

Exploiting Muslims in Popular Culture  
to craft  
Narrative Society

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Exploiting Muslims in Popular Culture  
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Narrative Society

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## Preface

When I came to London in 2013 for higher studies, I was asked questioned by a friend who has never been to India, if I lived in houses constructed of mud or if everyone in India lived in slums? I was surprised by his question so I asked him? “Why do you think so?”. He responded by telling me he noticed it in the movie ‘Slumdog Millionaire’. A movie that stereotyped India and its people as poor, dirty and mostly residing in habitats such as slums. The movie garnered 169 award nominations and won a total of 119 awards. If, that movie had such a negative impact on my friend, just imagine how many people around the globe have such similar notions about India.



## Abstract

For centuries, big screens have stereotyped many ethnicities- from Blacks to Jews, Native Americans to Asians. These moving images have one thing in common; a protagonist who is usually portrayed by a white person and a villain that's had his appearance change over time. Filmmakers have stereotyped almost every race to date; it has adversely affected the society in history but most of these stereotypical images eventually vanished. Now the primary target of such stereotypes are Muslim people. Over time filmmakers have produced over 100's of movies displaying negative images of the Muslim community in which they are shown as terrorists, suicide bombers, extremists, murderers, rapists, kidnappers, etc. Devastatingly, constantly repeated, these stereotypes have manipulated the viewer's thoughts and feelings, provoking forces of hatred, insecurity, unreasoning and sometimes even causing them to face prosecution in society.

Through a qualitative analysis of the post 9/11 terrorism show: *Homeland*, Season 4 (2014), Bollywood/Docudrama: *The Attack of 26/11* (2013), David Lean's Biography movie *Laurence of Arabia*, children's Disney films and many more; this thesis argues that years of negative Arab stereotyping in films have constructed, twisted and manipulated viewers' minds about the entire Islam religion and its people around the globe as an "out-group". It also provides visual evidence to support the argument; please note the visual references are serial in numbers. It further proves that fictional narratives by media and politics collectively have contaminated society with a feeling of (in)security and necessity of 'identity'. As Italian political philosopher- Niccolo Machiavelli cautioned centuries ago, makers of the popular culture have the power to alter reality. Film makers have intentionally or accidentally projected the Muslim world as the only traitor of the Westerners on screens since the 1800s and the image since then, has negatively distorted so much that it has given birth to a feeling of Islamophobia around the globe.

This thesis tries to find out the root cause of the dehumanization of the Muslim community where film, media, and politics uses the Muslim to create a sense of anxiety in society that leads to the creation of the identity to "initiate exceptional policy measures, including the perpetration of atrocities" (El- Affendi, 2014); and hence becomes the main victim of one nation's own future.



## **Roots of Exploitation of Muslim Culture.**

- Introduction
- Design Rational
- Primary source
- Methodology

## Introduction

[Man] is ... essentially a story telling animal... I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'

Alasdair Macintyre, 1981

رَامِحَالَا مُلَّعِي رَارَكَتَلَا. *“Repetition teaches the donkey”*

Humans are the best of the creation. If repetitions can teach a donkey, then think about what it can do to human beings. A small child uses repetition to master numbers and learn alphabets; older children use repetition to remember historical dates and algebraic formulas. Just as in today's age of advertising where companies use repeated advertisements to make viewers feel familiar with their products and services; in the same way, makers of popular culture have repeatedly “advertised” the Muslim Community as an “out-group”. Film makers have produced an enormous number of films around the globe, a majority of which has repeatedly distorted the images of what most Arab men, women, children and the Muslim community are really like. While gathering the evidence for this thesis, I found out that, constant repeated distortion of the Arab people on screens has created a sense of (in)security against the 2nd largest community (Muslims).

When our knowledge is limited about a group that shares a different history, heritage, culture, language, we use words like “others”, “foreign”, “they”; it helps us to collectively identify the group as something different. By using these words something or someone that is unknown becomes familiar and known. For instance, the word “alien” is used to describe a creature that is not from planet Earth. We don't know where they originate from, what their living style is, how they communicate. We know nothing about “the people not from earth”. It also has different meaning; When Congress passed the INA (Immigration and Nationality Act); it defined an “alien” as any person lacking citizenship or status as a national of the United States. (Staff, 2007) The fact we use these words, is to differentiate ourselves from them. Simultaneously, it helps in the creation of identity. “Identity is revealed to us only as something to be invented rather than discovered; as a target of an effort, an objective.” (Bauman, 2013) By using these words, our understanding of them becomes clearer. It is also used to describe foreign people and when the same word is used in two different contexts it

automatically generates fear of the “unknown”. Furthermore, when it is used to describe a group of people who have a different culture, language, history, it becomes decisive.

Cartoons were one of the main streams to sense such stereotypes such as Mickey in Arabia (1932) or Aladdin (1995) where the lyrics of the title song of Aladdin are “Oh I come from a land, from a faraway place, where the caravan camels roam. Where they cut off your ear if they don’t like your face, it’s barbaric, but hey, it’s home.” (Aladdin: Arabian Nights, 1995). It is alarming how such aggressive words were used in the opening sequence. But it does not end there, these visuals also show how brutally the Arab men treat people when they feel disobeyed; Arab women as belly dancers and as sexually available. (Jarmakani, 2008) This negative stereotyping cartoon series by Disney was widely watched by almost every child in every corner of the world. Personally, I spent most of my childhood days watching this cartoon series. And when you get familiar with these “reel people” you start noticing similar plots surrounding you.

Arab stereotypes started rolling on screen since the late eighteenth century; from 1896 until today, the filtered lens of these filmmakers, Arabs look different to what they actually are. We have seen “them” as murderers, sleazy rapists, religious fanatics, oil rich dimwits, abusers of women and the list goes on. Filmmakers have collectively implied all Arabs as public enemies. But what is an Arab? Pause and visualize “them”. Are they kind and peace loving people? Or do you see them with black beards, in headdresses with limousines, oil wells, camels or a desert in the background. Or perhaps rich enough to fund nuclear weapons, crazy hate in his eyes, automatic guns in his hands and “Allah” on his lips. (Shaheen, 2014) The fact is that, producers have failed to recognize that “Allah” is Arabic for god. Quoted by a Greek philosopher Plato “Those who tell the stories also rule the society” and by repeated negative stereotyping, these story tellers have slanted our views on the Middle east, in broader; the Muslim community around the globe.

But what do we know about real Arabs? With 12 years of experience in the Muslim world Shaheen mentioned in his book; Reel bad Arabs, that just like any other country, the Arab world has accommodated diversely talented and hospitable citizens: lawyers, bankers, doctors, engineers, farmers, computer programmers, businessman, store managers, writers, musicians, etc. Arabs have made many contributions to our civilization too. They invented algebra and the concept of zero. Words like algebra, coffee, chemistry and many others have Arab roots. Geographically, the Arab world

is one-and-a-half times as large as the United States. In most Arab countries, 70% of the population is under age 30 and most of them share common language, culture, history and religion. Though most of them are Muslims, 15 million Arab Christians reside there as well. Their dress is traditional and western. The majority are peace loving, not violent; poor, not rich; most of them have not even seen



fig 1 (Aladdin travelling in his magic carpet)

oil well or mounted a camel. No one travels in “magic carpets”<sup>fig 1</sup> as shown in the Aladdin cartoon series. Their lifestyle defies the stereotypes built around them. In fact, most of the 1.1 billion Muslims are Indian, Indonesian or Malaysian. Only 12% of the world’s Muslims are Arabs. Yet the movie makers ignore the reality as they depict Arabs and Muslims as the same people. As a result, viewers tend to link the same attributes to both people as “strangers” which the Greek called “xenophobia”, meaning, when one racial, ethnic or religious group is vilified, innocent people suffer. For example, in February 1942, more than 100,000s of Japanese Americans were displaced from their homes, native Americans too, were displaced and slaughtered, in Europe six million Jews perished in the holocaust.

This is what happens when people are dehumanized and it is upsetting that it is still going on. In today’s multiple award winning TV series; with millions of viewers; Homeland has adversely stereotyped not only the middle eastern people but the whole Muslim community including Pakistan and Afghanistan (Southern Asia). In account to that, this thesis refers and analyses the negative representation of Muslims in Homeland and similar motion pictures to support its argument that negative stereotyping on popular media has created a false alarm against the whole Muslim community where a non-Muslim has a difficult time trusting a Muslim.



## Design rationale

This book's front cover resembles the identity of a terrorist; the one we see through the lens of a camera. Thick black colour hard cover of the book, that is printed with green color. *(In the Qur'an [Surah 76:21], it is said that the inhabitants of paradise will wear green garments of fine silk.)* It will grab the reader's attention when the cover will turn over as if seeing behind the stage of a show. The considered size of the book is A3 and the back cover will be glued with the same cloth. The book consists of 34 double sided pages.

## Primary source

The primary source used in this thesis to support the argument is from the American television drama Series aired in Channel 4, “Homeland”, Season 4 that consists of 12 episodes showing widespread negative images of Muslims where the CIA Officer, Carrie Matthison and her team are hunting a major Islamic Leader, ‘Haqqani’, responsible for the bombing at the CIA office which killed dozens of CIA officers. There are two main reasons why I have chosen to focus mainly on the fourth season. First, considering the space limit for the thesis it is not possible to conduct a thorough analysis of a larger amount of material than season 4. Secondly, it is watched by over 2.3 million people in America. (Homeland, 2012) is also available on Netflix, Amazon movies, YouTube for the rest of the viewers around the globe. Also, I find the show thrilling and entertaining. This makes the empirical data interesting to analyze. Including that, Homeland is new and has received critical acclaim and won several awards including the 2011 and 2012 Golden Globe Award for Best Television Series. This shows the significance and possible influence in the American popular culture which is not only limited to USA geographically as America is the world’s leading exporter of the screen images; able to display its culture via television and film, and provoking billions to condemn the 2nd largest community as “Others”. In this thesis, I also analyse a Bollywood blockbuster movie ‘The Attacks of 26/11’ by Ram Gopal Verma. Though this thesis mainly focuses on season four of Homeland that stereotypes Muslim men, women and children; it also supports its argument by references to other seasons of Homeland. To support the primary source, this thesis also analyses a European television serial; Britz (2007), and Laurence of Arabia (1962), a few references from Disney films and other mentioned movies in further texts.

To analyze and support the argument, notes and references have been laid down from various books (secondary sources)

1. Reel Bad Arabs by Jack G. Shaheen.
2. Genocidal Nightmares by Abdelwahab El-Affendi.
3. Packaging terrorism by Susan D. Moeller.
4. Writing the war on Terrorism by Richard Jackson.
5. Visibly Muslim: Fashion politics faith by Emma Tarlo.
6. Identity: Conversation with Benedetto Vecchi by Zygmunt Bauman.

## Methodology

Because the aim of this thesis is to analyze the stereotypical representation of Muslims from screens to pop culture, distorting and manipulating viewers' minds, resulting in creating the current community, I have chosen a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is "a situated activity that locates the observer in the world," and consists of a set of "interpretive, material practices that make the world visible." When using a qualitative approach, the aim is to "make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them." (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011) In this thesis the aim is to analyze the effects of stereotyping in popular culture shaping the feeling of insecurity for one's own nation hence, creating the urge of fear and insecurity of the "others". This was achieved by watching the mentioned films and television series a couple of times and finding the correlation to my thesis and my desired approach. Also, identifying meaningful units that links to the "imagined communities" and "securitization" of "self". The approach was successful by carefully categorizing series of stereotypical images of Muslim men and women, children, government and in general the Muslim community.

## **Portrayal of Arab and Muslims in constructive narratives**

- Stereotyping
- Women Stereotype
- Children Stereotype
- Government and Religion stereotype

## Stereotyping

When a racial, ethnic, religious community is characterized on behalf its culture or aspects of an individual with very little facts and certainty, it becomes easier to differentiate oneself from the 'others' by categories. When we place something in a category we implicitly assume that it has something in common with the other exemplars of the category. But does it mean that it is bad? The truth is, stereotyping is only based on negativity. It is a way of dividing the world. Stereotypes are the products of our cognitive activity. It is also a product of cultures. (Hinton, 2000)

A few definitions from different authors are –

“a fixed impression which conforms very little to the facts it pretends to represent and result from our defining first and observing second” (Katz and Braly, 1935)

“a structured set of beliefs about the personal attributes of a group of people” (Del Boca and Ashmore, 1985)

“Stripping down of the manifold characteristics of other people or culture to such a limit range that any possibility of truth is negated” (Pickering, 2001)

It all began in the eighteenth and the nineteenth century when European artists and writers presented images of deserts, corrupt places and slimy souks as inhabited by the cultural “others”- the lazy, bearded heathen Muslim Arabs. The images portrayed were of cheating vendors and exotic concubines held hostage in the slave market. This fiction got popular and became part of the European culture. Arabs were negatively stereotyped by almost every European Artist. The Arabian night stories impacted Western perception. Until 1979 more than 200 tales of Arabian nights was printed in more languages than any other text other than Bible. (Shaheen, 2014). Most of the early Aladdin films projected Arab people as fat, ugly, bearded, with hatred in their eyes. Since the beginning, movie-makers had a mind-set of “seen one, seen 'em all” which Shaheen called an “Arab-Land”. This non-existing imaginary land consisted café and clubs like the “Shai-sha-ka-bob Café” and “The Pink Camel Club” located in made-up places with names like, “Lugash”, “Othar”, “Hagreeb”. The desert picture consisted of the an oasis, oil wells, palm trees, tents and camels. Arabs were shown with big swords and guns, killing their own kind. For instance, in the film, Laurence of Arabia, the most disturbing scene occurs where Sherif Ali, riding a camel approaches T W

Laurence who is accompanied by an Arab guide in a desert. Ali greets Laurence by killing the guide because the guide belonged to different tribe and drank from the well that belonged to Ali's tribe, as the Guide was Laurence's friend, he got angry and calls Ali "greedy, silly, barbarous and cruel as they fight tribe against tribe"; note that the film shows a well in the middle of nowhere with no chance of vegetation and inhabitation; later the movie also shows an oasis in the middle of the desert. In the movie, several scenes display Arabs contesting against Arabs. For example, Auda, refuses to permit Ali and a Bedouin to drink from his well. And it is Laurence who bravely rides back into the



fig 2 (video of Pakistani civilians killing an CIA agent)

desert to rescue a faltering Bedouin. Later when the same Bedouin kills another Arab, Laurence steps in to avoid the "Blood Fued". In the movie, 'The Attacks of 26/11' there is a scene where a taxi driver named, Mohammed, picks up 3 terrorists unsuspectingly, the terrorist does not hesitate, knowing the driver was Muslim and places the bomb in his taxi. Another perfect example is from Homeland, (S4 E9) a video flashes on the screen showing Muslim civilians killing a CIA informant on the street during broad day light. <sup>fig 2</sup>

But in reality, majority of these people are kind hearted who do not only care for the people of the same religion but respect all religions. For example, during the Attacks of 9/11 at the World Trade Center, a lot of victims were Muslims as well as there were people who were rescued by Muslim fire fighters. It is upsetting that stories like this never reach the top of any screens in movies or news, but what reaches to the top is the fictional Arabs such as Sheikhs releasing lurid sexual threats. The same Sheikh kidnaps blondes and tortures them. Therefore, this paints Arabs as dangerous, dumb villains whilst westerners are projected as bright, brave heroes. Palestinians appear as "terrorists" and most of these roles are usually played by Israeli actors. Movies made in Israel, for instance; The Finest Hour (1999), Deadly Heroes (1994) show American soldiers killing Iraqis and blowing up Arab "terrorists". These films also depict Arabs as terrorists and focus on the killing of American Soldiers in the Middle East. Whether in comedy, war, love, drama or science fiction movies- constant repetitions have corrupted the images of the Muslim society.

## Women Stereotype

From the research, I came to discover that image makers have projected Muslim women, children, government as villains in over 1000 feature films. But what is missing on these screens are the ordinary men and women, children, friends, grandfathers and grandmothers who care for each other and their. "Such scenes are as sparse as geysers in the Sahara." (Shaheen, 2014) In the book 'Reel Bad Arab', Shaheen wrote that the producers were projecting Arabs as billionaires, bombers and belly dancers (BBB) and this history is still on-going on screens. There is no escaping from the Arab stereotype. It is everywhere. Yesterday, Arab women were shown as forward belly dancers, sexually available and partially involved in terrorist activities whilst wearing a niqab/ burkha ; today it is still going on but with added strains. For example, in the end of the 1st episode of Britz, a Muslim girl, Nasima, is sitting in an open music orchestra wearing a suicide bomb with the aim to kill the Westerners. Also, in Homeland (SE 4) Fara, an intelligent, young, loyal and professional Persian analyst, working for the CIA, seemed confused towards her kind of people. This "her kind of people" were the antagonists supporting terrorism. Her behaviour creates suspicion in the viewers' minds. Once again in Season 4 (Ep 3) Fara is shown seducing a Muslim teenager boy named Aayan Ibrahim. Here, in both examples one can tell that Nasima and Fara are smart, intelligent and ambitious women but their actions not only support the women stereotypes but also indicates that they can easily be influenced and manipulated.

Jordan's Queen Raina Al-Abdullah is aware of the images damaging the Arabs and she is using YouTube as a platform to eradicate warped portraits that injure Arabs and Muslims and indeed all people. Her YouTube video from March 27, 2007 has already been seen by more than two million people. She says that "in a world where everyone can be easily connected, the world is still disconnected". Today we need more women like Queen Raina to spread the knowledge about the Muslim women.

Kawkab, another Muslim Baghdadi women, talks about everything that we think these women are not allowed to; from sex, love, virginity to Pro-Saddam patriotism. She is not afraid to take her niqab off to show her dyed hair. Again, one can only think that these women are the ones we see on films but here, they are not only liberated to choose their life and their love but also open-minded where words like sex and virginity is just another word for them. (Birder, 2006)



## Children Stereotype

In video games like Call of Duty, Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain or any other shooting game that involves two teams particularly enemies if mentioned, one always happens to be an Islamic group, no one would like to play a character who resembles as terrorist. Today, Muslim children will be unwilling to play as an Islamic group character as they will be certain in their minds that this group is the extremist group due to the Muslim stereotypes they see in movies and such video games. Actor Richard Dreyfuss made this comment, "There are film artists who affected me more than any textbooks, civics teachers, or even a lot of what my parents taught me. And that's big." (Bowser, 2000) If this is true then I ask what do teenagers think about Arabs and Muslims? In fact, teenagers not only watch television but 4 out of 10 cinema tickets are purchased by them.

In Homeland season 4; Aayan- a bright kid turned out to be involved in the act of terrorism when he hands over a bag of medicines to a terrorist. Similarly, in the end of the season 4 of Homeland, a Muslim kid wearing clothes <sup>fig 3</sup> indicating his religion, is wearing a suicide vest, with the aim to kill everyone around him. In the film, The Attacks of 26/11, based on true events, the narrator mentions Kasab's (terrorist) age to be 17 years old. But his actual age was 25 when he attacked in Mumbai. It is shocking that filmmakers have expanded their boundary of storytelling where they now include negativity of Muslim clothing, violent children and exaggerate narratives based on true events. Images like these are detrimental for Muslim children and for non-Muslims as well. Since, children can easily be manipulated through movies, where in real life tragically they have tried jumping off buildings in reciprocation of admiration they have for their ideal superheroes. Another solution can be that movies like these should be rated accordingly and should only be watched by 18+ age people or whatever appropriate age.



fig 3 (kid wearing muslim dress with suicide vest )

## Government and Religion stereotype

Not only as extremists but Islamic political organizations are also negatively stereotyped on screen. The stereotyping intensifies in Homeland when Islamic political organizations are linked with terrorist acts or condone violence, not once or twice but several times. For instance, a scene where Saul; CIA chief easily bribes Pakistan Airport's security



to skip the security checking. In addition, Aayan bribes the border forces to avoid troubles with the police. Later in season 4, the security at the border allows the kidnapper to cross the border with no questions asked. In the end of the season, it is revealed that Pakistan's political



fig 4 (Pakistani prime minister releasing the terrorist)

leader releases the terrorists. <sup>fig4</sup> In Britz, a police officer calls a Muslim guy, "Pa-ki-Fuck" where "Paki" stands for Pakistani. Also, a scene in The Attacks of 26/11; where scared police men are throwing stones at the Attacksed venue to confirm the presence of the terrorist. <sup>fig 5</sup>

The ideology of these frames is to build "fear of terror" in the viewers' minds. A sense that understands the current conflicts in Islamic places needs to be resolved. As humans are influenced from films, these corrupt images construct a sense of "need-of-security" for one's homeland hence, make it necessary to send external forces into the Islamic regions

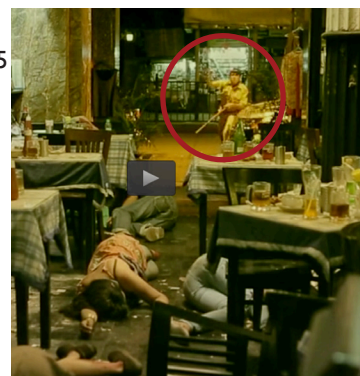


fig 5 (police with a stick, throwing stones at the venue)

or incite exceptional policy measures. And as far as the negative stereotypes are concerned, damaging images of men, women, children and the government portrays that extremists not only come from these territories but shows the involvement of the entire Islamic nation in acts of violence.

There is no doubt that visual lessons, motion pictures with constructed stories lasts forever. "it is time to recognize that the true tutors of our children are not the school teachers or university professors but filmmakers" writes Benjamin R. Barber in The Nation. Today filmmakers regularly link Arabs with the Muslim faith and Muslim faith with terrorism. Muslim is "an identifier used to describe those who believe in the religion of Islam, and thus Muslims can come from any nation and be of any racial or ethnic background." (Peek, pp. 11) Arabs, on the other hand, "represent a heterogeneous ethnic population that share a cultural and linguistic heritage and includes people who live in or trace their ancestries to countries in northern Africa and southwest Asia where the primary language is Arabic." (Peek, 2010) Therefore, there is no correlation between being an Arab and belonging to the Muslim faith. But filmmakers always tend to correlate Arabs with the Muslim faith and the Muslim faith is linked with male supremacy, holy war and acts of terror with the intent of using nuclear weapons. The screen displays mosques and the camera cuts to an Arab praying with the word "Allah" oh his lips before gunning down the civilians. Here, the word "Allah" is wrongly interpreted. Allah means God in Arabic but the western protagonists call the Arabs the "devil worshipper's". In Homeland Season 4 (Ep 6), the terrorist chants

in Arabic before gunning down his nephew. Also, in SE I (Ep 09) Abu Nazir (terrorist) reminds Brody, who has converted to Islam that he found peace only in the religion of Islam but this conversation flows into the context of bombing the president of the United States of America. Also, in season I, when Brody's wife Jessica, finds out that Brody has converted to Islam, she directly links Brody's new religion to those people's religion who tortured Brody for eight years. In addition, she links Islam with terrorism, implying that the two are synonymous. Due to her lack of knowledge about Islam, she slams the Quran (holy book of Islam) on the floor. Homeland also shows positive images of Islam when Brody does his prayers in peace and talks about Islam and its teachings to his daughter. The Attacks of 26/11 terrorist Kasab talks about going to Allah after his death in the context of killing civilians. In the end of Britz Ep I, Nasima is projected wearing a white Salwar Kameez,<sup>fig 6</sup> a traditional dress worn by Muslims in Pakistan; while wearing a suicide vest;<sup>fig 7</sup> In Islam, the color white symbolizes purity and peace. The fact is, all Muslims wear white clothes while attending the Friday prayers. And when you show these lousy images repeatedly, one should not be surprised by the unusual behavior of Muslims. Remember that, every group has amongst its members a minority that has committed heinous acts. But the majority are kind and peace loving people. When we create narratives like this, it generates Islamophobia in society and if we look back at our history, hatred towards any religion has caused viciousness and genocidal acts. These images impact viewers via television repeats, big screen revivals, the internet, movie rentals and becomes the main cause of Islamophobia which may result in massacre. Filmmakers must understand the tension they are creating and stop linking the religion of Islam with extremists and terrorism because "denigration of one's people, one's religion, is the denigration of all people, all religion." (Shaheen, 2014)



fig 7 (Nasima holding a customised remote of the suicide vest)



fig 6 (Nasima wearing white Salwar Kameez)

## **Popular/contemporary culture**

- Filmmakers
- News and media
- Politics

## Filmmakers

Filmmakers around the world, whether Hollywood, Bollywood or children's' favourite-Disney; they have singled out Arabs as the world's enemy. The fact is that for more than a century these filmmakers have tarred an entire group of people with the same sinister brush. The stereotypical image began to intensify when the state of Israel was founded on the Palestinian land. The Arab- Israel wars of 1948, 1967, 1973, hijacking of places and disruptive 1973 Arab oil embargo led to the "Arab as enemies" mindset. In the 1980's, 90's and the twenty-first century, these "bad people" images have prevailed. In the 1980's, 52 Americans were held hostage in the U.S embassy in Tehran. More than 70 Americans wrongly identified Iran as an Arab country. In the 1990's Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, leading to Gulf war and bombing of the World Trade Center (9/11) combined, leading some people to believe all Arabs are terrorist and do not value human life. This inspired the filmmakers to exaggerate the images of these Arabs and Islam linking with acts of terrorism. Also, there are several reasons to why this stereotype has endured for so long; profitable box office, politics, and absence of Arabs in the industry. The other main reason of the ongoing stereotyping is the media and the news, that filmmakers hear on radio, read on paper, see on television. It led the image makers to future deepen the stereotyping of Arabs. Almost every filmmaker choses Arab as the enemy as if they are free enemies. From the beginning moviemakers conjured up a mythical uniform 'seen one, seen "em all' setting which Shaheen calls it "Arab Land". But there are some filmmakers who are unwilling to damage the image of Arabs but are forced to do so. There are several reasons to that; he mentioned that it is the peer pressure in the industry where the filmmakers are reluctant to present good Arabs, even good American Arabs in the movies, because they might get labeled as 'pro- Arab'. Other filmmakers grew up watching western heroes crush hundreds of "reel Arabs" on screens so they are just repeating what they saw. When J.K Shaheen asked Writer- Director Sindy J. Furie to explain why the Arab Stereotype existed, Furie said that in his movie Iron Eagle (1996) he never revealed any country or Arab but it would also be one's stupidity to not think it was Arab. (Shaheen, 2014) To my understanding, Furie means, it is now obvious to recognize an Arab or Muslim in films. And then there are some filmmakers who tend to destroy the Arabs knowingly, in the interest of supporting their own personal or political agenda. Homeland is an anti-Muslim TV series, that links terrorism with the religion of Islam in every episode; it won the 2012 Golden Globe Award for Best Television Series. In fact, the internationally known motion pictures Marvel Studios in one of its globally recognized films, Iron Man depicts Islamic groups as the enemy. The movie made millions of dollars at the box office. And since then the comics version has been

rewritten into movies, in the comic version the villain is “not-a-Muslim”. The truth is that by adding an Arab Muslim as the enemy and the movie becomes a “Billion-Dollar-Hit”.

Since visual images are a powerful source of inspiration and learning for us and many filmmakers, they tend to repeat the stereotype unknowingly thus, joining the group of stereotype creators. Most likely, the future filmmakers will repeat the history of the negative stereotyping which might slaughter once again the sentiments of the 2nd largest community in the world. Established professionals and filmmakers should step forward and create movies that change our views on Reel-Arabs and Muslims; I say Muslims because it is the religion-Islam is used as a false trigger of terrorism in films. Also, we need teachers and scholars to make children aware of the current dehumanization of Arabs.

## Media

Not to solely blame the film makers, the media also never lacks behind in stereotyping Muslims. The word “media” is a plural noun and there are no common grounds on how every news organization responds to the news they cover. Usually when you hear the word “Islam” or “Muslim” in any news coverage it is always connected with the act of violence or terrorism; e.g: “Terrorist act was committed by a follower of Islam” instead of “Terrorist act was committed by an extremist group.”

The word “terrorism” originated during the French revolution and it was not referred to those who hate freedom, nor to non-state actors, nor of course to Islamofacism. (Furstenberg, 2015) Today's news headlines sound more threatening than what the original concept of terrorism is. The fact is, if an event threatens us, the chances of it getting major coverage is high. For example, on the headline of Newsweek's cover story on the Madrid train bombing in March 2004, it was labeled as “Europe's 9/11: a new threat to America?” following the failed bombing in London and Glasgow in the summer of 2007, it was labeled as “the great fear”. Headlines like this not only attract viewers, but words like threat, fear and danger grab our attention and that is the media's motive. In this way, their average viewer ratings get higher. To sum up, Western news outlets are mainly concerned with the bottom lines. Money matters. The media analyses how many people are reading, watching and listening to their news and continues to provide information on similar events to improve their market share on viewers. This kind of reporting, not only distorts viewers' minds, but also limits the knowledge of terrorism to bigger stories usually labeled with bold titles such as “Acts of terrorism by an Islamic group”.



The attack at Paris and Brussels got a lot of coverage throughout the media. In fact, the whole world showed support through the medium of social media on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter for several weeks. But the recent attack at one of the top night clubs in Istanbul on the New Year's eve of 2016 where not only Turkish but people from around the globe including India, America and England died that night. The event hardly got any coverage in the foreign media. In the first half of the year 2008, the three US prime-time networks devoted only 181 minutes to Iraq compared to a 1,157 minutes dedicated to other countries in the whole year of 2007. (Stelter, 2015) Al- Jazeera; the most watched news channel in the Arab world; continually shows corpses including those of children, victims of violence, in hospitals with bloodstained bandages, shops in flames after bombings, refugees, widows and orphans. But the U.S News programs tend to ignore that. There are several reasons to this. Firstly, an event geographically close to us tends to interest us more. Secondly, with the general cutting of the news budgets the media cannot afford to cover all the disasters that occur so they now choose to show what they think their audiences care most about. Because of all these factors not only does our knowledge of the Middle-East become limited to what we see on the television but also distorted.

The international media's hunger for Muslims on the aftermath of September 11th also, escalated to the Muslim women's hijabs. Wearing a hijab became more of an invitation to suspicion and fear rather than something that raises the awareness of the religion "Islam". Shazia Mirza, a stand up Muslim British comedian who performs acts wearing austere black clothes with a black hijab was asked in a television interview where she thought that Saddam Hussein was keeping his weapons of mass destructions to which she replied, "Up his wife's purdah because no one's thought of looking there". (Tarlo, 2009) The interaction between the two not only justified the false assumptions of the whole weapon search but also showed bizarrely how Muslims were somehow expected to be able to answer such questions.

Media is the most powerful source of the communication. It has the power to show the world the "truth" but today with its own political agenda or profit motive, the news media selectively focuses on the minority of the minority of Arabs- 'the extremists' which wrongly conveys that the 265 million ordinary Arabs are "bad guys". Since the media has always provided and distorted events to turn that into a profit, it should not solely showcase events with catchy headlines but should also provide further factual information to it for the viewers. This way,

at least some viewers will gain knowledge about the subject and might hope to help by further spreading the knowledge to their companions. This might not be an ideal solution for the current situation but at least it is a start.

## Politics

The fact is that the government has a long history that films do and don't feature, during the World War I, England was America's ally so, the government prosecuted Robert Goldstein by sending him to prison because in his 1917 film 'The Spirit of '76' some frames showed British soldiers committing acts of atrocities which the judge deemed "the movie advances anti-British sentiments" labelling the film "potent German propaganda". (Fizzinoglia, 1999) Also, most of the corporate media relies relatively uncritically on government and security agencies for its information on foreign policy and intelligence matters, including terrorism. Also, filmmakers have been bribed by the pentagon, pressured and censored Hollywood filmmakers to adapt story lines to support its propaganda. (El-Affendi, 2014)

U.S interest in energy reserves, globalization of the world and the preoccupation of the military bases in the Islamic world are the main factors of the involvement of the U.S government with the Media and the Muslim world. Today, when you see the government, army or the secret agencies wiping out the "bad guys" in films one can notice the power of these organizations and the extreme level of torture they make the terrorists endure, whether domestic or foreign. It is in fact true that it shows the negativity of one's own government but when compared to the level of violence done by the extremists, it blind folds' viewers eyes on the interpretation of what we think of these organizations. You see massacre killings of civilians in the Islamic region by the military, extreme level of torture by the secret organization, etc. But my question is why only Arabs and the Muslims? In movies that features Americans killing the Arabs, more than fourteen films have credited the Department of Defence and the U.S Marine Corps for providing needed equipment and technical assistance. (Shaheen, 2014) At the period of cold war and WWII, Russians and Japanese were stressed with terrors and torture. They were projected as killing and torturing the Americans. But as the foreign policy with these nations improved, the stereotyping faded. The Department of Defence (DOD) has sometimes shown concern when other people have been tarnished in films. For example, "Donald Baruch, head of the DOD's motion picture production office cautioned producers not to over emphasize Japanese terror and torture" for the reasons of maintaining a mutual friendship and respect with the foreign land people, discrimination of national or religious

group, will bring harm to our national interest. (Suid, 1996) Today, we have over 100's of films, mobile games, television shows, advertisements showing the excitement of the military life, that helps to generate a favourable atmosphere for recruiting. These war films and army games have mutual enemies; the Arabs. This thesis understands the importance of recruiting but doubts about the common ground enemies. The fact that these images help interested people in joining the army but the hidden picture of massacre of the "terrorists" in these games somehow builds up a sense of "islamophobia" around us that this thesis covers in the next chapter.

In Melis Birder's video, in several scenes, Kawkab asks the camera man to hide the camera in most of the public places or else they would get prosecuted by the American soldiers. The fact that if an individual wants to show the truth of what is really happening in the Middle East, it is almost impossible due to the fear of being prosecuted and due to no electric supply in most of the regions in the Middle-East, it becomes difficult to share images of devastation on social media. In Birder's video, she shows the cameraman the places where she works; it shows the damaged building walls, poor living conditions and no electricity, she mentions that the reason for these calamities is war. One can argue that the anger created in these people against the Americans is giving birth to insecurity in both nations but the Americans must ask themselves "What are we doing to liberate the Middle East, is that how the Middle-Eastern people want to be liberated?" fig 8



fig 8 (painting of war by the middle eastern childrens)



## **Narrative societies**

- Self and Other
- Identity

## Self and other

One can only identify themselves if they are differentiated from the others. We must understand that the creation of self can only be implied by creating the others. But in doing so, it does not necessarily create the anxiety and insecurity of the “others” but movies and media has repeatedly framed them as villainous figures on screen, since popular culture has the power to alter reality we have inherited the anxiety in reality where an Italian or a French as ‘others’ will not generate anxiety but a Muslim will because this is how we have seen them through tinted filters with “the enemies” scripted all over it.

Popular culture has collectively created a society where we have alienated the “others” to identify ourselves. By constructing the simulated world on screen where we fight the “aliens” of the society, we have sunken into unimaginable depths of Islamophobia where the meaning of the word is no longer black and white and has got deeper roots of hatred, insecurity, self and others. ‘Today, security often masks “violence’ for counter terrorism and massacre killing’. (El-Affendi, 2014) And since we have created this sense of Islamophobia, it has created this need of security of the “self” which feeds of the insecurity of the “others’.

Today popular culture has advanced so much that it plays a dominant role in shaping the community we live in today. “Popular culture narratives are vehicles for working through anxieties and insecurities; they are mechanisms that offer fictive solutions to real social and political contradictions and threats... They also work to transform real social and political desires and insecurities into manageable narratives in which these can be temporarily articulated, displaced or resolved”. (Martin et al., 2006) In recent years there have been hundreds of sci-fi movies involving scenarios such as an alien invasion or zombie apocalypse etc. For example, in the movie Independence Day: Resurgence (2016), Earth faces a new extra-terrestrial threat, where the aliens; “others” aim to destroy the Earth. The images used in the films are mass destruction by “aliens”, army fighting and survival of the people. But what does this have to do with Islamophobia?

Since popular culture generates anxiety, when the word “alien” is used to identify Muslims, in politics and media, one can link the sci-fi movies to mass terror attacks and conflicts in the Middle East, this makes the “policy makers, and even whole communities, to behave irrationally, thus generating more insecurity and instability. Here danger is as valued as much as security.” (El-Affendi, 2014) Hence makers of popular culture play a crucial role in shaping the collective feeling of (in)security, that justifies and incites the implication of exceptional policy measures and perpetration of atrocities if necessary.

Image makers solely use the Muslim worlds to show holy war, link Islam with terrorism, show Islamic faith with male supremacy, the mainstream media shows the western foreign policy measures and Islamophobia (and radicalization experienced within Muslim communities residing in the West). Additionally, Islamophobic media encourages an anti-muslim mentality within the viewers, alienating Muslims and fuelling the extremists. Simultaneously, images of mass destruction and devastation of the Iraq war distress and anger the Muslim diaspora, intensifying the sense of alienation.

## Identity

“Your Christ is a Jew. Your car is Japanese. Your pizza is Italian. Your democracy- Greek. Your coffee- Brazilian. Your holiday- Turkish. Your number – Arabic. Your letter- Latin. Only your neighbour is a foreigner.” (Mamzer, 2002)

The depiction of “imagined communities” is in fact a “mythical” narrative like the creation of “a system of cultural signification. (El- Affendi, 2014) In imagined communities, a nation develops its traditions, norms and values by creating flags, anthems, emblems, languages, names and a constitution. These norms get instituted and become a part of the communal property that binds together the citizens that creates one’s “identity”. But it becomes crucial when linked with fundamentalism. Giving identity to any racial, ethnic, religious person is not dehumanized by just giving a description, but within the context of the constructive narrative, with the myths of origin, accusation of the past misdeeds, acknowledgement of evil plans and conspiracies.

One can witness the communal violence in Gujarat, India in 2002 which was a propaganda of Hindutva; a political party, aimed at controlling the Muslim and Christians minority, used the media as a means to justify the anti-Islam violence in Gujarat. Regional newspapers printed false stories about Hindu girls being raped by Muslim men, pamphlets assuring Hindu men that they should not to feel guilty about raping Muslim women, distribution of bangles to Hindu men who did not participate in the killing or boycotting the hate campaigns. The Gujarat riot gave birth to Islamophobia not only in India but around the globe. This representation of a Muslim as a danger to the security of the Hindu body of politics facilitates politicians as the hate agents of Muslims in India. (Genocide Gujarat, 2002)



## Conclusion

This thesis was able to analyse all the mentioned movies, that filmmakers have done an amazing job in destroying the stereotypical image of the Arab, post 9/11 American television series, Homeland shows good images of Islam in the 1st season however, the season 4 completely destroys it, including other seasons as well. I would call Homeland an “Anti-Muslim” show rather than a counter-terrorism show.

After the partition of India that divided the country into India and Pakistan, both these countries have had bitter relations with each other. And in the Bollywood movie, The attacks of 26/11, horrible images of dead children <sup>fig 9</sup> and women, mass killings of the public, attacks at the iconic places of Mumbai, and critical



fig 9 (childrens killed by terrorists)

narration tells us that the objective of terrorism is to generate fear, but by enhancing the stereotype of Muslims it does not only tell the audience about the objectives of terrorism but causes the bitterness in the hatred towards its neighbor Muslim country, Pakistan to increase; and Muslims residing in India.

Also, in Laurence of Arabia, T.W Laurence’s attitude changes during his time in Middle East. As a British man, he was a kind-hearted person, he believed killing was wrong but as he becomes an Arab and starts wearing Arabic clothes, he acts more aggressive; he is also shown killing other Arabs. After his return to England, he says “I didn’t like one thing that I killed an Arab and I enjoyed it”. From this movie one would assume that killing and violence comes naturally in an Arab person.

Movies have used Muslims as enemies only. And over time, these repeated images have imparted false knowledge to us about the Muslim community. But if the film industry continues to stereotype the Muslims it will further damage the image of Muslims in the future, the upcoming filmmakers will repeat the history of stereotyping. It is frightening, because when “history repeats itself” nothing good ever comes out of it. Producers need to be informed about the impacts on the public and future generation that comes from negatively representing the Arabs and Muslims. On the other hand, whilst the media is solely distorting the images of Muslims for a motive of generating profits, it is a filmmaker’s moral duty not to tar the image of an entire group of people based on the crime of a few. Also, the Media should be more careful on the way they present the information. They should provide insight to the issue where its audience can further gain their knowledge about the extremists and not judge the entire Islamic community. As the politics play a colossal role in generating Islamophobia it has also kept the world and media distracted from the conflicts occurring in the Middle

East with the current 2016 presidential campaign and elections in United States and the Brexit has kept the Europeans consumed in the issues they might face in the coming years.

Hence popular culture has collectively triggered anxiety and insecurity of the 'others'; we are constantly looking for securitization. And using "Islamophobia" as securitization we have divided ourselves according to the identity where an individual's identity is judged by their race, place of birth, family and social class. But the real question arises as to what identity really is? Is it a creation of social convention or political discourse?

We have seen that the popular culture is the reason of Islamophobia but politics also has a lot to do with the creation of these images and where they have been used in films and news to continuously distort the image of Islam. Due to the government's interest in fossils in the Middle East and globalizing the world, it has framed the "others" as anti-modernizers. Bauman, doyen of European sociology, is concentrating on globalization, examining it not only from an economic point of view but also primarily from its effects on daily life; So the "politics of identity therefore speaks the language of those who have been marginalized by globalization." (Bauman, 2013) Hence, it is definite that the identity crisis has dominated the world stage, a danger which we already had warning signs for. Ultimately, if it's the politics of identity, the various religious fundamentalists are nothing more than a rearrangement of identity presented by a cynical magician and we are the audience.





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