

## **Media Orientalism: Thailand Queer Gender Depictions through the Lens of Contemporary Indonesian Popular Media**

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### **Abstract**

*This research examines the orientalism characteristics in contemporary Indonesian popular media contents on Thailand queer gender images. As Indonesian society consume popular contents from various forms, the popular textual ideology definitely conceives the dominant media cognitive which imposes and drives people perspective on various issues, including queer gender from overseas. Popular media contents become the major reference as they're easy to access, packed in simple languages and sensational. Thailand as the neighboring country has well known by its vibrant queer gender environment. This image has been articulated in the Indonesian popular media for a long time. Nevertheless, as the LGBT moral panic begins to emerge in contemporary Indonesia, the current Thailand queer gender depictions in Indonesian popular media has also shown frivolous tunes and justifications. This study used Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis to dissect how Edward Said's concept of Orientalism works in 21<sup>st</sup> century popular media contents. Examining 76 Indonesian popular media contents as in pop news websites, commercial movies, popular YouTube channels, and prime time variety shows, the research reveals 11 characters of Indonesian media orientalism point of views toward Thailand queer gender images. Notably, the study found 11 media orientalism characters that have just emerged in the last 5-6 years, in parallel with the rise of religious conservatism in contemporary Indonesia.*

**Keywords:** *Discourse; Media Orientalism; Popular Culture; Queer; Thailand*

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## INTRODUCTION

By entering the era of “Disruption of Information”, the penetration of information and globalization perspectives inevitably permeate among ASEAN community member of society. As a well-known established community, ASEAN nations have diversities in many aspects like languages, costumes, cultures, heritages, and religions. ASEAN perhaps one of the world diverse communities when it comes to cultural exoticism.

Many studies have been conducted to examine each of ASEAN nation identities. Notable example includes Islamic Populism in contemporary Indonesia (Hadiz, 2013), Multiculturalism in Singapore (Chee & Siddique, 2019), Thailand Tourism Business (Berger, 2007), Myanmar’s Rohingya dispute (Ibrahim, 2016) and several other contemporary issues of ASEAN nations like Cambodia, Laos, Brunei, The Philippines, and Vietnam. As a region with a complex diversity, ASEAN community would persist to be an interesting subject of study for years.

Each of the nation’s identities is articulated through a bunch of information from pop news, movies, and even trivial YouTube channels across the region. Thailand, one of the initiators of ASEAN is perceived with a strong stigma on their gender fluidities by their ASEAN neighbors. Thailand is well known for their cosmopolite society and yet is still able to preserve their cultural identity. In this regard, Thailand cannot completely isolate their nation from any Western and Eastern influences.

Thailand’s strategic geographical location at the very center of Southeast Asia is considered as a significant advantage. According to prominent business site *forbes.com*, a research conducted by Mastercard Global Destination City Index (Talty, 2019) named Bangkok as the most visited city around the globe. Cultural richness, accommodative people and nightlife are among top reasons for tourist in visiting Bangkok. However, Thailand main global identity beside its preservation of ancient culture and delicious street foods is Thai *kathoey* or transgender people.

Previous studies demonstrate how Bangkok as its capital city provides hospitality for LGBT people as it has become one of Thailand sources of national

capital (Sanders, 2011, p. 230). In short, Thailand has become a home for LGBT and Queer community to gather and enjoy their sexual liberation without hesitation. Thailand's nice and comfortable manner toward LGBT and queer scenes has a long history since the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Scholars tracked this LGBT and queer blueprint in Thailand and found out that it has a strong correlation with social and political condition (Jackson, 2011, p. 42).

At the same time, Indonesia as Thailand's neighboring country is currently facing a panic towards gender inclusivity issue. It started with 2014 presidential election period and grew even worse in 2015 as The United States of America fully recognized and legalized LGBT activities. Soon after, Indonesian Broadcast Committee/*Komisi Penyiaran Indonesia* (KPI) responded the news with a strange regulation. They banned any effeminate activities on television and made a circular letter contained a regulation to restrict LGBT activities in any forms and contents of broadcasts. This regulation evoked a great debate between the activist and conservative ones up until this day. Interestingly, KPI has issued this kind of circular letter since 2012 but there was no political turbulence came along as what happened in 2015 onward.

Therefore, it's interesting to see how Indonesia's contemporary LGBT panic has an impact on how its popular contents represent Thailand queer gender images. By looking at its contemporary popular contents, this research examined the difference on the representation of Thai queer gender images before and after Indonesian controversial socio-political gender issue began to rise in society.

Despite the abundance of studies on Thai queer gender images and its national development, the studies don't entail a general positive representation and depiction of Thai identity in foreign media. The representation on Thailand identity and its society conceives different gradations and depends on which foreign media portrayal.

There are two major global pop culture products depicting Thailand through the eyes of Western Hollywood media. The first one is film called *The Beach* (2000) that narrated Western tourists at a Thai exotic tropical beach and its society in Krabi

Province. Particularly, there was a research examining this movie that emphasizing the concept of orientalist ‘tourist gaze’ on Thailand as a genuine exploitable tropical land (Law et al., 2007). Based on the top-selling novel with the same title as the movie, *The Beach* (2000) illustrated how the West views the East particularly Thailand as an exotic and primitive civilization (2007). The research also points at the paradoxical representation of the Western tourist searching for Eastern tropical pleasure while fulfilling their Western gaze superiority perspective to the non-West.

The notable part of aforementioned research was the implementation of theoretical framework “tourist gaze” (Urry, 2002) to examine how Western tourists view the non-Western entities in comparison and display their colonialist imagination on commercial movie screen. Colonialism was known to end post-World War II but Western domination is yet to end. Colonial perspectives are just transformed into another form as is seen in mass media and global popular culture.

The second example and probably the most controversial representation on Thailand is found in a movie released a year before *The Beach* (2000). A Hollywood movie titled *Anna and The King* (1999) triggered a debate due to its controversial representation of Thailand monarch and kings particularly the images of King Mongkut and King Chulalongkorn. Starring prominent actors and actresses such as Chow Yun-Fat and Jodie Foster, this movie led into a huge criticism among Thai society following the dismal interpretation of the Thai monarchy (Jory, 2001). This movie was originally intended to take shots in Thailand, but a stern restriction from Thai government and society forced the filmmakers to conduct the filming in Malaysia.

This movie is a blatant display of the way Western popular media represents the East and how the Western with their media power depicts a culture they barely understand. Produced by 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, the movie depicts King Mongkut as a tyrannical and cruel, and they even humiliate Siam society as uncivilized and primitive (2001). While in reality, King Mongkut and King Chulalongkorn were respectable kings in the history of Thailand who modernized Thai culture. Their legacies are still felt until now. The bias of Western gaze is a major problem in communication and

media studies. Western inaccurate, stubborn, imaginative, and racist perspectives about the non-Western society drove Edward Said to write a particular symptom he called Orientalism.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1979) has led into a broader perspective on how an insider viewed outsiders. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said emphasized how the West dominates the discourse about the East society, or The Oriental. The West views the East as uncivilized, and out of date society who, desperately need the Western world to develop (Said, 1979). This particular point of view is often used to justify colonialism.

In contemporary society, Edward Said's *Orientalism* has expanded into a broader scale. As the 21<sup>st</sup> century is signified as the information era in which information across the world can be easily spread in seconds. Therefore, any countries can be the Occident and their outsider is the Orient. The internet and media content disruption has de-monopolized Western side as the Occident. Although The Western still has a strong power to disseminate their ideology through their popular culture products or often called as Americanization (Kellner, 2003, p. 34), other nations of the world can also have difference nuances in terms of representing and captivating other countries.

Thailand is often represented by foreign media across the world with different perspectives and point of views. Research conducted by Yingying Du and Junyi Li et.al (2019) showed that Chinese local commercial movie called *Lost in Thailand* (2012) has a strong impact on Chinese people's perception on Thailand and led them to visit the country after the movie hit the local box office. The study found that after the movie was released, China's digital environment was brimming with reviews and discussions of itineraries to visit Thailand. And it was proven in 2013 as the number of China's tourist exceeded to 4.7 from 2.8 million in 2011 before the film was released (Du et al., 2020) where the number of China's visitors increased by 68.7% after the film was released in December 2012.

The research proved that popular culture products such as film and literature had a significant impact to stimulate a demand in visiting country portrayed and represented by as a destination by popular commercial media. Furthermore, it indicates that popular culture products such as movies, TV, and literatures can construct the perception of a certain society on other countries.

For example, numerous studies have been conducted on gender issues in Indonesia such as women political representation in parliament (Robinson, 2009, p. 158), sexual assault and the prevalence of victim blaming (Blackburn, 2004, p. 208), pedophilia and child abuse (Saputra & Suponyono, 2018), depiction of violence against women and children in prime time soap operas (Udasmoro, 2013), and the most recent issue, the existence of LGBT people in contemporary Indonesia (Davies, 2018).

The use of the term LGBT in Indonesian public sphere is quite a recent phenomenon. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the term was seldom used in everyday life. It was only used in academic and activist circles to stand up for their rights as citizens (i.e. education, health, economy). Prior to the widespread use of the term LGBT in recent times, similar local terms used to describe people with ‘peculiar’ gender expressions include *banci* or *bencong* (similar to transgender term) for effeminate men and *tomboy* for masculine girls.

As the consequence of rapid information flow in contemporary era, the used of Western terms began to spread in Indonesia. In addition, The Ministry of Communication and Informatics (Kominfo) also banned several websites containing ‘LGBT contents’. Even The Minister himself stated that he would shut down all LGBT movements on Indonesian media (Dahono, 2021). These two Indonesian media regulators amplified the mass hysteria due to their ability to spread anxiety and released a discriminatory policy. Even if it’s impossible to close all LGBT activities in media, their regulation and public statement made by their elites dragged the mass into hatred against LGBT people (Mujani, 2016).

It is a perplexing phenomenon since Indonesia has a long record of queer representation in broadcast television, even if as a sidekick character. For example,

there used to be several LGBT figures taking part as host/artist (Dorce Gamalama), soap opera cast (Tata Dado), and master of ceremonies in various Indonesian entertainment contents, including the beloved-imaginary screen icon (Emon). Queer expressions, in fact have been long present since ancient times in Indonesian tradition. As many studies on LGBT group in Indonesia has shown even when the term LGBT wasn't yet known, the same sex practices and expression have already existed. Oetomo (1991) noted that Indonesian ancient culture archipelago has been running these practices as a part of divinity ritual.

LGBT issues in contemporary Indonesia are regarded in context of the rising of populist politics was named as a part of the rising of politics practices (Hadiz, 2013). Indonesia as a large democratic country has experienced many political turbulences. As the electoral system has been changed into direct election, politicians often bend over backwards to engage and appeal their masses by constructing a moral threat and framing a common enemy. LGBT as a minority group, has been framed as the new public enemy ever since (Listiorini et al., 2019).

Local politicians and religious groups in Indonesia framed the LGBT community as the cause of disasters nationwide like floods, earthquakes, and plagues (Rohmah, 2018). This isn't the first time Indonesian politicians employ fear mongering populism. During the military regime, similar tactic was exerted by framing communism as the national moral threat. Scapegoats like communism as well as LGBT are exploited as political commodity to sell by politicians. There is not a single Indonesian political party in Indonesia that explicitly stated that they will fight for LGBT rights, as it would be a political suicide due to the immense pressure and moral threat against the LGBT community.

Study on public opinion on LGBT community in Indonesia (Mujani, 2016) and how the national media orchestrated the panic into a larger scale (Listiorini, 2018) have explored how LGBT community is positioned in the current political climate. However, study on how Indonesian local popular media portrays LGBT and queer gender images of other nation has yet to be conducted, and whether the contemporary

socio-political condition in Indonesia influences the depiction of other nation's queer representation. Thailand, one of Indonesia's closest neighbors has a strong image on its LGBT scene, particularly in their major cities like Bangkok, Pattaya, and Phuket. This paper examines how Indonesian popular media contents portrayed Thailand's queer gender images amid the queer gender political turbulence in contemporary Indonesia.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This research examines how Indonesian popular media contents portrayed Thailand's queer gender images by using Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis in deciphering Indonesian popular media with Thai queer gender images related contents (Dijk, 2008). Data was obtained from 4 popular forms of media selected by popularity, based on top sites online portal traffic (*alexa.com*), viewer numbers on YouTube, television variety programs, and two commercial movies portraying Thailand culture, mentioned in their respective movie titles and trailers. From the criteria mentioned above, the top 3 online news portals, 2 commercial movies, 4 most viewed YouTube channels, and 5 variety TV programs were selected. In total, 76 items or samples were examined.

The contents consist of a variety of Thai queer gender depictions such as LGBT news and issue coverage, gender identities, Thailand national policy related to gender, night-life vibes and portrait on how Thai society deal with gender fluidity. Several keywords attached in popular media channels like YouTube channels, online news portals and variety shows include "LGBT," "transgender" and "Thailand". For popular movies, the samples were selected due to their portrayal in Thailand, containing scenes and dialogues depicting Thai queer gender images.

The contents selected were aired or released in the period of 2014-2023 to see the nuance of Thai gender depictions in Indonesia in relation to the emergence of ASEAN Economic Community as well as gender inclusivity as a part of global SDGs goal. The length of contents in this research are not taken into consideration. There is



no minimum length for each content. As long as they depicted Thai queer images through conversations, statements, and pictures, they're qualified to be analyzed textually.

**Table 1.**  
**Matrix of Samples**

| <b>Platform Type</b>           | <b>Contents Name/Title</b>                                   | <b>Channels</b>            | <b>Format</b>        | <b>Number of Episodes</b> |
|--------------------------------|--|----------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Top Popular Online News Portal | 68 episodes of Thai LGBT pop news construction               | <i>Detik.com</i>           | News                 | 25                        |
|                                |  | <i>Okezone.com</i>         | News                 | 20                        |
|                                |  | <i>Tribunnews.com</i>      | News                 | 23                        |
| Commercial Movies              | (1) Check in Bangkok – 2015                                  | Movie Theater / DVD Format | Pop Movie            | 1                         |
|                                | (2) <i>Haji Backpacker</i> (Backpacker Pilgrim) – 2014       | Movie Theater/DVD Format   | Pop Movie            | 1                         |
| Variety Programs               | Stand Up Comedy Indonesia Episode: Being Weird and Different | National TV                | Stand Up Comedy Show | 1                         |
|                                | Celebrity Soap Opera Episode: Transgender Artists            |                            | Talk Show            | 1                         |
| YouTube Channel                | Why are There so many Ladyboys in Thailand?                  |                            | Feature              | 1                         |
|                                | 5 Crazy Things that only Happen in Thailand                  |                            | Feature              | 1                         |
|                                | 7 Unique Facts about Thailand                                |                            | Feature              | 1                         |

|       |                                       |  |         |    |
|-------|---------------------------------------|--|---------|----|
|       | Wow! 7 Most Beautiful Men in Thailand |  | Feature | 1  |
| Total |                                       |  |         | 76 |

Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis was implemented to analyze how media orientalism exercises in Thai queer gender depiction contained in 4 Indonesian popular media channels. There are 3 principles on Van Dijk's model of analysis (Textual Structure, Social Cognitive, and Social Context). For Van Dijk (1988), discourse in any media like mass media contents-consists of two structures, **macrostructure** and **microstructure**. The macrostructure explores the **thematic** and **schematic** or **superstructure** scheme of the text (p.31), while microstructure (p.59-65) exposes semantics (details, backgrounds, nominalizations), syntactic (coherences, prepositions), stylistic (lexicons, words and sentences style), and rhetoric (graphics, metaphors, expressions). These elements will unveil the shape of ideology behind the text (Angelmuller et al., 2014, p. 259).

Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis emphasizes on the social cognitive (Van Dijk, 1988) and how the discourse on a particular matter lives on in daily basis through media contents. LGBT as a part of queer characteristics has various interpretations and identifications. In Indonesia, LGBT and any queer expressions have suffered turbulence in the last 5 years due to right wing populist affairs (Listiorini et al., 2019). At the same time, Thailand has a strong stereotype as the land of ladyboys. Therefore, discourse on Thai queer gender in Indonesian popular media makes a curious case in understanding the characteristics of media orientalism.

The depictions of Thai queer gender weren't as intense as it is today. A study showed that there was only one popular media product depicting Thai queer gender images. Andrei Aksana's novel in 2004 titled *Lelaki Terindah* (The Most Beautiful Man) examined by Ben Murtagh (2011) represented Bangkok as a vibrant queer space while a gay couple from Indonesia seeks for an accepting environment. In novel, Bangkok is depicted as a progressive city with great acceptance towards LGBT people (Murtagh, 2011). It is considered as an Indonesian popular media depiction that has quite an open-minded stance on Bangkok back in 2004.

Reflecting Murtagh's examination, we can see the different nuances on how the gaze of Thai's queer images has transformed into something more blatant, comical,

satiric, and biased in current times. As Indonesian political life turns the daily basis into a more unwelcome and discriminative environment against queer communities, the result of this research unveils the shift in the way Indonesian popular media depicted and represented Thai queer gender.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are 11 forms of media orientalism in Indonesian popular media channels portraying Thai queer gender. These 11 points are derived from examining 76 samples in 4 popular channels in Indonesia consist of pop news portals, pop movies, YouTube contents with thousands of viewers, and national TV variety shows. Most of them have similarities such as framing Thai queer gender characters like Thai ladyboy as odd, grumpy, ridiculous. The result thus shows that, Thai queer gender depictions in Indonesian popular media channels revolve around sexuality, oddity, heteronormativity, and character bias. The types of Indonesian popular media orientalism on Thai queer gender depictions can be seen in the next page below.

**Table 2.**

**Thai Queer Gender Depictions in Indonesian Popular Media Contents**

| No | Discourse Findings on How Thai Queer Gender was Depicted in Indonesian Popular Media Channels     |
|----|---|
| 1. | Accusation on UNDP Funding for LGBT Legalization in Indonesia and other Southeast Asian Countries |
| 2. | Odd and Uncivilized   |
| 3. | Slippery Slope Fallacy (A=B=C)  |

|     |  |
|-----|--|
| 4.  | Misunderstanding on Thai Gender Disparities            |
| 5.  | Liberal Society  |
| 6.  | Heavenly Place for Sex Reassignment Surgery            |
| 7.  | Making Fun of Thai Ladyboys                            |
| 8.  | Exploitation on Thai Red District Area                 |
| 9.  | Us against Them Paradigm                               |
| 10. | Pushing Heteronormativity Standard to Thailand         |
| 11. | Thai Queer Gender Images as a Bad Example to The Youth |

Pop movies represent transgender or effeminate characters in excessive manner like being sassy and looking very flashy with strong make-up features. *Check in Bangkok* (2015) movie features a character named Quin played by a prominent Indonesian actor Ervan Naro. Quin is a sidekick character who accompanied the protagonist and often got bullied due to his effeminate character. This effeminate depiction is displayed continuously throughout the film. In a scene, there is a depiction of a macho man with muscle that turns out to be an effeminate man by the way he walks. Excessive depictions on queer characters like transgender and effeminate men are clearly found in *Check in Bangkok* (2015).

Meanwhile *Haji Backpacker/Backpacker Pilgrim* (2014) was a movie that highlights the city of Bangkok as a heavenly place for red-district areas with transgender crowds. The main protagonist character arrived as a part of his religious pilgrimage from Indonesia to Saudi Arabia. Later on, we can see the intertextuality of media text depicting Thai ladyboys and offensive queer sexual activities not only in both *Check in Bangkok* (2015) and *Haji Backpacker/Backpacker Pilgrim* (2014) but also in other Indonesian popular media contents.

**Figure 1.**

**A Scene from the movie *Check in Bangkok* (2015) (left) and screenshot from popular Indonesian YouTube channel titled “5 Crazy Things about Thailand” that gained more than 5 million viewers (right)**



The pictures above illustrate the typical visual semantic on how media orientalism works in Indonesian popular media depicting Thai queer gender identities. They present Thai ladyboy as an object of ridicule. The name mentioned frequently as an object of ridicule is Thai transgender actress Nongpoy. Stereotypes like being odd and uncivilized was mentioned in popular prime time talk show and standup comedy TV performances to stimulate public laughs. The derogatory expressions to stigmatize Thai transgender images were *palsu* (fake) and *menyalahi kodrat* (running away from their biological destiny). In popular news, the journalist wrote a warning statement for readers to be careful visiting Thailand as they might find themselves difficult to distinguish between ‘original’ women (as opposed to the ‘fakes’) and ladyboys.

Another discourse on Thai queer gender is UNDP conspiracy who is accused of funding LGBT legalization across Southeast Asia. Thailand is accused to be the first country to receive this funding scheme in recognizing LGBT marriage and could have impacted Indonesia as neighboring ASEAN member state. In the accusation, slippery slope logical fallacy is applied in depicting Thai queer gender images. This fallacy occurs as a mistake in forming logical conclusion that one event would bring

consequences to others without providing strong arguments (Kelley, 2014, p. 121). In other words, it tries to explain domino effect without rational data and explanation, only presents claims and simplification of problems. In this case, Thailand's queer image is simplified into a start of a disastrous domino effect that may impact Indonesia as a predominantly Muslim majority country.

Simplification is one of orientalism characteristics against outsider (Khair, 2011, p. 147). The West described the colonies in the East (Asia and Middle East), by imposing their biases and simplifications to justify superiority and hegemony upon the Orient. In this context, Indonesian sociopolitical conditions created a moral standard that condemns any queer and LGBT images along with the rising of right-wing populism in contemporary Indonesia (Hadiz, 2013).

An interesting point about Thai queer representation in Indonesian media was the gender fluidity. A claim that Thailand has 18 different sex identities is circulating in Indonesian popular news portal and YouTube channels, narrated with sensational phrases like *Wow! di Thailand ada 18 jenis kelamin berbeda* (Wow! there are 18 different sexes in Thailand) and *Tak Sebatas LGBT, di Thailand ada 18 jenis kelamin* (Not only LGBT, Thailand recognizes 18 different sexes). While in reality, Thailand only recognizes 2 sexes, male and female. The terms *tom*, *dee*, *kathoe*, *tut*, and other variant are gender constructions used culturally in daily life and not legally recognized by the state (Sinnott, 2004). Only male and female sexes are recognized by the government and this legal recognition influences the military service or conscription policy in Thailand (Yerke & Mitchell, 2013). Thai military service policy is another subject containing oriental discourse in Indonesian pop news. It emphasizes how transgender people have to deal with the obligation of conscription policy and featuring comical photos when transgender people have to report themselves to the authority during the conscription submission.



Figure 2.

**Indonesian Pop News Accusation and Depiction on Thailand Queer Gender Images: “Not Only LGBT, Thailand Recognizes 18 Sexes, Here is The List” (left) and “These are the Photos When Thai Transgender Submitted a Conscription, Their Skin Will Make You Jealous” (right)**



Thailand has become the closest example in terms of proximity to justify moral degradations through Indonesian popular media contents. The discourse occurs as the result of the interplay among elite politics and media tycoons that influences how the populist discourse on LGBT remains to continue. Mainstream media like national TV and online news portals are owned by the politicians while movies and YouTube channels are dominated by homogenous commercial genre like comedy and romance. Within the period of 2014-2023 Thailand queer image discourses appeared in popular media channels to validate the mainstream moral panic and right-wing religious populism in contemporary Indonesia.

Orientalism in Indonesian popular media contents imposed on Thai queer images is constructed upon heteronormativity cognitive bias. Heteronormativity is an assumption that indicates heterosexuality as the normal mode of human sexuality and designates it as the standard of morality that deems everything outside as deviant (Ludwig, 2011). Heteronormativity has then become the basis of media knowledge and

cognitive reference to rationalize queer images in Indonesian daily pop culture products. LGBT and queer community are regarded as deviant of normal human being and deserve to be depicted as immoral group of people.

It's quite thought-provoking to see the intertextuality (Fairclough, 1992) between industrialized media like TV-movies and news portal and media with user-generated contents like YouTube channels. The two shape Indonesian contemporary pop culture contents with huge exposures to public measured with ratings and views, and they somehow share similar discourse on Thai queer gender. Rating and views system amplifies discourses to appeal the masses in both commercial and ideology. Interplay between media contents and sociopolitical condition inevitably creates a new dominance of discourse in Indonesian contemporary popular media. Thailand longtime image as a LGBT-friendly place has transformed into a moral justification for contemporary Indonesian LGBT moral panic.

## CONCLUSION

In practice, orientalism occurs not only in conversations or real-life interactions but also in media representations and depictions. A group of people with certain ideological belief like superiority complex, xenophobia, and homophobia will tend to see people different from them as the Orient. As Edward Said (1979) stated that this particular behavior is the product of post-colonialism.

Orientalism doesn't only happen when the Western world portrayed what they called as the East. However, orientalism can emerge as long as there is a superiority complex in assessing others regardless ethnicities, nationalities, and family backgrounds. In 21 century the study of orientalism has expanded into various forms of orientalism gazes like gender disparities like what this research examined. The changing course of Indonesian popular media depiction of Thai queer gender images as their neighbor country has shown the characteristics of media orientalism.

These representations have transformed since the last examination on Thai gender depictions in Indonesian popular media. In 2004, there was only one Indonesian

popular media channel depicting Thai queer environment. The novel *Lelaki Terindah* (The Most Beautiful Man) was the only popular product portraying Thai queer environment in Bangkok as its central storyline. The representation of Thai queer images within the 2004 novel wasn't as notorious as it would be 10 years later. With political discrimination against LGBT people and moral panic on their very existence in contemporary Indonesia, the social cognition on how popular media contents depicting Thailand has also changed.

Based on 4 popular media channels with 76 contents from the year 2014-2023, this paper examined the social cognition of media orientalism in Thai queer images representation which, emphasizes on the sensationalized Thai queer gender images by portraying the misbehaved of ladyboys, inappropriate red-districts area, odd Thai queer gender identities, and slur campaign against the danger of liberal ideas with Thailand's gender fluidity as a perfect bad example.

In popular media like movies, YouTube channels, and national TV variety shows, transgender and effeminate characters appear as objects to ridicule. The narrators use Thai queer images as a justification of the ridicule. In addition, Thailand is regarded as an immorally permissive country when it comes to sexual activities without further explanation on the existence of Thai national laws and rules.

When public information conveyed incomplete it bases itself on stereotypes and superiority complex of one group to another. The changing shape on the representation of Thai queer gender images in Indonesian popular media uncovers the changing of social cognition from media content producers at the level of discourse practices in their daily basis. This changing shape is parallel with the increasing number of LGBT persecutions in contemporary Indonesian society, orchestrated by right wing populist politicians. Thailand is framed as the moral justification for mainstream media owners to exacerbate discrimination against queer and LGBT people through the production of discourse. The trend will sustain for many years to come as there is yet to be a significant political intervention and alternative discourse to counter the dominance of queerphobia in contemporary Indonesia.

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