

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study examined the literary techniques used to represent Asia including its places, people and cultures based on the concept of Orientalism in American popular media in the 21st century, namely films: *Rambo 4* (2008) and *Aladdin* (2019), television programs: *Fresh Off the Boat* (2015-2020), *The Big bang Theory* (2018) and *The Simpsons* (2019), advertising: Target (2009) and Mountain Dew (2010), as well as comic books: *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang (2006) and *The Totally Awesome Hulk #15* by Greg Pak (2017). To clarify, Orientalism refers to the construction relied on the distinction between the East (the Orient) and the West (the Occident) (Said, 1978). According to the analysis in the previous chapter, it was found that American popular media conducted between 2006 and 2020 apparently represented Asia through the concept of Said's Orientalism. Such representations reflected the way Asia was depicted as negative and inferior to the Occident (American and Western European regions). Particularly, Asia was made in association with exoticism, mystery, backwardness, irrationality, femininity and threat. These negative depictions of Asia completely contrasted to the portrayals of the Occident which was perceived as civilized, competent, masculine, rational and completely superior to the Orient. Interestingly, the results of the analysis also revealed the most frequently-used literary techniques employed to represent Asia based on Orientalism. Those techniques were repetition and symbolism found mostly in the American popular films and television programs. For possible reasons behind the use of these two techniques, it could be stated that those American producers and authors might probably prefer employing them since these techniques could represent Asia through the Orientalist ideas in the dialogues indirectly and seamlessly. As repetition allowed the negative depictions of Asia to appear to the audience repeatedly. This technique could also function to familiarize the audience with the Western prejudice towards Asian characters. While the use of

symbolism could encourage the audience to decode and interpret a variety of symbols in relation to the Western assumptions based upon the concept of Orientalism. Apart from repetition and symbolism, the use of metaphor and diction followed close behind in second place. In terms of metaphor, it was reasonable to state that this literary technique was numerous found in the American films and television as it could help avoid a direct representation of Orientalism. In addition, another reason for using metaphor was because the negative representations of the Orient could be offensive to non-western and/or non-American audiences. Thereby, metaphor could be another effective tool to serve the Orientalist purposes. Yet, this technique required an ability of the audience to interpret its possible meanings. For diction, the word choice appearing in various conversations spoken by different characters, especially in the films and television program could assist the viewer with the reinforcement of the binary opposition. In doing so, negative words such as and 'exotic', 'liar' and even 'fucking' often appeared with the portrayals of Asian characters. On the other hand, there were many literary techniques which least appear in the American popular media. Some examples included periphrasis, zoomorphism, motive and anecdote. The plausible reason behind them might be due to the unpopularity and difficulty of such techniques in visual media. Also, these unfamiliar techniques seriously required some level of interpretation and intertextuality in an effort to expose and understand the Orientalist representations of Asia circuitously shown in the American media. As a surprise to this study, it was found that advertising and comic books in the American popular media seldom contained the use of literary techniques. The reason could be because these media, especially advertisements, were somewhat short and were not popular compared to films and TV programs. Additionally, contents in advertisements are supposed to be direct, simple and easy to understand. By this way, literary techniques are not often employed in this medium. As a consequence, the Orientalist representations of Asia in the American popular media in this study confirmed the Orientalist perspectives which constructs Asia as inferior to the West (and America) based on the binary opposition drawn between the Orient and the Occident.

In terms of racial and cultural factors which influence Orientalist representations in the American media, it is likely to state that the differences between the West and the East play a major role in creating the binary opposition made between the Occident and the Orient. This system which functions to set two different objects apart had been produced and applied by the West which later became an ideological discourse and (has) somehow served for providing an authority of the West over the East. This leads to a status of dominant race with cultural hegemony which triggers a recall of Western “imperialism”[1]. To explain, this Western ideology plays a great role in extending Western influence and culture to non-Western world, the Occident is perceived as a powerful race with its cultural hegemony over the Other. Orientalism then has been produced and applied to serve as a tool to spread the hegemonic domination of the Occident through negative representations of the Other. Such a process has been done for centuries in order to maintain and normalize the superiority and dominant position of the West to the eye of the world. By this way, the Western cultural lens of the Other or Orientalism named by Said has been used to shape the way non-Western countries perceive and are perceived. Moreover, the negative self-perception as inferior races paralleling inferior cultures among the East countries, enables Orientalism to become an opportunity for the West to manage, civilize and even exploit the East righteously. Thus, the distinction of races and cultures between the West and the East has influenced the production of the binary opposition called Orientalism, a way which possibly serves for the imperial purposes of the West in the modern era.¹

Discussion

As demonstrated in the American popular media in the 21st century, it could be described that the literary techniques used to represent Asia including its peoples, places, and cultures fell in line with Orientalism. As stated by Said in his influential theoretical framework, Orientalism served to exaggerate and distort

¹ [1] Imperialism is defined as the way of obtaining a foreign colonial realm and to the state of empire possession. The term also refers to the ability to dominate or rule the political, economic, or cultural development of a separate geographical existence (Manktelow & Veevers, 2015).

differences between the West and the East grounded on Western assumptions. To simplify, Orientalism is perceived as “Western style technique that is used to dominate, restructure, and have authority over the Orient” (Said, 1978). This strongly supports the argument that the idea of the binary opposition is still rooted in the Western world and is presented in various forms through their various media. Moreover, the negative portrayals of Asia as inferior to the West, especially in the American film ‘Aladdin’ and the television sitcom series ‘The Big Bang Theory’ clearly conform to the results of the study of *Orientalism in Children’s Literature: Representations of Egyptian and Jordanian Families in Elsa Marston’s Stories* by Noura Awadh Shafie and Faiza Aljohani in the way that the idea of the binary opposition in the literature depicted the East, particularly Arab families who were far from the West as poor, ignorant, and uncivilized compared to the West (Shafie & Aljohani, 2019). Moreover, the portrayals of Asian characters and their cultures, in ‘Rambo 4’ and the comic books ‘The Totally Awesome Hulk #15’ were clearly based on Western imagination. These portrayals correspond with the alien Other based on Western fantasy as reported in Murphy’s *Asian Representation and Anti-Asian Racism in Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Murphy, 2005). Therefore, it is totally clear here that such negative representations of the Orient in the American popular media in this study proves the existence of Orientalism in the present era and it is not much different from what it used to be.

Recommendations

As the author, my aim of this study is to explore the possible existence of Orientalist representations of Asia through literary techniques whether intentionally or unintentionally. This is done in an effort to increase more understanding of the use of literary techniques as possible tools for producing Orientalist perspectives in popular media as they can possibly shape our identities and the way we perceive ourselves and others. Thus, recommendations from this study are to acquire more knowledge of history and to study more interpretation skills, especially in various forms of media not only in the West but also Eastern or Asian media. As seen in this study, those media can produce negative depictions of others based on the binary

opposition. Further, with the rise of globalization, the media are all around us. The way we perceive and understand others without authority is considered highly important as it can help raise awareness of negative portrayals as well as avoid being framed by those media. This way enables us to learn and see what things truly are. Nevertheless, it is not the purpose of this study to create any resistance or prejudice against American or Western media as those negative images might be created unconsciously and possibly for entertainment purposes. Lastly, I hope this study can be beneficial and useful for any further studies in the field of Postcolonialism. And I hope to inspire those who are interested in this groundbreaking text 'Orientalism' to other areas of analysis using different perspectives and methodologies.

