Making and Unmaking a Hero –
Aung San Suu Kyi in the News Media

Astrid Juckenack
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Abstract

At the start of this thesis stood the supposition that news media frame issues and actors in ways which convey and underscore particular aspects thereof, and which lead media consumers to think about these issues and actors, and their potential implications and ramifications, in particular ways, including in cases of genocide and mass atrocity. Further, this happens through a gendered lens which ‘others’ women actors. A recent case in which a woman’s public image has undergone significant change and received considerable media coverage throughout is that of Aung San Suu Kyi, de facto head of state of Myanmar, and unexpectedly silent on the ongoing Rohingya crisis. This thesis set out to illuminate how Aung San Suu Kyi is portrayed in internationally read news media, specifically the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, *The Atlantic*, and *Al Jazeera*, between 2015 and 2018. Using a theoretical framework of framing theory, the gendered mediation thesis, and critical perspectives on victims, bystanders, perpetrators, and ‘hero’ figures in the context of genocide and mass atrocity, a framing analysis using the four groups as its organizing structure was conducted. It was found that Aung San Suu Kyi is predominantly cast as a passive bystander who is morally complicit to the persecution and has significant though not unlimited authority in Myanmar, but is discussed in the context of all four groups. She is portrayed in a gendered manner to some extent, as her elevation and demise are amplified by gendered descriptions, often drawing from feminine stereotypes and expectations, and relations to men. Predominantly, the media reconciles opposing images of her arguing either that Aung San Suu Kyi was never a hero to begin with without calling the concept of ‘hero’ into question, or by critiquing this concept.

**Key Words:** Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar, Burma, Rakhine, Rohingya crisis, news media, news framing, bystander, perpetrator, victim, hero, gender

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# List of Abbreviations

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<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>AFPFL</td>
<td>Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League</td>
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<tr>
<td>ARSA</td>
<td>Arakan Resistance Salvation Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>BIA</td>
<td>Burma Independence Army</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>GMMP</td>
<td>Global Media Monitoring Project</td>
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<td>ICC</td>
<td>International Criminal Court</td>
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<td>NDSC</td>
<td>National Defense and Security Council</td>
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<td>NLD</td>
<td>National League for Democracy</td>
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<tr>
<td>OHCHR</td>
<td>High Commissioner for Human Rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLORC</td>
<td>State Law and Order Restoration Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNCHR</td>
<td>United Nations Human Rights Council</td>
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<td>UNSC</td>
<td>United Nations Security Council</td>
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<td>USA</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
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<tr>
<td>USDP</td>
<td>Union Solidarity and Development Party</td>
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Topic Area

In 2017, then-United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’Ad al-Hussein called the violent persecution of the Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State, Myanmar, a textbook example of ethnic cleansing at the United Nations Human Rights Council. In a report on the United Nations fact-finding mission in Myanmar, released in 2018, it was found that “[m]any of these violations undoubtedly amount to the gravest crimes under international law,” and warrant, inter alia, further investigations and procedures to determine the possibility of genocidal intent. Over the past years, ethnic cleansing potentially amounting to genocide has been underway in Myanmar, and has been especially severe since mid-2017. Since then, more than 700,000 Rohingya are estimated to have fled to neighboring Bangladesh. Amid the Myanmar officials targeted with heavy critique in regards to the treatment of the Rohingya people is Aung San Suu Kyi. Now-State Councilor and de facto leader of Myanmar, she is also a long-term dissenter and democracy advocate who spent a total of 15 years under house arrest during her protest against the military junta. Idealized domestically and internationally, awarded a Nobel Peace Prize and a plethora of other humanitarian distinctions, and widely portrayed as a hero figure and, for example, a “perfect hostage” during the time of her captivity and resistance. The silence and potential endorsement she is currently alleged to display on the matter of the military-lead ethnic cleansing have consequently come as a shock and surprise to many of her former admirers. Any person hailed a ‘hero’ today may defy the ideals associated with this status tomorrow. Nevertheless, the turn remains startling, and is what gave rise to the focus of this study.

The atrocities in Rakhine State have been well-documented, and some measures have been taken by the international community(ies) in an attempt to aide the Rohingya, as well as other

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1 Throughout this thesis, I will predominantly use the term ‘Myanmar,’ as it is currently (part of) the official name of the country. When referring to the past, the name applicable at the time will be used, or a clarification will be given. This concerns the name of Rakhine State as well, even though the term Arakan continues to be used as well, and there is certainly merit in refusing government-shaped terminology in the light of current events. However, the decision was taken to use current official, widely-used names, whilst recognizing that awareness of their implications or political motivations remains important.


3 Hereinafter: UNCHR

4 Hereinafter: UN


8 As emerges from the UN report, as well as e.g. the media sources used throughout this thesis.
ethnic groups targeted with persecution. The European Union\(^9\) has passed and renewed a travel ban against 14 Myanmar officials,\(^10\) and the International Criminal Court\(^{11}\) decided in its First Trial Chamber “that the Court may exercise jurisdiction over the alleged deportation of the Rohingya people from Myanmar to Bangladesh.”\(^{12}\) This surpassed expectations stemming from the low chance that the decision to launch an ICC investigation would have been taken in the UN Security Council,\(^{13}\) owing to China’s veto power as one of the Permanent Five members. Nevertheless, the possibility of an intervention remains small, if not defunct, and international reactions to the expanding knowledge about the violence have been deemed an “awkward silence” rather than an appropriately vocal response.\(^14\)

According to Kjell Anderson and Ingjerd Brakstad, the media play an important role in shaping public willingness to intervene, or the importance attributed to intervention, in cases of genocide and mass atrocity as they happen.\(^{15}\) They frame the dynamics driving the atrocities, and can encourage passive and active bystandership alike. Concerning Myanmar and the case of Aung San Suu Kyi, holding the positions of a political and a moral leader alike and thereby occupying a crucial place in understanding the dynamics encountered in Myanmar at the moment, it thus appears a relevant point of focus to examine the media portrayal of her role, both in relation to her changing status, as well as in relation to the role, behavior, or position assigned to her. Moreover, as a woman holding a leadership position, and being implicated in the context of mass atrocity and persecution, Aung San Suu Kyi’s case may prove interesting from an oft-neglected gender perspective, especially regarding women who fall within the scope of those responsible for, rather than those passively affected by, such events.

**Previous Research**

In the following sections, I will outline the bodies of research to which this thesis aims to contribute. An attempt will be made to provide a concise overview without going into more depth than is necessary. An overview will be given on research concerning the representation of female

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9 Hereinafter: EU  
11 Hereinafter: ICC  
13 Hereinafter: UNSC  
politicians and political leaders, the actions and representations of women in different roles in the context of genocide and mass atrocity, as well as studies on the representation of issues concerning Myanmar, with special attention to representations regarding the Rohingya crisis. Following this section, the lacuna this thesis aims to fill will be laid out more explicitly, and will serve as an introduction to the research aim and questions.

The Representation of Female Leaders and Politicians in News Media

The geographical focus of studies concerning the media portrayal of female politicians, focusing on different types of print-media as well as on images and television, rests predominantly on the UK, the US, and Canada, though attempts have been made to broaden this spectrum, e.g. with studies focusing on France and the Scandinavian countries, Eastern Europe, Germany, and Australia and New Zealand. Notably, some of the relevant research is not strictly limited to women politicians, but encompasses the broader category of “elite women” who are “persistently trivialized by media speculation over their private lives, domestic arrangements, and sartorial style.” Turley presents the results of the Global Media Monitoring Project, which notes imbalances in female representation between topics as well. According to these results, female underrepresentation extends to “professional categories such as law (18 percent), business (12 percent) and politics (12 percent)” even though women make up larger percentages within these fields overall. The focus on the political sphere is deemed important owing to its construction as not only a male-dominated but an


17 Krogstad & Storvik, “Picturing Politics: Female Political Leaders in France and Norway.”


22 Hereinafter: GMMP

explicitly male space, which is consequently portrayed and mediated as such. The male-driven use of gendered language in reports on masculinized topics, such as war, politics, and a 'male' understanding of democracy, perpetuates the notion of these spaces as inherently male, and affirms the perception of women as an “Other” who is an exception or intruder.24

The gendered portrayal of women occurs in tabloid-style newspapers as well as in ‘serious’ news media, albeit the latter may feature stereotypical representation less blatantly and through more overt elements.25 The “newsworthiness” of a news item, in all outlets, is primarily determined by men, with a male audience in mind.26 Nevertheless, as shown by Uscinski and Goren, the gender of the journalist or moderator may be significant for how female politicians are treated.27 The gendered portrayal employed affects the media-treatment of women in a plethora of ways, and is not necessarily limited to the field of politics. Some scholars have paid particular attention to the frequency with which women politicians are mentioned, or to the amount of news coverage female politicians receive: Research analyzing data from the 1980s has exposed stark differences in the amount of news coverage dedicated to male and female senatorial candidates in the US,28 though later analyses, focusing on different levels of electoral races including presidential campaigns, have not always been able to detect similar trends.29 There is also an imbalance in the coverage a candidate receives depending on whether an issue is constructed as feminine or masculine. Generally, male politicians have been shown to receive more extensive coverage on ‘male’ issues, and women politicians, respectively, on ‘female’ issues, though there are certain exceptions when

27 Uscinski & Goren, “What’s in a Name?”
male dominance can be found in ‘female’ topics. Further studies have explored the news discourses surrounding female politicians, as an overall presence in the media does not necessarily reflect on the manner in which a politician is being discussed. Here, too, there are many but not unequivocal indicators that reports on women take a more negative and critical tone, or stress different topics, such as issues dealing with their person as opposed to their policy aims or propositions, more so than in relation to their male counterparts.

Coverage of female politicians by male reporters is disproportionately concerned with their person with private, non-political matters and outward appearance. Women politician’s personal lives are scrutinized more closely as though they were celebrities rather than politicians, whereas male politicians may benefit from the inclusion of their personal lives into their political campaign. “[M]ale-centered naming strategies” are used, leading to explicit and repeated mentions of women’s gender and the use of sex as a distinct marker, as well as to their identification based on their relation to men, e.g. by “their marital or family status.” Meanwhile, their skills and capabilities as politicians called into questions more frequently when the subject is female, and conflicts in which women politicians engage tend to be exaggerated and over-emphasize emotional rather than professional engagement.

Yet another feature commonly noted throughout the studies is the portrayal of women in politics as outliers and ‘novelties,’ or as “deviant” beings within the political sphere, whereas male politicians are defined by their careers and achievements. Thus, women politicians are presented as occupying a role which deviates from what media portray as typical female roles, and the transgression carries with it “social penalties which often speak in the register of hysteria or

30 Bystrom et al “Framing the Fight.”
34 Allan, News Culture. 135.
35 Ross, Gendered Media: Women, Men, and Identity Politics. 75.
aberration.”

Even where women politicians are apparently framed in positive ways – i.e. “as breaking the mold, as outsiders winning against the odds, and as agents of change” – these frames tend to underscore their deviance and bar them from entering mainstream politics nevertheless.

Female Victims, Perpetrators, Bystanders, and ‘Hero’ Figures

Not unlike studies concerned with the media representation of women politicians, the literature regarding the perception of female perpetrators points towards the prominence of ‘exceptional’ women as well. Concerning research on the roles of women in the context of genocide and armed conflict, much attention is paid to their victimization. Such research reveals that women are often considered as being passive, as being the victims rather than the perpetrators of genocide and mass atrocity, and as being considered extended territory of a national or ethnic group rather than independent, responsible actors in the gruesome events. Moreover, the recognition of their victimhood may depend on the specific type of victimization. Thus the victimization of women may be awarded recognition in the context of genocide or armed conflict because it begins to resemble the victimization of men, though women may experience similar abuse during peacetime as well. Moreover, narratives of sexual violence are often favored over narratives stressing other types of victimization. Notably, this treatment continues in the aftermath of such violence as well. For example, various mechanisms of transitional justice have been criticized for denying or misconstruing the agency of female victims as well.

Women are often associated with peacetime rather than armed conflict, or may be understood as inherently innocent and apolitical, and therewith not considered in the context of collective violence. However, Sjoberg and Gentry suggest that “[a]s women’s freedoms increase,

42 Ross, Gendered Media: Women, Men, and Identity Politics. 75.
so will their violence.”49 In regards to their contribution to episodes of mass atrocity, research thus far indicates that women were predominantly bystanders, who fulfilled various supporting roles and, moreover, whose passivity indicated their approval and thereby worked to support the dominant ideology, but who might further use their privileged roles to exploit victims when possible.50 This can entail bureaucratic tasks, supporting official procedures and systems of oppression, as well as work reproducing and enforcing the dominant ideology, for example as teachers or medical staff.51 On the ground,’ alongside the combatants or active perpetrators, women may fulfill other positions of support, for example as nurses, cooks, or fulfilling ‘domestic’ tasks,52 although this may not always be done voluntarily.53

Research on the active participation of women in mass atrocity and armed conflict constitutes an expanding field, which now reveals that while women may not have been as widely involved in the perpetration of past atrocities as men, they were more present than has long been recognized. This extents across cases, and includes for example the activity of women guards in concentration camps, their participation in the Rwandan genocide, or their participation in the torture, including sexual violence, perpetrated in the Abu Ghraib detention facilities.54 Moreover, ‘higher level’ participants are increasingly recognized as well, which Shannon Holland’s results echo somewhat.55 Other aspects of research highlight the perception, treatment and representation of female perpetrators. Thus, according to “evil woman theory,” women in the criminal justice system generally benefit from the femininity attributed to them by being treated with more leniency, but are treated comparatively harshly if their crime is violating this very femininity.56 A finding that permeates and is affirmed throughout the dominant literature concerns the stark categorization

evoked in discourses on female killers, who are found to be frequently discussed as reflecting a deteriorating modern society.\(^{57}\) Thus, women perpetrators may be considered as mothers, monsters, or whores,\(^ {58}\) or similarly, as “bad, mad or sad,”\(^ {59}\) making women who perpetrate severe violence, or who kill, either deeply and exceptionally evil or deranged – having been driven mad or fallen victim to their own hormonal imbalances, i.e. to their female bodies.\(^ {60}\) This removes their agency, on one hand, whilst also portraying female perpetrators as having been, in a way, victimized as well.\(^ {61}\) Moreover, by considering these acts as individual and exceptional events, larger social structures or a wider understanding of humanity do not have to be called into question.\(^ {62}\) Notably, in a study on Lyndie England, Howard and Prividera bring up the concept of a ‘fallen’ women, and highlight the complexities involved in the judgment of women and their situation within typically male-dominated structures. Thus, they find that the ability of individuals to ‘fall’ does not apply to men and women equally. In this case, it serves to shield the military from structural criticism, but also allows for the redemption of England.\(^ {63}\)

Lastly, regarding female rescuers, who may be considered to fall within the scope of a hero figure, Sara Brown’s book considers them alongside female participants in genocide, as both roles involve the mobilization of women from bystandership, and both roles tend to be neglected in current research. Thus, Brown reveals the diversity of aspects which motivated Hutu women to aid Tutsis during the genocide, e.g. due to religious convictions, parental and familial influences, personal connections to the victims, or believes linked to their personal worldview.\(^ {64}\) Becker and Eagly highlight the presence of women in spaces they consider ‘heroic,’ noting their increasing presence.\(^ {65}\) While, focusing on behavioral aspects, women rescuers active during the Holocaust were found to have been driven by relational factors more than men, whose actions were deemed to have

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\(^{58}\) Sjoberg & Gentry. *Mothers, Monsters, Whores. Women's Violence in Global Politics.*


\(^{61}\) Berrington & Konkatukia, “An Evil Monster and a Poor Thing: Female Violence in the Media.” 69f.


been more autonomous, there do not appear to be many studies taking this angle, perhaps because the concept is somewhat elusive. Looking for their representation as literal ‘hero’ figures, moreover, women appear to be studied as such figures predominantly in the context of myths and legends.

Media Discourses on Myanmar

Most of the studies conducted on media representation and Myanmar appear to be focused on the representation of the Rohingya people, the former drawing from images, the latter stressing the construction of a Rohingya-image by outsiders rather than the group-members themselves. One study analyzes the representation of Rohingya suffering in news media as well as on Facebook, though the actual study dates back to 2012 and much may have changed since. Secondly, some of the recent research also focuses on refugees from the 1990s; these are of some relevance as well as e.g. Emily Ehmer’s study notes the portrayal of Aung San Suu Kyi as a “superhero” among the refugees, thereby shedding light on the perceptions of her, and notes diverging representations of US-dwelling Burmese refugees as well.

Thirdly, there are those studies examining political and democratic issues in Myanmar – the influence of Buddhist tradition on women’s participation in politics and elections, the role of the press in the transition towards democracy, as well as similarities to other countries with prominent national Buddhist ideology.

Concerning peer-reviewed literature dealing with the Rohingya-crisis overall, it stands out that many of the articles are concerned with it as an emergency, and therefore feature prospects as well as urge that action ought to be taken. This concerns the statelessness of the Rohingya and the vulnerability deriving from this status, 74 gender as a factor for vulnerability, 75 potential actions related to the Responsibility to Protect principle, 76 and the potential impact on South East Asian jihadist groups. 77 In both wider contexts—the representation of Myanmar politics and the media as well as the Rohingya crisis—it is found that journalistic strategies in the area perpetuate simplistic narratives which stress old us/them binaries without being able to problematize the situation complexly. 78

Lacuna

The lacuna this thesis aims to fill is threefold: First, as has been outlined in the literature review, most of the studies on the representation of female politicians concentrate on ‘ordinary’ women in politics, who are framed as novelties and outsiders nonetheless, or cannot reach a state of true ‘ordinariness’ as a result. However, there are female politicians who arguably occupy an extraordinary role on other grounds, or women who are extraordinary in their status because of their gender as well as due to other factors. Secondly, much of the research reviewed herein seems to suggest that women are far from absent in situations of genocide and mass atrocity. They are, however, largely absent from policies and remedies pursued in its aftermath. Moreover, the research conducted thus far does not consistently consider the ambivalence of their status or the overlapping of these categories. Lastly, studies concerned with representation and media discourses on Myanmar appear to predominantly focus on the representation of the Rohingya people, which is a highly relevant topic to explore. As has emerged from all of the areas reviewed above, representation of groups and issues is crucial in forming an understanding of events, and ultimately in forming the will for enacting potential remedies, i.e. when measures are deemed necessary, or which measures are expected to be beneficial, proportionate, or leading towards lasting peace. However, the representation of those associated with the perpetrator-group may play a crucial role in determining the answers to these questions as well. It is at this intersection of the representation of women

politicians, women’s roles in episodes of genocide and mass atrocity, and media representation of the situation of Myanmar and the shaping of public opinion, that this thesis sets out to make its main contribution.

**Aim of the Thesis, and Research Questions, and Relevance to the Study of Religion in Peace and Conflict**

On a general level, the aim of this thesis is to contribute to a deeper understanding of the representation of women politicians and female leaders in the media, as well as to advance critical research on the complex roles of women in genocide and mass atrocity. In conjunction therewith, the aim is further to illuminate how the *transition* of political leaders, especially of women, from a high moral standing towards complicity in acts of mass atrocity is taking place. Specifically, this thesis seeks to analyze the changing representation of Aung San Suu Kyi in the international media, in regards to both her changing role in Myanmar, as well as from a gender standpoint. The research question derived from these aims is therefore: *How is Aung San Suu Kyi portrayed in the media between 2015 and 2018?* This question is operationalized through additional sub-questions:

- To what extent is the media portrayal of Aung San Suu Kyi gendered, and how?
- How are the categories of victim, perpetrator, bystander, and ‘hero’ figure applied to Aung San Suu Kyi, and how is she situated within the respective categories?
- How does the media reconcile Aung San Suu Kyi’s achievements as a human rights champion with the current developments in Myanmar?

This thesis’ contribution to the study of religion in peace and conflict is owed to a number of factors: First, it contributes to the understanding of discourses surrounding a current case of mass atrocity which features a distinct religious element, namely the influence of Buddhist nationalist ideology, as well as Islamophobic persecution. Second, it can contribute to the understanding of the role of women in genocide and mass atrocity, and, third, can contribute to illuminating the contribution of news media in forming concepts of who is a victim, perpetrator, bystander, or hero figure during periods of genocide or mass atrocity.

**Delimitations**

Although the self-representation of female politicians is an interesting and relevant angle of research as well,⁷⁹ the inclusion of this perspective would exceed the scope of this study. Social media and the different-level discourses it enables, too, are an increasingly relevant aspect for

studying the representation and knowledge production in cases of genocide and mass atrocity, and has been of particular relevance in the Myanmar case. However, it will not be included herein, but provides ample possibility for future research. Lastly, while more work has to be done in order to understand the role and responsibility of Aung San Suu Kyi regarding the persecution of the Rohingya people in Myanmar, this thesis sets out to critically assess how the perspectives on her current role are informed and influenced, but not to ascribe any one role to Aung San Suu Kyi with certainty.

Disposition
Following this chapter, this thesis consists of four main sections: The second chapter presents the theoretical framework, consisting of framing theory, the gendered mediation thesis as well as critical understandings on the categories of victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and rescuers and ‘hero’ figures in the context of genocide and mass atrocity/collective violence. Following this, the third chapter provides an overview over the method and research design, i.e. a single-case study and framing analysis, as well as the material chosen for the empirical analysis. In the fourth chapter, background information regarding the history of Myanmar, the situation of the Rohingya people, as well as Aung San Suu Kyi is given, followed by the presentation or the empirical analysis in the fifth chapter. The sixth chapter is dedicated to a discussion of the analysis, and the seventh chapter concludes this thesis with a summary of the findings and perspectives for future research.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework
Framing Theory and the Gendered Mediation Thesis
According to Spivak, power depends not only on its initial assertion, but on the continuous reproduction of its structures. Following Deleuze, she asserts that: “[t]wo senses of representation are being run together: representation as ‘speaking for’, as in politics, and representation as ‘representation’, as in art or philosophy.” However, Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross contend that lacking attention is paid to an additional facet of representation, concerning “the manner in which the mediated presentation of politics is gendered, and its implications for representative democracy at large and specifically for strategies to increase women’s political participation.”

82Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” 70.
considering questions regarding representation and power, news media is a vital outlet to consider, especially if one considers news to facilitate a societal ‘consensus,’ i.e. as constructed rather than an impartial reflection of events.\textsuperscript{84} As a widely consumed public source of information, the selection and editing of featured stories can have a substantial impact.\textsuperscript{85} Such a third function, the processes and implications of mediation, is central to the this thesis, underlying which is the understanding of news media as fulfilling a narrating task which not only presents facts – information about events which, on their own, appear fractured and removed from their social context – but provides structures and interpretations endowing them with a perceived truth – and providing the contextualization of these events – as well.\textsuperscript{86} This extends to episodes of genocide and mass violence, in which news may frame such a case in a way that evokes “moral disengagement” or, conversely, a moral obligation among media consumers in bystander countries.\textsuperscript{87}

Tuchman’s seminal study,\textsuperscript{88} built on her previous works, marks the emergence of news framing theory, a concept which is at the core of the gendered mediation thesis as well. As journalists are confronted with the task of conveying unexpected information about events-as-news on a routine basis, organizing structures are imposed on these events. However, these structures inherent in news reporting limit what knowledge can be derived from it.\textsuperscript{89} Framing theory purports that news stories will contain certain elements which not only iterate the course of events, but utilize, through poignant language or images, substantive or procedural frames. While the former frame revolves around suggesting moral judgment, causation, problems and consequences, as well as countermeasures, and shapes the method and analysis of this thesis, the latter provides evaluations of “political actors’ legitimacy.”\textsuperscript{90} The framing of an issue can achieve the priming of the audience or readership, i.e. news reporting does not only direct the selection of issues considered relevant but also the patterns in which these issues are evaluated and prioritized by the audience, and ultimately the conclusions to be drawn as a result.\textsuperscript{91} Moreover, it determines the conditions

\textsuperscript{84} Hall, Stuart; Critcher, Chas; Jefferson, Tony; Clarke, John; and Brian Roberts. Policing the Crisis. Mugging, the State, and Law and Order. (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1978): 55.
\textsuperscript{87} Anderson & Brakstad, “The Impossibility to Protect? Media Narratives and the Responsibility to Protect.” 98.
\textsuperscript{89} Tuchman, Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality. 129.
\textsuperscript{91} Entman, Robert M. “Framing Bias: Media in the Distribution of Power.” Journal of Communication 57 (2007): 164.; Importantly, these tendencies are not limited to the reporting of events-as-news, but are also ingrained in the bureaucratic structures of newspapers, which routinely remain in place across time and news stories and therefore remain unquestioned, as well as in the professional ideologies, i.e. the news values, based on which an event is deemed ‘newsworthy’ by the journalists themselves (Hall et al 1978:53). Thus, the consensus-creating function of news framing
under which a story is deemed ‘newsworthy’ to begin with. Thus, “frames provide an interpretative structure” with which to negotiate an individual’s and group’s position within the social world and its institutions, as well as the relation between groups and actors, their concerns, needs, dominance, and authority. Notwithstanding “[t]he news frame’s tacit claim to comprehensiveness,” which discursively emphasizes balanced and reflected reporting, news framing does not convey neutrality, but normalizes a set of perspectives, some of which emerge not merely as dominant, but ultimately as self-evident, and therefore undergo a normalizing, naturalizing, and depoliticizing process through framing. The frames utilized in news media consequently subliminally perpetuate the existing hegemony of a privileged (ruling) class, conceptualized by Gramsci as dominating the political sector, a prevalent ideology, as well as civil society.

In its essence, news framing permeates stories on all issues and events, as well as on actors of all genders and sexes. Nevertheless, news media work in favor of male-dominated narratives of the social world, shaped by the gender-related power-imbalances, namely the patriarchal structures which permeate “both fiction and fact-based media.” By extension, one may therefore expect that dominant framing techniques will employ gender stereotypes and images in a manner favoring male dominance. Given the ingrained structures of gender inequality permeating all spheres of society, the gendered mediation thesis stipulates that media reporting on women, most prominently of women leaders and politicians, undergoes more extensive mediation than that on men, and is subjected to more extensive editing and filtering. However, these gender differences are not limited to the extent of the ongoing mediation, but permeate the process of mediation as well, i.e. the thesis assumes “that the filter itself is gendered.” Gidengil and Everitt suggest that this becomes evident in two main ways: First, it is indicative of the bias internalized by journalists themselves as well as the news values understood to determine the interested generated by a news story. The stories selected, as well as the narratives styles preferred, mirror the notions of femininity and masculinity and the social norms and expectations, associated therewith. Secondly, a gendered media filter will likely be shaped by gender-specific stereotypes. Due to the stringent norms to which women’s behavior has to conform, women’s participation in situations of disagreement and conflict are

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92 Allan, News Culture. 58.
93 Allan, News Culture. 69.
94 Allan, News Culture. 59.
96 Ross, Karen. Gendered Media: Women, Men, and Identity Politics. 68.
98 Gidengil & Everitt, “Filtering the Female.” 109-10.
especially likely to gather public and media attention. Due to the news value of *unexpectedness*, the gendered mediation thesis holds that such moments of confrontation will be amplified in the media when they include women as actors, as confrontational behavior defies the behavior typically attributed to women in political and leadership roles.\textsuperscript{99}

**Critical Perspectives on Victims, Perpetrators, Bystanders, and Helpers**

The aim of this thesis is to examine the transition of a female activist and politician from a ‘hero’ figure to one who faces severe criticism and condemnation. The gendered mediation thesis’ dominant use has been in relation to the study of the representation of female politicians, but is applicable to gendered representations in other areas as well.\textsuperscript{100} The second component of the theoretical framework aims to implement framing theory and the gendered mediation thesis in relation to the chosen case study. To this end, I will proceed to introduce critical perspectives on victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and the ambiguous category of ‘heroes,’ rescuers, or people engaging in helping behavior, which are intended to function as analytical frames later on.\textsuperscript{101}

Throughout this section, the aim is to present different angles and perspectives from which to study these roles. It is important to note that these terms describe people who exhibit a particular kind of action, but are not an exclusive or definitive group of people. For example, as will be outlined, people who act as perpetrators may be victims in other situations, or may be bystanders on yet another occasion. Similarly, a person may aide one victim but harm another. Moreover, the concepts described herein will, in the context of this study, ultimately serve to capture how a person is perceived, and how their perceived role is discussed. Thus, they will not be used to assign any one ‘real’ role but to capture the representation of and related discourse on Aung San Suu Kyi over time.

\textsuperscript{99} Gidengil & Everitt, “Filtering the Female.” ibid.

\textsuperscript{100} Burke & Mazzarella, “‘A Slightly New Shade of Lipstick.’” 400.

In this thesis, victims are perhaps the most straight-forward group. In the context of genocide and mass atrocity, they are those “directly victimized and killed” in the persecution.\footnote{Vetlesen, Arne Johan. “Genocide: A Case for the Responsibility of the Bystander.” \textit{Journal of Peace Research} 37:4 (2000): 520.} As is the case for the other groups, however, being a victim does not necessarily exclude a person from potentially displaying other behaviors as well, for example as a perpetrator.\footnote{Gross, Jan. \textit{Neighbors. The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland.} (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).} Thus, while the understanding of who is a victim may be relatively simple, the treatment of victims, for the sake of this thesis with a focus on female victims in particular, is not, and has posed significant challenges. Generally, it appears that this is the case for perpetrators as well. Though James Waller presents an overview of some of the factors that may lead ‘ordinary people’ to participate in genocide and mass atrocity, he is careful to remark “that the process is far too complex to be reduced to one factor alone, such as the nature of the collective; the influence of an extraordinary ideology; psychopathology; a common, homogeneous extraordinary personality; or the elaborate creation of a divided self.”\footnote{Waller, James. \textit{Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing.} Second Edition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). 133.} The representation of women perpetrators has further been captured theoretically. According to Sjoberg and Gentry, violence perpetrated by women is cast through a gendered lens, leading to gender emerging as the primary factor explaining the violence.\footnote{Sjoberg & Gentry. \textit{Mothers, Monsters, Whores. Women’s Violence in Global Politics}. 29.} This explanatory attempt to demonize and yet dismiss female perpetrators is further indicative of a “male anxiety over female control,” and thus ties in with the dominant tropes of women-perpetrated violence “across time, religion, culture and state.”\footnote{Gubar 1977:380, in: Sjoberg & Gentry. \textit{Mothers, Monsters, Whores. Women’s Violence in Global Politics}. 30.} Three tropes are identified as being featured with particular prominence in discourses on female perpetrators of proscribed violence: Those of mothers, monsters, and whores. Additional nuance can be found within each of these motives, which stress either nurturing or vengeful
maternal instincts, portray women perpetrators as lacking femininity and womanhood, ultimately as lacking their humanity as a consequence, or as “sexually deviant.”

As bystanders to genocide and mass atrocity are considered those who neither participate in the persecution of the victims, nor are themselves targeted as victims. Thus, bystanders are largely defined by their not belonging to other groups, and consequently remain a diverse group, and “can be individuals, groups or organizations, as well as states or international political systems, and their actions and inactions can be assessed at the micro, meso and macro levels.”

The literature expounds the question of who is a bystander as well as the implications of different notions and dimensions of bystandership. For Arne Vetlesen, in the broadest sense, everybody aware of an ongoing genocide, through mass media or otherwise, is a bystander. He considers these people as passive bystanders who do not take part in a genocide, though some of them may choose to become involved in its opposition eventually. Bystanders by appointment, conversely, are involved as ‘third parties’ which often consider themselves neutral, while bystanders by assignment may be ‘on the ground’ in order to fulfill a task that is related to but does not actively interfere with the violence.

107 The narratives on female perpetrators as mothers assign one of two roles to women: “a support role (the nurturing mother) or [a role taken on] out of revenge (the vengeful mother),” the former of which implies an instinct-driven role as caretaker, leading women to enable but not actively perpetrate violence. The latter, meanwhile, holds that women compensate maternal failure with erratic violence, creating an image of women as helpless against their own irrational emotions. Hence, this narrative links women’s motives for perpetrating violence to their emotional constitution and social experiences rather than the broader set of motives recognized in the case of male-perpetrated violence. (Sjoberg & Gentry. Mothers, Monsters, Whores. Women’s Violence in Global Politics. 33-35.)

108 Narrating female perpetrators as monsters “explains their violence as a biological flaw that disrupts their femininity.” Feminine gender norms cast women in the role of naturally nurturing, compassionate caregivers. Therefore, women who defy these expectations through violence are considered deviant, and are understood as less human, as they lack their womanhood and therefore the central component of their humanity. Because of this, women considered ‘monsters’ are also considered to be more dangerous. At the same time, the monster narrative ridicules and fetishizes transgressive women. While male perpetrators are considered as “more predictable and rational, even at their worst,” thus, this narrative allows to dismiss women from spheres in which their actions may have (not good, but discernible) causes and consequences, and in which they exercise agency, for better or worse. To “[dehumanize women] through sexualization,” lastly, is a frequently encountered occurrence in patriarchal spaces, and is at the center of the whore narrative as well. (Sjoberg & Gentry. Mothers, Monsters, Whores. Women’s Violence in Global Politics. 36-38.)

109 Sjoberg and Gentry point towards three prominent tropes within the whore narrative: Erotomania, erotic dysfunction, and ownership and control of women’s bodies. Specifically, these refer to, respectively, the escalation of unchecked sexual urges, as “sexually less than real women [emphasis in original],” which also includes lesbian and infertile women, or as owned and used by men, i.e. as sold and forced to, or manipulated into, the perpetration of violent acts against their own will and without being able to influence the course of events. All of these narratives are in denial of the possibility of female agency, are stigmatizing women in violation of gender-norms by excluding them from womanhood, are depoliticizing women’s actions and thereby perpetuating the placement of women in the private sphere devoid of political engagement and concern, and are ultimately perpetuating the hegemony of the patriarchy even though women are at the center of the narratives. (Sjoberg & Gentry. Mothers, Monsters, Whores. Women’s Violence in Global Politics. 45-51.)

i.e. in the context of a monitoring function.\textsuperscript{113} For the perpetrators of genocide, the presence of bystanders may be worrisome as they bear the potential of becoming active in stopping an ongoing genocide. For the victims of a genocide, bystanders may be the only potential source of help, and the responsibility to become active is therefore with the bystanders.\textsuperscript{114} Discussing the responsibility of the bystander, Vetlesen follows Ricoeur in that “not acting is still acting,”\textsuperscript{115} which indirectly affirms the actions of the perpetrators, and thereby amounts to an act of complicity.\textsuperscript{116} The responsibility of different bystanders, however, is further influenced by their “closeness” to the respective genocide, for example “by virtue of professional assignment …, or by virtue of one’s knowledge as an intellectual.” Citing Larry May, he further distinguishes between collective omission, a group’s decision to refrain from taking action, and collective inaction, in the case of which a group does not decide to act.\textsuperscript{117} While Vetlesen focuses on the potential of bystander action, but does not elaborate on their actions in detail, Ervin Staub stresses the diversity inherent to the category of bystanders, and asserts that, while passive bystanders’ failure to act may aide the escalation of the violence,\textsuperscript{118} active bystandership is essential to prevent the evolution of violence and to bring about all the outcomes and processes required for prevention,” and can emerge through individuals, the interaction of bystanders in different situations, external encouragement, and other factors.\textsuperscript{119} Additionally, Donà argues for the notion of situated bystandership, noting that “the inaction of passive bystanders could be considered passive resistance to the ideology of mass killing.”\textsuperscript{120} This concept further highlights the situational circumstances of bystandership overall, but also of passivity more specifically. Thus, bystandership is a complex category, which does not absolve but rather acknowledges a scope of action, awareness, and responsibility.

Notably, being considered a bystander herein does necessarily entail the inaction or indifference of an individual. As Staub has considered the actions of bystanders acting as rescuers or helpers, further attention will be paid to these groups of people. Nevertheless, bystanders and rescuers are not always conflated, and a breadth of research has indeed been dedicated to the study of rescuers or ‘hero’ figures.\textsuperscript{121} There appears to be one significant disagreement in the relevant

\textsuperscript{119} Staub, Overcoming Evil: Genocide, Violent Conflict, and Terrorism. 20.
\textsuperscript{120} Donà. “‘Situated Bystandership’ During and After the Rwandan Genocide.” 18.
\textsuperscript{121} For a comprehensive overview, see for example: Jayawickreme, Eranda; and Paul Di Stefano. “How Can We Study Heroism? Integrating Persons, Situations and Communities.” Political Psychology 33:1 (2012): 165-178.
studies: Whether hero figures exist or are a useful category to study people at all. As Jayawickreme and Di Stefano assert, ‘rescuers/heroes’ continue to be associated with specific “personality profiles” rather frequently.\(^{122}\) Some scholars have argued for a distinctive personality shaped by dominant altruistic traits,\(^{123}\) and have ascribed a selfless and idealistic worldview in which they consider their identity tied to the responsibility for defending the values they hold in accordance with their worldview at large.\(^{124}\) For Monroe, rescuers are more conscious of their own ability to act towards an improvement of their circumstances,\(^ {125}\) and according to study by Varese and Yaish, appear to be especially “pro-social” in their actions.\(^ {126}\) Lastly, Keczer at al draw a distinction between the role of a hero, who is considered in much more abstract terms than that of an everyday hero, which was defined by concrete values typically considered attainable to almost any ordinary person.\(^ {127}\) An approach proposed as an alternative to talking about ‘heroes’ or ‘rescuers’ in these somewhat rigid terms is the reference to ‘help’ instead,\(^ {128}\) as well as the differentiation of “helping and helper,” which creates space for the discussions of actions which are simultaneously helpful and harmful.\(^ {129}\) Just as perpetrators may not be ‘evil’ people as such,\(^ {130}\) people displaying helping behavior do not have to be altruists, either. Moreover, not all factors causing people to become involved in helping behavior are selfless;\(^ {131}\) they may save lives as well, but are unlikely to be considered ‘heroes’ according to the understanding presented above. Others, conversely, may aide victims without consciously choosing to do so.\(^ {132}\)

\(^ {122}\) Jayawickreme & Di Stefano.,“How Can We Study Heroism? Integrating Persons, Situations and Communities.” 168.


\(^ {130}\) Waller, Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing. 269f.


Theoretical Considerations

To summarize, framing theory suggests that news items are presented in a manner as to make readers consider particular issues or highlighted topics. They do not merely report current events, but judge and evaluate them as well, and suggest remedies or courses of action. The gendered mediation thesis assumes that framing extends to gender-relations as well, i.e. that female public figures, especially those in political and leadership roles, will face media representation through an inherently and inevitably gendered lens. These strategies situate them within the social world overall, reiterate norms and values, including gendered ones, and contribute to the construction of the social world.

In a second step, the behavioral categories of victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and ‘hero’ figures have been introduced, and their respective complexities and more nuanced understandings presented. The aim of thesis is, in part, to explore how news reporting on Aung San Suu Kyi will utilize some of these categories in order to describe and discuss her varying roles in the Myanmar political sphere. Additionally, it is suspected that within discussions placing her in any of these roles, this placement will be filtered through a gendered lens as suggested by the gendered mediation thesis. Put together, the two sections of the theoretical framework therefore seek to trace the decline of her reputation as a person of exceptional moral authority. In the context of this thesis project, I therefore consider it a useful framework for studying a woman who is, on one hand, a politician and activist, but who has been, and still is, cast as filling roles that arguably exceed any such category. Thus, within each of the main frames, particular attention will be paid to features implying or discussing questions of agency and responsibility, criminal culpability, and moral expectations or grievances. Importantly, while many of the studies employing the gendered mediation thesis have a dominant quantitative component, this will not be the case in this study, and a direct comparisons concerning e.g. the mention of certain relations or personal qualities will not be undertaken. This will be further outlined in the following.

Chapter 3: Method and Material

The Value of a Single Case Study

The general research design used for this study is that of a case study, a strategy of research “in which one or a few instances of a phenomenon are studied in depth.” Case studies are useful for

theoretical development as well as a descriptive-interpretive approach,\textsuperscript{134} and show one of their central strengths in asserting and exploring the existence of causality between different elements, but do not typically offer an evaluation of e.g. “the average strength of a factor that causes an effect.”\textsuperscript{135} They tend to produce analyses focused of “depth” of perspective as opposed to the “breadth” offered by large-\textsuperscript{N} studies, and assert “better construct [and internal] validity” than large-\textsuperscript{N} studies, which “are better equipped for securing external validity” due to their reliance on statistical analysis and the possibilities of control associated therewith.\textsuperscript{136} For this thesis, an \textit{instrumental case study} for which a distinct case is selected in order to explore a specific issue\textsuperscript{137} is conducted, in which some of these benefits and repercussions may become especially apparent. Thus, the limitations of this approach ought to be kept in mind e.g. when attempting the generalization of the results produced by this study,\textsuperscript{138} which is possible to an extent but not absolutely.

The constructivist understanding underlying many approaches to case study research\textsuperscript{139} renders this design especially suited for the study of e.g. hegemonic discourses, such as the research undertaken in this thesis and put forth in the theoretical framework. Typically, a case study "has a strong deductive element because it begins with theories and assesses their comparative strength in understanding and explaining empirical cases."\textsuperscript{140} In this study, a main component, however, will be neither the direct comparison of cases nor of theories, but rather comparison achieved \textit{through} theorizing. Lastly, while Creswell points towards the variety of sources used in a case study,\textsuperscript{141} this does not seem particularly expedient in the context of this project, as the type of material is a crucial component to the end of the study, i.e. constitutes part of the case itself.

\textbf{Framing Analysis}

Framing constitutes a theory, as well as a methodological approach. As has been outlined in the previous chapter, and also underlies the gendered mediation thesis. As with a case study, there is no set consensus on exactly what constitutes framing, however, which is argued, on one hand, to render

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{134} Blatter, “Case Study.” 68f.
  \item \textsuperscript{135} Blatter, “Case Study.” 69.
  \item \textsuperscript{136} Blatter, ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{137} Creswell, “Five Qualitative Approaches to Inquiry.” 74.
  \item \textsuperscript{138} Creswell, ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{140} Blatter, “Case Study.” 70.
  \item \textsuperscript{141} Creswell, “Five Qualitative Approaches to Inquiry.” 74.
\end{itemize}
the approach “fragmented,” whilst others see the resulting flexibility and variety as an asset. Therefore, one approach has been selected which will constitute the core framework of the method of analysis, namely framing analysis as featured in Robert Entman’s work.

To analyze frames, in the case of this thesis news frames specifically, can help to uncover the ways in which the presentation and organization of information in different manners can influence the patterns according to which this information is understood and thought about. Thus, frames direct how an audience perceives, debates, and recalls an issue or event. According to Entman, selection and salience form the core of the framing process. Framing presumes that when communicating any perceived truth, certain aspects will be highlighted as especially important in a way which shapes or guides their being understood as being of imporance, definitonal of an issue, or as calling for a particular set of remedies, solutions, moral judgments and conclusions, and the like. Thus, “frames diagnose, evaluate, and prescribe.” Frames increase the salience, i.e. the meaning and visibility, of topics, themes and information. In texts, this may happen if a term is repeated or contextualized “with culturally familiar symbols” that elevate its meaning for the reader. Entman summarizes these functions of frames as follows:

“Frames, then, define problems – determine what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits, usually measured in terms of common cultural values; diagnose causes – identify the forces creating the problem; make moral judgments – evaluate causal agents and their effects; and suggest remedies – offer and justify treatments for the problems and predict their likely effects. A single sentence may perform more than one of these four framing functions, although many sentences in a text may perform none of them. And a frame in any particular text may not necessarily include all four functions [emphases in original].”

Consequently, framing assumes that an audience will, indeed, be affected by the information, and conveyance of information, they consume. Frames functioning thusly “have at least four locations in the communication process.” Communicators utilize frames and make communicative choices, i.e. deliberately or unconsciously organize the information they wish to convey according to the frames and schemata which form the frames of their own knowledge or convictions. These

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144 Entman, “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm.” 52.
147 Entman, “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm.” 52.
149 This effect, as well as the core functions of framing, are achieved not only through elements ‘actively’ present in a type of material, however, but are conveyed through “what they omit as well as include.” Hence, the omission of certain terms, definitions, or evaluations may influence the audience’s understanding of an issue or event as well, and constitute a crucial aspect of framing as well. (Entman, “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm.” 54.
frames transpire into texts, in which they find expression through *inter alia* stereotyped images and phrases, “by the presence or absence of certain keywords,” or phrases and expressions associated with distinct information which “[reinforces] clusters of facts or judgments.” The *receiver* of the framed material, in turn, employs frames in order to organize the consumed information as well, which can but does not have to be in accordance with the frames featured in the text. *Culture,* lastly, “is the stock of commonly invoked frames” which have emerged as dominant within a community’s discourses and practices. Following this, frames are “selecting and highlighting, and use of the highlighted elements to construct an argument about problems and their causation, evaluation, and/or solution” across these four locations.

**Methodological Considerations**

Notably, the significance of elements of framing featured in textual and other material cannot be captured by a purely quantitative approach. Sparse or even singular appearances of an element can have a higher salience than recurrently appearing themes that will not evoke associations of the same gravity or will not have sufficient salience in order to influence the understandings or interpretations of the receiver if they do not match “their existing schemata.” It is, therefore, not the aim of this thesis to pursue a predominantly quantitative approach to framing analysis, but rather to emphasize qualitative analysis and discussion. Thus, quantitative data will be provided sparsely, in order to create a general overview of the empirical material and be transparent about the sources used, but not in order to conduct the analysis itself.

The aim of this thesis is to illuminate how Aung San Suu Kyi has been depicted in media reports from 2015 to 2018, and specifically how this depiction deals with her changing role and public image in regards to the political situation in Myanmar and the persecution of the Rohingya. Thus, a framing analysis is a suitable approach due to its compatibility with framing theory and the gendered mediation thesis, on one hand, and the introduction of the roles of victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and ‘hero’ figures, on the other hand. Its capacity to “illuminate many empirical and normative controversies, most importantly because the concept of framing directs our attention to the details of just how a communicated text exerts its power” appears consistent with the former, while the latter can constitute a kind of frame, and the qualitative emphasis of the chosen methodology can help to further discuss the nuances and challenges encountered within each frame.

151 Entman, ibid.
152 Entman, ibid.
Due to the emphasis on qualitative analysis herein, there is no systematic coding of the material according to a coding scheme established a priori. However, while intercoder-reliability is therefore no explicit concern, the aspect of subjectivity remains crucial. For example, another person working with the same aim or project may select relevant articles differently, or working with the same material, may draw different conclusions nonetheless. Concerning gendered language in particular, there may be aspects I understand to be gendered which others would not agree with, or conversely, some expressions or imagery might escape my notice. This is inherent to the method and impossible to avoid entirely.  

Selection of, and Working with the Material

This thesis’ empirical material consists of different news media sources. In my sample, these sources are different types of news articles. A particular focus is put on such articles that highlight Aung San Suu Kyi, her past, as well as her current role in more detail, e.g. articles written as news reports centering on or commenting on her position, as well as opinion pieces, editorials, or introductory or overview articles and analyses. On the other hand, articles that mention Aung San Suu Kyi in passing, for example mentioning but not discussing or evaluating, her position as state councilor, will not be included in the analysis. Thus, the sampling strategy is purposive insofar that it focuses on articles expected to be fruitful for an analysis, and the sample is not created in order to, for example, create a random selection of articles related to the situation in Myanmar.

The selected sources are The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Guardian, Al Jazeera English, and The Atlantic. Generally, outlets were selected as to include sources revolving around the political center, i.e. sources either centrist, center-left, or center-right. According to the media-bias rating website All Sides, The Washington Post, The Atlantic, The New York Times, and The Guardian can all be considered as left-leaning, whereas Al Jazeera is rated being at the political center. Moreover, an attempt was made to select internationally read sources. The New York Times and The Washington Post are, indeed, studied in the context of “[g]lobally

155 Van Gorp, Baldwin. “Strategies to Take Subjectivity Out of Framing Analysis.” In: D’Angelo, Paul; and Jim A. Kuypers (eds.) Doing News Framing Analysis. Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives. (Routledge, 2010): 90. However, it should be noted that although this is an issue inherent to framing analysis, it is not exclusive to it, methods emphasizing quantitative research are often not as objective as may be expected.
156 In this case, articles on the Al Jazeera website were analysed, though an analysis of their television program may be of interest for future research.
dominant news media,”¹⁵⁹ and in this thesis, The Guardian and The Atlantic were considered in a similar vein owing to their English-language content available online.¹⁶⁰ While Al Jazeera may appear somewhat set apart from the other sources due to its origin in the Middle East, its English branch “reaches nearly 260 million homes in 120 countries,” and the network has “proclaimed [its] global visions,”¹⁶¹ and their online representation consequently holds the potential of reaching a great international audience as well. Moreover, it presents an attempt to produce transnational news specifically,¹⁶² rather than a national-focused source which is consumed across boarders (which is an angle from which some of the New York Times material, i.e. that featured in the International New York Times, may be considered as well).

Relevant material was searched using, for the New York Times, Washington Post, and The Guardian the news database Factiva, and the website’s own search function in the case of The Atlantic and Al Jazeera.¹⁶³ The search term Aung San Suu Kyi was used, as it is unlikely that an article discussing her would do so without mentioning her full name at least once. The term was used to search for articles published between 01 January 2015 and 31 December 2018, as the time-frame covers the process of Aung San Suu Kyi’s attempt to become president, the establishment of the position as state councilor, as well as the escalation of the violence against the Rohingya. Because Factiva displays articles without images featured in the original, images were not included in the data collection and analysis. An overview of the search results is laid out in the following figure:

¹⁶⁰ Notably, The Guardian and The Atlantic have not installed a paywall in front of their content, thereby rendering it widely accessible.
¹⁶³ In the case of Al Jazeera, the filter “Opinion” was used, and the articles published within the relevant time-frame read, and selected in accordance with their relevance.
In order to make a narrower selection, all of the articles were read. Duplicates appearing in *Factiva* were eliminated. In a second step, articles which did not discuss Aung San Suu Kyi in spite of mentioning her, or which offered a summary of a statement but no evaluation or tangible discussion, were also eliminated. The aim was to create a narrowed-down selection of articles which did, in fact, hold the potential to make a relevant impact on the analysis and discussion. Clearly, this renders the selection process quite subjective, and it is possible that another person reading these articles may come to a different conclusion in regards to their relevance. However, to the best of my knowledge, I am not aware of articles that I have chosen to exclude from the analysis which featured content that might contradict any points of the analysis. I have made the selection in all conscience and believe that if any relevant articles have been left out, or more articles should be included in the corpus overall, they would likely strengthen but not contradict or proof false my main claims.

**Ethical Considerations**

The above-outlined method, methodological considerations, and approaches to the material warrant further reflection on the ethical dimensions of this research. Owing to the method and material used throughout this thesis, the immediate ethical implications of this research are limited, although they ought to be taken seriously nevertheless. To my knowledge, none of the articles have been retracted by the authors, and due to their publication in widely read media outlets, including them in an academic study appears a legitimate use of the material. I have read and analyzed the material in good faith, attempting to include nuances, disagreement, and to provide a large number of
Chapter 4: Historical Background

Myanmar in Recent History

Prior to colonization, “the territories of ethnic minorities … were not part of Burma proper,” and they consequently retained a larger degree of independence. This separation continued following the establishment of British colonial rule from the mid-1820s onward, which considered these communities, the Frontier Areas, as inferior to the Buddhist majority. Burma remained under the same colonial administration as India until 1937. Missionaries taught in the Frontier Areas specifically, and the regions “were able to maintain their traditional political institutions and social practices,” which was not the case for the Burmese monarchy. While the Rohingya Muslims have lived in the territory of current-day Myanmar prior to colonization, many first settled in the area while Burma was under colonial rule. Starting in 1823, migration to Arakan State, today Rakhine State, was encouraged by the British.

During the Second World War, the loyalties of the Bamar majority and the ethnic minorities groups saw further divide as the Burma Independence Army, under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi’s father Aung San, supported the Japanese army at the onset, perceiving a chance to gain independence from the British colonizers. The minorities meanwhile, lend their support to the British army, fearing that an independent state led by the Bamar majority would be to their detriment. Throughout this period, after the British retreat from Burma, violence between the BIA and ethnic minorities increased, but the Japanese army “disbanded [the BIA] and placed its leadership into a puppet government,” training select individuals, including Aung San and the future military leader Ne Win. As the British army regained control, it installed positions concerned with

167 Thus, in spite of their long and complex history in what is today Rakhine state, the Rohingya Muslims are often constructed as immigrants from Bangladesh. Among other promotions of Buddhist nationalist supremacy, a name-change of Arakan to Rakhine state occurred in 1989, naming it after the Rakhine Buddhist population which is officially considered indigenous to the state. (Yusuf, “Three Faces of the Rohingya Crisis.” 522.) With about a third of the population in Rakhine state, and more than 90 percent of the population of northern Rakhine State, Rohingya Muslims comprised a substantial amount of the population, this region prior to the increasing persecution in 2016/17. (Fink 2018a:261, Joseph 2018:101).
168 Hereinafter: BIA
detecting and retaliating against those who had collaborated with the Japanese, and clad those positions largely with members of the ethnic minority groups. In a state such as Rakhine, where the population consisted to substantial degrees of Rohingya Muslims and Rakhine Buddhists, clashes ensued, as was the case throughout the entire country.170

Aung San was among the most prominent political leaders who achieved an agreement of independence in 1947. He headed the elected Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League,171 and represented the interim government of what was then the “Union of Burma.” On the 19th of July 1947, he was executed by his political opponent U Saw.172 Burma achieved independence from Britain on January 4th, 1948,173 and was subsequently ruled democratically until 1962. However, throughout this time the civilian government struggled to provide essential security and prosperity, and developed towards ultranationalism without adhering to the values of its alleged socialist ideology.174 “[E]thnic, political, and territorial tensions escalated,” and the Tatmadaw, the national military, developed into a vital organ for maintaining stability and authority throughout rather than merely in sections of the country.175 The government could not reach agreements with the insurgencies of several ethnic minorities,176 and the growing influence of the military eventually led to the 1962 coup d’état, ousting Prime Minister U Nu, and effectively putting Myanmar under a long-term dictatorship led by General Ne Win and his military government.177 Ne Win championed a nationalist, non-federalist, and isolationist domestic and international policy, aiming for the reduction of foreign influences and exaggerating hostility against the ethnic minorities. His policies pursued a “Burmese Way to Socialism,” in which “Marxism, extreme nationalism, totalitarianism, and Buddhism” were combined, and from which the Buddhist nationalism currently encountered in Myanmar derives.178 Throughout military rule, too, there was an ongoing struggle within the country rather than with neighboring states, with ethnic minorities as well as Communist insurgents.179

171 Hereinafter: AFPFL
173 Kipgen, ibid. 10.
174 Kipgen, 9f.
179 Kipgen, Myanmar: A Political History. 140ff.
In 1988, another coup occurred, resulting in the rule of the State Law and Order Restoration Council, which “was characterized by military expansion” and its deep involvement in nearly all aspects of the domestic economy. Though the work towards ceasefire agreements with the insurgent ethnic groups was prioritized, this was often reached through corruption or financial benefit of these groups’ illegal tradings, and thus achieved ceasefires without a resolution of the underlying conflict. In 2008, the military government passed a pseudo-democratic constitution, granting itself one quarter of the seats available in parliament and establishing the National Defense and Security Council, which holds extensive power and can claim authority “over all legislative, executive, and judicial powers” of the Myanmar government should it proclaim a state of emergency. Nevertheless, the military’s power has decreased since 2011, as has its involvement in the domestic economy, and free elections have been held in 2015.

Buddhist Nationalism in Contemporary Myanmar and the Muslim Rohingya

As emerges from the historical background and the persistent clashes between Buddhist nationalism and the ethnic minorities throughout Myanmar, the discrimination of the Rohingya Muslims is tied to a number of developments, but their exclusion from citizenship has come about during the last decades. With the 1982 citizenship law, a “three-tiered citizenship system made of ‘full,’ ‘associate,’ and ‘naturalized’ citizenship [was introduced,] and the last two types are subject to revocation.” Under the new law, the Rohingya Muslims’ citizenship was revoked entirely. However, this has been a long-term process—the creation of the citizenship system in 1974 rendered their National Registration Certificates invalid, which they had held since 1947. Moreover, Rohingya children have not received birth certificates since 1994, and the White Cards were revoked in 2015. Since then, the Rohingya have been fully stateless people. These changes could take place largely due to the pressure of Buddhist nationalist extremists.

The pattern of violence perpetrated against the Rohingya shifted in 2012. Hate speech has become systematic and more pervasive, being produced and reproduced not only by government propaganda outlets, but by Buddhist religious institutions and individuals, and distributed via social media.

180 Hereinafter: SLORC, which would later be the State Peace and Development Council.
182 Hereinafter: NDSC
188 Yusuf, ibid.
media, as well.\footnote{Zin, “Anti-Muslim Violence in Burma: Why Now?” 379.} Additionally, the violence, although it has previously been excessive, has taken on a new dynamic, where it is no longer perpetrated with the aim of revenge or to shield the military from scrutiny by redirecting public attention, but instead with the aim of “physical destruction … \[and\] changing norms, practices, and the very lifestyle of society at large,”\footnote{Zin, “Anti-Muslim Violence in Burma: Why Now?” 384.} which would be in line with criteria that might render this violence genocidal. While violence executed by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army\footnote{International Crisis Group. *Buddhism and State Power in Myanmar.* (Brussels, 2017): 29.} is considered to feed into anti-Rohingya discourses, it is a response to rather than the trigger of “local grievances.”\footnote{International Crisis Group. *Buddhism and State Power in Myanmar.* (Brussels, 2017): 29.} In 2015, moreover, the Union Solidarity and Development Party,\footnote{Hereinafter: USDP} formerly governing and currently in the opposition, “passed what have been termed the four race and religion laws … [which] regulate religious conversion and marriage between people of different religions, institute jail sentences for those who have more than one spouse, and allow for population-control measures in areas where government officials see fit.”\footnote{Fink, “Myanmar: Religious Minorities and Constitutional Questions.” 266.} They are primarily targeting Muslims, and aim to regulate Muslim-Buddhist relationships. These measures, in turn, have been driven by the Organization for the Protection of Race and Religion, or Ma Be Tha, a Buddhist organization founded in 2013,\footnote{Zin, “Anti-Muslim Violence in Burma: Why Now?” 382.} who have been remarkably successful at mobilizing civil society via social media, often by appealing to Islamophobia and nursing fears of an Islamic takeover of the country.\footnote{Fink, “Myanmar: Religious Minorities and Constitutional Questions.” 266.}

The Ma Ba Tha endorsed the USDP before the 2016 elections, and former President Thein Stein appears to have sympathized with the Buddhist nationalist 969 movement.\footnote{The Buddhist nationalist movement is "named for the nine qualities of Buddha, the six qualities of Buddha’s teaching, and the nine qualities of monastic community – [and] became active in 2012 and is led by Wrathu."(Zin 2015:382).} While the National League for Democracy\footnote{Hereinafter: NLD.} has criticized the Ma Ba Tha previously, and taken a critical stance towards the 2015 legislation, they have neither reversed these laws, nor taken serious action against the nationalist groups.\footnote{Fink, ibid.} This also indicates that these movements, though they do not receive uniform support from all Buddhists, are not restricted to “hardliners,” but receive support from different layers of society, not all of which are strictly or conservatively religious.\footnote{Zin, “Anti-Muslim Violence in Burma: Why Now?” 388.}
Who is Aung San Suu Kyi?

Aung San Suu Kyi was born the 19th of June 1945 in Rangoon, then British Burma. After the assassination of her father, she spent her childhood and adolescence receiving an education in Burma and India, and upon completing her schooling moved on to study at Oxford University from 1964 to 1967, followed by time spent in New York, working for the United Nations. When at Oxford, “she met her future husband, the British scholar Michael Aris,” whom she married in 1972, and with whom she had two children. 202

She traveled to Burma in 1988 due to the stroke of her mother. In July 1988, only a few months later, Burma’s military ruler General Ne Win died. His death was followed by protests demanding “the end of military rule,” which were met with violent oppression by the military. Aung San Suu Kyi joined demands for the establishment of democracy in Burma, was among the founders of the NLD, and became a public figure in the protests, still associated with her father’s prominent name. 203 She was held captive in house arrest by the “military government” in July 1988, denied communication with the outside world, to be released only if she left the country. With interruptions and always under severe restrictions by the government, 204 she remained under house arrest until 2010. In 1990, elections were held in which the NLD “won more than 80 percent of the parliamentary seats that were contested in 1990, but the results of that election were ignored by the military government.” 205 In 1991, Aung San Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her democracy work. 206

Her husband died in 1999 without being allowed a visiting visa to the country. Her house arrest was set to be completed in 2009, but Aung San Suu Kyi was charged with alleged violations of its rules shortly before its end and sentenced to three years’ imprisonment, a sentence which was quickly mitigated and effectively served as a means with which to ensure she would not be eligible to become president, as legislation was subsequently passed which banned people who are or have been married to foreign nationals, as well as those who have previously been convicted of a criminal offense, from “running for office” and from “any participation in elections.” 207

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204 Her house arrest was interrupted between 1995 and 2000, as well as between 2002 and 2003, but other, still restrictive regulations remained imposed upon her each time.
205 Pletcher, “Aung San Suu Kyi.”
206 As she could not leave Burma and return to the country, Alexander Aris, her older son, accepted the prize in her stead.
207 Pletcher, “Aung San Suu Kyi.”
Elections, most likely fraudulent, took place in 2010, and neither Aung San Suu Kyi, nor the NLD, which had declined to register and had been banned as a result, took part. However, her ability to meet with international political actors increased throughout 2011, and the laws that had prohibited her from participating in the 2010 elections were relaxed the following year, “the NLD was officially reinstated,” and she participated in and won elections in Yagon. The NLD participated and won in the 2015 national elections. Because Aung San Suu Kyi could still not take the office of president, Htin Kyaw took the presidency instead and ultimately introduced Aung San Suu Kyi’s future position of state counselor, rendering her de-facto political leader of Myanmar.

Chapter 5: Empirical Analysis

In order to conduct this framing analysis, I will look for “clusters of facts or judgments” within the previously outlined categories, and will thereby attempt to identify which facets or perspectives are put to the forefront within articles discussing each category. As has been stated, these categories frequently overlap, which has become evident in the empirical material, too. In this case, I will aim to discuss the different interpretations of the potential roles of Aung San Suu Kyi in the context of campaigns of ethnic cleansing and mass atrocity in Myanmar and in relation to the international community, looking for how she is situated within Myanmar, to what extent she is considered responsible for the atrocities, and the implications deriving from these assessments. Throughout the analysis of each section, the findings will be tied to, and discussed in relation to, the theoretical framework as well as, where relevant, previous research.

Frame One: Aung San Suu Kyi As A Victim

As a person who has been a long-term prisoner of conscience as a result of her democracy activism, Aung San Suu Kyi may conceivably be considered a victim of Myanmar’s military dictatorship, and it is therefore possible that authors choose to highlight this aspect of her life as a relevant factor in their articles. In passing, mentions of her house arrest and her past role in Myanmar politics and democratization are frequently pointed out or summarized, but do not necessarily frame this time as victimizing, or do not build on this aspect. This notwithstanding, Aung San Suu Kyi is discussed specifically in relation to victimhood in a few of the articles. However, this frame is employed rarely and infrequently overall, and strongly overlaps with other frames.

208 Pletcher, “Aung San Suu Kyi.”
209 Pletcher, “Aung San Suu Kyi.”
Some of the articles tie descriptions of Aung San Suu Kyi’s time as a prisoner of conscience to the authority, both political and moral, she continues to hold in Myanmar. A past of deprivation is described and still acknowledged as having been wrongfully imposed on her, and is further extended to include the experiences of other dissidents and many people in Myanmar, which is also used to contextualize her continuing support:

“"But Suu Kyi remains popular in her home country. When Oxford removed her portrait in September and placed it in storage, dozens of copies of the Chen Yanning painting - of a young Suu Kyi with red flowers in her hair - flooded the streets in Burma. "People really support Aung San Suu Kyi. She suffered a lot. She was arrested in her house for more than a decade - the military repressed her, and she could not see her family. So we feel very sympathetic to her," Nyo Nyo Thinn said. "Whatever she does, we can forgive her."”

Thus, it is underscored that the nation suffered, and she is still recognized for having suffered for the nation. While her current role in Myanmar, as will be discussed in further detail later on in this analysis, may contradict her embodiment of notions of heroism, it does not contradict past adversity. Another type of sacrifice is tied to her womanhood, and again portrays Aung San Suu Kyi as having sacrificed this for her country’s civilian population. Alex Wagner states that “[s]he forsook her family, because in this struggle, she understood herself to be more than a woman, a wife, a mother: She represented the hope of freedom for the Burmese people.” Other articles, too, appear to both have been prompted by moments in which Aung San Suu Kyi’s public actions overlapped with familial aspects of her life. When she visits London on her way to Washington DC, her visit is not limited to a meeting with Theresa May, but includes an encounter with her family as well. This prompts a recap of the effects her captivity had on her family overall.

“Since 1988, when Suu Kyi left her family in Britain to return home and care for her sick mother, she has rarely seen Kim or her older son, Alexander. … Visits were few and far between. The years passed. She was unable to be with her husband, British historian Michael Aris, when he died of cancer in 1999. ... Suu Kyi's plight mirrored that of others. Tens of thousands saw the breakup of their families over decades of military rule, which lasted from 1962 to 2010.”

Thus, the extent of her house arrest is laid out clearly, and becomes less abstract by naming some of its consequences. Simultaneously, the impact of separation and captivity are abstracted as her own fate is further extended to include the experiences of many dissidents in Myanmar under military rule. Based on Alex Wagner’s article, it further seems that Aung San Suu Kyi is considered to have sacrificed many of the aspects that render her a woman –being with her husband and children– in

211 Ellis-Petersen, Hannah. 19 October 2018. “Brother of Aung San Suu Kyi Fights to Sell Symbolic Site of Her House Arrest.”
213 Wagner, Alex. 16 April 2018. “Burma’s Collective Amnesia.” [The Atlantic]
214 Freeman, Joe. 14 September 2016. “Aung San Suu Kyi’s Visit With Her Son and Grandchildren Is A Poignant Reminder of What She Has Sacrificed; Since Leaving Britain in 1988, the Burmese Leader Has Rarely Seen Her Family.” [Washington Post]
order to be a mother of her nation. The separation from her family is considered a crucial part of her victimization, i.e. what renders her sacrifice extraordinary and evokes sympathy. Notably, in one article, a member of the Obama administration speculates that her sacrifice may have had a long-term impact on her actions, including her apparent detachment, stating that “I sense a very distinct lack of empathy for anybody,” ... ‘I found myself wondering whether all those years of separation from her family and the loss of her husband had an impact on her.”

In a framing analysis, apart from identifying and describing the different frames, one further seeks to identify implied judgments and, where existent, corresponding remedies. All of the articles featured in this section seem to situate Aung San Suu Kyi in relation to the political situation in Myanmar – in 2015 and 2016 in relation to structures of political power she is yet to enter one way or another, and subsequently in relation to the persecution of the Rohingya Muslims. The judgment one may derive from these articles is that, though it may seem self-evident, she was once also a victim, and not only her public resistance but her public captivity have had a grave impact on the nation, not only as a carrier of hope but also as a person whose dissidence was unique, but whose suffering was not. As her dissidence is, in part, cast as motherhood, an image held not only within Myanmar but also transpiring through international media, this may also constitute part of the betrayal felt in response to Aung San Suu Kyi’s changing role in Myanmar, which violates the stereotypical characteristics attributed to a mother. This notion of a violation rooted in motherhood is in line with previous research, as is the assumption that a female perpetrator has herself been victimized. The potential remedies or consequences, in relation to the present-day political situation in Myanmar, are at best elusive. No clear courses of action are advocated for within the victim-frame, which may imply that it is not considered crucial for grasping her current (in)action. The small amount of articles conceptualizing Aung San Suu Kyi as a victim may be defying the gendered expectations somewhat, as the overarching rejection of victimhood implies individual agency and resilience, and acknowledges her role as an activist and politician, which does often not happen in regards to female victims. In respect to the gendered mediation thesis, it still appears that the mediation of Aung San Suu Kyi as a victim is gendered insofar as victimization is closely tied to the sphere of family and personal relationships. However, Aung San Suu Kyi’s behavior as a victim of state oppression, and the actions following her release and rise to political power, are

216 Sjoberg & Gentry. Mothers, Monsters, Whores. Women’s Violence in Global Politics. 33-35.
217 Carpenter, R. Charli. ‘Innocent Women and Children:’ Gender, Norms and the Protection of Civilians.
disconnected from victimization in most instances. The small number of relevant articles employing this frame, too, suggest that it is not a priority in explaining her current role.

**Frame Two: Aung San Suu Kyi As A Bystander – The Power of An Absent Voice**

Discussions pertaining to whether Aung San Suu Kyi is to be considered a bystander to the situation in Myanmar recurrently center in on her apparent silence on the topic. These discussions feature a couple of prominent elements, *inter alia* perspectives on whether she could speak out against the military, the causes underlying her silence, processes beyond the silence, and lastly its consequences, i.e. its moral implications, and implications for demands and for action to be taken.

When discussing the apparent silence of Aung San Suu Kyi, articles frequently turn to the practical evaluation of her current behavior, recognizing that she has to balance the demands of political stability and her own power as an elected official, but ultimately considering her a moral accomplice to the military. No one consensus is formed regarding this question. Some criticism has been voiced early on, in the light of the remaining influence of the military in Myanmar, and the lack of true reform, suggesting that Aung San Suu Kyi chose to become more impervious in her political role by compromising rather than opposing the military presence in the government whilst still being revered internationally. Coherent with this line of argumentation, much of the international community is designated a bystander as well – as having created and continuing to believe in an idealized image of Aung San Suu Kyi whilst using this exact image to remain unconcerned with the more difficult and harmful developments in Myanmar. Nevertheless, the assumption that Aung San Suu Kyi could speak out with any hopes of mitigating the violence is not held uniformly, including in later years. In her September 2017 article, Poppy McPherson summarizes some of the international uncertainty regarding Aung San Suu Kyi’s role in Myanmar, from the disappearance of the term “state councilor” from her Facebook profile, over anti-Rohingya

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statements she has previously uttered towards international leaders and which have been reflected in statements made by her close associates, to the continued hopes held by diplomats that she will eventually use her influence for the better and has not completely sided with the stance of the military. According to McPherson, “[t]here is a prevailing view that Aung San Suu Kyi, even if she wanted to, could not speak up for the Rohingya without risking the stability of the country.”\footnote{222 McPherson, Poppy. 31 March 2017. “Aung San Suu Kyi: Myanmar’s Great Hope Fails to Live up to Expectations.” [The Guardian]} She therefore acknowledges the precarious situation Aung San Suu Kyi faces as the leader of a barely democratizing country, but implies doubt as to the causes of her inaction, the phrasing even if she wanted to perhaps implying that her non-interference is a choice. Others, too, question her willingness. In the Washington Post, Azeem Ibrahim points out that given Aung San Suu Kyi’s continued popularity in Myanmar and the international willingness to investigate further and potentially try those responsible for the violence in the ICC, she would be able to exercise greater influence in the country, including through voicing such criticism that would challenge the authority of the military.\footnote{223 Ibrahim, Azeem. 6 September 2018. “This May Be Aung San Suu Kyi’s Last Chance to Do the Right Thing for the Rohingya; The Nobel Prize Laureate Can Still Salvage Her Reputation – and Perhaps That of Her Country.” [Washington Post]}

Based on this ambivalence, several evaluations of the causes of Aung San Suu Kyi’s silence are offered, of which some assume that she “calculates that she would do more good in office” than out of it, but is instead “used as a human shield for the military’s murderous defense,”\footnote{224 Editorial, 4 September 18, “The Guardian View On Aung San Suu Kyi: A Deadening Silence.” [The Guardian]} or aims to preserve her “political capital”\footnote{225 Kurlantzick, Joshua. 15 September 2017, “Why Aung San Suu Kyi Isn’t Protecting the Rohingya in Burma; What Prompted Her to Cast Aside Her Moral Authority?” [Washington Post]; Schrank, Delphine. 7 November 2015, “The Lady and the Election.” [New York Times]; Beech, Hannah; and Rick Gladstone. 25 January 2018. “U.S. Adviser Rebukes Aung San Suu Kyi: ‘I Don’t Want to Be Part of a Whitewash.” [New York Times]” with a population taken by nationalism, the former of which indicates an inept passivity, whereas the latter may be the result of active calculation. Adding an international dimension to this evaluation, the latter argument further suggests a “stubbornness” triggered by international pressure and criticism, which has been a reputation of Aung San Suu Kyi’s before.\footnote{226 A yet more drastic interpretation of her inaction does, indeed, go beyond this silence, noting that apart from a harmful silence, “the civilian government … has consistently opted to use its power to support the military campaign against the Rohingya,” and has thereby signaled to the military that cooperation with the civilian government is neither an expectation nor an}
obligation. Apart from official statements, therefore, other supportive actions are taken into account as well, including such actions as threaten the democratization process overall. It is pointed out that while she may not be able to control the military, she could have pardoned two detained journalists but chose to refrain from using her authority to this end. Additionally, she has hindered investigations and humanitarian aid, has shielded the military from criticism, and diminished Rohingya witness testimonies, suggesting that her silence does not stem from the desire to remain neutral, but shows that she has sided with the military.

From many of the articles, a judgment of Aung San Suu Kyi’s silence emerges according to which it renders her morally complicit to the violence. Frequently, her silence is deemed especially grave due to her status as a Nobel peace prize bearer, and as somebody who has been repressed by the military herself, which leads to the notion of her silence as especially noteworthy and condemnable, and potentially a graver offense than the misconduct of a military which has historically behaved in the same manner. In this sense, she appears to be seen as indebted to, and now offending, “all those who campaigned for her release.” Thus, her silence is considered to do harm to the Rohingya, but to constitute an injustice against her domestic and international supporters as well.

Perhaps the most starkly gendered expression encountered in this frame is the description of Aung San Suu Kyi as “a handmaiden to genocide,” quoting Bob Geldorf during the return of his Freedom of the City of Dublin award. This term is explicitly referring to a docile woman subservient to a master, whilst also using it to attribute guilt to Aung San Suu Kyi explicitly, and to the military only by extension. Based on the articles read, however, this description stood out as an

exception. Its relation to (the demanded revocation of) an award, appeared more in line with other articles, and underscores her perceived moral culpability. While applications of the gendered mediation thesis to spheres of politics have previously revealed tendencies according to which women politicians are cast as exceptional and deviant, in articles concerning this frame, exceptionalism appears to be closely tied to the Nobel prize and other human rights distinctions, i.e. to awards and achievements that are, in fact, exceptional.

The evaluation of Aung San Suu Kyi’s silence seems to suggest that she is a passive bystander, according to which her inaction can constitute an action in itself. Moreover, the potential influence of the bystander, and the capacity they have for interfering with a situation, influences the extent of their responsibility. Herein, it appears that her silence is considered to affirm the actions of the military. As she is considered to choose to refrain from action, she may display omission rather than ordinary inaction. The remedies or courses of action proposed in articles using the bystander frame are extensive. Unsurprisingly, articles focusing on the potential power of Aung San Suu Kyi’s public voice and the repercussions of its absence make suggestions and discuss potential remedies related to her voice, too, which would perhaps transform her role to that of an active bystander. Whether Aung San Suu Kyi can restore her reputation and live up to ideals she was previously considered to personify is a point of contention. Regardless, her voice is considered influential, and she is urged to speak out as well as act and cooperate with the international community on behalf of the Rohingya. Thus, while her voice is considered of great influence, it is not understood to be her only asset, and given her political position, is not considered enough, and it is this total inaction, as opposed to merely her silence, which renders her a bystander. An editorial piece in the The Guardian goes as far as to suggest that she ought to have relinquished

her position as state councilor and retreated from office rather than accept that such atrocities be perpetrated “in her government’s name.”\textsuperscript{241} This suggestion could entail other expectations of action; however, it also includes the possibility of benign rather than complicit silence. This may point towards a perspective of situated bystandership,\textsuperscript{242} too, and might show some sensibility for the potential limits of Aung San Suu Kyi’s actions.

**Frame Three: Aung San Suu Kyi As A Perpetrator – The Bitterness of Hindsight**

Generally, the articles reviewed herein do not deem Aung San Suu Kyi a perpetrator unequivocally, but consider the possibility that she could be one, challenging the assumptions according to which her current role was unpredictable. One of the “clusters of facts or judgments”\textsuperscript{243} encountered whilst reading those articles discussing Aung San Suu Kyi in relation to the perpetrator-frame concerns a seeming attempt to reevaluate her past, and to contextualize criticism and suspicions currently leveled against her with anecdotes and behaviors indicating that she has displayed similar behavior previously. This is done in relation to several facets of her, and occurs in regards to her leadership style and demeanor during her captivity, signs of long-held Islamophobia, and, to a smaller extent, family-based arguments which tie Aung San Suu Kyi’s potential nationalism to the aspirations of her father for a unified Burma.

In several articles, past expressions of Buddhist nationalism and/or Islamophobia by Aung San Suu Kyi, and in some cases the NLD,\textsuperscript{244} are pointed out, going beyond the time-frame of the escalation of the Rohingya crisis, and including her time under house arrest. For example, Azeem Ibrahim remarks that “[w]riting in 1985, she expounded on the Burmese "racial psyche," in which, she said, Buddhism "represents the perfected philosophy. It therefore follows that there [is] no need to either to develop it further or to consider other philosophies.”\textsuperscript{245} It is argued that sentiments along the lines of Buddhist supremacy and an alleged threat posed by the Indian Muslim population can be found in her writings dating back to 1985,\textsuperscript{246} and that although many Rohingya supported Aung San Suu Kyi, she never worked towards a state system in which all ethnic minorities could have

\textsuperscript{243} Entman, “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm.” 52-53.
\textsuperscript{244} Bearak, Max. 20 October 2017. “For Rohingya, Suu Kyi a ‘Bright Light’ No More.” [Washington Post]; Richard Cockett, 4 January 2018, “Why Even Burma’s Democracy Activists Don’t Stick Up For The Rohingya; Burma’s Pro-democracy activists don’t believe that democracy is for everyone.” [Washington Post]
\textsuperscript{245} Ibrahim, Azeem. 8 August 2018, “Democracy’s False Dawn in Myanmar; After Thirty Years of Struggle, Myanmar’s Hopes for Democracy Remain Unfulfilled.” [Washington Post]
safe and equal standing to the Buddhist majority. Focusing on a different aspect of Aung San Suu Kyi’s demeanor, some articles point towards descriptions or anecdotes regarding her style of leadership outside of public, highly performative settings. She is described as draconian, inflexible, stubborn, and controlling, which changes the context in which her current role is situated. Thereby, these articles provide a perspective from which Aung San Suu Kyi is acting in accordance with the behaviors she has displayed thus far, and the need to find an explanation for a seeming ‘change of heart’ becomes less pressing. Nevertheless, some of these articles appear to perpetuate an idealized image of her in spite of their apparent criticism. A section in a 2017 article by Poppy McPherson stands out in this regard as it precedes a description of her leadership-style – portraying Aung San Suu Kyi as having been “micro-managing,” controlling and unable to leave responsibilities with other people – with a more personal-seeming description of her habits.

“The 71-year-old is a disciplined ruler. Her habit, established during imprisonment, is to wake before dawn and meditate in the house she shares with her pet dog and a small retinue of maids. She has breakfast with an adviser, often Kyaw Tint Swe, a former ambassador who spent decades defending the junta’s actions. An aide, Win Htein, says Aung San Suu Kyi eats very little. “The amount of food she is taking is like a kitten,” he said. “She doesn’t eat carbohydrates. Fruit and vegetables. No pork, or mutton, or beef. Only fish.” Her few indulgences include a vast wardrobe of luxurious silk longyis and evening film viewings, musicals being her favourite. Win Htein recently gave her a copy of La La Land. But mostly she works. And there is a lot of work.”

The diet, the comparison to a kitten, as well as the focus on cinematic preferences appear personal and somewhat intimate, but may simultaneously have an abstracting effect. It seems to contrast a highly idealized image of a delicate and composed woman to one who appears rather sinister ‘under the surface,’ whilst the article itself is reinforcing the illusion of this very surface. Additionally, this reevaluation of Aung San Suu Kyi also gives rise to the reevaluation of the NLD. While Aung San Suu Kyi is its most prominent member, the NLD featured other members who had been dissidents under the junta, and their apparent collective failure is also striking. Thus, Richard Cockett describes the party to “[look] more as if it was merely a Suu Kyi fan club all along.” This shines a more pessimistic light on most of the democratization movement in Myanmar, and could be

expanded to include the international community, as having been ‘fans’ of Aung San Suu Kyi rather than genuine supporters of democratization in Myanmar, too.

Though this appears to be a rare occurrence overall, while some articles point towards Aung San Suu Kyi’s family history and her father’s role in Burmese independence, it is sometimes pointed out that the earlier strive for independence and unity, too, was a nationalist movement. It is remarked that “although he was not a xenophobic murderer, Aung San was a signatory to Thein Pe’s pamphlet, the one that made no secret of the disgust felt by the Burmese toward the Indians. It wasn’t called Burma for the Burmese… but it might as well have been.” Therefore, that Aung San Suu Kyi appears to be a nationalist herself is not considered surprising, and indeed is not necessarily understood to contradict the ‘legacy of her father.’

The judgment emerging from this attempt at re-evaluation suggests that Aung San Suu Kyi was not a hero to begin with, though it does not necessarily negate the notion of ‘heroism.’ Bearing similarities to the critical approach to a Western-constructed image of Aung San Suu Kyi, discussed in the following section, it does imply that more caution ought to be taken when elevating a person to a morally exceptional status. These articles, however, bear an accusing tone against Aung San Suu Kyi more than against the West. However, while Aung San Suu Kyi has moral responsibility, considered as the de facto perpetrator is the military, and even when measures through the ICC are raised as a possibility, this is done in regards to the military generals specifically. It therefore appears that while she is considered a potential perpetrator based on her past, or is considered to distinctly approve of the violence against the Rohingya, it is still a violation of moral standards first and foremost. As the judgment remains vague, so do the potential remedies. Given the attempted reevaluation conducted in the media, an implicitly suggested remedy may be to put leaders under closer scrutiny and refrain from idealizing individuals to the extent to which Aung San Suu Kyi has been idealized, though, notably, there is no clear call to do so. As it negates the image of Aung San Suu Kyi as a de facto, rather than merely apparent, human rights advocate, it may further be implied that concerning practical action regarding the situation of the Rohingya, she is not a crucial component on which the West needs to rely.

252 Alex Wagner, 16 April 2018, “Burma’s Collective Amnesia.” [The Atlantic]
254 Tun Khin, 20 May 2018, “The Rohingya’s Hope for Justice Lies With the ICC.” [Al Jazeera]
The gendered dimension of this frame is, again, split: References to Aung San Suu Kyi’s father 255 might in a different context be taken as a tendency to understand women leaders through their relations to men, 256 as previous research suggests, but appear to be closely tied to historic developments herein. 257 However, while the moral exceptionalism of Aung San Suu Kyi is questioned – which may situate her among ‘ordinary’ people as opposed to exceptional leaders who ought to be drivers of change and progress 258 – the ‘elevated’ version of her relies on heavily gendered descriptions nonetheless. Moreover, descriptions of her personal behavior – the need to control, pettiness, stubbornness, and the like – and the retroactive attempt at creating a more draconian persona, may show tendencies of the ‘monster’ frame applied to some female perpetrators. 259 Overall, it stands out that both are partly, though not exclusively, gendered: The elevation of Aung San Suu Kyi to an impossible status, as well as the condemnation following inevitable failure. Simultaneously, this condemnation may serve to shield those who ‘believed’ in her from having to confront their own convictions pertaining to the existence of ‘hero’ figures by limiting the issue to her persona.

Frame Four: Aung San Suu Kyi As A ‘Hero’ Figure – From ‘Secular Saint’ to Politician: An Evolution?

Looking for articles within this frame for additional “clusters of facts or judgments,” 260 the discussion of Aung San Suu Kyi’s decline through a lens of politics emerges. There appears to be a transition from considering her a bearer of hopes but perhaps not politically versed, to an image of a politician who has disappointed the hopes formerly put on her. Simultaneously, some authors grapple with the concept of a ‘hero’ or ‘secular saint’, and fault the West for its disappointment.

While some of those articles published earlier on in the selected time frame cast Aung San Suu Kyi in a decidedly positive light, 261 this is not uniformly the case, and many articles are cautiously regarding the democratization process in Myanmar as well as the positions Aung San Suu Kyi and the ethnic minorities hold in it. 262 However, the assertion of her as a former hero is

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257 Nevertheless, this is a point which a more quantitative approach to the material could illuminate further.
258 Ross, Gendered Media: Women, Men, and Identity Politics. 75.
259 Sjoberg & Gentry. Mothers, Monsters, Whores. Women’s Violence in Global Politics. 36-38
encountered more frequently, both in discussions explicitly concerned therewith, as well as more overtly, and appear to present an image of particularly selfless action and esteemed idealism in her worldview, in line with some of the theoretical approaches to such behavior. Thus, even in critical articles, remnants of this idealization are still present. This becomes especially apparent in descriptions of Aung San Suu Kyi, focusing on her demeanor and outward appearance:

“She is 70 now but still carries herself with an air of quiet defiance, fresh flowers as always wound in her hair. On the stump, she speaks of freedom, hope and an honest government for Burma’s 51 million people, many of whom remained mired in poverty five years after the country’s military junta began the process of democratic reforms”

Contrasting her appearance with the military oppression exercised in Myanmar appears to highlight the former – i.e. to elevate the possibility of maintaining a beautiful and dignified persona in the face of a dictatorship, and can be found elsewhere, too. These descriptions evoke images of femininity and a somewhat feminine articulation of power, expressed through quiet defiance or quiet onlooking. From the recognition that this image of Aung San Suu Kyi has existed in the past, two main approaches appear to be taken: In one line of argument, Aung San Suu Kyi is considered to have betrayed this image and the hopes put on her, and to have ‘fallen’ to performing the role of a politician as opposed to a moral leader. Other articles, however, direct their criticism towards (predominantly) the West, focusing on the creation of moral expectations to which a political leader cannot live up.

Later articles take a more critical stance overall, as was expected given the worsening of ethnic persecution in Myanmar. Yet, some articles still make references to her former status as a heroic hopeful, e.g. that Aung San Suu Kyi “once symbolized all that is admirable about resisting tyranny,” thereby upholding her idealization in the same argument that is critiquing it. Specific disappointment appears to stem from the observation that “the moral giant has become a pragmatic

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political,"  

who chooses silence or compliance in order to preserve her own position of power. This becomes especially clear in the accusations of pragmatically accepting oppression of the free press when Aung San Suu Kyi has previously relied on dissenting journalists.  

While it is recognized that other politicians have received high praise for promises they could not fulfill, she was expected to be “a moral icon, a human rights champion, a latter-day Gandhi,”  

and to surpass the reality of politics. Again, it appears that her failure to do this constitutes a deception of her supporters.  

At the same time, the need to become a politician, implying a distinct change of status and duties, is discussed. In a 2015 article, predating the elections, this is discussed not only in relation to Aung San Suu Kyi, but to the NLD as a whole, which is described as “a party of wisened dissidents and greenhorn politicians [which] offers Myanmar its least bad chance at democracy.”  

While the lack of political experience is considered as inherent to a party striving towards democratic transition, it is further acknowledged that a democratization process will take time as well as require compromise with the military. While Schrank describes this as a challenge, but not one with inevitable moral drawbacks, Ignatieff asserts that “Aung San Suu Kyi has learned that it may actually be easier to be a saint than a politician.”  

Thus, it seems that the articles create a distinction between a moral and a political leader, where the role as political leader is, from the standing of a moral leader, both a decline as well as a necessary next step if one is to progress from moral to more tangible and practical influence. However, Aung San Suu Kyi’s decline is steep not only because she has become a politician, but because she is ultimately seen to have become like the established politicians of Myanmar, i.e. one to accept the authority of the military and potentially condone its actions.  

This is the point at which most of the judgment emerges, and at which true disappointment is voiced. This appears to be understood as her primary offense. It is construed as a personal offense and a kind of retroactive exploitation of her supporters. However, the category of ‘hero’ is not categorically declined in the articles. As has been the case in the previous frame, it is difficult to fully answer the question as to whether this portrayal of Aung San Suu Kyi is conducted through a

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269 Freeman, Joe. 30 June 2017. “As Burmese Journalists are Arrested, Aung San Suu Kyi Isn’t Doing Much to Help; Some Journalists Think Burma’s De Facto Leader Is Ignoring Them Now that She Doesn’t Need Them to Spread Her Story.” [Washington Post]  
274 Ellis-Petersen, Hannah. 24 November 2018. “From Peace Icon to Pariah: Aung San Suu Kyi’s Fall From Grace.” [The Guardian]  
gendered lens, or how this lens affects her portrayal. Her elevation, again, appears to stress feminine, passive, and dignified attributes, perhaps pointing towards a similar direction, as has been indicated earlier, according to which those descriptions critiquing but nonetheless affirming her exceptionalism are gendered at least in certain regards. Treating her as a person formerly constructed as a hero includes implications in accordance with her changing status as well, i.e. demands for removing, or calling for the removal of, such credentials as affirm her moral authority.\textsuperscript{276} Again, one asked-for consequence is the revocation of her Nobel prize, though it is considered unlikely.\textsuperscript{277} But another course of action is suggested as well, which proposes to treat her as the politician she has become. Nicholas Kristof asserts that “[w]e know that the Myanmar government responds to pressure, because that’s what won Daw Suu her freedom.”\textsuperscript{278} Though this support is now perceived to have been futile, as has been discussed above, it is understood to work nevertheless, if directed towards other people – for example, towards the government currently headed by Aung San Suu Kyi, and in support of people suffering from current oppression, i.e. the Rohingya. As a result from having witnessed her transition from hero to politician, Aung San Suu Kyi is now recognized as no longer ‘above’ the system, but is considered an integral part of it.

As has been mentioned earlier, some authors re-evaluate the construction of hero figures, as opposed to Aung San Suu Kyi’s position as an alleged hero. Considering Nelson Mandela an exception, Anne Applebaum identifies several commonalities between the issues faced by Aung San Suu Kyi and other democratic leaders whose reputation has been tarnished during the course of democratization efforts, such as “[L]e ch Walesa in Poland, Boris Yeltin in Russia, Patricio Aylwin in Chile, Vaclav Havel in Czechoslovakia, [and] Corazon Aquino in the Philippines,” all of which had to navigate situations in which democratization was coming about whilst autocratic structures remained powerful in their respective countries. With democratization being a long-term process, and as even established democracies remain vulnerable to change, the failure of any one individual to achieve democratization without drawbacks is a real possibility. Similarly, Roger Cohen stresses the importance of critically considering Aung San Suu Kyi’s current position – not through a reduction of Myanmar politics to her person, but by recognizing the complex position in which she herself is put.\textsuperscript{279}

\textsuperscript{277} Editorial Board. 15 September 2018. “A Fall from Grace in Myanmar.” [Washington Post]
\textsuperscript{278} Kristof, Nicholas. 10 September 2017. “Huts Burn, Kids Die, She Shrugs.” [New York Times]
\textsuperscript{279} Cohen, Roger. 26 November 2017, “This is Not a Morality Tale.” [New York Times]
the violence against the Rohingya as proof “that Myanmar is not a democracy. It’s a quasi democracy at best.” Given the precarious state of Myanmar, Aung San Suu Kyi is understood as trying to “walk the fine line set by the army” rather than risk her own position and Myanmar’s democratization through grand statements and gestures. The West, then, has to acknowledge her precarious situation if they are to react it appropriately.

Applebaum appears to favor explanations of Aung San Suu Kyi’s silence on the persecution of the Rohingya which center the power of the military and the precarious political state of the country, and largely considers this an ordinary outcome. “In truth, the real difference between Aung San Suu Kyi in 1995 and 2017 is the difference between theory and practice,” inherent to such transition. Thus, the reaction of surprise is pointed out to be a recurring pattern in the behavior of the West rather than merely the idealization and referencing of particular figures. A critical stance towards this surprise and resulting disappointment is another recurring feature in articles taking on this perspective. Taub and Fisher, too, argue that the West has oversimplified the solution and overly relied on singular leaders to establish stability and democracy, and have “[assumed] that countries are the products of their leaders, when it is almost always the other way around.” This evaluation no longer implies merely an idealistic failure of elevating people to a moral status to which they could never have lived up, but carries with it more tangible failure as well, affecting the very understanding of politics and therefore tying to crucial policy failures of the West.

The implied judgment in articles in this frame is targeting the West by arguing that the expectations put on Aung San Suu Kyi as Myanmar’s democratic leader were unrealistic to begin with. Moreover, it is pointed out that the West need not have come to this realization only in hindsight, but could have learned from previous cases in recent history. The retraction of Aung San Suu Kyi’s Nobel prize, too, is not considered a vital remedy, but rather is understood as an extension of the simplified and superficial ways of dealing with disappointment in her moral authority. As opposed to those articles considering Aung San Suu Kyi’s political pragmatism an explicit offense against her ‘hero’ status, Applebaum holds that “it is pointless to call for her Nobel Prize to be withdrawn: This isn’t a game of symbols anymore.” Rather, calls for the revocation of

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280 Cohen, Roger. 26 November 2017, “This is Not a Morality Tale.” [New York Times], emphasis added.
281 Cohen, Roger. 26 November 2017, “This is Not a Morality Tale.” [New York Times]
284 Davis, Charles. 11 September 2017, “The ‘War on Terror’ Has Won.” [Al Jazeera]
such awards are taken to reflect an international sense of having been betrayed, and of contrition over having made a substantial contribution to forging her current role. These articles thus reveal a pattern within the creation of ‘hero’ figures in the West, as well as their nearly inevitable demise, as reflecting a political and ideological laziness.

The suggested remedies contrast this evaluation starkly, and stress a need to “use real political tools … offer to mediate, organize aid for the refugees and document the tragedy,” ideally including Aung San Suu Kyi in the discussions but targeting whichever parts of the Myanmar government are relevant. It is further argued that more scrutiny ought to be put on the military leaders. In a similar vein, Taub and Fisher cite the evaluation of a Peace Corps Officer, who suggests that democratic reform may have to be brought about with bottom-up efforts aiming to change a system at all levels, and requiring more extensive time and investment, as opposed to relying solely on auspicious individual leaders.

These articles, discussing Aung San Suu Kyi through a frame of heroism as a concept but not a reality, still frame her as a bystander to different extents. Regarding her motivations, they seem to favor pragmatism and politics over ethnic hatred or an outright evil and controlling personality, but acknowledge her shortcomings nevertheless. Thus, here too she is considered a passive bystander first and foremost. However, this perspective stands out because it explicitly considers the international community as bystanders as well, and criticizes it widely, including the unwillingness to let go of the symbolic action, for example by focusing on the revocation of awards and honors. This focus may reflect some of the trends noted by Anderson and Brakstad, i.e. the disengagement of bystander states. In this section, it appears that Aung San Suu Kyi serves as the prompt for this discussion, but because the concept of heroism is discussed through her, she remains secondary to the discussion. It is perhaps due to this that some of the elements observed throughout the previous frames, i.e. a gendered idealization or especially condemning language, are less visible throughout this section.

291Staub, Overcoming Evil: Genocide, Violent Conflict, and Terrorism. 5.
Chapter 6: Discussion of the Findings

The purpose of a media framing analysis is to uncover the frames employed in the media which are used to highlight or emphasize particular facets of and provide particular evaluations of a reported-on subject and its implied problems. “Frames, then, define problems … diagnose causes … make moral judgments … and suggest remedies [emphases in original].”

In bystander countries i.e. in countries which are not actively involved in an ongoing conflict or crisis, media framing of cases of genocide and mass atrocity can further facilitate “moral engagement” or lack thereof, and may thus contribute to how a society considers its own responsibility towards the victims of ongoing atrocities.

In relation to women depicted in the media, moreover, a gendered filter is often detectable. Previous research suggests that this filter casts women leaders as deviants, and can accentuate and exaggerate different aspects of their statements and behavior.

As has been illustrated, an internationally renowned democracy advocate and Myanmar state councilor, Aung San Suu Kyi holds a central position in Myanmar, as well as in international discourses dealing with Myanmar overall and the persecution of ethnic minorities, especially in the context of the Rohingya crisis. Due to the stark change in her position – from a revered dissident and victim of the military regime, to either a bystander or potentially a supporter of the persecution of the Rohingya – as well as the uncertainties surrounding her de facto influence and responsibility, one problem engaged with in the media concerns this exact position, seeks to identify the underlying causes and implications, and ultimately seeks to address potential remedies and causes of action that ought to be taken in the Rohingya crisis, and vis-a-vis the Myanmar government.

This analysis has revealed that Aung San Suu Kyi is considered in the context of the four main frames used, but is most prominently cast in the role of an passive bystander who does not have full political authority over the situation, but whose failure to use her continuing moral authority constitutes a deliberate action, and deliberate omission, rather than an inevitability. Thus, she is generally considered morally complicit to the violence. Due to this, many of the dominant arguments question Aung San Suu Kyi’s status as a hero figure or moral icon. However, they do not necessarily question the concepts underlying this categorization, but revise Aung San Suu Kyi’s ‘heroic’ past to reveal the earlier presence of those attributes that now stun international onlookers. This entails a frequent demand of consequences focused on the individual, most prominently the demand to revoke Aung San Suu Kyi’s Nobel Peace Prize, the public revocation of other honors, as

293 Entman, “Framing: Towards the Clarification of a Paradigm.” 52.
296 Sreberny-Mohammadi & Ross. “Women MPs and the Media: Representing the Body Politic.”
well as appeals that she ought to ‘recover’ her moral voice. While demands leveled at the use of her political and moral influence in Myanmar recognize Aung San Suu Kyi as an actor, they appear noticeably numerous in comparison to suggestions discussing her influence from a broader perspective more focused on structural matters, e.g. in relation to providing international aid and cooperating with the ICC.

Such descriptions, focusing on her individual ‘fall’ appear to exhibit some of the strongest gendered aspects encountered, which vary considerably across frames and articles. Nevertheless, gendered descriptions – often concerning Aung San Suu Kyi’s demeanor, appearance, and family circumstances – appear to be particularly present in passages dealing with the description of the idealized figure as whom she was perceived in the past. This continuing idealization, in spite of its simultaneous critique, serves to further amplify her demise, discursively uplifting Aung San Suu Kyi in an attempt to illustrate the severity of her fall. Thusly framing Aung San Suu Kyi’s changing role in Myanmar through the perspective of individual failure, potentially inherent to her character all along and hidden through a kind of deception, might also serve to frame the Rohingya crisis, and the persecution of other ethnic minorities in Myanmar, in a manner which exempts the international community from much of its responsibility. The symbolic removal of awards, then, signifies their distancing themselves from Aung San Suu Kyi, but does not entail practical obligations to aide the refugees or truly prioritize measures against their persecution. Conversely, if Aung San Suu Kyi is framed to have deceived her international admirers, this exempts the international community from confronting their own contribution to an idealized democratic leader rather than approaching democratization processes in South East Asia with more complex and long-term engagement or support. Considering previous research, this may be in line with the individualization of Lynndie England’s actions in the Abu Ghraib prison in Bagdad. Nevertheless, those articles framing Aung San Suu Kyi as a legitimate politician, as opposed to one who has ‘fallen’ to this position, may create more space for discussions pertaining to democratization, responsibility for the atrocities, and attitudes of the West towards South East Asia. As has been noted, these articles further appear to be less obviously gendered, as they use Aung San Suu Kyi as a case through which to address larger issues and phenomena rather than her assumed character or virtue. Arguments deeming her heroism a construction of the international community and predominantly of the West, then, may be considered as indicating a trend towards acknowledging the complexities of Myanmar politics and ethnic relations. Thus, articles discussing Aung San Suu Kyi through a ‘hero figure’ framework do,

in some instances, use this framework to question heroism itself, and to question the perspectives which brought her to this status.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

At the start of this thesis stood the supposition that news media frame issues and actors in ways which convey and underscore particular aspects thereof, and which lead media consumers to think about these issues and actors, and their potential implications and ramifications, in particular ways, including in cases of genocide and mass atrocity. Further, this happens through a gendered lens which ‘others’ women actors. The central research question this thesis set out to answer was: How is Aung San Suu Kyi portrayed in the media between 2015 and 2018?, and was operationalized through three sub-questions. Using a theoretical framework of framing theory, the gendered mediation thesis, and critical perspectives on victims, bystanders, perpetrators, and ‘hero’ figures in the context of genocide and mass atrocity, a framing analysis using the four groups as its organizing structure was conducted. The analysis revealed that although Aung San Suu Kyi is discussed in the context of all four groups, she is predominantly cast as a passive bystander who is morally complicit to the persecution and has significant though not unlimited authority in Myanmar. She is portrayed in a gendered manner to some extent, as her elevation and demise are amplified by gendered descriptions, often drawing from feminine stereotypes and expectations, and relations to men. These descriptions are prominent in asserting her previous status as a hero figure, and indicate the surprise at her current role. Predominantly, the media reconciles these opposing images by arguing either that Aung San Suu Kyi was never a hero to begin with, without calling the concept of ‘hero’ into question, or by critiquing this concept. While the former frequently leads to calls for the revocation of her humanitarian awards, and suggests that her international supporters have been betrayed by her, the latter argument indicates that a more complex approach to democratization ought to be taken, as opposed to the reliance on individual leaders who become politicians. With these considerations, therefore, the questions this thesis set out for itself have been answered.

Noted earlier, there are limitations to this research, which point towards possibilities for future research. Throughout this thesis, the benefits of a qualitative approach to research have been apparent, as it allows for a focus on themes and contexts, as well as on the subtleties of language. Nevertheless, a quantitative angle may be a contribution insofar as it would allow to capture those elements which have been found to fall outside of the scope of a qualitative approach. The frequency with which Aung San Suu Kyi’s family is mentioned, the term “Daw” is used in front of
her name, or which types of adjectives or emotions are used to describe her would be examples of such elements. Such an approach would be especially promising if it is designed as a comparative study, for example comparing the representation of Aung San Suu Kyi with that of one of the moral-turned-political leaders mentioned by Anne Applebaum.298

Ultimately, it appears that any person seen as a “perfect hostage” in the public eye will cease to be perfect the moment they cease to be a hostage, and instead have to interact on a day-to-day level in which they have to navigate a wider social structure and issues, and are judged based on their day-to-day action rather than based on an abstract ideal. This ought to be expected, and astonishment at such occurrences ought not to stand in the way of direly needed action.

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Appendix 1 – List of Articles

The articles listed below were selected following the initial Factiva search. The search conducted on the English-language website of Al Jazeera, and the website of The Atlantic.

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