

## Chapter 4

# Misleading Media Portrayals in a Globalized World: Justification of State Control Through an Orientalist Lens

**Tymoteusz Chajdas**

*University of California – Santa Barbara, USA*

### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter discusses the phenomenon of media power and dissemination of misleading and spurious representations. The author argues that global mass media can increasingly be seen as devices of control. This is inferred from a frequent use of Orientalist discourses when portraying the Middle East, which bestows the media messages with hidden power structures. These messages, along with the emergence of social media and a high saturation of visual media, contribute to strengthening of media power. This enables the state to justify its control and political actions. By drawing on Orientalism and by exploring media portrayals of the Middle East, this chapter suggests that misrepresentations produced by the media should be seen as a violent rhetoric which aims at acting to discipline Middle Eastern bodies and trapping them in a cycle of alienation. The analysis discusses media coverage of the 2015 Paris terrorist attacks, the war in Iraq, and 9/11. The author suggests that through the practice of alienating subjects from society, mass media create an opportunity for them to turn to extremes.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Globalization, in all its complexity, gave birth to many theories. While socio-political approaches framed it as “complex interdependence,” (Keohane and Nye, 1977), cultural theorists explored the theses of “functional proximity,” “homogenization,” and “connectivity” (Steger, 2009; Tomlinson, 1999). Nevertheless, the conversations concerned with globalization of media industries tend to be centered around the notions of transformation, especially in terms of social restructuring (Modelski et al., 2007), as well as proliferation and dissemination of media in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These conversations have placed media industries at the center of globalization, predominantly as powerful technologies which play fundamental

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roles in contemporary societies through their ability to shape public agenda, establish status quo and influence the state's political actions.

Modern-day media have transformed considerably over the past decades since the invention of the printing press and telegraph in the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, respectively. Traditionally thought of as informing and information-sharing devices only, media promptly became an object of scholarly and intellectual debates. Although the conversations over the role of mass media in modern societies started to flourish only in the twenty first century, many thinkers referred to media as the "fourth estate" of the government as early as in the eighteenth century (Burke in Willis and Willis, 2007). This gave birth to a series of conceptualizations about the cultural and sociological impacts of increased use of media noting their extraordinary impact on societies.

The ways of understanding the practices of media industry have been transforming alongside both the changes in media outlets themselves and various globalizing processes. The proliferation of media globally, along with an increasing role of developing countries and emerging economies in media production and distribution as well as the emergence of new media, complicated the ways in which scholars and the general public tend to think about media and practices underlying the industry.

Nevertheless, one could not deny the fact that the emergence and rapid expansion of the new means of communicating and disseminating information made many contemporary western societies develop media cultures (Deuze, 2011), in which individuals, media consumers and spectators are continuously being exposed to, and are being "bombarded" by, media images and messages (Potter, 2013, p. 112). This phenomenon propelled many conversations about the concept of media power and its repercussions, which are specifically pertinent in the contemporary era which many have defined as one where misleading information, fake news, spurious representations and alternative facts dominate the political sphere.

This essay engages with the very phenomenon of media power and argues that media should be seen as devices of power and control. This can be seen especially in their portrayals of the Middle East, which is often represented in a fabricated, preconceived and constructed fashion (Fuller, 1995, p. 187). These Orientalizing practices of media and their portrayals of the "East" in the globalized world should be seen as a violent rhetoric aimed at acting to discipline the Middle Eastern bodies, trapping them in a cycle of alienation by rendering them different and punishing them for their identities.

This allows the state to justify its control and certain actions it undertakes. Additionally, this paper suggests that through the process of Orientalizing and alienating certain subjects from society, mass media create an opportunity for these subjects to turn to extremes. This paper carries significance in drawing attention to the necessity of disassembling and deconstructing the western media in order to understand the structures of power within which they operate.

## **HISTORICIZING MEDIA POWER**

Throughout much of Western history, the mass media have often been objects of public desire. This has been conditioned by the fact that the vast majority of conversations and literature concerned with media have traditionally equipped them with a particular ideology which supported media's privileged status in society.

Conventionally, the earliest examples of media technologies, such as written journalistic texts, were conceptualized as tools of informing and information-sharing only (Rosen, 1999). With the emergence of new technologies, which enabled the more rapid spread of information, and with the proliferation of

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