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FRAMING THE STATELESS CHILDREN IN SABAH: AN EXAMINATION THROUGH CORPUS ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

In 2018, after winning the Malaysian general elections, Pakatan Harapan (PH) offered a promise to address the issue of statelessness. To better understand the premise of this promise, this study analysed the framing of stateless children in Sabah by conducting a corpus analysis of news articles published online in 2019. Specifically, the researchers created a corpus of 80 news articles from local and regional news portals that provided free access to their news items. The corpus was analysed using AntConc, and five keywords were identified based on their keyness level, which was determined through a comparison with the top 5,000 words from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). The keywords served as frames, and they were further conceptualised through their collocates. Through the analysis of the frames and their characterisation, stateless children were portrayed as having restrictive access to education and healthcare, and without the possibility of being legally adopted. Furthermore, while help has been rendered by different agencies or key individuals, this has been done based on the grounds of morality that aim to spur charitable actions, but without offering any impactful legal solutions. Another valuable finding from this study was that all the news portals analysed

shared the same sentiment against the stateless children, similar to that held by PH. Not only do the findings of this study provide a comprehensive view through the analysis of various news portals, it also offers evidence explaining why the stateless population and children in Sabah have been perpetually stuck in statelessness.

Keywords: Stateless children, Sabah, media framing, corpus analysis, online news

INTRODUCTION

> To date, the people of Sabah are still facing threats related to the presence of foreigners. The practices of the ruling government have led to these illegal immigrants having identity cards to pass off as locals. The Pakatan Harapan Government will set up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to achieve a fair solution to the issue of identity card which have been granted to illegal immigrants, thereby ensuring that voters' lists in Sabah can be cleared. (Pakatan Harapan 2018: 98).

Pakatan Harapan (PH) was the coalition party that won the Malaysian general elections in 2018. As part of their campaign strategy, they listed 100 promises to be fulfilled within five years. The excerpt above was one of them – Promise 46: Protecting the Sovereignty and Security of Sabah, which highlights a long-standing issue affecting Sabah. To some, this promise seemed to offer a fair resolution for the management of the stateless population; nonetheless, it maintains the discourse of securitisation (Dollah and Abdullah 2018) and casts the population as a threat (Mohd Don and Lee 2014). A quick glance through Malaysian news articles reflect the persistence of such discourse. Furthermore, from these reports and relevant research findings, the stateless population in Sabah and in Malaysia have been framed as residing in a complex and vulnerable realm (e.g., Allerton 2014, 2017, 2018, 2020; Acciaioli et al. 2017; Lasimbang et al. 2016; Lumayag 2016).

While Mohd Don and Lee (2014) had examined select media's representation of voices in discourse pertaining to the stateless population, no known study had considered the reiteration of a view or frame, towards the stateless population in Sabah. There has been, however, some recent work on the framing of Rohingya refugees in West Malaysia (e.g., Ehmer and Kothari 2020). Framing enacted by the media is crucial, as it not only necessitates a response by the higher authorities, but it also influences views held and potential actions taken by the public. The framing of an issue needs

to be persistent, but more importantly, it needs to present controversy that prompts a response (Dekker and Scholten 2017; Crow and Lawlor 2016). Bearing in mind the media's potential in constructing a frame to represent the stateless, as well as the actors involved, our study seeks to examine the framing of the stateless population in Sabah, particularly the children.

This study employs corpus analysis to examine the framing of the stateless children in Sabah. With the help of a corpus tool (AntConc), this study examines frames employed by online news reports in the year 2019, a few months after PH took power in 2018. For our study, framing is deemed appropriate as it considers cognitive processes in the discursive representation of an issue. This includes "moral evaluations, causal reasoning, appeals to principles, and recommendations for treatment of problems" (Weaver 2007: 146). It also considers the strategic use of discursive features in media, whereas its relative concept, agenda setting, considers the spatial and chronological development of an issue (see Park et al. 2012). Analysing media through agenda framing may reveal issues critical to a community (Chew et al. 2012), and in some circumstances, it "reflects a conflict between dominant social norms and efforts for change" (Yang and Ishak 2014: 273). It may also reveal biases held by the media or those assuming positions of power (Entman 2007). The study of media framing may be facilitated with the availability of corpus tools (such as AntConc), which allow researchers to draw insights from larger sets of data to "make more confident claims based on the appearance of quantitative patterns" (Baker 2012: 255) but still bearing in mind that this does not eliminate potential bias in a researcher's interpretation of quantitative data. The use of corpus tools is aligned with the principles of framing, that is, the corpus-based identification of recurring discourse and meaning may point towards salient frames employed by media. A corpus-based approach is valuable, not to mention useful, in its ability to offer multiple perspectives regarding a group of people, including the stateless population, refugees, or asylum seekers. Baker and McEnery (2005) further argue that through a corpus approach, language or discourse strategies used to establish a particular frame may be identified, especially when complemented with qualitative analyses, which can provide a fuller picture as to why a particular frame may be salient. Examples of other recent studies that utilised corpus as its tool for identifying framing are Gui's (2021) study regarding media framing of efforts to combat COVID-19 in China, and Ho's (2019) study examining the use and collocations of words in the framing of the 2008 global financial crises.

STATELESSNESS IN SABAH: FACTORS AND IMPACT

To understand the framing of the stateless children in Sabah, we need to first consider factors that contribute to statelessness. An outstanding issue is the disruption imposed upon the historical mobility of the stateless population. This was instigated during the colonial era, when borders between nation-states were drawn arbitrarily. This division of nation-states disregarded the livelihoods of many, who routinely move across land and oceans for social and trading purposes (Acciaioli et al. 2017). Though these people may have assimilated into the local practices and population, statelessness seems inescapable, even across generations. Another issue contributing to statelessness is the principle of *jus sanguinis*, which stipulates that citizenship is granted based upon both or one parent being a legal citizen (Allerton 2017). Nonetheless, this has only been applicable to Malaysian fathers, as seen in reports of children whose mothers are Malaysian, but with a foreign father without legal documents, having been denied citizenship (Buang 2019).

Other factors for statelessness are the promise of income and meeting familial obligations. These are illustrated in Allerton's (2020) ethnographic work on stateless families who had migrated to Sabah years ago (some even a generation or two ago), who feel "stuck" in jobs which they think are the only options available to them. They choose to continue working and living in Sabah to provide financial support to their immediate and extended families back in their home countries. The idea that remaining in Sabah for economic gains, despite being stateless, is also ingrained in the discourse of the local economy, especially among employers who advocate for the stateless to remain as a source of cheap labour. Moreover, local employers believe that Sabah will suffer considerably if and when these undocumented workers are detained and sent away. To this end, Dollah and Abdullah (2018) surmised that no drastic actions have been taken since *Ops Nyah II* in 2004 and 2005.

As a result of these factors, the stateless population has restricted access to amenities such as education and healthcare. This affects children of foreign workers (Pisanò 2019), as well as the locals who live in rural areas (Miwil 2019). While there are cases where stateless families' children return to their home country for education opportunities (e.g., Allerton 2020), there are still many who remain in Sabah. For these children, there is the option of attending alternative learning centres. Nonetheless, the fear of being caught by the authorities deters regular class attendance (Lumayag 2016). Furthermore, education centres may not receive support and face dire

restrictions imposed by the authorities. Similarly, government subsidised healthcare is also highly restricted. As a foreigner, seeking healthcare incurs double (or more) the amount paid by a local (Lasimbang et al. 2016). While healthcare was recently introduced as part of migrant workers' social security scheme, access is at a high cost and it still requires proper documentation. Even those with proper documentation, such as valid passports, may find difficulty accessing healthcare as there are employers who withhold their workers' travel documents (Loganathan et al. 2019; see also Chuah et al. 2018). These workers and their families may also avoid government hospitals, as it is a requirement to report undocumented individuals seeking medical help (Barua et al. 2019). Hence, to steer clear of brush-ins with the authorities, stateless families may prefer private clinics which may not require identification (Lasimbang et al. 2016) or they may even wait to consult with a traveling (traditional) doctor from their home country (Loganathan et al. 2019).

MEDIA FRAMING OF STATELESSNESS IN SABAH

Based on the discussion so far, it becomes apparent that views regarding the stateless are not entirely positive. For instance, Allerton (2017) reported that stateless children are typically labelled as "street kids", which brings the connotation of a "menace to the public" (see also Dollah and Abdullah 2018). The labelling of stateless children as underaged individuals without a proper roof over their heads renders the very existence of stateless children an impossibility, and is further exacerbated by the fact that "immigration and other laws deny their [stateless children's] existence, and, on the other hand, by the public and political discourse that portrays them as an unsolvable problem" (Allerton 2018: 1087). Furthermore, the negative sentiment held by the public may be fuelled by the media's portrayal of the stateless as being inferior and dangerous (Acciaioli et al. 2017). Mohd Don and Lee (2014) found that media often create a distance between the elites (people of power in the government) as the representative voice of the nation, and the stateless. This implicitly creates a dissonance but with overt results—"us", the nation as good and "them", the stateless as bad (see also Ehmer and Kothari 2020). The stateless population is also blamed for political manipulations resulting in the jeopardisation of Sabah's autonomy (Allerton 2017), where they are accused of receiving illicit residence status and subsequently voting rights. This portrayal of the stateless

as a threat may have reached a saturation point, to which two instances of securitisation (*Ops Nyah*) against the undocumented population were carried out in the early 2000s (Dollah and Abdullah 2018). Nevertheless, the explicit negative disposition towards the stateless has appeared to become dormant, as Sabah has seemingly relaxed its implementation and monitoring policies. This stands in contrast with the initiative of PH, which pledged to securitise immigrants. Furthermore, in spite of the negative perceptions held towards stateless children, there are also those who attempt to provide support. Even though these attempts may be noble, the support falls short as it is driven only by a morality of care, which does not lead to any real change to alleviate these children's legal conundrum (Boyden 2009). This may be linked to the government's lack of political will to recognise the problem of statelessness in Malaysia (Allerton 2017). Failure to grasp the notion of statelessness is also observed among the children themselves, as seen in Allerton's ethnographic work (2014). To these children, statelessness only means the lack of certain documents that safeguard them from deportation and allow them access to public amenities.

How the stateless population in Sabah is framed is not surprising, especially since we can observe similar media framings about the stateless population, asylum seekers, or refugees in other parts of the world. For instance, Rasinger (2010) reported Lithuanian immigrants being framed negatively by the media and were perceived as a threat to the nation (see also Baker et al. 2008; Vu and Lynn 2020). This is also illustrated through the study of Burroughs (2015), where the persistent negative description of immigrants festered a call for the government to remove them. Through her analysis, Burroughs also found that asylum seekers are referred similarly to those who had entered Ireland (and the EU) illegally, which, unfortunately delegitimises their asylum claims. Besides the examination of frames, research on immigrants in print media have been conducted through topoi analysis (e.g., Burroughs 2015), transitivity approach, i.e., the representation of one's experience through discourse (e.g., Rasinger 2010), and critical discourse analysis (e.g., KhosraviNik 2010).

What we have presented so far points towards the role that media plays in perpetuating a perspective, or a frame, where power is conceived and (re)configured through the production of a specific meaning in discourse. A frame is most effective when it becomes salient, as the frame is ultimately taken for granted as a natural means to think of an issue. The salience of a frame may be constructed through the regularity of reporting, or the characterisation of an issue (Jasperson et al. 1998).

The salient characterisation of an issue, especially when angled from a controversial point of view, may spur public reaction, seen through critical discussions online (Lagason and Loo 2019) and possibly action (Morrison 2017). Ultimately, salient frames enable authorities to legitimise actions, some of which centre upon enacting inequality and exclusion, such as the case of handling illegal immigrants or the stateless population (e.g., Burroughs 2015).

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This study aims to examine frames employed by online news reports regarding the stateless children in Sabah. It is hoped that through a corpus approach, we offer a more encompassing view regarding the issue of statelessness and reaffirm what other research studies had found. We used corpus analysis to identify frames through keywords and subsequently, characterised them by their collocates, which are the conceptual associations that construct a characterisation for an understanding of the framing. The examination of collocation can be fruitful, especially for studies that are taking a critical stance. This is because through collocations, researchers are provided with an "objective sense of the themes and associations that are embedded in words due to their continual pairing with other words" (Baker and McEnery 2005: 223). This will subsequently offer evidence to support perceived biasness in media reporting. Furthermore, according to Halliday and Hasan (1976: 286), collocation denotes words that are highly likely to "share the same lexical environment" (as cited in Michael et al. 2013).

Since our interest was borne out of PH's stated promise to address the stateless population, we decided to collect online news articles published from January to December of 2019. This period is approximately six months after PH won the general elections. The keywords used to search for news articles were "Sabah", "stateless", and "children". Articles were searched through Google News, and only those which were freely accessible will be retrieved (see also Gui 2021). At this juncture, we should point out that news portals would have certain political leanings, shaped by their parent company or sponsors. This is exemplified in studies such as that by Tham et al. (2020), who found that radio stations operated by the national broadcaster, Radio Television Malaysia (RTM), were pro-Barisan Nasional (BN); the study of Ehmer and Kothari (2020), who found that *The Star*

reflected the Malaysian government's stance on the Rohingya refugees, which was perceived as a threat to the nation's society and sovereignty; or the study of Yang and Ishak (2014), which reported that news agencies such as *Utusan Malaysia* supported the government's stance, *The Star* published views from across the aisles, and *MalaysiaKini* published more on the voices critical towards the government. As our study took a corpus approach, which aims to construct a wider and comprehensive picture, we included all the news articles that were published within our designated time period, and those that were accessible for free. We were able to collect a total of 80 articles published within 2019, by 14 local and international online news portals (see Table 1).

Table 1: News portals and number of articles retrieved

No.	News portal	Number of news articles
1	Borneo Today	1
2	Channel News Asia	1
3	Daily Express	7
4	Free Malaysia Today	21
5	Malay Mail	5
6	Malaysia Kini	8
7	New Sabah Times	1
8	New Straits Times	10
9	South China Morning Post	1
10	The Borneo Post	4
11	The Malaysian Insight	1
12	The Star	18
13	The Sun Daily	1
14	Today Online	1

Prior to analysis, the selected articles were prepared. Specifically, text formatting in the news articles was removed to ensure that only meaningful words were analysed (there were 11 rounds of data preparation). After data preparation, our corpus size came to 45,680 unique words. The subsequent analysis comprised of two steps. First, keywords were identified through comparison with a reference corpus on AntConc. Specifically, the top 5,000 words from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA n.d.) were used as a benchmark for comparison, which was subsequently loaded into AntConc. Aside from its size of more than one billion words, COCA also offered a wide coverage of different genres

(e.g., spoken, fiction, academic texts, and newspapers). COCA was also last updated in 2019, the year our data came from. The keywords that were identified were determined to be significant based on their keyness (log-likelihood) and effect size. The analysis of keyness through log-likelihood assumes difference of words between corpora. In the case of a high log-likelihood score, it would then be safe to suggest that a word would have a significant relative frequency, indicating a disparity in words used. Keyness, then, would identify words significant to a specific corpus. Effect size, on the other hand, considers the difference between frequencies from two corpora of a word (Pojanapunya and Todd 2018).

Second, we examined collocates within the span of five words to the left and right of the keywords. The word span is considered sufficient due to the genre being examined, that is, the news report genre which has shorter sentences. Our examination was guided by Pojanapunya (2016), wherein collocates with significant Mutual Information (MI) scores contribute to the construction of conceptual associations of keywords. The collocates were ranked according to its MI scores, with scores higher than 5 representing stronger conceptual associations (Brouwer et al. 2017; Xiao 2015). In other words, the frames and their constituents can be gleaned through keywords' association with other terms. It should be noted, that while MI scores may be high, the frequency of occurrence of a collocate might appear low, with the possibility of even one occurrence. Despite a low frequency, Baker and McEnery (2005) argue that the collocate is still a deliberate choice that is made, which will inadvertently contribute to the connotative meanings of keywords, as well as the overall discourse. The significance of low frequency collocates, but with high MI scores, is also supported by Gabrielatos and Baker (2008: 11), who argued that "low-frequency words are usually content words (nouns, adjectives, and verbs), which are the word classes that can *more clearly* [emphasis added] indicate semantic/discourse prosodies or topics/*topoi*". Hence, collocates that appear sparsely can still be highly insightful, especially when one is keen to understand the nuances or undertones of media discourse, especially those with a hint of bias.

FINDINGS

We generated a list of keywords through a comparison with the top 5,000 words from COCA, which yielded the keywords in Table 2. These keywords served as the frames to be analysed in our study.

Table 2: Key nouns and adjectives

Frequency	Keyness	Effect	Keyword
489	+8689.68	0.0212	children
397	+7054.01	0.0172	stateless
141	+2504.53	0.0062	parents
223	+2070.49	0.0087	citizenship
104	+1847.23	0.0045	rights

The frames consist of content words, which included nouns and adjectives, which had a high frequency, keyness (log-likelihood), and effect size (see Table 2). In the analysis of our corpus, it is not surprising to see that "children" and "stateless" emerged as key, since they were our search terms. What is of interest, though, were frames that may provide further insights, such as "parents", "citizenship", and "rights" regarding the stateless children in Sabah. From each frame in Table 2, we examined their top five collocates, ranked according to MI scores. As mentioned previously, it may be the case that collocates will have a high MI score, yet occur infrequently (e.g., Gabrielatos and Baker 2008). This is not considered a problem as these collocates represent a deliberate choice of words that adds meaning to the keywords of a topic (Baker and McEnery 2005). The collocates may be nouns, adjectives, or verbs, as stated by Gabrielatos and Baker (2008). The collocates and their context of appearance help with the conceptualisation of frames, and subsequently construct an understanding of the frames. This furnishes an understanding of the saliency of a frame, as explained earlier, where it offers a characterisation of issues being examined (Jasperson et al. 1998). In the next section, Tables 3–7 provide information regarding each frame, which includes the collocates, accompanied by details of the collocates' frequency, MI score, and at least one context of appearance, where the keywords are italicised and underlined, while the collocates are underlined.

Table 3: "Children" and its collocates

Children				
Rank	Frequency	MI Score	Collocate	Context
1	5	7.86751	hidden	The Asia Foundation described these hidden *children* as among the country's most vulnerable. They are offspring of migrant workers from the Philippines, Indonesia, or the Bajau Laut nomadic people.
2	2	7.54558	sizeable	While the government of Malaysia has shown tremendous commitment towards ensuring the protection of children in Malaysia, stateless *children* remain a sizeable category of *children* who are not afforded adequate protection.
3	2	7.54558	elementary	Without elementary education, the *children* will continue to be vulnerable.
4	1	6.54558	youth	UNICEF and its partners will engage with *children* and youth in Malaysia to ensure their voices are heard and empower them to become agents of change for themselves…
5	1	6.54558	worked	Under MERCY and UNICEF, they have worked on immunisation for the *children* and were doing screening test on those going back to Philippines.

The frame "children" had a keyness level of +8689.68. Children is collocated with words such as "hidden", "sizeable", "elementary", "youth", and "worked". The MI scores of these collocates exceeded their frequency, which are considered high (Xiao 2015). When the contexts of appearance of these collocates were examined, the frame of "children" became more apparent. Not being given the opportunity for education is a persistent problem for the "sizeable" number of stateless children in Sabah. As reported by Allerton (2020: 456), these children "face systematic exclusion from public services, from Malaysian citizenship, and from different spaces of Sabahan life"; however, such exclusions have been denied by public officials. Similarly, there have been many children who are unable to complete their education, with many leaving their "elementary" education and becoming manual labourers (see also Farzana et al. 2020). The inability of stateless children to complete their formal education perhaps contributes to their invisibility, given that they have to disappear

from a more organised setting (i.e., school) into hidden spaces of illegal employment. This unfortunately contributes to stereotypes and discrimination, which subsequently perpetuates the maintenance of a discourse of securitisation (Idrus and Ismail 2013). Aside from restricted access to education, the stateless population, in general, has limited access to healthcare. They may be unaware of the health and welfare assistance available to them, or they do not have the linguistic means to communicate health concerns, or the financial means to pay for healthcare (see Chuah et al. 2018). Thus, NGOs have sought to improve the health of the stateless population, including "working" towards providing them with immunisation. To advocate for these stateless children, there have also been efforts to bring awareness of their plight among Malaysian "youth", in hopes that future generations may bring about positive changes. This may be promising, as it has been found that Malaysian youth have been more engaged with civic and moral causes, rather than those of which are political (Salman et al. 2017).

Table 4: "Stateless" and its collocates

Stateless				
Rank	Frequency	MI Score	Collocate	
1	4	7.26132	remaining	Remaining *stateless* will deprive children of many fundamental rights such as healthcare, welfare and other social services.
2	2	6.84628	wrangling	After years of legal wrangling, three *stateless* children who were born in Malaysia were given approval by the Home Ministry to register as Malaysian citizens.
3	1	6.84628	win	Malaysia-born but *stateless*, three kids win citizenship at doorstep to hearing
4	1	6.84628	wasting	Someone even accused *stateless* students of wasting school resources.
5	1	6.84628	vital	The inherited statelessness of the Bajau Laut seems arduous to resolve. It requires collaboration between Malaysia, Philippines and Indonesia to study the community's cultural diversity, complexity and mobility. But it is nevertheless vital, as being *stateless* leaves them excluded from basic protections and rights.

The next frame is "stateless", with a keyness level of +7054.01. For "stateless", some collocates with a high MI score are "remaining", "wrangling", "win", "wasting", and "vital". This frame reiterates and extends the framing of "children". In the frame of "stateless", children are reported to continue to "remain" vulnerable. This may be observed through the characterisation of the stateless population as "wasting" resources privileged for citizens. Allerton (2020) reported that since 2002, stateless children have been excluded from the public education system and access to subsidised healthcare (see also United Nations Human Rights Council 2009). This forces them into an endless cycle of statelessness, or as Allerton (2020) puts it, "being stuck".

Vulnerability is also prolonged because of the lack of means to resolve statelessness, of which the process is described as "wrangling". When children do gain citizenship, it is considered a "win". This victory is perhaps significant, given that there are systemic measures put in place, along with public discourse, that make the process impossibly challenging (Hoffstaedter 2014). Hence, gaining citizenship is a rarity. This can be observed among those who are historically seafarers or sea-nomads, who, even after establishing settlements many generations ago on the coast of Sabah, are still considered illegal and in need to be securitised (Acciaioli et al. 2017). Furthermore, statelessness is rendered even more complex due to the lack of, or minimal recognition of other nations, including Indonesia and the Philippines, as well as the unwillingness of the stateless population to seek recognition in their countries of origin (Allerton 2017). To address this issue, it is "vital" for Malaysia to cooperate with its neighbouring countries. However, cooperation may be difficult to achieve if the sentiment of the local society is not favourable. This is seen in the case of the Rohingya refugees, where the possibility of a cooperation may have reached a stalemate, as local media framed Myanmar as failing in its management of its internal affairs (Ehmer and Kothari 2020). In a similar vein, the stateless population in Sabah has often been portrayed as a group that needs to be securitised, as they have been perceived as a threat to the sovereignty of the state and to society's morality, which inadvertently festered racist sentiments among the local population (see Hilsdon 2006).

Table 5: "Parents" and its collocates

Parents				
Rank	Frequency	MI Score	Collocate	
1	2	9.33972	undermining	Adoption provisions for Muslim adoptive *parents* are more restrictive, <u>undermining</u> the right of adoptive *parents* to transfer their nationality to their adopted children.
2	1	8.33972	warrant	Angkatan Perpaduan Sabah (APS) finds it hard to swallaw [sic] that there are so many children in Sabah due to their *parents* marrying foreigners to <u>warrant</u> giving them documents.
3	1	8.33972	viable	This will help simplify the adoption process for prospective parents to adopt refugee children and also make adoption of Malaysian children by overseas *parents* a more <u>viable</u> option.
4	1	8.33972	standardising	Review and amend current adoption laws, particularly with regard to strengthening the review process for potential adoptive *parents* and <u>standardising</u> the process generally.
5	1	8.33972	sins	Don't punish these children because of the <u>sins</u> of their *parents*. If one of their parent is a Sabahan, especially the mother, then the child is a Sabahan. There are no two ways about it.

The next frame is "parents", with a keyness level of +2504.53. This frame is collocated with "undermining", "warrant", "viable", "standardising", and "sins". The collocates conceptualise the parents of stateless children in two distinct ways. First is the challenging process of becoming legal parents of stateless children through adoption. The adoption process requires "standardising" as it is more difficult for Muslim parents who have to go through more restrictions that "undermine" the possibility of adopting. Hence, it is not surprising that overseas adoption is not a "viable" option. This is discussed by Liew (2019), who illustrate how adoption fell through as the children did not have legal or citizenship rights to begin with (see also discussion by Mohd 2011, 2012). Second, the collocates refer to the challenges that the stateless children experience due to the "sins" of their parents. This is compounded by the hesitance of a local NGO

(*Parti Sejahtera Angkatan Perpaduan Sabah* – Sabah Wellbeing & Unity Front Party) to "warrant" help for the stateless children, due to their sheer number. It has been difficult to approximate the number of stateless children in Sabah, due partially to the lack of presence of international NGOs such as the UNHCR (UNHCR Malaysia 2021). A decade-old state consensus, however, puts the stateless population at about 30% (about 800,000) of the state population (Mohamed Razali 2017). This issue has also been observed affecting the Rohingya refugees who are predominantly in West Malaysia (see Farzana et al. 2020).

Table 6: "Citizenship" and its collocates

Citizenship				
Rank	Frequency	MI Score	Collocate	
1	1	8.67838	voting	*Citizenship* is about voting *rights*. Locals would not benefit in any way by foreigners getting citizenship. In fact, Sabahans would lose their sovereignty if foreigners in the state are given citizenship and added to the electoral rolls.
2	13	7.79385	granting	However, Mohd Shafie said, there was a tight set procedure to be followed, including the applicants needed to prove that the children were born in Sabah and that one of the parents was a local before they could proceed further. The onus of granting *citizenship* to this group is not within the jurisdiction of the state government. It is the responsibility of the federal government, he added.
3	1	7.67838	wrongful	The group said the children already suffered enough from the wrongful denial of their *citizenship* under the Barisan Nasional (BN) administration, adding that the Pakatan Harapan (PH) government should not prolong the matter.
4	1	7.67838	win	Malaysia-born but *stateless*, three kids win *citizenship* at doorstep to hearing.
5	1	7.67838	undergoing	Maintaining the objections in court increases the uncertainty and trauma that these children and their families have been undergoing for many years. *Citizenship* should have been granted years ago instead of dragging these children through the courts.

The frame "citizenship" had a keyness level of +2070.49. Collocates include "voting", "granting", "wrongful", "win", and "undergoing". These collocates reiterate meanings established through the previous frames. For instance, the former Sabah Chief Minister, Mohd Shafie bin Apdal, held the belief that "granting" citizenship to the stateless children, or population, will diminish the sovereignty of the locals as it will allow more "voting" power to a group of people who are not inherently local, despite many being born and raised in Malaysia (see discussion by Hoffstaedter 2014). This may have led to a hesitance at the state level to address this issue, with the argument that it is a federal issue. Such legal and political wrangling is familiar, as seen in cases where children's citizenship application status has been on hold with no end in sight (see Liew 2019). While there is an overarching securitisation of the stateless population, there seems to be a moral obligation to ensure that the stateless, especially the children, need not "undergo" such suffering. It is not difficult to see how traumatic this plight can be (see Allerton 2020; Farzana et al. 2020), given that gaining citizenship is perceived as needing to be "won", instead of being rightfully granted after certain conditions are met. Nonetheless, this discourse of ending the "wrongful" denial of citizenship to stateless children may be politically motivated by the previous government. The more dominant view is perhaps that of worry (instead of one grounded in morality), seen through the securitisation of the stateless population, and the unwillingness to introduce any form of standardisation, framework, or pathway that may lead to citizenship, as this would open the "floodgates" of mass application of citizenship by the stateless population (Liew 2019; Ishii 2020).

Table 7: "Rights" and its collocates

Rights				
Rank	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency	
1	2	9.77884	sermons	Also ironic is SUHAKAM's laudatory descriptions of mosques that have agreed to carry its human *rights* message in their Friday sermons when the national human rights body itself has failed to address those Muslim men barred by their employers from performing Friday prayers.

Table 7: (*continued*)

Rights				
Rank	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency	
2	1	8.77884	voting	*Citizenship* is about <u>voting</u> *rights*. Locals would not benefit in any way by foreigners getting citizenship. In fact, Sabahans would lose their sovereignty if foreigners in the state are given citizenship and added to the electoral rolls.
3	1	8.77884	underdeveloped	Some of these schools are deemed illegal and are usually dismantled by immigration authorities. Education and healthcare in Sarawak and Sabah have long been considered poor and <u>underdeveloped</u>. *Rights* group Lawyers for Liberty has urged Putrajaya to allow stateless children to take the public examinations they previously missed due to a lack of documents.
4	1	8.77884	treaties	SUHAKAM, Komnas HAM [Indonesia] and CHRP [the Philippines] aim to provide recommendations based on the collective findings and guided by relevant international human *rights* <u>treaties</u>, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Global Compact on Migration.
5	1	8.77884	transmission	In 2018, the UN Cedaw Committee urged the Malaysian government to amend all provisions of the Federal Constitution that deny women equal *rights* with respect to the <u>transmission</u> of their nationality to their children and foreign spouses.

The last frame is "rights", with a keyness level of +1847.23, for which collocates were "sermons", "voting", "underdeveloped", "treaties", and "transmission". As mentioned earlier, there exists discrimination against the stateless population, as they are perceived as culturally inferior to the majority, the Malay Muslims. This applies even to Muslim refugees who had arrived decades ago and had adopted the lifestyle of a local Muslim.

Though practicing the religion of the local majority, Muslim refugees remain racialised (Hoffstaedter 2017). This contradictory observation does not represent what is preached through "sermons" at the mosques, as well as the teachings of Islam to care for those who are displaced (Hoffstaedter 2017). This also illustrates that religion alone has not been sufficient for the stateless to be accepted, despite reports where citizenship has been unlawfully granted to Muslim migrants (Allerton 2017). The frame of "rights" is also conceptually linked with collocates discussed earlier, such as "voting", and "underdeveloped" facilities to offer education and health to the stateless population. The frame of "rights" also brings in a new angle not seen in other frames. To tackle the problem of statelessness, a "treaties" was signed between Malaysia (Suruhanjaya Hak Asasi Manusia Malaysia [SUHAKAM]), Indonesia (National Commission on Human Rights of Indonesia [Komnas HAM]), and the Philippines (Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines [CHRP]) to explore potential solutions. The memorandum of understanding between the three nations is in effect until the end of 2021 (SUHAKAM 2021). Moreover, there have been external calls for Malaysia to revise existing frameworks to be more supportive of the stateless, and perhaps understand and enact the constitution in plain language, as so to allow the "transmission" of citizenship if the mother is a Malaysian (see also Liew 2019).

DISCUSSION

Through our corpus analysis, we were able to identify significant frames pertinent to the stateless children in Sabah. Aside from the frames, our findings also contributed to our understanding of Malaysian (and regional) news portals, many of which shared the same sentiments as PH. From the frames and their conceptual associations (collocates), we were able to surmise that there is a large number of stateless children, who do not have access, or are denied access to, education and healthcare. These children are also framed as not having a way out of statelessness, and that it is almost impossible for them to win a citizenship. It is also difficult for them to be adopted locally or internationally. This is most obvious through the cycle of statelessness affecting communities that have been around for several generations. Ishii (2021) points out that this cyclical predicament and prolonged delay in addressing issues of statelessness contribute further to this grave concern. For the stateless children, time is of essence to seek legal recognition.

In particular, stateless children hold a better chance at being recognised as a legal citizen at a younger age, given the temporal and spatial proximity to their parents or guardians, and because they are better protected under international laws or policies. Furthermore, the plight of the stateless children has been framed from the standpoint of morality, with local and international agencies arguing that the children's suffering is not their fault and is thus wrongful, especially since these children were born in Sabah. There have been recent efforts placed to examine the situation, but there may be very little political will to see that supportive frameworks are enacted. This concurs with the findings in other nations, such as Rasinger (2010), where Lithuanian immigrants were painted as inherently bad and that the United Kingdom, as a whole, has to take stern actions. More pressingly, is the use of morality as a means to instigate discourse that may risk the safety of people who are already living at the fringes of society, such as that seen in the manifesto of the then PH government. Thus, the stateless population in Sabah continues to be discriminated against not only because of their lack of legality, but because of their perceived cultural inferiority. The promulgation of the stateless as belonging at lower tiers of the cultural hierarchy not only reinforces their illegality, but also instigates other negative and unfavourable sentiments within the local community (Ishii 2020).

From these frames, we can see that the state, through the media, continues to view the stateless population as illegals that pose a security threat, while outsiders view them as people who need to be helped. This reifies the frame of "us" versus "them". This is rather ironic, given that public organisations in Malaysia endorse human rights activism yet maintain a distance in matters affecting stateless children. The Rohingya refugees in West Malaysia face similar challenges, where the lack of (or even the refusal) to recognise refugees continues to trap them in statelessness (Abdullah et al. 2018). This issue is not unique to Malaysia; instead, it is rampant throughout the Southeast Asian region, where there has been a downplay of the rising concerns stemming from stateless populations. Most evident through the lack of recognition given to frameworks supportive of the stateless, Malaysia, along with its neighbours, are also rife with inherent biases towards this group of people (McAuliffe 2017). To this end, we can see that for the nation to truly address statelessness, morality and legality need to work in tandem. Work in this regard has actually started, with international bodies such as the Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC), managed by

ASEAN, being established. Though these bodies may still rely heavily on government support, its establishment sets in motion actions that can contribute to the recognition of the stateless, especially children (Pisanò 2019). This is similar to the cause championed by the Sabah Law Society (SLS), which has been vocal about their support for stateless children. SLS believes and subscribes to the core principles of human rights for every child, which are survival, development, protection, and participation.

CONCLUSION

For future studies on media framing, researchers employing a corpus analysis approach may consider establishing more parameters in the management of corpus data, such as the equal number of news articles analysed and perhaps a comparative content analysis between a few news portals. Despite this limitation, our study was still able to offer a comprehensive view, which reflects the principle of corpus analysis. In summary, based on our corpus findings, the promise set forth by PH through their manifesto did not seem to offer any concrete resolution about the status of the stateless population in Sabah. This comes as no surprise considering that the stateless population constitutes an affordable source of labour for local employers. In a way, the constant demand and availability of jobs offered to the stateless population reflect their legitimised discrimination. This further affirms the formal exclusion and an informal inclusion practiced by the nation, whereby the stateless will never be offered the possibility of seeking legality or citizenship, yet they are manipulated into staying permanently through minimum-wage employments, an example of the new global regime where labour is shouldered by cheap, transnational migrants (Ishii 2020). The frame of statelessness, then, paints a picture of the narrow epistemology held by those in the ruling class of what Malaysia should be, which unfortunately serves only the "narrow and monological perspective of the ruling elite in power" (Noor 2019: 20), resulting in no foreseeable legal resolution to the issue.

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NOTES

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**   Linda Lagason is an independent researcher based in Sabah, Malaysia. She is passionate about communication studies, particularly on how communication affects our perception of others. Her works at the moment are focused on media effects and are aimed at starting discussions on higher accountability in mass communication.

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