

Research Space

Conference paper

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

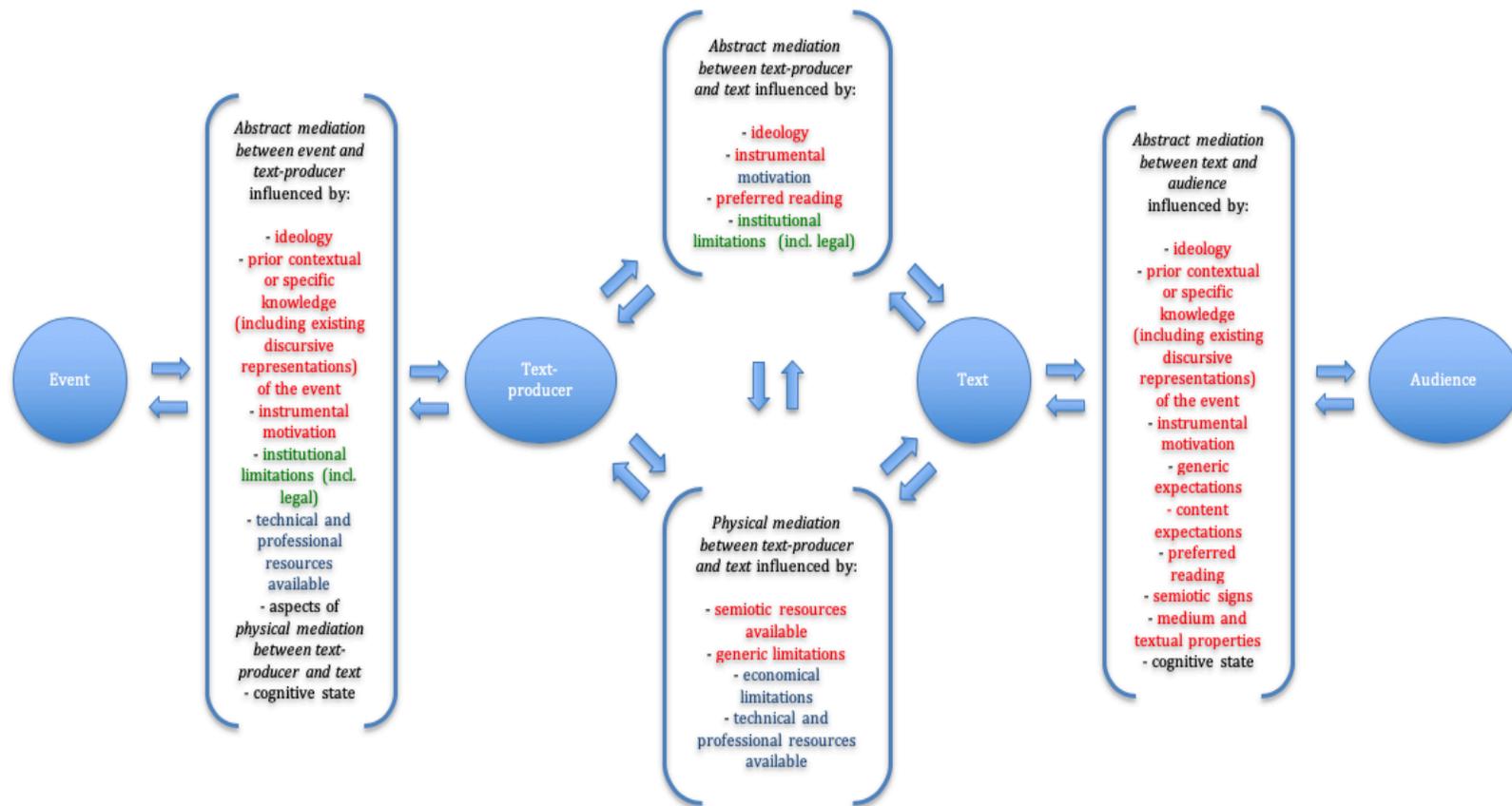
Outline of the presentation

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

A Mediation Analytical Framework

The *Mediation Analytical Framework* (after Hall, 1980/2005: 119 and Charaudeau, 1997: 72)

Types of power: economic, legal, ideational



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

The Text:

Burma with Simon Reeve (BBC, 2018, ep. 1)

The screenshot shows the BBC website interface for the program 'Burma with Simon Reeve'. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the BBC logo, a sign-in button, and links for News, Sport, Weather, iPlayer, Sounds, and More. A search bar is also present. Below the navigation bar, the program title 'Burma with Simon Reeve' is displayed in large white text on a dark background. Underneath the title are links for 'Home', 'Episodes', and 'Clips'. A large image of Simon Reeve in front of a train is featured. To the right of the image, there is a 'Last on' section indicating the program was broadcast on Tuesday, 5 Mar 2019 at 21:00 on BBC FOUR. Below this is a 'More episodes' section with 'PREVIOUS' and 'NEXT Episode 2 Series 1' options. A 'Watch now' button is also visible. The main content area is titled 'Episode 1 Series 1 Episode 1 of 2'. It includes a synopsis: 'Adventurer and broadcaster Simon Reeve heads to beautiful and troubled Burma - or Myanmar as it is now officially called - for a new two-part series. Cut off for decades under military rule, the country now has a democratically elected government led by world-famous Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi. But in August 2017 the world was left stunned when a brutal military operation drove hundreds of thousands of ethnic Rohingya Muslims from their homes.' It also mentions '11 months left to watch' and a '1 hour' duration. A second paragraph describes the episode's content: 'In this first episode, Simon travels to Burma to find out the roots of this crisis - as well as heading to Bangladesh to witness the drama that is still unfolding. He begins his journey in the biggest city in the country, Yangon, and drives north into Burma's Buddhist heartlands and the stunning ancient capital of Bagan - a sight that rivals the great wonders of the world. He meets the monks who supported the people through the darkest days of dictatorship. And he is granted an audience with some of the most contentious figures in the country - ultra-nationalist monks preaching hate against the country's Muslim Rohingya.' A third paragraph concludes: 'Stopped from visiting the scene of the military crackdown against the Rohingya, Simon travels to Bangladesh to meet the refugees traumatised by the violence. In what is now the biggest refugee settlement in the world, he learns about a crisis that has been brewing for decades, with no sign of ending, and potentially grave consequences for the wider region.'

Credits

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

Show less

<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)

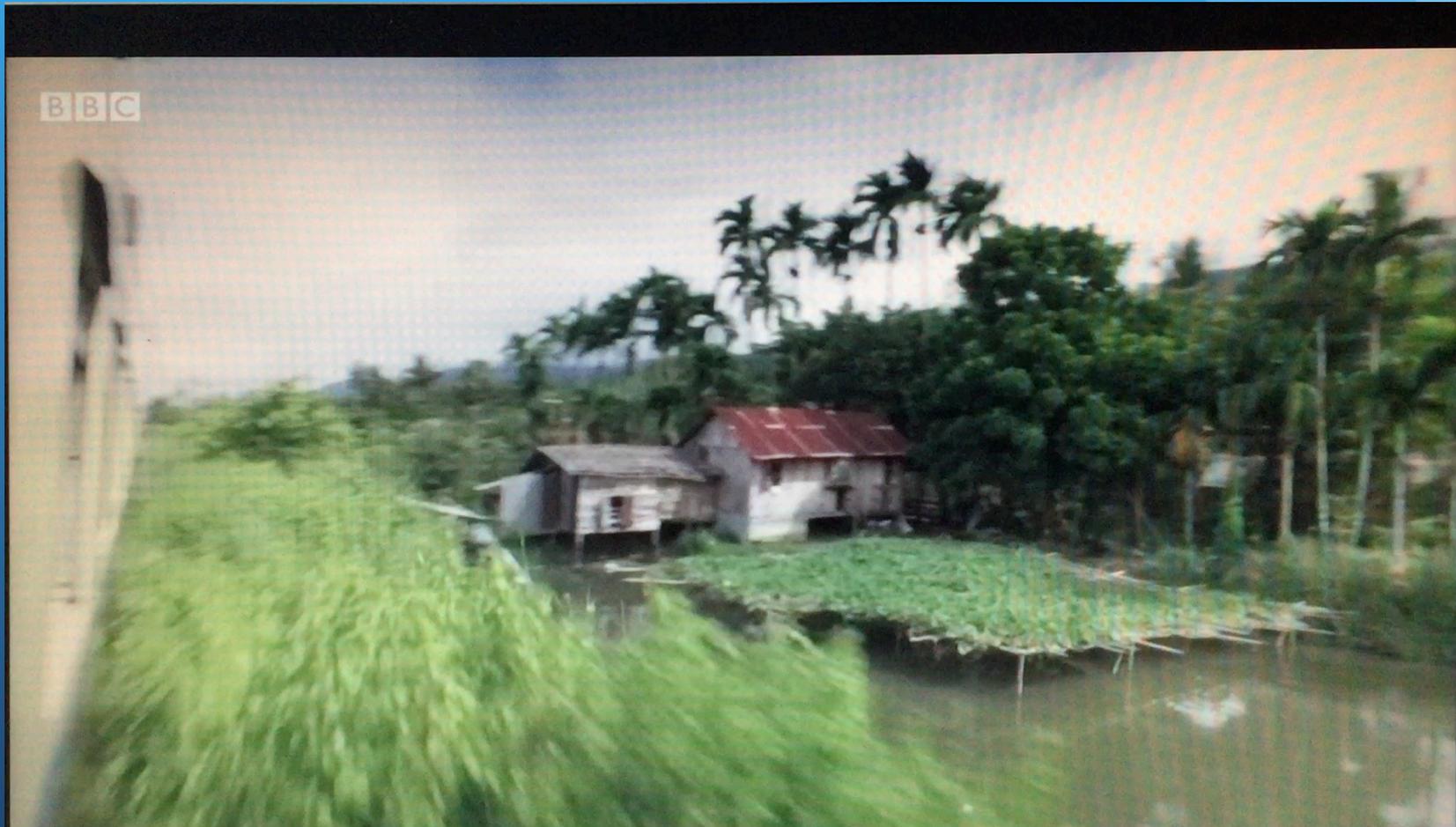
UK parliamentary debate following the escalation of the crisis (5th September 2017)

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*

	Linguistic representation of actors	Linguistic representation of processes	Music & sounds	Visual representation of actors	Visual representation of processes
The Myanmar military	Part 1: <i>the military (x 2), they</i>	Part 1: active (<i>seized power, completely ruined, wrecked, jailed, imposed severe censorship, cut Burma off</i>)	Part 1: slow, melancholic music; sound of rain	Part 1: Not represented	Part 1: Not represented
	Part 2: i. <i>the military</i> ; ii. <i>Burmese troupes, the Army, troupes, they (x 3)</i> ; iii. <i>the military regime, the generals</i>	Part 2: i. active (<i>ruled by the military</i>); ii. state (are) and active (<i>tried to crush dissent, appeared, arrest</i>); iii. active (<i>never conducted, changed [x 2], fooled by the generals</i>)	Part 2: i. traditional music; ii. sounds from original doc; iii. traditional music	Part 2: Not represented (x 3)	Part 2: Not represented (x 3)
	Part 3: <i>former leader, military dictator, the generals</i>	Part 3: active and state (<i>had a premonition, such is the power of a military dictator, could be bizarre, switching</i>)	Part 3: cheerful music and noises from the roads	Part 3: Not represented	Part 3: Not represented

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 are 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

	Part 1	Part 2	Part 3	Part 4	Part 5	Part 6	Part 7	Part 8
The Rohingya		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
The Jihadists						✓		✓
The Myanmar military	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
ASSK / Civil government	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓
The international community		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
MaBaTha monks					✓			

Participant's representation - Questionnaire data

Pre-viewing notes

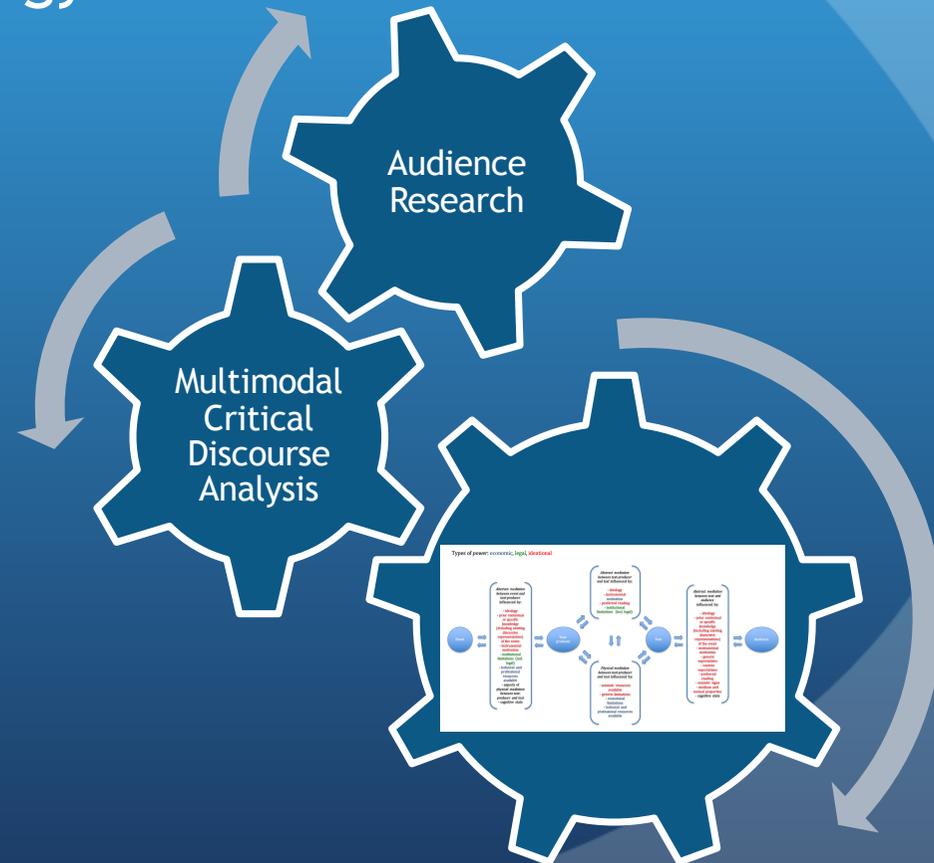
- “Have spoken with friend about the programme and knows it touches up the recent Rohingya refugee crisis”
- People expected: “*Burmese government, colonial rulers, Rohingya, Aung San Suu Kyi*”
- Ideas associated with them: “*oppressive government and previous rulers*”

Text analysis vs. participant's representation: Post-viewing questionnaire notes and interview data

	Rohingya	Jihadists	Myanmar Military	ASSK	International players	MaBaTha monks
Multimodal analysis	Represented as the victims both through the host and their own representation.	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.	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.	Represented as a travesty and accomplice to the military horror. She is somehow depicted as traitor of the West and cannot be trusted.	Portrayed as neutral, expert and humanitarian. They are the only trustworthy political player that would be able to sort the situation out.	Part of the ideological justification for the suffering of the Rohingya. They are shown spreading propaganda and indoctrinating younger monks.
Participant representation	<p>“Sympathy for the plight of Rohingyas” (Q)</p> <p>“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)</p>	<p>“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)</p> <p>“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)</p> <p>“There was a sort of like naivety to them, but you can see that their actions were borne of that... of their situation” (I)</p>	<p>“Anticipated more focus on military but this could happen over the course of the series” (Q)</p>	<p>“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)</p>	N.A.	<p>“Surprised by the existence of ‘militant’ Buddhist monks” (Q)</p> <p>“I perceived Buddhism as a peaceful faith that co-exists with others. Did not expect militant factions to exist” (Q)</p> <p>“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)</p>

Methodological considerations and conclusions

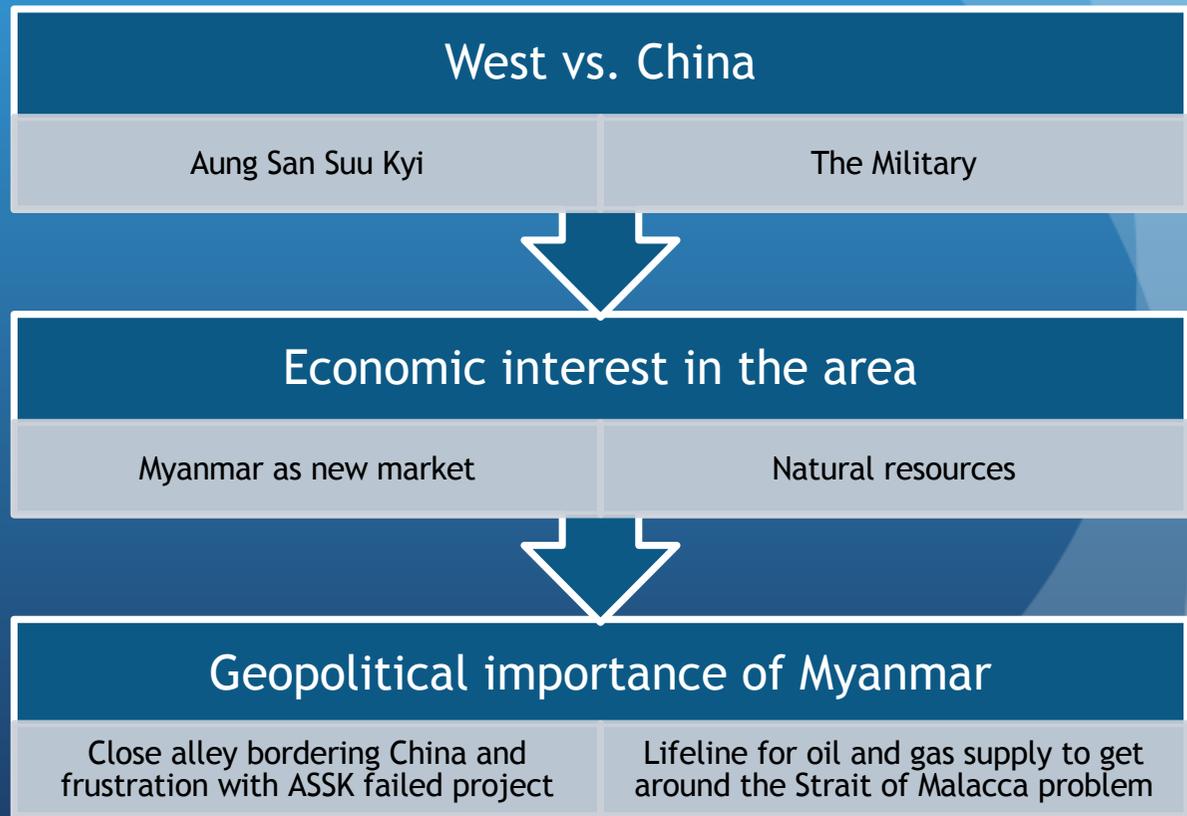
Mapping the *Mediation Analytical Framework* with
the research methodology



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)



Thank you



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