

## Journal of Peace, Development and Communication



Volume 05, Issue 1, January-March 2021  
 pISSN: 2663-7898, eISSN: 2663-7901  
 Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36968/JPDC-V05-I01-13>  
 Homepage: <https://pdfpk.net/pdf/>  
 Email: [se.jpdc@pdfpk.net](mailto:se.jpdc@pdfpk.net)

<b>Article:</b>	<b>Islamophobia In Western Media: A Study Of American Movies After 9/11</b>
<b>Author(s):</b>	Dr. Muhammad Umair Chaudhary Assistant Professor (IPFP Fellow), Department of Mass Communication, Virtual University, Lahore, Pakistan
	Dr. Abdul Ghani Assistant Professor, Department of Mass Communication, Minhaj University, Lahore, Pakistan
	Hassan Naseer PhD Scholar, Department of Mass Communication, University of Gujrat, Pakistan
<b>Published:</b>	30 <sup>th</sup> March 2021
<b>Publisher Information:</b>	Journal of Peace, Development and Communication (JPDC)
<b>To Cite this Article:</b>	Chaudhary, Muhammad Umair , et al. (2021). “Islamophobia In Western Media: A Study Of American Movies After 9/11” <i>Journal of Peace, Development and Communication</i> , vol. Volume 5, no. Issue 1, 2021, pp. 143-150, <a href="https://doi.org/10.36968/JPDC-V05-I01-13">https://doi.org/10.36968/JPDC-V05-I01-13</a>
<b>Author(s) Note:</b>	Dr. Muhammad Umair Chaudhary is serving as Assistant Professor (IPFP Fellow) at Department of Mass Communication, Virtual University, Lahore, Pakistan E-mail: <a href="mailto:umair.chaudhary@vu.edu.pk">umair.chaudhary@vu.edu.pk</a>
	Dr. Abdul Ghani is serving as Assistant Professor at Department of Mass Communication, Minhaj University, Lahore, Pakistan E-mail: <a href="mailto:drabdulghani.masscom@mul.edu.pk">drabdulghani.masscom@mul.edu.pk</a> , <a href="mailto:ghanimalik83@gmail.com">ghanimalik83@gmail.com</a>
	Hassan Naseer is a Ph.D. Scholar at Department of Mass Communication, University of Gujrat, Pakistan E-mail: <a href="mailto:7016@uog.edu.pk">7016@uog.edu.pk</a>

### **Abstract**

The present study discussed the feelings and sentiments that unquestionably exist in Western media particularly in U.S films against Islam and Muslims after Sep 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States, and the reaction to them increased the hater against Muslims. Specifically, the assumption that Islam is characteristically fierce or that Muslims have a reopensity for psychological warfare. Since 9/11, explicit people have transformed Islamophobia into an industry. In this study, content analysis of some commercially successful U.S films is being provided that has perpetuated popularized Islamophobia. Specifically, Hollywood films i.e. American Sniper, The Hurt Locker, and The Dictator have been examined. Although the researcher's analysis fundamentally talks about these movies inside the setting of twenty-first century Islamophobia, Additionally, it will also elaborate how relentless negative stereotypes are being drawn from decades against Muslims by the West with the help of media.

**Key Words:** Muslims, Islam, U.S movies, Western media

## Introduction

This research paper is focused and aimed to explore the term Islamophobia and the mindset propagate against Islam and Muslims in Western Media particularly in American movies after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Islamophobia is an idea that arises unequivocally to accomplish the work that categories like prejudice, racism was not doing (Sayyid, 2014).

There are two methodologies that researchers of Islamophobia have assumed, which can be named as personal and structural. In the personal methodology or approach, Islamophobia is assumed to a greater extent as the psychology of an individual who is obsessed with the threat, dread, and disdain of social distinction. This condition of an individual exploited due to stereotyping of mind and further provoked due to the occurrence of some events such as 9/11, whereas structural methodology or approach is established and associated with social cycles, government strategies, and political philosophy, etc. (Massoumi, et al., 2017)

The portrayal of Muslims in Western media, particularly in U.S movies and the propagation of harming figures of speech and generalizations identifies with both personal and structural Islamophobia. The association of the phrase "terrorism" with the Muslims results in consideration of Muslims as an enemy by the individuals and the outcomes in the clear division and common use of the terminology of "good Muslim/bad Muslim" across the world, particularly in the United States where 43% percent of Americans believe in anti-Islam and anti-Muslim prejudices (Mamdani, 2005).

The term Islamophobia is frequently discussed and contended as a problem during coverage of Islam and Muslims by the stereotypical media, although media are primarily focused on the side effect instead to identify and present the root causes of the problem. Islamophobia predominantly appears in public debates, discussions, and part of state policy for the post-Cold War period and expands upon inactive Islamophobia that is supported in the long history of Orientalist and the portrayal of Arabs, Muslims, and Islam itself in stereotypical media (Bazian, 2018).

It is important to comprehend and enhance the resurgence of Islamophobia in the USA after the 9/11 attacks. It is necessarily required to exhaustively interpret and understand the mechanism and the basics of Islamophobia. At the point when these issues are investigated, American Islamophobia arises as a unique and contemporary phenomenon that is linked with historic roots, driven by "othering" and abused for individual goals and benefits. It gets a show in the public arena differently, particularly in debates, discussions. To more readily comprehend and address such polemics, primarily five topics have been outlined inside Islamophobic talk, which are cruelty, sexism, relations with Judaism and Christianity, democracy, modernism. It is strongly recommended to additionally create Christian-Muslim interfaith discourse by the inclusion of cognitive and intellectual methodological elements to mitigate Islamophobia (Cluck, 2008).

The present case study is conducted to examine some movies released by the U.S after 9/11 which were widely seen throughout the globe and generated revenue worth Millions of dollars. The success of these anti-Muslim movies exposed that these movies are largely accepted by the audience in the West. The enormous size of the global audience depicts the fear of normalizing anti-Muslim prejudice and can enhance the solidification of Islamophobia.

## Objectives of the study

The key objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To know the portrayal of Muslims and Islam in Western Media
2. To know the projection of Islamophobia in U.S movies after 9/11

### **Islam and the Western Media**

The movies are considered as the key source that represents social life, culture of a society and religion. The movie industry had grabbed the attention of the viewers after the World War I. The cinema industry has undoubtedly changed the mindset of its viewers. The industry of filmmaking got more specialized progressions and more appreciated because of its order under the subjective studios and the incorporation of specific stars (Noureen & Paracha, 2018). The West has used the media, particularly film industry to accomplish its hidden agendas against Islam and Muslims. (Shaheen, 1997) examined more than 150 movies and revealed that disgusting, unpleasant and negative portrayal of Muslims have been presented in these movies. The image of Muslims has been represented in Hollywood movies as stereotypes, spoofs, cruel, extremists, terrorists, and killer of innocent citizens, particularly US citizens, whereas (Alsultany, 2012) believes that after the 9/11 horrible incident, there is still a propensity towards recognition of Islam that presents a negative portrayal of Muslims and Islam in the West. After September, 11 Islam has been politicized Islam has become highly politicized post-9/11, mainly due to the propaganda theories which are established based on Othering, Stereotypes, and Orientalism, the Islamophobia factor has been spread throughout the news media particularly in and Hollywood (Veldhausz, 2017).

### **Research Questions**

1. What was the portrayal of Muslims and Islam have given by U.S movies after 9/11?
2. Whether the U.S movies on Islamophobia have made a positive impact on the audience?

### **Literature Review**

Elouardaoui (2011) discusses that various Hollywood movies after 9/11 tried to portray the real image of Arabs, which is contrary to a wide range of such movies that have perpetuated a racially biased picture of Arab Muslims. The researcher supported this phenomenon with the example of the movie "Babel" which was released in the year 2006 wherein Arabs are presented as normal and very simple human beings with some ordinary issues and concerns. The researcher attempted to address some questions in his study that how did the incident of 9/11 assist to change Hollywood's depiction of Arabs in modern Hollywood movies? How do these modern movies endeavor to rupture the traditional assumption about Arabs? And also, how much have they been effective.

According to Patino (2015), Islamophobia is dominating presence in Western societies, mostly including North America and Europe. Individuals that are open-minded toward Islam see the expression "Islamophobia" as an approach to carry attention to the treacheries looked at by specific Muslims, though those difficult Islam consider certain Islamic practices as "backward" and shed a negative light on authoritarian states. The researcher further argues that it is from these convictions, which incorporate abuse that Westerners view Islam as an abusive religion and that enemy of Muslim pictures and negative generalizations are made.

Weaver & Bradley (2016) argue the impression of Islamophobia, anti-Islam, and anti-Muslim racism presented in a comedy movie named "The Dictator". The researcher describes and highlights the four main dialogues from the center groups. The dialogues and discussions show understanding in the center gathering and contend the parody is Islamophobic and anti-Muslim.

Veldhausz (2017) illustrates that after the event of 9/11, the religion Islam has become exceptionally politicized due to Islamophobia which has been spread throughout the globe with the help of mass media and particularly by Hollywood. The researcher has conducted contextual analyses of three Hollywood films, i.e. Zero Dark Thirty, The Hurt Locker, and American Sniper. In these movies, deprecatory manner of speaking perspectives ends up being formed Islamophobia. These films are centered on the happenings of incidents after 9/11 and the philosophers which indicate Islamophobia in these films are consequently

identified with the sentiments on Islam that have circulated through Hollywood that Muslims are non-viable with Western social setup, brutal, and psychological militants.

Corbin (2017) describes that the inside the United States, two normal thoughts or narratives about terrorist exists who attacked America. These thoughts are flourished through media i.e. T.V, news & films, etc. The first thought is that “terrorists” are always Muslims and the second is that “white” people are never terrorists. These narratives are projected with the help of the media and movie industry to gain power and political goals. However, the propagation of such baseless and false narratives leads to damage to the nation’s security. Noureen & Paracha (2018) portray the line of action by the U.S after the 9/11 incident. The United States brings new policies against Al-Qaeda, Taliban primarily, and against Muslims. Hollywood industry was used to get the desired goals set out by the Americans. In this scenario, such movies were produced which were against Muslims in the name of war against terrorism. According to the researchers, the incident of 9/11 had dramatically changed the movie industry. The minds of the audience were trying to reshape with the help of anti-Islamic movies.

Abadi (2018) states that disrespect, hater, disdain, and delinquency against the Muslims or individuals who resemble Muslims are at a record-breaking high in the U.S.A. The researcher also describes that the quantity of anti-Islam and anti-Muslim disdain groups has been enormously raised to 197% in the U.S.A whereas the ratio of anti-Muslim crimes rose to 67%. About 63 attacks have been reported on mosques since July 2017. On the other hand, due to Islamophobia the young Muslims in the West have been targeted, disregarded, and harassed.

According to Noureen & Paracha (2019) Hollywood is considered and plays a role of the opinion building industry in the film business throughout the globe and the reminiscent creative mind movable to stereotypes methodology. After the event of September 11, the notion against Arab Muslims in the U.S movies presented as notorious, harming portrayals of Arabs and Islamic religion like cruel, rude, disdain and ideologically harming which is contrary to their past perceptions. The researcher further argues that most philosophers rely upon the Islamophobia movies' stories and contents. The majority of the researchers considered and focuses upon Arabic characters at reasonable opportunity to examine the portrayal of Islam in the movies by neglecting such areas and localities where Islam is being followed.

Woods (2019) discusses the relationship of Hollywood with Arabs and the Middle East. The researcher argues that the relationship between Hollywood and Arabs (Muslims) have been fraught with misconceptions since the beginnings of film. Theater, art, and opera have long contained stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims as mysterious and mystical, while simultaneously dangerous and barbaric. When film grew as a new means of cultural expression in the early twentieth century, it subsequently began to draw upon these preexisting tropes.

### **The portrayal of Muslims in American Movies after 9/11**

Firstly, two movies i.e. American Sniper and The Hurt Locker are analyzed, examined and discussed. In these movies, every film is based on a character that works for the military secret service and follows a specific mission. Every hero is portrayed either as a savior or defender. In the movie American Sniper, the heroic character Chris Kyle is roused by retribution and revenge. The movie American Sniper is originated and established in the journal of a similar name by Chris Kyle which was the deadliest sniper in the history of the U.S military. The Hurt Locker portrays the character of a bomb specialist who has worked during the war in Iraq, and the movie it did not base on a real story. The Hurt Locker was coordinated by Kathryn Bigelow, and American Sniper was disseminated by Warner Brothers

Both the movies *American Sniper* and *The Hurt Locker* were filmed in Iraq and criticize, doubles against Muslims and Islam. *The Hurt Locker* does this in its initial scene, wherein a bomb expert while exploring a bomb, says he needs citizens to know "had they hide a bomb for us" we're simply going to explode their small screwing street."

The character Chris Kyle arrived in Iraq in the movie of *American Sniper*, sergeant illuminates him that the city has been cleared and "any military-age male who's still here will be here to assassinate you." During the film's initial scene, while Kyle is surveillance at home, a mother leaves her home with her youngster toward a US military tank. She holds a "grenade", and spontaneously gets shot by Kyle. After that, her son gets the explosive and rushes towards the tank, and he too is shot by Kyle. Later in the film, Kyle and his unit attack home to conduct a clearance operation. The guardian of the family that lives in the home welcomes the soldiers and asked them to share a meal with them. Despite this fact, this act of hospitality immediately turned and subverted when it is exposed that the family has an enormous reserve of attack rifles and explosives. The clear and unequivocal negative portrayal isn't the main issue, but, all of these three movies disseminate and propagate the "Great Muslim" & "Bad Muslim" terminology, which doesn't renounce, but also adds to the revilement of Islam.

*The Hurt Locker* and *American Sniper* have utilized generalizations to propagate the unhealthy image of Muslims and Islam that Muslims are naturally unkind, brutal, and violent. These portrayals rearrange the "us versus them" point of view endorsed by the War on Terror in that strict distinction is depicted as the base of the contention that characterizes Muslims as "the real enemy." By dehumanizing Muslim characters and adultifying youngsters, these movies verifiably legitimize Islamophobic US international strategies, for example, drone attacks and the redefinition of terrorist murders and non-military personnel killings. In this manner, these portrayals uphold the international interests of the US government and disregard the full history of Islam and US international strategy.

The movie "The Dictator" was released in 2012. It is a political satire and comedy movie written by Sacha Baron Cohen and directed by Larry Charles. Baron-Cohen has played the role of Admiral General named Aladeen who was shown as the dictator of the fictional Republic of Wadiya. The character of Admiral Aladeen was inspired by the real-life of Muslim dictator's i.e. Muammar Gaddafi, Saddam Hussain, and Iddi Amin. It is also said that the Dictator is based upon the story of a North African dictator, who was against democracy and tried throughout his life to ensure that democracy would never come to his country. The film seemed to be inspired by the novel *Zabibah and the King* by Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussain.

The plot of the film revolves around the character of a Muslim ruler Hafiz Aladeen who has been shown as the ruler of the fictional North African nation Republic of Wadiya. His character is shown as a sexier, childish, dictatorial, anti-Western, and cruel dictator who promotes and sponsors terrorism by giving shelter to Osama bin Laden, the leader of a Muslim terrorist organization Al-Qaeda, who always surrounds himself with feminine security and bodyguards. It has been shown that "Aladeen" is working to develop nuclear weapons to attack Israel. The main character in the movie Aladeen is shown in the movie with the Islamic getup i.e. a long beard, believe upon sexism, hostile to racism and has anti-American sentiments. The architecture shown in the movie is also represented and looks like a purely and typically Islamic. Thus, the Dictator is packed with signifiers that are stereotypes about Islam and Muslims. The key elements in the movie depict containing Islamophobic contents.

### **Conclusion**

The literature of the present study reveals that American movies are disseminating the negative image of Muslims and Islam for a long time particularly after the 9/11 horrible

incident. The stereotype image of the Muslim portrays in American movies has instigated the biased depiction of the Muslims and the Islamic. This is believed that the 9/11 attacks have played in actuating experts, scholars, philosophers, media, business in the United States to know about Muslims and Islamic culture. The distorted depiction of Muslims in Hollywood movies is believed to have negatively impacted the lives of Muslim immigrants residing in America. This all is happening due to the production of such movies in Hollywood which has portrayed debasing images of Muslims. Islamophobia is not a Muslim problem, but an affront to our common humanity. It is a fundamental violation of human rights and human dignity. It is deeply interconnected with racism, xenophobia, and other forms of dehumanization, often serving those who seek to maintain prevailing power structures.

Islamophobia is not a Muslim issue, but an attack against humankind. Islamophobia is a sheer violation of basic human rights, dignity and self-respect, and human poise. This term is profoundly interconnected with bigotry, xenophobia, and different types of dehumanization, frequently serving the individuals who try to keep the force and power. Media should play a key and positive role to curb this issue and media should be focused to portray for progressive representation of Muslims as unconventional and reformist portrayal neither accentuates nor eradicates the religious identity of a character.

**References:**

- Abadi, A. (2018). *Countering the Islamophobia Industry: Toward More Effective Strategies*. The Carter Center, One Copenhill 453 Freedom Parkway, Atlanta, GA 30307
- Alsultany, E. (2012). *Arabs and Muslims in the media*. New York: New York University Press. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Bazian, H. (2018). Islamophobia, “Clash of Civilizations”, and Forging a Post-Cold War Order! *Religions*, 9(9), 282. MDPI AG. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/rel9090282>
- Cluck, A. E. (2008). *Islamophobia in the Post-9/11 United States: Causes, Manifestations, and Solutions*. Unpublished Master of Arts Thesis, The University of Georgia, USA.
- Corbin, C. M. (2017). Terrorists Are Always Muslim but Never White: At the Intersection of Critical Race Theory and Propaganda. *FLASH*. Retrieved from <https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/flr/vol86/iss2/5/>
- Elouardaoui, O. (2011). *Arabs in Post-9/11 Hollywood Films: a Move towards a More Realistic Depiction?* Conference Session. Conference on Media and the Construction of the Muslim other at Stewart Center, Purdu University USA.
- Mamdani, M. (2005). Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War and the Roots of Terror. *American Anthropologist*, 104 (3). Harmony Press.
- Massoumi, N., Mills, T., & Miller, D. (Eds.). (2017). *What is Islamophobia?: racism, social movements and the state* (Vol. 264). London: Pluto Press.
- Noureen, A., & Paracha, S. A. (2019). Muslims and Islam: Freeze Framed Discourses in Hollywood during 1978-2013. *Global Regional Review*, 4(4), 37-43.
- Noureen, A., & Paracha, S. A. (2018). Pictures in Hollywood: A Momentous influence of Films after 9/11. *Global Media Journal: Pakistan Edition*, 11(2).
- Patino, E. (2015). A New Perspective Through Islamophobia: The True Oppressors of Veiled Muslim Women. The First-Year Papers (2010 - present). Retrieved from <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1055&context=fypapers>
- Sayyid, S. (2014). A Measure of Islamophobia. *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, 2(1), 10-25. doi:10.13169/islastudj.2.1.0010
- Shaheen, J. (1997). *Arab and Muslim Stereotyping in American Popular Culture*. Washington: Georgetown University.
- Shaheen, J. (2008). *Guilty: Hollywood's Verdict on Arabs after 9/11*. Northampton, MA: Interlink Publishing.
- Veldhausz, M. (2017). *Constructing Islamophobia: Hollywood*. Unpublished Master's of Arts Thesis, Radboud University, Nijmegen, Netherlands
- Weaver, S., & Bradley, L. (2016). I haven't heard anything about religion whatsoever: Audience perceptions of anti-Muslim racism in Sacha Baron Cohen's *The Dictator*. *HUMOR*, 29(2), 279-299
- Woods, G. (2019). Adventure, Intrigue, and Terror: Arabs and the Middle East in Hollywood Film Music. Student research. 129. Retrieved from <https://scholarship.depauw.edu/studentresearch/129>