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Reading Abbas: A Postcolonial Study of One of the Main Characters of *Kelas Internasional*

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the introduction to the research, consisting of the background of the study and the research questions of the research. This chapter also includes the aim of the study, scope of the study, significance of the study, clarification of the study, and brief elaboration of the research method and data collection and data analysis used in this research.

1.1. Background of the Study

Sahara, zebra, poverty, stupidity, exoticism, and infection are some words explicitly or implicitly used by the media to present the ‘Dark Continent’ that is called Africa. In March 2017, the first news and buzz displayed in CNN African Edition website is “Orphanage ‘recruited kids to get donation’” and followed by “Somalia: ‘people are dying of hunger’”. In the website of BBC African Edition, the first headline shown is “UN: World faces ‘largest humanitarian crisis’ since 1945” with an African malnutrition kid as the main picture. In National Geographic Expedition website, you could find the pictures of gorillas, elephants, zebras, lions, and other kind of wild animals in East Africa. In North Africa, you could only find the picture of the Morocco’s desert. In Southern Africa, there is a picture of lions with headline “Southern Africa Highlights”. These are all the most common portrayals of Africa that can be found through the media. Emmanuel Fru Doh (2009) states in his book

entitled *Stereotyping Africa* that “the portrait of Africa to the world has been painted with broad strokes-prejudiced on a canvas of natural and man-made disasters characterized by frustration, despair, blood, and pain” (p.3).

How the media represent Africa leads their audience to believe in what they say. People then construct the images that are presented by the media when they hear the word ‘Africa’. The vast majority of people know very little and what they know is what they see on television, read in the newspapers, and hear on the radio that finally amounts to their knowledge and understanding of Africa (Doh, 2009). Through the examples proven above, the images that then appear are Africa that is related with wild animals, disease, poverty, etc., which are different from the images generated when people think about Europe. This kind of thinking depicts what is meant by Edward Said (1979) in his theory of the West and the East which is called Orientalism. Said believes that in the perspective of the West, the world is divided into two parts which are the West or the Occident, and Non-West or the Orient who are the opposite of the Occident. Africa, in this context, is included into the Orient.

In addition, according to Said (1979) in the beginning, the term Orientalism arose from a particular closeness between Britain and France and the Orient which only meant India and the Bible lands until the early nineteenth century. However, the old notion of the Orient no longer exists. In geography and politics, the current term is Asia, subdivided into East, Southeast, South and Central; the region that might be called West Asia is normally known as the Middle East (Lary, 2006). The term Occident, as Said (1979) stated in his book, refers to the people from three great empires: British, French, and American. On the other hand, the Orient refers to the people from other than those countries in the world, including Africa (Said, 1979). Orientalism itself is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and, most of the time, "the Occident" (Said, 1979). From those explanations, Orientalism is simply the negative representations of the Orient from the Occident’s perspectives.

The representations of the Orient, in this case Africa, emerge in many kinds of text such as newspaper, novels, poems, and even in TV Series in Indonesia. In 2015, NET TV, one of Indonesian TV Stations, broadcasted an Indonesian comedy series entitled *Kelas Internasional*. *Kelas Internasional* tells about an Indonesian teacher who teaches Bahasa Indonesia to his students. *Kelas Internasional* has several main characters who are mostly foreigners. The foreigner characters bring their culture in the film and represented as having different traits based on their cultural identities. One of the foreigner students is Abbas from Nigeria as the only African student in the class. The representation of African in this comedy series is depicted through the characterization of Abbas. The character of Abbas is played by Abbas Aminu who is originally from Nigeria. *Kelas Internasional* was aired every day until its third season in 2017.

This is a new phenomenon in Indonesian film world to have an African as a main character in a film. Regarding the depiction of Africa, it is interesting to analyze the characterization of Abbas as the only representative of Africa in *Kelas Internasional*. Therefore, the present study will focus on the character Abbas through the selected episodes of *Kelas Internasional*, a comedy series produced by NET TV, using the theoretical framework of representation by Stuart Hall (1997), African stereotype by Emmanuel Fru Doh (2009), orientalism by Edward Said (1979), and film theory by Heintz and Stracey (2008).

The selected episodes are taken from the first, second, and third seasons to show the development of the character more clearly. The selected episodes are: (1) the 47th episode from season 1 entitled “Abbas Homesick” whose theme is around Abbas’ educational condition, (2) the 255th episode from season 2 entitled “Abbas Move On” whose theme is around Abbas love life, and (3) the 375th episode from season 3 entitled “Cangcimen Abbas Hilang, Abbas Harus Cari Uang Lagi” whose theme is around Abbas’ economic condition. The chosen episodes are selected based on their different themes to see the varieties of Abbas’ traits. The episodes that are

used in this study are also selected based on the story lines that have Abbas as the main character of the stories.

Moreover, through the findings, it is revealed that the character Abbas in each episode is depicted in contrast with other characters. Abbas is represented as a backward man in terms of education since he has poor concentration ability, poor self-images, low score on achievement test, low-level jobs, and does not have long range goals. Abbas is also the poorest in class to the point that he could not afford education and has debts everywhere. He also has to do low-level jobs to survive from poverty. Not only represented as educationally backward and economically poor, he is also represented as attitude-wise impolite since he often annoys and insults people, lies, and does things as he please.

There are a number of studies that have been conducted regarding the issue of Orientalism in films. One of the issues of Orientalism was risen in animated film *Aladdin*. Addison (1993) analyzed the film using Orientalism as her theoretical frameworks in her research. She found that the characterizations of Arabian people are represented as immoral in this film which is produced by Walt Disney, an American animation production house. Moreover, in 2015, Michael Robert Chavez conducted research regarding race, gender, and sexuality in *Orange is the New Black*. He explored how race, gender, and sexuality are represented within the series produced by Netflix. He states that the show continues to use harmful stereotypes that perpetuate negative cultural ideologies about minorities.

However, no one has ever raised the issue of Orientalism in Indonesian TV series. Therefore, this present study tries to find out the representation of African through the character Abbas in the selected episodes of *Kelas Internasional* an Indonesian Situational Comedy by using the theory of representation by Stuart Hall (1997), African stereotype by Emmanuel Fru Doh (2009), orientalism by Edward Said (1979), and film theory by Heintz and Stracey (2008). The present study will

also contribute to the study on how Indonesian perceived African through literary work.

1.2. Research Questions

This research focuses on the issue of Orientalism in *Kelas Internasional* episodes 47, 255, & 375 to answer the following questions:

1. How is the character Abbas represented in *Kelas Internasional*?
2. What do the representations mean?

1.3 Aim of the Study

This research aims to investigate the following problems:

1. Observe how an African is represented in *Kelas Internasional*;
2. Discover the meaning behind the representations.

1.4 Scope of the Study

The analysis of the representations of an African in *Kelas Internasional*, a comedy series by NET TV will be limited around the character Abbas. The episodes will be limited into three selected episodes which are: (1) Episode 47 entitled “Abbas Homesick”, (2) Episode 225 entitled “Abbas Move On”, and (3) Episode 375 entitled “Cangcimen Abbas Hilang, Abbas Harus Cari Uang Lagi”.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The result of the study is expected to give contribution to critical literary analysis in the field of film. The study is also expected to contribute to the study on how Indonesian perceived African through literary work. Additionally, the study is expected to broaden the research on representation, stereotype, and orientalism in literary works.

1.6 Research Method

The study uses descriptive qualitative approach to observe the representation of an African in the character Abbas in the three selected episodes of *Kelas Internasional*. This approach is also used to reveal the stereotypes behind the representation of the character. Descriptive qualitative approach is appropriate for this research since it deals with a lot of descriptions in the analysis. Descriptive qualitative approach is chosen since it serves to explore phenomena and create the meaning behind them (Mack, et al., 2005).

1.7 Data Collection and Data Analysis

The data for the research is collected from the selected scenes from the three selected episodes of *Kelas Internasional*. The data is collected through watching the film for several times and taking notes regarding Abbas' appearance in the screen. The scenes that are relevant to the research are screenshot and then categorized into three main tables regarding Abbas' educational condition, economic condition, and attitude. The data are analyzed by using Heintz and Stracey (2008) framework of film theory: *mise en scène* and soundtracks. The descriptions and the analyses from the characterization are used to find out how the film represents the character Abbas. Finally, the representations of Abbas are discovered by analyzing the overall data.

1.8 Clarification of Terms

1. **Representation:** Representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. It is the link between concepts and language which enables us to *refer* to either the 'real' world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events (Hall, 1997). In this study, the term will be used to see the depiction of the story and the characterization of Abbas.
2. **Stereotype:** Stereotypes is the outward expressions of hidden beliefs and values of the members of a particular society, or a community within a

society. In their extreme form, they can lead to prejudice and discrimination, even to hatred and violence (Kumaravadivelu, 2008).

3. **Orientalism:** Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident." (Said, 1979).
4. **Orient:** The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences (Said, 2003). Not only as a place, The Orient could be interpreted as the Non-Western people who are misleadingly identified as the negative opposite of The Western people. This term will be pinned to the character of Abbas
5. **Occident:** The countries of The West, more precisely England, the United States of America, and Europe (Said, 1979).

1.9 Organization of the Paper

1. ABSTRACT

This section functions as summary of the paper presenting brief information about the content that will be elaborated further in the next sections.

2. Chapter I

This chapter focuses on introduction of the research that is divided into nine parts which are background of the study, research questions, aim of the study, scope of the study, significance of the study, research method, data collection and data analysis, clarification of the terms, and organization of the paper.

3. Chapter II

This chapter presents some review of the theoretical frameworks and the literature reviews as the foundation of the research.

4. Chapter III

This chapter deals with the description of methodology employed in the present study, describing the steps and also procedures of the research, as well as the data resources of the research

5. Chapter IV

This chapter presents the findings and discussions of the research. It will be the part where the discussion of the research is elaborated by the writer.

6. Chapter V

This part is the last chapter which includes the conclusion of the present research and also the suggestion for further research.