

Who is Burning down Rohingya Villages? The Portrayal of Rohingya in Media through Transitivity Analysis

SAWARINN AU-ON, WANNAPA TRAKULKASEMSUK & SOMPATU VUNGTHONG

King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi

This study aims to investigate the representation of the Rohingya in the comments in response to the online BBC News' YouTube video "Who is burning down Rohingya Villages?" through Transitivity analysis. Transitivity analysis was applied to uncover the ideational meanings of language use. The data were analyzed in three main steps. Firstly, each comment was divided into clauses. Second, the process types were identified. Then, the process types were counted and calculated into percentages. The results from the transitivity analysis of the comments indicate that the Rohingya were represented as people who acted in both negative and non-negative ways, and in the material process were mostly acted upon negatively. The Rohingya were also given certain non-negative characteristics more than negative characteristics in the relational process. The study suggests that representation of the Rohingya can be varied depending on the content providers' perspectives. The comments from the international audiences appear to imply that the Rohingya might not be victims of the Myanmar government

Keywords: *critical discourse analysis, transitivity analysis, the Rohingya, representation*

INTRODUCTION

Rohingya are a minority Muslim ethnic group living in the northern part of the Rakhine State (formerly known as Arakan province) of Myanmar. The Rohingya have become one of the most contentious issues in the 21st century. The Rohingya people have been differently represented in many types of social media and news articles.

Many researchers have analysed the representation of Rohingya in the news media including broadcast news (radio & television), print media (newspaper), and Internet content (online newspapers) (Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Biver, 2014; Rahman, 2015; Afzal, 2016). However, a paucity of research has addressed the public comments in response to the topic of the Rohingya which can, at least partially, reveal the public's attitudes towards the Rohingya.

In response to online media, people who give written comments (commenters), through their language use, construct an image of Rohingya based on their background knowledge and personal experiences. A few studies have been conducted on comments on the topic of Rohingya in online media and the data of these studies tend to be collected from a specific group of people (e.g. Thai Online Gay's community in Bunsom and Jimarkon's 2013 study).

This study focuses on the comments in response to an online BBC News presentation on the Rohingya. BBC News targets a wider international audience, and not necessarily only British people. The study aims to analyse through Transitivity analysis how Rohingya people are represented in the comments. The use of the Transitivity system can help reveal the ideational meanings of language use or, in other words, how experiences are represented through the use of language.

LITERATURE REVIEW

With the purpose of analyzing the representation of the Rohingya in the online comments, this study investigated this topic through the lens of critical discourse analysis, or CDA. CDA is “a research perspective, which has basically a critical attitude towards society” (Langer, 1997, p.3). It is suitable for this study as CDA aims to uncover the implicit ideologies hidden in texts (Widdowson, 2000) and sheds light on how people's language use reflects their ideological stance on social problems or important issues such as racial discrimination and power relations (Fairclough, 1989). As a theory, CDA investigates the relation between the use of language and the social and political context which occur in texts (Paltridge, 2006; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). In this study, the focus is on the online comments under the YouTube video clip on the Rohingya and the analysis of the comments can shed light on the commenters' views about the Rohingya who tended to be portrayed as being marginalized, discriminated against and victimized in the media as shown in many studies (e.g. Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Biver, 2014; Rahman, 2015; Afzal, 2016).

Through CDA, the representations of the Rohingya have been analyzed through many ways such as using historical narratives (Pugh, 2013), employing qualitative content analysis in secondary sources (e.g. journal articles, textbooks, government and non-government organizations' reports) (Rahman, 2015), applying qualitative analysis of the human rights violations (Crossman, 2014), and conducting a survey with the registered Rohingya refugees in Pakistan (two Rohingya refugee camps) (Jahan, 2014). Most of the studies on

the Rohingya in this perspective pointed out the unfair treatment of the Rohingya and that Rohingya people have suffered and lacked basic needs as well as been persecuted and ignored as a stateless minority.

Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) as a linguistics perspective on discourse developed mainly by M.A.K. Halliday has also offered various tools for CDA. Among various SFL tools for linguistic analysis, the system of Transitivity, which will be employed in this study, can be used to reveal how the language is used to form the representation of the participants in a clause. According to Halliday (1973, p.134), “transitivity is the set of options whereby the speaker encodes his experience of the process of the external world, and of the internal world of his own consciousness, together with the participants in these processes and their attendant circumstances”. In other words, the system of Transitivity offers choices for representing experience in terms of process types, participants, and circumstances (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). To explain, the process types describe relationships between participants and/or circumstances. The process types are commonly realized grammatically as a verb phrase (e.g. shoot, kill, see). Participants are people or entities involved in the process. They are typically realized grammatically as a noun phrase (e.g. John, he, she). The circumstances provide information about the conditions in which a Process occurs such as where, when, why, how, how far, how long, with what, about what or as what. Circumstances can be classified in terms of the type of information they contribute: space, time, manner, means, cause, extent, accompaniment, matter, and role (Halliday, 1994). The circumstances are regularly realized grammatically by adverb and prepositional phrases (e.g. in the street, on the wall, at breakfast) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

In this study, how the Rohingya as a participant are represented in the comments can be analyzed through Transitivity analysis which can be used to reveal types of process performed by the participants and the roles they play in a clause (e.g. Actor or Goal; Senser or Phenomenon; Carrier or Token).

In the system of Transitivity, there are six types of process, namely material, mental, relational, verbal, existential, and behavioral as shown in Figure 1.

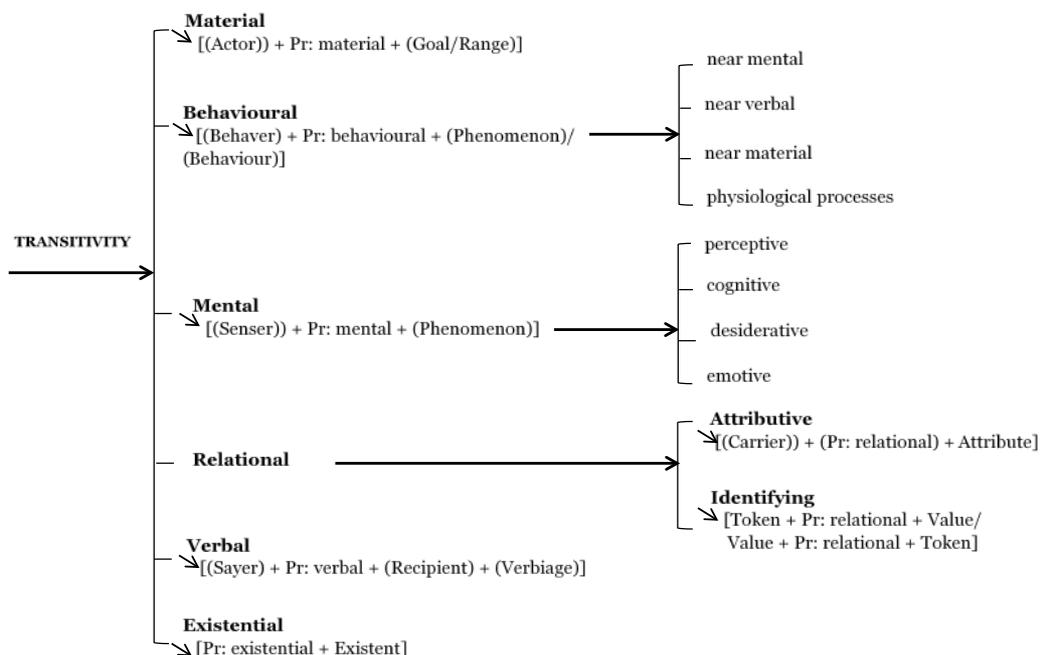


Figure 1 The system of Transitivity

Material Process

Material process presents the notion of acting and happening. The processes exhibit some material or visible, tangible actions, usually concrete in the flow of events or the environment. There are four possible participants in this process type. The two main participants are Actor and Goal. Actor is the one who does the action, whereas Goal is the one who is affected by the action. Two other participants in the Material process are Beneficiary and Range. Beneficiary is the one who benefits from the process. There are two kinds of Beneficiary: Recipient and Client. Recipient is the one that something is given to, whereas Client is the one that something is done for (Eggins, 2004). Range is an extension of the process which is constructed by the use of dummy verbs, like have, make, give, do, and take (e.g. have a bath, make a mistake, take a look (Eggins, 2004)).

Table 1
Sample of Material process

Actor	Process: material	Goal
They	built	a house.
The mayor	dissolved	the committee.

(Halliday, 1994, p. 111)

Mental Process

Mental process is the process of feeling, thinking and perceiving which can be classified into four types: perceptive, desiderative, emotive and cognitive. There are two participants: Sensor and Phenomenon. Sensor is a conscious participant who feels, thinks or perceives, whereas Phenomenon is what is felt, thought, or perceived by the Sensor (Egins, 2004).

Table 2
Sample of Mental process

Sensor	Process: mental	Phenomenon
Mary	liked	the gift.
Tim	realized	that he was in a big city.
Jill	can't see.	

(Halliday, 1994, p. 114)

Relational Process

Relational Process is a kind of being/having. Relational processes can be categorized into two modes: Attributive and Identifying. The main participants in the Attributive mode are Carrier and Attribute. Specifically, Carrier is an entity which is being described, whereas Attribute is the description of the entity. In Identifying mode, two main participants are Token and Value. Token is an entity which is being identified, whereas Value is the identifier which defines Token. Generally, they are classified into three sub-classifications named Intensive, Possessive, and Circumstance.

Table 3
Sample of Relational process

Sub-classification	Type Mode					
	Attributive			Identifying		
	Carrier	Process: relational	Attribute	Token	Process: relational	Value
Intensive	John	is	wise.	John	is	the monitor.
Circumstantial	The meeting	is	on Tuesday.	Yesterday	is	the fifth.
Possessive	Peter	has	a piano.	The piano	is	Peter's

(Halliday, 1994, p. 119)

Behavioral Process

Behavioral processes are processes of physiological and psychological behavior, such as breathing, coughing, staring, dreaming, smiling, looking, listening, and laughing. (Gerot and Wignell, 1994). Most Behavioral processes have only one main conscious participant which is called Behavior. Another participant is

Behaviour which rarely occurs in the Behavioral processes. The Behaviour is a restatement of the process or a Range. In other words, Behaviour is a subcategory of Range (e.g. *a sigh* in breathe a sigh, *a song* in sing a song, *sweet dream* in dream sweet dream (Bloor & Bloor, 2004)).

Table 4
Sample of Behavioral process

Behaver	Process: behavioral	Behaviour
She	gave	a faint sign.
My sister	coughed.	

(Halliday, 1994, p. 139)

Verbal Process

A verbal process is the process of saying. The participants of the processes are Sayer, Receiver and Verbiage. Sayer is the doer of the verbal process, whereas Receiver is the participant to whom the verbalization is directed. Verbiage is a nominalized statement of the verbalization or a noun conveying some kind of verbal behavior (e.g. report, question, answer, statement, etc.) (Egins, 2004).

Table 5
Sample of Verbal process

Sayer	Process: verbal	Target	Receiver	Verbiage
He	told		me	the truth.
The report	says			that there is an accident.
She	praised	him.		

(Halliday, 1994, p. 140)

Existential Process

Existential process represents processes of existing and happening. The use of the word '*there*' is easy to identify as part of the structure. The only participant is called the Existent.

Table 6
Sample of Existential process

	Process: existential	Existent	Circumstance
There	is	a robbery	in the street.
There	hangs	a portrait	on the wall.

(Halliday, 1994, p. 142)

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

Data for this research consist of the comments given under the BBC News' YouTube video "Who is burning down Rohingya Villages?". The top 53 comments were chosen based on the following criteria:

1. A comment must feature at least one clause. To analyse the data based on the Transitivity system, a unit of analysis must be a clause. Therefore, if a comment has only noun phrases such as "fake news" or "terrorist Buddhists", it will not be selected as data.
2. A comment must include Rohingya people or the Rohingya as the participant. For example, the comment "Why BBC care so much about Rohingya?" will be selected. In addition, some comments which feature Rohingya by using other words such as "those Muslims" and "poor people" will be chosen too. However, if a comment does not include Rohingya as the participant such as "BBC is a communist organization and desires worldwide chaos", it will not be selected.

Data Analysis

1. A unit of analysis is a clause. Each comment was divided into clauses. Each clause was analyzed by using Transitivity Analysis to identify its process type. There were 115 clauses in total (see samples of analysis in Appendix). After the data was coded, the coding consistency was checked by a second coder for reliability, with a result of 100 percent agreement.
2. The process types were counted, and then the percentage of each type of process was calculated.
3. The results were discussed in terms of how the Rohingya were represented in the clauses (e.g. the tendency of Rohingya to be presented as Goal or victims who are acted upon in the material process). The results of each process type were categorized in terms of negative or non-negative portrayal of the Rohingya by interpreting the whole contextual meaning. This study did not merely consider the lexical level. To explain, some words in association with the Rohingya in this study seemed to be non-negative (e.g. support, join hand), but they were considered as negative because of particular contexts (e.g. joining hand with Pakistan terrorists). Through this analysis, the global media commenters' views towards Rohingya were revealed.

RESULTS

The Transitivity analysis of comments under the YouTube video “Who is burning down Rohingya Villages?” reveals that people represented Rohingya through five types of process— material, relational, mental, existential, and verbal (but without behavioral process) — as can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7
Frequency of Rohingya as a participant in process types

No.	Types	Number of Findings	Percentage
1.	Material Process	82	71.30
2.	Relational Process	26	22.61
3.	Mental Process	4	3.48
4.	Existential Process	2	1.74
5.	Verbal Process	1	0.87
	Total	115	100

According to the results in Table 7, the most frequently used process type was material (71%). This process type is significant and worth discussing in detail. Relational processes (23%) were also used in representing the Rohingya and should not be ignored although it was not found as often as material process. The other three process types found in this study were mental process (3%), existential process (2%), and verbal process (1%). However, they rarely occurred so they could not contribute much in understanding the portrayal of the Rohingya. Thus, they will not be discussed in detail in this section.

1. Material Process

The representation of Rohingya through the material process is shown in Table 8, and the Rohingya were represented in the material process as Goal (56%), as Actor (39%), as Circumstance (4%), and as Recipient (1%).

From the comments, the Rohingya were frequently represented as ‘Goal’ and ‘Actor’ in the process while rarely as ‘Circumstance’ and ‘Recipient’.

Table 8
Frequency of Rohingya as a participant in material processes

Rohingya as a participant	Number of Findings	Negative or non-negative portrayal of the Rohingya	Frequency	Verbs
		The Rohingya as being acted upon negatively	35 (76%)	Radicalize (1), kill (12), burn down (1), expel (1), ban (1), mock (1), insult (1), don't give (1), burn

A Goal	46 (56%)			(2), not send (1), rape (1), shoot (2), blast (1), don't accept (1), blame (1), persecute (1), cannot accept (3), ignore (1), oppress (1), deprive (1)
		The Rohingya as <i>not being acted upon</i> negatively	11 (24%)	send (2), bring (1), support (1), interview (1), save (2), take (1), welcome (1), call (1), born (1)
An Actor	32 (39%)	The Rohingya as doing negative things	16 (50%)	join hand ¹ (1), do this type ² (1), murder (1), support ³ (1), attack (4), kill (1), fight (1), rebel (1), worship ⁴ , do (2) ⁵ , destroy (1), protest (1)
		The Rohingya as <i>not doing</i> negative things	16 (50%)	need to go (1), help (1), support (1), die (1), do (1), fly (1), want to go (1), live (5), go (1), flee (1), escape (1), share (1)
Circumstance	3 (4%)	The Rohingya as being in the circumstance with negative connotations	1 (33%)	from the vile, raping, beheading, thieving scum (Rohingya)
		The Rohingya as in the circumstance with <i>non-negative</i> connotations	2 (67%)	for reporting the situation in Burma and showing the world the daily suffering of those poor Rohingya, So much about Rohingya
Recipient	1 (1%)	The Rohingya as receiving negative things	-	-
		The Rohingya as <i>not receiving</i> negative things	1 (100%)	Give (shelter, food, house and mosque)
	100%			

1 with Pakistani terror groups

2 to other religion in the name of jihad

3 the Islamic Militia of Myanmar Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front (ARIF)

4 the devil called Allah

5 for bombing, rape, sell children as sex slaves, to anger the Buddhists

When the Rohingya were represented as the Goal, they were acted upon by the ‘Actor’. In this study, mostly, the Rohingya as Goal were acted upon negatively (e.g. being killed, banned, mocked, insulted, raped, not accepted, ignored) by the Myanmar government and Myanmar Buddhists (e.g. *“The Burma government and Buddhist people burn[ed] those villages and killed rohingya Muslim”*). On the other hand, when they were acted upon by other agents such as the audience of the video clip (the public in general), or all Muslims, the actions were not negative (e.g. *“Please [you] save Muslim [Rohingya]”, “all Muslim save to [save] rohingya”*).

When Rohingya people were represented as ‘Actor’ who did something or performed certain actions to affect other participants, the Rohingya were constructed as doing negative and non-negative things with the same proportion. For doing negative things, the Goal tended to be the Myanmar government. However, for not doing negative things, the Rohingya acted non-negatively with other participants.

Mostly, the Rohingya were constructed as doing negative things to the Myanmar government and Myanmar Buddhists by performing acts such as attacking, killing, rebelling, murdering, and joining hands with and supporting the terrorists (e.g. *“they [Rohingya] attacked police station 2 weeks ago, killing [killed] 10 police officers”*).

On the other hand, the Rohingya as not doing negative things were represented as living in Myanmar and helping support the British in the past (e.g. *“But bangladesh government also think that they are not a part of their nation b[e]cause they already lived in myanmar since long time ago.”, “Rohingya help [helped] and support [supported] British during ww2 against Japanese force.”*).

2. Relational Process

The second most frequent use of process type is relational process (26 times). The Rohingya in relational process were viewed in two sub-process types: identifying and attributive. As indicated in Table 9, the Rohingya were constructed as a ‘Token’ (14 times) and a Carrier (12 times).

In identifying relational process, the Rohingya as a ‘Token’ were given certain ‘Value’ in two main ways: as not being identified negatively and being identified negatively. The Rohingya in this study were more likely to be identified non-negatively than negatively. As not being identified negatively, the Rohingya were identified in association with the religion (Muslims), country (Bangladesh), and race (Rohingya), (e.g. *“Those who blame who[-] all Rohingya people because they are muslims*). However, when the Rohingya were identified with

negative ‘Value’, they were given the image of criminals and law breakers (e.g. “ALL MUSLIMS ARE TERRORISTS”).

Table 9
Frequency of Rohingya as a participant in identifying relational process

Rohingya as a participant	Number of Findings	Negative or non-negative portrayal of the Rohingya	Frequency	Utterance
Token	14 (54%)	The Rohingya as being identified negatively	4 (29%)	rapists and killers, TERRORISTS, criminal, illegal immigrants
		The Rohingya <i>as not being identified</i> negatively	10 (71%)	the pawns, Rohingya Muslim, Bangladesh, no connection, a part of their (Bangladesh’s) nation, Rohingyas, the Muslims (4)
Carrier	12 (46%)	The Rohingya as being given negative Attribute	3 (25%)	active, (not) different, violent
		The Rohingya <i>as not being given</i> negative Attribute	9 (75%)	responsible, there, under Britain and Myanmar, from Bangladesh, in hunger, dying, suffering..., there since the colonialism era, systemic measures, citizenship, the luxury
	100%			

In attributive relational process, the Rohingya as a ‘Carrier’ were given certain ‘Attributes’ in two ways: as not being given negative Attributes and being given negative Attributes. The Rohingya were given non-negative Attributes more than negative Attributes. As not being given negative Attribute, Rohingya people were portrayed based on their life situation in Myanmar, their native land and history (e.g. “*Rohingya was under Britain and Myanmar*”). For the portrayal of the Rohingya with negative Attributive, they were constructed as aggressive Muslims like ISIS (e.g. “*they [Rohingya] are muslims are not different from ISIS*”).

DISCUSSION

From the Transitivity analysis of the comments from international audiences in this study, the Rohingya were mostly represented as people who acted and were acted upon in the material process and were also given certain characteristics in the relational process. In general, the international audiences

did not have negative attitudes towards the Rohingya and tended to perceive the Rohingya only as people in the news who were having a conflict with the Myanmar people and government.

Through the analysis of the material processes, the Rohingya were perceived to be mistreated only by the Myanmar government and Buddhist Myanmar. On the other hand, when they were perceived as wrongdoers, the actions were all done to Myanmar. This means for the international audiences, the Rohingya were not that threatening or problematic to other groups of people. In fact, the Rohingya were only perceived by the international audiences as enemies of Myanmar and vice versa. The findings of the relational process also agree with those of the material process in that the Rohingya were not viewed negatively.

The findings from the current study demonstrate a different representation of the Rohingya, as compared to other previous studies. Normally, the analysis of contents in the mainstream media or news media represented the Rohingya as victims suffering from Myanmar's mistreatment and thus they deserved help, support and/or protection (Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Biver, 2014; Rahman, 2015; Afzal, 2016). However, in this study, the Rohingya were represented neutrally. They were viewed as people in the news who acted and were being acted upon without an accompanying tragic image.

The main reason that makes the findings from this study different from many other studies might be because the contents were from different sources. To clarify, the Rohingya in the mainstream media were represented by journalists, newsagents, news organizations and so on. These groups of people tended to consider the Rohingya situation through the lens of human rights and social equality (Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Biver, 2014; Rahman, 2015; Afzal, 2016). Therefore, they presented the Rohingya as people who lacked basic needs in accordance with international norms (e.g. health care, education), and highlighted that the Rohingya need help and support from international organizations. On the other hand, the Rohingya in the online comments were commented on by laypeople or general audiences who just consumed the news and responded to the news based on their personal attitudes without any intention of demanding rights for the Rohingya. Therefore, they might not see the Rohingya as submissive victims.

From a critical point of view, one should bear in mind that all content information is always constructed based on senders' perceptions, attitudes and/or values. As we are now living in the digital era with overwhelming amount of information, we should be aware of how we could be manipulated by information we receive. That is, we need to develop our media literacy. Having the knowledge of media literacy may not totally change our attitude towards people, but it may lead us to recognize bias, misinformation and to understand

how media messages shape our society and culture. It helps us not to get the wrong perception of people that would lead to hatred.

THE AUTHORS

Sawarinn Au-on received a master's degree in English for Professional and International Communication from King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, Bangkok, Thailand. Her research interests include critical discourse analysis and politeness theory.

Wannapa Trakulkasemsuk is an assistant professor at the Department of Language Studies, School of Liberal Arts, King Mongkut's University of Technology. Her research interests mainly include World Englishes, English as a Lingua Franca, Language and communication and corpus-based language analysis.

wannapa.tra@kmutt.ac.th

Sompatu Vungthong is a lecturer at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, Bangkok, Thailand, and a PhD graduate from Department of Education, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia, and. Her research interests include ELT, critical discourse analysis, and social semiotics. She has published in journals (e.g. TESOL Quarterly) and written a book chapter.

sompatu.vun@kmutt.ac.th

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APPENDIX

Comment 1:

"Seriously, all my respect goes to you BBC for reporting the situation in Burma and showing the world the daily suffering of those poor Rohingya people"

Actor	Pr: material	Goal	Circ.
my respect	goes to	you	for reporting the situation in Burma and showing the world the daily suffering of those poor Rohingya

Comment 2:

"...muslims are rapists and killers"

Token	Pr: relational: identifying	Value
Muslims (Rohingya)	are	rapists and killers

Comment 3:

"Send all of them to UK"

Actor	Pr: material	Goal	Circ:location
(You)	Send	all of them (Rohingya)	to UK

Comment 4:

"Guess who is voicing for Rohingyas....Saudi, Turkey & Pakistan that was divided because of their genocide of epic proportions."

"Rohingyas want a separate country and joined hands with Pakistani terror groups who are radicalizing them in the name of religion."

Sayer	Pr: verbal	Circ.
Who	is voicing	for Rohingyas....

Senser	Pr: mental: desiderative	Phenomenon
Rohingyas	want	a separate country

Actor	Pr: material	Range	Circ.
(Rohingya)	joined	hands	with Pakistani terror groups

Actor	Pr: material	Goal	Circ.
Who	are radicalizing	them (Rohingya)	in the name of religion.

Comment 5:

"I have a lot of sympathies for innocent people fleeing their homes Muslims or otherwise."

Carrier	Pr: relational: attributive	Attribute	Circ.
I	have	a lot of sympathies	for innocent people fleeing their homes Muslims or otherwise.

Comment 6:

"...if you kill Muslims you can justify by saying you kill terrorists."

Actor	Pr: material	Goal
you	kill	Muslims (Rohingya)

Actor	Pr: material	Goal
you	kill	terrorists (Rohingya)