the present) of AI’s reports, high-level advocacy genres, and press releases on the specific issue. The second spatial field provides direct

---

59 As I documented in the third chapter of this study, this contrast in organizational objectives comes from HRW itself: “‘Amnesty International is a mass-membership organization. Mobilization of those members is the organization's central advocacy tool. Human Rights Watch’s principal advocacy strategy is to shame offenders by generating press attention and to exert diplomatic and economic pressure on them by enlisting influential governments and institutions’ (“Frequently Asked Questions”).
Figure 5.1 Amnesty International’s Organizational Homepage
links to the “Latest News” and “Latest Reports,” but only reflects the most recently published media-genres and human rights reports and does not organize them by specific issue or theme. Two key elements of this spatial field subordinate it to the campaign and activism links that dominate the site. The visual distinction of this field is emphasized by the muted blue color of the text box that frames it (in contrast to the vivid white that covers the rest of the site) and the lack of visual icons that link the news items and recent reports. In addition, the links to “Latest News” and “Latest Reports” are placed in a smaller type-face than the links to specific campaigns and online actions. Both of these visual elements serve to frame the spatial field with less urgency than those that contain AI’s campaign and activist links.

AI’s center page is visually the most dominant spatial field of the site and often the most visually complex in terms of the icons, photographs, and other visual elements that frame AI’s campaign and activist links. The campaign and activist links that occupy this center page are set apart from the other spatial fields through the size of their visual icons and through the size of the bold typeface that frames the hypertext link. Users have the option of clicking on either the photo or visual icon or this bold typeface to link directly to AI’s campaigns or online activism. Photographs are often employed alongside hypertext links in this spatial field that encapsulate or reflect specific campaign issues or human rights exigencies. In Figure 5.1, for example, the second photograph in this spatial field shows a group of Vietnamese cyber dissidents working online, with an action link directly below it that calls on visitors to “Free Vietnamese cyber dissidents!” When contrasted to the muted color and regular typeface of the spatial field that contains AI’s latest news and reports, the visual and textual elements in this field construct a sense of
rhetorical and visual urgency. Online action links are also given a sense of rhetorical urgency through their utilization of imperative statements, such as “Act Now,” or (as in Figure 5.1) statements such as “Get Online for Freedom of Expression.” The coordination of the visual icons and images with the large bold typeface and central position of this spatial field clearly illustrate the dominant visual presence of Amnesty’s campaigns and activism on its organizational website.

The graphic hypertext links to Amnesty’s campaigns in the right-most spatial field work similarly, framing the current campaigns that AI desires to emphasize to its global audience. These visually framed hypertext links direct users to specific AI campaign pages that offer opportunities for online activism, as well as opportunities to read specific news and human rights reports significant to the campaign. A key example in Figure 5.1 is the hypertext link “Crisis in Sudan,” which uses a visual image of a Darfuri woman in anguish in order to frame AI’s international campaign. Images of individual victims utilized for these links reflect AI’s organizational emphasis on “effective action for the individual victim” (Statute of Amnesty International), as well placing a human image onto what are often abstract human rights exigencies. From this campaign link, for example, users are taken to AI’s Darfur crisis page, which currently has a central spatial field framed by opportunities for signing public petitions in support of UN peacekeepers, photographs of individual victims, first-hand testimonies of the human rights violations they have suffered, and further opportunities for action. The visual dominance of AI’s campaign and activist programs in the spatial fields of its organizational homepage clearly reflect AI’s public persona as a campaign based organization. As a professional public or mass-membership based NGO, AI faces the
task of drawing new members into opportunities for activism and membership, and AI’s organizational home page orients readers towards the genre systems of its campaigns in order to utilize the site for the growth of its activist base.

Human Rights Watch’s homepage presents an interesting organizational contrast to Amnesty’s campaign emphasis. As Claude Welch has observed in his comparison of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, “Human Rights Watch cannot claim the geographic breadth and citizen support of Amnesty International. HRW has nonetheless scored significant successes in its twenty-year history, the result in large part of its effective, focused research, its media savvy, and its major roles in several NGO coalitions” (101). As a centralized, research-based NGO, Human Rights Watch has nevertheless sponsored letter-writing actions on human rights exigencies, including a long-running letter-writing campaign on the crisis in Darfur. However, because of its lack of a coordinated membership base and national sections, these campaigns are primarily posted on HRW’s website and are not distributed to specific collectives of activists. In contrast to AI’s homepage, HRW’s main homepage is visually and textually dominated by its major publications, which are most often human rights reports, press releases, public statements, and multi-media genres such as Audio Commentaries and videos on specific human rights issues. As Figure 5.2 illustrates, the spatial fields of HRW’s website and their visual elements are designed to construct the dominant presence of HRW’s professional genres. HRW’s homepage is divided into five major spatial fields: (1) the Blue HRW Banner and Search Box that frames the top of the screen, (2) the organizational links that are framed in the blue hypertext menu at the left side of the
Figure 5.2 Human Rights Watch Organizational Homepage
screen, (3) the center page, which utilizes photographic and multi-media links to HRW media genres and human rights reports, (4) the donation link and “Latest News” textbox that frame the right side of the screen, and (5) a section not captured in Figure 5.2 that advertises HRW’s book-length reports and studies for purchase. In contrast to AI’s campaign focus, there are often no direct links to opportunities for human rights activism on HRW’s webpage. Activists seeking to engage in letter-writing or to sign public petitions on human rights issues must click on the “Get Involved” hypertext link in the rightmost spatial field and then from the next page click on a small type-face link with the generic title “Take Action.” The center spatial field reflects the rhetorical presence of HRW’s professional reports and media genres by framing them with large visual elements (on most HRW pages these are photographs) that accompany the large, bold typeface hyperlinks to HRW reports and press releases. In Figure 5.2, the first subsection of center spatial field contains links to HRW’s full-length country report on Burundi, as well as a variety of subgenres of this report, such as a “Report Summary” and a link to HRW’s press releases entitled “More on Burundi.” This first subjection of the center spatial field emphasizes the visual presence of new HRW reports, while the subsection directly below it normally contains HRW press releases and multi-modal media genres. The spatial organization of the third subsection of this center spatial field is organized around hypertext links to press releases and public statements HRW has developed for the major regions of the world that HRW covers. The small typeface of these links and their position towards the bottom of the homepage emphasizes the scope of HRW’s current human rights news coverage. Three hypertext links to press releases for each region are presented under a blue hypertext link that directs users to HRW’s main
webpage for the region. The spatial and visual organization of AI and HRW’s genres reflects two distinct rhetorical presences on their homepages. While AI’s subordinates the size, format, and amount of hypertext links to human rights reports to those of its campaigns and opportunities for online activism, HRW’s homepage emphasizes the international scope of its media coverage, and the publication of its professional human rights reports over direct links to its human rights campaigns.

In order to more fully document the analysis above, Table 5.1 presents the occurrence of professional and activist genres on AI and HRW’s website over a six year period. Utilizing a random sample drawn from a six year period of AI and HRW’s archived home pages, Table 5.1 tabulates the average and median number of direct links to four major genres in 20 AI and HRW homepages: Press Releases/News, Human Rights Reports/Publications, Campaign Websites, and Online Actions. These samples were drawn from the Internet Archive, which keeps selected digital archives of all internet pages on the web from 1996 to the present. While this table cannot reflect the visual transformations that have taken place over the last six years of AI and HRW websites, it provides a glimpse at the relationship between the visual primacy placed on specific genres and the relationship of these genres to NGO organizational ideologies. The comparison highlighted in Table 5.1 illustrates the emphasis placed upon specific genres by the rate of direct links given to them AI and HRW’s organizational homepages. The visual presence of these genres on AI and HRW’s homepages is illustrative of the

---

60 The Internet Archive has utilized the Freedom of Information Act to archive a massive amount of web-documents and web pages. Sources were accessed by utilizing its main archive search engine “The Wayback Machine,” which provides dated listings of websites archived. (<http://www.archive.org/index.php>). See Terry Ryan, Richard H.G. Field, and Lorne Offman’s “Homepage Genre Dimensionality” for another example of a rhetorical genre study that utilizes this source.
Table 5.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hyper-text Links By Genre and Purpose</th>
<th>Average No. of Links</th>
<th>Median No. of Links</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Amnesty International</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press Releases/News</td>
<td>6.35</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights Reports</td>
<td>5.15</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>2/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign Websites</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Activism</td>
<td>5.15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2/7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Human Rights Watch</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press Releases/News</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5/26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights Reports</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1/15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign Websites</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Activism</td>
<td>.065</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0/2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
mandate and discursive activity system of each organization, and further underlines the
distinction between AI (as a member-based, activist NGO) and HRW (as a NGO focused
more intensely on human rights reporting, high-level advocacy, and media campaigns).

AI and HRW’s organizational websites are cybergenres that act as visual
embodiment of the organizational structures of each movement, functioning as an
interactive, “institutionalized form of social interaction” (Yates, Orlikowski, Okamura 18). As Devitt has argued, “the relation of group and genre is reciprocal . . . the group’s
values, epistemology, and power relationships shape the genres and that acting through
those genres in turn then maintains those same values, epistemology, and power
relationships” (Writing Genres 63). The visual rhetorical analysis and the quantitative
analysis above suggest that as hyper-linked documents organizational websites can reveal
the social relationships, values, and ideologies of specific organizations through the
visual emphasis and prominence they place on specific genres. AI’s activist, campaign-
based organizational and discursive strategies are reflected in the constant presence of
links to online activism on its website, while HRW’s organizational emphasis on human
rights reports and media-shaming strategies is reflected in the lack of lack of online
activist opportunities present on its website and its higher rate of human rights reports
and press releases. HRW does sponsor a significant number of human rights campaigns,
but opportunities to take action in these campaigns are largely confined to HRW’s
organizational website and often provide less coordinated forms of activism. AI’s
campaigns, by contrast, offer members the opportunity to join campaigns and to be called
to action through coordinated contact with AI. This coordination is significant in that it
allows AI to foster the sustained activism of its members.
Amnesty International’s Multi-modal Action Genres and the Power of Human Rights Testimony

AI’s website has created a virtual activist space capable of distilling the vast array of human rights reports, media genres, and high-level advocacy genres into accessible and recognizable opportunities for human rights activism. While members of national sections like AIUSA often take part in coordinated activist campaigns through local Amnesty groups or through the email alert systems of AIUSA’s Urgent Action and Online Action networks, AI has developed innovative forms of public activism that are accessible to all visitors of its homepage. These actions often involve multi-modal genres that utilize various visual and textual elements to dramatically frame human rights exigencies and calls for activism. As Gunther Kress has argued, multi-modal communication that utilizes new media technologies has redefined previous text based definitions of genre and has challenged scholars to rethink literacy as textual practices move from “book and page to screen” (5). Kress argues that new media “make it easy to use a multiplicity of modes, and in particular the mode of image—still or moving—as well as other modes. . . .They change, through their affordances, the potentials for representational and communicational action by their users” (5). For Kress, multimedia, multimodal genres involve their users in interactive discursive environments:

“Interactivity has at least two aspects: one is broadly interpersonal, for instance, in that the user can ‘write back’ to the producer of a text with no difficulty. . . .and it permits the user to enter into an entirely new relation with other texts—the notion of hypertextuality. The one has an effect on social power directly, the other has an effect on semiotic power, and through that on social power less immediately” (5). Amnesty International’s multi-
modal activist genres synthesize the modes of video, flash media, and pictoral slide-shows with textual commentary and interactive links to Amnesty’s letter-writing, internet petition, and internet post-card campaigns. In this sense, multi-modal, multi-media genres link potential activists to the text-based forms of discursive activism that AI has traditionally employed throughout its campaigns.

AI’s multi-modal genres link potential activists to the *leverage* and *accountability* politics of AI’s human rights activism, aligning activists with letter-writing campaigns and internet petitions that call on offending governments and the international community to intervene in human rights crises. These actions extend the moral leverage exerted through AI’s campaigns by enlisting visitors to AI’s homepage in actions designed to illustrate the political will of a the global public for action on human rights crises. In addition, the utilization of human rights testimony in these genres serves to frame the human rights violations of offending governments in terms of international accountability. Testimony frames activism within the context of individual narratives of need and suffering that serve as counter-discourses to the official denials of offending governments. As Karen Dwyer has argued, Amnesty’s use of testimony offers a powerful counter-discourse to government denials of human rights abuses: “Witness testimony bridges the discursivity of the silenced victim, who is deprived of an ability to speak and the government’s version of ‘reality’ that refutes human rights abuse charges or impugns evidence of abuse” (79). Government counter-claims to AI’s human rights reports have, as Cohen has argued, the ability to lock NGOs and offending governments in “ritualistic patterns of claim, counterclaims, and repeated claims” (519-20). Multi-modal activist genres that draw on the immediate presence of victim testimony can
therefore play a key role in the public accountability politics needed to circumvent this cycle of claims that occurs in high-level institutions.

Figure 5.3 is an example of Amnesty’s multi-modal framing of the Darfur crises that utilizes the power of firsthand testimony from refugees along the Chad-Sudanese border to link visitors to AI’s petition for a strong UN peacekeeping force in Darfur. Utilizing an edited set of video sequences, this genre sequences the oral testimonies of women fleeing Darfur with images of Darfuri women fleeing the Janjaweed militias, video testimony from a victim of Janjaweed attacks, brief text-based background information on the conflict, and a text-based call to sign Amnesty’s online petition for UN peacekeepers. In addition, the video sequences and testimonies of Darfuri women are followed by a video statement by actor Don Cheadle, who played Paul Rusebegina in the film *Hotel Rwanda*, symbolically linking the Darfur crises to the Rwandan genocide of 1994. Figure 5.3 illustrates the utilization of firsthand testimony in this multi-modal genre alongside the images of fleeing Darfuri women and children. The visual sequencing of the final frames of the video is significant, as it textually links the images and victim testimonies utilized in the video to the larger conflict of the Darfur crisis, framing both the broader human rights exigency and calling on viewers to address this exigency through AI’s online activism. The final frame of the video presents a black screen with AI’s call to activism in a large white typeface: “Sign the petition and put pressure on the UN to send peacekeeping forces to Darfur NOW!” The spatial field framing the video player is framed by hypertext link utilizing that utilizes the visual icon of the blue helmet worn by UN peacekeepers.

The online petition linked to this genre is also a multi-modal genre that utilizes
Figure 5.3 Amnesty International Multimodal Activist Genre Segment
Flash Animation in order to visually represent the impact of online activism in securing the presence of UN Peacekeepers in Darfur. Figure 5.4 illustrates the multi-modal framing of this petition and the visual rhetoric that it utilizes to encourage activism. The petition is framed by the imperative statement “Protect the People of Darfur” and by a short background paragraph describing the urgency for a UN peacekeeping force: “Despite a UN resolution calling for Peacekeepers for the battle-torn area of Darfur (West Sudan), there is still no adequate protection for the thousands of civilians who are being subjected to killings, rape and displacement from their homes.” Upon signing the petition electronically, a blue helmet rises above the map of Sudan and is then placed within the Darfur region, visually representing the objectives of the action. The link “Tell a Friend” brings up a screen where the petition can be forwarded to others via email, thus extending the range of the individual action while also extending AI’s membership potential.

The generic intertextuality between the multi-modal action genre that frames this petition and the petition itself underscores AI’s rhetoric of direct action. The testimony of Darfuri women in the multi-modal genre dramatically frames the human rights exigency and the urgency of the action, while the visual sequencing of the genre directs users to the action necessary to address the exigency. In this sense, they play an important role in AI’s information politics in that they “call attention to issues, or even create issues by using language that dramatizes and draws attention to their concerns” (Keck and Sikkink 20). Through their use of victim testimony, multi-modal action genres frame the complex human rights exigencies described in Amnesty’s reports within a humanizing rhetoric that creates a moral obligation for action.
Figure 5.4 Amnesty International Multimodal Petition
Testimony, as it is contextualized in these genres, is utilized differently than in AI’s human rights reports, which utilize testimony to dramatize human rights violations within narratives of legal culpability under international law. Within these genres, human rights testimony is often contextualized within a “just the facts approach,” which omits the “performative dimensions of the speech act” (Wilson 146). Wilson argues that that, “Over time, it appears that private narratives on abuse have themselves transformed according to how human rights workers textualise them” (146). Multi-modal action genres offer great promise for mediating between the performative dimensions of testimony and the framing of this testimony for human rights campaigns. Rather than being used to document human rights abuses, multi-modal action genres draw on the visual presence of human rights victims in order to emphasize the necessity of intervening to stop the abuses they describe. This process does not preclude the selectivity that often occurs when human rights professionals contextualize these testimonies. Human rights testimony raises problems in terms of its contextualization by human rights professionals and its textual representations of human rights victims. As Keck and Sikkink argue, transnational advocacy networks may “filter the testimony through expatriates, through traveling scholars . . ., or through the media. There is frequently a huge gap between the story’s original telling and the retellings—in its sociocultural context, its instrumental meaning, and even in its language” (19). However, the presentation of direct testimony that these genres utilize perhaps allows for less textual interference than the process of filtering and contextualization that Keck and Sikkink describe. Given the highly visual culture that dominates global capitalism, the potential of multi-modal action genres for galvanizing discursive activism is great.
Conclusion

This chapter has documented the role of Amnesty’s multi-modal, multi-media genres in creating online discursive forums for potential human rights activists. While the potential role that cyberactivists play in Amnesty’s activist community is great, AI has recognized the political and economic inequities that often separate cyberactivists from the victims they are representing. Information communication technologies have allowed NGOs to exert the pressure of their reporting, advocacy, and activism more rapidly and have decreased the distance between human rights offenders and international scrutiny. However, the extent to which the benefits of information communications technologies extend outside of well-funded western NGOs raises several difficult problems. Shane Weyker, in his study of the benefits and dangers of ICTs for NGOs, has argued that while information technologies have increased the potential advocacy of NGOs, they also have the potential to create communicative inequities between NGOs and local human rights groups or groups of individual victims. Drawing on the work of Clifford Bob, Weyker argues that a group seeking international attention for their human rights claims must often possess “the ability to present its case abroad; knowledge of the developed world; skill in a major world language; pre-existing contacts with people in the press; and universal rather than parochial goals” (124). The necessity of these capabilities produces a clear division between NGOs and those they represent: “International NGO’s professional staff have all of the above qualities, while oppressed groups in developing countries will typically only have some of them” (124). In countries where there is a large degree of political oppression, even groups who possess these qualities are often unable to frame their cases internationally. The Government of
Sudan’s oppression of the Sudan Development Organization and the imprisonment of its key personnel is just one example among many of the difficulty of NGOs to access in oppressive regimes.

Economically underdeveloped nations also pose problems for local groups and NGOs who seek to make their human rights claims known internationally. Patti Whaley has argued that economic development creates a difficult dilemma for those who argue for the power of the Internet to spread human rights norms globally. Whaley states, One often hears that online access in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East is developing rapidly. While this may be true, access still tends to be available primarily to Westernized, educated, urban and commercial sectors of every country. This follows an economic pattern seen in many developing countries, where wealth concentrates in a relatively small portion of the population, while the rural poor are excluded from the benefit of technological advancement, therein lies the dilemma: it is precisely those communities in greatest need of empowerment that are least likely to have access to the internet” (38)

The digital divide between many human rights victims and western NGOs makes it necessary to consider the range of human rights victims whose stories are not brought to international attention. This divide also has implications for those who study the rhetoric of human rights NGOs. An essential question for study is whether the genre repertoires that structure advocacy and activism in these campaigns also construct and reproduce these communicative inequities. I will turn to this question in the following chapter, arguing that studies of professional publics must also address the discursive issues surrounding the selective process by which NGOs choose specific human rights
exigencies for their campaigns.
Chapter Five: Professional Publics, Technical Rationality, and the Public

Accessibility of Human Rights Discourse

“The world is divided into parts by differences in policy which reflect basic differences in whatever is said about science, morals, politics, or art. These differences of meaning are insuperable unless they are treated in their practical dimension. The fundamental problem of communication and cooperation is whether common action to common ends in a world community depends on doctrinal agreement or whether common understanding can determine to what extent doctrinal are merely different modes of stating mutually consistent positions and to what extent they entail mutually exclusive objectives and manners of action” (Richard McKeon, “Freedom and History” 166-7).

“The interdisciplinary role of rhetoric, then, would approximate the role some have ascribed to theory: an opening of what appears private in disciplines to public scrutiny and to public accountability. This task could be described as ‘public-making’: making public or visible, opening to a variety of perspectives and judgments, but also the interdisciplinary fashioning of new publics, new instances of judgment, new collective viewpoints” (Bruce Robbins Secular Vocations: Intellectuals, Professionalism, and Culture 116).

“In any case, it is absurd to expect the public, because it is called in no matter how eulogistic a sense the state, to rise above the intellectual level of its average constituents” (John Dewey, The Public and Its Problems 378).

I have argued in this dissertation that professional discourse plays a significant role in shaping forums for human rights activism and that this role challenges scholars to more fully analyze the varying levels of agency, access, and rhetorical competence that are loosely grouped under terms such as transnational civil society and the global public. A central aspect of this analysis is, I have suggested, the role of genres in dynamically shaping the social structures of activism within human rights institutions and the role of professional discourse in mediating between the varying rhetorical capacities of human rights professionals and grassroots activists. As activists take part in the virtual communities of human rights NGOs, they traverse the highly technical discourse of
human rights institutions and are enculturated within institutional structures that embody and reinforce NGO ideologies and structures of power. Genres, as typified rhetorical structures, structure this process of enculturation and serve as a bridge between the institutional contexts of NGOs and the rhetorical contexts of activists. The complexity of human rights exigencies and the dominance of human rights issues by legal and technical discourses have, as I have also suggested, made the study of professionally mediated activism a necessary element in the study of public discourse on human rights. In essence, I have attempted to map out intersections between activist discourse and the institutional context that frames and sponsors it.

While human rights issues are advanced by a variety of actors and social movements, I have suggested that the public spaces of human rights activism are perhaps best regarded as spaces that are shaped and defined by professional communities. These communities are dynamic and differing sites of organizational communication, and the study of organizational communication is central to understanding the relationships between the various NGOs, transnational advocacy networks, social movements, and individuals that make up the global public or transnational civil society. Professional publics such as human rights NGOs negotiate these relationships through an intensive process of textual transformation and mediation, which balances the technical discourses of human rights activism with the genre and background knowledges of human rights activists. As sponsors of activist literacy, NGOs also socialize activists into the ideologies and epistemologies that govern their practices, and NGOs such as Amnesty International exercise a strong degree of organizational control in the genres that they use to frame activist discourse. In this sense, the role of NGOs in developing a global public
or transnational civil society for human rights requires a far more extensive process of textual mediation than discussions of movement framing or discussions of institutional rhetoric and ideology have thus far implied.

The varying organizational structures of NGOs, the plurality of social movement organizations that deal in human rights, and the multiplicity of human rights exigencies makes generalized discussions of a human rights public or a transnational civil society for human rights problematic. Such discussions, I have argued, level out distinctions in power and agency within these institutions and often do not reflect the highly competitive field of human rights, where publicity becomes a legitimating force that NGOs utilize for leverage in domestic and international politics. In addition, by leveling out the agencies within these institutions, these discussions often gloss over the rhetorical strategies, literacies, and genres that define and separate the practices of human rights activists and professional advocates. My aim in this dissertation has been to suggest that an analysis of the genres of communication utilized by human rights NGOs, transnational advocacy networks, and social movements more concretely accounts for the agencies and identities of human rights publics. By focusing on the discourse of Amnesty International, perhaps the most widely influential professional human rights public, I have sought to illustrate that human rights activism requires intensive framing by NGO professionals and that this mediation raises compelling questions about the discursive agency of activists.

In this conclusion, I would like to read the genre analysis of this study against conceptions of the public sphere and transnational civil society in order to advocate for a more practice-centered analysis of the micro-politics of the organizations and institutions that make up the human rights movement. Rhetorical scholars and discourse analysts
have much to contribute to the study of NGOs, advocacy networks, and social movements in international politics. By being attuned to the concrete discursive practices of agents who advocate and act within these groups, scholars of rhetoric and discourse analysis can play an important role in mapping out the structures of power that shape and influence public discourse on human rights. Professional publics, like Amnesty International, have sought to mediate between the powerful, exclusionary institutions of human rights policy and law, aligning their members with concrete opportunities for activism. In doing so, they have played an important rhetorical role in opening up the disciplinarity of professional human rights advocacy to public scrutiny and fashioning important activist publics. I will call for and attempt to outline an extensive, collaborative, and comparative project of analyzing the discourses of the various organizations, movements, and agents that advocate for human rights and that shape transnational civil society. Such a project has the potential to more concretely define the power relationships that underlie the loose conceptions of the public and civil society. In addition, such a project will also open up avenues for more critical perspectives on the role of public activists in human rights discourse and the ideological terrain that they traverse as they engage in human rights activism. One important avenue for further research is analyzing the potential benefits and problems of activist discourse as it reproduces the ideological assumptions and social structures of NGOs. Another key assumption that this chapter engages is how the professional mediation of public discourse on political and moral issues such as human rights challenges scholars to redefine the boundaries and structures of the public or of civil society. Genre analysis provides an effective means for carrying out this process, as it is able to more fully
account for the relationship between discursive agents and their relationships to the changing local and international contexts of power that shape their discourse.

While rhetorical scholarship has been central to discussions of the role of public deliberation and the communicative practices of the public sphere, the study of international publics like NGOs by rhetorical scholars has only recently begun. Because of this, it is necessary to trace the current communicative paradigms utilized in interdisciplinary studies of human rights NGOs and social movements. Social movement theory has been particularly successful at identifying the discursive character of NGO campaigns and in outlining the ideologies and “collective action frames” that draw members to NGOs and that coordinate members for action (Benford and Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements” 614). The study of social movement frames offers important methodological tools for rhetorical analyses of social movements and NGOs. Drawing on the work of Marc Steinberg, I argue that frame theory’s conceptual understanding of language and discourse can be usefully expanded through studies of rhetorical genre. Rhetorical understandings of genre as social action are useful in mediating between frame theory’s division between frames and action. In addition, this chapter also points to the need for critical rhetorical analyses of the potential negative repercussions that come from NGO representations of human rights victims. Tracing current debates over the westernization of human rights, this chapter maps out several strands of inquiry into the role of international human rights NGOs as carriers of western norms and the potential harm that comes from reading these norms against local political cultures.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of the opportunities for critical praxis
that the study of professional publics provides for scholars of rhetoric. Professional publics offer scholars of rhetoric and discourse opportunities for critical and cooperative engagement with the NGOs, social movement organizations, and civil society groups that frame human rights discourse. A promising area for further research is the role of what Ellen Cushman has called “activist research methodologies” (“The Public Intellectual” 824) in the analysis of public discourse. These methodologies would involve scholars of rhetoric, discourse, and communication in mutually beneficial discussions with NGO and social movement practitioners on the public discourses of human rights. Activist research also offers a means of avoiding the dark-side of human rights professionalism addressed by critics of the human rights movement, where the discourse of human rights is dominated by technocratic and academic discourses that limit public access. Genre analysis, through its focus on the discursive communities and discursive agencies available to actors in specific contexts, provides an important methodology for activist research into contemporary public discourse on human rights, one that can read theorizations of the public against the concrete communicative spaces and rhetorical practices that shape actually existing networks of public activists.

**Normative Models of Human Rights Discourse and Discursive Agency**

Human rights discourses are often highly normative, drawing on the force of normative declarations and human rights instruments that seek to outline a set of international values, liberties, and duties for the behavior of nation-states towards their citizens. The normative grounds of human rights discourse has produced a tendency in human rights scholarship to draw upon normative theories of discourse to characterize the
development of a transnational civil society for human rights. On this point, the work of Jürgen Habermas has been immensely influential, and has emerged as a dominant communicative paradigm for discussions of human rights and public discourse. In this section, I trace the influence of Habermas’s discourse principle on discussions of human rights discourse and transnational civil society and trace out the problematic aspects of his theory of discourse for the analyses of human rights NGOs. Habermas’s theoretical model of the influence of rational public communication on structures of political power has informed this study through its analysis of the role of civil society in mobilizing a non-technical public sphere over questions of political administration and policy. In addition, Habermas’s insistence that public will must be aligned with the structures of institutional power in order to produce “political power” is also born out in this study’s analysis of Amnesty International’s bridging genres, which align activists with powerful, institutional audiences (Between Facts and Norms 363). This study can also be seen to support Habermas’s description of the increasing “paternalistic monopolies on knowledge” that characterize the technical and non-public character of contemporary political life, and the role that civil society organizations can potentially play in constructing “counterknowledge” that challenges this paternalism by providing “sufficient expert knowledge along with appropriate and, if necessary, multi-level translations in regard to the managerial aspects of public issues” (372-3). Amnesty’s role in translating the technical and institutional discourses of high-level human rights institutions is clearly observed in the integrated genre system that it coordinates the public activism of its campaigns. While this study has benefited from Habermas’s analysis of the structural, material, and administrative contexts of contemporary
democracies, it has differed significantly in its conception of discourse and has argued for a multi-faceted analysis of the genres of human rights advocacy rather than a normative and procedural model of public discourse.

Habermas’s work on communicative rationality and the public sphere has been especially influential in discussions of a transnational civil society for human rights. A central reason for the influence of Habermas’s model is that it provides a theoretical linkage between public will-formation, human rights, and state sovereignty. This model is especially enticing to scholars of NGOs, as it provides a way to discuss the role of NGOs as challenging the norms of state sovereignty and power and exercising leverage on states to conform their policies to the demands of public legitimation. Habermas’s well-known hostility to rhetoric (as a form of self-interested and instrumental communication) exercises a strong presence in these arguments, as human rights become norms that require a universal consensus that rhetoric (because it is the tool of a self-serving and strategic action) cannot address. In other words, universal norms, in order to be legitimate, must be embodied in a discourse capable of producing universal parity and validity. Critics of Habermas, however, have pointed out that universal validity, despite being achieved through communicative practices that stem from the lifeworld, are accessible only to a select few and do not allow for the cultural and social dissent that characterizes social discourse. As Danielle Allen has argued in her *Talking To Strangers*, Habermas’s communicative rationality “represents widespread errors produced by liberalism’s orientation toward unanimity” (63). For Allen, “Habermas solves the problem of generating agreement only by undoing the need to work hard for it. The relationality between speakers and auditors is what a Habermasian pragmatics of
citizenship must overlook in order to see forms of language that can convince all parties ‘in the same way’ or ‘without reservation’” (63). As this study has shown, professional publics like human rights NGOs draw on a range of public actors that possess differing amounts of professional literacies and rhetorical competence that define their agency in producing discursive consensus. Rhetorical studies of human rights NGOs serve, in this sense, while sharing similar concerns with Habermas’s notion of communicative action, can serve as important counter-statements to consensus-based approaches to public discourse.

In Between Facts and Norms, Habermas has offered a highly influential, normative model of international discourse that builds upon his long sustained projects of research into the theory of democracy and the public sphere. Habermas views his project as an extension of Enlightenment theories of human rights that attempt to theorize theory of rights that would explain “why human rights and the principle of popular sovereignty still constitute the sole ideas that can justify modern law” (99). Habermas argues that the concepts of human rights and popular sovereignty and their theoretical contentiousness are not mere relics of the Enlightenment, but formative concepts that structure the “normative self-understanding of constitutional democracies up to the present day” (94). This contentiousness, which Habermas argues is present in the work of both Rousseau and Kant, is an “unacknowledged competition between morally grounded human rights and the principle of popular sovereignty” (94). Habermas frames this discussion of the conflicting conceptions of human rights and popular sovereignty within a narrative of philosophical movement in which human rights as facts (legal rules that can be enforced) of international law must be legitimated by the validity (the rational consensus of the
governed) of the law. He states, “this history of political theory is a necessary element and reflection of the tension between facticity and validity built into law itself, between the positivity of law and the legitimacy claimed by it. This tension can neither be trivialized nor simply ignored, because the rationalization of the lifeworld makes it increasingly difficult to rely only on tradition and settled ethical conventions to meet the demand for legitimating enacted law” (95). Habermas views his explication of human rights and the legitimation of modern law as answering this fundamental opposition created in Kant and Rousseau’s work, thus uniting *Between Facts and Norms* with the roots of public discourse that he traces to the development of the bourgeois public sphere in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

Habermas’s extension of his critical projects of communicative rationality and the bourgeois public sphere in *Between Facts and Norms* to issues of international law and human rights attempts to ground human rights in the “legitimating force of a discursive process of opinion-and will formation, in which the illocutionary biding forces of a use of language oriented to mutual understanding serve to bring reason and will together—and lead to convincing positions to which all individuals can agree without coercion” (103). For Habermas, human rights and the legal forms that guarantee them are symbiotically related and constructed simultaneously, thus creating a set of conditions in which communicative action (a processes that is accessible to all language users) serves as the basis for international understanding and consensus on human rights. He states, “the discourse-theoretic understanding of the system of rights directs our attention on both sides. On the one side, the burden of legitimation shifts from citizen’s qualifications to legally institutionalized procedures of discursive opinion-and-will formation. On the
other side, the juridification of communicative freedom also means that the law must draw on sources of legitimation that are not at its disposal” (131). The problem that Habermas’s discursive theory of human rights encounters is one of moving from the utopian possibility of an ideal speech situation to the realm of the actual discursive practices of human rights discourse. While Habermas’s resolution of the conflict between human rights and popular sovereignty would seem to allow for the maximum potential for the structural transformation of modern democracies, his explanation of the discourse principle itself leads to problems in its neglect of the material and cultural conditions that shape the level of access to the discourse he describes.

Habermas’s communicative action has exercised and immense influence on discussions of human rights discourse and has emerged as perhaps the dominant communicative perspective. Habermas’s emphasis on the legitimation of norms through public-will formation and the role of human rights as a legitimating force in global governance makes this model congenial to discussions of the spread of human rights as international political norms. Thomas Risse, one of Habermas’s most powerful exponents in the field of human rights, has sought to empirically document the role of communicative action in shaping the domestic and international politics of global civil society. Risse has extended Habermas’s discourse principle and communicative action to the study of the communicative structures of transnational civil society. Drawing on long range analyses of NGOs and governmental human rights discourse, Risse has developed a stage model of “arguing and truth-seeking behavior” in human rights discourse (“International Norms and Domestic Change” 531). Risse’s model expands Habermas’s discussion of rhetoric in international politics by regarding rhetoric—which he
distinguishes from argument—as a necessary stage of communication in the establishment of international norms. Rhetoric, for Risse, is important in setting the preconditions for “argumentative rationality,” which brackets out differences in state power and governmental self-interest and pursues the validity of international norms through rational communication. Risse describes the transformation of rhetoric into argument through a description of governmental responses to human rights claims:

Over time . . . the dialogue no longer resembles rhetorical exchanges by which both sides use arguments to justify their given interests or behavior. . . . Both sides accept each other as valid interlocutors, try to establish some common definition of the human rights situation, and agree to the norms guiding the situation. . . . In sum, actors behave as if they were engaged in a true moral discourse. What starts as rhetoric develops its own dynamics, and argumentative rationality increasingly takes over. (550-1)

In this sense, Risse’s argument is able to account for the structural alignments of governments and international institutions with international norms through communicative rationality. Rhetoric is simply a stage of communication that sets the preconditions for a communicative rationality that alters the discursive and normative structures of international institutions and domestic governments. Rhetorical argument, strategic communication for self-interest, succumbs to rational argumentation through a

---

61 Risse’s project is regarded as one of great importance in the study of international relations and transnational advocacy networks and is only dealt with in brief here. Risse and his various colleagues have developed a long-range analysis of the discursive practices of numerous governments, international organizations, NGOs, social movements and other actors. Throughout this project, Risse has developed his stage theory or “spiral theory” of human rights communication along the lines described above. See Risse et al. The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change for a more complete discussion of this long-range discursive analysis.
process of “self-entrapment,” in which “starts as rhetorical action and strategic adaptation to external pressures but ends in argumentative behavior” (550). As pressure groups force governments to adapt their discourse to the language of international norms such as human rights, they change the grounds of argument from one of sovereignty and national self-interest to those of international normativity.

The methodological and theoretical effects of Risse’s application of Habermas in the study of transnational advocacy are many and have been formative to many readings of human rights discourse. For Risse and others, the effects of international human rights discourse can be observed empirically through the structural alignment of governments and high-level institutions with human rights norms. Eva Erman, in her *Human Rights and Democracy: Discourse Theory and Global Rights Institutions*, has recently expanded the work of Habermas and Risse to include analyses of “global rights institutions,” such as IGOs like the United Nations and the European Union (4). Erman argues for a “revised discourse theory” of human rights within international institutions—the United Nations specifically—that would make “international human rights discourse less strategic than it is today” (13). Erman argues for a discourse theory of human rights that is rooted in “the logic of communicative rationality” and that creates “an action-related notion of political rights with ‘quasi-transcendental status,’ stabilized by institutional means” (10). Erman’s modified approach contextualizes Habermas’s communicative rationality within the institutional structure of the UN Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) and adapts Habermas’s discourse principle to the institutional hierarchies of international law and policy. Central to this approach is Erman’s modification of the role of consensus in discourse theory, in which “the notion of consensus . . . is revised and
defined as a performative attitude rather than as a potential outcome” (22). Erman astutely points out that consensus in human rights disagreements is often presupposed through governmental ratification of specific rights instruments and through public commitments to human rights by member states of the UN (18). Conflicts within institutions such as the UNCHR are often conflicts between specific applications of human rights across sovereign states: “Thus, in most cases, the parties (states) involved in a dispute have recognized the human rights at issue. But, as we will see, these rights often conflict with each other, and then we need global rights institutions to be accountable by implementing decision-making procedures for solving these conflicts in a deliberative rather than a strategic, way” (18). Erman’s project thus becomes practice-oriented, as it seeks to outline the discursive conditions necessary to ensure the impartial deliberation of human rights claims within the institutional frameworks of human rights law and policy. Within this reading, Habermas’s discourse principle and universal pragmatics are modified in terms of their approach to consensus, but retain their normative character through acting as a lens through which appropriate procedural norms can be designed to settle human rights conflicts.

While Habermas’s discourse principle has been applied successfully to the discursive contexts of high-level institutions, its discussion of the legitimating power of civil society for human rights norms and law has been more problematic. Like theories of global civil society, Habermasian readings of civil society have often collapsed the heterogeneous discursive agencies that are coordinated within civil society organizations like NGOs and social movements onto an amorphous definition of civil society or public discourse or onto the institutional discourse of specific organizations. Risse has
described NGOs as part of a newly emerging “non-hierarchical” form of “global governance” that modifies traditional “top-down” models of state-sovereignty (“Global Governance and Communicative Action” 292). However, discussions of structural changes such as these have often highlighted the institutional role that NGOs play as expert communities and have viewed the role of non-professional activists as that of legitimating of NGO action and policy. The role of membership in NGOs is often referred to in terms of organizational accountability and moral authority, terms that often ignore the complicated questions of agency and rhetorical competence in public activism for human rights62. Though NGOs may question the traditionally established hierarchies of traditional state-sovereignty models, they are, themselves, hierarchical structures with heterogeneous levels of organizational access, literacy, and rhetorical competence. It is in elucidating the coordination of the heterogeneous agents of transnational activism that Habermasian readings of human rights discourse become problematic.

**Communicative Rationality, Rhetoric, and the Problem of Agency in Human Rights Activism**

Human rights NGOs exercise a powerful norm-producing and monitoring function in high-level institutions such as the United Nations, but overemphasizing this function ignores the wide range of discourses, agencies, and identities that make up the human rights movement. Approaching human rights NGOs, institutions, and movements from the level of discourse genre allows researchers to avoid an overemphasis on

---

62 See Risse’s “Transnational Governance and Legitimacy” for an example of these discussions.
institutional rhetoric and more fully account for the dynamic relationship between the various agents that address human rights exigencies within these institutions. A micro-analysis of the genres, exigencies, and agencies of human rights discourse challenges normative conceptions of the public sphere and civil society. Normative, consensus-based models of civil society or the public sphere, while attempting to secure the role of public discourse and political will in the legitimation of domestic and international politics, nevertheless often perpetuate the dominance of the technical rationality of political systems by failing to address the range of rhetorical competencies, discourses, and social relationships that animate and structure political fields. These models, while attempting to carve out a theoretical space for discursive action and solidarity, often result in privileging specific genres or genre sets of discourse and reifying those genres as the discourse of human rights. This is perhaps an endemic feature of the philosophical and theoretical genres in which these analyses are written. Human rights exigencies, however, reflect social and material conflicts that often preclude many normative or pragmatic models of communication. Further, as I have shown, human rights publics are populated by a vast number of communities and networks that are connected through a wide range of literacies and genres, and to collapse these communities and networks onto a single public sphere or onto a single discourse ignores the material, organizational, and ideological contexts of human rights discourse.

The exterior relationship of public opinion to the juridification of human rights further underscores a sharp separation between the technical and legal discourses of policy-makers and the discourses of public opinion. Nancy Fraser’s well-known critique of Habermas’s bourgeoisie public sphere outlines the tendency in Habermas’s work to
bifurcate the public into “strong publics” and “weak publics” (24). Fraser argues that Habermas’s classical liberalism relegates the discourse of “weak publics” to an autonomous sphere of public opinion that serves as “a counter-weight to the state,” while the discourse of “strong publics” “encompasses both opinion formation and decision making” (24). While the separateness of the discourses of nation-states and the discourses of public deliberation is clearly observable, Fraser takes issue with the sharpness of the division between them. Fraser concludes that “any conception of the public sphere that requires a sharp separation between (associational) civil society and the state will be unable to imagine the forms of self-management, interpublic coordination, and political accountability that are essential to a democratic and egalitarian society” (26). Studies of communicative rationality in international human rights discourse, such as those of Risse and Erman, have adapted Habermas’s discourse principle to bridge the gap between civil society and the state that occurs in Habermas’s work. However, as this study has argued, the relationship between established civil society organizations like NGOs and the public remains blurred in discussion of human rights discourse. As NGOs have developed into professional publics, they have made the distinction between strong and weak publics increasingly problematic; and, through their discursive practice, have altered the traditional division of labor between the state, civil society, and the public.

Given the universal normativity inherent in human rights, there is a real necessity to develop descriptive vocabularies and comparative understandings of the public spaces of human rights. However, theoretical descriptions of human rights discourse must be tempered with the concrete analyses of discursive practice. It is in regards to this point that I feel that rhetorical analyses of human rights discourse offer serious challenges to
conceptions of a unified public sphere or transnational civil society for human rights. Rather than offering a model of normative discourse that brackets out the socio-political and ideological differences of agents, rhetorical analysis shifts the emphasis onto the situated cognition necessary to rhetorically address human rights exigencies. Such an analysis differs from an analysis of communicative action in that it acknowledges differences in genre knowledge and rhetorical competence as its starting point, rather than the pre-existence of a single, rational discourse principle. As differences in genre knowledge and rhetorical competence reflect differences in access to institutional discourse, they offer an opportunity for a more self-reflexive analysis of public discourse. Craig Calhoun has argued that it is this self-reflexivity that Habermas’s account lacks: “If the public sphere exists in part to relate individual life histories to public policies—as Habermas himself suggests—then bracketing issues of identity is seriously impoverishing. In addition, the bracketing of differences also undermines the self-reflexive capacity of public discourse” (169). This self-reflexive capacity of public discourse is vital to addressing the basic differences in communicative practice and agency across a wide range of social and discursive groups. Calhoun adds that, “If it is impossible to communicate seriously about basic differences among members of a public sphere, then it will also be impossible to address the difficulties of communication across such lines of basic difference” (169).

The influence of Habermas’s communicative action on discussions of transnational civil society and human rights has helped scholars ground their discussions of international politics in both the force of international law and the force of rational, moral discourse. This theoretical move has also been significant to the work of many
scholars of international politics and globalization, who have sought to sketch out the political, legal, and discursive mechanisms necessary to the expansion of a global civil society. As Jeffrey Flynn has noted in a discussion of Habermas’s theory of human rights, “presupposing only the discourse principle and the modern form of law entails that the same system of rights comes into play for any political community that attempts to legitimately regulate its common life through the medium of law, be it a national, regional, or global community. This leads to another path for the global realization of the system of rights—some form of global legal order” (454). This proposition can be seen in the work of Risse and others and the degree to which states and civil society groups and networks conform to the discourse principle is often regarded as a barometer of the degree to which a global civil society can be claimed. The extent to which these studies are self-fulfilling prophecies is debatable. For the purposes of this discussion, however, I shall only note that their overwhelming emphasis on the discourse of nation-states, powerful intergovernmental and non-governmental institutions (coupled with their relative inattention to the discourse of social movements, marginalized groups, and human rights activists) can be clearly linked to the Habermasian model of discourse they utilize. While much is owed to Habermas for grounding discussions of human rights in the legitimating power of moral discourse, the rhetorical analysis that this study has advanced offers several challenges to his theorization of human rights discourse.

First, though the legitimating power of discourse on human rights is often palpable in international politics, Habermasian communicative action dissolves the discursive agencies through which human rights become a legitimating force into a realm of public discourse that is supposedly accessible to all citizens. While these discursive
conditions would seem to allow for the inclusion of all citizens in debates over human rights norms, the validity requirements of discourse that Habermas advances ignores the differing levels of competency and literacy that make up public discussions of public issues such as human rights. This aspect has been noted by rhetorical scholars who have responded to Habermas’s exclusion of rhetoric as a rational communicative action. As Gerard Hauser has stated, Habermas’s “idealized theory of discourse runs contrary to the lived experience of political relations. His model contains an a priori disposition to overlook both discursive milieus that fall outside the institutionally sanctioned enclaves of embowered exchange and modes of discourse that do not adhere to the norms of ideal speech” (Vernacular Voices 55). Thus, the communicative action that Habermas outlines advances the assumption that citizens possess equal access to the discourses of the public sphere, while setting out a set of boundaries for those who lack access to the discourses of validity that are essential for rational communication. This communicative idealism is especially limiting and exclusionary for human rights discourses that lie outside of the province of largely western and high-level NGOs and intergovernmental institutions. However, as the critiques of Hauser and others have shown, Habermas’s model of communicative action also sets exclusionary limits on the discursive participation of citizens from western democracies who lack access to the discourses of high-level institutions. The consequences of this model’s appropriation by scholars and NGO practitioners could be to involuntarily reinforce the technical and often exclusionary character of human rights discourse.

To appropriate this model, it is necessary to gloss over a central problem in the human rights movement: the accessibility of human rights discourse by citizens who exist
outside of the professional confines of human rights institutions and agencies. Often, it is
these individuals who have the most at stake in human rights claims, but often it is also
these individuals who lack the specialized literacies required to engage in discussions of
the human rights policies that directly affect them. By looking at this context through the
lens of rhetorical genre, however, it becomes apparent that human rights discourse, in
Habermas’s terms, is in fact a reification of the discourse practices and professional
genres of high-level institutions. Within Habermas’s model, individuals must abstract
themselves from their socio-political contexts in order to rationally weigh and advance
the validity claims surrounding the structures of their societies. However, as Michael
Warner has argued, this practice reflects mastery of high-level rhetorical genres, rather
than a shared, universal communicative rationality. Rather than being a practice rooted in
the equitable communicative structures of the life-world, “the ability to abstract oneself
in public discussion has always been an unequally available resource. Individuals have to
have specific rhetorics of disincorporation; they are not simply rendered bodies by
exercising reason. And it is only possible to operate a discourse based on the claim to
self-abstracting disinterestedness in a culture where such unmarked self-abstraction is a
differential resource” (239). In this sense, human rights discourse (from the standpoint of
Habermas’s discourse principle) would seem to be the discourse of the knowledge or
professional class of human rights agents and the discourse of cultures with political
cultures based upon rational differentiation of personal and public interests.

Pierre Bourdieu’s critique of J.L. Austin and Habermas’s “purely internalist
approach to language” is useful in unpacking the relationship of Habermas’s
communicative rationality to the reproduction of the very technocratic consciousness that
it is supposed to circumvent (‘Authorized Language’ 109). For Bourdieu, both Austinian and Habermasian descriptions of speech-acts and discourse are descriptions of ‘authorized language,’ or the representative languages of power-elites (109). Bourdieu argues that Austin (and Habermas in appropriation of Austin), ‘was in fact working out a theory of a particular class of symbolic expressions, of which the discourse of authority is only the paradigmatic form, and whose specific efficacy stems from the fact that they seem to possess in themselves the source of a power which in reality resides in the institutional conditions of their production and reception’ (111). Normative readings of human rights discourse, such as Habermas’s in Between Facts and Norms, give universal status to forms or genres of communication that are in actuality based in fields of cultural and political production that are exclusive to those who possess specialized knowledges and rhetorics. Bourdieu argues that descriptions of communication ‘fail as long as they do not establish the relationship between the properties of discourses, the properties of the person who pronounces them, and the properties of the institution that authorizes him to pronounce them’ (111). Normative discourse models, while rooted in communicative parity, obscure these properties, collapse levels of rhetorical competence and agency, and metonymically reify the technical discourse of human rights institutions as the discourse of human rights.

As NGOs engage the high-level spaces of intergovernmental and governmental institutions, they must adapt the resources of their reporting and advocacy to the discourses of these institutions. It is in this limited sense that the discourses of these institutions reflect Habermas’s discourse principle. Human rights NGOs such as Amnesty International have developed rhetorical strategies for abstracting their
organizational interests and political ideology from public discussions of human rights exigencies and policies. Amnesty International’s longstanding policy of political impartiality could be seen as a central example of an NGO’s attempt to avoid instrumental rationality in order to promote universal consensus around human rights issues. However, as this study has shown, institutional NGO rhetoric is only one part of the discursive context of NGOs, and the diverse audiences that NGOs such as Amnesty adapt their professional discourse to reflect the recognition of the differing literacies and identities that characterize its membership. As bridges between their multiple discourse communities, NGOs face the difficult task of sponsoring the literacy of their activists in ways that enable them to address these high-level contexts while drawing upon and constructing their own ethos as citizens and activists.

Reconceptualizing Human Rights Publics Through the Study of Genre: Directions for Further Research

As the analysis of Amnesty International in this study has shown, the discursive terrain of human rights is one that is not only characterized by multiple, reticulate publics but also multiple levels of agency and association within particular public organizations. As professional publics, human rights NGOs and social activist groups such as AI, face the task of translating the professional discourses they utilize to engage high-level national and international institutions into discourses that can be utilized by their member activists. Translating the recommendations of lengthy, technical human rights reports into discourses accessible to members is a difficult and multi-layered textual process that often requires the negotiation of the legal and political policies of individual nations with
the rhetorical capabilities and the background knowledge of the activists that carry out the action. It is in this sense that normative readings of NGO institutional discourse often collapse the agencies of human rights activists onto the official, sanctioned discourse of the NGOs. Amnesty International’s ideology of individuals speaking with the same voice across the Amnesty movement makes such a reading of AI’s discourse tempting. However, as I have shown throughout this study, AI’s ideology of one voice is dynamically constructed through its activist genres, which are heavily mediated by the discourse of human rights professionals. The level to which this professional guidance or organizational control exercises dominance on the discourse of activists has not been quantified and requires further research by rhetorical scholars and critical discourse analysts. This study has shown that the relationship between professional/expert discourses and activist discourses is both necessary and problematic within professional publics such as human rights NGOs.

The professional mediation of activist discourse is a logistical necessity, given the dominance of the legal and technical discourses of human rights. In most cases, and as illustrated by AI’s Sudan Crisis Campaign, even the most well informed activists often lack the country and legal expertise necessary to address the specific recommendations necessary to remedy a human rights exigency. Professional framing enables activist discourse to draw upon relevant legal and political texts in order to address the policy-makers of offending governments, groups, or corporations with concrete recommendations. Professional framing also identifies the appropriate audiences of human rights activism, as well as the appropriate kairos of the human rights exigency, allowing activists to tactically address offending governments and groups within a socio-
political context that has clear resonance with the current political climate. In this sense, the professional framing of activist discourse can be seen as a response to the efficiency, technical rationality, and the accessibility needed to wage effective human rights campaigns. As activists learn the genres of human rights activism, they are socialized into a complex textual network where their literacies and capacities for rhetorical invention are sponsored and facilitated by professional advocates.

The integration of technical and grassroots discourse that takes place in professional publics such as Amnesty International therefore causes scholars or public discourse to rethink several prevailing conceptions of the public sphere or transnational civil society. First, the integration of the high-level discourses of human rights professionalism with the discourses of grassroots activism introduces a new type of discursive community into discussions of human rights publics and expands the range of discursive groups and networks that need to be outlined. Analyzing the varying discursive communities, collectives, and networks that make up professional publics attunes us to the discursive micro-politics that shape the discourse of the professional and grassroots agents of human rights. Such an analysis challenges us to reconsider the various levels of discursive agency and social organization that exist between weak and strong publics, and the varying levels of literacy and rhetorical competence that shape the various sub-groups of these publics. This analysis requires that conceptions of the public be read against the actual discursive networks of specific NGOs and social movements. Fraser’s distinction between weak and strong publics, Warner’s counterpublics, and Hauser’s multiple publics with permeable boundaries can thus be read as macro-terms for distinguishing and describing the relationship of specific publics to powerful and high-
level institutions. These macro-terms for the terrain of public discourse can be expanded through the micro-political, discursive analysis of the levels of agency and discursive coordination that exist within specific publics. Further, the relationship between specific public institutions like AI and other publics holds great potential for a comparative analysis of the various strategies and genres utilized for activism and the influence of these activist networks on the broader scope of public rhetoric in transnational civil society. Such an analysis would expand these terms by first delineating the multiple discourse hierarchies of professional publics and then by analyzing the interdiscursive relationship between the various groups that make up this hierarchy. Contrary to theoretical elaborations of the public sphere, such a study would reveal the need for an ongoing and comparative analysis of the discursive agencies of various human rights NGOs, or professional publics.

Second, transnational advocacy networks are made up not only of multiple political actors, but also multiple rhetorical communities that are structured through the genres that they utilize for their human rights reporting, advocacy, publicity, and activism. Consequently, the study of professional publics and other civil society organizations must address not only the differentiation of groups and subgroups within organizations, but also the range of genres through which they recognize their agency within their organizations. Finally, transnational advocacy networks are not necessarily analogical and the coordination of differing NGOs across advocacy networks is not an indication of structural similarities in organizational structure or discourse. In contrast to a theoretical elaboration of the rhetoric of human rights NGOs, this study advances the need for comparative, long-range empirical analysis of the rhetorical practices of the
wide range of actors--states, IGOs, NGOs, social movement organizations, interest
groups, and individual activists—that engage in human rights advocacy and activism.
Central to such an analysis should be the facilitating roles that these organizations play in
constructing opportunities for public literacy on human rights issues and opportunities for
human rights activism. As this study’s comparison of Amnesty International to Human
Rights Watch has shown, differing organizational structures within NGOs often foster
different organizational objectives and opportunities for discursive activism. If the
agency of the public in creating pressure for intervention and action into human rights
crisis is to be more concretely understood, then comparative analyses of the role of public
discourse within their structures are needed.

Such a project would entail a large body of interdisciplinary analysis and its
empirical and practical focus makes defining or endorsing any one method of analysis
problematic. Instead, it is perhaps more helpful to trace out several key interdisciplinary
contexts for this project and illustrate how genre analysis both complements and
complicates these contexts. This study parallels discussions in several interdisciplinary
fields that could be usefully brought into dialogue with rhetorical studies, and which
could benefit from the situational theory of language developed through contemporary
genre theory. Critical inquiries into social movement processes, mass media, and the
globalization of human rights norms have developed usefully tools for analyzing the role
of power and agency in the human rights movement. Rhetorical analyses of human rights
NGOs and SMOs must engage these interdisciplinary fields in order to contextualize their
scholarship within the dominant critical paradigms of transnational civil society, and this
study has sought to offer several entries into these conversations. If a comparative study
of international human rights NGOs and the rhetoric of global society is to have currency among current discussions of global politics, there are two key fields that it must address: social movement theory and globalization theory. These two paradigms in the study of transnational advocacy and activism offer both conceptual and methodological tools for rhetorical analyses, while also standing to benefit from the more concrete and localized conception of discourse that rhetorical theory and analysis can bring to bear on international and domestic human rights exigencies.

Social Movement Theory

Genre analysis has the potential to expand discussions of the framing processes of social movements and to offer a useful methodology for understanding the reproduction of social movement frames through the discourses of specific social movement organizations and their members. Social movement scholars have documented the dynamic relationship between social movements, the political fields they engage, and the resources that their members must possess in order to wage effective campaigns for action. This study has been both empirical and transnational, and social movement scholars have attempted to trace the specific political conditions that give rise to social movements and the specific range of tactics that social movements have developed to challenge the policies of both sovereign nations and (in the case of the well publicized World Trade Organization protests) international governing bodies. In addition, social movement scholars have also sought to document the “diffusion” of these tactics across international movements and specific social movement organizations (Tarrow, The New Transnational Activism 99). Social movement theories offer a comparative and
transnational methodology that is essential to rhetorical analyses of social movements and NGOs. Social movement theory’s focus on the utilization of “collective action frames,” or the “beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization” has been particularly helpful in tracing the relationship between the discourses of social movements and their members (“Framing Processes and Social Movements” 614). Missing from these discussions of collective action frames, however, are analyses of the specific genres that are utilized across the various organizational hierarchies of the social movement organizations.

Social movement theory has been the influential paradigm in the study of international and domestic social movements and has developed a core repertoire of concepts and methodologies that have allowed for more concrete analyses of the processes involved in facilitating and sustaining collective action and protest. Doug McAdam and W. Richard Scott have recently characterized the shift from earlier conceptions of protest to the social movement perspectives developed through the work of Gamson, Tilly, and Zald in the 1960s: “SM scholars reframed the view of protest and reform activities from one of irrational behavior—a flailing out against an unjust universe—to one involving instrumental action. Rather than stressing common grievances, SM theorists focused attention on mechanisms of mobilization and opportunities to seek redress” (6). The study of the mobilization and facilitation of movements has developed significantly since the early work of Gamson and others, developing a specific range of methodological concepts for the study of social movements. Of these concepts three major ideas have formed the core many social movement analyses: resource mobilization, political opportunity structures, and
While the range of concepts developed within social movement theory is much more expansive than this truncated list demonstrates, these concepts have been elaborated most completely and have served as the basis of many empirical analyses of social movements\textsuperscript{63}. McCarthy and Zald’s 1977 “Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory” developed the concept of resource mobilization, which emphasized “both societal support and constraint of social movement phenomena” and examined “the variety of resources that must be mobilized, the linkages of social movements to other groups, the dependence of movements upon external support for success, and the tactics used by authorities to control or incorporate movements” (1213). Resource mobilization allowed social movement scholars a means of documenting the particular set of communicative, economic, and symbolic resources of specific social movement organizations, and the dynamic nature of these resources to the dominant discursive institutions that they address. As John Campbell has documented, resource mobilization scholars also attuned their analyses to the development of organizational hierarchies within social movements and the power relationships that developed among actors within specific movements (41). In this sense, the present study is indebted to the resource mobilization perspective, which has sought to document the organizational networks through which actors in social networks are mobilized for collective action and the resources for action that are available within these groups.

Building on the work of resource mobilization scholarship, social movement

\textsuperscript{63} See, for example, Zuo and Benford’s 1995 study of the democracy movement in China, “Mobilization Processes and the 1989 Chinese Democracy Movement.”
scholars, expanded their analyses of the dynamic relationship between social movements and external political institutions in the nineteen eighties and nineties to include the study of the political environments that facilitate the growth and activity of social movements. Resource mobilization’s focus on the tactics used to control social movements was expanded to a more complete discussion of political opportunity structure (Morris 446). Political opportunities structures, as described by Sidney Tarrow, are “consistent—but not necessarily formal or permanent—dimensions of the political environment that provides incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectation for success or failure” (qtd. in Morris 446). Drawing on analyses of the internal resources and organizational cultures of social movements, analyses of political opportunity structure analyzed the dynamic relationship between these resources and the opportunities for social protest facilitated and open to organizations within specific political environments (Cambell 44). Social movements, in this approach, organize their organizational outcomes and mobilize their organizational resources around what they perceive as reasonable opportunities for social protest and action. Political opportunity theories of social movements thus more fully account for the dynamic relationship between movements and the powerful states and organizations that they address. Two major critiques of this perspective have emerged. First, as Morris has argued, political opportunity structure “stresses the political weakness of challenging groups while assigning considerable causal weight to elite external actors” (446). Secondly, as Tarrow has pointed out, political opportunity structure approaches are rooted so firmly in domestic politics that they cannot account for international forms of activism (The New Transnational Activism 8). However, as this analysis has shown, the politics of
transnational activism engage in domestic and international politics simultaneously, and a key role of professional publics is in recognizing the opportunity structures available for activism across a variety of institutional (whether domestic or international) contexts and in framing these opportunities in genres that serve as accessible resources for activism.

Collective Action Frames, developed most completely by sociologists David Snow and Robert Benford from Erving Goffman’s 1974 *Frame Analysis*, offers a useful method of analyzing the discursive strategies that social movements utilize to mobilize their members for action. Though not synonymous with ideologies, Snow and Benford argue that “collective action frames are typically comprised, at least in part, of strands of one or more ideologies” (“Clarifying the Relationship Between Framing and Ideology” (9). Snow and Benford’s description of “collective action frames” is similar to both McGee and Condit’s discussions of ideographs: “Frames help to render events or occurrences meaningful and thereby function to organize experience and guide action. Collective action frames also perform this interpretive function by simplifying and condensing aspects of the ‘world out there,’ but in ways ‘intended’ to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists” (“Framing Processes and Social Movements” 614). The theory and analysis of collective action frames helps explain the dynamic nature of public organizations such as human rights NGOs by emphasizing the organizational pressures that required these organizations to frame their public rhetoric in the context of the epistemologies, ideologies, and practices of their potential adherents. Frame theory, as developed by Benford and Snow, also roots the institutional framing of NGOs and social movements in
discussions of audience and rhetorical context. Surveying several decades of frame theory, they state that, “the movement literature suggests that the audience(s) targeted are one of the major contextual factors that help explain why movements seek, from time to time, to modify their collective action frames” (“Framing Processes and Social Movements” 630). Rather than specifying a top-down model of ideological production, frame theory allows analysts a method of observing and cataloguing the negotiation between institutional or movement epistemologies, practices and ideologies and those of potential adherents or actors. Frame theory and rhetorical analysis, while often not placed in dialogue, share not only methodological similarities, but also an emphasis upon audience effects and the role of discourse in shaping adherence and action in collectivities.

Social movement theory, while developing methodologies for the analysis of movement resources, opportunities, and action frames, has been slow to address the relationship between discourse and agency within specific movements. Agency, as Morris has argued, is a “blind spot” in social movement theory, which has tended to “assign undue causal weight to external factors” and has overlooked “the deep cultural and emotional processes that inspire and produce collective action” (452). Perhaps more perplexing is the tendency of frame analysts to overlook the differing rhetorical strategies, genres, and discourses that construct, instantiate, and reproduce collective

---

64 Ideographic analysis, as developed by McGee, and utilized by Dechaine in his study of human rights NGOs, bears striking resemblances to the theory of collective action frames as elaborated by Snow and Benford. Celeste Michelle Condit in “Crafting Virtue: The Rhetorical Construction of Public Morality” has argued that McGee’s description of the ideograph provides a helpful means of analyzing the language and “commitments” of social collectivities (309). For Condit, “public rhetoric requires that an individual speak a public language that includes linguistic commitments shared by all who are constituents of a community. This language, as Michael McGee has described it, includes the unique linguistic elements ‘ideographs,’ which constitute social narratives for public action” (309).
action frames. Marc Steinberg in his “Tilting the Frame: Considerations on Collective Action Framing From a Discursive Turn” has argued that while the theory of frames has increased in its sophistication, “its proponents have largely failed to problematize the role of discourse in these processes. While the ideological visions structured by frames are exposed as contested and dynamic, the discourse used in framing is taken to be a generally straight-forward bearer of meanings” (845). Steinberg draws upon Bakhtin’s dialogic theories of language and his analysis of speech genres in order to call for a more nuanced approach to the relationship between frames and their rhetorical construction. In relation to speech genres, Steinberg argues that “to understand the framing process we should center our investigations on the discursive fields within which the framing process takes place. Such fields contain the genres that collective actors can draw upon to construct discursively diagnosis, prognosis, and motivation” (856). Appropriating a dialogic theory of language into frame theory allows for a more dynamic understanding of the construction of action frames through the discourses of various agents within movements, rather than the more limited understanding of action frames as proceeding from movement leaders and their understanding of political opportunity structures (858). Discourse, for Steinberg, is thus conceptualized as “critical mediating action by which activists create legitimacy and collective identities to garner resources for collective action” (862). Steinberg’s work has clearly established the necessary link between studies of rhetorical genre and the study of social movements and transnational networks like NGOs. However, his conceptualization of discourse points towards the need for an expanded understanding of the relationship between genres, collective action frames, and the discursive forms that collective action often takes.
As this study has shown, a significant portion of the social activism or collective action in NGOs like Amnesty International is discursive and embodies organizational ideologies, resources, and power structures within the genres through which it takes its form. As Norman Fairclough has argued in *Critical Discourse Analysis*, “a particular set of discourse conventions . . . implicitly embodies certain ideologies—particular knowledge and beliefs, particular ‘positions’ for the types of social subjects that participate in that practice . . . and particular relationships between categories of participants . . . . In so far as conventions become naturalized and commonsensical, so too do these ideological presuppositions” (qtd. in Paré 58). Genre analysis offers a necessary complement to the analysis of “collective action frames” (Snow and Benford 614) developed by sociologist Robert Benford and David Snow and expands Steinberg’s reading of collective action. Genre analysis is helpful in elucidating the ideological terms and cognitive frames necessary to engender membership and action in NGOs and social movements, as well as the rhetorical or discursive processes through which institutional or movement ideologies are embodied. Frame analysis can be strengthened by genre analysis, which examines the micro-levels of ideology and power that are inscribed in the discursive actions of a variety of discursive groups and agents. Collective action frames constructed around conceptions of international community and civil society are readily observable in the public documents of NGOs such as Amnesty International. It is through the reproduction of collective action frames within a range of professional and activist genres that their true adaptability and durability can be discerned. Genre analysis allows for the observation of the shaping function of collective action frames in discursive practice, connecting the analysis of human rights NGO institutional discourse
(analysis of organizational rhetoric) to the analysis of the discourse genres that agents within NGOs utilize for discursive action on human rights.

Globalization and International Representation

While the international reach of NGOs like Amnesty International has expanded, local, non-consultative NGOs and social movements often face severe limitations in terms of funding, international exposure, and (in many cases) political freedom. NGOs in politically oppressive countries like Sudan, for example, have little opportunity for growth and face severe consequences for dissent against governmental policies. These limitations raise problematic questions about the role of local NGOs in international politics and the representation of human rights claims and human rights victims internationally. As Risse has documented, most international NGOs are largely western-funded and located within highly developed western economies and democratic political structures (Risse, “Transnational Governance and Legitimacy” 12). Amnesty International has a larger international reach and funding base than many international NGOs; but, as Risse has argued, “even Amnesty’s ‘principals’ are relatively wealthy people in Western societies” (12). Western dominance in the international NGO community raises compelling issues for the rhetorical analysis of NGOs, not least of

---

65 See Joanne Bauer’s “The Challenge to International Human Rights” for an excellent discussion of the political and global forces that shape the distinction between largely western, international NGOs and local NGOs. In regards to African NGOs, Bauer argues that “Foreign scholars of Africa and international human rights groups . . . generate much of the human rights activity and debate that takes place in Africa today. The few indigenous human rights groups that do exist, which are for the most part not membership-based organizations, are stigmatized within Africa as ‘elitists’ and ‘out of touch.’ African social justice advocates, in particular, criticize them for their dependency on foreign funds and for having stronger ties with the international elite than with the common African people they claim to serve (248).
which is the recontextualization of human rights claims within the rhetoric of western NGOs. The use of human rights testimony in human rights reports, for example, lends an international voice to those who have suffered from human rights violations and whose stories would often otherwise not receive international attention. Amnesty’s multi-modal activist genres have also lent a human face to these testimonies and serve as powerful video documentaries of the local needs of human rights victims. However, the lack of a subjective background for these narratives and their translation into the reports of human rights NGOs transforms them from local narratives to artifacts of international human rights documentation (Wilson 146). As Keck and Sikkink have argued, “local people . . . sometimes lose control over their stories in a transnational campaign” (19). The rhetoric of international human rights NGOs, in many cases, takes on a representative function that contextualizes local narratives of abuse within an international context that is largely shaped by western values of human rights. Further research is needed into the textual relationships between local communities of human rights victims, local NGOs, and international NGOs in order to understand the range subjective agencies that are involved within human rights campaigns.

A central question in the study of professional publics is the extent to which they are implicit in the spread of westernized values that subjugate the local subjectivities of non-western cultures, while advancing the liberal values and economic interests of the globalized west. Recently, Bonaventura De Sousa Santos has argued in “Toward a Multicultural Conception of human rights” that “a review of the history of human rights in the postwar period shows that human rights policies, by and large, have been at the service of the geopolitical interests of hegemonic capitalist states” (45). Santos’s
statement serves as a useful summary of the central claim shared by most critics of western human rights discourse: that human rights are often subordinated to the dictates of western power and the legitimacy of western states. For Santos, western human rights discourse is thus the “dominant” human rights discourse, one that can be seen to permeate the concept of human rights all the way to its normative core. Santos urges scholars to remember that “The Western, and indeed the Western liberal, mark on the dominant human rights discourse can be found in many other instances: in the Universal Declaration of 1948, which was drafted without the participation of the majority of the peoples of the world” (45). Western dominance in the form of human rights can be observed in “the priority given to civil and political rights over economic, social, and cultural rights; and in the recognition of the right to property as the first and, for many years, the sole economic right. (45). Santos argues that the effects of western power upon undeveloped nations has shaped the possibilities for human rights discourse in a way that makes engaging in such discourse on equal cultural terms problematic. The effects of western hegemony upon human rights discourse leads Santos to a crucial and disturbing question: “What are the possibilities for a cross-cultural dialogue when one of the cultures in the present has been itself molded by massive and long-lasting violations of human rights perpetrated in the name of the other culture?” (53). Santos’s question entails both ideological and material conditions that shape the possibilities for rights discourse among nations and makes the universal conception of human rights seem ahistorical and apolitical when read against the history of colonialism and globalization. NGOs like Amnesty International have recently expanded their focus to include social and economic rights and have engaged these questions through campaigns like AI’s on Economic
Globalization and Human Rights, which have held transnational corporations accountable for human rights violations. The degree to which current human rights environments outside the west have been shaped by western economic and political hegemony and the effects that this has on international human rights activism has largely been unexplored.

An issue of central importance to this discussion is the potential negative consequences of international representation of human rights violations by international NGOs. As David Kennedy has argued, the contextualization of local struggles within western conceptions of human rights can potentially result in an ideological divide between western and local political cultures. Kennedy critiques the obscuring of local political movements and crises that can occur as the particular political problems of underdeveloped countries are translated into the language of globalization and modernization. For Kennedy, “the human rights movement contributes to the framing of political choices in the third world as oppositions between “local/traditional” and “international/modern” forms of government and modes of life” (116). Human rights, in this conception, can carry with them the ideology of modernization, globalization, as well as conceptualizations of civilization: “This effect is strengthened by the presentation of human rights as part of belonging to the modern world, but coming from some place outside political choice, from the universal, the rational, the civilized” (116). The effects of this rhetoric can have devastating consequences for local human rights groups: “the human rights movement impoverishes local political discourse, often strengthening the hand of self-styled ‘traditionalists’ who are offered a common-sense and powerful alternative to modernization for whatever politics they may espouse (116). The conflict between tradition and modernity that Kennedy diagnoses in human rights discourse is one
that has major implications for western NGOs, which must often develop recommendations for international action and strategies for international campaigning outside of the local context of human rights abuses.

In addition to analyzing the discourses of modernity and western ideology implicit in the rhetoric of NGOs, rhetorical scholars should also pay close attention to the rhetorical strategies that local civil society groups have developed in order to draw the attention of international human rights NGOs. The work of Clifford Bob has been seminal in this area of human rights and has empirically documented the discursive strategies that local human rights groups have developed to frame their complaints in the discourse of human rights NGOs. In “Globalization and the Social Construction of Human Rights Campaigns,” Bob poses the troublesome question of why some regions garner international attention from NGOs, IGOs, and social movements, while other (often with similar degrees of human rights abuses) are overlooked or receive more limited attention (133). Bob argues that the international exposure of human rights claims is often dependent on “strategic actions by local-level human rights victims” who possess the knowledge and resources to link their needs to the campaigns of international actors (133-4). Bob traces out a competitive market for NGO attention, in which “those groups with significant material resources, preexisting linkages to international actors, skill at international public relations, organizational cohesiveness, and leadership charisma will have an advantage over otherwise similar groups” (134). The relationship

---

66 A key contention of Bob’s work is directly related to the network principle worked out by Keck and Sikkink and utilized for this study. Bob argues that “transnational advocacy networks” have “neglected a key antecedent issue, the origins of linkages between local victims and transnational networks. Most research assumes such linkages or attributes them to contemporary technologies without showing how these general conditions produce some linkages but not others” (134-5).
between victims and international NGOs, in these circumstances, requires both access to human rights institutions as well as a sophisticated set of rhetorical strategies for engaging them.

The central rhetorical task of local groups of human rights victims is to frame the human rights violations they have suffered within the context of NGO mandates and campaigns. Bob refers to his description of these rhetorical processes as “the organizational match hypothesis” (138). For Bob, local groups engage the support of NGOs through “the extent to which violations . . . ‘fit’ or ‘match’ those recognized by international networks” (135). Utilizing the rhetoric of market capitalism, Bob argues that “those groups best able to ‘pitch’ themselves to international audiences and ‘match’ their grievances to recognized abuses—often by reframing localized conflicts, parochial demands, and particularistic identities—are most likely to arouse transnational activism” (136). This rhetorical process requires political resources that many local groups of victims do not have at their disposal, as well as rhetorical competencies and literacies that many victims in underdeveloped countries may not possess. Despite the reach of informational communications technologies and the promises of global civil society, the level to which groups possess these resources and rhetorics may determine the range of international attention they receive (145). The relationship between local human rights communities and international NGOs is therefore highly rhetorical and reflects a dynamic textual relationship between victim discourse and international human rights campaigns. Bob’s work poses compelling questions for rhetorical scholars in regards to rhetoric and ideology and points to the significance of studying simultaneously the ideological
discourse of NGOs and the discourses of specific national or local groups who reframe human rights exigencies within the context of these discourses.

**Conclusion: Activist Research Methodologies**

In addition to long-range rhetorical studies of human rights NGOs, the study of specific NGOs offers opportunities to develop what Cushman has called “activist research methodologies,” which forge mutually informative relationships between scholars of rhetoric and NGO professionals and activists (821). As Cushman has observed, “when public intellectuals not only reach outside the university, but actually interact with the public beyond its walls, they overcome the ivory tower isolation that marks so much current intellectual work. They create knowledge with those whom the knowledge serves” (821). Cushman’s work touches upon the anxieties of professionalism that often accompany academic studies of the public and points to the need for more concrete, mutually informative studies of public discourse. I would like to suggest here that professional publics, like Amnesty International, offer new paradigms for activist research that challenge strict dichotomies between professional discourse and public deliberation. In terms of rhetorical scholarship, activist research into the communicative strategies of professional publics will require what Hauser has described as an “empirical attitude” towards public discourse, one which reconceptualizes theories of the public through an analysis of the rhetoric and social organization of specific publics (*Vernacular Voices* 275). Activist research, as Cushman describes it, will require interdependency between scholars or rhetoric and discourse and the various practitioners of public rhetoric within specific publics (821). This relationship is one that has the
potential to be mutually beneficial to both scholars and NGO practitioners alike. Studying the mediating discursive strategies developed by professional publics to bridge between professional and public discourse broadens our understanding of the public and the range of institutions and movements that sponsor public deliberation. Such studies more concretely map out the communicative structures that frame and coordinate contemporary public discourse. In addition, activist research by rhetorical scholars can play a mutually informative role for NGOs, which are intensely interested in the development of new communications strategies and in the accessibility of their discourse by broader publics.

Professionalism, both in the academy and within civil society organizations, has taken on the stigma of being divorced from public deliberation and from contemporary public life. In this sense, the anxieties over the public utility of professional discourse within human rights NGOs parallel those of academic research. As this study has shown, criticisms of human rights professionalism have suggested repeatedly that human rights NGOs have been co-opted into the human rights bureaucracy and are becoming specialized, expert-driven organizations that are removed from meaningful public discourse. The well-worn dichotomy between professionalism and the public has shaped many of these accounts. Professional publics, as I have argued, trouble this dichotomy through their mediating discourse, and have developed genre systems that bridge between professional access and expertise and grassroots activism. By balancing expert discourse communities and professional genres and grassroots activist collectives, these organizations challenge us to rethink the relationship between the professional and the public. Bruce Robbins description of the role of the public in professional discourse is
readily applicable to professional publics as I have outlined them in this study. Arguing that the public plays a role in forming a “professional unconscious,” Robbins describes academic and professional discourse as consistently being attuned to the public (88). Within academic and professional work, “We listen ‘for’ the public in two equivocal senses of the preposition: we listen so as to hear what the public may be saying, and we listen to ourselves, on behalf of the public, which is of course us too. Both senses invite us to surrender the illusion of professional identity that is hermetically sealed and to recognize instead the social reality of an identity that is looser, less autonomous, more diversely populated” (89). Professional publics like Amnesty International reveal the discursive structures necessary to transform this act of listening into opportunities for the alignment of professional discourse with public action.

Activist research assumes, as Robbins has argued, a more “porous” conception of professions and of disciplinary boundaries (91). Activist research into the rhetoric of professional publics can potentially assist NGO professionals in analyzing their discursive practices. Literacy studies of NGO activist genres can be particularly useful in this regard, as they can provide NGOs with analyses of the accessibility and efficacy of their discourse for non-specialized activist collectives. While the scope of this study has been too broad to include ethnographic research on local Amnesty groups, opportunities for ethnographic research into the composing processes of Urgent Action and Online Action letter writers would be one example of the benefits of activist research for NGOs. At this time, Amnesty International only tabulates the number of actions taken through its programs and does not request or catalogue the letters sent by activists. Embedded studies within activist groups could provide empirical evidence of the effectiveness of
Amnesty’s activist genre system, while more concretely documenting the discursive agency available to activists within human rights NGOs. My analysis of the intertextual sponsoring of human rights activism and literacy through professionally constructed genres has sought to document the need for further analysis into the role of literacy and rhetorical competence in discussions of transnational civil society. In this sense, I view this study as a starting point for more future embedded studies of the heterogeneous genre communities of professionals and grassroots activists that work with NGOs.

As powerful and recognized institutions in international politics, human rights NGOs have played a central role in establishing and implementing the norms of human rights policy. As professional publics, human rights NGOs like Amnesty International have also shaped the discursive terrain of human rights advocacy and activism and have played the formative role in sponsoring public deliberation of human rights. The extent to which this public deliberation is effective in promoting a truly transnational civil society and in influencing domestic and international human rights policies will require continued research. However, if indeed a transnational civil society is forming, then understanding the texture of this society makes it necessary to reevaluate the rhetorical agencies and subject-positions of its members as they engage in public discourse.

Technical and legal discourse are, for now, the dominant and necessary paradigms of

---

67 Sidney Tarrow’s *The New Transnational Activism* provides a detailed discussion and summary of current literature and surveys on the attitudes of elites and normal citizens towards global citizenship and society—cf. chapter 4 “Global Framing.” Drawing on evidence provided by academic polls on the attitudes of corporate and political elites and by Eurobarometer surveys, Tarrow suggests the continued dominance of national identities. He states, “while intellectuals and journalists have begun to propagate global thinking, among both elites and ordinary citizens territorial identities are narrowly diffused, nationally contingent, and remain rooted in national and regional contexts. If citizen’s attitudes are becoming more “global,” these attachments coexist with national identities. If elites are part of an international system, it is a system with strong national roots that more closely resembles a dispersed set of unequal spatial relations than an integrated global network” (72).
human rights rhetoric, and professional publics (as mediating institutions between professional and activist discourse) play a vital role in translating these discourses into opportunities for public discourse on human rights. As this study has shown, these opportunities for public discourse are framed within activist genres that embody not only the rhetorical exigency to be addressed but also the institutional ideologies, situated cognitions, and identities of human rights NGOs. Activists within the structure of a human right NGOs such as Amnesty International are implicated in an intertextual, professionally mediated rhetorical context embodied in an accessible set of rhetorical genres that frame the issues they address in recognizable but governable terms.

Contemporary human rights discourse thus relies on “interpublic coordination” (Fraser 26), and the extent to which the discourse of activists is coordinated with the high-level discourses of human rights raises compelling questions about the power/knowledge relationships within human rights NGOs.

As notions of sovereignty are modified and forms of political citizenship and identity are transformed through globalization, understanding the role that public discourse plays within international politics has become a significant and vital task. Throughout this study, I have sought to expand discussions of the public by focusing on the professional institutions through which public activism on human rights is sponsored. Professional publics, as mediating, literacy sponsoring institutions, challenge us to rethink the levels of knowledge and power and structure the agency in contemporary public discourse. NGOs like Amnesty International, with its large membership base, are emblematic of the ways in which professional publics coordinate the public activism of private citizens with their professional discourse and their organizational goals. NGOs
like Amnesty play an important educational role in facilitating the literacy and rhetorical competence of activists through their campaigns; and, in doing so, expand the range and efficacy of contemporary public discourse. This role is central to combating the tendency of political discourse towards technical or administrative rationality and serves as an example deliberative democracy in action.
Bibliography


Dwyer, Karen Ruth. “A Cultural and Rhetorical Analysis of Internationalized Human
Rights Discourse.” Diss. Purdue University, 1997.


Risse, Thomas. “Global Governance and Communicative Action.” Government and

---, “Transnational Governance and Legitimacy.” ECPR Standing Group on International
conference2004/papers/Risse%20Transnational%20Governance%20Legitimacy.pdf>

---, “International Norms and Domestic Change: Arguing and Communicative Behavior

Robbins, Bruce, ed. Secular Vocations: Intellectuals, Professionalism, Culture. New

Ron, James, Howard Ramos, and Kathleen Rodgers. “Transnational Information Politics:
49.3 (2005): 557-587.

Ross, Brian and Nicholas Kristof. “A Discussion About State of Security in Middle East;
The Crisis in Darfur.” The Charlie Rose Show. 25 April, 2006. 11:00 PM EST.

Darfur Information.com. 6 November, 2006 <http://www.darfurinformation.com/
janjaweed_envoy_denies.asp>.

Russell, David. “Rethinking Genre in School and Society: An Activity Theory

Proceedings of the Eighth Americas Conference on Information Systems, Dallas,


---, “Enhancing and Strengthening the Effectiveness of the Special Procedures of the Commission on Human Rights: An Open-ended Seminar in Consultation with the Expanded Bureau of the Commission, as Part of the Effort to Enhance and Strengthen the Effectiveness of the Special Procedures.” December 2005. UN


VITA

Chris Minnix completed a bachelor’s degree in Biblical Studies from Grace College and Theological Seminary in Winona Lake, IN in 1996. He then pursued a Master of Arts in English at Radford University, which he completed in 1999. He then continued his studies at the University of Tennessee, where he completed his Ph.D. in 2007. His research interests include genre theory and analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis, contemporary rhetorical theory, political literacy, cultural studies, and the history and theory of rhetoric.