

Edward Said's *Orientalism* and the Representation of the East in *Gardens of Water* by Alan Drew

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ABSTRACT

This research paper is aimed to uncover the ways in which the western author, Alan Drew, represents the East culture in the novel *Gardens of Water* (2003). The research employs qualitative descriptive study with the content analysis approach. The analysis of the novel is done within the theoretical framework of Orientalism proposed by Edward Said (1978). The results of the analysis show that the representation of non-western people and cultures confirms orientalist point of view that puts the East and the West in a binary opposition and represents the East as inferior to the West. The study also proves that the author uses typical stereotyping in representing the East in the novel such as untrustworthy, rude, barbaric and traditional and also exposes the issue of patriarchy which is usually pinned into the East Culture. This representation of the East leads to the justification of the West imperialism and colonization toward the East.

Keywords : *Orientalism, orientalist, binary opposition, representation of the East, West Imperialism*

INTRODUCTION

Alan Drew's novel entitled *Gardens of Water* (2003) presents a modern encounter between the West and the East. The novel, which is written by an American author, tells about two families from different cultures -- American and Kurdish, West and East -- that meet after an earthquake hit Turkey in 1999. What becomes interesting is that even though the novel is written by an American, it uses the point of view of Kurdish characters as a part of the East in presenting its characters and the culture in the novel. What is represented in the novel about the East can be false or misleading in which as an American author, he does not experience the culture himself, but rather uses his research and knowledge. Starting from this assumption, I then intended to find the ways in which the author represents the East culture in the novel.

In relation to the representation of the East by the West, Edward Said has taken a big role in capturing this phenomenon by

writing a book entitled *Orientalism* in 1978. Through his book, Said has challenged the concept of Orientalism that believes that there are massive distinctions between the West and the East that put the East as inferior to the West. European or the West, according to Said, defined themselves as the superior race compared to the Orient or the East. Said found that these representations constructed by the West create a discourse that is traditionally aimed to spread two hegemonic purposes; those are to make imperialism legal to the government; and to make false conviction that the West is capable of helping and bringing a 'better' civilization to the Orient (Bartens, 2008). Said, as cited in Oldmeadow (2004) further says that Orientalism is colonizing the knowledge about the Orient that draws a great distinction between the West and the East.

The knowledge about the Orient, according to Moosavinia (2011) is handled by the Westerners in order to construct a power operation between the Orient and the

Occident. The West, through the representation of their literature, speaks for the Orient by negating the Orient's own voice (Gardner, 2012:1) and constructing knowledge about the Orient. The Orient is seen as standing in the opposite of the Occident--the Occidents's other--that own every opposite qualities of the Occident. The Orient "were rarely seen or looked at; they were seen through, analyzed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined"(Said, 2003, p.207). In short, it can be understood that Orientalism is a term that relates to the West's representation over the Orient whose purpose is mainly for colonizing the Orient by controlling, constructing and representing them in binary opposition.

Regarding the issue of Orientalism, Gifford (1999) says that the authors such as novelists or the poets become the vehicle of the creation and the perpetuation of Orientalism that are commonly served through the construction of binary opposition between the Orient

and the Occident. The authors (novelist and poet) have power to spread certain ideology through words in fiction because they can control what happens in the story and construct a kind of hegemony that align the readers, consciously or unconsciously, to what the authors tell and construct. In the works of fiction by Westerners that represents East (Orient) culture; the westerners are the side that hold the power over it, this is in line with what Said (2003, p.40) believes that the westerners, in Orientalism's manner, is the source of knowledge about the Orient due to the fact that they create the Orient, the Oriental and their world. In this way, the western authors can construct, manipulate and control the representation and description of the eastern people, even if they are created in misleading ways.

To return to the content in the novel *Gardens of Water* (2003), it can be said that there is a contrasting representation between the East and the West which is presented by the author in the novel.

Many presentations, which are found in the non-western characters' attitudes, physical appearance and some events and settings, lead to the positioning of the East and the West in binary opposition. It is in accordance with Said's (1978) concept of the Self and the Other in Orientalism. He argues that Orientalism is "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between 'the Orient' and 'the Occident' (2003: 2). In this way, Orientalism tends to rely on a binary opposition between the West and the East that most of times is misleading and destructive. In the novel *Gardens of Water* (2003), it is found that the author also tends to present this distinction between the West and the East that keeps them positioned in distinct position; superior and inferior.

BINARY OPPOSITION BETWEEN THE WEST AND THE EAST

The binary opposition between the West and East can be

seen in the event when the earthquake hits. The local government shows slow response in evacuating the victims. While in contrast, the Americans are described as responsive as they come to evacuate the victims so fast. This illustration of the event also brings another binary opposition in which the text puts the East people, as represented by Sinan's family and other victims of the earthquake, as weak because when the earthquake hits, they can do nothing but wait for the help. On the contrary, the West is represented as strong as they simultaneously come up right after the earthquake hits, even though they are also the victims of the earthquake.

Furthermore, the binary opposition between the West and the East can be seen in the event of post-earthquake. It is illustrated that the ones that provide primary needs such as foods, tents and clothes are the Americans. And again, the government of Turkey, as the representative of the East is absent in helping the victims. Thus, it can

be seen that the West in this event is represented as powerful, while in contrast, the East is represented as powerless. By providing the primary needs, the West also will have more control over the East which is at the same time will raise the importance of the presence of the West.

Moosavinia (2011) mentions in her paper that the knowledge of the Orient is handled by the West to construct a power operation between them. The presence of these binary oppositions which are found in the text is the knowledge that the author constructs to show the superiority of the West and the inferiority of the East. However, this typical encounter between the powerless East and the powerful West, according to Hunt (2009), has historically used by the West to increase their own knowledge, which is at the same time will also increase their own power toward the East.

STEREOTYPING AND PATRIARCHAL CULTURE OF THE EAST

In the novel *Gardens of Water*, it is also found that the portrayal of the non-western characters in the novel follows Orientalist stereotyping that has been mentioned by Said in his *Orientalism*(1978). The East is represented as an anti-America, hypocrite, manipulative, untrustworthy, rude, barbaric, religious, traditional, rough and dirty. These portrayals of non-western characters are the typical stereotypes of the Orient which is usually pinned by an Orientalist. These constructions of stereotypes that the author presents become the ‘invitation to settlement and missionary ventures, which were the practical results and strategies of European colonization’ (Addison, 1993).

Lary (2006) says that Edward Said saw that Western authors often focus on the presentation of the East in degrading and humiliating actions that represent the East as uncivilized that need to be helped and to be enlightened by the West. In the novel, one of the main issues which is

brought by the author and becomes the main focus is the exposure of patriarchal culture of the Middle East. By presenting Irem as the representative of non-western women and also the family as the representative of the Eastern society, the author also seemingly wants to show a patriarchal discourse in the novel. The author also tends to show that the eastern women are unvoiced, muted, silenced and also oppressed by the patriarchal culture. In contrast to that, the women in America are described having a freedom to speak and to be anything they want.

The patriarchal culture that the author presents in the novel leads to an assumption that the non-western women need to be rescued from the patriarchal practices and the West is the model of freedom that the non-western women dream of. According to Hasan (2005) the exposing of native patriarchy is the ways that the Orientalists and imperialists do to propagate the theory of globalization and of ruling eastern countries. He also adds that the way of exposing patriarchal

culture of the East is a “colonialist enterprise” in which it brings about an assumption that the non-western women need an intervention from the West as intermediaries in the civilizing mission.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be said that the novel entitled *Gardens of Waters* which is written by Alan Drew carries some patterns of Orientalism. The author uses typical ways of degrading the East by exposing the patriarchal society of the East so there is an assumption that the non-western women need an intervention from the West as intermediaries in the civilizing mission. The author also puts the East as inferior to the West in which he illustrates them as weak, powerless and dependent by constructing the event of post-earthquake in the story. While in contrast to that, the study found that the West is illustrated in positive ways such as superior, modern and independent.

Based on what Said says in his *Orientalism* (1978), the novel

also brings about two hegemonic purposes in which it represents the East as inferior and subordinate to the West, so it is legal for the West to come and give 'enlightenment' to the East. The binary opposition which is presented in the novel also brings an understanding that the West should come to east to 'civilize' them. This fact may lead to the construction of hegemony that the colonization is right because the purpose is to help and to give the East some lessons.

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