



ON SCREEN MANIFESTATION OF MUSLIMS IN CONTEMPORARY GLOBALIZED ERA

Afraz Jabeen^{1*}, Saima Waheed²

¹ Institute of Communication and Cultural Studies (ICCS) University of Management and Technology, Lahore.

² Department of Media and Communication University of Management and Technology, Lahore (UMT)

Article Info

*Corresponding Author

Tel: +92 324 4600920

Email Id: afrazjabeen@gmail.com

Keywords

Grotesque, Representation, Islamophobia, Hegemonic West, Muslim women.

Abstract

This research paper aims to highlight the on screen Grotesque representation of Muslims in the Contemporary Globalized era. The research describes that certain onscreen Hollywood programs have intentionally deteriorated the real image of Muslims and have presented Muslim women as oppressed beings. Visual images have always a strong impact on the psychology of audience. Using this technique as a weapon, hegemonic Western media has dismantled the original culture, rituals, and traditions of the Muslims in general and real image of Muslim women in particular. This tactic employed by Western Media has put all the globalized world in the trepidation of Islamophobia. Data has been collected by analyzing the content of the following movies: Aladdin (1992), The Breadwinner (2017), and Body of Lies (2008). Two methodologies of research quantitative and qualitative by using the method of content analysis and framing analysis have been applied in the study.

@Kinnaird College for Women. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Past always haunts the present. It's like a bad dream that chases you everywhere. The incident of 9/11, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, war on terrorism, the bad and massive massacres of history are the examples of past which is haunting our present. These brutal incidents have changed the whole scenario of the contemporary globalized era which is also known as an age of development, progression, advancement and multiculturalism. There is no doubt that Media Technology has made its place in every corner of the world and has played the role of "Connection Bridge". It shapes public opinion, influences the psychology of public and has attained the status of the fourth pillar in any country. It is composed of the Electronic Media and Print Media. Media plays a crucial role in policy making and trend-setting and the informative aspect of the media enhances its power and role in society (Sproule, 2002). Media and psychology are inseparable, coexist and co-evolve with each other. Hegemonic Western Media has used this connecting bridge as a weapon and deformed the real image of Islam and its followers. They have spread the dichotomy of Orient/Occident through visual images.

The main aim of this research is to show that certain Hollywood programs have intentionally deteriorated the real image of Muslims. They depict Muslims as violent, irrational, and shabby in appearance, barbaric, uncivilized with beards and inhuman towards women. On the other side, women are shown as subalterns, suppressed, bound in the patriarchal cage with no voice of their own. According to Kai Hafez, this media gives us "an image of oriental life that consists of 50 percent wars, catastrophes, revolutions, terrorism, crises and tensions". (Ahlin, M. & Carler, N, 2011). This media discourse has a very strong influence on public opinion. After the incident of 9/11 Western Media intentionally misrepresented, over-generalized and exaggerated the real image of Islam. As visual images have a strong impact on the psychology of the audience. The repeated Grottesque representation of Islam and its followers has put the entire world in the dread of Islamophobia. This media discourse has strengthened the ideology of Islamophobia and has put all the Muslims in the frame of

extremists, terrorists and fundamentalists. The Western Media has presented Islam as a monolithic and constant visual representation has provoked this stance. For data analysis following movies have been selected: Aladdin (1992), The Breadwinner (2017), and Body of Lies (2008).

1.1 Significance of this topic:

Western Media has attained a significant position. Its targeted audience is under the deep influence and has always admired it. The main aim of selecting this study is to show that Western Media has misrepresented the real image of Islam, the religion and its followers in general and the Muslim women in particular. The focal area of this research is to spread awareness among the audience that the message conveyed by the sender is one sided and biased.

1.2 Rational of the topic

"Image speaks itself". The main aim of selecting this topic is to aware the masses that the visual images are always strong and the continuous repetition of one image strengthens the motif behind the screen. Almost all Hollywood programs have deteriorated the real image and have put all the world in the dread of Islamophobia. The agenda behind this agency has ruined the career, status, originality of all the followers of Islam and Muslims. The aim of selecting this issue is to highlight that everything has two sides and Western Media has just covered one side of the picture.

2. Literature Review

Literature review basically explores and evaluates previous research in contemplate to the subject of representation of Muslims in the era of globalization.

According to Shaheen (2014) in almost all Hollywood movies the following stereotypes are attached to Muslims and Arabs 1) The fabulously wealthy; b) sex maniacs; c) barbaric and uncouth; and, 4) those that revel in acts of terrorism .

This study highlights that Hollywood has attached certain stereotypes to Orients. In the lens of these stereotypes, Western Media has overgeneralized the Muslim Community.

Ridounai (2011) stated in the article entitled: "The Representation of Arabs and Muslims in Western Media" that Western representation of Muslims and Arabs is not a recent phenomenon. It is deep rooted in the conceptualization of West. From the very beginning of Crusade wars, the image of Muslims has been distorted. During the Islamic expansion in Europe with Islamic state in Spain and other parts of Europe, the Hegemonic West has taken his revenge and spread the hatred for a specific community.

This article reflects that Muslims and their image are always on the hit list of the Western Media. There are repeated incidents in the history where West take out their grudges by manipulating the reality.

Duke (2010) articulated in his forum entitled "Through a Screen Darkly: Hollywood as a Measure of Discrimination Against Arabs and Muslims" shows Arab and Muslims in terrorism ventures before and after 9/11 attack. This study highlighted about Hollywood movies popularity and their impact on the psychology of audience. Muslims are shown as negative, white walkers.

Above mentioned study depicts that 9/11 incident worsened the situation of the whole world. The dawn of 11th September 2001 caused the downfall of Muslims and Arabs all over the globe. The discrimination against Muslims and Arabs prevailed through media discourse.

According to a comparative study of Kozlovic & Karl (2009), "Islam, Muslims and Arab in the popular Hollywood cinema" highlighted that cinema contributes in implementing the ideology of anti-Islamism.

Study of K& K shows that Western cinema has enclosed all the Muslims under one roof and labelled them as extremists. They have forgotten the reality that all five fingers are not equal.

Said (1978), presented three major dogmas in his famous book of Orientalism. The first of which was to create systematic difference that distinguished the civilized West from the backward East. This can be shown in American films especially in early productions where Egyptian Arabs are comically portrayed as villains. Later Hollywood represented Middle Easterner not only as villains but also lacking in morals and honor in movies like the

Hostage series (1986-1992) and Three kings (1999). Said represented his second dogma is orientation tends to generalize the Western perception of the Orient and purposefully signors the diversities between middle Eastern countries. Moreover he added representation of East is entangled with political and economic strategies.

The above mentioned Study revealed that how television is portraying stereotypical image of Arabs and Muslims and aggravates the othering processing.

According to Rousseau & Jamil (2008), wrote in their research paper, "Meaning of 9/11 for two Pakistani communities: from external intruders to the internalization of a negative self-image" discuss the international tension after 9/11 and fears in immigrant communities, fanned by the media in the context of the war against terrorism. The research of R&J compared the meaning systems evoked around 9/11 within Pakistan the political rhetoric used by the US government and its allies to justify the pervasive feeling of fear and the bleak image that the community has of itself support the negative representations of Muslim and South Asian identities in the North American context.

The study highlights that every agenda has a certain motif. The motif of Western media is to caricature the image all the Muslims and Arabs. It also focus to unveil the agenda of Occident's.

3. Theatrical Framework:

3.1 Agenda setting theory:

In 1972 Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, formally presented the theory known as Agenda setting theory. The name of this theory suggests agenda is a target issue and it is always implemented with a proper plan and setup. Media make us aware about our surroundings and it has a strong impact in the formation of public opinion. "Mass media have the ability to transfer the salience of items on their news agendas to the public agenda" (Almalki 2017). We judge objects important what the media judge as important. This theory highlights that Cognitive principle of accessibility, which refers to the memories the brain accesses when asked to retrieve information.

The more a story or issue is publicized in the media, the more prominently it is stored in people's memories. There are two basic levels of this theory. As per the level one media using objects or issues to effect the people what people should think about. The second level decides what parts of the subject are important. Priority issue of the media becomes the priorities of people. Agenda setting, according to Tankard (1992), is one of the possible ways that the mass media can have an effect on the public. Agenda setting is the idea that the news media, by their display of news, came to determine the issues the public thinks about and talks about (P.206).

- *Rational /connection of this theory with the study:*

Media is penetrated into our lives to an extent that it tells us what and how to think. People utilized this medium for knowledge, decision and in making opinions. This theory is quite related to the research topic in way that Western Media agenda is to dismantle the status of Muslims through on-screen representation. By using the lens of Hollywood programs they put the whole world in the fringes of Islamophobia. Media agenda is always intentionally set by industry. Similarly Islamophobia is a tactic of Western media in order to politicize the Muslim Community. Selected movies, for this study made by Hollywood cinema which highly exposed the distorted image of Muslim men in general and oppressed women in particular. This theory supports the idea that media makes things important and a subject of debate. It also highlights that media has an agency behind the screen which has a proper agenda.

4. Methodology

"Methodology is a research strategy that translates ontological and epistemological principle into guidelines that shows how research is to be conducted" (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 30).

The purpose of this study is to highlight the Grotesque representation of Muslims in contemporary Globalized era. Most watched Hollywood movies is a universe of this study. Quota sampling is done by analyzing the following movies:

- 1) Body of Lies (2008), 2) Aladdin (1992), 3) The Breadwinner (2017)

4.1 Research Questions:

Q: 1 what are the tactics employed by western media agency in defaming Islam as a religion and its followers as extremists?

Q: 2 what are the consequences of grotesque on screen manifestation of Muslims in contemporary globalized era?

4.2 Research Objectives:

- To highlight the agency behind the screen
- To highlight the problems faced by Muslims due to the misrepresentation.

Hypothesis:

H1. Does the on screen Grotesque manifestation of Muslims effect the real image of Muslims or not?

5. Discussion and Analysis:

The film, *Breadwinner* (2017) is an animated film directed by Nora Twomey and executive produced by Mimi Polk Gitlin and Angelina Jolie. The story revolves around a girl Parvana and her struggle for survival in Kabul, Afghanistan. The film shows the unbearable, tortured, suppressed life of women in Kabul. The plot of the movie reveals that Kabul is in the control of Taliban regime and they have made the lives of people especially women miserable. This is evident in plot that men are intolerant towards women. They treat them as an object, a commodity and just for four walls of their houses. As for example when Parvana assists her father in a market, a boy named Idress first scolds her and her old handicapped father and later forces her to be his wife.

After the imprisonment of Parvana's handicapped father, she tries to get food from the market. It is shown that no one gives food to a girl, everyone refuses her and asks her to stay with in her house. This contradicts the reality. In any city, no shopkeeper scolds or rejects a woman costumer. Hunger forces young Parvana to disguise herself as Aatish a young boy. As she changes its appearance from a girl to a boy, life become easier for her and she becomes able to fetch water and food for her family. The plot unfolds the traumatic situation of Kabul and the miseries of its inhabitants especially women . .

Proceeding ahead in the movies, almost all the violent scenes are attached to Muslim men with knives in hand. In this voyage of living a dual life a man in appearance and a women in real Parvana met Shazia another disguised girl. This movie shows only a man can survive in Kabul Afghanistan. War, chaos, Curfew runs parallel in the movie. It is shown that Taliban regime distorts the peace of the city. All the scenes in the movie contradict the reality. There is no doubt in the fact that there are certain areas of Pakistan which are facing socio-political unrest. Kabul is one of those cities where external and internal forces have caused problems. The situation is tense and volatile. Taliban has their strong roots there.

Women are supposed to cover their bodies in traditional attires. But the situation as shown in movie is the distortion of reality. A woman can spend her life within her own gender, despite of gender discriminated society. The acceptance of Parvana as Aatish is a mere exaggeration. In actual, the movie creates a bad image of Muslim men and their attitude towards women. Despite of unrest, war and conflicts situations in reality differs from the movie.

Aladdin is a 1992 American animated comedy musical romantic fantasy adventure film produced by Walt Disney Feature Animation for Walt Disney Pictures. It was directed by John Musker and Ron Clements, it follows the pattern of Arabian folktale *One thousand and One Nights*.. The very opening of the movie depicts poverty in a society and land is full of thieves and thugs. All the thieves and thugs are brown skinned, with big tummies, beard and are Arabs. This movie is a complete example of Orient/ Occident dichotomy as per the view of Occident's that all Orients are devoid of characteristics, which they possess. In the movie, protagonist is a white skinned man, obviously an occident who despite of his poverty feeds the tummies of the poor.

He is kind-hearted, good, noble man whereas all other characters are its opposite. Sultan the king is shown as an irrational man who does not know how to rule. He is shown as a fool. This is to show that Orients are irrational, illogical and weakminded. They are not suitable as rulers. Through the character of Jafar, it is shown that it's easy to fool an eastern ruler. It is the responsibility of the West to rule the rest of the world. Like *Bread*

Winner Aladdin also shows the marginalized status of women. Princess Jasmine is locked within the patriarchal cage. She has no human friend and is unaware of her surroundings.

The negative stereotypes attached to Muslims are quite evident in the movie. Sorraya from Paravana and Jasmine from Aladdin depicts the fate of Muslim Women. Their sole purpose in life is to get married with a suitor of their elder's choice. Women are show pieces, overly sexualized character of Jasmine completely contradicts the real women of Arabian Society. They are bound to follow the Law of Father. Edward Said's notion that all the goodness lies in West whereas East is an abode of terror, violence and bloodshed is apparent in the movie.

where the camels roam...where they cut off your ear if they don't like your face. It's barbaric, but hey it's home".

The song of the movie is another example of negativity attached with Arabs. In the end it's the white skinned Ali who solved all the problems and become the super hero. This movie shows that White men is solving all the problems of Orients whereas their ruler like "King" is coward and easy to manipulate.

Body of Lies is a 2008 American action spy film directed and produced by Ridley Scott. This movie is an adaptation of David R. Ignatius novel by the same name. This movie shows the contemporary terse relationship between Westerns and Arabians. The protagonist of the movie Roger Ferris is in the hunt of a terrorist who is Muslim Al-Saleem. In his voyage of finding a terrorist he moves from one place to another and it is shown in the movie all bad, corrupt men who are involved in corruption or terrorism are all Muslims. Demonization of Islam is quite evident in the movie. As this study supports the idea that media has the power to influence, shape, and reshape the psychology of people. Not everyone has seen the Muslims and Arabian countries, it is only through the media that we see and visualize all unseen things.

The repeated and continuous imagery of Eastern countries as Kabul in *The Bread Winner* is shown as an abode of Taliban a place where the life of women is miserable, Arabs are shown as thieves and in *Body of lies* all Muslims are shown as directly or willingly involved in terrorism. The tool of media has made the agency of west strong in a sense that

after watching such sort of movies which has globalized attention forced the people to view Orients as Barbaric.

Islam is a beautiful religion which promote peace harmony and brotherhood. The media has the direct access to our brain. It encodes images in a way that get fixed to our brain as per agenda setting theory it is the media who fixes image in our mind. In the movie *Body of Lies* Islamic imagery is used. As for example, the man who is a tyrant ruler always starts his conversation with the name of God.

This is a policy employed by Western media, they Hijacked the real image of Islam and this tactic give birth to Islamophobia. Islamophobia means fear of Islam. The religion which promotes peace is crushed into pieces. Islam has given all the rights to men and women. Women are not inferior in the eyes of Almighty. Parvana's disguise, Sorrya's misères, Jasmine's isolation, Aisha's abduction are the images shown not only in the under discussed movies but also in other movies. Their veil/purdah is even considered a symbol of repression. The continuous watching of these movies will make one believe that the Arabs are all exactly like the characters presented in the movies. In almost all the on screen programs Arabs are depicted as rats, jackals, pigs and bastards.



Figure 1: This picture is of King and his daughter "Jasmine" from the movie *Aladdin*. (1992) On one hand the white beard, fat body of the King and on the other hand the overly sexualized appearance of the Jasmine both contradicts the reality. The watery eyes of Jasmine shows her dissatisfaction with her life. These characters misrepresent the image of Muslims.



Figure 2: This picture from *Aladdin* (1992) symbolize that a white man is saving brown woman and a naïve brown child from a brown man. This again highlights the notion that white men are saviours whereas brown woman are under oppression. This picture also symbolize that even children are not saved from the tyranny of brown man.



Figure 3: This picture symbolize that Jasmine is engaged in patriarchal setup. She is alone and has no human friend. She finds solace in the company of an animal. (*Aladdin*, 1992)

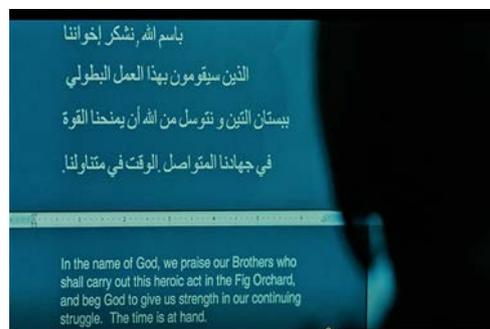


Figure 4: As shown in the movie, these pictures are basically email correspondence among terrorists and its starts with the name of God. They are asking strength from God before committing a heinous act. This put the

followers of Islam and religion itself in question mark. Is this Islam preach? The Arabic language shows the involvement of Arabs in violent acts. (Body of lies, 2008



Figure 5: This man is shown as the head of all crimes, the master behind all the evils. His head is covered with cap, he has beard, in short he is intentionally portrayed in a way because usually Muslims have such looks. This makes all men suspicious. (Body of Lies, 2008).



Figure 6: This picture is from the movie body of lies where the protagonist is in the arrest of terrorists. The backdrop has the first Kalma of Muslims.this again provked the point that Mulsism are doing this under the shade of Islam. This again put the religion Islam and its followers in question zone. (Body of Lies,2008)

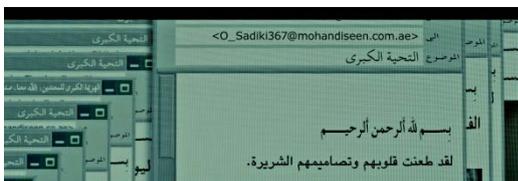


Figure 7: Another picture where conversation starts with “ In the name of Allah the most beneficent and most merciful”. This again shows that Islam supports the ideology of fanatics and extremists. (Body of Lies, 2008)



Figure 8: This picture is from the movie “The Breadwinner”. (2017)This is to show the overgeneralized identity of Muslim men.



Figure 9: This picture is of Parvana from the movie “The Bread Winner”(2017). The closed eyes of the protagonist shows that women are not expected to see things from their perception. They are meant to be suppressed.

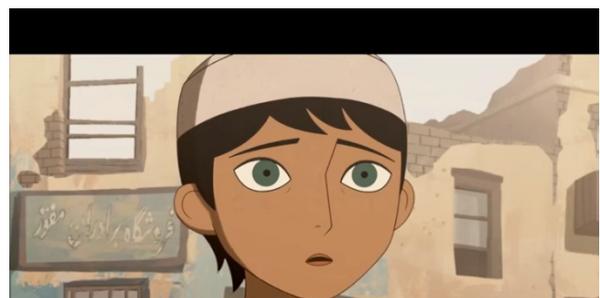


Figure 10: This is Parvana when she disguised herself in Aatish and became acceptable in the society. (The Bread Winner, 2017).

The above-attached pictures are from selected movies. The analysis and pictorial display proves the hypothesis that the grotesque representation has effect the image of Muslims, Islam and Muslim women.

6. Conclusion

Not everyone has personally witnessed the cities, sites and localities of Muslims depicted in the under discussed movie. The media agenda has put “pictures in our heads”. All over the world Muslim men and their religion is considered as a synonym of terrorism. This has made the lives of Muslims miserable across the globe. Green passport has become a symbol of threat. The media agency in the hands of politicization has successfully implemented their ideology and has put the whole world in the dread of islamophobia. The visual images and the continuous representation of Muslims has dismantle the culture, traditions, rituals of Islam and Muslims.

The oppression on Muslim women and its continuous demonstration in different ways have removed the real image of Muslim women and the whole world consider them oppressed, miserable pitiable women. Every religion has extremists. So has Islam. Western media has picked the extremist stance and has shown the one side of the picture to the world. All the on screen programs have covered the real picture and exposed the negative side in an exaggerated way.

References

- Ahlin, M & Carler, N (2011). Media and the Muslims: A thesis on media framing & priming in Argentina. Bachelor's thesis in Political Science, University West.
- Almalki, S. (2017). What is agenda-setting theory? Retrieved April 03, 2018, from <https://almalkishoaa.wordpress.com/2017/10/23/what-is-agenda-setting-theory/>
- Clements, R. Musker, J. (Producer/Director). Aladdin (1992). [Animation] United States: Walt Disney Pictures.
- Experiment Resources (2008). Research methodology. Retrieved March 1, 2018 from experiment Resources: <http://www.experiment-resources.com/research-methodology.html>
- Gitlin, P.M. & Jolie, A. (Producer), & Twomey N (Director). The Bread Winner (2017) Canada: Cartoon Saloon.
- Newman, W. L. (1997). Social research method: qualitative and quantitative approach. (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Scott, R. (Producer/Director). (2008). Body of Lies. Spy thriller film. United States: Scott Free Productions
- Shaheen, J. (2014). Reel bad Arabs: How Hollywood vilifies a people. Olive Branch.
- Shaheen, J. G. (2008). Guilty: Hollywood's verdict on Arabs after 9/11. Performing Arts.
- Severin, W.J., Tankard, J.W. (1992). *Communication theories: origins, methods and uses in the mass media* (3rd ed.). London: Longman
- Tung Yin, (2010) Through a Screen Darkly: Hollywood as a Measure of Discrimination Against Arabs and Muslims, Duke Forum for Law & Social Change Vol (2) 103-123 (2010)
- Kozlovic, A. K. (2009). Islam, Muslims and Arabs in the Popular Hollywood Cinema. Comparative Islamic Studies, Vol 3(2)
- Rousseau, C., & Jamil, U. (2008). Meaning of 9/11 for two Pakistani communities: From external intruders to the internalization of a negative self-image. Anthropology & Medicine, 15(3), 163-174.