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Non-Recognition of the Indigenous Community in Malaysian Media: Perspectives from the *Orang Asli* and Stakeholders

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ABSTRACT

This study presents the findings of interviews conducted on the *Orang Asli* and stakeholders concerning the issue of representation of the community in media. The main objective of this research was to investigate the views and opinions of the community and stakeholders concerning the portrayal of the *Orang Asli* community in local newspapers. Interviews were conducted with members of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), personnel from the Department of *Orang Asli* Development (JAKOA), journalists from mainstream Malaysian newspapers and *Orang Asli* individuals. Findings revealed that a number of opposing views could be traced in terms of the prejudiced treatment given to the community in media. The NGO members and the *Orang Asli* individual unanimously advocated the various plights faced by the *Orang Asli* community in their daily lives, apart from being discriminated in the media. On the contrary, JAKOA members and journalists interviewed rebutted the claim that discriminatory projection of the community existed in the selected newspaper. Such contrary findings call for more studies investigating the portrayal of the community in the media to be undertaken.

Keywords: Indigenous community, Malaysian media, media and discrimination, *Orang Asli*, representation

INTRODUCTION

The media possess the power to depict the central images of multiple social groups (Creedon, 1998). Information on the minorities that people from certain societies

are exposed to is usually based on the images and narratives constructed by the media. Media representation has the capability to affect the perceptions of diverse groups as negative portrayals are commonly linked to negative attitudes and positive portrayals are usually associated with positive attributes of the minorities concerned. Allan and Seaton (1999) believed that media representation of the minorities could play a central role in the image construction process of these minority groups, and as a result, affected the predisposition that the majority had had toward them.

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 possesses the capability to determine the majority's perception and attitude toward the minorities the most since it is the most widely read and discussed genre.

The patterns of representation of the indigenous community tend to depict them in an unfavourable and adverse manner. Meadows (2001) stipulated that the media coverage of indigenous people had often revolved around stereotypical images that had been overtly discriminatory. A report by the Australian Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1996 concluded that the indigenous people and the issues concerning them were 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.

On a local front, research carried out by Jamal and Manan (2016), David et al. (2010), and Loh (2011) on the projection of the *Orang Asli* showed that the depictions of the community in the media had been negative and prejudiced. To add, 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 had 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.

Much work conducted on the issue of representation focuses solely on text analysis and fails to provide a proper channel for the voice of the discriminated subject (Orang Asli) and other stakeholders to be heard concerning the issue of misrepresentation. This paper acts as supplementary evidence to text analysis (which has repeatedly proven the existence of discrimination) in reinforcing the notion of discrimination of the community in media. Considering that as a context, this paper integrates an attempt by the researcher in interviewing the subject of this study, the *Orang Asli* as well as stakeholders to get an overall impression from the *Orang Asli* community and the stakeholders over the projection of the community in media.

Literature Review

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 of 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. 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 an infant by aborigines who have 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
>
> 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 *Orang Asli* today has been demoted to become the most impoverished in terms of living status reports (Nicholas et al., 2010). In statistics provided in the Government's 10th Malaysia Plan (2011-2015) (The Economic Planning Unit, 2010), almost 50% of the 29,990 *Orang Asli* households in existence live below the poverty line while 19% (5700) of the same households are deemed to be in the hardcore poor category. Their level of poverty is usually expressed in the lack of basic amenities and infrastructure in their villages. Although improvements have been made in the provision of amenities in recent years, the *Orang Asli* still lag behind the rest of the other communities in Malaysia in terms of access to basic infrastructure (this includes access to electricity, potable water and proper roads). Anyone who observes *Orang Asli* affairs and the *Orang Asli* themselves will find it evident that they are no longer in control of their own lives with the perception that they are a backward community and need the direction and largesse of the government.

This perception has been formed through the expressed objective of the government in 'integrating the *Orang Asli* into the mainstream community' taking into context that they are incapable of developing themselves and need to be governed (Ibrahim, 1989). Such executive administration over the *Orang Asli* is carried out through the *Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli* (JAKOA), a government agency that is responsible for matters related to the *Orang Asli*. The *Orang Asli* consider themselves as the most marginalised ethnic group in Malaysia today - experiencing the highest poverty rates, suffering disproportionately poor health conditions, tolerating the lack of basic infrastructure and amenities, and having limited access to political power are indications of their lack of a special status as an indigenous community of the country (Lim, 1998). This is a recurring scenario despite the positive obligations that the Constitution provides for the *Orang Asli* community.

Media and Discrimination. According to van Dijk (1993), the mass media play a fundamental role in the reproduction of discrimination in contemporary society as much as their role in the reproduction of modern societies. No discourse can be as influential as it is without the mediating and sometimes reinforcing functions of the press, radio and television. The powerful role played by the media also incorporates the function to shape the social cognition of society at large. In the field of ethnic affairs, for example, the role played by the media in the cognitive, social and communicative process is essential as it is both ideological and also structural (Hall, 2003). The immediate effects of specific messages to specific audiences under specific circumstances of the media (especially news media) are significant, especially on the structures and contents of the social cognition of groups (van Dijk, 1993). Put simply, the news media become the most important source of information and beliefs applicable informing the interpretative framework for specific types of social and public relations, including those in the field of ethnic relations.

The media play a central role in reproducing discrimination due to its relations with other elite institutions and because of the power they possess in structuring, shaping and changing the minds of the general public. In the scope of ethnic affairs, for instance, the power of media is exceptional due to the fact that large segments of the dominant communities do not have access to information regarding ethnic affairs as they only possess few or no immediate experiences with members of the minority groups (van Dijk, 1987). Thus, the media face no competition in its communicative functionalities with regard to ethnic affairs. Preferential media access and their social cognition authority on ethnic affairs may actually be influencing factors in its selection of topics, the choice of news actors, quotation patterns, style, prominence, the way the minorities are depicted and described, and also the overall features of the news article itself (Kneebone, 1985). Since the dominant groups are most

likely to maintain their affluence, they will instead resort to representing the minorities in a negative manner, while at the same time contrasting with positive representations of their own selves. This symbolic polarisation, as to how van Dijk (1993) puts it, is known as the division between 'us' and 'them,' and is an important theme in managing the ethnic consensus among the members of the public at large.

On a local front, the focus of the Malaysian media has always been on the aspects of nation-building, social cohesion, and responsible journalism (Kenyon & Marjoribanks, 2007) as opposed to other facets such as freedom of information or critical engagement. The local media is said to be at the moment, facing some very real constraints as Freedom House (2011) via its consistent assessment regime has declared the Malaysian media politically 'not free.' In its annual survey on press freedom, Reporters Without Borders (2012) had not only downgraded the liberty of the press but had also indicted the Malaysian press of obstructing or censoring critical opinion in their write-ups. One major structural problem which surrounds this scenario is the reality that the majority of Malaysian print and broadcast media organizations are closely bound to the political regime (Weiss, 2012).

Past Studies. In the coverage of ethnic affairs, a collective of experiences and research by scholars have repeatedly shown evidence that the dominant media have always perpetuated stereotypes of and prejudice toward minority groups in various degrees and extents (Snorgrass & Wooty, 1985; van Dijk, 1989). In his analysis of the portrayal of the black people in the United States, Johnson (1991) examined the performance of the local media in Boston and found a significant lack of news reports that challenged racial stereotypes. White newsmakers were more likely to report news that aligned with their preconceptions of the blacks, such as them being drug pushers, thieves, dirty, violent and is only involved in sports or entertainment. The whites are instead presented as being more in control and powerful when they are portrayed alongside the blacks. In addition, the media often only cite the remarks of the whites on racial matters. A remarkable conclusion of this study is the fact that the concept of 'discrimination' still remains a taboo with the press and euphemisms such as 'disadvantaged' and 'underprivileged' is commonly used to denote the victims of discrimination.

The main conclusions of scholars after more than three decades of extensive and strenuous research on the association between the press and the ethnic minority groups are neither ambiguous nor contradictory (van Dijk, 2000). Although the press had been blatant in the past and is more subtle today, they indeed remain as the main rival of the ethnic minorities. This is because they assume the role of ambassadors of the dominant group, and have consistently limited the access to either centre-staging the views of the ethnic minority groups or depicting them in positive ways. The definition of minorities

has always been negative and stereotypical as they are constantly viewed as problematic or threatening and are commonly associated with unconstructive themes such as crime, violence, conflicts with the dominant group, unacceptable cultural differences and other forms of deviance. The extensive focus has always been on the explicit racialized forms of conflict whereas the press fails to take into consideration the deeper social, political and economic causes and backgrounds that might have caused these conflicts (van Dijk, 1993). From the viewpoint of 'the elites and the dominant groups,' the minorities are generally categorised as 'them' and opposed to 'us.' Similarly, events in the ethnic communities continue to be defined by the dominant authorities such as the police and the politicians, where the voices of the minorities are often overshadowed.

The conclusion drawn from the arguments above provides the fundamental background of this study that focuses on the largely neglected *Orang Asli* and the details of their representation in the media, what are the viewpoints and perspectives from the *Orang Asli* and stakeholders themselves?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The researchers analysed the findings of informal interviews to get an overall impression from the *Orang Asli* community and the stakeholders over the issue of representation of the community in media. This process involved substantiating evidence from different individuals or types of data such as interviews and observational field notes (Creswell, 2012). Interviews were conducted with ten stakeholders whom among them include members of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), personnel from the Department of *Orang Asli* Development (JAKOA), journalists from mainstream Malaysian newspapers and *Orang Asli* individuals.

The interview approach used a one-to-one basis and this approach was specifically chosen as it is ideal for the interviewees who are articulate and are able to share their views and ideas comfortably (Creswell, 2005). The interviews were conducted via e-mail due to predicaments arising in terms of time allocation, accessibility of individuals, financial issues and logistics. Five open-ended questions were constructed for each group of participants. Asmussen & Creswell (1995) posited that in qualitative research, an interviewer might ask more than four questions and this statement justified the selection of five questions for the interview. In addition to the questions, probes (defined as sub-questions that are posed to extract added information from the respondent) were also used to encourage better clarification and explanation from the interviewees. Open-ended questions were specifically chosen as they allow better responses from the respondents in expressing their views (Creswell, 2012). Table 1 presents the interview questions designed for the *Orang Asli* and the corresponding explanations which elucidate their validity.

The interview questions for the journalists, NGO members and the JAKOA personnel and their justifications in the selection of the questions are displayed in Table 2.

Table 1

Interview questions for the Orang Asli and their justifications

Interview question	Explanation / Justification
Do you read the newspaper?	The first question serves as the ice-breaker and helps relax the interviewees. This question is important to pin-point if the person reads the newspaper as there is no rationale in interviewing someone who does not.
How often do you find news related to the *Orang Asli* appearing in the newspaper?	The second question is vital in the sense that it requires the opinion of the *Orang Asli* on the coverage offered by the media about their community.
Do you feel that newspapers play a role in constructing people's actions and thoughts toward the *Orang Asli* community?	Question 3 seeks to answer the questions on whether the ideology people have towards the *Orang Asli* is constructed through the news.
Are you contented with the way the *Orang Asli* are being depicted in the newspaper?	This question is asked to inquire about the overall impression that the community has on the issue of representation in the media.
If no, can you identify the ways of reporting that you are dissatisfied within the newspaper?	This question is asked to see if the *Orang Asli* can identify one or more ways of reporting which they are unhappy about.

Table 2

Interview questions for the stakeholders and their justifications

Interview question	Explanation / Justification
Do you feel that discrimination towards the *Orang Asli* community is still present in our country and if yes, how serious of a problem is it?	This question is asked to distinguish if the person is aware of the prevalence of discrimination toward the community and the extent of this problem.
Do you feel that you have directly or indirectly played a part in the construction and sustenance of public view on the *Orang Asli* community? If yes, in what way?	Question 2 is posed to inquire if the person agrees to accept responsibility in helping construct public opinion on the *Orang Asli.*
What will your view be on the notion that the *Orang Asli* community is negatively portrayed in the press?	This question is relevant as it attempts to answer whether the respondents agree to the idea of misrepresentation of the *Orang Asli* in media.
Do you think that any of the news which appears in newspapers with regard to the *Orang Asli* constitutes discrimination?	The outcome of this question will be a cue towards the idea that the news appearing in newspapers contain elements of discrimination.

Table 2 *(Continued)*

Interview question	Explanation / Justification
Do you feel that the *Orang Asli* community deserves equal opportunities as compared to the other citizens of the country?	This question is constructed to procure the views of the press team on providing equal opportunities to the *Orang Asli* community.

Ethical considerations and initiatives were carefully observed prior to conducting the interviews. The researcher had obtained an approval letter from the course faculty to undertake data collection. Prior to conducting the interviews on the *Orang Asli* and the JAKOA personnel, permission was obtained as well from the Department of *Orang Asli* Development (JAKOA). In presenting the outcome of the interviews, the identity of the respondents will be kept confidential (Asmussen & Creswell, 1995). Table 3 below summarizes the cycle of procedures prior to conducting the interviews.

An interview protocol that will contain the questions that are to be posed and adequate spaces for taking additional notes was structured to help the researcher compose the entire interview process. The interview protocol template was adapted from Asmussen & Creswell (1995).

Data Analysis Procedure

The interviews are hoped to provide a platform for the voices of *Orang Asli* to be heard. The interviews were conducted via email due to time and financial constraints. Preparation for the interview transcripts was a straightforward task as it only involved

Table 3

Respondent selection process

No.	Step	Explanation
1	Setting the frame	The first step undertaken was locating suitable informants or respondents who are the typical group under study (Creswell, 2009). As such, a purposive sampling technique was used to include participants who are directly involved in the issue being raised in this study; the representation of the *Orang Asli* community in a local newspaper. Those selected were active researchers (individuals who had a plausible history of research and publications on the *Orang Asli*), NGO members, JAKOA personnel (those who were directly or indirectly involved in implementing policies for the *Orang Asli*), journalists (individuals who were directly involved in the publication of news about *Orang Asli*) and finally the *Orang Asli* themselves (*Orang Asli* individuals who read newspaper).

Table 3 *(Continued)*

No.	Step	Explanation
2	Locating the respondents	Locating the respondents differed according to the group they belong to: i. JAKOA personnel - Prior written permission was sent to the JAKOA head office located in Jalan Ampang, Kuala Lumpur. Upon approval, the officers were located through the staff directory found in the official portal of the *Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli* (JAKOA) website (www. jakoa.gov.my). Emails were sent out to three personnel inquiring their willingness to participate in the study and upon agreement, follow-up emails were sent. ii. Journalists - Potential respondents were contacted via the emails provided in the 'Contact Us' section of selected newspaper webpages. Similar to other groups of participants, emails attached with informed consent were sent before the interviews were conducted. iii. *Orang Asli* individuals and NGO members - *Orang Asli* individuals and NGO members were located through searches in Facebook Groups bearing the *Orang Asli* name. Precisely, searches were done on the "Group *Orang Asli* Malaysia". Messages were sent out via the personal messaging service on Facebook to establish contact with potential respondents. The researcher purposely chose Facebook users as it was assumed that they were educated and thus would be able to answer the interview questions. The participation of these individuals was voluntary.
<u>3</u>	Collecting and storing data	The entire interview conversations in the emails were saved in both soft and hard copy, however, information-bearing the name of the respondents and their email addresses were kept hidden for ethical concerns.

printing the emails and compiling the printed copies. However, certain limitations existed as the email interview transcripts may lack paralinguistic cues such as intonation and pauses. The researcher adapted Chesler's (1987) approach to analysing the interview transcripts. Chesler provides a seven-step sequential analysis, however, according to Ball (2011), the first four steps in the approach are sufficient to analyse certain emerging themes or answers related to the research questions posed. The four steps are described in Table 4.

The key findings of the interview data will be discussed in the following subsection.

Table 4

Steps in analysing interview data

No.	Step	Description
1	Underline key terms	In the first step, the transcripts were read and key terms that seemed prevalent in the verbatim were underlined. The terms underlined were those that were deemed important and relevant to the research questions.
2	Restate key phrases	Secondly, the underlined key terms were restated using words as close as possible near the margin of the text. This is crucial to so that it will be easier for the researcher to go back to the comments without having to go through the long scripts repeatedly.
3	Reduce the phrase	The third step involved the researcher reducing the verbatim by placing recurring ideas together. The comments by respondents were clustered together according to similarities. Strauss & Corbin (1988) stress that a researcher's knowledge and experience play an important role during the grouping of the comments.
4	Generalisation	The final step adhered by the researcher was generalizing the cluster of data extracted from the transcripts in order to provide meaning.

RESULTS

Analysis of Interview Data from JAKOA Personnel

In this discussion, the respondents will be labelled as JAKOA1 and JAKOA2 and both replied to all questions asked. When enquired if discrimination towards the *Orang Asli* community was still present in the country, JAKOA1 mentioned that there was no discrimination owing to the fact that JAKOA was persistently looking after the community. JAKOA2, on the contrary, admitted that if discrimination was present, the only possible explanation to the notion was that the community themselves might perhaps feel that they were being discriminated against. The second question asked revolved around

their role and responsibility towards shaping people's view on the community and both agreed to the fact that they did play a role in constituting the public's view towards the community, and further mentioned that many projects were being implemented for the betterment of the community.

When asked if the *Orang Asli* community was negatively portrayed in the press, JAKOA1 posited that:

> *"An interesting question indeed. Of course, I have seen some writing by researchers who say that the community is negatively shown in media. As for my opinion, I think not all the news is bad, of course, there are positive writings about them too."*

JAKOA2 agreed that no discriminative news was reported about the community, and what was usually portrayed in media were the many projects and development schemes implemented by the department. Adding on, JAKOA2 revealed that news usually report sensational news, and *Orang Asli* might be subjected to that as well.

The respondents were further asked if they think that any news in media relating to the *Orang Asli* community constituted discrimination and both of them were uncertain about the response. However, both respondents assured that JAKOA eradicated the thoughts of discrimination and only focused on bringing the community on par with the rest of the mainstream citizens of the country. Lastly, JAKOA1 and JAKOA2 agreed to the point that the community possessed every right to enjoy equal opportunities as compared to other citizens of the country.

Analysis of Interview Data from Members of Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)

Two members of the non-governmental organisation participated in the interview. For easier identification, they will be labelled as NGO1 and NGO2 throughout the discussion. Both respondents accepted that the *Orang Asli* are projected to biasness in this country and deemed the issue to be particularly severe. NGO1 mentioned that:

> *"It's indeed very serious. They are not treated as the original people of the land. They are more bumiputra than all of us!"*

Both respondents admitted the role they played in constituting the public view on the *Orang Asli* community. NGO1 mentioned bringing the community to the University of Malaya to present a talk and posting about the community in his Facebook account. NGO2 resorted to creating a Facebook page dedicated to the community and uploading posts about the community in order to change the misconception mainstream people had on the community. As for question 3, NGO1 claimed that the projection of *Orang Asli* in the media as being negative and depiction of the community as destroyers of the forest, drunkard, rebellious, lazy, uneducated and dirty was redundant. NGO2, on the other hand, mentioned that despite the negative portrayal (owing to the ownership of media agencies), occurrences of positive projection did exist.

NGO1 and NGO2 agreed to the idea that the prejudiced depiction of the community is present, and felt that the *Orang Asli* community deserves an equal opportunity as citizens of the country. NGO2 mentioned:

> *"Yes. They deserve equal opportunities. After all, they are the original people of Malaysia. Some of them are still living in a deplorable condition. Together with the government, JAKOA, we, the more fortunate Malaysians, have the moral obligation to help them to live a better lifestyle."*

To conclude, the responses from the NGO members have largely supported that there have been instances of projecting the community as with negative labels such

as poor, uneducated, drunkards and also intruders which tallies with the views of the respondents and also findings of previous research (Lim, 1998; Nicholas et al., 2000).

Analysis of Interview Data from Journalists

Two journalists participated in this study and they will be coded as SJ1 and SJ2 in this discussion. Responding to the question of whether the discrimination towards the *Orang Asli* community was still present in the country, SJ1 denied by mentioning that the country was moving towards an equal front. In contrast, SJ2 admitted that subtle discrimination existed towards the community such as using the term 'Sakai' and 'Jakun' as derogatory terms, however disagreed that open discernment towards the community existed. Asked whether they played a part in establishing the society's outlook on the community, SJ1 agreed by saying that:

> "I feel that as a journalist due to me being involved in the distribution of information, I have played a part in influencing the people's view on the Orang Asli community in the sense of educating and enlightening the general populace on the status, well-being and the condition of the Orang Asli community."

However, SJ2 refuted the prerogative saying that "I'm just a reporter". When asked about their view regarding the adverse projection of the community in the press, two contradicting statements from SJ1 and SJ2 are observed. According to SJ1, the

press portrayed the community in a neutral way and further reiterated by saying that people are entitled to their own opinion of what the press shows. SJ2, on the other hand, mentioned that the *Orang Asli* community is not being portrayed enough rather than being negatively portrayed.

Responding to the question of whether any reports appearing in newspaper constituted discrimination towards the community, rebuttal could be observed from both the journalists whereby both disagreed with the existence of discriminative features in the reports published. One of the respondents demanded the researcher to present examples and proofs that discriminatory practices existed in the projection of the community. Responding to the question of whether the community deserved an equal opportunity as compared to the other citizens of the country, SJ1 mentioned that:

> "Of course the Orang Asli deserves an equal standing as the rest of the citizens of this country and they already are being treated equally. They have equal rights to as any other citizen by rights of the Constitution of Malaysia."

SJ2 agreed to the question but further commented that the *Orang Asli* community might need affirmative actions to place them on a parallel track with the other races in the country. In summary, it is prevalent that both journalists agreed to the idea that similar and equal treatment should be given to the *Orang Asli* community. However,

both refuted the claim that reports published about the *Orang Asli* community comprised elements of biasness.

Analysis of Interview Data from Orang Asli Individuals

Four *Orang Asli* individuals participated in this interview and they will be coded as OA1, OA2, OA3, and OA4. All respondents admitted to reading newspapers, and respondent OA2 mentioned that:

> *"Yes, if compared with other English medium newspapers because "The Star" is easy to understand. The interesting segments I like to read are like local and world news, economic, career advancement, sport & recreation and other quality articles or reports."*

When inquired about the frequency of news relating to *Orang Asli* appearing in newspapers, OA1 related that 'not much news' was covered by the newspaper due to the non-existence of sensational news relating to the community. On the other hand, OA2 admitted that the frequency of news about *Orang Asli* was intermittent, while OA3 and OA4 mentioned that it was very rare for news concerning the community appearing in the newspapers. OA4 further reiterated that the hesitancy might be due to the fact that newspapers 'are controlled by the government" and thus any publishing of news concerning the community must be done to safeguard their (the government) importance.

Asked whether the newspapers played a role in establishing people's engagements and judgments towards the *Orang Asli*, OA2 specified that:

> *"Yes, I absolutely agree with that statement but, unfortunately, the majority of our newspaper does not play such role and they are very much satisfied with their own agenda and sometimes manipulate the event for their own benefit. The newspaper should become a medium to interact with people from different backgrounds to give precise and correct information to some issues especially aspects of our origin, locality, cultures, custom, healing power and etc. I think the public does not know and maybe want to know what the Orang Asli community is. What they know about Orang Asli from others' points of view."*

Respondents believed that the mainstream community relied on newspapers in accessing news and updates about *Orang Asli* and they approved the idea that newspapers played a central role in projecting the image and identity of the *Orang Asli* community towards the public.

The respondents further voiced their discontentment with the ways the *Orang Asli* community was illustrated in newspapers. Understanding that the journalists, reporters and editors did have duties to perform, OA1 felt that they must adhere to the etiquette of writing as well. OA4 further reiterated that:

> *"I do not agree at all because sometimes newspaper can be*

dishonest, the reporter or editor edit news about the Orang Asli affairs. There is news published that is different from the real story. A serious issue is written playfully so readers are not attracted to read. Many Orang Asli leader fights for their land and is not published in newspapers or given attention."

The respondents supported the idea that most of the time, news reports were edited and altered to denote ideas that aligned with the ideology of the newspapers and the final product that was presented in the news form strictly adhered to what was meant to be shared with the public. The respondents were asked to identify ways of reporting which contain preconception in the newspaper and some of the feedbacks received were:

OA1:"For instance, on February 9, 2010, the news article wrote by Chan Li Leen - 'Dept: *Orang Asli* was trying to kill tiger, not collect petai'. The title itself has pictured a thousand words about *Orang Asli* itself. When I saw this title, I chuckled and one word came out from my mouth which is 'Idiot". If I as *Orang Asli* can detect this, how about others who read this article? I bet there are many describable words for it."

OA4:"Most newspapers like The Star doesn't report the real thing about *Orang Asli.* Reporters are not attentive. For example, I am not happy about this news with the title '*Orang Asli* steals motorcycle'. It tells like every *Orang Asli* steals a motorcycle. They should write the name of the person, and not the race. If other races steal, the title will be 'Man steal motorcycle. The unsuitable title gives a bad impression of *Orang Asli.*"

Other respondents reiterated that the *Orang Asli* was constantly presented as 'underprivileged, poor and uneducated', and a ream of news reports depicted them as being left behind when compared to other races in the country. One respondent stated that the community was depicted as constantly needing help from others and respondent OA2 called for the discriminatory depiction of *Orang Asli* to discontinue and urged the newspapers to publish positive news relating to the community. The interview with the *Orang Asli* community managed to gather their thoughts about the issue researched and also provided space and opportunity for their voices to be heard.

DISCUSSIONS

In analyzing the interview data, a number of opposing views can be traced. Firstly, the JAKOA personnel interviewed mentioned the non-existence of discrimination towards the community, and their responses glorify deeds of JAKOA towards developing the community.

Strong opposition from journalists is apparent in the interview whereby both respondents resiliently rebutted almost all the questions asked. Besides disproving the claim that the news appearing in newspapers contained elements of discrimination, one of the journalists further demanded proofs and evidence. This result is afore-predicted,

as van Dijk (1998) posited that journalists rarely admitted their writings and views to contain any element of biasness.

Interviewing the NGO members forecasted some general ideas about the community from the perspectives of other citizens of the country. Both respondents unanimously advocated the plights faced by the *Orang Asli* in their daily lives, apart from being discriminated in the media. Various initiatives, ranging from real-life assistance to online-based posts were taken by the NGO members to further publicize the predicaments faced by the community.

Upon interviewing the *Orang Asli* individuals, responses given showed the dilemmas and quandaries faced by the community. All the respondents agreed that their community is discriminated against, especially in the news media. They appeared deeply articulate, and much discontentment over the way they are being handled in the media was noted in their utterances. As a final point, two opposing views emerged from the interviews: JAKOA members and journalists who disagreed with the view saying that the community is being discriminated against and, the admittance by NGO members and *Orang Asli* individuals themselves who agreed on the existence of biasness towards the community.

CONCLUSION

One of the many problems encountered in resisting racial inequalities, particularly in a consecrated institution such as the newspaper is the inherent denial among individuals that certain parts of the views and decisions

reported do in fact consume elements of discrimination (van Dijk, 1998). He further argued that discriminatory groups seldom admit that they were in fact prejudiced. In addition, journalists and editors rarely perceive that their views, opinions, and writings may contain biased elements. van Dijk (1998) added that the denial of being biased was usually a defensive strategy employed by the elites and people in power to enhance in-group preservation through positive self-representation. This unequal system of dominance hypothesizes an ideological view that discrimination is an oppressive strategy employed by the elites to bolster their own power (Mills, 1997).

Future studies will need to establish the specific portrayal of the Orang Asli community in Malaysian media, such as conducting a comparative portrayal of the community in different forms of media and inspecting the recent themes reported about the community. The results will lead to a better understanding of how, why, and under what circumstances the community is discriminated against. Newspapers in Malaysia possess the ability to structure, shape and change the ideology about the community presented to the mainstream public. In addition, a majority of the dominant communities do not possess first-hand knowledge about the *Orang Asli* community and depend on the media to get to know them. Thus, the media faces no competitors in terms of communicating about the ethnic group to the general public. Presenting the *Orang Asli* in a disapproving manner might influence the minds of the

readers to stereotype the community the same way they have been stereotyped in the media. As such, these findings raise the hope of solving a problem that vexed social scientists - reducing discrimination of the indigenous community. By empowering people to break the prejudice habit, this study takes an important step toward resolving the paradox of ongoing discrimination in a nation founded on the principle of equality. The media should play a fundamental role in combatting discrimination as the media is not only responsible for creating prejudice in society, but also has the power to help reverse and decrease prejudice. As such, this study strongly calls for any practices of discrimination of the community in media to discontinue.

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