



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF PUBLIC ASSEMBLY IN THE PRE-  
ELECTION DISCOURSE OF MALAYSIAN MAINSTREAM PRINT  
NEWSPAPERS***

**PARVEEN KAUR GILL**

**FBMK 2014 33**



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ELECTION DISCOURSE OF MALAYSIAN MAINSTREAM PRINT  
NEWSPAPERS**

**By**

**PARVEEN KAUR GILL**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,  
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts**

**April 2014**

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## DEDICATION

*This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved father, Pritam Singh, who has continued to work in his seventies to enable me to attend post-graduate studies as a full-time student. I will never be able to find the words to fully express how grateful I am to have a father like him nor truly comprehend the sacrifices he has made in life for all his children, especially me. I thank him from the bottom of my heart for never complaining about the financial burden he has had to shoulder, for painstakingly editing all the drafts for this dissertation, for always offering a sympathetic ear and a shoulder to cry on and, most importantly, for believing in me when I have failed to believe in myself. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my loving mother, Kuldip Kaur, who has always been a source of inspiration for me. I cannot even begin to thank her for the innumerable times she has gone down on bended knees to seek grace from the Divine for my successful completion of this dissertation. Last but not least, I would also like to dedicate this study to my spiritual master, teacher, father, mother, sibling and best friend, Sathya Sai Baba, who in His ever-compassionate nature has been guiding, guarding and building my faith in Him. Thank you, Bhagawan.*

Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

**DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF PUBLIC ASSEMBLY IN THE PRE-ELECTION DISCOURSE OF MALAYSIAN MAINSTREAM PRINT NEWSPAPERS**

By

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**April 2014**

**Chair: Associate Professor Mohd. Faiz Sathi Abdullah, PhD**

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The Malaysian mainstream print newspapers (henceforth MMPN) are owned by conglomerates closely affiliated to the ruling coalition parties and the state. Thus, the MMPN is a powerful instrument which the newspaper owners can use to (re)construct reality for the masses by advancing the views and ideologies of the political parties to which they are affiliated and help the state to secure hegemony and the consent of the masses. Recognising this important role of the MMPN, this study investigated critically the language used in the pre-election discourse of two pro-establishment dailies to address the issues of public assembly during a one-year period beginning June 1, 2011, prior to the 13th General Election.

By means of qualitative content analysis, this study explored the prevalent themes and topics in the heading, sub-heading and lead (news abstract) of the front page and page lead news articles of the *New Straits Times (NST)* and *The Star* and how various discursive strategies, and as well as their related linguistic means were employed with a view to unveil the ideologies that appeared to underpin the pre-election discourse practices of the newspapers. The discourse analysis framework adopted for this study was based on the Critical Discourse Analysis approaches espoused by Fairclough, Van Dijk, and Wodak in tandem with theories and ideas from mass media studies, particularly the agenda-setting theory. A total of 352 news texts containing words such as “gathering”, “assembly”, “rally”, “demonstration”, “protest”, “strike” and related epithets were identified of which two major issues

were discerned—the legitimacy of demonstrations or gatherings, as well as the tabling and passing of the Peaceful Assembly Bill 2011.

The thematic analysis of the news texts revealed six prevalent themes in the discursive construction of public assembly: 1) the constructions of menace and public nuisance; 2) legitimate versus illegitimate motivation; 3) unsuitable venues; 4) disruption of legitimate order; 5) police violence as untrue or provoked; and 6) the state in support of freedom of assembly. Furthermore, discursive strategies such as referential strategies, predication strategies and argumentation strategies were employed to justify, legitimise and naturalise the social exclusion of the Other and to have action taken against “Them”. The ideological representation of the Other was linguistically realised through lexicalization and the overall consequence of the discourse themes, strategies and their related linguistic means was negative representation of “Them” while “We” were portrayed positively. It was concluded that in the run-up to the 13<sup>th</sup> GE, the MMPN discursively constructed the issues of public assembly in favour of *Barisan Nasional* or National Front and against either those who appeared to threaten the status quo of the state or those who were directly or indirectly affiliated to *Pakatan Rakyat* (People’s Alliance) or Opposition Front.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Sarjana Sastera

**BINAAN DISKURSIF TERHADAP  
PERHIMPUNAN UMUM DI DALAM WACANA PRA PILIHAN RAYA  
DALAM AKHBAR CETAK ARUS PERDANA MALAYSIA**

Oleh

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Akhbar cetak arus perdana Malaysia (English: MMPN) dimiliki oleh konglomerat yang memihak kepada parti pemerintah dan kerajaan. Justeru itu, MMPN adalah instrumen yang berkuasa yang boleh digunakan oleh pemilik akhbar bagi tujuan membina atau membina semula realiti untuk orang ramai dengan cara menyampaikan pandangan dan ideologi parti politik yang mereka sokong serta membantu kerajaan mengukuhkan hegemoni dan mendapatkan persetujuan orang ramai. Menyedari kepentingan tersebut, kajian ini meneroka secara kritikal bahasa yang digunakan dalam wacana pra pilihanraya oleh dua akhbar harian yang pro kerajaan bagi menangani isu-isu perhimpunan awam dalam tempoh setahun mulai 1 Jun, 2011, sebelum Pilihan Raya Umum ke-13.

Menggunakan kaedah analisis kandungan kualitatif, kajian ini meneliti tema dan topik yang tersebar luas dalam tajuk, sub-tajuk dan perenggan utama (abstrak berita utama) bagi artikel berita utama yang dipaparkan di halaman muka depan dan halaman muka dalam akhbar-akhbar “New Straits Times” dan “The Star” serta bagaimana pelbagai strategi diskursif dan cara yang berkaitan dengan bahasa yang berkaitan memaparkan ideologi yang diamalkan dalam abstrak berita pra-pilihan raya akhbar-akhbar tersebut. Rangka kerja analisis wacana diskursif yang diguna pakai untuk kajian ini berdasarkan pendekatan Analisis Wawancara Kritikal yang diajukan oleh Fairclough, Wodak dan Van Dijk, sejajar dengan teori-teori dan idea daripada kajian media massa, terutamanya teori penetapan agenda. Sebanyak 352 teks berita yang mengandungi perkataan-perkataan seperti *gathering*, *assembly*, *rally*,

*demonstration, protest, strike* dan julukan telah dikenal pasti dan berdasarkan analisis sample, isu utama yang dikenal pasti adalah berkaitan kesahihan demonstrasi atau perhimpunan, dan pembentangan pelulusan Rang Undang-Undang Perhimpunan Aman 2011.

Hasil kajian, tema teks berita menunjukkan enam tema utama dalam wacana diskursif penganjuran perhimpunan awam: 1) wujudnya ancaman dan gangguan awam; 2) motivasi yang sah berbanding motivasi yang tidak sah; 3) lokasi yang tidak sesuai; 4) gangguan perintah yang sah; 5) keganasan yang dilakukan oleh polis tidak benar atau diprovokasi; dan 6) kerajaan menyokong kebebasan perhimpunan awam. Tambahan pula, strategi diskursif seperti strategi rujukan, strategi benaran dan strategi perdebatan telah digunakan untuk menentukan, mengesahkan, dan menaturalisasikan pengecualian sosial terhadap mereka atau *Them* yang dianggap berbeza daripada kumpulan dominan serta tindakan yang diambil terhadap *Them*. Perwakilan ideologi yang lain atau *the Other* telah direalisasikan melalui leksikon bahasa dan akibat keseluruhan tema wacana, strategi dan cara yang berkaitan dengan bahasa menunjukkan gambaran negatif terhadap *Them*, manakala Kami atau *We* digambarkan secara positif. Sebagai rumusan, menjelang Pilihan Raya Umum ke-13, MMPN binaan diskursif mewujudkan isu-isu perhimpunan awam yang memihak kepada Barisan Nasional dan meminggirkan mereka yang sama ada dilihat sebagai ancaman kepada status quo kerajaan atau mereka yang secara langsung atau tidak langsung memihak kepada Pakatan Rakyat atau Barisan Pembangkang.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the following people without whom it would have been impossible to complete this master's dissertation:

The Ministry of Higher Education for paying the tuition fees for the first two years of my post-graduate studies through the *Budget Mini* allocation.

The chairman of my examination board, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Wan Roselezam Wan Yahya and internal examiners Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ain Nadzimah Abdullah and Dr. Afida Mohamad Ali, as well as external examiner Assoc. Prof. Dr. Shakila Abdul Manan for providing invaluable feedback during viva voce and conducting the session with dedication, patience and professionalism.

Members of my supervisory committee, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mohd. Faiz Sathi Abdullah and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Yap Ngee Thai for their invaluable guidance, advice, comments, patience and encouragement. They are indeed the epitomes of love, selflessness and humility in every sense of the word. I would also like to express my thankfulness to a couple of lecturers from the English Department at the Faculty of Modern Languages namely Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ain Nadzimah Abdullah and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Wong Bee Eng for making a lasting impression on me, as well as, making post-graduate studies a fun- learning experience.

To my wonderful friends, who have time-and-time again stood the test of time, E. Sivabalan, Hwa Mei Shen, Raja Suhaini Raja Aznam, Shaila Koshy and Vick Nes Warren, may we grow together emotionally and spiritually for many more years to come. To new found friends, Anahita Azarhoorshang and Maxwell Sim, thank you for tolerating my mood swings, for teaching me the meaning of trust and teamwork. To Patrick Yeoh, thank you for editing the initial references list of this dissertation and to my confidant and husband, Somboon Eh Chum, thank you for proof reading the final draft of this dissertation and I sincerely hope you will always be my pride and joy.

Last but not the least, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my father, Pritam Singh, who painstakingly edited and re-edited all the drafts of this dissertation. This incredible post-graduate journey would have never been possible without his blessings, sacrifices as well as mental, emotional and financial support.

I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 28 April 2014 to conduct the final examination of Parveen Kaur Gill on her thesis entitle “Discursive Construction of Public Assembly in the Pre-Election Discourse of Malaysian Mainstream Print Newspapers” in accordance with the Universities and University College Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U. (A) 106] 15 March 1998. The committee recommends that the student be awarded the Master of Art.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>BN</i>	<i>Barisan Nasional</i> , or Lit. National Front (of coalition parties)
<i>Bersih</i>	<i>Gabungan Pilihanraya Bersih dan Adil</i> (Lit. Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections)
<i>Bebas</i>	<i>Gerakan Menuntut Kebebasan Akademik</i> (Association Demanding for Academic Freedom)
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CPE	Critical Political Economy
DAP	Democratic Action Party
<i>DBKL</i>	<i>Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur</i> (Kuala Lumpur City Hall)
EC	Election Commission
EO	Emergency Ordinance
GE	General Election
HINDRAF	Hindu Rights Action Force
HIP	Human Rights Party
<i>Himpun</i>	<i>Himpunan Sejuta Ummah</i> (Lit. Assembly of One Million Muslims)
IGP	Inspector General of Police
ISA	Internal Security Act
Isa	Ideological State Apparatus
<i>JMM</i>	<i>Jaringan Melayu Malaysia</i> (Malaysian Malay Network)
<i>Kesan</i>	<i>Persatuan Kemajuan Insan Malaysia</i> (Insan Malaysia Development Association)
<i>KPIS</i>	<i>Kelab Perpaduan Insan Selangor</i> (Lit. Selangor Human Integration Club)
KL	Kuala Lumpur
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender

MAF	Malaysian AIDS Foundation
MPK	<i>Majlis Perbandaran Kuantan</i> (Kuantan Municipal Council)
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
MoC	Manufacture of Consent
MoCS	Movement of Changes Sarawak
MIC	Malaysian Indian Congress
MP	Member of Parliament
MMPN	Malaysian Mainstream Print Newspapers
MTUC	Malaysian Trades Union Congress
MR	Members' Resource
NEP	New Economic Policy
NGOs	Non-governmental Organisations
<i>NST</i>	<i>New Straits Times</i>
NSTP	News Straits Times Press
NUJ	National Union of Journalists
<i>NYT</i>	<i>New York Times</i>
PAS	Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party ( <i>Parti Islam Se-Malaysia</i> )
PBB	<i>Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu</i> (United Traditional Bumiputera Party)
PDRM	<i>Police Diraja Malaysia</i> (Royal Malaysian Police)
<i>Pembela</i>	<i>Pertubuhan-Pertubuhan Pembela Islam</i> (The Muslim Organisations in Defence of Islam)
<i>Perkasa</i>	<i>Pertubuhan Pribumi Perkasa Malaysia</i> (Malaysian Indigenous People's Rights Movement)
PKNS	<i>Perbadanan Kemajuan Negeri Selangor</i> (Selangor State Development Corporation)
PKIM	<i>Pertubuhan Kebajikan Insan Mulia</i> (Insan Mulia Welfare Foundation)

<i>PKR</i>	<i>Parti Keadilan Rakyat</i> (People's Justice Party)
PM	Prime Minister
PLWHAs	People Living with HIV/ AIDS
PPPA	Printing Presses and Publications Act
<i>PPSMI</i>	<i>Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran Sains dan Matematik Dalam Bahasa Inggeris</i> (The Teaching and Learning of Science and Mathematics in English)
<i>PR</i>	<i>Pakatan Rakyat</i> or <i>Pakatan</i> (People's Alliance) or Opposition Front
<i>PSM</i>	<i>Parti Sosialis Malaysia</i> (Malaysian Socialist Party)
<i>PTPTN</i>	<i>Perbadanan Tabung Pendidikan Tinggi Nasional</i> (National Higher Education Fund Corporation)
PWTC	Putra World Trade Centre
RC	Resource Centre
RCI	Royal Commission of Inquiry
RSA	Repressive State Apparatus
ROS	Registrar of Societies
SFL	Systemic Functional Linguistics
<i>Suara</i>	<i>Pertubuhan Suara Anak-Anak</i> (Voice of Malaysian Children's Association)
<i>Suhakam</i>	<i>Suruhanjaya Hak Asasi Manusia Malaysia</i> (Human Rights Commission of Malaysia)
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
<i>SMM</i>	<i>Solidariti Mahasiswa Malaysia</i> (Students Solidarity of Malaysia)
<i>SM</i>	<i>Seksualiti Merdeka</i> (Sexuality Merdeka)
UCSCAM	United Chinese School Committees' Association of Malaysia
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UMNO	United Malays National Organisation

<i>UPSI</i>	<i>Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (Sultan Idris Training College)</i>
<i>UUCA</i>	<i>Universities and University Colleges Act</i>
<i>WSJ</i>	<i>Wall Street Journal</i>
<i>YdPA</i>	<i>Yang di-Pertuan Agong (Paramount Ruler or the King)</i>



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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the Study

The role of the mass media in contemporary society cannot be overlooked or underestimated because the public often rely on the media for information on various topics, issues and events (McCombs, 2007; Puglisi & Snyder, 2008). For the majority of the masses, the reliance on the mass media as the primary and sometimes as the only source of information is said to be particularly high because many of the issues and events cannot be experienced directly (Altheide, 2006). For this reason, the public take for granted that the daily news reports that they are exposed to are a reflection of what is important and true and inevitably accept the reality of the world as projected by the mass media without too many questions (Mayr, 2008). However, the public's dependence on "accurate and sincere news reporting is taken for granted" (Harrison, 2006, p. 144) because the news media often construct the people's perceptions of reality based on versions of reality primarily determined by those in power (Hamelink, 2010; McQuail, 2005; Herman & Chomsky, 2002; Fairclough, 2001; Manan, 2001).

Van Dijk (1996) argues that elite's power may be measured by the extent to which they have access to the news media and the notion of access is closely connected to the monopoly of the mass media industry as it is in the case of the United States where fewer than ten multinational corporations have control over newspapers, books, magazines, movies, television and radio (Bagdikian, 1997, p. xiii). The main reason for such acquisition is for "money and influence" and this inevitably enables the elites to exert a strong influence over the public's social and political views (p. 5). In contemporary society, those holding social power constantly need to legitimise their actions in order to sustain their positions of power and, therefore, it is important for them to rule by consent (Preston, 2009; Herman & Chomsky, 2002). Furthermore, Fairclough (2001) contends that "ideology is the key mechanism of rule by consent" (p. 28). In other words, ideology is linked to language because it is the most common form of social behaviour and the form of social behaviour that people rely most upon is common-sense assumptions, which are ideologically shaped by power relations (p. 6). From this perspective, the mass media is said to serve a hegemonic function, that is, it disseminates dominant ideology by reproducing ideas and values in order to manufacture consent for those in power, which contributes to the process of securing hegemony (Hamelink, 2010; McQuail, 2005; Herman & Chomsky, 2002; Fairclough, 2001; Manan, 2001).

The issue of monopoly of the mass media industry is also evident in the local context because the Malaysian mainstream print newspapers (hereafter, MMPN) are also

controlled by privately-owned conglomerates whose stakeholders are closely affiliated to those holding political power—the ruling coalition, the National Front (Lit. *Barisan Nasional*, hereafter *BN*) (Yusof, 2009; Cherian, 2007, Netto, August 30, 2005). Since this is the case, then it appears evident that politicians in Malaysia, who have access to the MMPN discourse via acquisition of large media corporations by their political parties' investment arms are not only able to advance their socio-political views and to influence the content of the media to protect their own interests but they also set the agenda for the masses. Therefore, it has been argued that the danger of the trend of monopoly of the mass media is that it can translate into undue political influence (Preston, 2009) mainly because the mass media not only report and analyse political activities but they also form part of the political activities often serving as a resource for politicians and advisers (McNair, 2007, p. 43). In other words, media owners are able to exert their political influence by promoting a single political perspective and this is seen as a threat to democracy for it limits the audience's access to dissenting viewpoints which are necessary to make informed socio-political choices (p. 68). Therefore, the power of the media as an instrument in the hands of the powerful can neither be underestimated nor ignored (Mayr, 2008) more so because the mainstream print news media across the world has done little to expose powers, especially with regards to the highlighting of socio-political issues which those in power prefer to keep under wraps (Hamelink, 2010).

Given the powerful role played by the media through its discourse to “produce social relations of domination and exploitation”, various methods can be used to study and analyse media discourse and its social role in terms of its ability to set the agenda and shape people's perception of reality in favour of those in power (Fairclough, 2001, p. 44). One of the methods include Critical Discourse Analysis (hereafter, CDA) espoused by Fairclough (2001, 1995, 1993), Van Dijk (2005, 2001, 1997, 1995, 1991a, 1991b, 1988) and Wodak (Wodak, de Cillia and Reisigl, 2009; Wodak & Busch, 2004; Wodak, 2001; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997).

CDA is a multi-disciplinary approach that is primarily concerned with deconstructing power, dominance, inequality and biasness in various social, political and economical contexts and how they are initiated, sustained and reproduced linguistically and non-linguistically in discourse as covert ideological assumptions (Fairclough, 2001). Garrette and Bell (2005) contend that CDA has “an explicit socio-political agenda”, a concern to demystify unequal power relations which underpin ways of communication (vis-à-vis discourse) in society, in particular to reveal “the role of discourse in “reproduction and challenging” socio-political dominance (p. 6).

Thus far, Van Dijk, as one of the main proponents of the socio-cognitive approach, has conducted extensive work on media discourse in Britain, the European countries and in other parts of the world with detailed focus and analysis of how racism is discursively reproduced in the public discourse, especially the press (see, Van Dijk, 2005; 1998;



1991a; 1989; 1988). Fairclough, whose line of study might be referred to as textually-oriented discourse analysis, has focused on various forms of exploitation and domination achieved through the use of language with specific reference to globalisation, new capitalism and national identity through the integration of ideas and concepts drawn from Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, among others (see, Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2005; Fairclough, 2006, 2004, 2003; Fairclough & Mauranen, 1998). His work includes a broader range of discourse types. Another distinguished scholar in the field is Ruth Wodak (see, Wodak, De Cillia & Reisigl, 2009; Krzyżanowski & Wodak, 2009; Benke & Wodak, 2001; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Muntigl, Weiss & Wodak, 2000; Wodak & Van Dijk, 2000), who, through the discourse historical approach, has focused on how social issues such as racism, unemployment in the European Union, national identity, post-war anti sentiments, racism and immigration (migrant, asylum seekers and refugees) are discursively reproduced in public discourse. Hence, the CDA framework and associated analytical techniques are often used to investigate socio-political issues in a principled way and extend existing findings in the area of media discourse.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Article 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares that “everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association” (United Nations, 2013). In Malaysia, Article 10 (2), (3) and (4) of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia deals with the citizen’s right to freedom of speech and expression, the right to assemble peacefully and without firearms, as well as, the right to form association (Commissioner of Law Revision Malaysia, 2006a, p. 24-25). What this also means is that individuals may come together for reasons beyond their own personal interests and collectively “express, promote, pursue or defend a common interest” (Smagadi, 2008, p. 254). When they collectively do so, it may be to voice out their grievances against the authorities (the state, the local councils, the police etc), to protest or to influence local or national policies, to champion the rights of certain groups of people, or even to show support to a particular individual, among others (Klug, Starmer & Weir, 1996). Irrespective of the purpose, freedom of assembly and freedom of expression and association “lie at the heart of what it means to live in a democracy” without which citizens are unable to play an active and effective role in public affairs (Irvine, 1998, p. 185).

In Malaysia, it appears that freedom of assembly, as well as freedom of expression and association, is severely curtailed by a plethora of laws (see, Weiss, 2012) and the state appears to be cynical and resistant to public assemblies organised by government critics, opposition parties, non-governmental organisations (hereafter, NGOs) and human rights activists as compared to those organised by those affiliated to the state (Weiss, 2012; Anthony September 23, 2011; Nagpal, January 23, 2009; Weiss, 2006, 2003; *Suhakam*, 2000). This is especially true in the context of public protest. Yeoh (2009) points out that political parties under the umbrella of *Pakatan Rakyat (PR)* and civil society movements



in Malaysia have been “periodically organizing candle-light vigils, public rallies and street demonstrations” to voice their concerns over issues such as “fuel or toll hikes, building of dams, closing down of Chinese vernacular schools, forced evictions of squatters”, among others (p. 135) but the state, through the police, typically reacts to marginalise or silent dissent by denying police permit application needed to hold such gatherings or launching crackdowns on the movements or members through the Internal Security Act (Yeoh, 2009, p. 135) or Sedition Act (p. 140). The organisers and participants of such protests have also been charged for illegal assembly, causing damage to public property and in some rare cases, attempted murder (ibid.). Other means of resistance include the use of coercion methods such as firing tear-gas and chemical-laced water cannons to disperse the crowd (p. 140). As aptly pointed out by Davenport (2000), when the status quo of the state is challenged by an internal threat, it has the tendency to resort to repression and this is indeed one of the “few relationships in the social sciences that “has stood the test of time” (p. 1). This aside, the mainstream media news coverage on such protests is also said to be unfavourable and this is due to the “press legislation and media ownership entanglement with member parties of the ruling coalition” (Yeoh, 2009, p. 134). Apart from public protest, the police also often ban *ceramah* or public talks which are organised by *PR* on the basis that such talks “may cause instability” (Wan, 2008, p. 231).

Bearing all this in mind and the subtle role of print media discourse in enacting, reproducing and resisting “social power abuse, dominance and inequality” (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 352), researchers across the world have often used the CDA framework to explore how unequal power relations are maintained and legitimised in the social and political context. A common theme that has been often studied is racism (Catalano, 2011; Baker, Gabrielatos, Khosravini, Krzyżanowski, McEnery & Wodak, 2008; Hill, 2008, Harding, 2007; Harding, 2006; Jiwani, 2006; Agard, 2005; Van Dijk, 2005, 1992, 1991 1988, 1984a, 1984b; Santa, 2002; Henry & Tator, 2002; Erjavec, 2001; Wodak & Reisigl, 2001; Wodak & Van Dijk, 2000; Teo, 2000; Brookes, 1995; Wodak & Matouschek, 1993).

In Malaysia, there is a small but growing body of empirical research which also involves the linguistic analysis of newspaper discourse in relation to various social problems and political issues from a critical perspective through the use of the CDA framework. For example, in order to understand how various voices are re-contextualised in relation to People Living with HIV/ AIDS (hereafter, PLWHAs) and how these voices are given space in the MMPN, Lean and Fernandez (2008) analysed newspaper articles of two English dailies by focusing on direct quotes, indirect discourse and free indirect discourse, among other features. Results revealed that while the MMPN was making efforts to increase public awareness of AIDS by highlighting the views of PLWHAs, their identities were concealed possibly due to the stigma associated with the disease. Overall, this study revealed that the negative sentiments towards PLWHAs still prevailed by means of the representation of the disease in the MMPN.

Meanwhile, Nair (2008) investigated the way the MMPN discursively constructed illegal immigrant workers during the Malaysian deportation exercise and the plight of tsunami victims in Indonesia. The researcher relied on lexical analysis and transitivity analysis to study the language of the texts. Results revealed the MMPN portrayed immigrants negatively as being a threat to the country and its people. Moreover, the Us versus Them dichotomy was also prevalent in the media discourse through the positioning of Malaysians as more superior Us as opposed to the immigrant workers, who were regarded as Them. The same division was also prevalent during the aftermath of the tsunami that razed Aceh. He pointed out that although Malaysians had also suffered from loss of lives and property damage during the tsunami disaster, the two dailies gave prominence to the Bandar Aceh disaster by publishing it in its main news section as opposed to under the “World” section, in an attempt to downplay the sufferings and loss of lives and property in Malaysia.

Apart from this, Ng (2008) explored how bilateral issues were constructed by the Malaysian and Singapore mainstream print newspapers through the analysis of editorials and results which revealed that recontextualisations of outstanding bilateral issues were present in both newspapers’ editorials during certain time frames. Moreover, the Us versus Them dichotomy was evident in both newspapers, which appeared to be in line with the respective newspapers’ ideological stances.

Beyond the analysis of MMPN discourse, there seems to be a growing body of research on other types of discourse from a critical Malaysian perspective including media discourse (television and magazines), political discourse, education discourse, and organisational discourse, which primarily focus on socio-political issues such as gender (Hamid & Bakar, 2011; Nair & Talif, 2010; Nair, 2008; Rahman, 2005; Hamid & Bakar, 2004; Manan, 2003), national identity (Abdullah, 2008, 2004, 2003), discrimination (Lean, 2005; Haque, 2004; Don & Lean, 2003), manipulation (Afandi, 2002) and domination or assertion of power (Aman, 2009; Ghazali, 2004), among others.

In so far as the construction of public assembly in Malaysia is concerned, at least two empirical studies have been conducted in relation to public protest, either directly or indirectly. In the first study, Manan (2001) explored how dominant views were reinforced in hegemonic discourse by focusing on how former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar and his supporters’ *Reformasi* (Lit. Transformation) Movement were portrayed in the *New Straits Times* (hereafter, *NST*) in a three-month stylistic analysis beginning September, 1998 when his purported criminal acts were highlighted by the media. The researcher used lexical analysis and transitivity analysis to study the language of the text in the MMPN discourse. Lexical analysis revealed that Anwar was often referred to as the “sacked Deputy Prime Minister”, “ringleader”, “a rabble-rouser” and a “homosexual”, while the movement was often labelled in a highly negative manner with the use of words such as “aggressive (movement)”, “rebel(s)”, “illegal”, “potentially explosive demonstrations”; “violent demonstrators”; “violent protest”; “ungrateful

people”; “ringleaders”; “violent clash” and “violent rioting”, among others (p. 42). Meanwhile, transitivity analysis revealed that Anwar was often portrayed as an Agent/Senser or Sayer, that is, he was constantly positioned in a focal position, which implied that he was someone in power whose actions had the ability to directly affect other people. However, by placing him in focal position, the MMPN also implied that Anwar had abused his position and thus, power as the deputy prime minister. In doing so, Anwar was not only portrayed as a “powerful entity” but also as a “perpetrator” of crimes (p. 46). The researcher argued that by depicting Anwar as a “perpetrator”, the MMPN had successfully portrayed him as different from Us. The same strategy was adopted with regards to the *Reformasi* Movement, whereby the “victimized” were the police personnel and bystanders, while the “perpetrators” were the demonstrators. This was further intensified with the news reports of the social upheaval in Indonesia and other neighbouring countries, which the researcher questioned as being “too simplistic”. However, the researcher conceded that the daily did allocate some space for alternative viewpoints, including critiques of the government but “these voices of discontent were “...few and far between” and the write-ups were not placed in the main section of the newspaper (p. 48).

In the second study, Yang and Md Sidin (2012) conducted a content analysis of the Malay, English and Chinese-language mainstream newspapers, as well as, alternative publications to comprehend how these dailies attempted to influence the public’s perspectives of the Hindu Rights Action Force (hereafter, HINDRAF) movement. The researchers employed framing as their theoretical framework. The results revealed that by imposing the conflict frame, the mainstream dailies focused on the movement’s conflict with the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and the threat to Malay supremacy, while the protestors were criticised as being “wild, stubborn, rough, aggressive, and unacceptable” (p. 177). Moreover, the movement was also accused of having links with foreign terrorist groups and thus, the state justified the use of the Internal Security Act against several HINDRAF leaders. This aside, they also emphasised the state’s contribution to the Indian community and through the consequence frame, the dailies focused on the action taken by the police against the protestors, the damage and losses incurred due to the demonstration. In addition, protestors were threatened with possible termination of employment for participating in an illegal demonstration.

In the West, empirical research on public assemblies, specifically public protests is a well established area and various methods have been used to study the news media, which include both print and broadcast (see, 2.8, p. 33). Irrespective of the approaches and methods used, scholars have found a consistent pattern of news representation of protest in favour of hegemonic power (Cottle, 2008). Studies have shown that the mainstream media has the tendency to overstress violence or focus obsessively on a few instances of violence by demonstrators, overlook the various forms of brutality deployed by the police and also “shown great compliance at illegal police tactics designed to limit

all protesters' action, peaceable or otherwise" (Dawson & Scheller, 2007, p. 267; Herman, 2002, p. 73).

The reason the present study focused on the pre-election discourse of the MMPN is because the agenda setting role of the media is most evident during the run-up to the General Election (GE) (Rajaratnam, 2009). In Malaysia, several studies have focused on the pre-election news discourse and results revealed that the MMPN has the propensity to report in favour of the ruling, *BN* (Rajaratnam, 2009; Yusof, 2009; Mohd Sani, 2009; Anuar, 2003). However, the focus of these studies was mainly on the MMPN's construction of campaign message and the various political parties and social actors contesting in the General Election (hereafter, GE) in the days preceding (and occasionally, following) the election or campaign period.

From the discussion thus far, it would be reasonable to suggest that from a CDA perspective, the socio-political issue of public assembly have not been adequately addressed, more so because the nature of the previous studies in Malaysia were case studies of a single public assembly event, that is, *Reformasi* (Manan, 2001) and HINDRAF (Yang & Md Sidin, 2008) demonstrations. Hence this study sought to contribute to an important aspect of research by exploring how various public assembly events organised by those who are affiliated or adversaries to the state are depicted in the MMPN in the run-up to the 13<sup>th</sup> GE, a critical period for *BN* especially after in the first time of the country's history, it had lost its two-third majority in Parliament and five states to *PR* in the 12<sup>th</sup> GE in 2008 (Lye & Hofmeister, 2011, p. 8). More specifically, this study explored the prevalent themes and topics relating to public assembly events in the pre-election discourse of the *NST* and *The Star*, as well as, the discursive strategies and their related linguistic means which were employed in these MMPN in an attempt to unveil the ideologies that appear to underpin the discourse practices of these English dailies.

### 1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study was to assess the discursive construction of public assembly in the Malaysian Mainstream Print Newspapers (MMPN) in the run-up to the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election. More specifically, the study was

- To describe the prevalent themes and topics in the news abstracts of the pre-election discourse of the MMPN in relation to the issues of public assembly;
- To identify the prevalent discursive strategies that were employed in the news abstracts of the pre-election discourse of the MMPN in relation to the issues of public assembly; and
- To assess how the discursive strategies were realised in the language used in the news abstracts of the pre-election discourse of the MMPN.



#### **1.4 Research Questions**

This study attempted to answer the following research questions (hereafter, RQ):

1. What are the prevalent themes and topics in the news abstracts of the pre-election discourse of the MMPN in relation to the issues of public assembly?
2. What are the prevalent discursive strategies that have been employed in the news abstracts of the pre-election discourse of the MMPN in relation to the issues of public assembly?
3. How are these discursive strategies realised in the language used in the news abstracts of the pre-election discourse of the MMPN?
4. What are the ideologies that appear to underpin the discourse practices of the MMPN?

#### **1.5 Purpose and Scope of the Study**

The main purpose of this study was to investigate critically the language used in the pre-election discourse of the MMPN in relation to public assembly. More specifically, it attempted to explore the prevalent themes and topics in the news abstracts (heading, sub-heading and lead) of the front page and page lead news articles of the *NST* and *The Star* and how various discursive strategies and their related linguistic means were employed in the pre-election discourse, in hope of unveiling the ideologies that appear to underpin the discourse practices of these two MMPN.

The corpus used in this study was limited to the analysis of news articles published in two MMPN, the *NST* and *The Star* over a period of one year, beginning 1 June 2011, prior to the 13th GE. Another daily, *The Sun*, was not included in this study as it is a five-day newspaper without publications on weekends. Moreover, the study does not include the analysis of language used in the post GE discourse and non-linguistics aspects. Last but not the least, the analysis was limited to only the MMPN's news abstracts–headline, sub-heading and lead paragraph–of front page and page lead news articles. Thus, the generalisations are limited only to the issue of public assembly as represented in the news abstracts of the front page and page lead news abstracts of the pre-election discourse of the MMPN.

#### **1.6 Theoretical Framework**

The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework and the agenda setting theory (McCombs & Shawn, 1972; McCombs, 2007, 2004) are mainly used in this study (see 2.4, p. 24). Since CDA is a multi-disciplinary approach, this research effort also integrates various theories and ideas from media studies. Ideas of Marx and Engels (1970), Althusser (1977) and Herman and Chomsky (2002) are discussed under the political economy approach, ideas of Gramsci (1971) and Eagleton (1991) are discussed

under hegemony approach and ideas from critical elite theorists, Mills (2000) and Domhoff (2005) are discussed under the elite approach.

CDA is concerned with how power, dominance and inequality and biasness are initiated, maintained, reproduced and transformed through discourse. Fairclough (1993) explains that CDA “seeks to investigate often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) broader social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power” (p. 132). Thus, when analysing media discourse, three aspects should be carefully examined during the analysis of a particular communicative event – text, discourse practice and socio-cultural practice (Fairclough, 1993).

Similar to this model is Van Dijk’s (2001) three dimensions of ideology analysis—discourse, socio-cognition and social analysis. The difference between the two approaches lies in the second dimension, whereby Fairclough’s (2001) second dimension task is assumed by discourse practices of text production and text consumption (p. 59), while Van Dijk’s (2001) second dimension is occupied by the social cognition and mental model mediates between discourse and social analysis. However, the two approaches are similar in concept (Fairclough, 1995). Wodak’s (2001) discourse -historical approach is similar to Fairclough’s approach in the sense that both the scholars view discourse as a form of social practice (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258). Wodak’s (2001) framework is also three-dimensional structures involving themes or topics, discursive strategies and linguistic means.

Scholars in the field have stressed three important concepts in the study of language from a critical perspective including intertextuality, recontextualisation and interdiscursivity. In the broadest sense, intertextuality refers to the presence of “actual elements” of another text or world of texts within a particular text and what is said or written in that particular text is normally “attributed or attributable” in relation to another text or world of texts (Fairclough, 2003, p. 40-41). Simply put, intertextuality then concerns what or which external texts and voices are included in a particular text, which external texts and voices that are “significantly excluded”, whether or not they are attributed and if so, how they are specifically attributed (Fairclough, 2003, p. 40-41). The second core concept, recontextualisation, refers to “how elements of one social practice are appropriated by, relocated in the context of, another” (p. 222). Similarly, Wodak (1999) argues that different types of discursive practices are interconnected and argumentation patterns are often “reformulated and recontextualised in different context” (p. 3) Finally, interdiscursivity refers to the interplay between different types of genres, discourses or styles and how they are articulated together in a particular text (Fairclough, 2003, p. 218). From the level of analysis, the concept of interdiscursivity involves the study of text in relation to various social events and practices (Fairclough, 2003)

Another main concept that is adopted in this study, apart from CDA, is the agenda setting theory, which is used to explain the impact of the mass media in shaping public opinions (McCombs & Shaw, 1977; McCombs, 2007; McCombs, 2004). The theory posits that the mass media not only functions to focus the public's attention to certain issues but also influences how they think about those issues). For most people, the reality about the world of public issues is second-hand reality, in that it is a reality that is constructed by the mass media through careful selection of issues, how these issues are highlighted and which aspects of these issues are highlighted (ibid.). These factors have a large impact on what people think or feel and consequently, lead to formation of public opinion (ibid.). The agenda setting theory was first introduced in a ground breaking study conducted by McCombs and Shaw (1977). This theory will be further elaborated in Chapter 2 (see 2.4, p. 24).

### 1.7 Conceptual Framework

In order to comprehend how the MMPN used their discursive resources to set the agenda of those who finance and control them in view of influencing public perception, attitudes and behaviour on the issue of public assembly, the conceptual frame in Figure 1 below was used.

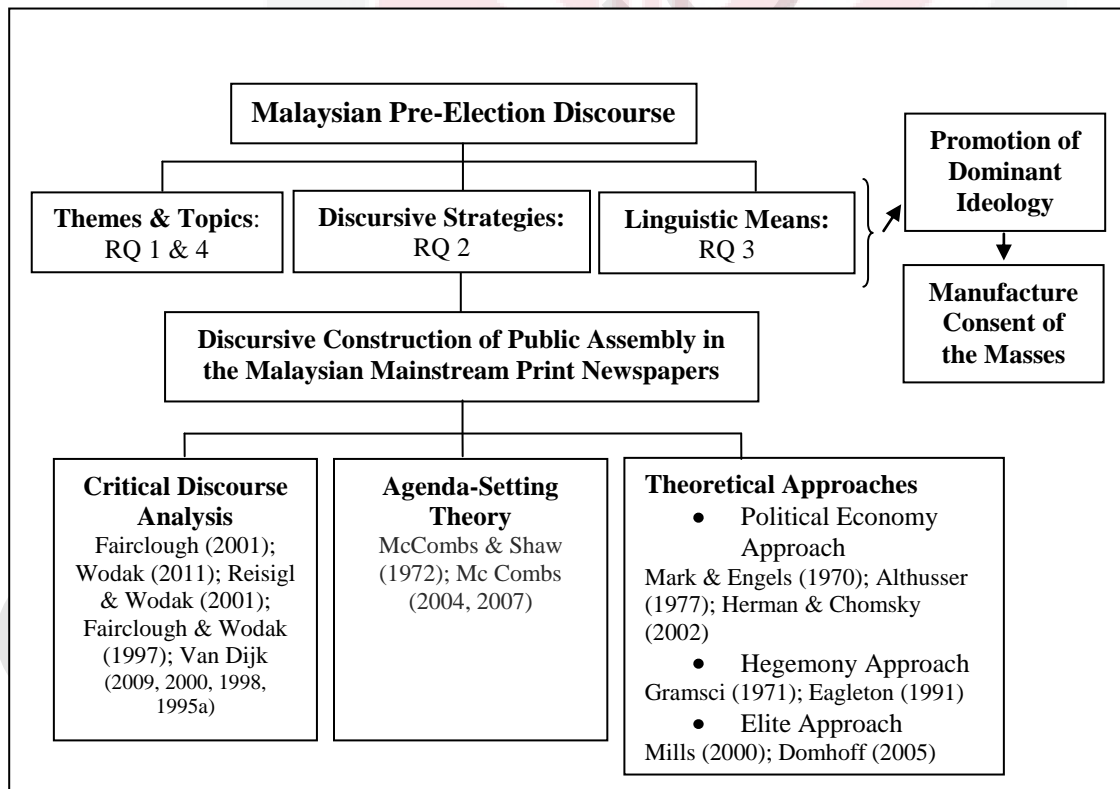


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study

Based on Figure 1 on page 10, it can be observed that by studying the Malaysian pre-election discourse by way of analysing the prevalent themes and topics, discursive strategies and their related linguistic means (Jahedi, 2012; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001), it was possible to demonstrate how the MMPN discursively constructed the issue of public assembly with a view of promoting or propagating dominant ideology to secure hegemony (Fairclough, 2001; Eagleton, 1991; Gramsci, 1971) and manufacture consent of the masses in favour of the state and those affiliated to it (Herman & Chomsky, 2002). The analysis was based on the theoretical framework comprising the various theoretical approaches of analysing mass media discourse including (See sections 2.5, p. 26, 2.6, p. 28 and 2.7, p. 29), the agenda setting theory (See sections 1.6, p. 8 and 2.4, p. 24) and Critical Discourse Analysis (See sections 1.6, p. 8 and 2.3, p. 17). In other words, the use of this conceptual framework enabled the researcher to demonstrate how the MMPN used legitimate language to sustain the status quo and the attendant power relations to exercise social control by means of manufacturing consent (Fairclough, 2001).

### **1.8 Significance of the study**

Fairclough (2001) argues that link between language use and the exercise of power is often unclear to the layman. Therefore, it is hoped that this study would offer an insight into how the MMPN (re) constructs the issue of public assembly by propagating dominant ideology in favour of those who finance and control them. It is also hoped that this study will help to increase greater awareness on how dominance over the masses is legitimised and naturalised through language used in the context of public assembly. Last but not the least, it is hoped that the findings of the study would contribute significantly to the disciplines of CDA, journalism, communication and human rights as it offers insights into how the MMPN plays a role in (re)producing unequal power relations.

### **1.9 Definition of Terms**

In this study, the following terms are used extensively:

#### **Ideology**

The traditional meaning of the term denotes the system of ideas used by the ruling group as a means to legitimise dominance or power (Childs & Fowler, 2006) or a set of values, ideas and assumptions that work in the interest of a social class or cultural group (Mayr, 2008). Ideology is also defined as “a form of social cognition, and more specifically, as the basic beliefs that underlie the social representations of a social group” (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 120). Similarly, Fairclough (1993) views ideology as construction of reality, which is built into discursive practices and which, produces, reproduces or transforms dominance. It has been argued that ideology is only effective when it is hidden, absorbed and constantly reinforced through institutions such as education and media, among



others (Child & Fowler, 2006; Fairclough, 2001). For this reason, common sense assumptions occur in ordinary and familiar ways and as a result, these assumptions are reflected in how people view the world and actions of other members of the society (Fairclough, 2001). In contemporary society, exercise of power is “increasingly achieved through ideology, and more particularly, through the ideological workings of language” (Fairclough, 2001, p. 2).

### **Manufacture of Consent**

Power can be exercised through coercion or force or by consent. Manufacture of consent refers to an implicit form of exercise of power, which involves winning the trust of people through persuasion (Fairclough, 2001). Ideology is said to be the prime means to manufacture consent (ibid). Gramsci (1971, as cited in Mayr, 2008) argues that the prime means by which the dominant groups are able to sustain their position of power is by persuading the subordinate group to accept their “own moral, political and cultural values and their institutions through ideological means” (p. 14). However, these moral, political, cultural values and institutions must be projected in a manner in which it appears commonsensical and universally beneficial (ibid.). Gramsci (ibid.) further argues that the more legitimacy the dominant group has, the greater it’s capacity to dominate and therefore, the less coercion or force is needed. Fairclough (ibid) argues that coercion and consent occur in various sorts of combinations and “ideology is the key mechanism of rule of consent” (p. 28). In this sense, the media plays a crucial role in manufacturing public consent to protect the interest of the elite group, which comprises “the government, the leaders of the corporate community, the top media owners and executives” (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p. xii). The best way to achieve this is to fix the premises of discourse (ibid., p. 2).

### **Themes and Topics**

The study of the meaning or content of discourse appears at two levels: the local level of words and sentences and on the global level of topics and themes (Van Dijk, 2000). Topics express the most important information in the text and form a hierarchical thematic structure, which also underlies the summary of a text (ibid., p. 34). In news reports, a summary is expressed in the lead, whereas (principally), the highest proposition of thematic structure is expressed in the headline and sub-heading. Themes then refer to “semantic macro-structures” or “what speakers think or discursively display as the most important information or opinions about “Us and Them” (Van Dijk, 2000, p. 90), which is inferred from the propositional topics.

For the purpose of this study, “issues” refer to the types of topics that were dissented from the data and they are: 1. demonstrations and gatherings, which are also referred to as “events”; and 2. the passing and tabling of the Peaceful Assembly Bill 2011. Propositional topics, which are unique for each news report, were then categorised under several “themes” based on a common denominator. For example specific topics such as property damage, risk of lives, loss of business opportunities, traffic congestion, road closures, among others, were all categorised under the “theme”– menace and public

nuisance. However, since the range of specific topics were too wide and made presentation and comprehension difficult, they were narrowed down to the general topics of law and order (specific topics: chaos, violence, risk lives, property damage) and public nuisance (specific topics: road closures, traffic congestions, road blocks), among others. For the purpose of this study, “topics” then may either refer to specific topics or general topics. Based on the analysis, six prevalent “themes” were presented in this study and in order to identify the macro-themes or the most important information about Us versus Them, inferences were made based on “topics” categorised under the selected “themes”.

### **Discursive strategies**

Discursive strategies refer to the manner in which a discourse is organised, that is, the means in which a discourse is “given meaning and force, and through which its object is defined” (Carabine, 2001, p. 222). In addition, “it is a device through which knowledge about the object is developed and the subject constituted” (ibid., p. 288). Discursive strategies also refers to the “systematic ways of using language” with “strategy” referring to “a more or less intentional plan of practices (including discursive practices) adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic goal” (Krzyżanowski & Wodak, 2009, p. 23). Reisigl and Wodak (2001) identify five discursive strategies – referential strategy, predication strategy, argumentation strategy, perspectivation strategy and intensifying strategy—which are normally employed by the mass media to construct racial, national, ethnic and discriminatory issues (ibid.). All the five strategies are macro-level strategies, which involve positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation (ibid.). For the purpose of this study, the focus is on the first three strategies just mentioned.

### **Public Assembly**

According to the Peaceful Assembly Act (2012), assembly refers to "an intentional and temporary assembly of a number of persons in a public place, whether or not the assembly is at a particular place or moving" (p. 5). Thus, for the purpose of this study, public assembly refers to public get-together for a common purpose beyond individual interest or needs such as meals, entertainments, sports and religious ceremonies.

Demonstration is defined as the “collective gathering in a public space” with the aim to “exert political, social, and/or cultural influence on authorities, public opinion and participants through the disciplined and peaceful expression of an opinion or demand” (Casquette, 2006, p. 47). Demonstration may manifest in various forms including strikes, marches, pickets, vigil, delegations, boycotts, mass demonstrations, sit-ins and occupation (Cottle, 2008, p. 863; McCarthy, McPhail & Smith, 1996, p. 483), among others. In the West, a protest is viewed as illegal or illegitimate when it takes the form of political opposition and when this occurs, the mass media has the propensity to depict protest as “a story of crime and order” involving defiance to authorities, violence and threats, among others (Lee & Craig, 1997, p. 350).

For the purpose of this study, the definition of demonstration provided by Casquette (ibid) is used, while “gathering” refers to an assembly: 1. organised by a minority group such as those with different sexual orientation from the dominant group; and 2. organised for the purpose of rendering support to a particular individual.

### **1.10 Outline of Chapters**

This dissertation is divided into six chapters. The current chapter, Introduction, deals with the background to the study, statement of the problem, research questions, purpose and scope of the study, theoretical framework, conceptual framework, significance of the study, definition of terms and outline of the chapters. In Chapter 2, Literature Review, the relevant literature on CDA and various theories and ideas from media studies are presented, together with an overview of how the issue of freedom of assembly has been dealt with in Malaysia. Also presented is a summary of empirical studies conducted in other parts of the world. Next, Chapter 3, Methodology, deals with the research approach and design, sampling and selection of corpus, data collection procedure and data analysis method. Moving on to the next chapter, in Chapter 4, Themes and Topics, the results of thematic analysis and lexical analysis are presented and discussed. Chapter 5, Discursive Strategies of “Othering”, deals with discursive strategies employed in the news abstracts of the pre-election discourse of the MMPN, namely referential, predication and argumentation strategies, as well as, their related linguistic means. Finally, the overview of the study, summary of the main findings, conclusion and recommendations for further research are presented in Chapter 6, Summary and Conclusion.

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