"Who's that Guy?"
A Discourse Representation of Social Actors in a Death

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Abstract

In rating Malaysia's mainstream media, Reporters without Borders accorded it 132nd position in 2008, a slide from the 124th position in 2007. The latest report by the agency also notes that Malaysia is among the few nations that suppress any sort of negative reporting of those in positions of authority.

One these positions of authority belong to those who maintain law and order in the country. However, disquieting reports of the abuse of this authority have led to calls from various quarters for greater regulation of the police force. The issue of a high number of deaths in police custody has been one of the concerns highlighted. According to reports from the Malaysian news agency, Bernama News, between 2003 and 2007, more than 1500 deaths are said to have taken place in police custody ("1535 deaths in custody between 2003 and last year").

A recent such death of a man, suspected of being a car thief on 20th January 2009, has generated much interest in the media as well as the public. Employing a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, this study will carry out an examination of the reporting styles of a state-owned mainstream English daily, *The Star*, to examine the manner in which the newspaper may choose to represent the social actors in the incident.

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1.1 Introduction

News relating to the incident first emerged in online news portals such as *Malaysiakini*. A 22-year-old man, A. Kugan, was picked up for questioning over car thefts on 15 January 2009. On 20 January 2009, it was reported, in *Malaysiakini*, that he had died while being questioned. The mainstream media, *the Star* began reporting on the news item on 22 January 2009. Unfortunately, the event did not die down with a report or two; instead it was played out at great length with more than 35 articles on this issue in *The Star*.

The death in question has to be viewed against the background of facts emerging of police brutality in the country. The 2007 annual report by a local non-governmental organisation, SUARAM, documents the 108 deaths officially cited deaths in custody between the period of 2000 and 2006 (Malaysian Human Rights Report 2007). A Bernama report on the issue in Aug 2008 places the total number of deaths in custody including in prisons, rehabilitation centres as well as detention centres between 2003 and 2007 at 1535.

The few investigations that are initiated into the deaths are often bogged down by long delays in conducting inquests. A related issue is the matter of the Royal Police Commission that was created in 2004 to review the work of the police in the country and to recommend changes.

The Suaram report notes that the government has refused to ratify the United Nations Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment and Punishment (CAT). Possibly as a result of this, the reports of police abuse and deaths in custody are many. Public confidence in the police has been greatly eroded as a result and this led to the appointment of the commission to make recommendations on the changes. Needless to say, the recommendations that were submitted in 2005 have yet to be fully implemented (Malaysian Human Rights Report 2007).

Adding to the general climate of reluctance and apathy is the position of the mainstream media. Aside from the fact that much of the mainstream media is state-owned (Anuar, 2005), the SUARAM report 2007 also highlights the various legal constraints in the form of acts such as the Printing Presses and Publications Act (PPPA) 1984, the Sedition Act 1948 and the Official Secrets Act (OSA) 1972 that muzzle the media. In addition to this, the Report notes the a number of occasions in 2007, when figures from the ruling governments have cautioned newspapers against the reporting of negative news that might put institutions and individuals in a bad light.

Teo's (2001) study of two news articles in the Australian media underlines the role of "social psychology and socio-political forces" (p.40) in influencing the representations of the various actors in a news event. According to him, "the ideas and values communicated through the media (media ideology) are 'commodified' and exchanged for financial and material support by the owners and controllers of the media industry…"(p.40).

Pietkainen's (2003) study on news representations of the minority group, the Sami in Finnish news shows the varying representation as created by the newspapers. According to Hall,

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news representations often play a crucial role in identity constructions (cited in Pietikainen, 2003). The dichotomous social perceptions resulting in an us-versus-them syndrome could be the result of such constructions by the media. The representation of the Sami was carried through the use of naming or labelling as well as through references to the specific actions ascribed to the various actors in the stories highlighted.

Thus in this study on the death of Kugan, the aim is to examine the manner in which the death of a detainee is reported and represented in a mainstream newspaper through reference to some of the significant actors identified in the first two articles in the Star and to highlight the actions attributed to them.

1.2 Research Objectives

This study aims to fulfil the following objectives:

1. How often are the social actors mentioned in the text?
2. What are the discursive strategies used by *The Star* to represent the death?
3. How are the following social actors represented in the text?
   a. Selangor police chief Deputy Comm Datuk Khalid Abu Bakar
   b. A. Kugan (the deceased)
   c. A. Kugan's next of kin
   d. Medical Sector (Doctors/Hospital)

2. Literature Review

Fang's (2001) study of two ideologically opposed newspapers highlights the tendency for newspapers to slant reporting styles to favour the stances of dominant parties. If that is so, the question arises as to what might be the style of reporting of a state-owned mainstream media in presenting local event that proves a challenge to authority figures.

While the online news sites have gained a firm foothold in reporting news, Haig sees studies on the print media as crucial for two reasons: firstly, he cites studies such as van Dijk's in 1987 that show the print media to be an important reference in interviews.

Also, further studies are cited to show that the print media may set the agenda for the other forms of media in terms of selection of issues for coverage as well as the adoption of stances. Thus, the role of the mainstream media as the purveyors of the official constructions of national truth must not be discounted.

Mohd Sani (2004) refers to Malaysian media as an adherent of the authoritarian model. He notes that there are references by leaders in speeches to indicate that the country has chosen the model of social responsibility, as seen in the speech he quotes by Dr Mahathir Mohamad in the 48th United Nations Assembly in 1993. However, he cites other studies that refer to

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Malaysia as the Asian press model for authoritarianism (Luwarso, 2000 and Jiafei Yin, 2003 cited in Mohd Sani, 2004)

Haque and Khan (2004) cite the power of the media in the "construction of identity" (cited in Haque 2008). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) attempts to unpack underlying issues of power and the discursive strategies employed in realizing these. One of the most fundamental means by which "the Other" is created is through the naming and labelling of social actors referred to in the media. CDA theorists have highlighted the creation of outgroups and ingroups through such identification of the actors (Reisigl and Wodak 2001; van Leeuwen 2008). In addition to naming the actors, studies also show that the actions attributed to these actors also play a part in creating a positive or negative representation of the actors.

Lean has conducted several studies on the discourse representation of social actors, namely in the fields of AIDS, politics and ethnic relations. In her study on AIDS, Lean looked at the social actors portrayed in the TIME magazine articles written about AIDS, and how they are given space to 'voice' their thoughts (2007a, 2005; Zuraidah Mohd Don and Lean, 2002b; Lean and Fernandez, 2005), and also how these social actors are represented as outgroups or ingroups (cf. Zuraidah Mohd Don and Lean, 2002a; Lean and Lee, 2008;). In the field of politics, Lean examined the representation of several past and present prime ministers in Malaysia and Singapore (i.e. Mahathir Mohamad, Abdullah Badawi, Lee Hsien Loong) (cf. Lean, 2008, 2007b; Lean and Lee 2007; Lean and Rajaratnam, 2005a, 2005b). In the field of ethnic relations, Lean analysed how the Star represented the three main ethnic groups in their daily reporting (Lean, 2009a, 2009b; David and Lean, 2008; Lean and Wong, 2009).

In examining the media discourse representation of the Roma minority in Slovenia, Erjavec (2001) shows tendency for journalists to give the impression of a dominant group in the population defending itself against the minority. The majority groups such as the villagers are represented in the role of actors involved in material processes against the threat posed by the minority. The Roma, meanwhile, are portrayed as actors in negative processes in which journalists seem to paint them as agents responsible for what befalls them.

Erjavec refers to Hall's (1978) "consensual mode of society" which influences news values to create a "notion of unity" (2001; p. 702). Those who do not conform to this consensual model may often be represented by the media as being deviants or members of outgroups.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach where textual analysis is used to analyse the chosen articles. CDA attempts to unpack issues of power and social inequality. To do so, a 3-step approach of description, interpretation and explanation is employed. As with much of qualitative study, the objective is not to produce quantifiable data that is representative, rather to gain an indepth understanding of a particular situation to understand how language employed may be indicative of existing power structures.

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For the purposes of this study, therefore, an examination of the representation of social actors will be carried out. To be more precise, van Leeuwen's theoretical framework on the analysis of social actors is identified and used to analyse the articles. Although it can be argued that Fairclough and Wodak's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework are more recognised and comprehensive in the field of CDA, it is undeniable that van Leeuwen's theoretical framework is more comprehensive among the three. This is duly acknowledged by Fairclough and Wodak themselves (cf. Fairclough, 2003; Reisigl and Wodak 2001).

A detailed explanation of Van Leeuwen's theoretical framework can be seen below:

According to van Leeuwen (2008), social actors can be identified through:

1. **Exclusion.**
   This involves suppression or backgrounding. In suppression, actors are left out completely, while in the latter case, they may be in the text, but not given a prominent role.

2. **Role allocation**
   The agent may play an active, dynamic role while the patient may play a passive role. Activation occurs when actors are assigned grammatical subject roles in material, mental, behavioural, verbal and relational processes (Halliday 2004).

3. **Genericization and Specification**
   Genericization is used to label ordinary people. The use of general class or group references may be employed in genericization. In the case of specification, the use of individual references may be employed to identify members of dominant classes who may be referred to by their names and titles.

4. **Assimilation**
   Actors are put into groups to show collectivization or aggregation. Collectivization is used when presenting statistics of people while aggregation refers to groups referred to in non-statistical manner as when referring to surveys.

5. **Association and Dissociation**
   Association reflects belonging among differing groups who are banded together when reflecting or possessing some common interest. The latter denotes separateness between people. It could be found among members of a group who might be initially associated, but then may be differentiated by individual qualities or interests.

6. **Indetermination and Differentiation**
   Indetermination provides anonymity to the actor. Typical example of this may be found in use of references such as "someone" or "somebody". Differentiation distinguishes an actor and identifies aspects and qualities that set them apart.

7. **Nomination and Categorization**

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In the former, specific references and formal or semiformal forms of identities including titles may be employed while the latter acquires group identity.

8. Functionalization and Identification
Functionalisation identifies an actor through reference to what the person does while identification identifies what the person is.

9. Personalization and Impersonalization
While personalization has been emphasised in the various ways, impersonalization occurs when an actor is identified by a quality or by a place or object associated with the person.

10. Overdetermination
Overdetermination occurs through inversion, symbolization, distillation and connotation. Inversion is realised through identification of the actor as a person with opposing personae. Symbolization is the reference to mythical figures to identify an actor.

Distillation involves the abstraction of a common quality to link a group of people. Connotation occurs when a quality or feature from folklore may be referred to in order to activate an image that is transposed on the actor.

Social action can be realised through:

1. Reactions
These are unspecified, cognitive, affective and perceptive reactions. They are distinct from actions.

2. Material and Semiotic action
Both of these can be transactive and nontransactive. Semiotic action can be realized by quotes, rendition (reported speech) and topic specification.

3. Objectivation and descriptivation
Objectivation is realised through the use of nominalisations and process nouns being foregrounded in the statement. Descriptivation represents actors by referring to specific qualities.

4. Deagentialization
This is seen as eventuation, existentialization and naturalization. In eventuation, the human agency responsible for the action may be missing or backgrounded. In existentialization, the action is realized through clauses that begin with "*There is…*". In naturalization, the actions are frequently depicted as part of a natural process.

5. Generalization and abstraction.
The former refers to a taxonomy of temporally linked micro-actions that might be generalized with a term like "milk time" (van Leeuwen 2008). The latter refers to terms that might summarise qualities of people, actions etc. as in the word "interaction" which could refer to a number of possibilities.

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6. Overdetermination

This refers to symbolic reference to a mythical action to reflect something in the current situation. Also, it may refer to an inversion of a situation where a child could also be represented as a dangerous creature.

The corpus of this study is derived from the Malaysian daily, *The Star*. This daily is chosen because it is the leading English daily in Malaysia. As of 2008, *The Star* daily has 1.082 million of readership (Nielsen Media Research, 2008) with a circulation of 304, 904 (Audit Bureau of Circulations, Malaysia, 2008). Its *Sunday Star* has 1.022 million readers (Nielsen Media Research, 2008) with a circulation of 313, 609 (Audit Bureau of Circulations, Malaysia, 2008). *The Star* daily and *Sunday Star* have the highest readerships and circulations among all the daily and weekly newspapers in the nation. There are altogether 28 articles written on Kugan's death, from the period between 22 January 2009 and 19 February 2009.

4. Analysis

4.1 Quantitative Analysis: Frequency

ARTICLE 1
Family barges into mortuary
They claim detainee has injuries on body
By Lourdes Charles and M. Kumar
newsdesk@thestar.com.my
Petaling Jaya

1.1   The family members of a detainee who was found dead in a police station barged into the Serdang Hospital mortuary to view his body, claiming he died after being assaulted.
1.2   They took photographs of the body, claiming there were wounds and injuries on his body yesterday.
1.3   Selangor police chief Deputy Comm Datuk Khalid Abu Bakar said there would be no cover-up in investigations into the death of A. Kugan, a suspected car thief, in the Taipan police station in USJ, Subang Jaya, during questioning.
1.4   "I can assure Kugan's family and the public that if the post-mortem report indicates that there was force used that led to Kugan's death then we will take action against those responsible."
1.5   "Everyone should wait for the post mortem report before jumping into any conclusion or politicising the issue." he said.
1.6   DCP Khalid said Kugan was arrested on Jan 15 over his alleged involvement in a car theft syndicate that was believed to have international links.
1.7   He said Kugan had led the police to the recovery of 15 luxury cars from a warehouse in Puchong that were being shipped overseas by the syndicate.

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1.8   "We were in the midst of obtaining more information from him regarding his involvement with the syndicate's activities when he was taken to Taipan police station."

1.9   An assistant medical officer from the hospital's forensics department has lodged a report yesterday alleging that family members and unknown people had barged into the mortuary where Kugan's body was kept.

1.10   In his report, the officer Mohamed Azharudin Abdul Ghani claimed that he and two staff were forced out of the room by the crowd that came to the hospital at about 11.30pm.

1.11   He claimed that the family members and the 50-strong crowd left the mortuary at about 2.30am after they identified and examined the body.

1.12   DCP Khalid said that when Mohamed Azharudin went back into the cold room, he found the shirt Kugan was wearing had been ripped and torn and there was also blood spots on the floor.

1.13   Kugan's family, too, lodged a report with the Subang Jaya police headquarters claiming that the police were responsible for his death.

1.14   The family's lawyer, N. Surendran, refuted claims that the family had tampered with the body.

1.15   "All they did was unbutton his shirt and turn the body around to examine his injuries."

(*The Star, Thurs, 22 January 2009, N16*)

Date	Number	Actors	Frequency of mention
Thursday, 22 January 2009	1.	Family members/Kugan's family	2/2 n=4
	2	Detainee/ A.Kugan, a suspected car thief/ Kugan/his body	2/1/4/2 n=9
	3.	Selangor police chief Deputy Comm Datuk Khalid Abu Bakar/DCP Khalid	1/ 2 n=3
	4.	Police	2 n=2
	5.	International Syndicate	3 n=3
	6.	Assistant medical officer for forensics dept/ officer/ Mohamed Azharuddin Abdul Ghani	1/1/2 n=4
	7.	Unknown people/50-strong crowd/crowd	1/1/1 n=3
	8.	2 other unnamed staff of forensics dept	1 n=1
	9.	Family's lawyer, N. Surendran	1 n=1
	10.	Those responsible for Kugan's	1

		death	n=1

Table 1 Frequency Count of Social Actors in Article 1

Frequency of mention

As indicated in Table 1, Article 1 identifies 9 actors. Of these, Kugan, who is the central figure in the incident, is fittingly mentioned the most number of times. While frequencies may be important, the manner in which the actor is mentioned is probably more important than the number of times he is mentioned.

The family and the Assistant medical officer of the forensics department are mentioned equal number of times. Close on the heels of these, is the mention of the Selangor police chief, the international syndicate as well as the crowd that is supposed to have barged into the mortuary.

ARTICLE 2
Kin postpone Kugan's burial
Post-mortem shows fluid in lungs caused detainee's death, family challenges findings
By Rasitha A. Hamid and Steven Daniel
newsdesk@thestar.com.my
Kajang

It was high drama all the way from the mortuary to the cemetery for suspected car thief A. Kugan who died while in police custody on Tuesday.

First his family and friends barged into the Serdang Hospital mortuary late Tuesday night and took pictures of his body in the cold room in the morgue.

And yesterday, at the very last minute at the cemetery, the family decided not to go ahead with the burial but instead sent his body to the University Malaya Medical centre where they want an independent doctor to carry out a second post-mortem despite the presence of an independent doctor at the first post mortem.

It is learnt the independent doctor present was brought in by MIC's T. Mohan with the consent of the family.

The doctor identified as Dr Rao when contacted said he was present when the post-mortem was conducted.

"I am not disputing the findings of the doctor who conducted the post mortem.

"I only noted down the bruises and injuries to Kugan. That is all. There was no hanky panky." He said.

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Selangor police chief Deputy Comm Datuk Khalid Abu Bakar said that the first post-mortem found there was no foul play and that Kugan had died due to fluid in his lungs.

"Although the post-mortem report found no foul play in Kugan's death, nonetheless we are still continuing with our their (sic) investigation."

"We have to find out why there were so many injuries on his body." He said, adding that would be no cover up and those responsible would be brought to book.

Police have yet to receive the full post-mortem report from the hospital and have classified the case under Section 330 of the Penal Code with voluntarily causing hurt to extort a confession.

Kugan's family lawyer, N. Surendran, said that the family would seek a second opinion on the cause of death as they were surprised with the hospital's findings.

Kugan, 23, collapsed and died at the Taipan police station in USJ, Subang Jaya, during questioning over vehicle thefts by a gang operating in the Klang Valley.

He had earlier led police to the recovery of 13 luxury cars which were ready to be shipped overseas.

(*The Star, Friday, 23 January 2009, N26*)

Date	Number	Actors	Frequency of mention
Thursday, 22 January 2009	1.	Family/his family/the family/they/ Kugan's family	1/1/2/1/1 n=6
	2	Detainee/suspected car thief/A. Kugan/his body	1/1/6/2 n=10
	3.	Selangor police chief Deputy Comm Datuk Khalid Abu Bakar/he	1/ 1 n=2
	4.	Police/we	1/ 2 n=3
	5.	Friends	1 n=1
	6.	Independent doctor 1 (the family's)	1 n=1
	7.	Independent doctor 2/doctor/ Dr Rao/he	1/1/1/1 n=4
	8.	Doctor at mortuary	1 n=1

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	9.	MIC's T.Mohan	1 n=1
	10	Family's lawyer, N. Surendran	1 n=1

Table 2 Frequency Count of Social Actors in Article 2

Frequency of mention

As with the first article, this too gives the central role to Kugan, in terms of the number of times he is mentioned. In total, Kugan is mentioned 10 (ten) times in the article. The family appears to be given a great deal of attention in this article as they are mentioned 6 times.

The article also provides some space to the independent doctor who was present at the post-mortem.

4.2 Qualitative Analysis: Social Actors & Discursive Strategies

a. Selangor police chief Deputy Comm Datuk Khalid Abu Bakar

Out of the 15 statements of the report, 7 are direct or indirect statements by DCP Khalid. His full title and responsibility are presented in the foreground of the third sentence of the article. The role allocated to him is an activated one where his identity, *Selangor police chief Deputy Comm Datuk Khalid Abu Bakar,* by formal title and name are foregrounded in nearly all instances where he is referred to, thus functioning as the grammatical participant.

Furthermore the use of such nomination in referring to this senior police officer enhances his authority and credibility. The use of titles may be seen also as a mark of respect to a person holding a high office. In the same way, titles are used to refer to the officer from the forensics department as well as to N. Surendran, the family lawyer for Kugan's family However, since Kugan's death occurred while in police custody, it is possible that the reference to an authority may be an attempt to allay public disquiet over the police connection.

This is all the more necessary as the story of the death has first been made public in online news portals at least two days before this report, with much reference to the police role. Also, this story broke almost close on the heels of another incident of police brutality which had occurred the previous month in December 2008, when a car park attendant under interrogation had allegedly been tortured while being questioned.

As noted by Van Leeuwen (2008), in his examination of the news report "Race Odyssey", high-status actors may frequently be functionalised to justify their views, stances and profiles. The continual reference to the title, "DCP", could be seen as an attempt to lend credibility to the words of the policeman in explaining the incidents leading up to the death.

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In the report, the social actions of DCP Khalid are realized through verbal processes where the he is accorded the role of sayer. The use of direct speech and the use of reported speech reflect this (refer 1.3 – 1.9). It is he who narrates the story in which Kugan is the central character.

The use of quotes in particular may often be seen in reports to emphasise the high status position of the actors being quoted. Van Leeuwen (2008) sees this as an indication of the writer's confidence in the strength of the utterance.

  b. Kugan (the deceased)

The central actor of this story is introduced to the readers through a generic reference, "detainee". And even so, the initial introduction is through a propositional statement in the byline where he is objectivated (*They claim detainee has injuries…*). In fact, the impression given by the byline is that the central theme of the article revolves around dead man's family rather than the man himself.

The generic reference is employed once again in the first statement of the article, *"The family member of a detainee",* as a postmodifying phrase of the statement which refers to the actions of his family members. In employing this phrase, it would seem that a double whammy effect is dealt, both to the dead man as well as his family: the former is referred to with a pejorative term; the latter is associated with the person referred to by such a term. The portrayal of their subsequent actions may only serve to create further impatience and lack of sympathy in the reader.

The specific identity of the dead man is only indicated in the third paragraph of the article where he is accorded a passivated role as the object of the preposition (refer 1.3). However, the mention of his name is closely followed by the functionalized realization of his identity as "a suspected car thief". While the functionalization of the policeman might lead to enhancing his stature and his credibility, the exact opposite is achieved in one fell swoop for Kugan. The man's name and his personal identity is backgrounded, while his last known status while alive is foregrounded. Is it possible that readers could be less sympathetic about the manner of his death, if they were made aware that he stood accused of a crime that is rampant and, clearly a worry to the middle-class reader of The Star?

Only when the senior police officer, DCP Khalid, is quoted do we see the use of his personal identity, Kugan, employed. Kugan's actions, as revealed in the article, are relayed to the readers through the words of the police officer (refer 1.4). The use of his first name by the officer might serve to humanise not just Kugan, but also those who might be held responsible for his death. The policeman is acknowledging the person rather than a criminal. His are not the irrational words of an avenging lawman. Is it possible for such a person or his ilk to be accused of beating a person to death?

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Kugan's actions as referred to in the quotes and the rendition show Kugan in an activated role when referring to his alleged crime and his links with the "international syndicate" as well as when leading the police to the discovery of stolen cars (refer 1.6-1.8). The actions are realized through reference to material actions which are mainly transactive in nature such as "*…had led the police…*" Van Leeuwen (2008) refers to an actor being given greater significance by attributing transactive material actions to him. In the case of Kugan however, his actions are of a significantly criminal nature, thus casting greater doubt over his innocence. His status as a suspect is again reinforced in the readers' mind.

At the same time, he is accorded a passivated role when mention is made of his experiences with the police and in the police station. However, the actors of those actions are excluded in the statements (refer 1.6 and 1.8). As Van Leeuwen (2008) notes, such exclusions may be done as the readers are aware of the actors. It could also be a deliberate action by writers and their editors to minimise the roles of actors engaging in actions that might be seen as unpleasant. Given the fact that there has already been a number of other unexplained deaths, it is possible that newspapers were attempting to downplay the police role and their possible culpability.

As the dead man at the centre of the controversy, reference to Kugan seems to be through an impersonal realization through the means of somatisation. This is seen in references to "his body" and "the body" in the first two statements of the article, before the subject is personalized (refer 1.1 and 1.2). Van Leeuwen (2008) refers to this impersonalization as "alienation" of the person in question, whose individual identity pushed into the background. Readers do not read of the man, rather it is of an objectivated part of his identity that they are first introduced to.

c. Kugan's next of kin

Another important social actor in this incident is Kugan's next of kin. They play a crucial role in this issue as they are closest to Kugan and thus, represent him.

In the first article, Kugan's family members are mentioned and foregrounded in the article. In fact, they are alluded to in the first sentence itself (refer 2.1). This implies the significance of the role that Kugan's family play in this whole episode.

However, it is interesting to note how Kugan's family members are labelled in the text. Kugan's family is referred to in several terms such as *family members of a detainee*, *Kugan's family*, *the family*, *they*. They are not mentioned by their names; hence they are not personalised. This goes to show that although Kugan's family is foregrounded, they are actually not important enough to be named as individuals.

They are portrayed similar to what van Leeuwen would define as 'characters that fulfil only passing, functional roles, and do not become point of identification for the reader' (1996: 53). Their role is to add a dimension to the backdrop of the situation (Lean, 2009).

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In other words, although Kugan's family is important to be mentioned in the article, they are NOT that important enough to be individualised. In addition, there is assimilation where Kugan's family is referred to collectively as a family unit.

means that the reader can neither identify the family members individually nor the actions of each member. They are collectivised as a family unit. This is another indication that although Kugan's family is central to the text, they are not important enough to be individualised. In a way, there is exclusion in the article and genericization.

Genericization means that the social actor is being labelled as ordinary people. In Article 1, Kugan's family is genericized, thus accentuating the triviality of the family's role and subsequently, Kugan. Furthermore, they are reported as associated with Kugan and not as a separate entity. In a way, anonymity is provided to Kugan's family as they cannot be identified by the reader. All these three strategies further adds to de-emphasize the importance of Kugan and his family.

What is noteworthy in the analysis of this article is how Kugan's family is activated in the text. They are illustrated as active agents who play an active and dynamic role in the article. Nevertheless, they are activated in a negative light. For instance, the behavioural verbs used to activate Kugan's family are very strong negative actions: *barged*, *took pictures, decided not to go ahead with the burial, sent his body to University Malaya Medical Centre, want an independent doctor….*

Aside from the implication that Kugan's family is uncouth and unruly in the manner in which they handled the situation, there seems to be a note of exasperation in the listing of the activated material actions in the part of the family. Readers might get the idea that Kugan's family themselves are crude people and thus, it is no wonder that Kugan himself is involved in illegal activities. This association is particularly disturbing as Kugan and family appear to have been found 'guilty' of criminal activities without even having gone for a court trial.

The material actions realized by the family are transactive. Thus they affect changes and are shown to be purposeful (refer 2.1 – 2.3). It is possible that this portrayal of the family may help put them in a powerful rather than a powerless position for the benefit of the readers. This also means that they are not the victims in the story as might be indicated in the news coming out of the news portals.

However, Kugan's family are not given space to verbalise their thoughts. The readers are only given an idea of what is in Kugan's family's mind through indirect discourse (*The family members of a detainee who was found dead in a police station barged into the Serdang Hospital mortuary to view his body, claiming he died after being assaulted, They took photographs of the body, claiming there were wounds and injuries on his body yesterday, Kugan's family, too, lodged a report with the Subang Jaya police headquarters claiming that the police were responsible for his death*).

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Thus, the discourse has already been recontextualised for public consumption. In addition to that, Kugan's family is also represented by their mouthpiece, the family's lawyer, N. Surendran (*The family's lawyer, N. Surendran, refuted claims that the family had tampered with the body. "All they did was unbutton his shirt and turn the body around to examine his injuries."*)

d.   Medical Sector (Doctors/Hospital)

The use of doctors and hospital in the representation of Kugan's death are salient as their expertise is needed to justify either party's claims.

References to the assistant medical officer and his full name are found in the first report to establish the credentials of the person making the report against the unseemly behaviour of the family.

In the second article, the doctor/hospital as social actors are identified in several ways: *an independent doctor*, *Dr Rao*, *the doctor*, *the hospital*, *hospital's findings*. Although they are referred to as doctors or hospital, there are exclusion and suppression involved in the text. For instance, the doctor(s) and hospital who/which are directly attached to the government or police, are backgrounded. They are not personalised and individualised. The doctor(s)' and hospital's names are not mentioned at all, although it is mentioned that Kugan's body is being kept in the Serdang hospital.

The exclusion and suppression of doctor(s) and hospital's details is prominent as this in a way dissociates them from any responsibilities or identification by the reader. Also, this will help to protect the identity of the doctor(s) and hospital involved in the first post-mortem. A very clear example would be Selangor police chief Deputy Comm Datuk Khalid Abu Bakar's statement: *"Although the post-mortem report found no foul play in Kugan's death, nonetheless we are still continuing with our their (sic) investigation."* In this statement, no doctors or hospital was mentioned, except for the reference to the post-mortem.

On the other hand, the doctor brought in to conduct the second post mortem was identified. The doctor was *identified as Dr Rao* and was *brought in by MIC's T Mohan*. Dr Rao is personalised and individualised as *the independent doctor*. This implies that he plays an important role in the text and also the whole issue. It can be suggested that Dr Rao is the determining factor in deciding whether or not there was foul play in the part of the police that led to Kugan's death. Also, it is mentioned that he was brought in by an MIC member, T. Mohan. This is significant as it means that the doctor can be trusted as he was selected by a component of the ruling party member and not by Kugan's family.

In a way, Dr Rao can be seen as someone objective. However, Dr Rao uses the technique 'apparent denial', a term used by van Dijk (2002). What this means is that Dr Rao denies that his findings contradict the findings of the first post mortem (*"I am not disputing the findings of the doctor who conducted the post mortem. "I only noted down the bruises and injuries to Kugan. That is all. There was no hanky panky."*). Thus, he wants to

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distance himself from making any sensational claims that might cause uproar among the parties involved. Dr Rao's importance is also accentuated by the title 'Dr' which shows that he is in the position to give his medical views and hence, can be trusted.

In addition to that, Dr Rao is activated in his actions: *I am not disputing the findings of the doctor who conducted the post mortem. "I only noted down the bruises and injuries to Kugan, That is all. There was no hanky panky."* This shows that he is actively doing something; he is not just being the affected party. Rather, he is shown as engaging in an activated role with actions that are transactive.

The use of direct speech emphasises the doctor's considerable importance (*"I am not disputing the findings of the doctor who conducted the post mortem. "I only noted down the bruises and injuries to Kugan. That is all. There was no hanky panky."*). In addition to emphasising his professional credentials, they also give him a voice to, perhaps, serve as a foil to Kugan's family whose actions may portray them as lacking credentials as well as credibility.

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the frequency of occurrence determined quantitatively, 2 individual actors and 2 group actors were examined to determine the manner of their representation as well as the actions attributed to them. They included Kugan, DCP Khalid, the family as well as the medical personnel.

The most important roles appear to have been assigned to the authority figures such as the deputy chief of police as well as the independent doctor. They are introduced to the reader with due respect to their titles and positions such as DCP Khalid whose title and name appear together undoubtedly in order to underline their importance in society as well as to establish their credibility as professionals and experts.

The fact that a number of questions had already been raised regarding the death of Kugan by various quarters, the mainstream press appears to have been at pains to highlight that the investigations were being handled by respectable men with credentials. In hierarchical communities as with Asian societies where Asian values, as espoused by some leaders, are meant to reflect respect for authority, such media statements may be a means to inspire awe and confidence.

Much of the representation of the authority figures in the articles is in active roles, with the writers employing extensive quotes. This finding supports van Leeuwen's (2008) view that high-status actors are given space and that their words are heard. This also serves to personalise them for the reader. Erjavec (2001) as well as Pietikainen (2003) note the tendency of the press in choosing to quote the majority actors, rather than the minority. They explain this by stating that access to the actors or statements representing the dominant groups' viewpoints may be reasons for this tendency. However, while access to the powerful elites in the local incident is available to the media, it is by no means the only source.

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However, it is possible that the local media has taken on the role of "explaining" the situation from the authority point of view. A possible reason could be that they are adopting a model of social responsibility as advised by high profile leaders and politicians.

Despite their frequency of occurrence, it would seem that Kugan and his family have been accorded the role of the low-status actors. In the case of his family, while no references are made to individual members, they are frequently linked to Kugan through realizations such as "family of the detainee". The family's status as being linked to "the suspect" appears to be foregrounded, possibly in a bid to remind us of some possible guilt by association. Can the views and wishes of such persons be given too much credence, considering the dubious family connections?

The bereavement of the family members and their grief appears to be almost overlooked or even forgotten. This possible attempt to discredit the family may be seen in the context of the SUARAM report 2007 highlighting families blaming the police for the deaths in custody.

Such reports as well as the Royal Commission's recommendations for sweeping changes to be made, appear to have created some defensiveness in the establishments such as the police as well as the ruling government. The Annual Report 2007 also notes that the numbers of deaths in custody as revealed by ministers concerned seem to differ from one year to the next. Also, promises to investigate deaths, conduct inquests as well as implement recommended measure have proven to be, at best, well-meant, but empty promises.

The first sentence of the second article, *Kin postpone Kugan's burial,* appears to almost parody the actions of the family through the sentence, *"It was high drama all the way…"*. The tone is one of mockery as well as exasperation as when one might refer to capricious children and their wilful ways. It is significant that in the early paragraphs of both articles examined, the family is shown to be in active roles with actions that have negative material processes (Refer to 1.1, 1.2, 2.1,.2.2, 2.3). Similar portrayals of denigrated minorities have been reported in a number of critical discourse studies of new articles (Teo 2000; Erjavec 2001; Pietikainen 2003)

An equally unsympathetic portrayal appears to have been accorded to Kugan. His presence and his actions are presented to the reader through the words of DCP Khalid. The labels ascribed to him stress his alleged crime and his last status as a "detainee" (refer 1.1), before he is personalised through reference to his name. Kugan's death appears to be incidental as the actions of his family is foregrounded in the first report of his death. Even when his involvement is mentioned and he is accorded the role of an active participant, it is, as in the case of his family, to highlight his active participation in negative material processes, particularly his alleged involvement in illegal activities.

Overall, while the identities of the titled authorities appear to be represented as a stable, steady form, the low-status actors are shown as actors whose identities and actions are realized through inversion. The order of things appears to have been given a spin so that instead of scrutinising the actions of the police, readers seem to be inexorably led to an examination of the dead man and his family. While they may be the victims as claimed by

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some, the messages in the two articles appear to represent them as powerful players in control of their destinies.

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