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Critical Discourse Studies
2020

‘Malaysia belongs to the Malays’ (Malaysia ni Melayu Punya!): Categorising ‘us’ and ‘them’ in Malaysia’s mainstream Malay-language newspapers

(📄 Article in press ⓘ)

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Abstract

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Malaysia’s 13th general election (henceforth, GE13) in 2013 was the final election where the longest-serving elected government in the world, Barisan Nasional (BN), regained power, before it was ousted after over six decades of authoritarian rule in 2018. In a country that practises parliamentary democracy but simultaneously observed close cooperation between the then ruling coalition and the mainstream press, this paper shows the micro-politics of the driving force of the coalition, United Malays National Organisation (UMNO)—specifically, how anxiety regarding the maintenance of their privileged and empowered Malay position dominated the national narrative during the GE13 campaign. Focusing on editorial journalistic genres in four paid-for Malay-language newspapers, I illustrate the typical politics of fear that characterises much of Malaysian right-wing rhetoric—the ways in which racial and religion issues are provoked. The in-depth representational analysis, via the Discourse-historical Approach’s (DHA) nomination and predication strategies, also suggests the normalisation of nationalistic and racist rhetoric, which primarily works with ‘fear’: fear of change, of loss of privilege, of the future, of other races; in principle, almost anything can be constructed as a threat to ‘Us’, an imagined homogenous people inside a well-protected territory through the discursive construction of such in-groups and out-groups. © 2020 Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

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