

**RESEARCH PAPER****Islamophobia in Hollywood Movies: Comparative Analysis of Pre and Post-9/11 Movies****¹Dr. Ayesha Qamar*, ²Dr. Sadaf Irtaza and ³Syed Yousaf Raza**

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Mass Communication, Fatima Jinnah Women's University Rawalpindi, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Assistant Professor, Department of Media Studies, University of Balochistan, Quetta, Balochistan, Pakistan
3. Lecturer, Department of Mass Communication, Institute of Southern Punjab, Multan, Punjab, Pakistan

***Corresponding Author:** ayeshaqamar@fjwu.edu.pk**ABSTRACT**

The objective of this study is to find out whether and to what extent Hollywood movies propagate Islamophobia through bigger screens. Movies greatly influence the way people feel and think about many different things. It has long been vital to examine film depictions of various religions. The portrayal of Islam in media before and following the events of September 11, 2001, is analyzed in this qualitative study. Using purposive sampling, each film is selected both before and after 9/11. The *Mighty Heart* (2007) and *True Lies* (1994) both set before 9/11. According to the results, Hollywood movies frequently depict Muslims in a stereotypical light and use Orientalist stereotypes about Islam. To examine the content and show instances of terrorism, extremism, espionage, intrigue, and gender oppression, researchers created three scenarios. It turns out that Muslim women had lower status than men and could not get their hands on necessities. Terrorism, extremism, espionage, and intrigue are also major plot points in these movies. future studies can examine the steps implemented by the Hollywood business in response to Islamophobia in its films.

KEYWORDS: Extremism, Hollywood Movies, Post 9/11, Pre 9/11, Spying**Introduction**

The depiction of Muslims in Hollywood films has been the topic of not only attention but also discussion, which is reflective of the larger dynamics of representation in the film industry. Even though the portrayal of Muslim characters has progressed over the years, there are still many obstacles to overcome to break away from conventional narratives and cultivate a more nuanced version of Islam and believers of the religion. (Sardar & Davies, 2010) When it comes to portraying Muslim characters, Hollywood has a proven track record of relying on clichéd clichés. The portrayal of Muslims as terrorists, fanatics, or repressive characters is an example of this. Their identities are reduced to a limited set of characteristics, which reinforces damaging preconceptions. (Shaheen, 2001)

Constantly portraying Muslims as religious zealots, Hollywood emphasizes a false and limited view of Islam. The depiction in question neglects to encompass the wide range of ideas and behaviours prevalent in the Muslim world, hence perpetuating a sensationalized and homogeneous image. (Eissa et al., n.d.) Before the occurrences of September 11, 2001, Hollywood had already established a precedent for portraying Muslims that was marred by fallacious portrayals and stereotypical attitudes. Edward Said's "Orientalism" (1979) presents a scholarly analysis of Western portrayals of the Middle East, focusing on the simplifying and exoticization of Muslim civilizations in various forms of media, such as film. As Shaheen and other critics have noted, films like

"True Lies" (1994) and "Executive Decision" (1996) had a dearth of nuanced depictions. They relied heavily on cliches, including the "Arab terrorist" archetype.

The terrorist events that transpired on September 11, 2001, precipitated a substantial shift in worldwide geopolitics and exerted a profound influence on the cinematic representation of Muslims. The transformation of Muslim representation in the years after September 11, 2001. According to Nour, the assaults served to amplify preexisting preconceptions. They precipitated a surge in adverse representations, wherein Muslims were frequently portrayed as possible dangers or associated with acts of terrorism. (Itaoui et al., 2018)

The current research investigates the many perspectives that are being utilized in the portrayal of Muslims both before and after the events of September 11, 2001. Concerning the field of media studies, the study of framing theory investigates how news, narratives, or pictures are presented to the audience. The emphasis is placed on how the framing of an issue by the media impacts public perception by drawing attention to some parts of the issue while downplaying or ignoring others.

How Muslims are portrayed in films involves selecting and emphasizing certain features, narratives, or visual components that contribute to a particular depiction of the Muslim community. (Kozlovic, 2007)

The film industry frequently uses selective framing to depict Muslims in particular circumstances. Certain attributes, like religious affiliation and geopolitical circumstances, extremism and gender oppression, are highlighted in the framing, whilst the range and intricacy of Muslim experiences are diminished. The aforementioned biased perspective reinforces preexisting biases by framing Muslims within a limited range of characteristics, hence contributing to the propagation of stereotypes.(Guarinos & Berciano-Garrido, 2022)

In films like "True Lies" or "Executive Decision," the framing of Muslim characters as terrorists is a deliberate choice that shapes audience perceptions. The selective focus on these aspects reinforces the association between Islam and terrorism, contributing to the perpetuation of a narrow and stigmatized representation. (Alsultany, 2012)

The political discourse surrounding the War on Terror incorporates racist depictions of Muslim bodies, which are the product of a systemic process of ethnoracial cultural othering. This othering dehumanizes, objectifies, and vilifies Muslim identities. (Haider, 2019) How Hollywood presents Muslim men and women influences gender roles and expectations on a larger scale, shaping society's standards. The media can perpetuate specific narratives and images that support established gender norms, hence contributing to the marginalization of those who deviate from these standards. (Hassan, 2021)

Literature Review

Terrorism and Extremism

The "globalization of Hollywood movies" refers to how American films are becoming more popular and influential all around the globe. Hollywood is well-known as a dominant force in the film business because of the widespread exposure its films have had for decades. For several reasons, Hollywood films have enjoyed more global popularity. (Ameli et al., 2007)The repeated representation of Muslims in Hollywood films as terrorists is a reflection of bigger concerns involving stereotyping, othering, and the maintenance of damaging narratives. (Riegler, 2010)There are real-world repercussions that result from Hollywood films portraying Muslims in a terroristic

framework. There is a link between bad media depictions and heightened public anxiety, which contributes to an environment of distrust and prejudice against Muslims, according to studies such as those that are presented in "Media and Terrorism: Global Perspectives" (2012). The 9/11 attacks exacerbated how Hollywood portrayed Muslims as terrorists. "Representation of Muslims in American TV and Film Post-9/11" (2017) by Sarah Nour examines how this era led to the emergence of Islamophobia and the reinforcement of preexisting prejudices. The association of Muslim characters with terrorism stoked widespread distrust.

Gender Oppression

The representation of gender in Hollywood movies has been a subject of ongoing scrutiny, revealing patterns of gender oppression that persist in the film industry. Hollywood has a long history of perpetuating stereotypical gender roles that contribute to the oppression of both women and men. Films often portray women as passive, dependent, and solely defined by their relationships, while men are depicted as dominant, assertive, and in control. (Shohat, 1990) Gender discrimination is exacerbated by the underrepresentation of women in crucial creative jobs, both on and off-screen. Martha Lauzen's research on women in cinema and television sheds attention on the enduring gender disparity within the industry, which restricts the expression of varied perspectives and the range of storylines that may be presented. (Lauzen & Dozier, 1999)

Hollywood storylines frequently confine Muslim women to conventional positions that are devoid of agency and depth. These depictions perpetuate a limited perspective that regards Muslim women as passive victims, devoid of their multifaceted identities, ambitions, and obstacles. (Kiran et al., n.d.)

In addition to being subjected to stereotyping, Muslim males are frequently depicted as tyrannical people who enforce patriarchal rules. In addition to oversimplifying the multifaceted opinions and duties of Muslim males, this narrative perpetuates detrimental generalizations that further marginalize Muslim communities. (Akabli and Chahdi, 2022)

Espionage and Political Intrigue

The spy genre is a potent medium for moulding public opinions, and Hollywood has leveraged it to reinforce preexisting prejudices to further its propaganda efforts. The portrayal of Muslim characters as covert agents or conspirators is a prevalent practice that reinforces the perception that Islam is inherently linked to deceit and concealment. (Boggs & Pollard, 2006)

At the nexus of espionage and political intrigue in Hollywood films, Muslim protagonists are frequently portrayed in a way that promotes geopolitical narratives and perpetuates stereotypes. This essay delves into how Hollywood, in its quest for captivating storylines, has contributed to the formation of a skewed and frequently deceptive perception of Muslims within the domains of espionage and political intrigue. (Ramji, 2005)

Hollywood routinely incorporates espionage as a captivating narrative element, utilizing it to interlace intricate storylines and thrilling stories into the industry's tapestry. On the other hand, the presence of Muslim protagonists in these narratives has the potential to reinforce stereotypes and encourage the formation of preconceived beliefs regarding Islam and Muslims. (Khatib, 2006)

Material and Methods

Hollywood uses a qualitative content analysis research technique to go deeper into film material, uncovering themes, slants, and frames using a directed approach to qualitative analysis.(Hsieh and Shannon 2005).

The purposive sampling technique is applied to select two movies from pre and post-9/11 to analyze the islamophobia depiction in these movies.

Table 1
List of Movies selected for the sample

Pre 9/11	Post 9/11
True lies(1994)	The Mighty heart(2007)

Table 2
Categorization Scheme

Frames	Description
Terrorism	A phenomenon involving violence or threat of violence to instil fear, intimidate, or coerce a population, often for political, religious, or ideological purposes (Hoffman, 2006). The strategic justification for terrorist acts, the use of violence, propaganda, and strategic rationale all fall under this category.
Violence	Scenes in the movie showed violence (Physical) using weapons included in this frame.
Propaganda	Terrorist organizations frequently utilize propaganda as a strategic instrument to mold narratives, sway public sentiment, and advance their ideological or political objectives. This may encompass the distribution of messages via rallies and in small groups with the intention of eliciting support or sowing terror.(Kunczik & Schweitzer, 2008) Numerous scenes where the Muslims are shown as propagandists against the West will count.
Strategic Rationale	Terrorist acts are motivated by strategic goals attained through deliberate preparation and attack execution. These aims could be political, religious, or ideological and could differ greatly. Many times, people view terrorism as a tool to further a specific cause, subvert authority, or elicit a reaction from institutions or governments.(Hoffman, 2006) Numerous scenes in the movies show strategic rationale to attack the government or institutions that will come under this frame. Scenes in the selected movies that portray the government's attack and planning to subvert the organizations will be considered in this frame.
Espionage and Intrigue	It usually entails obtaining secret or private information, frequently pertaining to political, military, economic, or strategic matters. Espionage agents, sometimes called spies or intelligence agents, operate covertly to get information that is not easily accessible to the general public. Examples of espionage are code-breaking, infiltration, surveillance, and other covert operations.(Davies & Gustafson, 2013) Scenes in the selected movies showed Muslims as spies, and intrigue and engaging in spying operations are considered in this frame.
Gender Oppression	Gender oppression in Hollywood films can be shown using characters, plots, and industry norms that uphold prejudiced attitudes, discriminatory practices, and conventional gender roles. (Benshoff & Griffin, 2021) Gender oppression can manifest in various forms in Hollywood movies, including discrimination against female Muslims, violence, unequal pay, and limited access to education or healthcare based on one's gender

identity. All scenes related to depicting these kinds of gender difference against female Muslims by male Muslims are considered in this frame.

Results and Discussion

True Lies(1994)

Terrorism

Terrorism is at the center of "True Lies" story. An undercover federal agent tasked with combating terrorism, played by Arnold Schwarzenegger, is Harry Tasker. The villain, Salim Abu Aziz, is in charge of a terrorist organization that is preparing a catastrophic assault using stolen nuclear weapons. Set in the mid-1990s, during the height of Cold War anxiety, the film paints a picture of a world where secret agents like Harry are indispensable in thwarting threats all around the globe.

Espionage

The act of espionage is central to the plot. Deception and the blurry lines between truth and fantasy are brought to light by the fact that Harry is both a clandestine spy and an ordinary computer salesman. By incorporating complex action sequences, clandestine operations, and high-tech gadgets, the picture departs from the standard fare of spy thrillers.

Gender Oppression

The character of Jamie Lee Curtis's Helen Tasker is used to investigate the problem of gender discrimination. At first, we see Helen as a typical suburban housewife who has no idea her husband is secretly a criminal. A symbol of the limitations and standards placed on women by society and traditional gender roles, the individual feels neglected and dissatisfied.

The gender discrimination issue is examined through the character of Helen Tasker, played by Jamie Lee Curtis. At first, we see Helen as a typical suburban housewife who has no idea her husband is secretly a criminal. Dissatisfaction and neglect characterize the person, who represents the limitations and standards placed on women by society and traditional gender roles.

The mighty Heart (2007)

Terrorism

Daniel Pearl was a writer for The Wall Street Journal who was abducted and savagely killed in 2002 in Pakistan. "The Mighty Heart" is an engrossing play that explores this true tragedy. The protagonist of the film, Daniel's wife Mariane Pearl, goes through the terrifying ordeal of her husband's kidnapping and subsequent quest to find him. Focusing on the human aspect of the tale, the movie offers a nuanced view of terrorism. It highlights the psychological and emotional toll that terrorist attacks take on victims, and "The Mighty Heart" is a riveting film based on the real story of Wall Street Journal journalist Daniel Pearl, whose kidnapping and brutal murder in Pakistan in 2002 was documented by several sources. Mariane Pearl, Daniel's wife, is the film's protagonist as she faces the nightmare of her husband's abduction and ensuing hunt. The film presents a complex perspective on terrorism by centering the story on real people. Instead of sensationalizing violent acts, the emphasis is on the emotional and psychological effects of terrorism on victims and their loved ones. The film also sheds light on the difficulties

of reporting in disaster zones and the dangers that journalists face while seeking the truth.

"The Mighty Heart" delves deeply into questions like what it means to be a terrorist, the motivations behind terrorist acts, and the resilience of the human spirit in the face of tragedy. This work explores the substantial consequences that terrorism puts on the people directly affected, going beyond just depicting it as a series of violent occurrences. They should focus on protecting their families instead of making violent crimes trend. The video also highlights the dangers that journalists confront while trying to convey the truth in war zones.

There are some profound concerns that "The Mighty Heart" poses concerning terrorism, its causes, and the strength of the human spirit amid adversity. It does not merely present terrorism as a series of violent events but explores the profound consequences it has on the lives of those directly affected.

Espionage

After Daniel Pearl was kidnapped in Pakistan while investigating a storey, the plot of "The Mighty Heart" centres on the attempts to find him. The film does not focus much on espionage in the conventional sense, where intelligence agencies carry out clandestine activities. However, it does touch on topics such as terrorism, journalism, and international affairs.

Gender Oppression

Although "The Mighty Heart" (2007) predominantly centres on the factual occurrences encompassing the abduction and slaying of journalist Daniel Pearl and does not overtly explore the subject of gender oppression, it does present a platform for deliberating on more extensive concerns about gender relations, particularly as they pertain to journalism and conflict zones. Mariane Pearl, a pivotal character embodied by Angelina Jolie in the film, provides valuable perspectives on women's obstacles during crises through her persona and life experiences. The film alludes to Mariane's fortitude, perseverance, and resolve as she confronts the arduous conditions after her spouse vanishes. As she collaborates with law police and the media to locate Daniel, her agency is highlighted.

Nevertheless, the film also subtly depicts the susceptibility of people, namely women, residing in areas afflicted by terrorism and violence.

Similarities and differences in movies (True Lies 1994 and The Mighty heart 2007)

"True Lies" (1994) and "The Mighty Heart" (2007) are two distinct films that explore different themes and genres.

Terrorism

James Cameron directed the action-comedy True Lies (1994), which delves into the story of counterterrorism. Arnold Schwarzenegger plays the main role, an undercover agent entrusted with stopping a terrorist plot involving nuclear weapons.

The Mighty Heart, a 2007 film directed by Michael Winterbottom, is based on the true story of journalist Daniel Pearl's kidnapping and murder by terrorists in Pakistan. It explores the effects of terrorism on people and the challenges reporters face in crises. The central idea of the iconic spy action comedy Espionage in True Lies from 1994 is espionage. To stop a terrorist threat, the protagonist uses cutting-edge technology, goes

undercover, and participates in covert operations. "The Mighty Heart" (2007) integrates law enforcement collaboration and investigation elements to locate the kidnapped journalist, even though the movie is not primarily focused on espionage. The essay discusses the challenges of reporting when there is a high level of danger.

True Lies: Gender Oppression (1994): How gender roles are portrayed in the movie has come under fire. The lady, played by Jamie Lee Curtis, is first shown as the stereotypical housewife, unaware of her husband's secretive actions. Still, she undergoes a transformation that epitomizes the quality of empowerment. While without explicitly addressing gender inequality, *The Mighty Heart* (2007) makes subtle references to how vulnerable people—women in particular—who live in places affected by violence and terrorism are. The character Mariane Pearl, played by Angelina Jolie, personifies resilience and tenacity in adversity.

Conclusion

Hollywood productions were largely responsible for the clichéd portrayals of Muslims.

While "The Mighty Heart" explores the horrific reality of a journalist being abducted and killed by terrorists, "True Lies" employs a fictitious, overblown scenario, including nuclear threats. Both movies deal with terrorism but in different ways. Both movies include espionage themes; "True Lies" is a conventional spy movie, complete with gadgets and covert operations, while "The Mighty Heart" has aspects of investigation within the framework of a true story. Regarding gender representation, "True Lies" has drawn criticism for how it first presents traditional gender roles until Jamie Lee Curtis's character, who experiences empowerment, subverts them. However, "The Mighty Heart" does not emphasize gender oppression as a key topic; instead, it subtly examines gender dynamics, notably the fragility of people.

In summary, although terrorism, espionage, and gender dynamics are topics in both movies, they do so in unique ways that represent their different genres and storey goals. While "The Mighty Heart" presents a more sombre examination of the difficulties experienced by people in conflict zones and the real-world effects of terrorism, "True Lies" tends toward action-packed entertainment with humorous undertones.

Recommendations

Broaden the dataset to encompass a heterogeneous assortment of Hollywood films that were created prior to and after to September 11th. It is important to guarantee that the selection encompasses a wide range of genres, filmmakers, and cultural contexts in order to furnish an all-encompassing comprehension of the ways in which Islamophobia is depicted across distinct cinema categories. Future research can be done with quantitative content analysis of different movies before and after 9/11. The post-9/11 movies of discourse analysis can be done. Incorporate audience reception research into the content analysis to gain a deeper comprehension of how audiences absorb and interpret portrayals of Islam and Muslims in films. Conduct various interviews, focus groups, and surveys to collect varied viewpoints on the effects of these depictions.

References

- Akabli, J., & Chahdi, C. (2022). Hollywood's (mis) construction of gender: The aesthetics and politics of stigmatising Arab/Muslim women. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation*, 5(8), 17-28. <https://doi.org/10.32996/ijllt>
- Alsultany, E. (2012). *Arabs and Muslims in the media : race and representation after 9/11*. New York University Press. <https://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BB10252747.bib>
- Ameli, S. Reza., Marandi, S. Mohammed., Ahmed, Sameera., Seyfeddin, Kara., Merali, Arzu., & Islamic Human Rights Commission (Great Britain). (2007). *The British media and Muslim representation : ideology of demonisation*. Islamic Human Rights Commission.
- Benshoff, H. M., & Griffin, S. (2021). *America on film: Representing race, class, gender, and sexuality at the movies*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Boggs, C., & Pollard, T. (2006). Hollywood and the Spectacle of Terrorism. *New Political Science*, 28(3), 335–351. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07393140600856151>
- Davies, P. H. J., & Gustafson, K. C. (2013). *Intelligence elsewhere: spies and espionage outside the anglosphere*. Georgetown University Press.
- Eissa, E. A., Guta, H. A., & Hassan, R. S. (2022). Representations of Arab Women in Hollywood Pre-and Post-9/11. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 24(5), 21.
- Guarinos, V., & Berciano-Garrido, D. (2022). Towards a representation model of Arabs and Muslims: USA TV series as an amplifier of the cultural hegemonic speech (case study: *Homeland*). *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research*, 15(1), 125–144. https://doi.org/10.1386/jammr_00044_1
- Haider, M. (2019). The Racialization of the Muslim Body and Space in Hollywood. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, 6(3), 382–395. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332649219885982>
- Hassan, D. (2021). Representation of the Other Reproduce Inequalities: A Case Study of the Dictator Film in Terms of Orientalism. *Journal of Advanced Research in Social Sciences*, 4(3), 41–49. <https://doi.org/10.33422/jarss.v4i3.651>
- Hoffman, B. (2006). *Inside Terrorism* (REV-Revised, 2). Columbia University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/hoff12698>
- Hsieh, H.-F., & Shannon, S. (2005). Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15, 1277–1288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>
- Itaoui, R., Elsheikh, E., Edu, H. B., Mcginty, A. M., & Galloway-Popotas, R. (2018). *Islamophobia in the United States: A Reading Resource Pack Design & Layout*. www.kchyun.com
- Khatib, L. (2006). *Filming the Modern Middle East: Politics in the Cinemas of Hollywood and the Arab World*.
- Kiran, U., Qamar, A., Adnan, M., & Youssef, E. Y. M. (2021). Muslims depiction in Hollywood movies: A qualitative study. *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, 18(08), 1126-1136.
- Kozlovic, A. K. (2007). Islam, Muslims and Arabs in the Popular Hollywood Cinema. *Comparative Islamic Studies*, 3(2), 213–246. <https://doi.org/10.1558/cis.v3i2.213>

- Kunczik, M., & Schweitzer, E. J. (2008). The use of public opinion research in propaganda. *The Sage Handbook of Public Opinion Research*, 496–503.
- Lauzen, M. M., & Dozier, D. M. (1999). The Role of Women on Screen and behind the Scenes in the Television and Film Industries: Review of a Program of Research. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 23(4), 355–373. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0196859999023004004>
- Ramji, R. (2016). From navy seals to the siege: Getting to know the Muslim terrorist, Hollywood style. *Journal of religion & film*, 9(2), 6.
- Riegler, T. (2010). depictions of Terrorism in American Movies. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 4(2), 35–45
- Sardar, Z., & Davies, M. W. (2010). FREEZE FRAMING MUSLIMS. *Interventions*, 12(2), 239–250. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2010.489698>
- Shaheen, J. G. (2001). *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*. Olive Branch Press.
- Shohat, E. (1990). Gender in Hollywood's Orient. *Middle East Report*, 162, 40–42. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3013287>