

# Muslim Stereotypical Images through the Lenses of Hollywood

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## ABSTRACT

*Stereotypes have been continuously appearing in Hollywood movies. The paper focuses on the movies released from 1994-2000: featuring Muslim characters. They have been depicted as stereotypes, as analyzed by the literary analysis. The main focus will be the analysis on the six important Hollywood movies depicting the Muslim characters: included speaking accent, attires be traditional or native, hostile acts and offensive behaviour, terroristic affiliation and portrayal in a victimized manner. The selected movies often project the negative existence of the real characters in the unanimous movies prior to 9/11. A coder that primarily authorize the authentic analyze of frequent scenes, while as on the other hand the secondary coder put a remarkable edge of 10% of the total scenes in the reliability of the movies. This study brutally highlights the inner appearance in the popular movies juxtaposing within the circle of study. The climax marks the stereotypes are the core evident in this unprejudiced and biased Muslim subjugation of culture and originality.*

**Keyword: Stereotypes, Muslims, Hollywood, biased, ethnic, Arabs.**

## I. INTRODUCTION

El-Farra writes in 'Arabs and The Media, "A stereotype put a kind of a biased opinion or view- an individual will take the behavior of one person and state that all people belonging to that particular group, be it an ethnic, religious or social group, behave in the same manner" [1]. No doubt there might be some authenticity behind the projection, Hollywood Film projection demonstrates the Muslims as if they are put on the right barrels of the bullets, but in the real sense it's simply an unauthentic to glorify such a veiled identity and the milieu of the positivity turn into the negative approval of the suitable characters. In response to this projection, the other groups in the social setup could create a ambivalence among the different notions and ideologies on the other ethnicities. According to Shaheen's deep routed analysation, efforts have been made that the racial and ethnic stereotype may be eliminated from the movies, but Hollywood's stereotypes have not yet to be put in the positive connotations. As Shaheen rightly puts it, "Over the last three decades stereotypical portraits have actually increased in number and virulence." There is no doubt, that Hollywood has been tagged as one of the greatest international entertainers to the people of all sexes, races, ages and ethnicities. As per the Abstract Census of U.S the annual box office receipts for 2002 totaled \$9,520,000,000. In turn, the movie industry depicts numerous images of a variety of races throughout its films. Interestingly, Hollywood's images may have the ability and power to allow audiences to generate thoughts, views, and opinions based on what they perceive.

Therefore, plots, characters, and specific characteristics may be repeated within many films in what seems to be an all too convenient manner. Whether deemed good or bad, movies have the capacity to last forever, and with them they hold images and visuals that cannot be changed. Plato once stated in his work "Republic" that "those who tell the stories also rule society" (Shaheen, 2001, p. 5). The images that are left behind may often play a contributing role in how viewers shape their beliefs and opinions about certain countries, events, and people of various races, such as Arabs. "Hollywood Movies have a pivotal impact on American society and the millions of people have been seeded up believing that they know the Muslim traditions obsequies through what they have been fixed on the big screen or on the curtains of the cinemas" (Savage 8). The Hollywood movies seems to be at the verge of enormous popularity and well-established as internationally as well as in the roots of United States. Motion pictures in Hollywood almost reached everywhere to give a new way of pursuing things. Cinematic illusions are nurtured created and circulated worldwide and touched more than 100 countries. Now the scenario has got totally changed without visiting to the theaters these movies are available at the video stores..."(Shaheen, 5). This ongoing popularity of movies also seems to entice children and teenagers in that "...teenagers are avid moviegoers and nowadays purchase four out of ten movie tickets" (Shaheen, 5). Shaheen (2002), also noted that Hollywood movies and American television are very popular within 150 nations worldwide. Within these movies, many images are available to all individuals who view them. However, the main focus to highlight these stereotypes may hold a kind of unauthentic approach to deal with the things. It automatically generate a typical kind of unconscious in mind. It may play a rigid role of mental processes of examining the world inside as well as outside" (Paul, 52). It's very obvious that stereotype may be a lucrative weapon for Hollywood moviemakers in establishing protagonists and antagonists, the placement of repetitive Muslims as antagonists roles may largely impact the individuals to identify these images as true. The vague of this trend is on the surface about the myths and hypothesis regarding the widespread acceptance of stereotype Muslim/Arab-Americans repetitive placement of Muslims. The negative roles, if consigned to particular individuals it may put an inverse impact on the film city as well as the spectators to go through such unreal films. "It is the myths about Arabs which often inspire directors, producers and screenwriters to develop a product which is then based on stereotypes" (Farr 4-5). It is very unfortunate that there are some classes and races depicted in a more crystalline light; while as some races are projected in a biased negative manner. "Several of Hollywood's most blatant patterns of bias fall within the categories of race, ethnicity and/or national origin. Included in this group are negative and/or stereotypical portrayals of Arabs and Arab-Americans..." (Cones 1998).

Although all races may be portrayed negatively at one time or another, it seems that some races, specifically Arabs and Arab-Americans, may be recognized as being associated with a majority of negative characteristics. Seen through Hollywood's distorted lenses, Arabs look different and threatening. Projected along racial and religious lines, the stereotypes are deeply ingrained in American cinema. From 1896 until today, filmmakers have collectively indicted all Arabs as Public Enemy - brutal, heartless, uncivilized religious fanatics and money-mad cultural "others" bent on terrorizing civilized Westerners, especially Christians and Jews. (Shaheen, 2)

Keeping current events and headlines in mind, Hollywood and movie producers, keeping current events and headlines in mind, may have used such perceptions and events to their advantage when composing ideas for new films. "Each set of villains reflected headlines and anxieties of its era...with Soviet pretensions shattered and

aliens from outer space passé, the new cinematic enemy is the Muslim extremist” (Goodstein, 1998). Shaheen’s Studies and Background on Muslim Stereotypes. Jack Shaheen, Professor Emeritus of Mass Communications at Southern Illinois University, “is probably America’s best-known expert on how Arabs are portrayed in the media” (Levesque, 2002). Within his most recent book, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, Shaheen (2001) completed an exhaustive survey of more than 900 movies that contained portrayals of Arabs. Of these, only a dozen portrayed Arabs positively, with about 50 more offering a measure of balance. Shaheen writes that Hollywood has used repetition as a dangerous teaching tool for more than a century. In using this method, Shaheen (2001) suggests that these stereotypical, repetitious images of Arabs and Arab-Americans have tutored audiences over and over in film after film.

Shaheen’s extensive research process spanned two decades, and he came to discover that “Hollywood has projected Arabs as villains in more than 900 movies. The vast majority of villains are notorious sheikhs, maidens, Egyptians, and Palestinians” (Shaheen, 13). Shaheen (2001) stated that since 1896 Hollywood has released more than 100 movies depicting Egyptians. However, “A full 95 percent of those mock and/or dehumanize Egyptians” (Shaheen, 2001). Interestingly, Shaheen (2001), noted that Arabs appeared in 250 movies that had absolutely nothing to do with Arabs or the Middle East, but the Arabs were used in cameo roles in order to establish them as the villains. “Between 1980-2001, Hollywood released more than 120 of these cameo features” (Shaheen, 27).

Arab portraits and themes are the focus of Shaheen’s research on motion pictures. Thousands of movie reviews and storyline of Arabs, settings and character casts has been examined. Shaheen’s exploration discovered that majority of Muslims characters fall under the five basic types- Villains, Sheikhs, Maidens, Egyptians, and Palestinians. However, according to Shaheen (2001), the other “Arab” characters may be but are not exclusive to, Algerians, Iraqis, Jordanians, Lebanese, Libyans, Moroccans, Syrians, Tunisians, and Yemeni. While some images may be labelled as more negative and offensive than others, Shaheen warns that one must also pay close attention to those Arabs and images one does not see on movie screens. “Missing from the vast majority of scenarios are images of ordinary Arab men, women and children, living ordinary lives.” (Shaheen 13). Perhaps, it might even be safe to say that the images one does not see may be as dangerous, if not more so, than the images one is bombarded with. I am not saying that an Arab should never be portrayed as the villain. All Hollywood depictions of Arabs are bad ones... for more than century producers have tarred an entire group of people with the same sinister brush. (Shaheen, 11) Throughout his research, Shaheen was “driven by the need to expose an injustice: cinema’s systematic, pervasive, and unapologetic degradation and dehumanization of a people” (Shaheen 1).

The study consisted employed a literature analysis and a qualitative study that included the content analysis of six films released between the years of 1994 to 2000. Many of the sources that were cited in the literature analysis were found online. Through the use of InfoTrac Web: Expanded Academic, several scholarly articles that pertained to the content of the research topic were obtained. Other articles that were found online were obtained from online newspapers, magazines, journals, and excerpts from books.

## II. RELATED WORK

**“True Lies”**: movie released in 1994 – having total 44 scenes- depicts Muslim- American characters. Among 44 scenes; 17 depicts the portrayal of the Muslim characters. Out of 17 scenes- total 44 scenes- 58.8% i.e. 10 scenes depict the characters who speak with an accent, while in the remaining scenes the Muslim characters were not speaking at all. The entire percentage of scenes was reached by using the scenes that carry the Muslim-American characters. So the scenes in which Muslim American characters were speaking includes an accent which was always present in their way of speaking. Among the scenes portraying Muslim Characters 10 scenes portray them as the characters dressed up traditionally. The costume scenes were all male oriented as there were no female characters present in the movie. In the rest of the scenes the male depiction of Muslim Arab American characters in European dressing such as t-shirts and blue jeans.

**“Executive Decision”** (1996), comprised 36 scenes, out of 23 of which are depicted Arab and/or Arab-Americans Figures. Out of 23 scenes that portrayal depiction of Muslim- Arab Americans.

characters, 19 (82.6%) of them presented as speaking with an actual accent. However, in the rest of scenes, the Muslim/Arab-American characters did not open their speech at all. The total number of percentage of locale scenes by using characters with Muslim/Arab-American, not the entire number of scenes within the movie. The **“other”** or the non-Arab characters spoke in totally a different kind of form and accent. By this change in characterization may help spectators to differentiate the Muslim/Arab-American as cultural **“others”** Therefore, in all the scenes in which Arab and/or Arab-American characters were speaking in such an accent that was always present in their tone and speech.’ In the movie, there are almost 45 important scenes. out of 45 scenes, 23 are portraying the depiction of Muslim/Arab-American characters dressed in such a traditional and in a native attire. The first scene in this movie **“Executive Decision”** puts the light on the costume and dressing of Muslim Arabs were westernized clothing such suits as, jeans, pants, and shirts. There is one more depiction in the first scene both the male and the female folk depicted Muslim/Arab-American in a form of native attire, there is no doubt in it that the males and the females of Muslim categories are given the negative roles and are also depicted in the lines of negative colour.

**“Three Kings”** (1999), has 31 scenes, out of which 25 scenes depicted Muslim/Arab-American characters. Out of the scenes depicting Muslim characters 60% scenes are shown as speaking with an accent. Within the movie, no Muslim was represented without an accent. Although the rest 10 remaining scenes contained the characters like Muslim Arab Americans were not speaking within this catalogue or their interactions were especially in Arabic and especially English was negated entirely. The total percentage of the scenes reached by using Muslim-Arab-Americans within the framework of the movie. Out of 25 scenes, there is a crude depiction of a Muslim/Arab-American characters, 22 (86%) scenes project them as wearing native customary apparel. The organization of events are being seeded in Iraq which demonstrated a climate of desert and terrain, most of the characters in the movie are projected in Iraqi civilians continuously wearing in the traditional attire. Despite, the fact is that both genders are seen in the movie as a whole. While on the other hand in the movie the force of Saddam was not projected in the native customary apparel. The force was seen regularly changing their army shirts and pants. The female folk were shown as wearing Hijab or veiled from head to toe covering in a black

costume within the movie. But the teen girls were shown using the western garments. In the climax of this movie the last, our scenes portray the Muslim/Arab-American characters in totally attired in traditional attire.

“**The Siege**” (1998) in this movie there are almost 30 valid scenes, out of which 22 are depicted the 13(59%) some character is personified in such a way as if speaking with a glamour’s accent. a character like Tony Shaloub’s the FBI agent of America, selected for the most of the scenes. Throughout the entire movie, Tony speaks continuously in his native accent. But the Muslim/Arab American characters from the beginning till to the end of the movie spoke with a distinct accent. However in the movie and in all the scenes where Muslim/Arab-American characters were always speaking in an accent which was present in their tone of speech. Out of 42 scenes, 23scenes contained Muslim/Arab-American characters, six (27.2%)project Muslim/Arab-American in native and traditional attire. In most of these scenes, the Muslim Arabs were massive in numbers and being rounded up in New York City Many of these scenes occurred when there were massive numbers of Arabs/Arab-Americans being rounded up in New York City martial law after it was enacted due to the sponsored terrorism committing and could not be conceived. Within these scenes both the females and males were present, and on both genders traditional attire was present. Although The FBI agent, Tony Shaloub was never seen as in any form of native dressing.

**Rules of Engagement**, the scenes released in this movie portraying the characters of Muslim/Arab-American. Among the 15 scenes, 8 scenes depict them speaking with an accent. All the characters in these scenes were male. No such character has been portrayed as being without an accent. There was always present a tone in the speech of these Muslim/Arab-Americans. Among the scenes, 4 scenes have been depicted the characters having customary attire apparel. Yemen, as seen the movie, was the setting place, place having the climate and terrain of the desert, portraying both genders as wearing their customary native apparel. Maximum scenes of the movies portray negatively Muslims/Arab-American as being either angry or shooting hidden at the force of U.S. There are few scenes not depicting the Muslim characters were when a doctor of Yemen was a witness in a court of America. Throughout the movie, the dressing code of the Muslim is seen as being as customary native apparel. There is a great concern in connection with the images of Muslims as stereotypical in the movies released during 1994-2000, the pre-era of famous tragic 9/11. Maximum movies during this period failed to present the positive image of Muslims or an unbiased representation of the ethnic group as a whole. In the wide projection of the Muslim identity in Hollywood cinema, Islam is justified as a law of mass destruction, in terms of sense of dressing, opinions, activities etc. creating a negative image of Muslim/Arab-Americans simply the negative appraisal of Islam. It is very unfortunate that the people who are the followers of this noble and pristine religion have been set in a Negative shelf. It can put an unbalanced aroma among the people of other ethnics. The projection may create a kind of hegemonic discourse among the rest of the religions. Hollywood filmmakers left no stone unturned to prove the Muslim category always behind the curtains but in the real sense, their presence must be at the front rather than the reverse scenes in the European cinema. This study presents a handful of witnesses that demonstrate the materialism within the boundaries of these biased movies which were given the highest status in the Hollywood. The image of Muslim minority goes from bad to worse and can put an enough strong inverse impact on the globe. As Shaheen has rightly put it in the words, ‘Worse’ isn’t a strong enough word- it’s dangerous”

The Hollywood film city seems to entertain the spectators but in the real sense the depiction is totally biased and unauthentic, it might develop a kind of unusual feelings among the spectators throughout the globe. "It is time to recognize that the true tutors of our children are not school teachers or university professors but filmmakers" (Barber 5). The deep analysis and extensive research Dr Jack Shaheen have analyzed almost near about 900 Hollywood movies that contain the Muslim Arab American Characters and only a few percent are presented in a straight forward portrayal of Arabs. While as the rest offered some measure in the balance within the movies. It seems that we often remember the scenes that we watch are consistently projecting the Muslim /Arab-Americans as barbaric, uncultured, evils, terrorists and also depicted in negative roles. This might lead to the belief about the Arabs as being the same, in the public. It is absolute that the Muslim\Arab-Americans to be depicted as something expectations other than what they belong to a radical fringe. In the foreword of the Shaheen's book, William Greider writes, "The malign images segregate some Americans from the whole experience of citizenship, impeding their capacity to speak and act for themselves in political life or intimidating any public leaders who dare to speak for them" (viii). The insane stereotypical notions consistently help the delicate manners in which a mass of public perceives a group of people to be the people who falsely decorated to suffer to make the false tales and epics regarding the Muslim/Arab-Americans. It is on the cards that today's Hollywood movies need ample money and the films require a lot of revenue and resources to produce such stereotypical exit movies which are readily in use in the top of the headlines. It is a hard nut to crack for the filmmakers to make such movies with a mini-budget to produce such biased movies.

Probably while focusing on the individual projects the filmmakers are totally to the view unwittingly endorse. But these stereotypes might be used for the sake of publicity, profitable, save time and revenue, to comprehend the Muslim/Arab-Americans. In order to get back the straightforward attention of the spectators to portrayals the balance within the film city, movie makers need to count to continuously negative placing of the portrayal of Muslim/Arab-Americans. Rather than the consistency seeing as terrorists in the Muslim Arab American Movies. It is a time to remove this blot of uncertainty and imbalance among the Muslim community to make it crystal clear. It is very unfortunate in Muslim-Arab movies Muslims are always given the roles of villain/antagonistic roles instead of heroes, which in turn defames the image of Muslim ethnic group without destroying the plot of the movie. In the movies, the Muslim are portrayal as 'other' and are debarred from such roles like as teachers, doctor, engineer and explorer to a few names. In this study, there are few films that categorize the false and fictitious presentation. But a group of the audience might have constructed such a vilified authenticity which have left these episodes and events capable of indeed occurring. The movie's makers may there films indicate such statements that the plot seems fictitious in order to present the main story line is for purpose of entertainment, probably above else all clearness and reachable purpose that may want to strive for the whole of this film study. In the context of these movies the real fairness and balance ought to be only limited to a particular religion or group but, in lieu of the opportunity and profitability should be assigned and are showed to others.

### III.CONCLUSION

Ethnic group- may be it any group- who is the prey of stereotype will lead to the ham in many ways. But this harm can be stopped through many ways and tools: knowledge, tolerance and other special tools. But ironically the supreme power of the movie board; censorship is not the answer. Speeches: bad or hate, can be turned into good ones. Something won't be able to go away by pretending that does not exist or by preventing that from doing so. Different opinions, facts and good portrayals can be used to broaden the public vision or can be used to do the same at the individual level rather than letting the public to believe what is consistently portrayed for them. For above discussion and opinions, Adlai has rightly said, "My definition of a free society is a society where it is safe to be unpopular." (200) It may be safe to say that people, although we are all different, are striving for the same regardless of belonging to any ethnic group. All the people in the world want to be happy, successful, a life of decency, fulfilling educational needs and other desires. Greider states in the foreword to Shaheen's book (2001) that, "The power to depict certain "others" as innately strange and dangerous—as foul creatures not like the rest of us—is surely as devastating as the physical force of weaponry." So, the next time you or anyone you know find yourselves watching images of Arabs and Arab-Americans being portrayed in movies, take the time to imagine how it feels, and then, imagine how it would feel if it were your ethnic group or culture instead.

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