

A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF 'INDIVIDUALISM' AND 'COLLECTIVISM': THE GLOBAL BERSIH 3.0 WEBSITE

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In 2012, one of the biggest rallies in the past decade took place in Malaysia calling for electoral reform (BBC NEWS Asia 2012). This rally took place amidst the ambience of the 13th General Election campaigning. The involvement of Bersih in the rally spurred my study of its webpage through a semiotic analysis with focus given to cultural values.

BACKGROUND²

Malaysia was bustling with activity as it was preparing for the upcoming 13th General Election. Malaysia in 2013 had a populace of around 30 million with Malays, Chinese and Indians making up the main cultural groups. The ruling party has always been the National Front Coalition or Barisan Nasional (BN) but it seemed to have had a stronger opposition at the time as in the 2008 elections. After the 2008 elections, Barisan Nasional returned to power with a reduced majority and the forfeit of five states to the opposition (Moten 2009). In light of this, the outcome of the 13th General Election was waited for in great suspense.

Some Malaysians have become more vocal in recent years. A colossal rally took place in Malaysia on 28 April 2012 calling for electoral reform. The Joint Action Committee for Electoral Reform³ or Bersih (or Global Bersih 3.0) was reported to be behind the Bersih 3.0 rally (Samy 2013). This was not the first rally organized by 'Bersih'; it had organized rallies in 2007 and 2011. The goals of Bersih are supported by the opposition party in Malaysia (Koswanage and Grudgings 2012). There was participation in the Bersih 3.0 rally by the opposition party

² I would like thank Ms. Syarifah Hasanah for her contribution of some materials to my research study.

³ The Joint Action Committee for Electoral Reform was established in Malaysia by concerned citizens in 2005

in Bersih and its leader, Anwar Ibrahim, was charged for his involvement in the rally and if convicted, would be prohibited from running for office (BBC NEWS Asia 2012). The Committee regards itself as an important part of Malaysia as it attempts to give the country an electoral system that delivers ‘...a fundamental democratic right to its citizens; an electoral process that delivers fair and free General Election.’ (Bersih 2012).

The Malaysian police claimed that 25,000 people attended the (Global Bersih 3.0) rally and that this would impact the date of the elections by pushing it back (Jegathesan 2012). The Bersih 3.0 rally had intrigued me and encouraged me to examine the Global Bersih 3.0 homepage in this research study.

VOTING TRENDS IN GENERAL ELECTION 13

For the Election Commission of Malaysia, the voting trend for the 13th General Election will be controlled by young voters (Jalil 2012). There were 5.2 million voters of ages 21 to 39 for 2011⁴. Young voters are further categorized into ‘emotionally influenced’ and ‘mature’ groups by the Commission. It is further reported that, the group that is emotionally influenced making up 2.3 million voters is more likely to make them publicly heard as in the case of the Global Bersih 3.0 rally and the PTPTN demonstration⁵. The study focused on a semiotic analysis of the Global Bersih 3.0 website from the perspective of a young mature prospective voter. Of great interest to this study is the concept of ‘culture’ on the Global Bersih 3.0 website.

⁴ This statistic encompasses from the first to the fourth quarter in 2011.

⁵ Demonstration on PTPTN or Perbadanan Tabung Pendidikan Tinggi Nasional in English is National Higher Education Fund. This demonstration was held on 14 April 2012.