

Prompt #1

In 1997, a band of masked attackers with ties to the municipal government sprung from the forests of Chiapa, Mexico, massacring 45 Indians in the village of Acteal.

The response from the international community was swift; Amnesty International condemned the lack of minority protections, Human Rights Watch released a damning report, and various United Nations special rapporteurs issued critical statements.¹ From the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to the European Union, the Mexican Government was slammed with scrutiny.

In a scramble to appease, President Ernesto Zedillo ordered the federal attorney-general to lead what would normally be a state investigation. In the following days, nearly 50 men would be arrested, including the mayor of the Acteal municipal.²

The Chiapa example is one of the many examples of the power of shame. Yet this strategy, coined ‘Naming and Shaming’, is not a perfect solution. Shamed states may question the legitimacy of the criticism such as by claiming neocolonial interference or lift some human rights restrictions only to clamp down on others³.

With this possibility of perverse outcomes, can we foresee the result of shaming in Myanmar? The answer lies in an analysis of the offending country:⁴ more specifically, the history behind the conflict and the sentiments of the Burmese people.

¹ “Massacre in Mexico.” *The Economist*, The Economist Newspaper, 1 Jan. 1998.

ibid

³ Kinzelbach, Katrin, and Julian Lehmann. “Publicity in Human Rights Foreign Policy.” *Can Shaming Promote Human Rights?*⁴ , European Liberal Forum.

Drinan, Robert F. *The mobilization of shame: a world view of human rights*. Yale University Press, 2002.

Dating back to the 19th century, tensions have existed between the Muslim Rohingyas and the Buddhist majority, reaching an inflection point in 1982 when new legislation excluded the Rohingyas from citizenship. Since then, the Rohingyas have increasingly fell victim to marginalization and violence.¹ However, a different picture exists in the eyes of the Buddhist population. In the words of former U.S. ambassador Derek Mitchell, “It’s true [the Rohingya] are largely innocent and uniquely abused. But to people in Myanmar, the name suggests something much more.”⁶ This ‘something’ that Mitchell refers to is fear. If the Rohingya regain their rights, the 1982 law— which ironically deprived them of citizenship— would allow a Rohingya autonomous region within Myanmar which the Burmese military view as a breeding ground for terrorist groups like the Arkan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA).⁷

This fear is already transforming into the government’s counter-frame against outside criticism, one in which the Rohingyas are violent terrorists and the international media is spreading false reports. In September last year, Myanmar State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi labeled the reports of Rohingya persecution a “huge iceberg of misinformation” distributed to benefit “terrorists”.⁸ Later, during a televised speech regarding the Rohingya refugee crisis, she

¹ France-Presse, Agence. “Tracing history: Tension between Rohingya Muslims, Buddhists date back to British rule.” ⁶ *Hindustan Times*, HT Media Limited , 16 Sept. 2017.

Calmer, Krishnadev . “The Misunderstood Roots of Burma's Rohingya Crisis.” *The Atlantic*, 25 Sept. 2017.

⁷ Murshid, Navine. “Why is Burma driving out the Rohingya - and not its other despised minorities?” *The Washington Posts*, WP Company, 9 Nov. 2017.

Westcott, Ben, and Rebecca Wright. “Aung San Suu Kyi blames 'terrorists' for Rohingya 'misinformation'.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 6 Sept. 2017.

failed to denounce the atrocities committed by the military, instead insisting that it was still unclear "what the real problems are." ¹ Her sole direct reference to the Rohingya was a condemnation of ARSA.

The long-standing religious hostility and the government's defensive stance make it unlikely that shaming will push through significant change. Yet, this grim outlook doesn't mean that human rights shaming is pointless. At the very least, it ensures that the Rohingya will not suffer in the dark.

¹ Wright, Rebecca, et al. "Aung San Suu Kyi breaks silence on Rohingya, sparks storm of criticism." *CNN*, Cable News Network, 19 Sept. 2017.

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