

DISSECTING JOURNALISTIC REPORTS IN CHALLENGING XENOPHOBIC PROTESTS: A CASE OF ROHINGYA EVICTION NEWS

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ABSTRACT

Toward the end of 2023, there was a massive discussion about how a group of students from varied universities in Aceh, Indonesia, forced out Rohingya refugees from their shelter. Based on this event, there was global and local news coverage about this which reflects how power dynamics are at play. The dissection of the news pieces is done following van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis. The findings hint at how the interwoven world of journalistic reports can act as the voice that challenge the multi-layered injustice and perpetual othering experienced by Rohingya refugees. We discuss and present how news pieces are produced and how the discourse about the intersectional marginalization of refugees intensifies and provokes action towards the perpetuation of injustices.

Keywords: CDA, injustice, journalistic reports, othering, Rohingya

INTRODUCTION

The news coverage about Rohingya refugees in online news canals have always been positioned them as victims of state genocide or the target of harmful reaction by the host communities. The Rohingya's plight that becomes the concern of this study takes the latter perspective, particularly in the context of Aceh people in Indonesia protesting their coming. The construction of Rohingyas as threats has been circulated on social media such as TikTok and X, causing the violent demonstration to happen in the last month of 2023. The representation of social realities can be meaningfully constructed in

media (Brooks & Hébert, 2006) by informing the audience how to deal with things described in that means (Morgan, 2007). Social media, in this context, spread and circulated the framing of Rohingyas as parasites which then culminates in Aceh university students protesting the Rohingyas incoming to their city. Fueled by the anger they cultivate through social media interaction, the protest becomes aggressive with the single intention of ushering all the refugees out from their temporary shelter in Aceh.

The mass anger is clearly detached from the fact that the Rohingyas have been denied access to citizenship, prevented from

accessing health care, education, and work opportunities, and subjected to structural extreme violence by the Myanmar government (UNHCR, 2023). This condition leads them to leave the country in search of safety in the neighbouring Bangladesh. However, as the human rights violations culminated in 2017, and the Bangladesh camp became overpopulated, some of the Rohingya families took a dangerous journey by boat to southeast Asian countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. In Indonesia, they arrived at Sumatera Island, particularly in Aceh and were welcomed and treated well. However, as the wave of refugees comes in multiply and the resources to help them get more limited, Acehnese started to have a horizontal conflict with the refugees (Febriandi, 2023). The Rohingyas with their multiple burdens have to face the inevitable conflict which was worsened by social media negative sentiments circulation, particularly intensified by the help of the so-called net celebrities that look at the Rohingyas as economic burden. The social networking sites that allow users to interact directly act as the catalyst to heat the debate and make bleaker the negative sentiments of some locals that lead them to do a demonstration. Their democratic involvement was legal but how the protest turned aggressive was what the global media such as Aljazeera and AP, highlighted.

There have been diverse discussions regarding how the media plays a key role in shaping the discourse of minority and marginalized groups. See for example Kohnen & Lacy (2018); Berg-Nordlie (2023); Serafis et al., (2020); Alcaraz-Marmol & G., Soto-Almela (2020). Kohnen & Lacy (2018) for instance, argued that local media representation of a fight at a high school in the southeastern United States silenced students of colour and perpetuated the master script that they are problematic and dangerous. They also demonstrated how the silenced students

resisted the media representation as a result of a critical literacy learning program. Similar with the focus of this study, Berg-Nordlie (2023) examined discourses on immigrants and immigration in local media in Norway's rural districts where immigrants were associated with workers and participants in local civic and cultural life. However, when it referred to refugees/asylum-seekers and Muslims, they were connected to economic burdens, security threats, and irreconcilable cultural differences. Serafis et al., (2020) highlighted the issue of refugee crisis in Greece. Using Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis and argumentation studies, they proposed a methodological synergy that examined a) racist conceptualization as culminated in headlines and photographs in newspaper articles, and b) the argumentative potential sustained in the multimodal representations. In terms of the representation of refugees as a state's economic threat, Alcaraz-Marmol & G., Soto-Almela (2020) also revealed that the dehumanizing language referred to refugees as an out-of-control phenomenon, objectification, and economic burden. Apparently, asylum seeking journeys are global phenomena that result in challenges to the host countries that have underdeveloped condition or still economically emerging. Arcos González et al., (2016) also reported how the influx of Syrian refugees to Lebanon affected the country due to increasing demographics, regressing economy, exhausting social services, complicating politics, decreasing security, and the worsening of the Syrian wellbeing.

How refugees are negatively portrayed in diverse news media and across social media platforms taper similar perceptions. This too happens to Aceh youth triggering them to protest the government's allowing Rohingyas to keep coming to their city. Van Dijk (2015) discussed how news reports express the topic that has the potential to increase a preferred mental model. For example, the journalists can cover a

demonstration as a violation of the social order or as a democratic right. Consequently, how media constructs an issue becomes a central point, since it can help us in understanding how news is produced and what values are taken into consideration. Even though news media often take the refugees' position as economic burden, the same media can also play as critics to advocate for the change in perspective and consider them as human beings, capable of not only being a burden but also bringing about progressive actions. This study attempts to unveil this role news media can play: as a site of struggle, criticising the exercise of domination by the host community demanding refugees to be deported despite the multi-layered injustices they experience to seek asylum.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a framework from van Dijk's critical discourse analysis (1989) to unveil the role of news media as a site of advocating against injustices done to refugees or marginal groups. Van Dijk's framework focuses on unveiling the role of discourse in the (re)production and criticism of the exercise of social power that causes social inequalities. To do so, the structures, strategies, and properties of texts and the context surrounding them are investigated to unveil how those factors (re)produce dominance.

In deconstructing how certain media covers the issue, it is important to consider the sociopolitical reading that may inform the analysis, particularly regarding discourse dimensions of power abuse perpetuating and maintaining the injustice undergone by the Rohingya. Drawing on this point of departure, CDA questions discursive practices, and social context surrounding the production, distribution, and interpretation of the text (van Dijk, 1989b, 1989a; Richardson, 2007; Kelsey, 2015). Richardson (2007) argued that the goal of different news pieces providing selected authoritative sources to legitimise

possible diverse viewpoints is to publish an objective piece of information and also to avoid public criticism. Therefore, the way a certain online news service reports an issue will be one of the many elements observed in the textual analysis that precedes another analysis of how the social context of the issue is being published.

Selection of data

The data examined in this study are news reports about how Rohingya refugees were forced out from their shelter and received hate-driven protest in Aceh, Indonesia. The reports included as data are news that is covered in global news media such as Aljazeera and the Associated Press (henceforth AP). News coverage from Aljazeera is taken as an important datum because it caught Indonesian netizens on X causing this to be widely discussed among Indonesian netizens. Besides, Aljazeera is also one of the news media that claims to "champion the Palestinian cause and gives space to hearing the marginals of the Arab world: dissidents of all colour" and to make manifest the space for 'subaltern to speak' (Sadiki, 2010). As the Rohingya refugees experience the state-sponsored silencing and oppression, the voice to speak about their multiple injustices is important and the role is taken well by Aljazeera. The second coverage from AP is taken because it has been cited and reproduced by several other newspaper agencies. In addition, the contributors are Indonesians who know well the discourse around Rohingya refugees in Indonesia.

Since the study attempts to observe news media's advocating role against the negative representation of refugees, the coverage published by BBC Indonesia is also taken as datum to explore the insight from the refugees' affective dimensions. The take of this incident from the dominated community is important to counter argue the false information circulated among Indonesian social media users regarding the portrayal of Rohingyas as land grabber and

the cause of horizontal conflict with the locals. Other news media are not taken since many are reproduction of the previously published news pieces and many others are published under the opinion column.

This study follows the notion that the data collection is an ongoing procedure that can be done along with the data analysis. This concept aligns with a perspective that sees CDA as a part of Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The connection between social theories of discursive strategies that legitimate control, or normalize the social order and unequal relations (Fairclough, 1985) and social practices need to be scrutinized critically. The findings will then be useful to enforce an understanding of how the issue of violent protest happens.

As van Dijk's approach to discourse is socio-psychological, this study construes the focal triad of discourse, cognition, and society. Meyer (2001) proposes discourse as a communicative event that is mediated by verbal, written, and multimodal means and this is circulated among a certain community's members. The perception of information circulated in the social-communicative event affects the collective opinion. He also suggests that the society's collective frame of perceptions bridges the social system and individual cognitive system which decides how subjective actions are performed within a society. This leads to social representations that sustain dominance.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

To understand the way students protesting the coming of refugees in Aceh is portrayed in news reports, we need to question the parallelism between social power and discourse access. And as the goal of critical discourse analysis is to take a position, this study takes a position that investigates how news media can be the agency that criticise students' eviction of Rohingya refugees as an exercise of dominance. The analysis

begins with unveiling the context of the news production, i.e. the values the agency upholds, setting (time, place), and participants. After examining the context in which the discourse is carried out to dismantle the hegemonic action, the discursive features manifested in the local details of lexical or syntactic style will be investigated as well.

Context of the News Production

In examining the interconnection between the macro-level (dominant) values and views and the micro-level of discursive choices, strategies, and texts (van Dijk, 2008, pp. 85-89), we need to consider the macro level of analysis along with the realization of it in the micro level of social order. Power, dominance, and inequality between social groups typically belong to a macro-level scrutiny (van Dijk, 2015). In the macro level, the news reports are produced to capture the xenophobic action and at the micro-level, the unveiling on the way in which news agencies report the Aceh students' protest toward Rohingya refugees is centered.

Different types of power dynamics can be traced back to the various resources used to exercise them. As the data analysed are from journalistic reports, the relations between discourse and power can be incorporated through observing the access, setting, and participants involved in the news production. Access in this context refers to a social dimension of dominance reflecting who is allowed to say what and to whom. In other words, access patterns are controlled and the participants controlled it in a certain time and place disclose power enactment to control context (van Dijk, 1993). Through this we can see whose voices are included and excluded and in what ways the voices help shape the way the news is carried out to the audience. The analysis of discourse properties to report students' eviction of Rohingya refugees can be seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1. The context of refugees' eviction

News Agencies	Aljazeera	AP	BBC Indonesia
Access	This agency stated that it is a independent (non state-owned) (Sadiki, 2010, par 8).	It claims to hold humanistic values (non-partial) in producing news	BBC Indonesia is still so 'UK' in providing news. By this they claim to be impartial in their news reports (BBC, 2023).
Setting	The source is addressed as an agency without mentioning the actor making the statement.	The source is UNHCR as agency and government officials.	The victims are interviewed as the major source. Besides, info from UNHCR, government officials, independent journalist alliance chair, Kontras (human rights organization) coordinator, Amnesty International Indonesia director, and two protesting students are also addressed.
	The publication date is on 27 December 2023.	The publication date is on 28 December 2023.	The publication date is on 29 December 2023.
Participant	News agencies (AFP) are mentioned as the contributors	The reporter writers, and the contributors are mentioned	The reporter is published explicitly but his name was put not after the title (the top part of the news piece)

Looking at the notions of discourse access and control can help the process of identifying how this issue is constructed, according to whose values, and for what purposes. By observing the profile statement of Aljazeera, we can then make a connection with how this agency prefer to mention only the institutional sources, without having to reveal who from such institution giving public comments. Van Dijk (2015) suggests that controlling the communicative situation can be done in deciding the participants or in this case the informants' identity.

Another aspect to put under careful scrutiny is the contributors to the report, in which AP and BBC clearly mentioned explicitly. Besides, the source cited is mostly from institutional officials, there is a line where the protest coordinator is also cited, informing the intention of the demonstration. What makes the news pieces different is the fact that BBC Indonesia did not put the name of the reporter under the title but in the body of the writing. Apart from that matter, from the three news

agencies, BBC Indonesia highlighted refugees' perspectives of the issue. This indicates that the participants that helps producing the reports were of different background, affecting how the reports are brought and framed. It also showcases that the control of the communicative situation of the participants controls the pragmatic appropriateness of the discourse (van Dijk, 2008b, 2008a). In conclusion, Aljazeera, AP, and BBC Indonesia demonstrate different editorial decision on how to control the semantic macrostructure through their access, setting, and participants. However, the three share similar stance, i.e. criticising the xenophobic action exercised by students to the refugees, even though the first two focusing on the actors while the last on the victims of the protest. In other words, Aljazeera, AP, and BBC Indonesia are never neutral and their production of truth claims and editorial practices are influenced by the power dynamics embedded in their sociopolitical contexts (Canella, 2023).

The Structure of News Reports

The topic of the reports is the students' eviction of Rohingya refugees. In the three newspapers, the topic is portrayed in

different manner. The distinctive strategies of the newspapers to show the topic can be seen in the title of each publication in Table 2 below.

Table 2. The Macrosemantics (Topic)

Newspaper Agency	Aljazeera	AP	BBC Indonesia
Headline	Indonesian students evict Rohingya from shelter demanding deportation	Students in Indonesia protest the growing numbers of Rohingya refugees in Aceh province	<i>Pengusiran pengungsi Rohingya oleh mahasiswa di Aceh, menyisakan trauma dan ketakutan – ‘Kami kira akan mati di sini’</i> (trans: <i>The eviction of Rohingya by Aceh students leaves the refugees traumatised – ‘We thought we were about to die here’</i>)

Looking at the way in which the issue is put in the headline of Aljazeera and AP, we can see that the focus is on the actor doing the action, i.e. Indonesian students doing the eviction (in Aljazeera) and the protest (in AP). Even though the actor is the same, the actions are differently portrayed. Aljazeera highlights the eviction and the demand that the refugees be deported—hence barbaric action—while AP centres the actors in the light of them participating in democratic movement (demonstration). This reflects how the two newspapers showcase the topic differently. Van Dijk (2015) revealed in his research that the construction of discourse structure influences specific mental models and generic representations of a certain actor. In this context, the process of demonstration is framed as democratic right in AP and as a violation of the social order in Aljazeera.

In BBC Indonesia, however, the topic focuses on how the refugees feel about the incident. Wallace (2019) and Anderson (2020) disclose that as global criticism of systemic racism and inequality keeps emerging, the marginalised communities that are often underrepresented plea for newsrooms diversification and transparency about their partiality. BBC Indonesia's coverage plays the role as it accentuates the Rohingyas's mental landscape as the

victims of the violent protest. Providing alternative perspective in reporting the issue, BBC Indonesia negates the representation of refugees as a natural disaster ('wave') (Musolff, 2015) flowing into one's region, but as a human being undergoing difficult times and multiple rejections.

Before discussing more about the linguistic features that demonstrates different discursive strategies in reporting the issue, we need to observe the way information and facts are gathered, what information is included and what is excluded. In Aljazeera, the name of the contributors is not mentioned under the title yet it can be seen from the photographs provided in the content. Similarly, BBC Indonesia also does not mention the contributor under the title but in the body of the report. AP is the only newspaper that inform the readers about the contributors and the reporter of the issue yet from the three newspapers reporting the incident, only AP does not mention the drive of the protest that suddenly turned violent, i.e. misinformation on social media. This makes AP exclude citing the sources that explicitly mention how this incident is driven by, what UNHCR stated as, "coordinated online campaign" (BBC Indonesia, 2023, par. 34) "of

misinformation and hate speech” (Aljazeera, 2023, par. 12).

Local meaning and coherence

The investigation on the semantic or local meanings are an integral part of unveiling the discursive strategies of a certain newspaper agency in delivering its report. The semantic analysis looks at propositions, vagueness, levels of description (van Dijk, 1993). Instead of showcasing dominance, the news criticises the exercise of

domination performed by Aceh students toward Rohingya refugees. Below are the semantic modes of meaning that constructs the issue of eviction that is the result of specific mental processes that are formed along the social media discussion about the refugees as others. The unveiling of the power dominance by emphasizing the othering of the powerless and the marginal such as the Rohingyas can be seen in table 3.

Table 3. Local Meaning and Coherence

Local meaning and coherence	Aljazeera	AP	BBC Indonesia
Level of specificity and degree of completeness	Providing detailed information about the 'discrimination against' the persecuted minority group from Myanmar (par 2)	Detailing the protests, to whom the protest is addressed, the refugees' feeling, and the number of refugees in the shelter (par 1, 3, 5, 6, and 7)	Highlighting the Rohingyas' perspective and emotional responses towards the incident.
Perspective	Criticising students' action	Criticising students' action	Criticising students' action
Implicitness	No implicitness, rather the criticism is voiced by explicit vocabulary such as eviction, discrimination, and rejection	No implicitness, but the target of the protest is not directly addressed to the refugees but to the lawmaker and non-governmental organization	No implicitness and vagueness. The refugees' experience is highlighted in detail, giving hint that they expected to be accepted by the locals due to their shared religious belief
Local coherence	Students = protesters = the students = the protesters = the mob Refugees = the refugees = the Rohingyas	Students in Indonesia's Aceh province = the protesters = many = some protesters = the demonstrators	Students in Aceh = a group of students = they Refugees = we = they

After analysing the local meaning and coherence, the three newspapers take a stance that the intimidating protest students done is condemnable. All reports describe the action in details and explicitly. In this case, the media acts as a space to criticise the exercise of power by the local towards the minority group of Rohingyas and hence addressing the social inequality presented in the incident. In unveiling the social injustice in the reports, it is important to consider how the coherence is maintained. The most

distinct coherence is showcased by BBC Indonesia since the refugees' perspective and emotional responses are taken into account, the pronoun 'we' is also used to bridge the refugees' experience directly to the readers.

Style: variations of syntax, lexicon, and visuals

The analysis of discursive style is demonstrated in table 4 below.



Table 4. Discursive Style

Style	Aljazeera	AP	BBC Indonesia
Lexical style	<p>The lexis embedded with student-protester is: stormed, demanding, forced out, discrimination against, chanting “kick them out”, “reject”, kicking the belongings, burned tyres, scuffled, broke a police cordon, protest, don’t agree with their coming</p> <p>The lexis embedded with refugees: shocked, traumatised, consume scarce resources, occasionally come into conflict with locals</p> <p>The lexicalization focuses only on the incident and how the actors exercise their intimidation towards the marginal refugee community</p>	<p>Students: rally, demanding government, protested, calling on the lawmakers, chanted “get out Rohingyas”, criticize the government and UN refugee agency, burned tires, urge parliament to take a firm action, marched to local community hall, threw out belongings of the refugees, breaking through a police cordon</p> <p>The Rohingyas: leave shocked and traumatized, taking shelter, seeking shelter, are victims of persecution and conflict, are survivors of deadly sea journey, was charged with trafficking, are largely denied citizenship rights, face widespread social discrimination</p> <p>The lexicalization covers the perspective of the refugees and Indonesia in hosting the Rohingya in their temporary asylum seeking journey</p>	<p>The Rohingyas: treated inhumanely/violently, intimidated, threatened continuously.</p> <p>Students: not having sound argument to do the protest, do not have the capacity to respond to hoaxes, take social media posts as their main resource, move like robots, have no ethics, shout, evict, promise to take another wave of protest</p> <p>The lexicalization is directed towards the emotional spheres felt by refugees and also the heated condemnation from several human rights and refugee organizations</p>
Syntactic style	<p>The syntax describing the students’ eviction is the highlighted information that is consistently displayed. The predicate ‘demanding’ and the goal ‘they be deported’ is positioned in the first sentence after the headline</p>	<p>The predicate ‘demanding’ is addressed to ‘the government’ that is followed by ‘Rohingya refugees who have been arriving by sea in growing numbers’ reflects different perspective regarding the object ‘the government’ instead of the refugees</p>	<p>The subject is a nominalisation of the action, i.e. ‘forced relocation’ that causes ‘trauma and fear’ is focused. The actor is put in the sideline because the ideas centres at the refugees’ experience</p>
Visuals	<p>3 visuals are embedded, the first one displaying the fearful expression of refugees in medium shot, the second one taken from the ground, capturing the burnt tire and the mass protesting, the third one showcasing refugees on the back of a truck surrounded by students and one of them took picture with her phone camera</p> <p>There are two videos that reveal the action</p>	<p>1 video is embedded to visualize the intimidating action students did to the refugees</p>	<p>11 visuals are displayed, most of them capture the refugees’ horror-stricken expressions</p> <p>There is also 1 video that showcases the incident and the interview with the refugees</p>



The scrutiny to the micro-structure of the texts is crucial to clarify how news agencies display their discursive strategies in criticising the incident of students' protest towards the coming of refugees in Aceh. The three newspapers' lexicalization signals their political stance, i.e. criticising the violent protest. However, AP is the only newspaper whose choice of argumentation offers the perspective from Indonesia's political dilemma regarding the management of Rohingya refugees as they no longer come as asylum seekers but also victims of human trafficking.

Also Wednesday, police in Banda Aceh named two more suspected human smugglers from Bangladesh and Myanmar, following the Dec. 10 arrival of another boat with refugees. One of the suspects, the boat's captain, himself a refugee, was charged with trafficking.

Through that, the complexity of Rohingya refugee crisis in Indonesia is highlighted. Unlike Aljazeera that put the focus only on the action as an exercise of domination, AP also considers the positioning of Indonesia's political role in taking care of the issues as the report cites Indonesian foreign minister's stating that *"this is an issue with enormous challenges."* BBC Indonesia's lexicalization revolves around

the documentation of both fear, sadness, disappointment by refugees and condemnation by human rights organization's chairperson (Kontras) stating that, *"The reasoning that the students stated (in justifying their action) referred to social media posts that spread hate speech and false information towards the Rohingya."* A refugee's attestation is also important to understand the multiple disenfranchisement they bear because they think that the Rohingya and Acehnese share the same religious belief yet they are still treated inhumanely. This indicates that shared identity cannot make violence less probable. As a consequence, differences that are seen as threats escalate the heated relationship between the host and the asylum seekers. There is also strikingly different lexicalization between Aljazeera and AP in describing the goal of the protest, as embedded with the predicate 'demanding', the former focusing on the refugees as the object of violent protest, the latter on the government agency that fails to address the ever-coming refugees to Indonesia, particularly to Aceh. This different lexicalization showcases how the two news agencies frame the incident, particularly when picturing the goal of the action.

Table 5. Different Goals of the same Action in Aljazeera and AP

Participant	Actor	The students
	Predicate	demanding
	Goal	They (refugees) (Aljazeera) The government (AP)

The strikingly different choice of goal in the two news agencies reflects the inherent normative ideals that they have and how these values and belief are implemented in news content (Scherr et al., 2019) when seen from a bottom-up perspective. The syntactic strategies in this context showcase critical-monitorial function (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018) including mentioning the factors

that cause the incident to happen at the first place (false information on social media). The object of criticism is the actors, i.e. the students doing the protest as they play their role as the more powerful parties exercising domination to the marginal community of Rohingyas. In performing the journalistic roles as the means of challenging the racist and xenophobic acts, the three news reports



advocate this role as expectedly. Hence, journalistic roles played in this context are not only informational but also critical and advocative toward domination exercise.

CONCLUSION

The analysis unveils the discursive strategies of three journalistic reports about the incident of students' protest turning violent and traumatising the marginal community of Rohingya refugees in Aceh, Indonesia. The critical discourse analysis (van Dijk, 1989) framework helps to expose the exercise of domination by Aceh students towards the minority refugee group of Rohingya in doing their asylum-seeking journey through journalistic report. The reports bring to light the condition of inequality and hence positions journalism as a means of socio-political criticism.

In two of the three reports, the incident is reported as the result of what UNHCR stated as 'an organized social media campaign'. It is most probable since Social Networking Sites (SNS) have become an integral part of modern interaction and individuals have the liberation to engage in the discussion that can trigger dysfunctional social behaviours (Ghaffari, 2022) in cyber world that enhances the probability of their manifestation in the real world. The statements in Aljazeera and BBC Indonesia that refer the violent protest as a result of social media campaign and misinformation are taken not only from UNHCR but also from the coordinator of KontraS (The Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence) in Aceh and the Director of Amnesty International in Indonesia, making students' action not only an exercise of dominance but also a violation of human right. This is another representation of how the connectivity and interactivity of social media communication can support the axiological distance of 'us' versus 'them' or what van Dijk refers as 'ideological square' (1998, p. 33). However, further discussions on the potentiality of social media in organising

campaign and real movement is another fruitful space to explore. Is the organised campaign pure a collective aspiration of the locals who experiences threatening impact of refugees' incoming or is there any power 'behind' the discourse (Fairclough, 1989)? This question can be used as a point of departure.

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