Framing Analysis of a Conflict: War / Peace Journalism

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ABSTRACT

The *keris* or *kris* is a Malay or Indonesian dagger. The wielding of *keris* was introduced at the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) Youth general assembly in 2005. Following that, during the UMNO Youth general assembly in 2006, some controversial statements were made by several delegates. After the 8 March 2008 political tsunami, the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and Malaysian People's Movement Party (Gerakan) leaders blamed UMNO for their electoral debacle, in particular the insensitivity shown by UMNO leaders like Hishammuddin for his provocative *keris* wielding action at UMNO Youth general assemblies. Hishammuddin also admitted that his raising of the *keris* was among the causes of Barisan Nasional's poor performance in the general election. He apologised to the non-Malays for raising fear of a symbol which was not his intention and to the Malays for not being able to uphold their symbol of heritage. Since the *keris* wielding incident and subsequent apology by Hishammuddin, many things have been said about the issues and ethnic relations in the mainstream media, online newspapers and blogs. Based on a content analysis of news items from *Sin Chew Daily*, the Chinese daily newspaper with the largest circulation in Malaysia, this study investigated the extent of coverage as well as the actualisation of war/peace journalism frames in *Sin Chew Daily's* coverage of the *keris* wielding incident in 2007 and subsequent apology by Hishammuddin in 2008. The theoretical framework was built on war/peace journalism and framing theories. It was found that both the *keris* wielding incident and the subsequent apology were not given much publicity by *Sin Chew Daily*, and therefore might not be viewed as important in the eyes of its readers. The dominant frame used in the coverage of *keris* wielding was war journalism; however the dominant frame used in the coverage of the subsequent apology was shared equally by war journalism and neutral frame.

Keywords: Conflict reporting, framing theory, war/peace journalism

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1. INTRODUCTION

The *keris* or *kris* is a Malay or Indonesian dagger. The wielding of *keris* was introduced at the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) Youth general assembly in 2005. At the start of the assembly, a procession carrying the *keris* would proceed to the hall to hand it to the Youth chief, who would then unsheath and kiss it. The UMNO Youth chief and Education Minister, Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein explained that the *keris* symbolises Malay tradition, and wielding the *keris* is a means to motivate the Malays.

Following that, the UMNO Youth general assembly in 2006 was noted for some controversial statements made by several delegates. It was reported by *New Straits Times*

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(16 November 2006) that the Malacca delegate Hasnoor Sidang Hussein stated that "UMNO is willing to risk lives and bathe in blood in defence of race and religion"; UMNO Youth Exco member Azimi Daim said that "when tension rises, the blood of Malay warriors will run in our veins"; and Perlis delegate Hashim Suboh directed his question at Hishammuddin: "Datuk Hisham has unsheathed his *keris*, waved his *keris*, kissed his *keris*. We want to ask Datuk Hisham when he is going to use it." There was uneasiness among the non-Malays when these speakers made racially slanted remarks about using the *keris*. In addition, things were made worse as the proceedings of the assembly were telecast live.

The leaders of Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and Malaysian People's Movement Party (GERAKAN) criticised the use of the *keris* in such a manner (*The Star*, 26 April 2008). Despite that, Hishamuddin wielded the *keris* again at the UMNO Youth general assembly in 2007. He later defended his action and explained that the act of wielding *keris* only aimed at injecting a new spirit among the younger Malays and he had no ulterior motives.

After the 8 March 2008 political tsunami, MCA and Gerakan leaders blamed UMNO for their electoral debacle, in particular the insensitivity shown by UMNO leaders like Hishammuddin for his provocative *keris* wielding action at UMNO Youth general assemblies. Hishammuddin also admitted that his raising of the *keris* was among the causes of the Barisan Nasional's poor performance in the general election. He apologised to the non-Malays for raising the fear of a symbol which was not his intention and to the Malays for not being able to uphold their symbol of heritage (*The Star*, 26 April 2008).

Since the *keris* wielding incidents and subsequent apology by Hishammuddin, many things have been said about the issues and ethnic relations in the mainstream media, online newspapers and blogs. In addition, both the incidents have also unleashed a storm of protest from the Chinese community. Scholars highlighted that news media are disseminators of information and there is potential for conflict or even the existence of disagreement or dispute. The central integrative role of the media means that they play an active role in covering or not covering social conflicts (Domke, 2001; Mastin *et al.,* 2005; Tichenor *et al.*, 1980; Viswanath and Arora, 2000). Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the actualisation of war/peace journalism frames in *Sin Chew Daily's* coverage of the *keris* wielding incident in 2007 and subsequent apology by Hishammuddin in 2008. In this study, a news frame refers to an interpretive structure that sets specific events within a comprehensive context. The following research questions were raised for the study:

RQ1: How extensively was the *keris* wielding incident and the subsequent apology covered by *Sin Chew Daily*?

RQ2: What was the dominant frame (war or peace journalism) used in the coverage of the *keris* wielding incident and subsequent apology by *Sin Chew Daily*?

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study relied on two theories to build its theoretical framework: (1) war/peace journalism, and (2) framing theory.

2.1 War/peace Journalism

According to Seow and Maslog (2005), the news coverage of conflict, including the reporting about war, is grounded in the notion of conflict as a news value. As a result, conflict reporting is often sensational and a mere device to boost circulation and ratings.

Norwegian Professor of Peace Studies, Johan Galtung first proposed peace journalism as a self-conscious, working concept for journalists covering wars and conflicts (Galtung, 1998). He viewed peace journalism and war journalism as two competing frames in the coverage of a conflict. He memorably likened war journalism to sports journalism, which typically sees its object in terms of a zero-sum game where winning is all. A better model, he argued, would be health journalism. Here the plight of a patient with cancer, for example, would be described but so too would the possible contributing causes–life style, environment, genetic make up–as well as the range of possible remedies and future preventative measures. This model would prove more productive in the context of conflict reporting than focusing on violence, negative events and siding with a particular protagonist.

War journalism is oriented in war/violence, propaganda, elites, and victory. In addition, war journalism plays up conflict as an arena where participants are grouped starkly into two opposing sides ('them vs. us') in a zero-sum game and focuses on visible effects of war (casualties and damage to property).

In contrast, peace journalism is a broader, fairer and more accurate way of framing stories, drawing on the insights of conflict analysis and transformation. Like public journalism and development journalism, peace journalism is grounded in communication philosophy–namely the commitment to the idea of civic participation, the understanding of social justice as a moral imperative, and the view that the value and sacredness of the individual are realised only in and through communities.

By taking an advocacy, interpretative approach, the peace journalist concentrates on stories that highlight peace initiatives; tones down ethnic and religious differences, prevents further conflict, focuses on the structure of society; and promotes conflict resolution, reconstruction, and reconciliation by giving voice to all parties (not only two opposing sides), and creates empathy and understanding.

Other peace journalism approaches include taking a preventive advocacy stance–for example, editorials and columns urging reconciliation and focusing on common ground rather than on vengeance, retaliation, and differences–and emphasising the invisible effects of violence (e.g. emotional trauma and damage to social structure). Through careful, consistent, and conscientious application of peace journalism practices, the peace journalist hopes to create a setting in which the causes of and possible solutions to the conflict become transparent.

2.2 Framing Theory

Seow and Maslog (2005) found that war/peace journalism is supported by framing theory theoretically. The origins of the framing concept lie in the fields of cognitive psychology and anthropology. Subsequently, it was adopted by other disciplines, often with a shift in meaning, including sociology, economics, linguistics, social-movements research, policy

research, communication science, political communication, public relation research, and health communication.

Tankard *et al.* (1991) defined media frame as the central organising idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration. Similarly, Price *et al.* (1997) highlighted that an issue frame is a theme, story line, or label suggesting a preferred interpretation of some questions. Therefore, by focusing on selected aspects of an issue, Price *et al.* (1997) found that frames can switch particular trains of thought to the forefront of audience members' consciousness, thereby affecting their cognition towards certain issues. McCombs (2005) further explained that to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text. In this manner, McCombs (2005) also found that media frame can promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.

From the research methodology perspective, Weaver (2007) stated that frame can be studied by means of systematic content analysis or more interpretive textual analysis alone. He also mentioned that framing is more concerned with how issues or other objects (people, groups, organisations, countries, etc.) are depicted in the media than with which issues or objects are more or less prominently reported. It focuses on the most salient or prominent aspects or themes or descriptions of the objects of interest. In addition, Weaver (2007) emphasised that framing includes a broader range of cognitive processes such as moral evaluations, causal reasoning, appeals to principles, and recommendation for treatment of problems. Therefore, he claimed that framing is about efforts at making sense of an issue.

In recent years, framing theory has taken over from agenda-setting as the most commonly applied research approach in the field of communication science (Bryant and Miron, 2004). Domke (2001) found that there is a small but growing body of survey and experimental research suggesting that public opinion on race depends on a systematic and intelligible way on how the issues are framed by interest groups, elites and news media. In an experimental study conducted by Domke (2001), he too found that racial cues in news coverage not only trigger the association between racial perceptions and political ideology but in turn may prompt individuals to become more ideologically distinct in their political evaluations. Richardson (2005) also conducted an experiment to investigate the impact of editorial framing on readers' political cognition and effect toward a different racial group. It was found that frames can activate distinct social identities within the minds of readers, priming their applicability to the task at hand.

Figure 1 represents the research framework of this study, which was established according to the theories mentioned above. It illustrates the overall relationships between the independent and dependent variables. The independent variables were (1) the extent of coverage, and (2) dominant frame found in the news items. The dependent variable was the coverage of the *keris* wielding incident and subsequent apology by *Sin Chew Daily*.

3. METHOD

This study was based on a content analysis of news items from *Sin Chew Daily*, the Chinese daily newspaper with the largest circulation in Malaysia. The unit of analysis was the news items from editorials, straight news and letters from readers. The sample of this
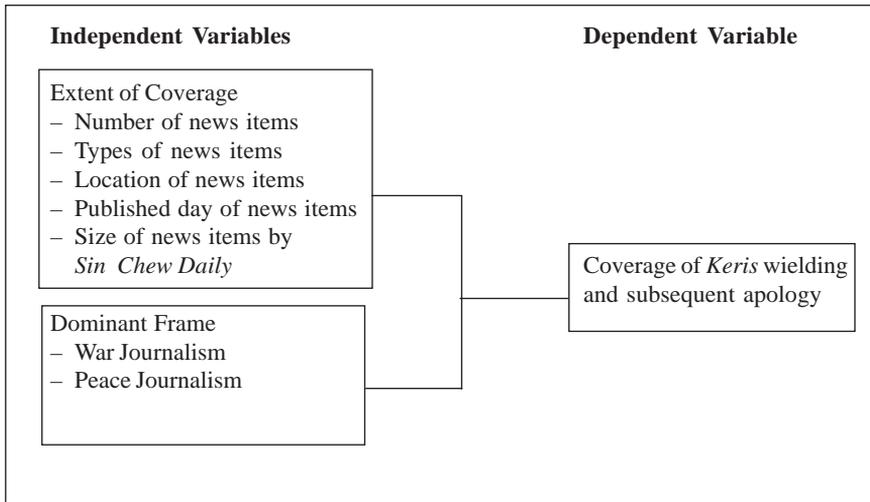
Figure 1. Research framework of study

study was drawn from the main section of the newspaper; it excluded the additional sections like sports, international, features and others.

This study investigated the coverage of *Sin Chew Daily* on the *keris* wielding incident in 2007 and subsequent apology by Hishammuddin in 2008. The sample for *keris* wielding was drawn from 1- 30 November 2007, while the sample for apology was drawn from 26 April to 30 May 2008. These dates were chosen respectively because the period carried the most coverage on the issues. There were 20 and 14 news items found to be related to the *keris* wielding incident and apology respectively. This study used the census sample of the news items and each of them was given an identification number starting from number 1 to 34.

The extent of coverage was studied from five angles: (1) number of news items, (2) types of news items, (3) location of news items, (4) size of news items, and (5) published day of news items. The coding categories for frames, based on Galtung's (1998) classification, involved 13 indicators of war journalism and 13 indicators of peace journalism (refer to Appendix). After a preliminary examination of the data, this study modified Galtung's coding categories into 5 indicators of war journalism and 5 indicators of peace journalism as shown in Table 1.

4. FINDINGS

As mentioned earlier, of the 34 news items analysed, 20 were related to the *keris* wielding incident and 14 were related to apology.

4.1 Extent of Coverage

The extent of coverage by *Sin Chew Daily* was studied from five angles: (1) number of news items, (2) types of news items, (3) location of news items, (4) size of news items, and (5) published day of news items.

Table 1. Coding categories for frames

War Journalism	Peace Journalism
1. *Elite-oriented* Focuses on leaders and elites as actors and sources of information.	1. *People-oriented* Focuses on common people as actors and sources of information.
2. D*ifferences-oriented* Reports on areas of differences that might lead to a worsening of conflict .	2. *Reports the areas of agreement* Reports on areas that might lead to a solution to the conflict.
3. *Focuses on here and now* Neither reports on factors contributing to conflicts nor consequences of it. Only reports aboutwhat, who, where and when of an event.	3. *Reports causes and consequences* Reports on factors contributing to conflicts as well as consequences of it.
4. *Dichotomises the good and bad* Points finger at other quarters as responsible for issue.	4. *Avoids labeling of good guys and bad guys* Does not point fingers at other quarters as responsible of the issue.
5. *Partisan* Biased to one side of conflict.	5. *Non- partisan* Neutral and not taking sides.

As shown in Table 2, the majority of the news items analysed were straight news articles. The coverage of the *keris* wielding incident carried 90% straight news articles, while the coverage of apology consisted of 92.9% straight news articles. The majority of the news items were located at the non-front pages.

The majority of the news items were small in size, which was 200cm^2 or less. On average, *keris* wielding had 165cm^2 and apology had 356.4cm^2 of article size. A finding of interest was that 90% of the coverage of the *keris* wielding incident fell on weekdays, while 78.6% of the coverage of apology fell on weekends.

4.2 Dominant Frame of Coverage
Of the 20 news items found for the coverage of *keris* wielding, 95% was framed as war journalism compared to 5% neutral (Table 3). On the other hand, the 14 news items for apology were shared equally by war journalism (50%) and neutral frame (50%).

4.3 Indicators of War Journalism for the Coverage of Keris Wielding Act
As shown in Table 4, the indicators supporting war journalism frame for the coverage of the *keris* wielding act, based on a total frequency count of 52, were elite orientation (100%), partisanship (80%), dichotomy of the good and bad (45%), here-and-now focus (20%), and differences orientation (15%).

By being elite-oriented, *Sin Chew Daily* focused on leaders and elites as actors and sources of information for the coverage of the *keris* wielding incident. These elites included those from the United Malays National Organisation(UMNO) (60%); Malaysian Chinese

Table 2. Extent of coverage

	Keris wielding (n=20)%	Apology (n=14)%
Type:		
Straight news	90.0	92.9
Editorial	10.0	7.1
Letter from readers	0	0
Location:		
Front page	5.0	7.1
Inner back page	5.0	0
Other	90.0	92.9
Size (cm²):		
0 – 100.0	40.0	35.7
100.1 – 200.0	45.0	28.6
200.1 – 300.0	5.0	7.1
300.1 – 400.0	0	14.3
400.1 – 500.0	5.0	0
500.1 and above	5.0	14.3
Mean	165.0	356.4
Day:		
Weekdays	90	21.4
Weekend	10	78.6

Table 3. Dominant frames of coverage

Frame	*Keris* wielding (n=20)%	Apology (n=14)%
War journalism	95.0	50.0
Peace journalism	0	0
Neutral	5.0	50.0

Association(MCA) (10%), Malaysian People's Movement Party (Gerakan) (5%), People's Progressive Party (PPP) (5%), Democratic Action Party (DAP) (5%), People's Justice Party (PKR) (5%), and *Sin Chew Daily*'s editorial board (5%). In addition, it was found that 85% of the source of information came from BN and only 10% from opposition parties.

Partisanship happened when the coverage was found to be biased in the *keris* wielding conflict. Among the news items that demonstrated partisanship, 75% of them conveyed a favourable impression towards the *keris*; *keris* wielding act; or Hishammuddin and the government. The news items either supported or justified the *keris* wielding act. As mentioned earlier, there was an article on the front page that carried three photographs, which showed respectively of Hishammuddin accepting, unsheathing and kissing the *keris*. Nevertheless, next to these potentially unfavourable photographs was a favourable headline "Hishammuddin told UMNO Youth delegates that it is not a zero-sum game, (the government)

Table 4. Indicators of war and peace journalism in coverage of *Keris* wielding act

Frame	Frequency	Percentage (%) (n = 20)
War journalism		
Elite-oriented	20	100.0
Differences-oriented	3	15.0
Focuses on here and now	4	20.0
Dichotomises good and bad	9	45.0
Partisan	16	80.0
Total	52	
Peace journalism		
People-oriented	0	0
Reports areas of agreement	12	60.0
Reports causes and consequences	4	20.0
Avoids labeling of good guys and bad guys	11	55.0
Non-partisan	4	20.0
Total	31	

does not restrict the development of Chinese and Tamil primary schools." Although the photographs were not seem to be related to the article, the favorable headline might be able to focus the readers' attention on the positive attribute of Hishammuddin rather than the possible antagonistic meaning portrayed by the photographs.

On the other hand, among the articles that exhibited partisanship, 25% conveyed a negative meaning that might cause the readers to form a negative opinion about the *keris*; *keris* wielding act; Hishammuddin or the government. There was an article reporting the speech of the Deputy Chief of the UMNO Youth wing, Khairy Jamaluddin, who insisted that the *keris* will be unsheathed and wielded as long as UMNO Youth exists. He also mentioned that anyone who dares not to wield the *keris* in the future will be viewed as a traitor to the Malay community and UMNO.

In pursuing dichotomy of the good and bad, the articles assigned blame to one party, or to the one who started the conflict. Among the 45% of articles containing this indicator, 15% blamed Hishammuddin for wielding the *keris*, 15% blamed the UMNO delegates for making extreme and offensive remarks during the UMNO Youth general assembly in 2006, and 15% blamed the opposition parties or foreign media for blowing up the *keris* wielding issue.

Through a here-and-now perspective, the coverage only reported about the what, who, where and when of an event rather than the factors contributing to the conflicts or the consequences of it. For example, some of the coverage only reported the ceremony of the *keris* wielding and the agenda for UMNO general assembly in 2007.

By adopting the differences orientation, the coverage reported on areas of differences that might lead to a worsening of the conflict. These included quotes by individuals who refuted the explanation for *keris* wielding; criticism on the act of *keris* wielding as insensitive, hostile and doing severe damage to national unity and nation building.

4.4 Indicators of Peace Journalism for the Coverage of Keris Wielding Act

As shown in Table 3, the indicators supporting peace journalism frame for the coverage of the *keris* wielding act, based on a total frequency count of 31, were agreement orientation (60%), avoidance of labelling of good and bad (55%), causes-and-consequences approach (20%), and non-partisanship (20%).

In pursuing an agreement orientation, the articles reported on areas that might lead to a solution for the *keris* wielding issue. The coverage included voices giving credit to Hishammuddin for his contribution as an Education Minister to the non-Malays. There were also articles that reported the explanation for *keris* wielding given by Hishamuddin and other UMNO leaders. Besides, there were quotes by BN leaders that urged the non-Malays not to worry about the act of *keris* wielding; not to be influenced by the racial sentiment; to disseminate Hishammuddin's explanation to others; and to quit the debate and put it to rest. Some articles also reported assurances from the government that all ethnic groups will be protected.

Through avoidance of labelling of good and bad, the articles did not assign blame to anyone. By adopting causes-and-consequences approach, the news items reported factors contributing to the *keris* wielding conflict. It was reported that the issue was not with the *keris* but the context in which it was wielded. The non-Malays perceived the action of Hishammudin wielding the *keris* for three consecutive years as defending *ketuanan Melayu* (Malay supremacy) and to threaten those who oppose Malay special rights. The non-Malays also felt that wielding a *keris* at a highly charged political meeting was confrontational, combative and trampled on the rights and sensitivities of the non-Malays.

The articles were neutral by being non-partisan. This means that the news items neither portrayed the *keris* or *keris* wielding act favourably nor unfavourably; neither supported nor condemned Hishammuddin and the government.

4.5 Indicators of War Journalism for Coverage of Apology

As represented in Table 5 the indicators supporting war journalism frame for the coverage of apology, based on a total frequency count of 34, were elite orientation (100%), partisanship (78.6%), dichotomy of the good and bad (45.5%), and differences orientation (28.6%).

As in the case of coverage of the *keris* wielding act, *Sin Chew Daily* also relied 100% on the elites as the source of information while ignoring the common citizen in its coverage of apology. These elites included those from the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) (42.9%); Malaysian People's Movement Party (Gerakan) (14.3%); Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) (7.1%); Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) (7.1%), Democratic Action Party (DAP) (14.3%); and *Sin Chew Daily*'s editorial board (7.1%).

Among the articles that exhibited partisanship, 72.7% conveyed a favourable impression on the apology, while only 27.3% conveyed a negative meaning toward the issue. Through a dichotomy of bad and good perspectives, the articles reported that it was not merely Hishammuddin's fault in the *keris* wielding conflict, rather, other quarters like a few UMNO delegates who made racist remarks, the Opposition parties and foreign media were those to be blamed for making the issue sensitive. There was an article which quoted the speech of an UMNO representative, who criticised the Chinese and Indians for being demanding.

Table 5. Indicators of war journalism and peace journalism in coverage of apology

Frame	Frequency	Percentage (%) (n = 14)
War journalism:		
Elite-oriented	14	100.0
Differences-oriented	4	28.6
Focuses on here and now	0	0
Dichotomises the good and bad	5	45.5
Partisan	11	78.6
Total	34	
Peace journalism:		
People-oriented	0	0
Reports the areas of agreement	8	57.1
Reports causes and consequences	6	42.9
Avoids labelling of good guys and bad guys	14	31.0
Nonpartisan	3	21.4
Total	31	

And therefore the UMNO representative felt that Hishammuddin should not apologise because it would denigrate the party in addition to its failure in the 12th General Election (*Sin Chew Daily*, 28 April 2008).

A difference orientation was demonstrated when the news items reported on areas of differences that might lead to a worsening of the problem. There were news items that claimed Hishammuddin's apology to be late and insincere. There was coverage on complaints that UMNO plays race politics, and the *keris* wielding incident has hurt the feelings of the Chinese badly as they had already encountered much unfair treatment and policies. There was also coverage on demand to all politicians who had given racist speeches to apologise.

4.6 Peace Journalism Frame for the Coverage of Apology

The indicators supporting peace journalism frame for the coverage of apology, based on a total frequency count of 31, were agreement orientation (57.1%), causes-and-consequences approach (42.9%), avoidance of labelling of good and bad (31%), and non-partisanship (21.4%).

By adopting agreement orientation, the coverage of apology reported on areas that might lead to a solution. The articles included voices giving credit to Hishammuddin for his contribution as an Education Minister to the non-Malays. Some articles gave voice to those who explained the meaning of *keris* wielding and praised Hishammuddin for apologising. Hishammuddin was praised to be courageous, sincere and noble. Some articles included quotes by UMNO leaders, who said that Hishammuddin did not denigrate the Malays by apologising, while others reported that the apology was not late. The non-Malays were also urged by BN leaders to accept Hishammuddin's apology in good faith, and to quit the debate. There was an article that reported the press statement given by the president of the Federation of Chinese Associations Malaysia, Lim Gait Tong. He praised Hishamuddin for apologising and demonstrating a good example of a great leader. He also

advised all politicians not to speak for only one ethnic group, and to take heed of every group's feeling. Moreover, Lim urged Hishammuddin to accept the Chinese community's opinion when making decisions about Chinese education. He hoped that Hishammuddin would revert to the policy of using mother tongue as the medium for teaching mathematics and science in the national-type primary schools.

Through the causes-and-consequences approach, the articles again reported that the issue was not with the *keris* but the context in which it was wielded. By avoidance of labelling of good and bad, the articles did not assign blame to anyone. And lastly, by being non-partisan, the articles neither portrayed the apology or *keris* wielding favourably nor unfavourably.

5. DISCUSSION

Readers of newspapers learn about issues of significance to their communities, and how much importance to attach to the issues, based on the amount of coverage given to them. Newspapers play a central role in shaping political and social reality because the editors and publishers are usually members of the elite (Weill and Castaneda, 2004). With only 20 and 14 small-sized articles found to be related to *keris* wielding and subsequent apology respectively, it is tempting to say that both the issues were not given much publicity by *Sin Chew Daily*, and therefore might not be viewed as important in the eyes of its readers. However, *Sin Chew Daily* enjoys better readership on weekends compared to weekdays (Selva, 2007), therefore the coverage on apology, which was published mostly on weekends might have reached and publicised to more readers than on weekdays.

McCombs (2005) noted that readers depend very heavily on the type of materials made available through the newspapers; the relative prominence given to different types of material and the way it is handled in order to evaluate an issue. Straight news articles give facts or quote references on general information like who, what, when, where, why and how. Palvik and McIntosh (2004) called this the surveillance function of journalism. On the other hand, editorials are opinion pieces that often identify, define, articulate and address current events or public controversies. Written by members of the editorial board, editorials reflect the stance of the newspaper. Palvik and McIntosh (2004) called the function of this type of journalism as correlation. By devoting most of the coverage of *keris* wielding and apology to straight news articles and very little space for editorials, *Sin Chew Daily* was mostly performing surveillance instead of a correlation function. It also hardly exposed the readers to opinions and comments, considered essential for evaluation of the issues.

The finding that *Sin Chew Daily* relied heavily on the elite as the source of information in the coverage of *keris* wielding act and subsequent apology was consistent with Nero's (2002) remarks. Like other countries in Southeast Asia, Nero (2002) found that Malaysian society values authority and power, which are mainly possessed by those occupying a higher position of authority in the community. The higher the rank of authority, the more prestigious the person is in the eyes of others. Nero (2002) also noticed that newspapers in the developing countries have the tendency to use sources that appear to be credible or to lend credibility to the messages contained in their reports. The higher seat a person occupies in a hierarchy of authority, the higher his perceived credibility as a source of that news.

Therefore, newspapers are inclined to obtain more information from authoritative sources, as they are the decision-makers in society and possess the necessary resources to implement the decision regarding development projects.

As *Sin Chew Daily* relied heavily on UMNO leaders as the source of information and giving very little voice to the opposition parties, it allowed the dominant political party in the country to act as the opinion leader and to define the *keris* wielding and apology issues. According to Shamsul (2005), there is a strong and yet unhealthy tendency in Malaysia to view *oppositionism* negatively, both by academics and non-academics. This has led to the government and individuals being intolerant to criticism, including healthy ones. Indeed, some even see *oppositionism* as something negative and bad for national unity and national integration. In addition, this study also found that the citizens were not invited by *Sin Chew Daily* to give their comment and debate on both the issues, and therefore the readers were more the observers and less the active players.

A closer examination of the pattern of war journalism in the coverage of *keris* wielding reveals that the framing is highly favourable towards Hishammuddin. For example, there was a strong tendency to quote individuals who supported or justified the *keris* wielding act; and blaming others instead of Hishammuddin as responsible for the conflict. There are many reasons why newspapers cannot always perform their roles as "critic" or "stimulant for discussion of an issue". According to Marder (2001), the reasons may be the domestic tensions that limit the "extent of being frank" by the mass media, while political and financial pressures may also tend to discourage public discussion of certain topics. Lent (1990) identified Malaysia as the Southeast Asian nation that has been most active in reorienting media to function in a pluralistic society. In this regard, mass media are used to play down materials that touch upon communal sensitivities.

In the coverage of apology, there was a shift to peace journalism and neutral frame by *Sin Chew Daily.* The four indicators found supporting peace journalism frame (agreement orientation, causes-and-consequences focus, avoidance of labelling good and bad, and non-partisanship) although important in the overall scheme of peace journalism, however, are merely reporting the facts as they are. These indicators did not represent an active attempt played by the journalists to play a strong contributory, proactive role in offering resolution or promoting integration. Peace journalism is a self-conscious concept, and the framing of the apology may be more reflective of a cautious attitude in reporting a controversial issue.

More disappointingly, none of the peace journalism stories were supported by a people orientation. Shamsul (2005) emphasised that the bottom-up collective expression of various groups at the grassroots can help to redefine and refine many aspects that sometimes escape the attention of the people in power. With little focus on ordinary people, and without finding out whether their position as stated by the elites is reflective of the true feelings on the ground, there is little that journalists can do to empower the ordinary people.

6. CONCLUSION

As stated by Viswanath and Arora (2000), in the interest of system maintenance, the primary function of media is social control. Media draw attention to what is acceptable and not

acceptable within the dominant norms and values of the community. Media provide platforms in which potential social problems are identified, defined, and articulated.

This study found that both the *keris* wielding incident and the subsequent apology were not given much publicity by *Sin Chew Daily*, and therefore might not be viewed as important in the eyes of its readers. The dominant frame used in the coverage of *keris* wielding was war journalism; however, the dominant frame used in the coverage of the subsequent apology was shared equally by war journalism and neutral frame.

It is believed that the findings from this study will be helpful in understanding how *Sin Chew Daily* handled racial controversy. More research is needed, however, especially at the level of news gatekeeping to investigate the factors contributing to the coverage of the *keris* wielding act and subsequent apology by *Sin Chew Daily*. Also, more research is needed to investigate the perception of *Sin Chew Daily* readers towards the issues to determine the effect of the coverage on the readers.

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Appendix

Galtung's (1998) coding categories for frames

War Journalism	Peace Journalism
Approach:	Approach:
1. *Reactive* – Waits for war to break out, or about to break out, before reporting	1. *Proactive* – Anticipates, starts reporting long before war breaks out
2. *Visible effects of war* – Casualties, dead and wounded, damage to property	2. *Reports also on invisible effects of war* – Emotional trauma, damage to society and culture
3. *Elite-oriented* – Focuses on leaders and elites as actors and sources of information	3. *People-oriented* – Focuses on common people as actors and sources of information
4. *Differences-oriented*	4. *Reports areas of agreement that might lead to a solution to conflict*
5. *Focuses on here and now*	5. *Reports causes and consequences of the conflict*
6. *Dichotomises good and bad, victims and villains*	6. *Avoid labeling of good guys and bad guys*
7. *Two-party orientation* – One party wins, one party loses	7. *Multiparty orientation* – Gives voice to many parties involved in conflict
8. *Partisan* Biased for one side in conflict	8. *Non-partisan* – Neutral, not taking sides
9. *Zero-sum orientation* – One goal: to win	9. *Win-win orientation* – Many goals and issues, solution-oriented
10. *Stops reporting and leaves after war* – Stops reporting with peace treaty signing and ceasefire and heads for another war elsewhere	10. *Stays on and reports aftermath of war* – reconstruction, rehabilitation, and implementation of peace treaty

Appendix continued

Language:	Language:
1. *Uses victimising language that tells only what has been done to people* – For example, destitute, devastated, defenseless, pathetic, tragic, demoralised	1. *Avoids victimising language* – Reports what has been done and could be done by people, and how they are coping
2. *Uses demonising language* – For example, vicious, cruel, brutal, barbaric, inhuman, tyrant, savage, ruthless, terrorist, extremist, fanatic, fundamentalist	2. *Avoids demonising language* – Uses more precise descriptions, titles, or names
3. *Uses emotive language* – For example, genocide, assassination, massacre, systematic (as in systematic raping or forcing people from their homes	3. *Avoids emotive words* – Objective and moderate. Reserves strongest language only for gravest situation. Does not exaggerate