**War, media and the West**

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The Russia-Ukraine conflict has re-emerged as ‘the war of this century’ after the Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen wars. But this one differs from all the previous wars. The recent crisis has multiple parallel perspectives from different schools of thought, colliding to explain the current situation. The question is: how did Europe become home to a deadly war after so long – the end of the Second World War? The answer is: Western media has opted for a predominant Eurocentric bias in the coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war.

While the invasion of any ‘sovereign’ states based on political, economic, or strategic interests is not justifiable, representational politics by Western media against Russia, and in favour of Ukraine, shows a hypocritical Eurocentric bias that favours the persistence of hegemonic ideas disseminated by the West. For example, while discussing the Kremlin’s deepening distrust in the US, the Washington Post published the following lines in 2010:

“With former KGB officer Vladimir Putin in charge, Russia has become increasingly closed in many ways. Historical archives that after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 welcomed scholars from all nations have re-shut their doors. Television has fallen back under government control. International organisations have been pushed out of Russia, and independent non-profit groups in Russia have been squeezed, harassed and threatened. Russia is essentially a one-party state, as it was 20 years ago.

“The United States by contrast is wide open. Unlike American organisations in Russia, the Russian government is welcome to hire public relations firms here, put Russian programming on cable television and distribute its message as it sees fit. Its diplomats are welcome to attend think-tank seminars in Washington, and the give-and-take of American politics is an open book for them.”

The representation that is attached to Russia provides an authoritarian characterisation of Russia by using references such as ‘closed’, ‘government control’, ‘squeezed, harassed and threatened’ and ‘one-party state’. On March 27, 2022, the Washington Post talked about President Vladimir Putin in these words, “Putin for years has snuffed out dissent, muzzled independent media and bolstered a security state to prevent protests, meaning he faces far fewer domestic constraints in waging such a war than the leader of a democratic nation would.”

Western media manipulates news to produce and reproduce the hegemonic principles of the state. It has a treasured spot in the political and cultural life of the nation, especially in the US. Gitlin has identified people rely on media for their realities, symbols, and heroes. As all modes of communication and text are open to the media, it is an ideal platform for reality and consent to be created and implemented per the interests of the ruling class; simply put, powerful people have a stronghold on the means of communication.

Also, critical thought and ideas against Western hypocrisy and such double standards have been pushed to the margins by the hegemonic Western viewpoints and approaches of international relations. All this is because the knowledge and power centres, by and large, reside in the West.

Ever since Russia invaded Ukraine, many scholars, researchers and critical journalists have pointed out the West’s double standards of characterising invasions and conflicts as something that occurs in only poor countries, not the West.

For instance, according to a CBS correspondent, Kyiv is a “relatively civilised” city; a British ITV reporter stated that Ukraine is not a “developing third world nation”, and according to an Al Jazeera anchor, refugees are “prosperous, middle-class people,” not “people trying to get away from areas in North Africa.” Kelly Cobiella, a news correspondent for NBC News, was more straightforward in discriminating between the so-called ‘civilised’ and uncivilised’ worlds: “Just to put it bluntly, [Ukrainian refugees] are not refugees from Syria; these are refugees from neighbouring Ukraine. These are Christians, they are white, they are remarkably similar [to Westerners].”

In a BBC interview, Ukraine’s deputy chief prosecutor, David Sakvarelidze, lamented, “It’s very emotional for me because I see European people with blue eyes and blonde hair being killed.” The problem is not that he could voice such a racist stance while creating a binary division, but the fact that he was left unchallenged during the whole interview. An ITV News correspondent stated similar words that summed up Western media’s perception about human lives abroad: “The unthinkable has happened...this is not a developing, third-world nation; this is Europe!” By that logic, the ‘unthinkable’ things happen only in the third world, not the West.

However, this hypocrisy has not gone unchallenged without criticism from dissidents and thinkers on the Left. For example, the Arab and Middle Eastern Journalists Association stated in a statement that such inaccurately framing portrays conflict outside of Europe and North America as “normal and expected”, humiliating people who suffer the consequences.

The assertion that Europe is too civilised for war is not only racially prejudiced but also inconsiderate, given that the West is responsible for many wars in the world since the end of World War II, especially in the Middle East. A state cannot claim to be the champion of human lives and global peace while being responsible for destroying countless lives in other parts of the world.

The demonisation of Russia, a country that remains critical to the US national security, in Western media has been afoot for several years. If the ongoing representation of Russia, Ukraine and President Vladimir Putin is any sign, this practice of media (mis)representation of conflicts is pervasive and has become a norm. Be it the Israel-Palestine conflict, the 9/11 attacks and the US invasion in Afghanistan, the Iraqi invasion, the disputed 2009 elections in Iran, the West-facilitated destabilisation of Libya in 2011, or the crisis in Syria from 2011, the hegemony of Western media as it legitimises false or misleading pretexts for America’s imperial wars, and eventually, normalises Western-centric discourse evidently serves the strategic interests of the Western elite.

The media is, therefore, the most crucial marketplace for ideas. So, the notion of objectivity attached to it gives it the legitimacy to perpetuate ideologies and perceptions that are deliberately or unconsciously in line with the interests of the ruling class ie the state.

The ideas that politically uninformed people are being socialised into regarding the Russia-Ukraine conflict benefit the military-industrial complex and political elite to maintain support for the US foreign policy on Russia. As Stephen Cohen argued in his article published in ‘The Nation’, “the media have followed a different leader-centric narrative, also consistent with US policy, that devalues multifaceted analysis for a relentless demonisation of Putin,” since the 2000s.

Therefore, this type of representation by Western media legitimises the political rationale of the West against its adversaries, which leads to the normalisation of Western-centric discourse across the globe because, as mentioned earlier, the centres of knowledge production reside in the West.

In this context, the media, being a hegemonic actor, controls what event is newsworthy and how it should be represented. Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci argues that the hegemony of the ruling class is perpetuated and sustained using middle-class intellectuals like the media that undertake the task of disseminating the ideas of the ruling elite to preserve their dominance and political interests. By Gramsci’s logic, the West is collectively aligned, once again, to demonise Russia using its hegemonic media. While doing so, it has exposed the bigoted and discriminatory binaries that still persist in the consciousness of the West.