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# MODERN SLAVERY AND FEMINISATION OF VICTIMISATION: THE PORTRAYALS OF FOREIGN WOMEN AS THE OTHER IN MALAYSIAN CRIME REPORTING

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## ABSTRACT

Media plays an important role in shaping the perception of an individual in looking at the gender's portrayal as whole. This study explores news discourses revolving foreign women in Malaysian crime reporting as it is informed by media othering of crime news subjects based on their nationality and gender. Using the concept of othering and thematic discourse analysis as the methodology, this study identifies the main themes of foreign women as victims based on headlines and news text published in The Star, The New Straits Times, The Sun, and The Malay Mail. Foreign women are reported as victims routinely. There are 7 themes emerged from the thematic discourse analysis which are trafficking representation, modern slavery, gender trafficking (sex industry), fictional representation, proliferation of conflict, racialized narratives, and stereotypical representation. These themes portray foreign women as victims under the rhetoric of Modern Slavery and the Feminisation of Victimisation. The narrative constructed them as a problem and threat due to their status as the 'other'. Foreign women can be put into unfortunate contexts that leads to the victimization of the gender that occurs in different settings of the community. As shown through this study, the media can be complicit in perpetuating bias via the othering of foreign women.

**Keywords:** *Crime Reporting, Newspapers, Foreign Women, Othering, Media portrayals*

## INTRODUCTION

There are estimated of more than 2 million undocumented foreign nationals in this country. Something to ponder is that the combination of documented and undocumented foreign nationals makes up about 16% of Malaysian total population which is more than local races namely the Indian, Kadazan, Iban and other ethnics too (Sim, 2017). Most of the foreign nationals who come as labour migrants were from neighbouring countries because the formation of ASEAN encouraged intra-regional migration within the region of South-East Asia (Harkins, Lindgren & Suravoranon, 2017). Although, most of foreign nationals come to Malaysia to fulfil the labour commodities in Malaysia, that there are high percentage of irregular migrants in Malaysia because Malaysia is reported as one of the canters of human smuggling activities within the South- East Asian region along with its neighbour on the North, Thailand (Magpanthong & McDaniel, 2016; McAuliffe & Khadria, 2019).

### Crime in Malaysia

Malaysian crime index ratio per 100,000 population in 2019 read lower than the previous year which was 273.8 while in 2018 it was 309.7 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). In particular, the type of crime in Malaysia is also reported namely on street crime such as snatch theft and breaking into houses (Tang, 2020). In a meanwhile, scamming which are both phone scam and cyber- scam also among frequently reported crimes in Malaysia alongside illegal entry to Malaysia such as no working permits and fake passports and others. Violent crimes such as murder and kidnapping for ransom have also become a threat among Malaysian citizens and non-citizens (OSAC, 2020). In addition, Kuala Lumpur is noted as the city with the highest crime rate, which is due to factors such as crowded population, negligence of the general public about their safety, and also lack in terms of security (Tang, 2020). In relation to this study, the influx of immigrants in Kuala Lumpur is also mentioned in the news as the main reason for the high crime rate there. Therefore, we can see that it is a norm in Malaysian newspapers' reports to relate the high number of foreign nationals specifically foreign workers as the reason for the high crime rate in Malaysia.

### Crime Newsworthiness

Research on crime reporting indicates that the news media routinely report on scandalous, extremely gruesome, and sexual crimes to boost circulation (Muraskin & Domash, 2007). Caple (2018) added that news selection and construction or representation by the media are weighed by the news values and newsworthiness. Basically, the selection of news is typically based on eight news values namely impact, timeliness, prominence, proximity, bizarre, conflict, proximity, and based on human interest (Caple & Bednarek, 2016; Caple, 2018). The exploitation of the headlines is somehow a cognitive approach to influence the readers on the relationship between foreign nationals and crime. In addition, headlines mentioning foreign status of the person involved in the crime events (both as offender and victim) instill the public fear of crime and prejudices towards foreign nationals (Muraskin & Domash, 2007).

Headlines authoring and image exposure in crime reporting of foreign nationals bring the element of sensation of news (Caple & Bednarek, 2016). Regarding news values, Caple (2018) added that news selection and construction or representation by the media are weighed by the news values and newsworthiness. Basically, the selection of news is typically based on eight news values namely impact, timeliness, prominence, proximity, bizarre, conflict, proximity, and based on human interest (Caple & Bednarek, 2016; Caple, 2018).

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The offenders or victim profiles are crucial whenever crime news are reported. On this note, researchers agreed on the fact that foreign background /status adds newsworthiness of a crime event (Chang, 2010; Don & Lee, 2014; Hoops, Thomas, & Drzewiecka, 2015; Kagan & Kagan, 2015).-The foreign nationals are the ideal 'other' for media to associate with various negative issues. Becoming an ideal 'other' makes the media to portray foreign nationals as a significant problem to the nation. According to Pickering (2001), foreign nationals (in the Australian case they were particularly refugees and asylum seekers), were assumed as a 'deviant' problem.

This study explores news discourses revolving around foreign women in Malaysian crime reporting published during the pivotal time described above as it is informed by media othering of crime news subjects based on their nationality and gender. The main objective of this study is to explore the portrayals of foreign women in Malaysian English language crime reporting.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Othering**

The concept that underpinned this study is a philosophical concept called the othering. It is also known as otherness which means the criteria of being different in certain key aspects, and the being assumed as the out-group (Staszak, 2008). A person who is assumed as the other also was labeled as unique, exotic, and barbaric (Button & Reed, 1999; Staszak, 2008). The othering was primarily a philosophical explanation of different status. The othering emerged and initiated by Hegel (1967, as cited in Brons, 2015) when he explained the relationship between the slave and the owner, and it evolved by circling on the status of women in comparison to men in the 1940s (Debeouvir, 1949) which it was the birth of feminist philosophical view. Later, the concept of othering interestingly evolved on the criticism of the colonial treatment towards Muslims in Middle Eastern countries (Said, 1979, 2007). In addition to Debeouvir philosophical view on the othering of women, this study added her fundamental ideas of 'Othering' women to contemporary analysis on the 'Othering' of foreign women

Researches on the discourse of foreign national/immigrants in some way used this concept to describe racism, ethnocentrism, and prejudices towards foreign nationals as outsiders (Brown, 2018; Cooper, Blumel & Bunce, 2021; Griffith, 2015; Gonçalves & David, 2024; Guliani et al., 2020; Himmel & Baptista, 2020; Pare, 2022; Staszak, 2008). Media in particular, have been found to engage in othering of migrants (Chouliarki, 2020; Galiga & Lind, 2021; Martikainen & Sakki, 2021; Martins, 2021; Walter & Fazekas, 2023). With that, this study is conducted to justify the othering of foreign women, which to express them as different, they were constructed by the media as victims in crime news.

## Foreign Women in Crime News

Coverage of foreign women in brutal crime cases includes rape, domestic abuse, and human trafficking activities (Bhuyan & Velakupudi, 2013; Dibennardo, 2018; Leone, 2016). Past researches conducted in countries namely America, South Africa, and European countries also reported foreign women being the victims of crime events caused by their intimate relationships (Messing, Amanor-Boaudu, Cavanaugh, Glass & Campbell, 2013). Foreign women are vulnerable and becoming easy targets for predators among syndicates which leads them to be trapped in the sex slavery industry (Andrijesavic & Mai, 2016; Bhuyan & Velagapudi, 2013; Dibennardo, 2018; Menjivar & Salcido, 2002). It is even hard for them to seek help judicially as they have to abide by the law of the country that they sojourn.

From the aspect of the media, foreign women are assumed as a stranger, exotic, and barbaric to a certain extent, which storytelling about them as involved in crime news indeed newsworthy (Grove & Zwi, 2009; Kagan, 2015). Consequently, the knowledge disseminated by the powerful media on foreign women and crime initiated moral panic among the locals although they were reported as victims in the news (Dagistanli & Milivojevic, 2013).

It is noteworthy to explain here, the newsworthiness of victimizing foreign women by the media. Andrijasevic and Mai (2016) wrote about the representation of victimhood and slavery by the media in the modern era. Among the images are powerless, problematic, and vulnerable. She suggested the idea of modern slavery to explain how inequality among citizens of the world causes foreign women to be represented as ideal victims in the media. Foreign women repetitively reported as involved in trafficking, sex slave, and victims of abuse.

## Foreign women in Malaysia

Foreign women among asylum seekers have lack of voices in the media which cause them to be represented as threats to the locals, highly involved in illegal activities, and they were framed as invaders because of their increasing number (Don & Lee, 2014; Idrus & Ismail, 2013; Suppiah, Kaur, Arumugam, & Shanti, 2019). Besides, a study on foreign nationals and moral panic done in Malaysia stated that newspapers in Malaysia constructed foreign nationals as highly involved in crime events both as offenders and victims which cause moral panic among the public (Periyayya & Krishnan, 2012). Moreover, they were media discourse of foreign women in Malaysian as sex trafficking victims, which victims, however, represented as a threat to Malaysian social well-being (Misman et al., 2017; Suppiah & Kaur, 2018; Alkaff & McLellan, 2018). Malaysian media also engage in othering of foreign women even in non-criminal private matters (Yoong & Lee, 2023)

Foreign women's image and story are somehow depicted in daily crime news published by Malaysian newspapers. Crime news is assumed as a necessity of daily news consumption (Jewkes, 2005; Surrete, 2002). Also, in this virtual era, people share more crime reporting published by Malaysian newspapers using social media platforms (Wok & Misman, 2015).

Foreign women often constructed as victims in crime news because they were the other and the outsider (Griffith, 2015; Kagan, 2015; Misman, Adnan, & Firdaus, 2019). They were victims of unpredictable and numerous types of crime. Therefore, this study is conducted to analyze critically on how foreign women been depicted as victims of Malaysian crime reporting.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employs thematic discourse analysis to draw analysis and discussion (Van Dijk, 1988; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The techniques work by identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes that are socially constructed (Social constructionist epistemology). The technique could provide rich, detailed, and complex accounts of qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Discourses/ themes were identified with the assistance of NVivo 12 software. The crime reporting published by the four English language newspapers namely *The Star*, *The New Straits Times*, *The Sun*, and *The Malay Mail* over the period from January 2016 to February 2017 were listed and analyzed critically according to the themes. Van Dijk (1988) suggested to analyze critically a piece of news, the relevant structure has to be recognized which are the actors of the crime news. Later, a researcher would see the headlines, lead sentences, and lastly the body of news. In this case, the crime news that involved foreign nationals is chosen.

## **SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

The time frame of the study taken was between January 2016 to February 2017. Due to the force and demand by the general public, the government announced to freeze the hiring of foreign workers in February 2016 (*The Malay Mail*, Feb 19, 2016), but they held back the decision in April 2016 due to the need and demand of local businesses especially the construction and manufacturing field. “*Ban on foreign workers to be lifted, but with conditions*” (*The Malay Mail*, May 6, 2016). Ever since the government announced to hire more foreign workers, the discussion on the foreigners as the cause of social ills continued to erupt and more crime news mentioning foreign status/background was reported by the local media. It was an endless debate and discussion between the demand for public safety and the industrial need. At the same time, the media tend to stir the issue with crime news involving foreign women particularly. Crime reporting which was analyzed included standard news reports, features, and commentary articles.

## **ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

About 20 crime reporting published by *The Star*, *The New Straits Times*, *The Sun Daily*, and *The Malay Mail* was analyzed critically using the method discussed above. To answer the research questions, thematic discourse analysis is used. As Andrijasevic and Mai (2016) discussed on the exploitation of foreign women by the media, two main themes are developed based on their writing on this issue. The themes circling the issue that can be found in Malaysian crime reporting are foreign women being reported as victims due to trafficking representation and fictional representation.

### **Trafficking Representation**

First and foremost, trafficking means businesses or deals which human is the “goods”. A deeper definition often based on the phenomenon or several aspects (Esser & Dettmeijer-Vermeulen, 2016) and it is evolving too. Previously, transnational marriage and its common consequences namely domestic abuse or forced labour were considered as part of trafficking. Chuang (2014) and Shamir (2012) explained the connotation of trafficking in terms of the

labour force paradigm where it focuses on labour market regulation. Regardless, since most of the reporting chosen as the data were from the Malaysian Police Department or Malaysian Court proceedings, the crime events were charged under Malaysian law and constitution.

## Modern Slavery

Issues in trafficking have recently been elaborated and discussed within the rhetoric of slavery (Chuang, 2014) which is called *Modern Slavery*. It is called it is because we live in the modern world but slavery or practices similar to it still widely practiced around the globe. *Modern slavery* is often portrayed by the media as a simplistic solution instead of portraying more complex issues such as inequality in the modern era (Andrijasevic & Mai, 2016; Segrave, Milivojevic, & Pickering, 2018 ). Besides, some researchers commented *Modern Slavery* is somehow rhetoric initiated by the media. The victims among foreign women were framed as pitiful and vulnerable, therefore they were manipulated easily (Segrave et al.,2018). They were forced to work in irregular industries or being “goods” of the black market. Therefore, it seems that these foreign women were treated as a slave by the offenders of the crime. For instance, a crime reporting mentioned forcing foreign women to work in a resort spa at Johor Bahru, Johore.

The report, *Three elderly men charged with trafficking women for prostitution* (*The Star*, January 31, 2016) depicted local elderly in their 60s involved in trafficking foreign women. Offenders among the elderly were reported for sensational purposes. From the report, it stated the offenders smuggled the victims from their home-country namely Indonesia and Vietnam. The news narrated that three Vietnamese girls were under-age girls between 15 to 17 years old. Then, other victims saved were three Indonesian women. It is questionable here on who provides them with these foreign women to work in their spa. Nevertheless, the word force and illegal immigrants showed that these foreign women were treated like slaves despite living in an era where slavery was aborted or banned.

*“Massage parlour caretaker denies trafficking six women”* (*The Star*, September 8, 2016) also reported the exploitation of women by a massage parlor owner to gain profit. These two stories depicted foreign women as being exploited similarly the same as slavery practices despite living in the Malaysian peace environment.

This news portrayed the exploitation of foreign women in irregular jobs such as massage parlours and spas. The news showed that the owners of these parlours need to hire foreign women because they want to offer sex-related services to their customers and only foreign women can be forced and controlled to do the jobs. Their status as the other leads them to easily accept any negative instruction from their employers.

Another issue reported related to slavery in the modern world was on foreign women as victims of beggar syndicates wandering at key places in Malaysia. In a report *“Rounding up Beggars in Selangor”* (*The Star*, January 12, 2017), it represented issues of foreign women being beggars in Malaysia. The news narrated these foreign women as begging at public spots with infants or small kids with them. It stated that 1346 foreign beggars were caught with local Malaysian being the mastermind of this syndicate. Nevertheless, the news also claimed that a past case showed that a foreign beggar had saving up to RM18 000 in their savings account after a thorough investigation by the government body. From this news, we can see that the foreign beggars among women at first being victims of beggar syndicate run

by Malaysian, however, in the end, it seems that the foreign beggars themselves portrayed as getting a high income due to the begging activities which means them as victims also at fault on this situation.

On the other hand, “391 child beggars rescued from street since 2008” (*The Star*, June 16, 2016) and “Malaysian are too generous when it comes to beggars” (*New Straits Times*, April 23, 2016) portrayed beggars most of them aged below 18 years old wandering around key places in Malaysia and later saved by the Malaysian authorities. The first news story even depicted that the mastermind of the syndicate changed their tactic from manipulating kids foreign beggar to beggar among the foreign elderly not only to avoid from charged but to get more funds from the public. In contrast, the second story from NST newspaper represented foreign women among the Rohingyas with UNHCR cards actively involved in beggar syndicates in Malaysia. These two reports reminded the Malaysian public not to be too generous to avoid these foreign beggars population to increase since they were manipulated by syndicates.

The news stories on the begging syndicate depicted *Modern Slavery* rhetoric as foreign women once again manipulated by a syndicate to gain sympathy from the public to help them survive to live in Malaysia. These foreign beggars were not only forced to beg but they were trained on systematic techniques to get more money.

### **Gender Trafficking (Sex Industry)**

In discussing the sex industry, it so much affiliated to Gendering Trafficking representation by the media. Gendering trafficking was an idea referring to the phenomenon of foreign women being victims of sex trafficking cases (Segrave et al., 2018). Similar instances occurred in Malaysian crime reporting where it portrays foreign women as highly involved in sex trafficking activities. Whenever foreign women are reported, they usually reported as involved in sex-related crime events. Past researches affirmed that the sex industry in Malaysia often affiliated with foreign women (Suppiah et al., 2019)

In the news with the headline “Two accused of trafficking 11 foreign women for sex” (*The Star*, September 7, 2016), it informed the readers on two separated cases on sex trafficking cases. Both were charged under Anti-Trafficking in Person and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants Act. Both offenders were Malaysian. The victims were reported as being smuggled to work in two different beauty parlours. The victims of the first case were six Thai women. On the other hand, the second case reported that the offender tried to smuggle four women from Thailand and a woman from Laos. Beauty parlours and massage parlours commonly narrated as where these sex trafficking victims were saved by Malaysian authorities.

“Massage parlour caretaker denies trafficking six women” (*The Star*, September 8, 2016) exposed a Malaysian who owned a massage parlour offered the customers body-to-body massage and other erotic massage services done by foreign women. Six foreign women from Thailand were the victims of this case.

Foreign women also involved in the sex industry as they were here to work in prostitution activities. “Four foreign women rescued from the vice den” (*The Sun Daily*, September 27, 2016) revealed that two Vietnamese and two women from Thailand were rescued from prostitution syndicate at a hotel in Penang, Malaysia. The news portrayed the foreign victims were underage at the youngest victims were only 16 years old. Vice den is a metaphor that usually refers to a place that offers sex-related services. We can see here that the reporting

portrayed them as being rescued by the authority seemingly depicted them as pathetic and weak.

In a report, *“Malacca arrests 9 foreigners in clampdown on prostitution, gambling”* (*New Straits Times*, November 1, 2016) reported seven Vietnamese women, a Thai woman and a Nepalese man nabbed for staying illegally in Malaysia. Foreign women from Thailand and Vietnam commonly associated with sex-related industries in Malaysia. Questions arise is that is there a high demand for foreign women among the Thais and Vietnam or there might be a larger sex trafficking industry that involved several countries that operated within supply and demand circulation.

Another worrying issue among foreign women as victims under the sex industry sub-theme is that the involvement of foreign women among college students in prostitution activities in Malaysia. A report, *“College girls available for a price at budget hotels”* (*The Star*, September 3, 2016) exposed the disgusting reality of college students among Thai and Vietnamese women as well be offering sexual services through online booking. The business had been actively operated at budget hotels around Malacca for two years. The news stated that each session cost RM250 to RM300 for locals while the foreigners charged between RM165 and RM200. The issue of sex trade among foreign college girls also related to the previous discussion on supply and demand circulation since the mastermind behind this case were two brothers from Malaysia. Apart from that, this news also is seen not only showing the college girls as victims, however depicting the foreign girls as manipulating their student visa to involve in the Malaysian sex industry.

A point to note, in reporting on sex trafficking or begging syndicate, Malaysian crime reporting seemingly portraying on the number of the victims. It will display an overgeneralization that they are many foreign women residing Malaysia and most of them involved in criminal rings. This thing happens because of lack of voices from their part. Most The main source of crime news in Malaysia is typically from the authority (Don & Lee, 2014).

### **Fictional Representation**

The second main theme which ought to be discussed is fictional representation by Malaysian crime reporting regarding foreign women as victims. Fictional representation is coined from the researches stating that foreign women depicted as victims in the media as a fictive construct (Cohen, 2002; Kagan, 2015) and media creating fiction on foreign women as the ideal victim (Dagistanli & Milivojevic, 2013). Analysis of the data showed that foreign women were typical victims of Malaysian English crime reporting. They were the ideal victims because of their foreign status, which will increase the news-value of crime reporting. It was a fiction as well to only depicting women as victims which are called the feminization of victimization (Segrave et al., 2018) meaning that they were easily being targeted to play the role of victim in a crime news narrative. The traits portrayed are foreign women as helpless and defenseless, therefore being the target of the criminal. There are two sub-themes conversed under fictional representation which are the proliferation of conflict and racialized narratives

### **Proliferation of Conflict**

Conflicts occurred due to the inequality and coping process of foreign women in an alien world (Andrijasevic & Mai, 2016). Thus, the proliferation of conflicts derived from the discussion

on foreign women being victims of cases such as domestic abuse, intimate relationships, and also burglary and even murder cases. The foreign status of these women causes inequality in terms of treatment and imbalance relationships (Bhuyan & Velagapudi, 2013; Leona, 2016; Menjivar & Salcido, 2002; Messing et al., 2013). Also, domestic abuse among foreign women commonly occurred in various countries due to their foreign status. It was harder for them to seek help due to unsupportive conditions such as language barriers, isolation from family and friends, uncertain immigration status, and unresponsive actions from the authority of the country of origin (Menjivar & Salcido, 2002). With this, foreign women in Malaysia been facing the same hardships as reported by Malaysian media. However, due to lack of voice from foreign women itself as the victims, the reporting narrated on the surface of the cases, for instance, the bad condition of the victims and why the victims were abused or murdered, yet not in-depth enough on why they did not seek for help earlier.

The headline of *“Man stabbed in crime of passion”* (*The Star*, September 10, 2016) portrayed that some foreign women developed intimate relationships with local men resulting in them being victims of violent incidents. In this crime report, a Vietnamese woman stabbed her husband to death as a defence act after a series of violent abuse by her husband who is Malaysian. On the side note, foreign women also typically depicted as victims of murder by their partner due to the unstable condition in the family.

A report with the headline, *“Man who killed self and wife may have been depressed”* (*The Star*, February 1, 2016). Portrayed a Thai woman as being slit to death by her depressed husband. The news revealed that the family had a financial problem due to gambling. The incident occurred after a scene of a quarrel between the couple. These narrations showed that foreign women usually depended on their local husbands or intimate partner to survive in Malaysia. Their dependency causes them to be subject to domestic abuse and so on. Being in a foreign country led foreign women to establish relationships with the wrong people.

*“Two arrested for abducting and dumping Indonesian woman into Klang river”* (*The Sun Daily*, February 7, 2017) narrated a complex story about a foreign woman from Indonesia who was abducted and dumped into Klang river by two Malaysian men. She was rescued by a passer-by seeing something moving was floating on the river. She was barely conscious with her legs tied during the rescue. She claimed that her abductors used an iron rode to assault her before the incident. The initial cause of the incident is that she had an intimate relationship with her assaulters’ relative. The story depicted the Malaysian judgemental view of having a relationship with foreign women which cause foreign women to be a victim.

Foreign women also become an ideal victim in cases like domestic rape where the rapist was among their employers. *“Man nabbed for molesting maid”* (*The Star*, January 21, 2016), saw a report on a maid from Cambodia who had been molested by her employer for almost four months. The news described the disgusting reality of a 63-year-old man been molested and rape her whenever his family (offender) members were not home.

In regards to maid case, *“Jailed for causing the death of six-month-old”* (*The star*, October 28, 2016) exposed a sad narration of an Indonesian woman who works as a maid for the offender. She delivered a baby boy as a result of an intimate relationship with her boyfriend who also a foreigner. The offender who is a 43-year-old man took her son claiming that he will take care of the new-born baby. Later, she was told that her son was missing and reported to Police on this. Interrogations by the police resulted in them to found the body of the baby composed near Genting Highland. The baby was wrapped in a plastic bag and

luggage. Therefore, the crime report portrayed foreign women as having a limited voice or limited choice in their daily life. As mentioned earlier, they were treated as slave due to limitation of power living in foreign country, and it was hard for them to seek proper help because of their legal status too.

Foreign women also reported as a victim of a robbery incident since they were narrated as weak and vulnerable. *"Video of Bangsar snatch theft goes viral"* (*The Sun Daily*, January 13, 2016) reported a Japanese housewife who was about to leave a shopping mall dragged on the ground after a motorcyclist grabbed her belongings in front of the mall. The incident became a viral around Malaysia due to CCTV footage circulation to find the criminals. The report portrayed foreign women specifically among the expatriates to be victims of snatch theft where the perpetrators aiming luxury areas in Malaysia. Foreign women among expatriates and tourists rarely reported in Malaysian crime news. Nonetheless, they were usually portrayed positively compare to foreign women among the immigrants.

### **Racialized Narratives**

On the other note, the fiction represented were stereotypically narrated where certain race or nationality depicted to involve in certain crime cases. De Noronha (2015) argued on the normalization of criminalizing people based on race or nationality by linking them with a particular crime where he gave an example such as Africans whom always associated with drug dealing activities. In this matter, media as well been reporting foreign women of certain nationalities with certain crime events (Andrijasevic & Mai, 2016; Dibennardo, 2018; Leone, 2016). Examples of Malaysian cases are that foreign women from Thailand, Vietnam, and China were reported being victims in the sex industry.

*"Alleged sex workers nabbed, 70 condoms found at health spa"* (*The Star*, April 22, 2016) reported 14 female foreign nationals as victims of sex-related activities. They were reported as originated from Thailand, Vietnam, and China. *"China dolls turned violent"* (*The Star*, July 23, 2016) portrayed drunk sex workers among Chinese nationals assaulted police officers during a raid. 'China doll' is a universal metaphor to portray Chinese national prostitutes.

Other than that, foreign women from Indonesia typically reported as maids in Malaysia. Being a maid resulted in them to be controlled by their employers. Indonesian maids were framed as weak and vulnerable and being an easy target of abuse and anger. *"Woman surrenders over Mutiara Damansara maid abuse"* (*The Star*, December 22, 2016) reported that a 19 years-old Indonesian maid being a victim of violence by her employer for almost two weeks. She was found unconscious by a security guard under a drain. In a similar note, *"Datin who abused maid slapped with no-fly order"* (*The Malay Mail*, March 22, 2018) revealed another case of maid abuse in Malaysia where the Indonesian woman was assaulted using a kitchen knife, steel mop, a cloth hanger, and an umbrella. The victims suffered severe injuries to her head, hands, legs, and internal organs. *"Businessman sentenced to 14 years in jail for raping maid"* (*The Star*, May 18, 2016) narrated another sad story on an Indonesian maid who had been raped by her employee. It was stated that the maid was still a teenager during the occurrence. What made the story a sensational story is that the offender already had six children and two wives.

On the other hand, Foreign women from Myanmar (the Rohingyas) and Bangladesh were attributed as involved in beggars syndicate. Most of the victims saved from this syndicate were typically women and children from these regions. *"Community centre a haven*

for Rohingya in Malaysia" (*The Sun Daily*, December 27, 2016) described foreign women among the Rohingyas fled Myanmar to escape from oppression. However, their movement here in Malaysia cause them to be the victims of human trafficking syndicates, some were raped and sexually abuse. Their small kids become victims of child labour. Many of Rohingya women and children were exploited in huge begging syndicate, therefore non-governmental bodies initiated a safe shelter for them.

"Wanita MCA: Dhaka Dolls arrival, not a cause for concern" (*The Star*, February 15, 2016) was a portrayal of the concern by the public on the increasing population of foreign women from Bangladesh. There were brought here to fill in some sectors such as cleaning services and manufacturing industries. However, they were concerns voiced by the Malaysian public on these foreign women involved in illegal activities namely begging around with their kids. Some of them were wandering in dangerous areas such as busy roads and traffic lights selling something.

Thus, these are racialized narratives by the Malaysian English newspapers represented certain races with certain crime events.

### **Stereotypical Representation**

Stereotypical representation refers to the voice of news which seemingly the same whenever foreign women are reported. Foreign women also associated with the same crime cases all over again namely murder/assault, rape, and abuse. Foreign women were framed as a stranger, therefore their other status increases the news value whenever they were linked with gruesome cases (Leone, 2016).

"Civil servant among two arrested over an alleged rape in Miri" (*The Malay Mail*, December 21, 2016) narrated news about a foreign woman from Indonesia who had been raped by two men claiming themselves as policemen. Their claims caused the foreign woman to adhere to their instructions to follow them in the car. They later gang-raped her and left her on the side road. The crime reporting showed that foreign women as the other, easily exploited by the in-group (Malaysian), who want to take advantage of them.

Other than that, murder cases were also stereotypically related to foreign women. "Employers arrested after Indonesian maid dies following alleged abuse" (*The Star*, February 27, 2016) saw a case of Indonesian maid murder by her employer. She was being abused to death since her post-mortem procedure reported that she suffered from several injuries such as fractures of her ribs and bruises. Her employee denied the allegation and claimed that she fell at home.

"Positive steps to end human trafficking" (*The New Straits Times*, August 26, 2016) reported on international solutions to curb human trafficking activities. Malaysia too is said as actively taking part in these initiatives. Part of this reporting describing foreign women in Malaysia become victims of abuse, some died due to bad treatment during their transfer process into Malaysia. This news revealed poor fate these foreign women have to face, yet being the other in a country that they sojourn, the media somehow set negative images on this foreign woman despite difficulties that they had suffered. As discussed before, foreign women from certain nations also were stereotyped with a certain type of crime.

Additionally, Malaysian crime reporting also represented foreign women with metaphors that initiated typical negative images towards them namely "China doll", which

universally refers to Chinese prostitutes, “Dhaka doll” referring to Bangladeshi women who been in Malaysia to work, but some involve in begging syndicate.

On the other hand, this phenomenon occurred because the sources of the crime news were from the police department, court proceedings, and following discussion in the Malaysian parliament hall. Malaysian crime reporting typically reporting Malaysian police department or Malaysian Immigration Department took action to curb the human trafficking problems or illegal immigrants -these two among the frequently reported cases involving foreign women and foreign nationals as a whole. Therefore, the voices from authority were usually used in crime reporting instead of voices from the person involved in the crime events (Don & Lee, 2014; Misman, Adnan, Firdaus, & Ahmad, 2017; Suppiah & Kaur, 2018). It was typical for crime reporting involving foreign women to portray foreign women as victims and later being saved by the police department, then the offenders were usually local men or foreign men. The police usually depicted as the saviour of these foreign women.

“*Four foreign women rescued from vice den*” (*The Sun Daily*, September 27, 2016) have a lead sentence stated that, **‘The police have rescued four foreign women who were believed to have been forced into prostitution at a hotel here’**. The term rescue stereotyping a positive image of police who saved these foreign women. Positive stereotyping of the member of the country is common to represent the police as the in-group whereas the foreign women who forced into prostitution are the out-group. Therefore, they had to do odd jobs that rarely be done by the locals to survive here.

Also, “*Two accused for trafficking 11 foreign women for sex*” (*The Star*, September 11, 2016) with lead sentence – ‘Two men were charged individually at the Sessions Court here for trafficking 11 foreign women for sexual exploitation’ portray local men as being charged in court after being nabbed by police to smuggle and forced foreign women into sex-related activities. A man usually depicted as the exploiter of foreign women which initiated a belief of gender inequality in the Malaysian crime landscape. Inequality becomes a major cause of media portrayal of foreign women exploitation in crime activities (Andrijasevic & Mai, 2016).

## CONCLUSION

Nonetheless, foreign women were reported in Malaysian English crime reporting because they are considered as peculiar (part of news-value) since they were the out-group. The themes discussed showed that foreign women seemingly the ideal victims in crime reporting due to their foreign status. Besides, most of the news selected for the analysis mentioned their foreign status. Their status added newsworthiness to crime reporting specifically whenever their countries of origin are exposed. About this, Segrave et al. (2018) suggested the idea of the *feminisation of victimisation* to describe women among immigrants as ideal victims and frequently reported by the media despite the reality that both women and men equally can be victims in crime events. The crime reporting typically represented them as vulnerable, weak, and easily exploited by various syndicates in cases such as human trafficking and controlled by others such as maid abuse cases. They were also defenceless which made them being in the middle of various conflicts that lead to crime events. Hence, foreign women were treated differently by the Malaysian media. It can be called as ‘*Media Othering*’.

Despite all, *Modern Slavery* rhetoric which coined by researches (Andrijasevic & Mai, 2016) also exists here in the Malaysian landscape. Malaysian crime reporting also initiated the depiction of foreign women as easily manipulated and exploited similarly to slavery

practices. Concerning that, foreign women in Malaysia represented within the rhetoric of *Modern Slavery* as they were the other. Numerous human exploitation activities occurred all over the world including Malaysia. It is important to note that, a bigger issue should be exposed by the media other than merely depicting pitiful and negative images of foreign women by reporting them in various crime reporting. This is because foreign women's involvement in crime cases exhibited bigger issues such as why there is a high demand for foreign women to work as sex slaves in Malaysia? They were forced into illegal activities or smuggled for a price similar to 'goods'. The media should report on the vice circulation of sex trafficking rings occurred here or on the manipulation of foreign women to gain funds from the public. With this, Malaysians can contribute to the effort to combat criminal activities involving foreign women. On the side note, human trafficking does not only involve women as portrayed by the media, which can be called as gendering trafficking (Segrave, et al., 2018) as foreign men also apparently become victims of human trafficking nowadays.

In relation to the reading of Button and Reed's (1999) book of narration on foreign women in British Literature, it seems that foreign women in Malaysia also are assumed as the other, somehow discriminated and alienated as they were introduced to the public through the crime news.

It is crucial to note that crime reporting should portray the equal voice of both victims and offenders of the crime to avoid prejudices towards foreign women. Don and Lee (2014) affirmed that too much control of the media by the Malaysian government cause the journalist to report the surface story of a crime event. Most of the news were voices from the authority. This is because the authorities were the main sources of this crime reporting. It showed the inequality of the report itself.

Overall, there is an increasing number of foreign women residing in Malaysia and the report of involvement in criminal activities portraying them as problematic. Daily crime reporting eventually gives effects to readers' perception towards foreign women because some local Malaysian get information about foreign nationals specifically foreign women from what they read in the news. Stereotypical representation of foreign women in crime reporting may cause prejudice and negative attribution towards them which in the end will lead to moral panics (Periyayya & Krishnan, 2012) or worst, xenophobic Malaysian. Foreign women are not only be seen here as victims but also an as dangerous threats.

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