

**IDEOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTION OF AN  
INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY: THE *ORANG ASLI*  
AS PORTRAYED IN *THE STAR* NEWSPAPER**

by

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**PEMBENTUKAN IDEOLOGI SATU KOMUNITI PERIBUMI: ORANG ASLI  
SEPERTI YANG DIPAPARKAN DALAM AKHBAR *THE STAR***

**ABSTRAK**

Kajian ini bertumpu kepada pemaparan kaum Orang Asli dalam akhbar *The Star*, dan khususnya, konstruksi kaum tersebut apabila dianalisis daripada perspektif analisis wacana kritis. Kajian ini mengadaptasi Teori Makrostruktur Semantik dan Teori Ideologi seperti yang diperkenalkan oleh van Dijk berserta integrasi Kaedah Linguistik Berfungsi oleh Halliday. Skop kajian bertumpu kepada dua aspek iaitu analisis elemen makro (struktur tematik) dan mikro (struktur leksis, sintaktik, retorik dan transitiviti). Hasil kajian mendapati bahawa terdapat ketidakseimbangan dalam pemaparan kumpulan ‘sendiri’ apabila dibandingkan dengan kumpulan yang ‘lain’. Didapati bahawa pemaparan kumpulan ‘sendiri’ amat positif manakala kumpulan ‘lain’ dipaparkan secara negatif. Beberapa tema yang digunakan untuk menerangkan Orang Asli telah dikenalpasti, misalnya pemaparan kaum tersebut sebagai selalu bergantung terhadap orang lain, mundur dan tradisional. Struktur-struktur leksis negatif telah digunakan bagi memaparkan kaum Orang Asli dan struktur sintaksis seperti ayat deklarasi digunakan secara berkesan bagi memperkukuhkan idea negatif tentang kaum tersebut. Pemaparan yang memihak pada kumpulan ‘sendiri’ dan menunjukkan kumpulan ‘lain’ secara negatif dilakukan dengan penggunaan struktur retorik seperti hiperbola dan pengulangan leksis. Analisis struktur transitiviti menunjukkan bahawa kaum tersebut tidak diberi peluang bagi mengutarakan pendapat dan kemahuan mereka. Penggunaan struktur-struktur ini memperkukuhkan ideologi yang dipraktikkan oleh akhbar *The Star*. Pemaparan ahli-ahli kumpulan ‘sendiri’ seperti organisasi kerajaan and ahli politik pula dilakukan secara positif, di mana pelbagai aktiviti yang dijalankan oleh mereka bagi membantu komuniti Orang

Asli dipaparkan secara jelas dalam keratan akhbar yang dianalisis. Secara kesimpulannya, pemaparan negatif kaum Orang Asli telah didedahkan melalui analisis elemen makro dan mikro keratan akhbar yang dipilih.

**IDEOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTION OF AN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY:  
THE *ORANG ASLI* AS PORTRAYED IN *THE STAR* NEWSPAPER**

**ABSTRACT**

This study examines the portrayal of the *Orang Asli* in *The Star* newspaper from a critical discourse analysis perspective. It mainly utilises van Dijk's Theory of Semantic Macrostructure, van Dijk's Theory of Ideology and Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics. The projection of the community is inspected through the analysis of macro (thematic structure), micro elements (lexical, syntactic and rhetorical structures) and transitivity structures. Findings revealed that there is a misalignment of the polarization of 'self' versus 'other' whereby the overall depiction tended to construct the 'self' positively, while the 'other' had its image and perspective being projected in an unfavourable manner. Several themes were identified in the analysis such as the portrayal of the *Orang Asli* community as being dependent, under-developed and traditional. Negative lexical items were tactically used to describe the community and syntactic structures, such as declarative sentences were aptly inserted to validate negative notions reported about the community. Several ideas glorifying the 'self' group members and degrading the 'other' were done by using rhetorical elements such as hyperboles and lexical repetitions. The analysis of transitivity structures brought to surface the fact that the community was not given voice in articulating their opinions and needs. These structures helped to reinforce the disapproving ideology practiced by *The Star* in reporting issues about the community. The 'self' group members such as governmental organizations and political leaders on the other hand, were depicted in an accentuated position whereby multiple positive actions taken by them were highlighted in the news reports analysed. In a nutshell, the negative projection of the

*Orang Asli* community is revealed through the inspection of macro and micro elements of the chosen news reports.

# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

### **1.0 Introduction**

This chapter establishes the objective of the study, which seeks to explore how the *Orang Asli* community is portrayed in a selected local newspaper. In order to achieve this aim, the researcher will provide first the background of the study, followed by the problem statement, then the main research questions which shall act as the backbone of the entire study. This is then followed with the discussion of the significance and limitations of the study. This chapter concludes with a brief definition of terms considered central to the subject matter of this research.

### **1.1 Background of Study**

The media, the influential instrument of communication, refer to the technological devices through which mass communication (the industrialized production, reproduction, and multiple distribution of messages) takes place (Turow, 1997). The media portray the dominant images from the various societies of the world and depict life as it is in those societies (Creedon, 1998). Almost every person in every part of every country is affected either directly or indirectly by the words and images presented by the mass media (Coakley, 2004; Creedon, 1998). The media have the absolute potential to shape, change or reinforce values and attitudes (Bandura, 1986; Fink, 1998; Kane, Taub, and Hayes, 2000) and also possess the power to direct people to the kind of issues they think about (Coakley, 2004).

Therefore, the media are highly prospective in acting as the effective articulator of dominant values and socio-political ideology in any one society; some scholars (van Dijk, 2000; Denis, 1997) argue that the minority groups are regularly excluded and marginalised, and that the dominant culture is usually reinforced as the norm (Fleras and Kunz, 2001).

The media capitalise on the ethnicity factor within their reporting by consistently manipulating the construction of dominant consensus. They help to structure racist practices that bestow important roles upon the powerful and the elite while limiting the non-elites to secondary or non-important backdrop roles. Uncountable reams of newsprint, hours of airtime and tons of professional papers have been devoted to studying the repetitive, ceaseless, negative and one-dimensional portrayal of minority groups by the media (Fischhoff, Franco, Gram, Hernandez and Parker, 1999). The portrayals do not only affect the way these minorities think of themselves but also play an important role in reinforcing the pre-existing negative stereotypes of the minorities prevalent in the minds of the majority groups. This notion is consistent with the Social Identity Theory proposed by Tajfel (1982) which claims that people are distinguished as members of social groups and seek a positive social identity through comparisons between their own and other groups.

Media scholars such as Wilson II and Gutierrez (1995) and Gergen (1985) theorise on how the minorities are portrayed in the various forms of mass media; by virtue of demeaning stereotypes, repetitive, and unrepresentative images which help, in part, to shape minority group social identities. In addition, the media also characterise the members of a particular minority group as being different from the members of the dominant group (Mullen and Hu, 1989). A negative portrayal of a

minority member in the mass media is said to have a greater speed of effect in generalising or hardening negative stereotypes, as compared to the case of a majority group member so portrayed (Jones, 1997).

Hall (2003) conducted a significant study on the politics of representation and its impact on culture. His analysis advocates the notion that representation is one of the central practices which produce culture and that the opinions and attitudes we have about the 'others' depend on the ways the 'others' are constantly presented to us. Such representations of cultures in the media have become primary material for the construction of views on the world, behaviours and group and individual identities (Kellner, 1995). Information on the minorities that people from certain societies are exposed to is usually based on the images and narratives constructed by the media. Allan and Seaton (1999) believe that media representation of the minorities can play a central role in the image construction process of these minority groups, and as a result affect the predisposition that the majority has had toward them.

Media representation has the capability to affect the perceptions on diverse groups as negative portrayals are commonly linked to negative attitudes and positive portrayals are usually associated with positive attributes of the minorities concerned. In simple terms, common forms of the mass media such as the newspapers, radio channels and television broadcasts act as key players in influencing public opinion about minorities (van Dijk, 2000). In this context, a news article is particularly essential due to the social function it conveys, which is the reconstruction of reality for the people who were not present at the site of a news event (Schlesinger, 1988). Gillespie (1995) also stresses the importance of the news. In his opinion, the news is



a genre which determines the majority's perception and attitude toward the minorities the most since it is the most widely read and discussed genre.

The portrayal of the aborigines by the media (of which this study concerns) has seen no change, as for decades, indigenous peoples have been stereotyped, marginalised and excluded from decision-making spheres in their very own countries (Inguanzo, 2011). Meadows (2001) stipulates that the media coverage of indigenous people has often revolved around stereotypical images that have been overtly discriminatory.

A report by the Australian Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1996 concluded that the aboriginal people and the issues concerning them are often ruled out from the media altogether. On occasions when they were being reported on, their voices were often misinterpreted and portrayed stereotypically as pathetic victims, angry warriors or noble environmentalists. Denis (1997) suggests that the media have constructed the aboriginal claims to self-government in binary terms such as "us vs. them, civilised vs. barbarian, modern vs. traditional, and individual rights vs. collective rights" (p.13).

Harding (2005) in his research on the portrayal of aborigines in Canada proposes that stereotyping has long been a feature in the media coverage of aboriginal people. He also states that the news media frame common knowledge about aboriginal people in ways that suggest that these people are not ready or able to assume full responsibility over their own lives. He adds to this by saying that stereotyping is one of the ways the media construct the 'common sense' that the audience uses in interpreting the news. The media do not simply "remind us of common sense notions and classifications that we already have, rather they produce

and reproduce them out of raw materials selected from the cultural and linguistic environment" (Hartley, 1982: p.105). The common sense produced in the news media is not neutral in value, but part of a larger process of presenting a hegemonic understanding of the world to the audiences or what Gramsci (1980) refers to as "the production of consent."

Taylor's (2006) study on the portrayal of the Sami People (indigenous people of Sweden, Norway and Finland) in the Finnish mainstream media found that they were extremely underrepresented and even if there were instances of coverage, historically they were negatively tainted. Prior to 1990, the Samis had been routinely and negatively caricatured via Finnish television. In similar perspective, recent media coverage has also shown strong evidence of stereotyping and romanticising elements that homogenises and fossilises the Sami culture and identity.

This study aims to discover if the same themes and patterns advocated by these scholars (Hall, 2003; Jones, 1997; Kellner, 1995 etc.) exist in the portrayal of the *Orang Asli* (indigenous minority of Peninsular Malaysia) in a local daily. To rightly situate this study, the history and background of the *Orang Asli* will be discussed in Chapter 2.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

In studying the link between language and the media, Fowler (1991) points out the existence of an extensive gap in the early media theories, where the linguistic element had been blatantly neglected. This deficiency has caused the weakened link between linguistics and sociology. Though there are a fair number of researchers and linguists who are dynamically involved in the analysis of news discourses, the call

for newer research in the area was made by Fowler (1991), especially in linking the relationship between language and the media.

In his book titled *Elite Discourse and Racism*, van Dijk (1993) argues for the need to study the role of the media in the reproduction of discrimination. He further adds that a critical discourse analysis is needed to not only reveal the discursive patterns that exist in the portrayal of minorities, but also the structures and strategies employed by the mainstream media in portraying them. A critical approach to discrimination, as he further clarifies, is emblazoned in a research paradigm which aims at supplying insight and expertise that may be applied in the development of oppositional, anti-discriminatory practices and ideologies. More scholarly work is thus needed to unravel and expose the prevailing prototypes in the representation of minorities in the news discourse (van Dijk, 1991).

It is to be noted that despite the fact that the portrayal of the minorities has been extensively studied by a host of dedicated researchers such as Meadows (1996, 1994, 1991, 1988, 1987), McKee (1995) and Mickler (1992), many of them have petitioned for more critical analysis especially on the representation of different indigenous groups in other geographical areas or other media discourses. Thus, a dynamic approach is imperative in understanding and addressing the issue of continued stereotypical representation of the aborigines in the media.

The patterns of representation of the indigenous community tend to depict them in an unfavourable and adverse manner. For example, Dunn and Mahtani (2001) conclude in their study on media representation of the aborigines in Australia and Canada that the community are treated in the media problematically in two different ways; total absence or underrepresentation and misrepresentation or

negative portrayal. Miller and Prince (1994) examined various newspaper articles and concluded that the non-whites were not receiving enough news coverage commensurate with their proportions. In similar perspective, research carried out by Sun (1998) suggested that the ethnic minorities are most often described as mysterious, inscrutable, or incompatible with an assumed mainstream.

Locally, a relatively fair number of researchers had based their studies on the sociological, historical, sociolinguistic and anthropological aspects of the lives of the *Orang Asli*. Among them are people such as Wazir Jahan Karim (2001), Razha Rashid (1973), Lye (2011, 2005, 2004, 1997, 1994), Alias Ghani et al. (2011) and Mahani Musa (2011). Lye (2011) focused on the history on the studies of *Orang Asli* ranging from the colonial up to present times by providing extensive bibliographies and reviewing research that has been conducted.

Other researchers (Alias Ghani (2003, 2007, 2008, 2010), Salasiah Che Lah (2007, 2010), Azimah Sazalie (2007) and Norizan Rajak (2003)) have observed the *Orang Asli* community from sociological and linguistic perspectives but none focused on the portrayal of the *Orang Asli* community in the print media. Alias Ghani et al. (2011) examined the usage of lexical items in the everyday language (when referring to words related to their surroundings and natural environment) of the Kensui people (a sub-group under the Negrito category of the *Orang Asli*) in Baling. The research suggests that rapid modernisation in the Kensui community has resulted in them shifting their linguistic preferences to a more dominant dialect which is the Malay language. The study also illustrated the extent to which the Kensui community maintained its native lexical items relative to the sociolinguistic language shift from its native language. Thee study did not however, focus on the

portrayal of the community in the media but dealt instead very specifically with their sociolinguistic aspects.

The issue of negative and prejudiced treatment of the *Orang Asli* and its associated problems have yet to be discussed in depth in the *Orang Asli* studies division. Few discussions emerged in the late 1990s and many reasons have been attributed to the scarcity in analytical studies of their portrayal in any mediated carrier of information such as the media (Nobuta, 2000). These reasons include timing, politics, lack of interest on the part of academics and also the ‘silence’ on the part of the *Orang Asli*. Politically, this subject may be distinctly sensitive for open discussion in Malaysia and academicians might also not appear to be visibly engrossed with the issue of negative labels of the *Orang Asli* (Nobuta, 2000). Regardless, the *Orang Asli* themselves choose to remain silent and refrain from taking any action whatsoever (Nobuta, 2000).

A review of literature revealed that only a limited number of studies have been conducted on the portrayal of the *Orang Asli* in major Malaysian newspapers such as the research carried out by David et al. (2010) and Loh (2001). However, these studies did not pay much attention to the concepts of language and ideology but instead focused only on the themes and tags affixed toward the *Orang Asli* through textual analysis. The findings of those studies showed that the depictions of the community in the media have been negative and prejudiced. David et al. (2010) prompted for more extensive analysis to be carried out to revoke the stereotypical depiction of the *Orang Asli* community and also advocated for more *Orang Asli* voices to be heard in the media.

It is critical to specify that practically all the studies mentioned above had failed to integrate the critical discourse approach and therefore had not provided a comprehensive analysis of the construction of the *Orang Asli* community in terms of the linguistic strategies used to characterise them. In a study on representation, Wodak (2007) stresses on the need for an in-depth analysis of text and discourse in studying the discriminatory practices that exist in society in order to unravel the hidden ideology and perception of a certain group over the other. Analysis of the macro and micro elements of language, as van Dijk (1993) clarifies, is an effective way to determine the discursive patterns in the representation of the indigenous community. The insertion of rhetorical elements in a news report for example, may serve to grab the attention of the reader and achieve the persuasive aim of the writer (van Dijk, 1991). Other elements selected for inspection in this study such as the semantic macrostructures (macro element), transitivity (micro element) and the lexical and syntactical items (micro elements) serve their own purposes in why they exist in a text and the meaning they convey toward the readers. It is most unfortunate that a critical discourse approach has yet to be employed in analysing the depiction of the *Orang Asli* community in the media, despite its effectiveness in studying the issue of representation. This study thus incorporates a critical discourse analysis in examining the news reports to uncover patterns of portrayal of the *Orang Asli* community in a selected local media source.

Instead of attempting to expand or extend previous studies that were carried out on the subject, this study hopes to bridge the gap that exists in linguistics and media studies. Also, this research is intended to function as a form of academic dissent in opposing prejudice against the fundamental changes in becoming a truly multicultural society via promotion of anti-discriminatory practices. Zawawi Ibrahim

(1996) asserts the necessity for more research on the *Orang Asli* in order to not only contest the hegemony of the dominant discourses, but to also renegotiate the *Orang Asli*'s platform and identity in the current state of Malaysia's political and social arena. This study is thus hoped to provide space for the voices of the *Orang Asli* to be heard in their quest as citizens of the country.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

To date, scholarly research has supported the notion that minorities are depicted in a negative and prejudiced way in the news discourse (e.g. Denis, 1997; Harding, 2005; Meadows, 2001). In order to effectively analyse the ways the minorities are being depicted in the media, discourse analysts such as van Dijk (2001) suggest a method of critical analysis in inspecting the data for results which involves scrutinizing the macro and micro elements of a certain text. Analyses of macro and micro structures have been employed by scholars such as van Dijk (1987) and Al Shaibani (2010) in better studying discriminative discourse. Through the application of this method, the objectives stated below are expected to be achieved:

1. To determine the semantic macrostructures (thematic structures) of the chosen news reports on the *Orang Asli*.
2. To determine the semantic microstructures (lexical choice, syntactic style and rhetorical pattern) of the chosen news reports on the *Orang Asli*.
3. To determine the transitivity structures (relational, material, mental and verbal processes) used in the chosen news reports on the *Orang Asli*.
4. To reveal the ideology that is being reinforced through the use of these linguistic features.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

The research objectives presented in the previous section helped develop the research questions that will be guiding this study.

1. What are the semantic macrostructures (thematic structures) of the chosen news reports on the *Orang Asli*?
2. What are the semantic microstructures (lexical choice, syntactic style and rhetorical pattern) of the chosen news reports on the *Orang Asli*?
3. What are the transitivity structures (relational, material, mental and verbal processes) used in the chosen news reports on the *Orang Asli*?
4. What do these linguistic features (semantic macrostructures, microstructures and transitivity structures) reveal about the ideology that is being reinforced in the news reports?

#### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The issue of representation will always promote the pre-existing void in the degree of social, economic and political disparity of the ethnic groups and will continue to be the obsession of the media (Harding, 2005). Thus, closer observation is much needed on the levels of attention the media pay to the indigenous people and also on the extent to which these people are being dispossessed by the media.

Interestingly, the indigenous people were always viewed as people who clung on to their cultural and traditional ways of life, and are impervious to the drastic advancement of culture through the many processes of urbanisation (Worgu, 2009). This argument has been further reinforced by the media as well, as the indigenous people are depicted by them in a negative and biased way. Such an ongoing theme



may greatly impact the process of perceiving the indigenous people in an impartial and neutral way at different political, educational, ideological, cultural and other levels. Hence, it is crucial for more and better research to be carried out to revoke the stereotypical representations of the indigenous people in the media.

Furthermore, conducting a textual and linguistic analysis in analysing news discourse material may be considered as an important cue in unearthing the ideological slant of a particular news agency, and at the same time help in better understanding the issues which revolve around the indigenous people. This is due to the fact that critical discourse analysis places a lot of emphasis on the implied messages that underlie communication and it is assumed that the ideological moulding of readers take place not just with explicit information but also through the implied propositions that are brought about in trying to make sense out of statements (Riggins, 1997). A better understanding of the ways in which discourse operates might contribute to a more efficient interpretation of the news discourse and its underlying message.

The practicality of van Dijk's 'Theory of Semantic Structures' and Halliday's 'Systemic Functional Linguistics' as integrative tools in analysing news reports will be demonstrated in this study. The researcher hopes to reinforce the validity of van Dijk's framework in helping to unravel the ideological slant of news discourse that may be employed by future researchers with similar interests in the field.

The condition and state of the *Orang Asli* community have been studied by a considerable number of sociological and anthropological researchers including Nicholas et al. (2010) and Baer (1999), who have reflected the community's poor and impoverished state of living. On another note, the *Orang Asli* are also reported to

be discriminated by the mainstream society itself (Bowen, 2000) and their voices purportedly muted in the media. This study may well be made a call for initiating better treatment toward and recognizing the *Orang Asli* so as to put them on par with the other citizens of the country and to allow them to enjoy their every right as legal ‘sons of the soil.’

The findings of this research will further contribute to existing knowledge on the *Orang Asli* and their portrayal in the media, which at the current time, can be assumed to be scarce.

## **1.6 Scope and Limitation(s) of the Study**

The objective of this research is to study purely textual material, and as such the researcher will avoid analysing other details that may accompany news reports such as pictures, graphic representations or links that may lead to other reports or pictures. As for the chosen genre of analysis, the researcher has selected only news reports, and will ignore other types of articles in a newspaper such as the editorials, letters and advertisements.

This study will analyse the main features of the discourse analysis approach which includes discourse topics, lexical choice, syntactic patterns and rhetorical figures such as metaphors and hyperboles. It is to be noted that though these structures are not prejudiced as such, they may have a discriminatory function within specific contexts and in other contexts the same structure being highlighted may have a different or even anti-discriminatory function (van Dijk, 1993).

In facilitating the analysis of this study, the researcher will reserve only limited use of the concepts and other theoretical instruments in the vast discipline of

critical discourse analysis. As concerning this study, the focus will be on macropropositions (in determining the global theme), micropropositions (including lexical, syntactic and rhetorical components) and transitivity analysis. In terms of ideology representation, the researcher will adopt van Dijk's theory of positive 'self-representation' and negative 'other-representation.'

The overall findings and conclusions made at the end of this study are entirely based on the selected news articles and may not be generalised or explicitly related to other articles that have been published by the same news agency or others.

## **1.7 Definitions of Key Terms**

- i. Ideology:** According to van Dijk (2006), ideology forms the basic foundation and set of values that a particular society is built upon. It decides on how the members of that society perceive a particular event, the point of view that they are looking from and also the ways in which they respond to that event. As such, it can be said that ideology deals with the link between thought and reality (Eagleton, 1991). Hodge and Kress (1993: p.6) assert that ideology is a "systematic body of ideas, organized from a particular point of view." The concept of ideology is fundamental in the field of critical discourse analysis (CDA) as it is through ideology that the discursive concept of dominance is materialised and maintained (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999). McGee (1980) posits that ideologies are present in the words that are used in communication and refers to ideology as a political language embedded in rhetorical documents with which certain groups of people in power manipulate the ability to make decisions and control public behaviours and beliefs, thus revealing the dichotomy of 'us' vs. 'them'.

- ii. Discourse:** Discourse is a term used in referring to samples of spoken and written language, for example, newspaper articles, advertisements and political speeches. Leech and Short (cited in Hawthorn, 1992: p.189) propose that discourse is defined as “a linguistic communication seen as a transaction between a speaker and a hearer whereby its form is determined by its social purpose.” In the field of CDA, social psychologists have a tendency to link the term discourse with power relations, resulting in structures that are authoritative, sexist or even racist (Mills, 1997). Similarly, Fairclough’s (1992) definition of discourse revolves around the concept of power relations and how these relations form the construction of text and expressions. In this study, the term ‘discourse’ accommodates the definition by Mills (1997), which explains that discourse not only refers to a collection of statements, but rather a collection of utterances that “enact within a social context, which are determined by that social context and contribute to the way that social context continues its existence” (p.11).
- iii. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA):** CDA is a field in which emphasis is placed on studying and analysing written and spoken texts to reveal the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality and bias (van Dijk, 1998). It explores the relationship between structures and strategies of text on the one hand, and social, political and cultural structures and processes on the other. CDA is aware of the fact that texts are not only a result of social and political contexts, but also have the constitutive power to shape cognition and influence relations among various social groups (van Dijk, 1998; Fairclough, 1995). The central concern of CDA, therefore, is how the structures of

discourse reflect, confirm, legitimize, reproduce or challenge power relations in society (Fairclough, 1995).

- iv. News reports:** These act as the rhetorical documents of an institution that transmits news of daily events. According to MacDougall (1973), Fowler (1991) and Reah (2002), news reports not only arouse the interest and curiosity of their readers but are also presented in a way that might influence the readers' minds, so they start speaking from the transmitting institution's point of view. Fowler (1991) argues that a particular ideological position is articulated and represented through language in any oral or written form. Language is therefore used as an instrument in different newspapers to express each newspaper institution's ideological point of view (Fowler, 1991).
- v. Self and Other:** According to Stevens (1998) and Duncan (1996), the concept of the 'self' and the 'other' can be traced as far back in time to Plato who used it in describing the relationship between an observer (the 'self') and an observed (the 'other'). In modern social science, the term 'external other' or the 'social other' is commonly used to refer to all people the 'self' perceives as gently or drastically different (Bakhtin, 1981). The 'other' is often perceived as a homogeneous category except for those few individuals who are known personally. On the other hand, the 'self' tends to make finer distinctions between its own members. The concept of 'us' vs. 'them' is the most pervasive pattern employed in the discriminatory discourse and van Dijk (2006) has justified that such purpose is employed to strategically designate the 'self' and the 'other' whereby positive things about the 'self' will be enhanced while on the contrary, negative traits relating to the 'other'

will be emphasized. In discourse analysis, the identity of the majority group is likely to be ‘univocal and monological’ as it is comparatively easy for them to convey their shared identity publicly (Riggins, 1992: p.276). In contrast, the discourse of the subordinate group is often ‘contradictory and ironic’ (Rosaldo, 1990). As for the context of this study, the ‘self’ refers to the ruling party of the country, governmental associations and authoritative figures such as law enforcers, while the ‘other’ refers to the *Orang Asli* community.

- vi. The term *Orang Asli* refers to the indigenous minority living in Peninsular Malaysia. Their population reaches to almost 150,000 people which represent only 0.5 percent of the general population of this nation (Nicholas et al., 2010). They consist of three main groups namely the Negritos (Semang), the Senoi and the Aboriginal Malays. The *Orang Asli* community is described as being the most impoverished in the country and is constantly disclosed as being deprived of basic amenities and infrastructure such as electricity, water and paved roads. In this study, the term *Orang Asli* is employed to refer to the entire community, which denotes that the researcher is not precisely investigating the portrayal of any particular or selected sub-groups. Remarks and findings made about the *Orang Asli* in this study assume them as a single community.
- vii. **Language and representation:** In the field of CDA, the term representation is commonly applied in referring to language used in a text or speech which allocates meaning to certain groups and their social practices (Fairclough, 1989, 1995; van Dijk, 2002). Many researchers (Fairclough, 1992; Goatly, 2000; Halliday, 1990; Hodge and Kress, 1993; Mehan and Wills, 1988; Muntigl, 2002; Shapiro, 1988; van Dijk, 2002; Wenden and Schaffner, 1999;

Wodak, 2002) have posited the view that the meaning of a particular text is not only embedded in the reality that is perceived from it but rather construed by its linguistic representation. Linguistic representation regulates the way we think and react to a particular issue, object or event, thus functioning as a source of action which manipulates definite social practice (Hodge and Kress, 1993; Wodak, 2002). In this study, the term representation is primarily constructed on the foundation of ideology, as ideology affects the mode by which a social group is represented.

## **1.8 Organization of the Study**

This dissertation is divided into six chapters, where **Chapter 1** offers a general overview of the study. This includes the objectives, significance and limitations of the study, research questions, definition of key terms and the organisation of the study.

**Chapter 2** provides a brief historical and political account of the *Orang Asli* in peninsular Malaysia. It also underscores the present conditions and status of the *Orang Asli*.

**Chapter 3** presents a substantial amount of literature pertaining to previous studies on the portrayal of minorities, meanings of discourse, ideology, Critical Discourse Analysis and the theoretical framework of the study. The chapter ends with the examination of some relevant theories and concepts that helped build the theoretical framework which acts as the backbone of the study.

**Chapter 4** deals with the methodology of the study. It introduces the corpus and the selected samples and illustrates the methods in applying the theoretical

framework for data analysis. Data validity, ethical considerations and the procedures of data analysis are discussed as well in this chapter.

**Chapter 5** presents the analysis of the corpus of this study which comprises 12 different news reports extricated from *The Star*. Each article undergoes a few stages of analysis, the macrolevel (semantic macrostructures or main theme of the article), the microlevel (the analysis of lexical, syntactic and rhetorical aspects) and finally the articles are analysed through the grammar of transitivity. The examination of ideological representations will be incorporated wherever necessary.

**Chapter 6** discusses the findings obtained from the previous chapter. It answers the research questions advanced earlier and attempts to draw a general conclusion based on the portrayal of the *Orang Asli* in a selected local daily. Finally, this chapter ends with a general discussion on the contributions of the study together with a list of suggestions and recommendations for the benefit of future research on the subject.



## Chapter 2

### Situating the *Orang Asli* in Malaysia's Socio-political Context

#### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter aims to situate the *Orang Asli* in the current Malaysian socio-economic platform as according to Fairclough (1992), it is of utmost importance for one to consider the social, political and historical contexts in the examination of a language. This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part discusses the historical and political context of the *Orang Asli* community in Peninsular Malaysia. It will also include a discussion of the various development policies and strategies formulated with regard to the *Orang Asli*, their lived experiences with Islamisation, their rights as mentioned in the constitution and the courts and issues of non-recognition as indigenous people. The second part presents the findings of the interviews with the *Orang Asli*, members of non-governmental organisations, officials from the Department of Orang Asli Development (JAKOA) and also journalists from *The Star* newspaper. The interviews are conducted to establish initial ideas on the overall impression of the Malaysian society towards the depiction of the *Orang Asli* community in the media. It also aims to look at the issue of representation from other sources (The *Orang Asli* themselves and stakeholders) rather than merely reporting previous scholarly studies by sociologists and researchers.

## PART I

### 2.1 The *Orang Asli* as People

The *Orang Asli* expression refers to the indigenous minorities residing in Peninsular Malaysia. They are commonly known as the early descendants or inhabitants of the peninsula before the establishment of the Malay Kingdoms. The *Orang Asli* community comprises approximately 150,000 people – representing less than 1% of the total population of Malaysia<sup>1</sup>. Anthropologists and historians describe the *Orang Asli* community as consisting of three major groups; the Negrito (Semang), the Senoi and the Aboriginal Malay. Each group is further divided into six subgroups. The term *Orang Asli* which literally translates into ‘Original People’ is the official name for the people of the indigenous minorities in Peninsular Malaysia (Lye, 2011).

As highlighted in Section 3 of the Aboriginal Peoples Act (1954), the term ‘*Orang Asli*’ may be defined as:

“[...] Any person whose male parent is or was a member of an aboriginal ethnic group, who speaks an aboriginal language and habitually follows an aboriginal way of life and aboriginal customs and beliefs, and includes a descendant through males of such persons;

Any person of any race adopted when infant by aborigines who has been brought up as an aborigine, habitually speaks an aboriginal language, habitually follows an aboriginal way of life and aboriginal customs and beliefs and is a member of an aboriginal community; or

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<sup>1</sup> According to Jabatan Hal Ehwal *Orang Asli* (JHEOA), the population of *Orang Asli* in 2003 stood at 147,412. This figure however decreased to 141,230 in the year 2006 – a 4.2% decline was quoted. Although no explanation had been given for this drop, a possible reason could be due to the fact that the statistics only account for people living in the *Orang Asli* villages and areas under JHEOA purview whereas those who have moved to the towns and cities were excluded from the census.

The child of any union between an aboriginal female and a male of another race, provided that the child habitually speaks an aboriginal language, habitually follows an aboriginal way of life and aboriginal customs and beliefs and is a member of an aboriginal community [...].”

The definition above suggests that the *Orang Asli* are defined more by their cultural characteristics rather than by biological heritage, unlike the constitutional definition for being ‘Malay’ (Nicholas et al., 2000). However, while both the *Orang Asli* and the Malays, together with the natives of Sabah and Sarawak are regarded as *Bumiputeras*, a term which literally means ‘princes of the soil’ (a political rather than a constitutional categorisation), it is understood that it is the *Orang Asli* who actually meet the criteria of indigenous peoples as defined by international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the World Bank.

Construction of a proper definition for the categorisation of the indigenous people is neither possible at the moment nor obligatory for the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). It is rather, more of relevance and essentiality in outlining the major characteristics which may help in identifying who the indigenous people are, especially in the Asian and African contexts<sup>2</sup>. One of the earliest criteria which characterise the indigenous people was crafted by Jose R. Martinez Cobo, a UN Special Rapporteur whose study on the problems of discrimination among the indigenous people has helped in establishing the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP). This eventually led to the development of the Draft Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. According to Cobo (1986), the indigenous people are:

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<sup>2</sup> The African Commission, Report of the Working Group of Experts (2005: p.87).

“[...] The existing descendants of the people who inhabited the present territory of a country wholly or partially at the time when persons of a different culture or ethnic origin arrived there from other parts of the world, overcame them and by conquest, settlement or other means, reduced them to a non-dominant or colonial condition and;

who today live more in conformity with their particular social, economic, and cultural customs and traditions than with the institutions of the country of which they now form a part, under a State structure which incorporates mainly the national, social and cultural characteristics of other segments of the populations which are predominant [...].”

The above mentioned criteria certainly did not suit all indigenous people and had posed problems particularly for those communities who were forced to be resettled by the government for a variety of reasons, including security motives as in the case of Malaysia. Over time, various bodies and agencies have readjusted these standards and had added ‘self-identification’ and the role they play as stewards and caretakers of the environment as important determining criteria in the ‘definition’ of indigenous peoples (e.g. Working Group on Indigenous Populations, the World Bank, and the International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forests).

It is apparent that there is no single definition for the indigenous people. However, according to Barume (2010: p.33-34), there is now a general agreement that the indigenous people can be identified by several distinctive features:

- i. Self-identification;
- ii. Non-dominant status within a wider society;

- iii. History of particular subjugation, marginalisation, dispossession, exclusion and discrimination;
- iv. Land rights prior to colonisation or occupation by other groups and;
- v. A land-based culture and the willingness to preserve it.

It is evident that the *Orang Asli* do meet all the internationally accepted criteria for the definition of indigenous people highlighted above as they still actively resist cultural assimilation and integrative policies, still lose out in the mainstream interpretation of laws that affect their rights and finally, their marginalised position is a result of their subjugation and discrimination by more dominant groups (Nicholas et al., 2000). According to Barume (2010), the *Orang Asli* are attached and share strong spiritual and emotional connections with their traditional lands. This is because these traditional territories have shaped their ways of living and identity and without these lands, they would be unable to survive with their culturally distinctive identities. This also explains why they are at times unwilling to be resettled into a new location despite being offered better amenities and interesting compensation packages.

## **2.2 The Historical Context of the *Orang Asli***

The *Orang Asli* were the first peoples on this peninsula and actively participated in the political and economic structure of early civilisation (Nicholas et al., 2000). Nonetheless, with the influx of immigrant people (namely the British and the Japanese) who purposefully coveted the *Orang Asli* resources, perceived their usefulness and dealt with them accordingly. Thus, they were reduced to mere salvagers and wards of the sultans by the time of British colonialism (Howell, 1995).