Examining views of racism in the media media essay

Racism, which has existed throughout human history, includes both the belief in racial differences, as well as associated discrimination. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, racism is a belief or ideology that all members of each racial group possess characteristics or abilities specific to that race, especially to distinguish it as being either superior or inferior to another racial group or racial groups.

Nowadays, the discussions about racism are still inevitable as many people argue that talking about supporting racial discrimination and prejudice is just words and that free speech should allow such views to be expressed without restriction, meanwhile the rest point out that these words can lead to some very horrible and serious consequences. Besides, racism in the media is becoming the major issue around the world with the development of globalisation, and these biased reports in various media are having adverse influences on publics. In this essay, the author is going to enumerate and interpret a number of racism-related media reports from all over the world in order to analyse and illustrate the existence of media racism.

Relevant Methodology & Theory:

Qualitative & Quantitative Research:

Denzin K. and Lincoln S. (2005) defined qualitative research as a method of inquiry appropriated in many different academic disciplines, traditionally in the social sciences, but also in market research and further contexts. Qualitative researchers aim to gather an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and the reasons that govern such behaviour.

Quantitative research refers to the systematic empirical investigation of quantitative properties and phenomena and their relationships in the social sciences. (Mbolo Y., 2010) Findings via quantitative research can be generalised to a larger population, and direct comparisons can be made between two corpora, so long as valid sampling and significance techniques have been used. Thus, quantitative approach allows the analysers to discover which phenomena are likely to be genuine reflections of the behaviour of a language or variety, and which are merely chance occurrences.

Content Analysis:

Content analysis is a methodology in the social sciences for studying the content of communication. Babbie E. (2003) defines it as ' the study of recorded human communications, such as books, websites, paintings and laws.' According to Dr. Krippendorff K. (2004), six questions must be addressed in every content analysis: Which data are analysed? How are they defined? What is the population from which they are drawn? What is the context relative to which the data are analysed? What are the boundaries of the analysis? What is the target of the inferences?

Words and phrases mentioned most often are reflecting important concerns in every communication. Therefore, quantitative content analysis starts with word frequencies, space measurements, time counts and keyword frequencies. Qualitatively, content analysis can involve any kind of analysis where communication content, such as speech, written text, interviews or images, is categorised and classified.

Semiotics:

Semiotics is the study of cultural sign processes, analogy, metaphor, signification and communication, signs and symbols. (Daniel C., 2007) It is closely related to the field of linguistics, which in its part, studies the structure and meaning of language more specifically. Semiotics is usually divided into three branches, which include: semantics (relation between signs and the things to which they refer or meaning), syntactics (relations among signs in formal structures) and pragmatics (relation between signs and the effects they have on the people who use them). It represents a methodology for the analysis of texts regardless of modality. For these purposes, text is any message preserved in a form whose existence is independent of both sender and receiver;

Discourse Analysis:

Discourse analysis is a qualitative method that has been adopted and developed by social constructionists. (Blommaert J., 2005) It is a way of understanding social interactions. The objects of discourse analysis are variously defined in terms of coherent sequences of sentences, propositions or speech acts. It examines how people use language to construct versions of their experiences, and is based on the assumption that people draw on cultural and linguistic resources in order to construct their talk in certain ways to have certain effects.

Ideology:

An ideology is a set of ideas that constitutes one's goals, expectations, and actions. (Christenson R., 1981) An ideology can be thought of as a comprehensive vision, as a way of looking at things, as in common sense and several philosophical tendencies, or a set of ideas proposed by the dominant class of a society to all members of this society. Ideologies are systems of abstract thought applied to public matters and thus make this concept central to politics. Implicitly every political tendency entails an ideology whether or not it is propounded as an explicit system of thought. It is how society sees things.

Stereotypes:

A stereotype is a commonly held popular belief about specific social groups or types of individuals. (Gordon A. & Miller J., 2005) Stereotypes are standardized and simplified conceptions of groups based on some prior assumptions. They can be either positive or negative. But most stereotypes tend to make us feel superior in some way to the person or group being stereotyped. Stereotypes ignore the uniqueness of individuals by painting all members of a group with the same brush, and they can appear in the media because of the biases of writers, directors, producers, reporters and editors.

Critical Analysis:

UK:

Britain's number one police officer, Sir Ian Blair's recent announcement that the majority of the British press are biased in favour of white middle classes when covering murder and serious crime has caused disturbance within the

liberal and right-wing press. (Loha T., 2010) He points to the way the media devoted greater coverage to the recent horrific murder of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman, two white middle class girls from Cambridgeshire, while ignoring the a series of murder of young black men and women in the inner cities as a classic case of racism in the media.

All horrific murders deserve maximum coverage. However, it is up to the media to show greater interest in black victims, even if they are older men. There are exceptions, of course. But the media often appears to have problems empathising with young black men growing into adulthood. As a consequence most young black men who were killed are ignored, with the assumption that any black teenage and adults killed in the inner city must be up to bad and dangerous.

If picking up a random newspaper, the coverage of black people would mainly point to musicians, gangsters or sports stars, which obviously doesn't reflect the majority of black men in the UK. The majority of them aren't sports stars or rappers and are not involved in crime. These who are successful are misrepresented by the media because they don't get enough credit for it as you rarely see or hear about them."

Darnley O. L, from Battersea in south London, who was involved in investigating a murder of a Black girl, once pointed out: I think most journalists agree with me on this, if you get a child murder the first thing the editor wants to know is what colour the child is. If it's a little Black girl they take less interest in the case than if it's a little White girl. (Wadsworth M., 2006)

Systematic racism in the media by omission is more severe. This is about the stories that are ignored by mainstream media. The black and Asian faces are almost absent in news rooms. News selection and hiring policies are at the core of the current systematic racism of the media, and the reason why the editors aren't interested in the news is presumably because they think there's less interest from their readers.

The news industry is under pressure to attract readers and viewers, and it has to produce stories that are compelling, short and easily understandable to a general audience. By using stereotypes, a complex issue involving people with complex motives can be reduced to a simple conflict between 'good guys' and 'bad guys.' This can happen when the media try to make real events appear more dramatic, or when a situation needs to be explained in a very short time.

On the other hand, four black stars, widely popular in Britain, have spoken out for the first time on being black in a white society. The quartets are the comedian Lenny Henry, the pop music impresario Jazzy B, the designer Ozwald Boateng and the track star Linford Christie. (' Media Racism', 2010) They are interviewed in Untold, Peter Akinti's new life-style magazine for black men, the four, who are considered to be super-heroes, targeted media illustration as a crucial issue.

Christie expressed his general feeling when he said: black people on the whole have had a bad experience with the media. It's one of the reasons why we've had such a hard time in this country. This comment raises further

issues such as why black people don't get the media exposure they deserve, and what can be done to get more positive images in the news media.

USA:

Mass media have played and will continue to play a crucial role in the way white Americans perceive African-Americans. As a result of the overwhelming media focus on crime, drug use, gang violence, and other forms of anti-social behaviours among African-Americans, the media have shaped a biased and harmful public perception of African-Americans. (Taylor R., 1995)

According to what we've learned in high school, the history of African-Americans is a centuries old struggle against oppression and discrimination. The media have played a key role in reinforcing the effects of this historical oppression and in contributing to African-Americans' continuing status as second-class citizens. As a result, white Americans have been confused from a deep uncertainty as to who African-Americans really are. Despite this racial divide, something is beyond question that Americans about African-Americans have raised doubts about the white man's value system. Indeed, it has also increased the troubling suspicion that whatever else the true American is, he is also somehow black.

Media have divided the working class and stereotyped young African-American males as gangsters or drug dealers. As a result of such treatment, the media have crushed black youths' expectations for future employment and advancement. The media have focused on the negative aspects of the

black community, for instance, engaging in drug use, criminal activity and welfare abuse, while maintaining the cycle of poverty that the elite wants.

The Rodney King incident in Los Angeles has been characterized by many in the black community as a reflection of how the police department treats black citizens. (' Violence and Racism' 1991) The incident began on March 3, 1991 when Rodney King and two of his friends were out drinking one night, and King drove the car when they left the local park where they had been drinking for some time. He led California Highway Patrol police officers on a high-speed chase. Once the officers were able to stop the car, they pulled King from the car and hit him 56 times with a baton. During the two-minute beating, King suffered 11 skull fractures, brain damage and kidney damage.

These police officers claimed that they were scared and felt they might have been attacked or harmed, which can be considered to be a legal excuse in the white American society. Their fear is a reflection of a deep-rooted media bias that anything black is bad. This media stereotype of bad guys wearing black or that anything that is black is evil has been fostered for decades. What the media refuse to acknowledge is that the t majority of black people are employed, attend school, and are not involved in gangs or other criminal activities.

During the disaster caused by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, a message board poster with the alias " Noah_The_African" pointed out a prime example of how America's racist media will quickly portray African Americans in a different light than White Americans even in a time of crisis: ' Two residents wade through chest-deep water after finding bread and soda from a local

grocery store after Hurricane Katrina came through the area in New Orleans, Louisiana; A young man walks through chest deep flood water after looting a grocery store in New Orleans on Tuesday, Aug. 30, 2005. Flood waters continue to rise in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina did extensive damage when it made landfall on Monday.' (' Example of Racist', 2005)

The majority of those left behind in this disaster were the poor and the poor tend to capitalize on any opportunity that allows them to remain alive. The aftermath of the Hurricane Katrina is no difference due to this basic will to survive. People are looting, some of the things being taken are essentials and some are non-essentials. However the one thing that is consistent is the bias in the media in their coverage of the looters right down to the wording used for two people doing the very same thing.

These two examples of America's racist media are just the tip of the iceberg. CNN, FOX, ABC, etc. have given America a number of one sided coverage of African Americans shown only as criminals rather than desperate victims fighting for survival as their white mates are shown. In addition, the effect of the media's coverage of African Americans throughout the crisis called by Hurricane Katrina is beginning to upset the White Americans who are already angry at Black people over their fight for compensations and affirmative action.

Canada:

Just as there are racial identities of colour in many countries, there is also a white racial identity in Canada. To Canadians of European descent whiteness is akin to normalness; yet, as Frankenberg (1996) once pointed out, it is

unacknowledged and unknown to most white people. Euro-Canadians do not define themselves as white as they merely construct themselves as not being people of colour. This invisibility of whiteness is ' historically, socially, politically and culturally produced and linked to relations of domination' (Weis et al., 1997). This domination manifests itself in the form of white privilege. These privileges are invisible to most Euro-Canadians, however, they exist. They are built into Canadian society.

The unequal status of racial minorities in the media is reflected by their absence from reporters, experts or actors. They are underrepresented at all levels of staffing operations, production and decision-making positions in communications. Their limited participation is seen as the result of obvious bias, structural barriers and cultural racism, which is woven into the collective system of beliefs, values and norms of the dominant culture.

Based on information provided by the 41 daily newspapers that responded to the Canadian Newspaper Association survey, just 67 of 2, 620 of newsroom positions (2. 6%) were held by non-whites. That's five times less than the 13. 2 % of the population counted as aboriginal or visible minorities in the 1991 census. (' Ethnic and Visible', 1995) In another study conducted at Ryerson Polytechnic University, which measured the content of six large newspapers and found that half the pictures of people of colour showed them as athletes or entertainers. If they are in the news otherwise, it is probably related to crime.

Canadian newspapers and magazines, television and radio stations are generally owned by corporate interests and are structured in such a way as

to produce sustainable support for the economic interests of business and government elites. While espousing democratic values of fairness, equality and freedom of expression, the media reinforces and reproduces racist ideology.

For instance, most media organizations have chosen to reflect the position of the corporate elite and have tried to influence popular opinion by misrepresenting employment equity as a risk to the operation of a free marketplace, a violation of the merit principle and a threat to white males.

Another example of the media negatively stereotyping people of colour is seen in the way the Muslim communities are covered by the mass media. Press coverage of issues of concern to this community is hideous and these groups are commonly depicted as militants, terrorists, and disposed to violence. Articles make up images of conflict, civil unrest, violent confrontation, terrorism and destruction of property. In turn, the repetition of these images and stereotypes reinforce prejudice against not only against Muslims, but South Asians as well. The Iraq war provided the media with ample opportunity to feed on these kinds of negative images.

Conclusion:

Racism in the media does exist, and it is a serious problem that needs to be dealt with. The issue of racism in media will not resolve itself until it is realized that there is no value of any race that necessarily equals to right value. There is no longer any country where only white, yellow or black people live in. There are other cultures and other ways of looking at the

world. We have to accept this fact and should encourage the incorporation of new ideas into their lives.