

Documenting Atrocity under Constraint: International and Grassroots Human Rights Documentation in Post-2021 Myanmar

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Abstract

Since the 2021 military coup, human rights documentation in Myanmar has taken place under conditions of extreme insecurity, restricted access, and institutional collapse. Both international investigative bodies and grassroots civil society actors continue to document patterns of violence, yet they do so with very different mandates, resources, and levels of protection. Despite these differences, common standards of verification and credibility often judge their documentation.

This paper investigates how these unequal conditions shape documentation practices. Drawing on a comparative qualitative analysis of documentation materials and interviews with practitioners, the study explores how actors interpret verification standards, manage ethical and security risks, and construct claims to credibility in a context where access to sites of violence is severely limited.

Rather than assessing the factual accuracy of specific allegations, the paper focuses on how documentation functions in practice: how decisions are made about evidence, how uncertainty is handled, and how authority is negotiated. By looking at the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) and grassroots documentation efforts in exile and border areas, the paper argues that credibility comes from relationships and institutions, influenced by recognition, authority, and limitations, rather than just being a result of collecting evidence.

In doing so, the study contributes to broader discussions about accountability, knowledge production, and civil society practice in contemporary Myanmar.