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**The Propaganda Strategies Adopted by the Colonial British During the Malayan
Emergency, 1948–1960 as Applied in Newspaper Coverage: A Case Study.**

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Abstract

The ongoing discussions on the fluid boundaries between ‘propaganda’ and ‘persuasion’ have emerged in numerous studies, the most prominent being Jowett and O’Donnell (2006). Sharing their views, Herman and Chomsky (1988) argued on the repercussions of only using elite sources in media reports due to their capacity to mobilise the masses for a single cause and shape elite opinions, due to the absence of alternative or opposing viewpoints. This case study examined the nature of propaganda strategies adopted by the colonial British during the Malayan Emergency that proved to be highly effective. This study consisted of two separate elements. First, it extends the discussion on propaganda by examining the significance of ‘race’ used as a crucial element within the discourses of anti-communism, as a legitimate rationale to mobilise forces, primarily within a Malayan context. Second, it investigated how propaganda strategies such as the forced resettlement of the ethnic Chinese, strategies used in framing the insurgents, and psychological warfare operated as powerful mechanisms to shape propaganda communication. A comparative content analysis of two mainstream English newspapers – namely *The Times* (London) and *Straits Times* (Singapore) – was conducted to identify trends in reporting used. Juxtaposing this method was the administration of in-depth interviews with ex-service personnel who had actively served in Malaya during the Malayan Emergency. The findings of this research reveal a significant correlation between ‘race’ and the constructs of communism. The results also indicate that psychological strategies adopted by the British in the form of deeds and news production proved to be highly effective.

The Propaganda Strategies Adopted by the Colonial British During the Malayan Emergency, 1948–1960 as Applied in Newspaper Coverage: A Case Study

Prabavathy Bangaroo and Niranjala (Nina) Weerakkody

Introduction

This paper reports on a study that comparatively content analysed the coverage of the Malayan Emergency (1948–1960) by *The Times* (London) and the *Straits Times* (Singapore) to examine how discourses about the insurgents were framed and correlated with the propaganda strategies adopted by the Colonial British and may have served to set elite public opinion in Britain and Malaya at the time. It was supplemented with the findings of in-depth interviews conducted with ex-service personnel who had served in Malaya during the Emergency, that support some of the findings of the newspaper content analysis.

While there has been abundant literature on the use of propaganda in times of unrest and conflict, especially within US and British contexts, ranging from both World Wars to Iraq and Afghanistan (Lasswell, 1977, 1971; Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Wilcox, 2005; Cottle, 2006; Jowett and O'Donnell, 2006), there is a lack of empirical findings or research on propaganda dissemination in a domestic conflict, especially so within a colonial setting perpetrated by colonial powers. Past research on British colonial propaganda during the Malayan Emergency had been largely qualitative focusing primarily on historical narratives (Deery, 2007, 2003; Clutterbuck, 1966; Hack, 2009, 1999; Ramakrishna, 2002). This paper attempts to fill a methodological gap in providing empirical findings through the adoption of a three-step triangulation method consisting of three separate modes of data collection – in-depth interviews, newspaper content analysis and archival research on propaganda dissemination in a domestic conflict, especially within a colonial setting. This study provides findings that can lead to further studies on media agenda setting and their effects on audiences.

Background

The Malayan Emergency spanned over 12 years – June 1948 to July 1960 – and was often referred to as the ‘Long, Long War’ (Clutterbuck, 1966). The root of this conflict stemmed from hostilities caused by a group that emanated from a sizeable local army approximating 6,000–10,000 (Clutterbuck, 1966; Jackson, 1991; Coates, 1992). This Malayan Peoples’ Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) was established by the British colonial

administration to help fight the Japanese during World War II. With the end of the War, a majority of the MPAJA members joined the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) to fight the British in order to end their colonial rule (Jackson, 1991). As priorities shifted, the MCP, by then operating under the banner of the Malayan Races' Liberation Army (MRLA), vied to fight for a Communist 'People's Government', while the British struggled to regain its authority over the colony once the Japanese occupation of Malaya had ended. The MCP members were largely ethnic Chinese Malaysians – a fundamental detail the British, especially the Colonial Office in Great Britain, were keenly aware of, widely publicised and exploited. The Malayan Emergency began with many minor incidents – mainly attacks on the locals. However, the British authorities started to respond to them only after the murder of three European managers by the MCP, in a rubber plantation on 16 June 1948. This brought about the declaration of a Federation-wide State of Emergency in Malaya, by the British on 18 June 1948 (Ramakrishna, 2002).

According to Kumar Ramakrishna (2002) and Karl Hack (2009), the Malayan Emergency can be classified into four chronological chapters, viz.:

1. June 1948 – May 1950 – The period of turmoil and increased violence from MCP members to overthrow British control.
2. May 1950 – February 1952 – A period where MCP members tried to seize power in Malaya due to the weaknesses of the British civil and military sectors, especially after WWII.
3. February 1952 – May 1954 – This third stage marked a turning point for the British with strengthened military and civil resources. Propaganda communication, through words and deeds, proved to be beneficial to the British during this period.
4. June 1954 – December 1958 – This final stage saw a decline in terrorist activities and strength, resulting in an end to the crisis that finally saw Malaya gaining its independence in August 1957.

News Management and Propaganda

The British Information Research Department of the Foreign Office (IRD) worked closely with the British Secret Service, supporting British propaganda communication and techniques with the intention to 'influence public opinion in its favour both at home and overseas' (Fletcher, 1982: 106). A remote station, the Regional Information Office (RIO), as another arm of the IRD, was set up in Singapore to produce counter-communist propaganda communication.

A Memorandum issued by the Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Cabinet underlined proposed improvements to information services for the purposes of: (a) general propaganda work, (b) direct ‘psychological warfare’ against the ‘bandits’ and (c) to develop an anti-communist propaganda campaign for Malayaⁱ. Using news management as a key priority for propaganda purposes was widespread to ‘ensure that, as far as possible, the ‘terrorists’ received only as much publicity (and of the right sort) as the government saw fit’ (Carruthers, 1995: 90). In addition to defeating communism, there was an urgent need for the British to manage their news so as to project a positive image of Great Britain’s economic and colonial status to its overseas allies and enemies.

The local newspapers dominating at the time were the *Straits Times*, which was owned by the company Straits Times Press Ltd, wholly owned by its British board of directors and based in Singapore, which was part of Malaya before the former’s independence in 1965. The *Straits Times* was read mostly by the local English-speaking elites and British nationals based in Malaya and Singapore, while the *New Path News (Sin Lu Pao)*, a British-sponsored Chinese language newspaper, targeted the local rural Chinese population. Another local paper, the *Kin Kwok Daily News*, an anti-communist newspaper, was another source employed by the British in opposition to communist propaganda.

Other media forms managed by the Psychological Warfare Division were propaganda leaflets distributed/dropped by the Royal Air Force that ranged between 53 million in 1950 and 77 million in 1953 (Jackson, 1991). Radio Malaya was used for local radio broadcasts, and voice aircrafts referred to as the ‘Stop Press of the Jungle’ (Simpson, 1999) were used to broadcast anti-communist messages and to drop propaganda leaflets. Mobile cinema shows and plays were prominent as effective media forms. Ex-MCP members who were also known as Surrendered Enemy Personnel (SEP) were used by the British to put up local plays and speeches to encourage other MCP members to surrender.

The Briggs Plan, Race and Resettlement

The element of ‘race’ became a vital tool during this conflict, especially when mobilising other races – predominantly the Malays and Indians – to support the British. The primary aim of British propaganda was to destroy insurgent morale and create division between the Chinese and other races in Malaya promoting a ‘divide and rule’ strategy within Malaya’s plural society of Chinese, Malays and Indians (Ramakrishna, 2002). This was made clear with the introduction of the ‘new villages’ that arose with the resettlement program

proposed in the Briggs Plan of 1950 – an initiation of Sir Harold Briggs, the Director of Emergency Operations at that time. It saw 86% of the Chinese Malayan population forced or ‘resettled’ into these segregated ‘new villages’. This containment initiative housed a large number of Chinese squatters/villagers suspected of aiding MCP members, willingly or under duress, allegedly providing the insurgents with food, money, medical supplies, clothing and information on British troop positions. These resettlement villages, surrounded by barbed wire and entrenchments, were deemed to be highly effective British counter-insurgency propaganda of deeds similar to the rewards policy (Clutterbuck, 1966), that resulted in the ‘severing [of] the umbilical cord’ between the MCP members and local reinforcements (Deery, 2007: 53).

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a functionalist paradigm, with attempts made to explain how and why some of these strategies worked and how media effects such as agenda setting and framing did not operate consistently in ways they were originally intended to, especially within a Malayan context as the conflict ended with Malaya gaining independence from Britain. The theoretical frameworks adopted were that of media agenda setting (McCombs, 2004), gatekeeping (White, 1950; Shoemaker and Vos, 2009) and framing of discourses (van Dijk, 1985; Entman, 1989, 2007, 2010) that refer to the selecting, emphasising and distorting of information for psychological impact on targeted audiences.

Literature Review

Media Power, Propaganda and Public Opinion

The nature of propaganda and ongoing discussions on the fluid boundaries between ‘propaganda’ and ‘persuasion’ emerges in the studies of Jowett and O’Donnell (2006). As propaganda scholars, Jowett and O’Donnell claim that propaganda is almost always in some ‘form of activated ideology’ and at times agitating and arousing an audience to act, lending credence to the hypodermic needle theory (Sparks, 2013: 58; Schramm, 1971). This will be especially valid within contexts and times in history where other more dominant and easily accessible modes of information and alternative viewpoints were unavailable to the targeted audiences.

In defining the levels of propaganda, Jowett and O'Donnell (2006: 16) categorise or label them according to source and information accuracy as either 'white' (where the source is clearly identified with the information likely to be accurate to maintain credibility but not necessarily verifiable); 'black' (as the other extreme with sources concealed and false information communicated to deceive); and finally, 'grey' propaganda (where sources may sometimes be identified or concealed with the accuracy of information disseminated being uncertain).

Herman and Chomsky's (1988) study on propaganda developed a similar view and adopted the position that highly emotive messages propagated by elite sources have a staggering capacity to mobilise the masses for a single cause. Another concept closely related to news media effects and public opinion is McCombs' (2004) study stemming from the initial work of Lippmann's (1965) titled *Public Opinion*. In terms of racial stereotyping, McCombs refers to the 'cause-and-effect relationship between media agenda and public agenda' (McCombs, 2004: 16) that draws on the impact of stereotypes on public opinion. His study found that the news media, in creating a fixed set of qualities or stereotypes for a particular race, no matter how subtle, has the effect of governing the way the public would perceive that race. This is especially so when audience members have no direct experiences with the relevant issues or particular groups of people involved and are therefore completely dependent on media depictions for creating their social reality (Adoni and Mane, 1984; Berger and Luckman, 1966).

The Propaganda Model and News Production

The 'propaganda model' of news production, as introduced by Herman and Chomsky (1988), will help inform some theoretical underpinnings of this study. Although this model has met with some scholarly criticisms for its failure to take into account journalistic objectivity and professionalism (Hallin, 1994), and disregarding audiences' oppositional readings (Hall, 1980) to dominant frames (LaFeber, 1988; Schlesinger, 1989; Hallin, 1994), this study will rely on this model, within limits, particularly to reflect on media's behaviour in conforming to elite agenda setting dominating during the Malayan Emergency. The prevailing argument contradicting the 'propaganda model' (Herman and Chomsky, 1988) predictions centres on the fact that media have a commitment to state the 'truth' and objectivity of journalists. However, it can be argued that in the case of mid-twentieth-century Great Britain, especially with respect to events that occurred in Malaya, media performance

inclined more towards elite sentiments and explains the way the newspaper medium operated. After all, ‘It was an axiom of British propaganda always to tell the truth – but the truth was presented to give the British point of view’ (Fletcher, 1982: 102). This situation is analogous to the *Fox News* coverage in the 2000s strongly supporting the George W Bush government and its conservative agenda in the US and worldwide. The *New York Times* and *Washington Post* and other prestige press followed the US government line after the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York and the early stages of the war on Iraq. However, this changed when these two newspapers later exposed and discussed the secret surveillance of US citizens in 2005 and the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal in 2004, respectively.

In terms of news production, five key factors or filters set the foundation to the propaganda model, as they merge to sieve out undesirable news and leave the residue as pertinent information which is as defined by the elites. These five filters are: ownership, funding through advertisements, sourcing, flak and anti-communist fear and ideology (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). Profoundly salient and significant to this study will be the filter of ‘reliance of the media on information provided by government, business, and experts’ known as ‘elite sources and/or opinion’ (Cohen, 1963; Gandy, 1982) and the filter constraint of ‘anti-communism’ as a national religion and control mechanism or ideology (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 2). Both these filter constraints appear to be valuable in researching the communication of propaganda by the British during the Malayan Emergency. This study attempts to augment the fifth filter of the ‘propaganda model’ (Herman and Chomsky, 1988) of ‘anti-communism’ to encompass ‘race’ as a component that rendered British propaganda effective. By adopting this trajectory and their continued focus on the actual racial differences existing within the Malayan population, the mainstream print media at the time had provided a pertinent mechanism for future researchers to examine the dominant British ideology of anti-communism that prevailed at the time and reproduced by the media that helped mobilise local support against their ‘common enemies’ during this conflict. This style of reporting and strategy suggests the use of dichotomies of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ with an explicit intention to mobilise forces against an enemy or ‘them’, which is a recurring strategy that has found its way from the twentieth-century through to the present with the global ‘war on terror’ narrative.

Discourses and Framing

Framing in news discourses examined in the past reveals how the salience of a particular story is promoted, minimised or excluded to influence audience perceptions of the issues covered by the media (Entman, 1989, 2007, 2010). Framing of a news discourse is shaped by the angle used in reporting a story and choosing a 'lead' for it which controls how the rest of the story is told and what headlines may be used (Dicken-Garcia, 1998). The use of specific adjectives, metaphors, analogies euphemisms and disphemisms when reporting a story within a selected frame leads to specific connotations (Planalp, 1998: 69). Entman (1989; 2007; 2010) equally categorises both agenda-setting and framing theoretical frameworks under the conceptual umbrella of bias. Kuypers' (2010) 'rhetorical framing analysis' framework is helpful when analysing the content in the press during this conflict, where news stories were framed using specific features of prominent storylines, terminologies and stereotypes to influence its readers' thinking and interpretations. Van Dijk (2008; 1988) and Steuter and Wills (2008) equally assist in interrogating discourses of power, ideology and racism, which was evident in the style of communication strategies and political rhetoric often used by the dominant British colonial powers.

Steuter and Wills (2008) found that enlisting discourses to study the framing of news with the media's engagement of metaphors as political rhetoric would help reveal the way propaganda constructs reality; 'othering' the enemy, and upholding dominant views. Emerging from the 'othering' and stereotyping perspectives, British colonial rule was promoted and justified through racial (Chinese) and ideological (anti-communist) division. The British in Malaya, like the French in Cambodia (Edwards, 1996) embraced political agendas of constructing an idea and expressing a worldview of themselves as protectors and custodians, representing the best interests of the Bumiputeras (Princes of the Land) or the Malays against the communist Chinese, hence justifying its colonial presence. An equally prominent framing strategy used was that of 'code words' (Graber, 1981), disphemisms (the opposite of euphemisms) which make a phenomenon sound worse than it really is to evoke strong emotions to shape the thinking of a group of people to behave in a particular manner as required by the communicator (Planalp, 1998)

Agenda-setting and Gatekeeping

Empirical studies, conducted in the past (Cohen, 1963; McCombs and Shaw, 1972; McLeod, Becker and Byrnes, 1974) revealed agenda-setting as a pervasive and potent media effect contributing to information on events or issues being legitimated to alter or shape

public opinion. The level and depth of facts and news sources the media used in giving extensive coverage, while prioritising and defining specific events or issues, defined the media as well as elite agenda and contributed to the way public opinion was generally formed. In other words, media in defining the saliency of issues make media agenda become the agenda of the public (McCombs, 2004). In finding an indisputable correlation between media agenda and public opinion, McCombs (2004) establishes, through his countless studies conducted over four decades, a causal relationship between media agenda and public agenda. However, this also unequivocally acknowledged other compelling influences that could also ‘shape individual attitudes and public opinion’. For example, ‘personal experience, general culture and exposure to mass media’ (McCombs, 2004: 19) help shed some light on audience reactions within the context of Malaya. Likewise, studies by Shoemaker and Vos (2009) would assist in further understanding the link between agenda-setting and gatekeeping in the ways certain issues that are detrimental to or challenge the dominant status quo are kept out and not covered by mass media. They draw attention to political media gatekeeping practices as involving the ‘process of culling and crafting countless bits of information’, through the selection, manipulation and exclusion of information (Shoemaker and Vos, 2009: 1). A large number of empirical research on the agenda-setting function are based on similar assumptions of ‘influencing public agenda through media gatekeeping in formulating meaning – selecting, screening, interpreting, emphasizing, and distorting information’ (Jowett and O’Donnell, 2006: 188).

Research Methodology

This case study used both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods; viz., an examination of archival documents, content analysis of newspaper coverage and in-depth interviews.

The archival data examined cabinet papers, and some private and confidential correspondence in the form of memoranda and letters exchanged between the British government and its military officials. These documents were downloaded from the ‘digital image system’ of the National Archives, UK, and were used to examine across the period analysed the relevant issues raised by the British government during the Malayan Emergency.

The quantitative and qualitative content analysis examined purposive samples of the articles published on the Malayan Emergency by two mainstream English language newspapers – namely *The Times* (London) and *Straits Times* (Singapore) – based on their

geographic location and readership for comparison. *The Times* was accessed electronically from its website while the *Straits Times* was manually accessed as hardcopy prints from the State Library, Victoria, for the period studied.

The Times (London) was considered a prestigious newspaper that dominated the market with a circulation of around 50,000 at that time (Williams, 2009). Despite its small circulation figures, *The Times* was reported to be targeted at mostly the educated elite and was considered a 'politically important and influential' newspaper that leaned more towards 'conservative' parties in the UK (Negrine, 1994).

The *Straits Times* (Singapore) was promoted as 'Malaya's National Newspaper' (Turnbull, 1995: 183), with circulation figures exceeding 50,500 in the early fifties. By 1953, the *Straits Times* newspaper's circulation had skyrocketed over all other competitive local newspapers (Turnbull, 1995: 183).

Using the criteria and guidelines suggested by the political and historical analyst Dr Kumar Ramakrishna (2002) and adhering to the chronology of events as stipulated in the *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs*, the period February 1952 to January 1953 was identified as the most critical and pivotal stage of the Malayan Emergency and was chosen as the time period for the content analysis of the news coverage. The analysis used a custom designed coding instrument consisting of 26 items that allowed for the examination of several aspects of the coverage. However, this paper reports only the findings obtained using 14 items of the coding instrument (see Appendix 1) that were relevant to the two aspects examined and reported on, viz:

1. The frequency of the race of insurgents mentioned in the coverage, and;
2. The terminologies used to describe the insurgents.

The population or the universe (Weerakkody, 2009: 148) of the news content for the study consisted of all Malayan Emergency related coverage in the two newspapers selected for analysis during the period under study. This non-probability purposive sample included all news stories and commentaries on the Malayan Emergency. The content analysis coded and quantitatively analysed the space allocated to Malayan Emergency stories, and the number of times the race of the insurgents were mentioned in the coverages, and qualitatively examined the different terminologies used when describing them. These were identified by qualitatively examining the statements made or views expressed by the different news sources relating to the emergency; violence or riots that erupted due to the conflict; any deeds or policies implemented that resulted in the surrender or arrests of insurgents; adjectival

descriptors used when describing insurgents and racial profiling; and any other events or narratives that appeared in the two newspapers related to the conflict (see Appendix 1).

In addition, the coding of MCP links to communist countries/organisation/groups and space allocation to stories were examined quantitatively (measured in words). Each of these variables was categorised, labelled and coded accordingly using the coding instrument and coding sheets specifically designed for the study. The construct of the British agenda-setting objectives and practices were the dependent variables that are examined in this paper. The independent nominal variables examined include: the terminologies adopted by the British to describe the insurgents; violence committed by insurgents; links to communist countries; and racial profiling of the insurgents by the British. These were used to examine the correlation between them and answer the research questions posed in this inductive study.

The Sample of Newspaper Articles

In selecting the relevant articles to be examined from the newspapers published during the period under study, purposive sampling was used via selecting a composite week for each month with randomly selected days, for example, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday chosen in each month for the selected newspapers. All news items concerning Malaya and the Malayan Emergency published in the selected papers between 1 February 1952 and 31 January 1953, excluding issues that were published on the weekend, were selected. Through this procedure, 65 news stories from *The Times* and 207 from the *Straits Times* were identified, totalling 272 news stories which served as the units of analysis that were content analysed using the coding manual (the abridged version relevant to this paper is provided as Appendix 1).

The Depth Interviews

Depth interviews were conducted with ex-servicemen with the relevant British military forces who served during the Malayan Emergency. The 17 interviewees participating were all males, consisting of 12 Army and 5 Air Force personnel. These interviews were conducted face to face, over the telephone and through email.

All volunteer participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their service in Malaya during the Malayan Emergency. Participants were recruited through advertisements in the *Vetaffairs* newspaper, RSL clubs in Melbourne and The National

Malaya and Borneo Veterans Association of Australia (Vic). To allow for a reasonable level of diversity and a representative sample, attempts were made to select from the Army, Air Force and Navy. Unfortunately, the ex-Navy respondents (2) had to withdraw from this study, despite their initial consent to participate, for health/personal reasons. To overcome this gap, a book written by former Navy personnel Ian Pfennigwerth entitled *Tiger Territory: The Untold Story of the Royal Australian Navy in Southeast Asia from 1948–1971* (2008) that detailed his naval experiences at that time was used as background information.

In each semi-structured interview, respondents were presented with three general grand tour questions:

- Duration of service
- Individual role in respective divisions/battalions
- Primary role of individual division, battalion, platoon during military activity

Given that the Malayan Emergency was a conflict fought essentially on land, Army ex-service personnel were presented the highest number of 16 semi-structured questions, followed by 11 questions for the Air Force personnel. During data analysis, all respondents were assigned numbers as identifiers so as to maintain confidentiality in terms of their identity throughout this study.

On focusing primarily on negative propaganda against a race and population control that operated as powerful mechanisms to shape and assist in the propaganda communication, respondents were asked about racial stereotyping and the adjectives used to describe the insurgents; as well as propaganda actions such as forced settlement (euphemistically called ‘population control’ at the time) and the reward system – that is, monetary rewards paid to insurgents to surrender, which varied between \$28,000 for someone with a Chairman’s rank to \$800 for an ordinary insurgent (Carruthers, 1995).

Findings

Race as a Crucial Element

The findings indicated that giving intensive attention to and promoting the salience of a particular race when reporting on insurgents was consistent with attribute of agenda-setting and framing used in McCombs (2004). Results from the content analysis showed that the race of insurgents specified as ‘Chinese’ figured at 23.1% in *The Times* newspaper with the *Straits Times* reflecting a higher frequency of mentions, standing at 31%. The *Straits Times* equally

published the names of Chinese insurgents including the offered rewards for their capture. Figures mentioning other races were also higher in the *Straits Times* as opposed to *The Times* (See Table 1).

Table: 1 Race of insurgents mentioned in the newspaper articles analysed

Race	The Times (London)	Straits Times (Singapore)	TOTAL
	%	%	%
Chinese	23.1	31.0	29.0
Malay	1.5	4.3	3.7
Indian	1.5	1.9	1.8
Other	1.5	0	0.4
Not Applicable	72.3	62.8	65.1
Total	23.9	76.1	100
	n=65 articles	n=207 articles	N=272 articles

Discussion

Although a large percentage – *The Times* (72.3%) and *Straits Times* (62.8%) – of the news stories analysed did not mention race, drawing attention to a particular race and making comparisons with other races suggest an agenda-setting effect. As found by McCombs (2004), some attributes are ‘more likely than others to be noticed and remembered by the audience quite apart from their frequency of appearance’ (2004: 92). In other words, psychologically implanting the information of a large number of communist insurgents belonging to a particular race would be more pertinent in the public’s mind and will more likely be noticed and remembered by an audience.

Labelling of Insurgents

Table: 2 Disphemisms and terminologies used in the news stories analysed

Terminologies	The Times (London)	Straits Times (Singapore)	TOTAL
	%	%	%
Communist-Terrorists	30.4	13.4	18.3
Terrorists	58.7	35.4	42.2
Bandits	7.7	39.5	30.2
Gangs	1.8	3.9	3.3
Insurgents	0	0.6	0.4
Comrade	0	0.6	0.4
Reds	0	5.7	4.1
Other:			
Guerrillas	1.2	0.1	0.4
Enemy	0	0.2	0.2
Not Applicable	0.3	0.6	0.5
Total	29.2	70.8	100
	n=65 articles	n=207 articles	N=272 articles

Discussion

On examining the framing and rhetorical strategies adopted by the British to label the insurgents, ‘terrorists’ and ‘communist terrorists’ were the preferred terminologies that were

reflected in *The Times* newspaper, totalled 58.7% and 30.4% respectively for the sample analysed. The *Straits Times* preferred the less threatening term ‘bandits’ – that recorded 39.5% – used mostly between the period February 1952 to June 1952. Interestingly, this practice changed from June 1952 onward to the preferred term ‘Terrorists’, totalling 35.4%. Other labels such as ‘insurgents, gangs, reds and guerrillas’ were also used by the *Straits Times*. A large number of respondents (76%) who were interviewed with regard to this question cited ‘bandits’ and ‘terrorists’ as the dominant labels used to refer to insurgents at the time, which appeared to be consistent with the results from the content analysis data.

Planalp (1998) claims the media play a powerful role in shaping emotions. In the case of *The Times* newspaper, the British had succeeded in mobilising global perceptions to fight communism by presenting it as a common global threat (Edwards, 1996) and referring to them as ‘terrorists’ at a later stage rather than ‘bandits’, which carries different connotations.

However, the findings indicated that things differed slightly in Malaya as factors such as counter-propaganda by communist parties – especially through acts of threats and violence towards the local population – found the locals helping the communist terrorists out of fear. This supports findings by van Dijk (2008; 1988) and Entman (2007), who state that framing the same news narratives, including the use of lexical terminologies, within different cultures and environments would produce contrasting audience reactions.

Propaganda Strategy of Deeds

Questions posed to the 17 depth interview respondents who were serving military personnel with the British or Australian forces during the insurgency also asked about how psychological deeds as supplementary mechanisms, especially population control through (forced) resettlement programs and the reward system, assisted in propaganda communication. Eighty-eight percent (88%) of respondents revealed that isolation of mostly the Chinese race into these ‘new villages’ enabled close and constant surveillance by the British and these resettlement programs were considered to be the most productive acts that paralleled propaganda messages. Similarly, about 77% of respondents cited the reward system as an effective state propaganda measure. One participant in particular summed it up by stating that ‘this form of propaganda produced more insurgent surrenders and useful information such as insurgent tactics, camp positions and local information on identities of communist terrorists’.

Conclusion

Evidence, especially in studying the media content in *The Times* (London) and *Straits Times* (Singapore), shows an integration of gatekeeping, agenda-setting and framing forces operating at diverse levels and targeted at different audiences. Responses from interviewees were consistent with some of the content analysis findings in that the identification of the Chinese race assisted the British to strategise and adopt a propaganda measure of segregation or resettlement to allow for increased surveillance and control of large numbers of mainly Chinese through strategies of population control. It also justified the segregation and surveillance of the Chinese population. Although findings were largely consistent with the theoretical paradigms applied, there appears to be a slight disjuncture between media framing and public behaviour, especially within the Malayan context – suggesting limited or no effects. This could be due to the two newspapers under study being read by mainly English-educated elites, or the public facing threats from the insurgents, or the servicemen of the British and Australian military, rather than the Malayan and British populations in general.

This study also suggests a strong correlation between race and the constructs of communism. This finding contributes to an extension of Herman and Chomsky's (1988) fifth filter constraint in news production of the ideology of 'anti-communism' in the 'propaganda model' to include race as a crucial construct.

Limitations of the Study

It is important to specify the limitations of this study because in extending the discussion on propaganda, especially with regards to 'race' and 'othering' in addition to the 'anti-communism' or ideological filter of the propaganda model (Herman and Chomsky, 1988), there was no local Malayan population's perspective (officials, civilians who experienced the crisis first hand and local journalists) sought or included in this study. This could have been rectified by interviewing a relevant and purposive sample of Malayan counterparts. Examining comparable archival materials from the Malayan side and examining Malayan newspaper content published in Malay, Chinese or Tamil languages for the same period as a comparison will contribute a more holistic perspective to the study's findings. This is a suggestion for further study for the overall topic area and project. Another limitation that restricts generalising the findings is the issue of selecting only a limited period of the

crisis rather than the entire period of the conflict, which would have allowed for comparison within and between the newspapers at various times of the conflict.

In order to extend the boundaries to discussions on propaganda, further comparative analyses of conflicts in colonial settings in Southeast Asia are warranted. Further research is also required to examine audience effects and news bias in media framing, especially through content analysis, consistent with political issues and ideologies.

Endnotes

¹ CAB/129/40 Memorandum number C.P. (50) 125, 'Preliminary Report on visit to Malaya and Singapore, 13 June 1950.

Appendix 1

Project Title: The Propaganda Strategies Adopted by the Colonial British During the Malayan Emergency, 1948–1960 as Applied in Newspaper Coverage: A Case Study

Coding manual for newspaper coverage of the Malayan Emergency conflict study

The following is a 14-item coding manual used in the content analysis of *The Times* (London) and *Straits Times* (Singapore) newspapers on propaganda messages that appeared during the Malayan Emergency.

Coding Date: _____

Title/Headline of article: _____

1. ID Number of article
0001 to 1000
2. Newspaper analysed
(1) Times (London)
(2) Straits Times (Singapore)
3. Date of Newspaper: day/month/year
4. Page number
5. Space allocated to Malayan stories (measured in words)

Prominent categories/themes covered in the press as per items (6–12)
(To be coded as Yes/No)

- | | | |
|--|--------|-------|
| 6. Riots | 1. Yes | 2. No |
| 7. Killings by insurgents | 1. Yes | 2. No |
| 8. Armed robberies | 1. Yes | 2. No |
| 9. Abduction of civilians by insurgents | 1. Yes | 2. No |
| 10. Ambushes by insurgents | 1. Yes | 2. No |
| 11. Insurgents killing to steal weapons | 1. Yes | 2. No |
| 12. Links to communist countries/organisations/groups | | |
| 1. Soviet Russia | | |
| 2. China | | |
| 3. Other e.g. Vietnam, Australian Communist Party-Party Secretary Mr. Sharkey; Anti-imperialists-India | | |
| 9. N/A | | |
| 13. Adjectival descriptors used when reporting on members of the Communist Party | | |
| 1. Communist-Terrorists | | |

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2. Terrorists
 3. Bandits
 4. Gangs
 5. Insurgents
 6. Comrade
 7. Reds
 8. Other (Guerrillas, Enemy)
 9. Not applicable

14. Racial profiling used on members of the Communist Party

1. Chinese
2. Malay
3. Indian
4. Other
9. Not applicable

Note: This is an abridged version of the original coding instrument used. This coding document includes only the variables relevant to this paper.

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