

Locked Up in Malaysia's Lockdown: Self and other positioning in Malaysians' online apologetics against Al-Jazeera's (2020) documentary

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Lecture outline

- Background
- Apologetics and apologetic discourse
- Methodology
- Key findings
- Final thoughts

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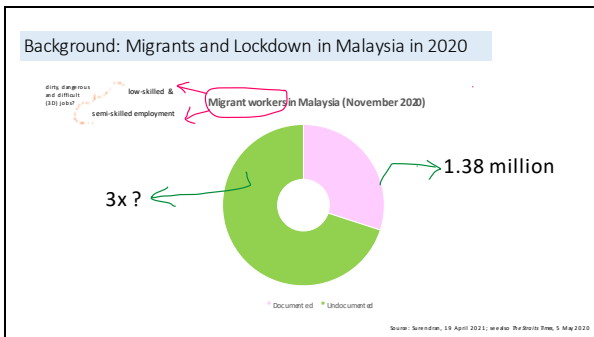
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**How different phases MCO in Malaysia pushed migrant workers further to the margins?**

- Loss of income
- Fear of threat of detention due to a series of raids
- Malaysia's inconsistent policies
- Unaffordable & inaccessible healthcare services
- Overcrowded, unsanitary, squalid and unsafe living conditions
- discrimination and xenophobia

Additional text in the infographic: "How different phases MCO in Malaysia pushed migrant workers further to the margins?" and "discrimination and xenophobia".

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Al-Jazeera's 101 East 'Locked up in Malaysia's Lockdown' (3 July 2020)

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**Malaysian responses to the documentary:**

- Malaysian officials and national television: 'Misleading, unfair attempt to tarnish the country's image' (See Tee, 6 July 2020; The Star, 7 July 2020).



- The then Defence Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob: the report is 'irresponsible', 'void of facts', 'full of baseless accusations' '...false news...done in bad faith...' (The Star, 7 July 2020).

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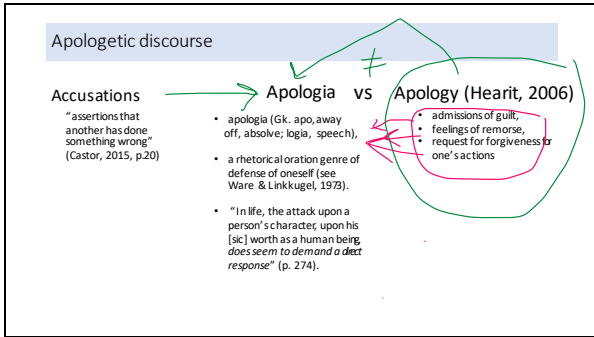
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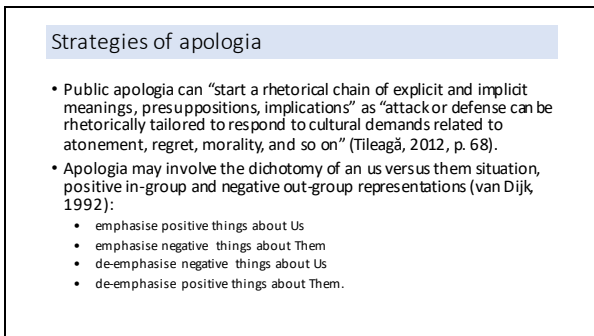
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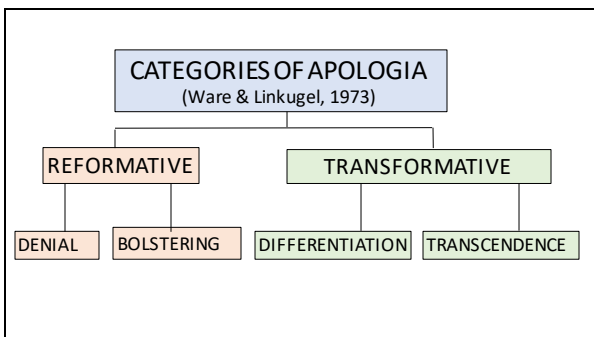
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Apologetic discourse as argumentation

- Persuasion = “the means of intentionally influencing a person so that she or he adopts, fixes or changes her or his ways of perception, attitudes to and views on persons, objects and ideas, and disposition to behave or act in a specific way” (Reisigl, 2018; p.69).

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Methodology

- First 5000 most relevant comments posted by users on the 101 East - Al Jazeera Facebook page published on 3 July 2020 at 7:59 PM MYT.
- Data scraper: exportcomments.com
- As of 3 July 2020, Al-Jazeera Facebook Page has 309,266 followers and 283 573 likes.
- All comments including nested or threaded comments (i.e. replies to individual comments on the post) as well as potential spams were extracted albeit with the ‘most relevant’ comments appeared first in the comment’s section.

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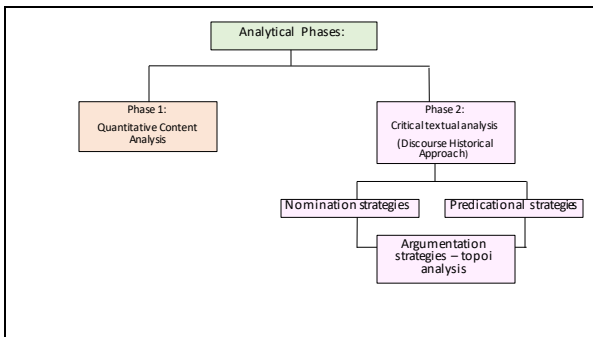
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## Phase 1: Quantitative content analysis

### 1. DENIAL STRATEGIES

simple negation in which the accused denies (i) the act or at least disavows taking part in it, or (ii) positive sentiment toward whatever it is that repels the audience.

- (a) act-denial ('I did not do/say that at all');
- (b) control-denial ('I did not do/say that on purpose', 'It was an accident');
- (c) intention-denial ('I did not mean that', 'You got me wrong');
- (d) goal-denial ('I did not do/say that, in order to...');
- (e) denial of responsibility ('If there were negative consequences, I did not have control over them...');
- (f) mitigations, e.g. down-toning, minimizing or using euphemisms when describing one's negative actions ('I did not threaten him, but gave him friendly advice');
- (g) justification: defending the alleged acts as an act of legitimate defence, or by detailing that the other person was indeed guilty, and therefore deserved a negative reaction.
- (h) excuse: acknowledging negative acts as such, but at the same time excused.
- (i) reversal: reversing the blame to an Other ('We are not guilty of negative action, they are')

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### 2. BOLSTERING STRATEGIES

- identify oneself with something viewed favorably by the audience and
- remind the audience (the accuser) of the existence of a positive fact, sentiment, object, or relationship in the past

### 3. DIFFERENTIATION STRATEGIES

- attempts to distinguish the offense from other similar but more offensive things.
- offense would not look nearly as bad in comparison to what could have occurred.
- Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's (1969) "dissociation", i.e., "alteration of conventional ways of thinking" (p. 274).

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### 4. TRANSCENDENCE STRATEGIES

- Any strategy "which cognitively joins some fact, sentiment, object, or relationship with some larger context within which the audience does not presently view the attribute" (Ware and Linkugel (1973), p. 280).
- attempts to place the offense in a broader, more favorable context.

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Phase 2: Critical textual analysis (Discourse Historical Approach)

Discursive strategies	Purpose	Devices	Linguistic function
REFERENTIAL	discursive construction of Self and the Other, phenomena, events, processes and actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>membership categorisation devices, dactics, anthonymy, etc.</li> <li>tropes such as metaphors, metonymies and synecdoches (pars pro toto, totum pro parte)</li> <li>verbs and nouns used to denote processes and actions etc.</li> </ul>	Ways of naming
PREDICATION	discursive qualification of Self and the Other, phenomena, events, processes and actions (positively or negatively)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(stereotypical) evaluative attributions of negative or positive traits (e.g. in the form of adjectives, appositions, prepositional phrases, relative clauses, conjunctive clauses, infinitive clauses and/or participial clauses or groups), explicit predicates or predicative nouns/ adjectives/ pronouns, collocations, explicit comparators, similes, metaphors and other rhetorical figures (including metonymies, hyperboles, litotes, euphemisms), allusions, evocations presuppositions/implicatures, etc.</li> </ul>	Ways of describing

Wodak & Reisigl, 2016, p.42

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Argumentation strategy- analysis of topoi

Topoi= "Certain headings of arguments which, in a way, summarise the argument while also providing it with a necessary "skeleton" which is fleshed over by respective discourse contents. Therefore, the analysis aims to discover the links which are established in the course of analysis between the levels of mapping of those contents (i.e. topics) and establish the argumentation schemes (i.e. topoi) deployed, and related linguistic aspects" (Krzyżanowski, 2010, p. 85).

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Aristotleian (2004) versus DHA's topoi (taken from Boukala, 2016)

Topic	Definition
Topic of threat or topic of danger	...if there are any specific dangers or threats, one should do something about them.
Topic of responsibility	...if a title or a group of persons is responsible for the emergence of a specific problem, it or they should act in order to find a solution to that problem.
Topic of benevolence/welfare	...if a particular action or decision does or does not conform with human rights or humanitarian conventions and values, that one should or should not perform or take in.
Topic of numbers	...if numbers prove a specific topic, a specific action should (not) be performed/carry out.
Topic of burden or weighing down	...if a person, institution or country is burdened by a specific problem, one should act in order to diminish that burden.
Topic of history	Because history teaches that specific actions have specific consequences, one should perform or omit a specific action in a specific situation compatible with the historical example referred to.

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Table 2: Selected DHA topoi

Table 1: Selected Aristotle's Rhetoric topoi

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- Rubinelli (2009): “what is more appropriate in a specific context is still a matter of [a] scholar’s creativity and understanding of the interlocutor. Clearly the selection of the scheme is influenced by the questioner’s general knowledge of the subject” (p. 23).

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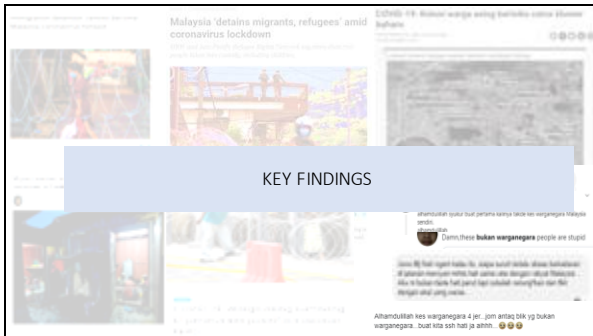
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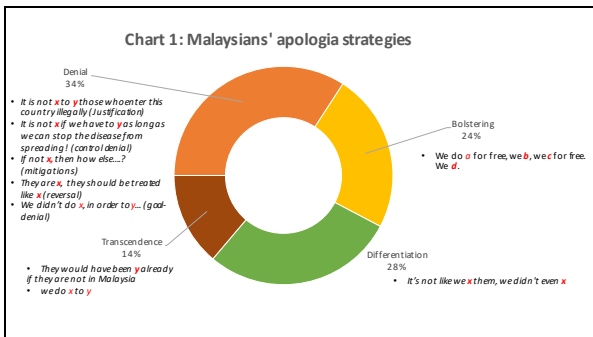
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DENIAL (reversal) strategies

Topos of threat: if the immigrants are allowed to stay in the country illegally, Malaysia will not be able to break the chain of the Covid-19 infection and will have to discriminate the illegal immigrants

unhygienic

(1) You should know that these illegal immigrants do not really keep their hygiene. Most of them come here and being dirty.

**Disease carriers** (2) Those illegal immigrants came with so many diseases and with the current Covid19 pandemic, that's not helping. Please, if you care them so much, take them back to your country.

(3) Malaysian Government did their best for national securities even if there is need to arrest all illegal immigrants. Outsider can keep their opinions to themselves.

**Freeloaders burden to OUR economy** (4) They're ILLEGAL. They don't pay taxes, involve in crime, and bad stuff. dangerous

(5) What do you expect? We treat them with 5 star hotel? These ungrateful illegal immigrants should be ashamed of themselves because we still provide food and free screening test for them regardless of their status in our country.

(6) They are illegal but did we kill them...? Our government take them and put them at good places. Gave them food... This is our country, so we have right to protect our country.

(7) This is very bias and very bad journalism practice. Nothing to do with racism. This is the counter measures in preventing COVID-19 spread among "ILLEGAL" immigrants.

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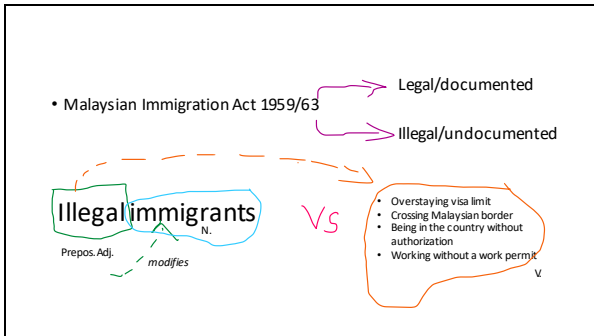
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Topos of reality: because the reality is as it is, the alleged action should be performed/made.

**Denial strategies scheme in Malaysians' apology to Al-Jazeera's (2020) documentary:**

- It is not x to y [those who enter this country illegally] [because we need to make sure our people are safe] [Justification]
- It is not x if we have to y [as long as we can stop the disease from spreading!] [control/denial]
- If not x, then how else [are we going to curb the virus]? [mitigation]
- They are x, they should be treated like x [especially during the pandemic] [reversal]
- We didn't do x, in order to y... we do x, [because we need to protect our people] [apal-denial]

**Triggered PSP:**

(If) There are illegal migrants in the country,

Antecedent

we are not safe from the Covid-19 virus

Apodosis

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Topos of prioritization: if this is our country, then we should be prioritized over the outsiders in order to protect ourselves from the virus.

DENIAL (justification)

DENIAL of responsibility

EMPHASIS of responsibility

- (9) Malaysia is doing its best. This is our country...what's illegal will stay illegal. Its not about human right.. its all about our country..we need to make our people safe first.. 🙄🙄🙄🙄
- (10) It is the right move! And we Malaysians support it, it's not for you to judge!
- (11) we are Malaysians..we keep our nation safe during this difficult time..
- (12) Malaysian is for Malaysia... Not for illegal migrants. It is imperative to make sure our people are safe, no matter what it takes.
- (13) No, our country does not recognize illegal immigrants .. other than us Malaysians who support the government for the sake of the people of Malaysia. you don't need to interfere with what our government does.. because we Malaysians are united. we support our government
- (14) This is our country..it up to us how to manage illegal migrants
- (15) This is OUR COUNTRY! OUR LAND! OUR HOME! Not yours. Let our government do what they do to protect US, the citizens!
- (16) What Malaysia government did is to protect its own citizens. Look what happens now. Our country is almost free from Covid-19. If Malaysia did not take these steps like this, we will become like the USA. Criticizing a country that is trying to take care its citizens is totally stupid and unfounded. We Malaysian, totally support our government. Now, we go out feeling safe because of the actions taken by our government.

Topos of induction: All humans must be saved, the immigrants are human too, therefore, they must also be saved.

- (17) We screen them and treat those who are Covid positive at our health facilities. This has proven to curb the spread among the immigrants as well as among the communities. Malaysia has now succeeded in controlling the pandemic when others are still struggling. Please stop spreading your lies and distasteful reporting!
- (18) Thank you and Congratulations Malaysia. For protecting our country and care for the immigrants for years, not only during pandemic. Malaysia is among the top country donating and assisting help to Palestine in Gaza, Syria, Yemen and many war-torn countries even Bosnia before. Thank you, Malaysians.
- (19) Anyway, we saved thousands lives by allowing you to stay in Malaysia to support your family.
- (20) They should thank Malaysia Government because got treatment like local, got medical attention, got good hospitality without paying a single cent to government!
- (21) Malaysia among the country had fighting covid 19 with highest rate successful decrease casualties in the world...but some of the bulshit journalist and reporter twist the facts Malaysia government are the best with fighting covid 19...
- (22) Do you know that Malaysia provided a hotel, including free meals. Do you know that the covid test here for everyone is free? Our government pays for everything.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

**Malaysia 'detains migrants, refugees' amid coronavirus lockdown**

**Petingin 19.08.2020**

Beritahuilah saudara-saudara saya bahawa Malaysia telah berjaya mengawal penyebaran virus COVID-19. Ini adalah kerana kita telah mengambil langkah-langkah yang tepat untuk melindungi rakyat kita. Kita telah mengasingkan orang-orang yang berisiko kepada negara-negara ketiga. Kita telah memastikan bahawa orang-orang yang tinggal di Malaysia adalah orang-orang yang selamat. Kita telah memastikan bahawa orang-orang yang tinggal di Malaysia adalah orang-orang yang selamat.

**Petingin 19.08.2020**

Bukan warganegara bukan warganegara

Bukan kita sah-hati ja ahnh.