Islam phobia as filmed in eastwood 'S "American Sniper": A post colonial quest

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Abstract

The attitudes have dominated Western mass media, ranging from Hollywood movies to even children's cartoons are reflecting stereotypes of the negative image of the Muslim world. They are inherited in the history of colonialism, postcoloialism, ad orientalism. Today, American mass media is adopting this inherited negative image of Islam and displaying it to the universe in the form of movies. Accordingly, this study aims at exploring the portrayal of Islam and Muslims in the lens of American popular culture through examining the post-colonial ideology of Self/Other and the negative images of Islam in Clint Eastwood's *American Sniper* (2014). American Sniper is a biographical war drama written by Jason Hall about sniper Chris Kyle's career. The film is based on American Shooter, the autobiography of the most deadly US sniper in military history, who participated in the Iraq War. Clint Eastwood directed the film in 2014.

Keywords: Post-colonialism; Negative images of Islam and Muslims; Self/Other; American popular culture; American Sniper

1. Introduction

The demise of the Soviet Union, the meaning of exceptionalism has become more important than ever in Western political discourse, particularly in the United States. Exceptionalism highlights the West's most evolved, institutional, instrumental, and so forth experience. Since the discovery of the American continent, the idea of America's uniqueness has stayed and seemed to be an important part of American political culture and the most common belief. Western discourse now sees the fall of the Soviet Union as proof of its claim to be unique. On the other hand, it now needs a new "Other" to back up its claims. It's because communism was the "Other," so in order to fill the void, Western policy has started to emphasize Islam as a new power.

A former NATO leader, stated, "We won the Cold War against communist Russia; now, after seventy years of damage, we can resume our true 140-year-old war against Islam." This meant that the US had to find a new foe because the communist threat was no longer adequate to justify the country's policy of internationalism. (Galvin, 1993).

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To accomplish this goal, 'Muslim terrorists' appeared to be an ideal candidate because they could provide a credible justification for imperial conquest of the Middle East and Central Asia, earning Islamism the name "the new Bolshevism." (Thatcher, 2002).

Some academics believed that Americans accorded Islam a position that communism and the Soviet Union formerly held. In Western political discourse, it emphasizes the institutionalized idea that Western experience is superior to other experiences. Some asserted that "the American media plays a significant role in this distortion, as their coverage of Islam frequently fosters preconceptions, excessive fear, and violence, and is dominated by crisis reporting" (Ibrahim, 2010).

There was a comeback of a more robust wave in politics and the media after September 11, 2001, when president of USA stated that "the Crusades" had begun again. Furthermore, in his essay 'Islam and the end of history', highlighted that Islam is only traditional system that poses a serious challenge to Western modernity. (Francis Fukuyama, 2001)

Because of the catastrophic Islamic anti-American attacks on September 11, many in the United States believe that Muslims have occupied a position formerly held by Communists. Muslims are commonly perceived as "Other" who should be prepared to combat the collective "Self (Poole and Richardson, 2010).

Islamophobia was first used as a promotion alongside violence and murder terror, but radical activists in the West were unable, until 11 September, to justify in their public minds their matching acts as acceptable, obligatory and legal. Thus, the 11 September can be seen as a turning point in affecting fundamentally western media's worldwide system and political vocabulary. In the course of constructing a new language, a new sign, and finally forming a fearful speech on political Islam and spreading the speech of exceptionalism, the episode was especially effective. The most important thing was that the words "exceptionalism" were not just used by Western governments. They were used in the media, as well as in all of the spiritual and social realms. The American media and film had a crucial role in this regard, being an integral element of popular culture. The film industry in Hollywood, for example, is one of the American media systems, and its products are linked to the political world that usually talks about exceptions. This seems to be a good match. American Sniper is one of the good movies or TV shows in this area.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a semantic system method in the theoretical context. The system was defined by Walter Benjamin as "a grouping of theoretical and conceptual elements that are combined but not connected" (Jay, 1984).

As a result, we applied the semantic frameworks of exceptionalism, clash of civilizations, and orientalism. The semantic appeal of these theories stems from their focus on culture and their relationship to the logic of 'self/other' and the function of popular culture's language in the replication and dissemination of binary opposition culture through exceptionalism. The first one to call America 'special' was credited that Americans have a completely special position because no democratic nation can reach this status (Tocqueville, 2003).

In the "Manifest Destiny," which is indeed a theoretical basis for American domination, the idea of exceptionality has also been conveyed. Sullivan has constructed a special kind of Christian nationalism, known as the "Manifest Destiny,". It is believed that American culture is the savior in "Manifest Destiny" of equality, human rights and a summation of human beliefs and goals in the world. Melville (Garaudy, 2004).

Similarly echoes the stance which states that "Americans are a special, superior nation and the Israelis of this era who steer the ship of freedom." lamented this address, pointing out that the Americans have always been confused by this particular form of nationalism, making them think that they truly are attempting to empower others in their warfare outside the US to improve their circumstances (Zakaria, 2008).

A discourse such as Europe center as an endeavor to bring the West to bear as a worldwide example, a project for revival of the central position of the Western world. The West and centrality are regarded as identical with this concept. Indeed, the result of this cultural perspective is missionaries in the sense that the United States views its own experience as exceptional, and hence embarks on a massive mission to heal other cultures, particularly those that operate in the background. (Callahan, 2004).

Within this rationale, the US believes that its God-given responsibility to itself is sufficient for the rest of the world if anything is good for America is also viewed as a city on a hill with a lamp that guides people worldwide who value liberty (Cox, 2003).

It seems like people all throughout the world love freedom. It seems to be an evolved civilization that has ideals, ideology and investment centered on liberty and a pioneering scientific stance.

The orientalism of Said (1979) shows this dichotomous reason why the West is seen as an example. He thinks that some of the works of the Orientalists have not been separate from each other. They were also drawn to western rule because of their one-sided interpretations, and orientalism was used to colonize places in the world (Kilani, 2008).

Said showed that the Western view of the East as inferior, retrograde, and stupid is based on a long history of colonial civilization. Since then, Islam has been seen as a big threat to Western civilization, and people have always thought it was bad. In fact, the cultural attitude towards the West in relation to the Arabs is considered to be an obnoxious attitude, which reminiscences the 'Same and Other' doctrine. What makes Said's point of view towards orientalism important is that of his emphasis on popular culture's role in promoting the cultural system of exceptionalism and Islamophobia, such as novels, travel journals, newspapers and magazines.

Said thinks that popular culture plays a significant role in the new world and emphasizes that the West has always attempted to strengthen its positive self-image through the media in opposition to the negative self-image of "other," the Eastern negative. Therefore, "Islam was nothing but trouble," for the most Americans (Said, 2008: 11).

Interestingly enough, Islam's and Arabs' media portrayal only reinforce the orientalist discourse historically introduced as "uncivilized, primitive, and below western theory" "the Orient". This connection between entertainment media and the Islamic East in Hollywood movies isn't just for fun. It can lead to "unconsciously unsatisfactory pictures of the East and depict it as a monolith of lower rank for the west," says the author.

In a brief, orientalism is an important part of understanding both common and political representations and it explains why they do what they do. Social actors can use a language full of ideological ideas, values, and patterns to get their point across. These three theories are interested in how they pay attention to culture and how they help spread the semantic discourse system. It's also true that popular cultural expressions such as novels, TV shows, movies, and so on are a part of the social structures and rhetorical scheme of exceptionalism and Islamophobia. The media play a big part in popular culture by making different kinds of products into symbols (like words or pictures) and giving speeches to people in very organized ways that make them feel good and make them want to listen (Williams, 2000).

The language as a major factor in culture and policy since language is an integral part of cultural reproductive processes which play a very significant part directly and indirectly in the reproduction of the existing social order. The contends that language classification is the basis of any national output. These categorizations are certainly not politically and informally neutral, but are entangled in the many fields of culture, the media and the like with the power and language and serve as an instrument for the continuance of social and political power. In terms of mass media, movies and cinema are the most essential aspect of contemporary society's popular culture in terms of visual imagery. Other forms of art, as a whole, aren't up to the task of mirroring the current state of the world quite as much as cinema is (Danesi, 2012).

Hollywood movies have the same view. Hollywood films are not just the U.S. industry and its popular culture, they play a very significant part in developing the US and popular culture worldwide. "US films are shown in more than 150 countries around the world, and US TV shows are shown in more than 125 countries around the world." This is because many people think that Hollywood movies are a big part of American popular culture, and their production language is full of symbols from American culture. American popular culture has a lot of rich imagery thanks to Hollywood movies, advertising pictures and packaging. "These are the main features of US popular culture," says the teacher. Hollywood, on the other hand, has a lot of symbols (words and images) in its texts, which influence and build on American culture, on the one hand. On the other hand, Hollywood is one of the most important parts of American popular culture, and it tries to make its products more popular around the world and show them in a way that fits with the American way of life. (Wasko, 2003)

The negative image of islam in eastwood "american sniper"

Islam and Muslims have been depicted negatively in American movies and *American Sniper* is an example. This negative image in the film has created a huge amount of feedback from the Muslim community, including some of the criticism from the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Khamenei, 2015).

Amr Salama and Hany Abu-Assad, two Egyptian directors, were both inspired to make the film Iraqi sniper as a response to the American Sniper, which they both did. A group that fights discrimination says that threats to Muslims and Arabs have gotten worse since the popular but controversial movie American Snippet came out. (Karizat, 2017). The movie was also called a fun movie about a gold-plated killing machine that starts to feel bad after killing many innocent women and children. (Taibbi, 2015). In addition, this film has been chosen as the sample simply because it suits the analysis in the context of critical analysis and can be a suitable case for disclosing the foundations for this approach.

In *American Sniper*, Chris Kyle's position in the military in the US is justified first by terrorist groups attacking U.S. bases, and then after 9 September, on TV, the shipment of Kyle and the U.S. troops to the Middle East. The incident shows that Muslim groups began a war and caused the U.S. to send troops to build peace. Thus, Hollywood films appear to have the warmth of Muslim groups and the peace-loving Americans.

While *American Sniper* is seen as an action movie, that Hollywood has long "promoted militarism," and *American Sniper* serves as an excellent example of that. Moreover, in conjunction with the action-adventure movie that builds up the film's narrative flow, it further legitimizes the aforementioned continuous use of military brutality, making it seem acceptable (Soltysik Monnet, 2018).

Modern post-colonialism: American 'self' vs. Muslim 'other' in American sniper

American Sniper is a Great War film globally due to the fact that it is based on real events during the Iraq war. In this movie, the Azaan (call to prayer) is first heard and then the American flag is displayed, signifying that the start of the war is from within Islam and Muslims while the United States then comes to the forefront and ends the battle. For American Sniper, a film in which Muslims are portrayed as terrorists, bombers, and sex terrorists, it is also realistic to suggest that people keep weapons beneath their beds, their children fight against American forces, and female terrorists conceal weapons beneath their attire. It, however, shows US soldiers refusing to shoot even the dog that has prevented them from carrying out their task. Every one of the American soldiers in the documentary appears to be a human person with all his or her concerns focused on making the world a safer and more peaceful place. In Nairobi, Chris Kyle, the protagonist of the film, witnesses an attack on the U.S. embassy in peril, prompting him to become a cowboy for the security of his country. To ensure the protection of the Americans, he serves in the military. It takes him away from his family for months and years at a time, in order to serve in the military. Retired U.S. Navy SEAL and former Navy SEAL sniper, Chris Kyle was assassinated in a shooting practice for veterans by a combat veteran who was both physically and mentally damaged in the war.

The action of cinematic dialogs in a syntagmatic way creates a negative meaning in describing Muslims: "Wolf," "savage," "evil," "fucker" and "bad man." The co-occurrence of phrases like "devoir," "sheepdog," "patriot," "legend" and "sacrifice" instead implies that American soldiers have a positive sense to depict. Linguistic symptoms are positively influenced by the texts and they represent the United States in 'Self-Discourse.' It represents and rejects Islam and it seeks to show a causal relationship between Islam and 'negative affairs.' As a result, the American as 'Self' and the Muslims as 'Other' are evident. Furthermore, it is evident that the discourse follows a special aim in the syntagmatic axis of the movie by neglecting the good words and sentences that the text does not contain to Muslims.

In the opening sequence, Chris Kyle kills a child and his mother to death because they are attempting to harm American forces with grenades. In another scene, a child draws a weapon and shoots at the American forces, but the American soldier is secure and comfortable. Another sequence of American troops postponed their operations purely for the sake of a dog. The co-occurrence of these visual indicators indicates that Americans uphold a high and just standard and are even concerned about animal welfare. However, they only kill the civilians and children if an American's life is at risk, and are thus forced to act. By contrast, the study of different sequences shows that Muslims have no pity even on their peers. The militants torture and kill Iraqi families in another sequence to collaborate with Americans and exploit their wives and children in terrorist operations. In yet another episode they are observed to solely sell for money to their fellow people. The co-occurrence of these episodes has a detrimental impact on Muslims and, for security reasons, legitimizes the US military. In the text, two groups of Western and Muslim social forces are shown as the "self" and the "other." The "self" group is shown as familiar, national and international, peaceful, security guards, and the "other" group is shown as violent, militant, and anti-security. An image sign also tells us about the semantic value (legitimate or not) of a bilateral opposition approach. On this plan, some Islamists control another group of people, while the second group doesn't have the means to fight back or political power, which makes it seem like the West and the United States should do something to free them. At the same time, people use language and images to show to people that the first group's authority is legitimate. They also try to show that the West's power in an occupied country is legitimate and that the public likes it. The way the film was made is shown in all of these descriptions.

Discussion Section

Now that we know the film's discourse practice, we need to figure out where this practice takes place in a bigger picture. People in the United States have a lot of different theories and ideas that can help them understand this bigger picture. Theories like the Clash of Civilizations and the idea that people are unique help us do this. It shows right away how important the United States and its military forces are to the world. In this scene, Kyle's father talks about his son's best childhood memories over a video of them. He sees the world through Kyle's dad's eyes (Everett, 2017).

Wayne: In this world, there are three categories of people. A herd of sheep, wolves, and sheepdogs. Some individuals prefer to believe that evil does not exist in the world, and if it ever came to their doorstep, they would have no idea how to defend themselves... those are the sheep. Then you have predators who prey on the vulnerable by using violence. Those wolves are out there. Aggression and an overwhelming need to protect one's flock are gifts bestowed upon people who are born with these traits. They are the sheepdogs, the uncommon breed of men who are prepared to face the wolf.

American Sniper has become a huge hit because it combines the ideals of American exceptionalism that have always worked well with the public. America's idea that it's a special country with a lot of power, courage, and a desire to help "sheep" fits right in with the "exceptionalism" idea of the Second World War. This very basic idea stays the same, no matter how the situation changes.

Another scene, Chris and Taya's conversation makes them the subject of the West's talk about being different.

"Chris: I'd lay down my life for my country".

"Taya: Why"?

"Chris: It's the greatest country on Earth. I'd do everything I can to protect it".

Chris says that he thinks that America is the best country in the world, and that he's willing to die for it, which is based on the American idea that we're different. There are a lot of reasons why the United States' policies make sense. It has a spiritual superiority that makes it better than other countries. It has specific democratic and revolutionary roots, as well as a political system, a society, and cultural and religious traditions. This is because the United States is unique. A family that is not involved in violence is the only one in the movie that is completely helpless. It has no way to defend itself or get out of trouble. In this picture, the family is a picture of Arabs and Muslims who need help from the West.

3. Conclusion

Critical discourse analysis regards language as a sort of window that, instead of displaying everything as is, conceals things that must be discovered on the other side. It is actually a distorted representation of the truth, heavily influenced by various outside and inside forces, which presents the complex power structures operating behind the scenes and those that are visible. This statement, in other words, indicates that the terminology used in the film is non-neutral and even partial. The concealed form of language has a larger discourse capacity than itself. The gap between the language of movies and reality serves to fuel dialogue and curiosity. The key objective of critical discourse analysis is to find the aforementioned instruments and methods that create dominance and inequality in society. This study explores the theoretical frameworks on which *American Sniper* is based and applies those frameworks to the text of the film. The film industry has been America's leading participant in the media industry since the beginning of the 20th century, helping to perpetuate American exceptionalism in politics and producing a new hegemonic power for the nation. Communism provided the crucial conceptual tools for the West's media during the Cold War. As the

USSR collapsed in 1989, unipolarity (one superpower) and the end of the Cold War took place, which allowed the Western media, especially Hollywood, to replace communism as a perceived threat with the emergence of Islamic extremism as a new power to fill the vacuum. September 11 was a turning point for how Islamophobia has evolved throughout time. Before, it was just a little-known movement in Western countries; but, in the future, it will be part of an inclusive movement on all levels, not just in Hollywood.

An in-depth critical analysis of the discourse of *American Sniper* found that it upheld a strongly embedded cultural and political exceptionalism in the United States. Said (1979) also notes that this discussion entails a striking contrast between the West, which is referred to as "Self," and Islam, which is referred to as "Other." This "Self" appears in *American Sniper* and shows up in these phrases like "duty", "sheepdog", "patriotic", "myth", and "sacrifice" that all present the Self in a positive light. Muslim is portrayed as a "Other" as having things like "wolves", "new savages", "the wild", "evil people", "rubbish", and "bad guys" used to describe them. A more precise analysis of the film's intertextual aspects and how it is interpreted at the second level has proven that it falls into the general mood of Hollywood, which is marked by 'Islamophobia' and involves many of the same concepts and symbols that exist in other Hollywood films of the same bent. As a result, there will be similar notions and symbols, such as the ones in other films in the same category. The details of this dialogue can therefore be expected to arise in *American Sniper*. It also shows that the ideas of American exceptionalism, Orientalism, and the conflict between Western and Islamic civilizations are deeply ingrained in the minds of many people. If you look at the cultural and political worlds in the United States of America, you'll see a lot of talk about "Self/Other exceptionalism." American Sniper wants to move beyond that.

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