A multimodal analysis of the representation of the Rohingya Crisis in BBC’s Burma with Simon Reeve (2018): building consensus for political action?

Castaldi, J.
A Multimodal Analysis of the Representation of the Rohingya Crisis in BBC’s *Burma with Simon Reeve* (2018). Building Consensus for Political Action?

Auckland University of Technology
Multimodal Research 2019 - International Conference
9th December 2019

Jacopo Castaldi
jacopo.castaldi@canterbury.ac.uk
Outline of the presentation

- Overview of my research
  - A Mediation Analytical Framework
  - Research methodology
- Analysis and results of one of the case studies
- Conclusions
A Mediation Analytical Framework


Types of power: economic, legal, ideational

(Castaldi, 2019)
Methodology and Research Instruments

- Qualitative study, focus on reception/perceptions of audiences
- Participants choose the television programme (travel or cultural) and watch it how/when they want - *Questionnaire* and *Follow-up Interview*
- Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of the text chosen with a focus on the following aspects:
  - *Linguistic*: lexis, representation of actors (van Leeuwen, 1996) and processes (or *transitivity*, e.g. Langacker, 2008:147-151; Hart, 2014: 22-30)
  - *Audio*: music and sound, e.g. figure, ground and field, provenance, experiential meaning potential, modality (van Leeuwen, 1999; Machin, 2014),
  - *Visual*: e.g. settings, salience, distance, gaze and poses, camera angle, frame position (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996; Iedema 2001; Machin and Mayr, 2012)
- Reception Study: critical thematic and linguistic analysis of the questionnaire and interview data
Burma with Simon Reeve (BBC, 2018, ep. 1)

Credit:
Presenter: Simon Reeve
Executive Producer: Sam Bagnall
Executive Producer: Sarah Waldron
Producer: Ruth Mayer
Director: Ruth Mayer

Broadcasts:
- Sun 13 May 2018 21:00 BBC TWO EXCEPT WALES
- Sun 13 May 2018 22:00 BBC TWO WALES
- Mon 14 May 2018 23:25 BBC TWO EXCEPT NORTHERN IRELAND & WALES

- Sat 19 May 2018 00:05 BBC TWO WALES
- Wed 6 Jun 2018 01:15 BBC TWO
- Tue 5 Mar 2019 21:00 BBC FOUR

https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0b3g1nm
The Rohingya crisis - a timeline (Hunt, 2017)

1430 - Last Rakhine kingdom founded, with its capital in Mrauk U. Situated on the border between Buddhist and Muslim Asia, the city became one of Asia's richest. In 1785 it came under Burmese control.

1824-1948: British Rule - The Muslim community in Rakhine expanded rapidly during colonial times, doubling from the 1880s to 1930s. Expanding rice cultivation required significant labour, largely filled by Muslim workers from neighbouring Bengal. Shortly after Myanmar's independence from British rule, a Muslim rebellion erupted in Rakhine, demanding equal rights and an autonomous area. The rebellion was eventually defeated.

1962 - Military rule begins. Rights that Rohingya had enjoyed before the coup were eroded. In 1978 and 1991, heavy-handed government campaigns pushed more than 200,000 Muslims across the border into Bangladesh. New citizenship law passed in 1982 identifying 135 national ethnic groups. The Rohingya aren't one of them, effectively rendering them stateless.

June 2010 - Religious violence leaves more than 200 dead and close to 150,000 homeless in Rakhine, predominantly Rohingya. Violence flares again in October. Between 2012 and 2015, more than 112,000 Rohingya flee, largely by boat to Malaysia.

9 October 2016 - About 300 Rohingya men attack border posts in Rakhine State, killing nine police officers, according to state media. The attacks spark an intense crackdown by the Myanmar military and trigger an exodus of 87,000 Rohingya to Bangladesh. Rohingya insurgent group, now known as Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), claims responsibility for the border post attack.

25 August 2017 - Myanmar's state media reports 12 security officers were killed by ARSA insurgents during a series of coordinated attacks targeting at least 20 police outposts and an army base in Rakhine State. Military responds with what they describe as "clearance operations," burning down villages and triggering a mass exodus of Rohingya to Bangladesh.
The discursive constellation of the text

Reports of the UN Special Rapporteurs (2014-2017) and UN Resolutions (2012-2018)

UK parliamentary debate following the escalation of the crisis (5th September 2017)

The ‘Rohingya Crisis’ Discursive Constellation in the UK

Aung San Suu Kyi speech on National Reconciliation and Peace (19th September 2017)

House of Common Report on the Violence in Rakhine (11th December 2017) and Government response (6th February 2018)
Multimodal analysis of the actors and related processes involved with the crisis - *sample text*
Multimodal analysis of the actors and related processes involved with the crisis - *sample analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Linguistic representation of actors</th>
<th>Linguistic representation of processes</th>
<th>Music &amp; sounds</th>
<th>Visual representation of actors</th>
<th>Visual representation of processes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Part 2: i. <em>the military</em>; ii. Burmese troupes, the Army, troupes, they (x 3); iii. <em>the military regime, the generals</em></td>
<td>Part 2: i. <em>active</em> (ruled by the military); ii. <em>state</em> (are) and <em>active</em> (tried to crush dissent, appeared, arrest); iii. <em>active</em> (never conducted, changed [x 2], fooled by the generals)</td>
<td>Part 2: i. traditional music; ii. sounds from original doc; iii. traditional music</td>
<td>Part 2: Not represented (x 3)</td>
<td>Part 2: Not represented (x 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Part 3: <em>former leader, military dictator, the generals</em></td>
<td>Part 3: <em>active and state</em> (had a premonition, such is the power of a military dictator, could be bizarre, switching)</td>
<td>Part 3: cheerful music and noises from the roads</td>
<td>Part 3: Not represented</td>
<td>Part 3: Not represented</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Multimodal analysis: 1. The Myanmar military

**Language**

*Voice:* no possibility for the military to tell their side of the story. If their views are conveyed is through SR. *Connotation* is generally negative, not so much in the names used for the military, but for the words used to describe their actions. *Active and passive processes* as well as *statives* are overwhelmingly negative.

**Images**

Hardly ever shown. In the couple of shots where they are represented, they are uniformed and armed.

**Music/sounds**

Grave melancholic music when describing the actions against the Rohingya; cheerful music (parts 3 and 5) when talking about some “oddities” of the generals; suspense-type of music during the “action” shots with the wounded Rohingya. Also sound of rain.

**Overall representation**

The Myanmar military is represented as the culprit and bears the responsibility for the current situation. They are, however, an invisible, faceless and nameless threat. The semiotic modes portray them as cruel and irrational at the same time; a political player that cannot be trusted.
Multimodal analysis: 2. The Rohingya

**Language**

*Voice:* possibility for the Rohingya to tell their side of the story.
*Connotation* is generally positive and compassionate.
*Active processes* are mainly positive, portraying the Rohingya as struggling to save their lives. The only negative ones (with the exceptions of one instance) are spoken by the MaBaTha monks.
*Passive processes* and *statives* are largely positive in the sense that they portray the Rohingya as victims. When the *statives* are negative, they are spoken by the MaBaTha monks.

**Images**

Close-ups to create an emotional connection with the viewer; wide and “busy” shots to highlight scale and nature of their present condition.

**Music/sounds**

Either grave music or no music at all, especially during interviews to eliminate distractions in the soundscape. Often “live” sounds and noises to highlight authenticity.

**Overall representation**

The Rohingya are represented as the victims both through the host and their own representation. The semiotic modes operate to create an emotional, sympathetic connection with the viewer.
Multimodal analysis: 3. *The Jihadists*

**Language**

*Voice:* possibility for the jihadists to tell their side of the story.

*Connotation* is generally sympathetic (*resistance, forced to, inspired to*).

*Active processes* are generally negative when spoken by both SR and the militants.

*Passive processes* and *statives*, however, are mainly positive, in the sense that they portray the militants as victims.

**Images**

Pixelated to guarantee anonymity, a sign of respect.

**Music/sounds**

Grave, slow and melancholic music. Also sound of rain.

**Overall representation**

The jihadists are represented as the part of the victim who fights back because of exasperation. The semiotic modes operate to create an emotional, sympathetic connection with the viewer.
Multimodal analysis: 4. Aung San Suu Kyi and the Civil Government

**Language**

Voice: no possibility for ASSK or the government to tell their side of the story. If their views are conveyed is through SR. Connotation is generally positive when it is Burmese people describing ASSK and negative or sceptical when SR speaks about her. Similar to connotation, Active and passive processes as well as statives are positive when uttered by Burmese people and negative when spoken by SR.

**Images**

Hardly ever shown. ASSK is only shown through a newspaper photo.

**Music/sounds**

Gentle Burmese-sounding music in initial part; grave and melancholic music in the final parts. No music at times.

**Overall representation**

ASSK is represented as a travesty and accomplice to the military horror by way of not denouncing their actions. She is somehow depicted as traitor of the West who has given her attention and a way into power. She also cannot be trusted.
Multimodal analysis: 5. The international players

Language
*Voice:* possibility for the UNICEF staff to tell their side of the story, otherwise views are conveyed through SR. *Connotation* is neutral or positive when talking about political institution, positive when talking about UNICEF, but negative when discussing the assessment made of ASSK. *Active* and *passive processes* as well as *statives* follow a similar pattern to connotation.

Images
Hardly ever shown. The UNICEF centre and member of staff ate the only exception. A very humanitarian face.

Music/sounds
Grave or melancholic music.

Overall representation
The international community is portrayed as neutral, expert and humanitarian. The semiotic modes operate to instil trust in them as the only political player that is already doing charitable actions to alleviate the sufferings and that would be able to sort the situation out.
Multimodal analysis 6: the MaBaTha monks

Language
*Voice:* possibility for the monks to tell their side of the story.
*Connotation* is generally negative when SR is speaking and positive when the monks talk about themselves.
*Active and passive processes* as well as *statives* follow a similar pattern to connotation.

Images
Close-ups to create a sense of threat for the viewer.

Music/sounds
Traditional Buddhist music; grave solemn music; no music during interviews to eliminate distractions in the soundscape.

Overall representation
The militant monks are portrayed as part of the ideological justification for the suffering of the Rohingya. They are shown spreading propaganda and indoctrinating younger monks to stir them away from the true, compassionate essence of Buddhism.
### Distribution of the actors throughout the programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Part 1</th>
<th>Part 2</th>
<th>Part 3</th>
<th>Part 4</th>
<th>Part 5</th>
<th>Part 6</th>
<th>Part 7</th>
<th>Part 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Rohingya</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Jihadists</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Myanmar military</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASSK / Civil government</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The international community</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MabaTha monks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participant’s representation - Questionnaire data

Pre-viewing notes

- “Have spoken with friend about the programme and knows it touches up the recent Rohingya refugee crisis”

- People expected: “Burmese government, colonial rulers, Rohingya, Aung San Suu Kyi”

- Ideas associated with them: “oppressive government and previous rulers”
### Text analysis vs. participant’s representation: Post-viewing questionnaire notes and interview data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Multimodal analysis</th>
<th>Rohingya</th>
<th>Jihadists</th>
<th>Myanmar Military</th>
<th>ASSK</th>
<th>International players</th>
<th>MaBaTha monks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Represented as the victims both through the host and their own representation.</td>
<td>Represented as the part of the victims who fights back because of exasperation. The semiotic modes operate to create an emotional, sympathetic connection with the viewer.</td>
<td>Represented as the culprit and bears the responsibility for the current situation. They are portrayed as cruel and irrational at the same time; a political player that cannot be trusted.</td>
<td>Represented as a travesty and accomplice to the military horror. She is somehow depicted as traitor of the West and cannot be trusted.</td>
<td>Portrayed as neutral, expert and humanitarian. They are the only trustworthy political player that would be able to sort the situation out.</td>
<td>Part of the ideological justification for the suffering of the Rohingya. They are shown spreading propaganda and indoctrinating younger monks.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Sympathy for the plight of Rohingya” (Q) &quot;I didn’t know that this is been going on for decades and they had sort of lived in apartheid in a different area of Burma” (I)</td>
<td>“When people talk about Muslims, perhaps, Islam, people talk about extremists. They don’t ever look at what happened to them before, it’s like ‘these people have done these terrible crimes’, no why they've been pushed to that extreme.” (I) &quot;If I think when he joins the jihadis [...] I don’t wanna talk down on them... they sounded frustrated, which I could... you can understand why they’ve gone into what they did” (I) “There was a sort of like naivety to them, but you can see that their actions were borne of that... of their situation” (I)</td>
<td>“I think that, probably, he was frustrated on the part of the Burmese people. Frustrated that [...] the democratic leader or saviour of Burma, Aung Suu Kyi or something like that, but I think there was real... yeah, he was disappointed that she wasn’t being more proactive in making it stop” (I)</td>
<td></td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>&quot;Surprised by the existence of ‘militant’ Buddhist monks” (Q) “I perceived Buddhism as a peaceful faith that co-exists with others. Did not expect militant factions to exist” (Q) “I was shocked by that, I just thought they were peaceful people. In my mind I didn’t think about them as politically active, I guess” (I)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Methodological considerations and conclusions

Mapping the *Mediation Analytical Framework* with the research methodology
Critical considerations and conclusions

Is “Burma with Simon Reeve” building consensus for political intervention for the benefit of the West?

“The starting point of the critique of ideology has to be full acknowledgement of the fact that it is easily possible to lie in the guise of truth” (Žižek, 1994: 5)

West vs. China
- Aung San Suu Kyi
- The Military

Economic interest in the area
- Myanmar as new market
- Natural resources

Geopolitical importance of Myanmar
- Close alley bordering China and frustration with ASSK failed project
- Lifeline for oil and gas supply to get around the Strait of Malacca problem
Thank you
References


References - continued


