

Mass Media's Racist Reportage about Russian Invasion of Ukraine: Orientalism Study

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ABSTRACT

This study discusses the mass media's racist report about the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This research is analyzed by using Orientalism. This study uses qualitative methods supported by the data from some mass media like CBS, Al-Jazeera, Hareetz.com, and Channel 4 News, articles, and books that are relevant to this study. The results of this study show that these reportages depict the West as 1) civilized; 2) prosperous, middle class, and well-dressed; 3) intelligent and educated; 4) priority. All of the depictions of the West above affect the audiences by internalizing them in their mind, starting to agree with and believe them. It will strengthen the belief of the West as the most superior nation among the other nations and relates to ethnocentrism. These beliefs will lead to racism and ethnocentrism in the West.

Keywords: ethnocentrism, mass media, orientalism, racist.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Russian Invasion of Ukraine received a lot of attention from the world so many media covered it. There are so many mass media that show their support for Ukraine considering the large number of casualties. Some of those mass media are CBS, Al-Jazeera, Haaretz.com, and Channel 4 News. CBS is an American television distribution company owned by CBS Studio as a part of CBS entertainment group. It is a division of Paramount Global. Paramount delivers premium content to audiences across platforms worldwide including CBS News which gives the latest news to the audiences (www.paramount.com). Besides CBS, Al-Jazeera is another media that also announced the Russian invasion of Ukraine. According to its official website (www.aljazeera.com), Al Jazeera is an independent news organization funded in part by the Qatari government. In 2006, Al Jazeera Satellite Network was changed to a public utility, private corporation by a public memorandum and articles of association in accordance with the provisions of Qatar Law No. 21 of 2006, and was re-named "Al Jazeera Media Network". Al Jazeera Arabic was the first independent news channel in the Arab world dedicated to providing comprehensive news and live debate launched in 1996. Al Jazeera English, which was launched in 2006, is part of a growing network comprising more than 10 channels and divisions. Next, according to its website (www.hareetz.com), Haaretz is the online English edition of Hareetz newspaper in Israel. It is an independent daily newspaper with a broadly liberal outlook on domestic issues and on international affairs. Hareetz has an important role in shaping public opinion and is read for government decision-making. Furthermore, Channel 4 News is the main news program on British Television and the highest television program in the United Kingdom. Channel 4 News is made for Channel 4 by ITN and is a publicly-owned and commercially-funded UK public service broadcaster (www.channel4.com). These media reported the Russian Invasion of Ukraine by using

racist narration, giving a comparison between Ukraine and Middle East refugees, and showing the unfair treatment towards Ukraine Black students. Mass media has an important role in social life not only to release tension and give entertainment but also to present a significant role in the social process through its content (Susanto, 2015: 826). Mass media also can change public perception since it can be used as a propaganda tool considering that it is a public reference in seeking information and news. In other words, both the narration and the content of mass media that are shown to the audience can have a significant influence on the audience. According to Ardianto et al, 2004:1, mass media are able to change attitudes, feelings, and behavior of the people or it can be said changes in cognitive, affective, and behavioral of them. Mass media can lead public opinion toward the latest event and indirectly spread certain values or ideologies in the audience's mind. It also happened in mass media reportage on the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The reporter used certain statements in describing the Ukraine refugee that emphasize the appearance of those refugees as White people who do not deserve to get attacked and bombed.

Based on the problem above, these mass media reportages not only deliver the message but also deliver the hegemony about the position of the West who is higher than the East. Orientalism believes and accepts that there is a fundamental difference between the West and the East. The knowledge about the East is shaped and designed by the West to maintain the belief that the West is superior and the East is inferior. As the result, it is expected that the East will depend on the West and this dependent relationship will give the advantage to the West. The advantage can be a form of eternal belief confirmed by people of the West's legitimacy as the most superior among others.

Orientalism is a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. If the West is called the "Occident", the East is called the "Orient". The term Occident for the West and the Other or Orient for the East does not naturally happen but it is a construction or human-made from the West towards the East for spreading and preserving power (Said, 2003:3). The Orient has helped to define the West as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience possessed by the East. In another word, there are binary oppositions defining the West and the East that refers to the identity stereotype between the West and the East. When the West is rational, civilized, and clever, the East is irrational, uncivilized, and ignorant. Based on those binary oppositions, there are the terms "other" for the East and "self" for the West as the subject. Because the West is considered the subject, the East-on the contrary is considered the object in every field (Said, 2003:1-2). All those characterizations and terms do not naturally happen as the result of the East's own effort but rather the whole complex series of knowledgeable manipulation by which the East was identified by the West (Said, 2003:40). These beliefs contribute to racism and ethnocentrism. Racism is best used to refer to racial attitudes, specifically negative perceptions of non-white groups (Shiao and Woody, 2021:497). It can be said that there are negative construction beliefs toward the attitudes of non-white groups. It relates to the ethnocentrism of the White. Ethnocentrism is a widespread tendency for people to favor their own group over another group on the belief that one's own ethnic group or one's own culture is superior to other ethnic groups and cultures (Njoroge and Kirori, 2014:357). Based on the definition above, it can be said that ethnocentrism is a group belief, based on a specific race or culture, that their identity is superior to other races or cultures. It leads to the way of thinking and behavior in treating other people from another race or culture. This behavior can be seen through some media that have been discussed below.

There are some previous studies that discussed Orientalism. *Representasi Ideologi Orientalisme Dalam Film "Kenapa Harus Bule?"* written by Maria Puspasari Perdana in 2020 explains how the East gets racist label as lazy and submissive, being oppressed by the West, and must accept the West's values and culture to become more "civilized". This research also used Semiotic Roland Barthes in analyzing the movie. Besides, *Humanisme Dalam Shi No Hana Dan Tsumi No Hi Karya Abe Tomoji*

(Kajian Orientalisme) written by Irvina Restu Handayani (2018) also discuss racism, especially the physical assessment Hinobe gave to people outside Japan based on the special characteristics that show which nation the person is from. Hinobe, shows that every human being, whatever nation he comes from, has a good attitude and a bad attitude, no one is in a lower or higher position, opposite to orientalism. Furthermore, he also believes that anyone can get knowledge despite their background identity. In addition, Representasi Orientalisme dalam Film The Man Who Knew Infinity written by Abrar et al in 2017 also discuss the West's power in the fight against the East. It also focuses on how denotation and connotation meaning and also Orientalism myth are depicted in this movie. Therefore, this study seeks to capture the mass media's racist reportage on the Russian invasion of Ukraine that has not been discussed before on the research above. This study also emphasizes the marginalization of the East and highlights the superiority of the West.

2. METHOD

The method used in this research is a qualitative study with the Orientalism theory by Edward Said. The data collection is done by using documentation and discourse analysis. The writer focuses on the narration of the reportages that depicted racism and ethnocentrism. The writer writes the narration of the reportages down. Then, it continued with finding some information about the mass media that give racist narration and show unfair treatment which are CBS, Al-Jazeera, Haaretz, and Channel 4 News. It is completed by reading some books, either printed or electronic books about the theory used in this research.

The media reportage is seen as the text consisting of the narration of the reporter about the Russian Invasion of Ukraine. The steps in analyzing the data are observing the narration, especially in describing the West, said by the reporters, and capturing unfair treatment towards the Blacks as Ukraine refugees. After that, the writer writes the narration of the reporters that contains racism and behavior of unfair treatment. Then, the writer analyses every part of those racist narrations and behavior of unfair treatment by using Orientalism theory.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The West as The Civilized

The depiction of the West as Civilized can be seen in the statement of a CBS reporter—Charlie D'Agata—about the refugee of Ukraine on February 25, 2022 “It is not like Iraq, Afghanistan. This is a relatively civilized, relatively European. City where you would not expect or hope that it is going to happen.” By his statement, it can be said that Iraq and Afghanistan are uncivilized countries and their people are uncultured that it is normal for them if there are wars in their countries. He also said that “But this is not a place, with all due respect, you know like Iraq and Afghanistan that has seen conflict raging for decades.” In other words, people in Iraq and Afghanistan more deserve hundreds of bombs. They deserve to be killed and attacked because there have always been conflicted for many years. In contrast, Ukraine is part of Europe where the people are civilized and cultured and it makes them do not deserve to be attacked and bombed, in this case, by Russia. Said (2003) said that the relationship between the West and Occident is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony (pp 4). The statement of CBS reporter above also contains hegemony which everything that is good like civilized always related to the West and the opposites belongs to the East like Iraq and Afghanistan. Ashcroft and Kadhim (2001) also added that —it refers to, but does not document, the material effects on the colonized of those techniques which construct them as inferior, dehumanized, and infantilized (pp 97). From the quotation above, it can be said that the past colonization affects the East by believing that they are inferior, backward, and even dehumanized, in contrast, the West is superior and civilized hence they have higher

positions than them. When the feeling of inferiority has been internalized in the mind, it will perpetuate the belief of West superiority without even questioning it. The West's superiority can be seen through its control over the East.

3.2. The West as prosperous, middle class, and well-dressed.

Besides the depiction of the West as civilized, the mass media also depicts the West as prosperous, middle-class, and well-dressed. It can be seen by the statement of Al-Jazeera reporter—Peter Dobbie—on February 2022,

“What is compelling is just looking at them the way they are dressed. These are prosperous. I am loving to use the expression these are prosperous, middle-class people. These are not obviously refugees trying to get away from areas in the Middle East that are still in a big state of the war. These are not people trying to get away areas in North Africa. They look like any European family that you would live next door to.”

The reporter tried to describe the appearance of the Ukraine refugees. In fact, he does not only describe them but also compares them to people in the Middle East and North Africa. By saying White people are prosperous and middle class, it can be said that Middle Eastern and North Africans are impoverished that mostly come from low-class people. Said (2003) said,

“Orientalism is never far from what Denys Hay has called the idea of Europe, a collective notion identifying —us. Europeans as against all —those non-Europeans, and indeed it can be argued that the major component in European culture is precisely what made the culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of Europe identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European people and cultures” (pp 7).

According to the statement above, the identity of Europeans is superior compared to the non-European people and cultures, in this case, the Middle East and North Africa. Based on the reportage above, people will definitely know that Europeans have a higher status in society just by looking at their appearance. The term superior belonged to Europeans, both the identity and the culture. It can also be applied to the look or the way they dress. The way they dress become the standard of being well-dressed. The way they dress can also become the standard of prosperous people. It means when people do not dress the way they dress, they cannot be said as prosperous people. This can be categorized as racist and ethnocentric since the depiction of a particular race—like European—is always depicted as the best race compared to other races. It is like Said (2003) said, “...every European was consequently a racist, an imperialist, an ethnocentric” (pp 204). This reportage is trying to not only maintain but also spread the belief of White superiority to the audience who watch it. Besides, the people who watch this reportage will strongly believe and agree that other non-Europeans, including Middle Eastern and North Africans, are definitely inferior compared to them by looking at their appearance. They even do not notice that this belief is actually constructed by the Western. They accept and consider the sense of European supremacy as default.

3.3. The West as Intelligent and Educated People

The other depictions of the West are intelligent and educated. It can be seen in Bulgarian's Prime Minister's speech and it is highlighted in Hareetz, “These people are intelligent and educated people.... This is not the refugee wave we have been used to, people were not sure about their identity, people with unclear pasts, who could have been even terrorists.” From the statement above, it can be seen that West has a clear identity as educated and intelligent unlike the others which stated as “not sure about their identity and unclear past”. Since the East's identity is unclear, it needs to be defined by the West by using the label of terrorist. By labeling them as terrorists, it can be said that non-Europeans are uneducated, vicious, and inhumane. This judgment done by the West is explained

by Said (2003) “Orient is depicted as something one judges (as in a court of law), something one studies (as in a curriculum), something one disciplines (as in a school or prison), something one illustrates (as in the zoological manual)” (pp 41). From the quotation above, it can be said that the East becomes the object and the West is the subject. The East is the object of the West in defining, explaining, and even judging their identity. Furthermore, by explaining the East as “people were not sure about their identity, people with unclear pasts, who could have been even terrorists”, it actually emphasizes the West’s identity as intelligent and educated as the contrast opposition. The identity of the West as intelligent and educated is in line with Said’s statement, “East is considered as a place isolated from the mainstream of European progress in the many fields especially science” (Said, 2003:206). Based on this belief, the East started to believe that they need the West to eradicate their ignorance. It is also expected that the West will bring them to civilization. This is the beginning of the dependency of the East on the West.

4. The West as a Priority

There is racial discrimination against Black people during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. There are a lot of Black students and foreigners in Ukraine that also need to be evacuated. In fact, the government made them wait longer than the White people to be evacuated. According to Channel 4 News, the Black students had come out via Hungary by walking for hours in order to avoid Ukrainian polish border exit points to the West. The Ukrainian border guard said that the policy was one foreigner allowed through for every ten Ukrainians. In fact, the White foreigner is in the same queue as the White people. They were separated in the queue between the White people and the Black people. They were also treated differently. Based on the news above, it can be said that the West is the priority to be saved and evacuated. In another word, White people’s lives are more valuable than those of Blacks. It can be seen through this quotation, “Nigerian embassy officials are here for example transporting hundreds of people to Budapest mainly students who have been walking for days... Victor first went to the polish border with Ukraine to the west but says he was told by Ukrainian border guide that the policy was one foreigner allowed through for every ten Ukrainians.” It is fine to make the Black students and people walk further and wait longer as long as the Whites are safe. Furthermore, the unequal treatment is clearly seen through the separated queue. The way the White people govern the Black people indicates that racism and discrimination still happen even during the war. Humanity is not the main reason to save people’s lives and it is based on skin color instead. It is in line with Said’s (2003) statement,

“An assumption had been made that the Orient and everything in it was, if not patently inferior to, then in need of corrective study by the West. The Orient was viewed as if framed by classroom, the criminal court, the prison, the illustrated manual...is knowledge of the Orient that places things in Oriental in class, court, prison, or manual for scrutiny, study, judgment, discipline, or governing” (pp 41).

According to the quotation above, the way the White people treated the Black people in Ukraine indicates that the Black people needed to be disciplined and governed by White people even though it means that they were unfairly treated. The White people acted like the ones who taught the Black how to be orderly and disciplined by separating the queue and suspending the evacuation. The Black must accept those discriminations and obey those policies if they want to survive. They have no power or chance to fight and defend their pride.

4. CONCLUSION

Mass media can be the medium to both spread and maintain the ideological construction to the audiences’ minds. It can be seen through the narration of those mass media that give to the

audience. Based on the research that has been done above, The Footage of Russia's invasion of Ukraine also tries to perpetuate the depiction of the West as superior to the East. These reportages show the depiction of the West as 1) civilized; 2) prosperous, middle class, and well-dressed; 3) intelligent and educated; 4) priority. All of the depictions of the West above affect the audiences by internalizing them in their mind, starting to agree with and believe them. As an effect, the East will consider themselves inferior and believe that they have to depend on the West or it can be said that the West has more power than the East. All those cycles will strengthen the belief of the West as the most superior nation among the other nations. These beliefs will lead to racism and ethnocentrism in the West. It is suggested to discuss racism and ethnocentrism in the Russian invasion of Ukraine by using another theory and approach.

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