

From Islamophobia to Neo-Islamophobia: An Analytical Review of Muslim Representations in Cinema Following 9/11

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the shift from Islamophobia to neo-Islamophobia in the portrayal of Muslims in post-9/11 cinema. The research explores the evolution of themes such as fear, antagonism, and prejudice via analysing diverse cinematic representations, especially those related to emerging discourses on feminism, LGBTQ rights, and Western cultural standards. The study emphasizes the internalization and externalization of Islamophobia in Western and Arab cultures, highlighting its significant effects on identity, self-esteem, and international relations. This study is a deep dive into the transition in the depiction of Muslims in post-9/11 films from Islamophobia to neo-Islamophobia, offering a comprehensive understanding of the societal implications of this shift.

1. Introduction

For decades, Western society has been dominated by Islamophobia, defined by fear, animosity, and prejudice toward Islam and its adherents (Ali, 2016). However, more recently, a more subtle and sophisticated kind of prejudice, neo-Islamophobia, has surfaced. This phenomenon represents a progression including modern socio-political processes, especially involving Western values and standards, not just a continuation of earlier forms of Islamophobia (Tariq & Iqbal, 2023). This research aims to investigate the shift from conventional Islamophobia to neo-Islamophobia as it shows in movies released around 9/11 and its broader, urgent consequences for societal perceptions and international relations.

2. Methodology

The following research has been prospected with the follow-up of qualitative research design in which the main motivation is related to the ideation about how Muslims have been represented in Films after the incident of 9/11. In prospect to achieve this objective a detailed analysis of currently available theory and literature has been carried out. Based on the consideration of content analysis technique for identifying themes and patterns from the content (Lindgren et al., 2020). The researcher gained the opportunity to critically analyse and present the evaluations on the relative demonstration of Muslims in Films after 9/11.

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3. Literature Review

3.1. Neo-Islamophobia in Movies After 9/11

The way that movies depict Muslims after the September 11 attacks clearly shows neo-Islamophobia. Arafa (2016) points out a change in conventional Islamophobia to neo-Islamophobia, in which the conflicts between Western ideals and Islamic standards have grown. Film stories that emphasize feminism, LGBTQ rights, and Western cultural values more and more mirror this shift (Briskman, 2015).

Neo-Islamophobia tackles how these conflicts have grown, even while keeping the primary themes of fear and antagonism against Islam. Amer & Bagasra (2014) note that while historical tensions are built upon in neo-Islamophobic rhetoric, they also contain new concerns, especially in reaction to current debates on social and cultural disparities.

Through his interaction with modern Western discourses, Bajuwaiber (2023) shows how neo-Islamophobia adds layers of complexity while nonetheless preserving the animosity, fear, and hate connected with Islamophobia. Similarly stressing the ongoing influence of 9/11 in forming both Islamic and neo-Islamophobic sentiments in Western media, Aswan (2016).

3.2. Muslims' Representation in Pre-and Post-9/11 Movies

This research demonstrates the representations of Arabs and Muslims as terrorists in the pre-and-post-9/11 period, which is significant because, in some of the films, an element of Islamophobia based on the events of 9/11 is evident, with Muslim characters still often being portrayed as terrorists and antagonists. Researchers have attributed this to Hollywood filmmakers' business instincts, whose audiences are inclined towards the single perception that Muslims are terrorists and relate this to the 9/11 attacks (Allen, 2010). Hollywood filmmakers have produced films such as 9/11 (2017), 12 Strong (2018), and The Report (2019), in which U.S. Navy SEALs are sent to Afghanistan to hunt down terrorists living in the region and use the Islamic religion to portray terrorism (Holiday 2020; Rich, 2020; Riegler, 2011). However, it contributes to the understanding that there is no doubt the events of 9/11 have affected both the Islamophobic and the neo-Islamophobic eras.

In films such as The Siege and True Lies, the filmmakers negatively depicted Muslims as conspiring against Americans. The analysis of the film found that the events of 9/11 had a lasting impact on Muslims in the West, and the implications are still there, from the era of Islamophobia to the era of neo-Islamophobia. However, with increased awareness regarding racism and discrimination based on Islam, Muslims living in Europe and America have started to challenge Islamophobia by increasingly condemning acts of racism (Hussain & Bagguley 2012).

A study by Al-Rawi (2014) argues that the Hollywood film industry has contributed significantly to strengthening the perception of Islamophobia in Americans and the idea that Muslims conspire against America. This article found that Hollywood representations attacked the Arab world in many ways by developing negative images of their social orders and physical appearances. The bulk of American cinema based on 9/11, as well as plays and television series, is due to Americans' interest in reframing real-life events in which the antagonist is punished in the end (Powell 2018).

3.3. Externalisation and Internalisation of Islamophobia

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann found in their research on the cognitive theory that the emotional relationship between the individual and the group is formed through processes of externalization and internalization (Berger & Luckmann 1967 cited in Riis & Woodhead 2010), in the way human beings imprint their ideas and projects on the outside world. This thesis found that the Internalisation of Islamophobia in films is the process of incorporating negative social perspectives into one self-conception and identity, or when minority members become aware of unfavourable portrayals of their group, they may begin to believe that these portrayals are accurate. In contrast, others will judge them based on these judgments, lowering their self-esteem about the portrayals of Arabs and Muslims in films. Minority members' self-esteem might be reduced by threats to their social identity (Schmader, Block, & Lickel 2015).

It is a mechanism for projecting internal characteristics onto the external environment. However, in association with this, the thesis findings suggest that the concept of Islamophobia is projected over the broader environment across the world externally and internally. As Rees (2016) highlights, the phenomenon of Islamophobia is regulated to represent the identity of the majority over minorities. The externalisation effect of the concept of Islamophobia may be seen in the way Muslim portrayals are covered by historical content in terms of extremists, terrorists, and activists that their majority has conveyed in this way (Lajevardi et al., 2024). Yet, minority believers, on the other hand, have no responsibility for their involvement with the criminal or the victims.

This study found that the externalization of the concept of Islamophobia exacerbates the perception that the Muslim majority is an oppressive and aggressive ethnic group in this regard. Experiences of discrimination contribute to a hostile schema of the external environment, which can lead to increased vigilance and the internalization of stigma towards one's in-group (Al-Ghamdi & Safrah 2020).

The findings of this article also suggest that due to the rise of Islamophobia, Islam has been characterised as illogical, incompatible with modern civilisation, and innately violent. However, it might be indicated that one of the most understudied and underappreciated repercussions of Islamophobia is the ingestion of negative conceptions about Islam by Muslims themselves, particularly those of the younger generation who are subjected to regular attacks on their faith. Internalised racism refers to unintentionally accepting the stereotypes of one's ethnic group held by the dominant society because their cognitive limitations prevent them from reflecting on these negative messages. Young children are frequently the most sensitive group to these unconscious signals (Al-Ghamdi & Safrah, 2020). They may be pushed through other structures without asserting their beliefs and identities (Suleiman 2017). As a result, acculturation is more difficult for those who must contend with the stigma of being different due to skin color, language, ethnicity, and other factors (Padilla & Perez 2003).

3.4. Islamophobia's Impact on Muslim Communities

For Muslim communities, especially among the younger age, the internalising of Islamophobia has significant consequences. Al-Ghamdi & Safrah (2020) point out that as they are often exposed to Islamophobic messaging, young Muslims are particularly prone to absorbing unfavourable preconceptions about their religion. This internalisation may cause a loss of self-esteem and a diminished sense of identity, complicating acculturation (Padilla & Perez, 2003). Furthermore, fuelling discriminatory policies and laws aimed at Muslim populations is the externalising of Islamophobia. Islamophobia has been accepted in important nations, according to Nusrat, Kashif, & Aemen (2020), which has resulted in institutionalised prejudice and souring of world relations. Furthermore, the article found that the concept of Islamophobia has

gained traction and acceptance in critical countries, leading to discriminatory practices and legislation directed at the Muslim and Arab communities.

Thus, the idea has also affected international relations between Muslim countries and the world (Nusrat et al., 2020). This study's findings suggest Islamophobia as a concept; Muslims are partly blamed for the international world's destructive reaction towards discrimination, racism, and religion due to their proximity to their faith, culture, and values. Moreover, the source of violence remains to be thought of as some or other understanding of Islam rather than contextualising the development of extremism on socio-political changes that the nations went over and the global political situation, which has donated to a great degree.

3.5. Islamophobia's Epitome in Arab and Muslim Films

Although Western media is usually blamed for Islamophobia, this research revealed that comparable ideas abound in Arab films. For instance, Egyptian movies mirror worries about Islamophobia and how it shapes Arab and Muslim identities. This shows that the problem has worldwide consequences rather than just Western ones. The study here found that the concern with American Islamophobia is not restricted to the Western world and the U.S. alongside Hollywood productions but is also apparent in 'Muslim and Arab' states and films, as found in the analysis of Egyptian cinema.

4. Conclusion

Particularly concerning modern social and cultural concerns, the shift from Islamophobia to neo-Islamophobia demonstrates a growing of contradictions between Western and Islamic norms. Employing post-9/11 film analysis, this paper has shown how cinematic depictions of Muslims still support negative preconceptions, therefore fostering both internalisation and externalisation of Islamophobia. For Muslim populations, these representations have significant consequences for their self-esteem, identity, and foreign policy. Neo-Islamophobia is changing. Hence, it is essential to investigate closely how media and cultural narratives impact opinions of Islam and its adherents.

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