

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Islamophobia in Selected 21st Century
Hollywood Movies



تحليل نقدي لخطاب الإسلاموفوبيا في أفلام هوليوود المختارة في القرن الحادي والعشرين

أ. م. د. رشوان رمضان صالح
جامعة صلاح الدين-أربيل، كلية
اللغات، قسم اللغة الإنجليزية
rashwan.salih@su.edu.krd

بيمان إدريس فاتح
جامعة صلاح الدين-أربيل، كلية
اللغات، قسم اللغة الإنجليزية
paymanidrees22@gmail.com

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإسلاموفوبيا، هوليوود، تحليل الخطاب النقدي، الاستشراق.

كيفية اقتباس البحث

فاتح ، بيمان إدريس، رشوان رمضان صالح ، تحليل نقدي لخطاب الإسلاموفوبيا في أفلام هوليوود المختارة في القرن الحادي والعشرين، مجلة مركز بابل للدراسات الانسانية، شباط 2026، المجلد: 16، العدد: 2.

هذا البحث من نوع الوصول المفتوح مرخص بموجب رخصة المشاع الإبداعي لحقوق التأليف والنشر (Creative Commons Attribution) تتيح فقط للآخرين تحميل البحث ومشاركته مع الآخرين بشرط نسب العمل الأصلي للمؤلف، ودون القيام بأي تعديل أو استخدامه لأغراض تجارية.

Registered في
ROAD

Indexed في
IASJ





A Critical Discourse Analysis of Islamophobia in Selected 21st Century Hollywood Movies

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Islamophobia in Selected 21st Century Hollywood Movies

Payman Idrees Fatih
Salahaddin University-Erbil,
College of Languages,
English Department

Asst. Prof. Dr Rashwan Ramadan Salih
Salahaddin University-Erbil,
College of Languages, English
Department

Keywords : Islamophobia, Hollywood, Critical Discourse Analysis, Orientalism.

How To Cite This Article

Fatih, Payman Idrees, Rashwan Ramadan Salih, A Critical Discourse Analysis of Islamophobia in Selected 21st Century Hollywood Movies , , Journal Of Babylon Center For Humanities Studies, February 2026, Volume:16, Issue 2.

This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>)

[This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.](#)

المخلص:

يدرس هذا البحث تمثيل المسلمين والإسلام في أفلام هوليوود في القرن الحادي والعشرين من خلال عدسة تحليل الخطاب النقدي (CDA) مع التركيز على نهج فيركلو في تحليل الخطاب النقدي إلى جانب الاستشراق لدى إدوارد سعيد. من خلال تحليل أفلام مثل سبتمبر شيراز (2015) و قندهار (2023) والملائكة القذرة (2024)، تستكشف الدراسة كيف تساهم السرديات السينمائية في إدامة الإسلاموفوبيا. تتضمن بيانات هذه الدراسة مقتطفات من المحادثات في الأفلام المختارة كعينات للتحليل. يحدد البحث الخطب والصور المتكررة التي تفسر ارتباط الإسلام بالتطرف والهمجية والإرهاب، وتصوير المسلمين على أنهم عنيفون بطبيعتهم، وتأطير الغرب كقوة حضارية ضد الهمجية. تشير النتائج إلى أن هذه الأفلام تعزز الصور النمطية المعادية للإسلام، وتشكل التصور العام بطرق تبرر السياسات والمواقف التمييزية تجاه المجتمعات المسلمة. تتضمن الموضوعات الرئيسية التي تم تحديدها في الأفلام



المختارة شيطنة الرجال المسلمين باعتبارهم براهرة عنيفين وغير عقلانيين، وتصوير النساء
المسلّمات كضحايا مضطهدات بحاجة إلى الخلاص الغربي، وتصوير المسلمين كأفراد ماديّين.

Abstract

This paper examines the representation of Muslims and Islam in 21st century Hollywood films through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) focusing on Fairclough's approach to CDA, Thematic Analysis along with Edward Said's orientalism. By analyzing movies such as *Septembers of Shiraz* (2015), *Kandahar* (2023), and *Dirty Angels* (2024), the study explores how cinematic narratives contribute to the perpetuation of Islamophobia. The paper aims at examining the discourse of the selected movies through the lenses of Fairclough's three-stage analysis of CDA to unveil the inserted portrayals of fear and hatred of Muslims. The data for this study comprises excerpts from the conversation in the selected movies as samples for analysis. The research questions explore the linguistic samples functioning as the codes to identify the recurring themes within the speeches that construe the association of Islam with extremism, barbarism and terrorism, the portrayal of Muslims as inherently violent, and the framing of the West as a civilizing force against barbarism. Besides, they bring to light the prior events leading to the creation of Islamophobic discourse. The findings suggest that these films reinforce Islamophobic stereotypes, shaping public perception in ways that justify discriminatory policies and attitudes toward Muslim communities. The main themes found in the selected films include demonizing Muslim men as violent and irrational barbarians, exoticizing Muslim women as oppressed victims needing Western salvation, and portraying Muslims as materialistic individuals.

1. Introduction

The portrayal of Muslims in Hollywood has historically been fraught with stereotypes and misrepresentations, particularly in the post-9/11 era. Films often depict Muslims as terrorists, oppressors, or backward extremists, reinforcing a binary opposition between the "civilized" West and the "barbaric" Muslim world (Said, 1978). Popular culture in general and media in particular have had perceived impact on spreading various ideologies, within those spreading fear and hatred of Muslims globally. One way of conducting is the production of Hollywood movies being influenced by prior events related to Muslims.

This paper employs critical discourse analysis (CDA) to dissect how selected 21st century Hollywood films (*Septembers of Shiraz* (2015), *Kandahar* (2023), and *Dirty Angels* (2024)) construct and



perpetuate Islamophobic narratives. This paper adopts the CDA theories developed by Fairclough (1995) to examine how language and narrative structures in cinema serve ideological functions. It focuses on the three stages of analysis developed by Fairclough i.e. description, interpretation and explanation. By applying this framework along with Said's orientalism, this study discloses how Hollywood's cinematic discourse contributes to the marginalization and defamation of Muslims, reinforcing real-world discrimination and justifying militaristic foreign policies.

CDA is a method used to examine how language and narrative structures maintain, perpetuate and reproduce power dynamics, prejudice and stereotypes within society. In particular, it adopts Fairclough (1995) CDA theories to investigate the way ideological motives are implanted within movie discourse, it goes beyond language study and aims at uncovering the socio-cultural motives behind producing movie discourse. While previous academics have examined the representation of Muslims in Hollywood, the three selected movies of this paper have not been investigated previously.

To fill this gap, this study delves into analyzing *Septembers of Shiraz* (2015), *Kandahar* (2023), and *Dirty Angels* (2024) in order to discover the constructed and perpetuated Islamophobic discourse. This paper demonstrates how the CDA framework exposes the continuous Hollywood movie industry practice of Muslim discrimination, which results in discrimination in the real world. The researchers present how popular culture, particularly Hollywood movies, function as a crucial factor in establishing orientalist beliefs as acceptable social norms in contemporary society.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Background

Since the beginning of Islam's appearance to the very recent day, Muslims have faced discrimination and challenged life to survive. Moreover, in the United States, the Islamophobic attitude toward them began with the early waves of immigration. Unlike post-9/11 Muslim's experience, those of pre-9/11 were not documented until very recently. One of the early scholars to do so was the Arab American scholar Edward Said (Elver, 2012).

Alsultany (2012) in his book *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation after 9/11* states that during twentieth century, Arabs and more specifically Arab-Muslims have been depicted as "rich oil sheiks, sultry belly dancers, harem girls, veiled oppressed women, and, most

notably, terrorists” (p.7). In the media, during the production of silent movies, Middle East was presented as a faraway land of magic, exotic, and genies, flying carpets, belly dancers and super wealthy men living in palaces as in films like *Fatima* (1897), *The Sheik* (1921), and *The Thief of Baghdad* (1924). This fashion kept being produced with movies with color and sounds such as in *Arabian Nights* (1942), *Road to Morocco* (1942), and *Harum Scarum* (1965). *Shohat and Stam* (2014) further support that by declaring that the reflection of these movies came from European colonizer’s fantasies and legitimization of rationally, who were invading certain parts of Middle East at that time. Muslim’s portrayals in the above movies include good and bad Arabs, and the good Arabs being saved from the bad ones by the colonizers.

Moreover, Shaheen (2012) believes that emergence of Muslim’s portrayal as terrorists was with the establishment of Israel in 1948, followed by Arab-Israel war, Israel’s conquest of Palestine’s territory and the foundation of Palestine’s resilience movement. Later than date, a new era of Muslim’s depiction appeared. Their representation changed from being lazy sheikhs climbing thrones to wealthy oil sheikhs who were threatening U.S. economy. In fact, these stereotypes and ideologies were not only present in movies but in new media as well. Shaheen further states that the news media significantly contributed to America’s view of Middle East, more specifically Islam as the source of terrorism. This ideology shows that while the terrorist attacks of September is a historical period, the media and Hollywood, specifically, have historically associated Arabs and Muslims with dissoluteness, patriarchy, and misogyny, eventually leading to terrorism (Eissa et al., 2022)

In other words, Islamophobia did not come to existence after the events of 9/11. The resurgence of Islam can be attributed to the significant influx of Muslims in the West in the late 20th century, the Iranian revolution, hijackings, hostage-taking, and acts of terrorism in the 1980s and 1990s, the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon on 9/11, and subsequent terror attacks in Europe (Esposito and Kalin, 2011). Similarly, Abbas (2005) points out that the discrimination level against Muslims was high even before the attacks.

More than two decades later, the events of 9/11 continue to have a lasting impact on Muslim American communities. The aftermath of 9/11 has resulted in widespread discrimination, harassment, dehumanization, and disempowerment against Muslims in America, which has been normalized by the media and government policy. Though this phenomenon has been established in United States for centuries, Islamophobic attitudes have become more prominent in American society



after the terrorist attacks by Al-Qaeda (Senanayake, 2021). Abbas (2021 p.402) points out that “for the foreseeable future the Muslim world and the world of Muslims would remain of keen interest to western foreign policymakers, with potentially severe implications for the numerous Muslim minorities across the global north and Muslim majorities in the global south”. Hence, ever since, Muslims have encountered ‘securitisation’ via the normalization process of Islamophobia. For instance, legislation that restricts Muslim women’s faith and cultural expression, cartoons being produced to mock Muslim religious symbols, widespread digital surveillance, and minarets ban in Europe.

According to Itaoui and Elsheikh (2017) the attacks of 9/11 not only had geopolitical impact; but also brought about a major shift on Muslim portrayals in cinema. Additionally, they argue that the assaults reinforced the preconceived notions related to Islamophobia. The events paved the way for the negative stereotypes of Muslims associated with terrorism and assassinations. Qamar et al. (2024) reinforces the already mentioned statement in which the attacks and the era afterwards established the Islamophobia phenomenon that exists nowadays. Moreover, “The aftermath of the 9/11 attacks serve as reminders of how geopolitical events can catalyze biases and stereotypes that cast an unfair shadow over an entire faith community” says Helen (2023.p:306). According to Noureen and Paracha (2019), contrary to the previous perception during pre-9/11, stereotypical portrayals of Muslims in Hollywood following the terrorist attacks are potentially harmful to Arab ethnics and Islamic faith.

2.2 Islamophobia

Islamophobia is a long-historical social phenomenon that despite its widespread usage, the term is not understood well (Kaya, 2011). Bleich (2011) considers islamophobia as a theory and states that political activists, international organizations and non-governmental organizations developed it at the beginning of 21st century. According to Edvardsson (2009) islamophobia is the refusal of Muslims and Islam relying on the stereotypes. The stereotypical definition of Islamophobia can vary from emotional and cognitive elements to violence, prejudice and discrimination.

Allen (2010) adds to the formation of the term stating that it is ideologically linked to racism. This is because for Allen Islamophobia is all about how Muslims are negatively spoken, written, thought about and referred to. Further, Islamophobic events occur in various areas of life, for instance in health care and education sectors, workplace and job vacancies, and exclusion from government. Not only that, physical and

verbal violence, and prejudice and misrepresentation of Muslims in the media and daily life are also inclusions (Trust, 1997).

Regardless of their definition of Islamophobia, other researchers provide a similar idea. For example, Muschert and Budd (2020) define Islamophobia as a type of racism: the hatred, hostility, and fear of Muslims resulting in religious intolerance. Sayyid (2014), on the other hand, defines islamophobia as a concept emerged to fill the gaps that were abandoned by racism and prejudice. The Merriam-Webster dictionary (n.d.) defines Islamophobia as an “irrational fear, or aversion to, or discrimination against Islam or people who practice Islam.” Depending on the definitions mentioned, it can be stated that Islamophobia is determined by fear, hatred, prejudice and discrimination towards both the religious faith itself and its followers.

2.3 Islamophobia in Hollywood

Hollywood is considered a worldwide industry that is geographically dedicated to its organization located in Southern California (Véron, 1999). Ibbi states that Hollywood is the oldest and largest film industry in the world, and it has “come to dominate the way of thinking of filmmakers and the audience” (2013: 94). One of the most important tools in shaping, reshaping, structuring, restructuring, constructing and reconstructing ideology is cinema. A movie is not produced for no reason; it requires ideas and lots of work. Media’s role is to show that the contents of media production leave impact on people by presenting and creating realities (Alford, 2017). One example of Hollywood’s imposed ideology in the minds of viewers is among the few traders following the September 11 attacks. The traders debate how it happened, and one of them says, “Leave Osama alone, America will show them Rambo.” This shows how movies influenced their way of thinking (Ibbi, 2013: 95). According to Ali et al. (2020) and Borah (2016) a film is originally a concept / idea that is manipulated accordingly to create a story. Therefore, the movie determines how and when the moviemakers construct and implement certain beliefs and dialogues. In addition, they alter the dialogs using positive as well as negative symbolic representation. The researchers further confirm that in Hollywood the phrase “Muslim Fundamentalist” is usually linked to negative stereotyping.

Maisuwong (2012) affirms that “Hollywood film is the American ideological medium of mass communication, it has influences to the movie industries in several countries as well” (p.95). Accordingly, the movie industry is an effective medium to convey messages effectively to





a massive number of audiences, and it constitutes a crucial part of media system in the world. It is also used to exchange cultural and traditional norms around the world. Thus, Hollywood has long controlled the global cinema industry. Moreover, movies are one of the most influential mediums that shape an individual's perceptions, beliefs, ideas, attitudes, and actions. In movies, Islam generally, and Muslims specifically are depicted with negative stereotypes. "The stereotyping in US media, including films, TV shows, news, and cartoons, mainly shapes people's perceptions of Islam and Muslims." Thus, Islamic society and community are portrayed as uncivilized and its followers as intolerant and conservative (Kiran et al., 2021, p.1127). Cowen further (2001) confirms that by stating Hollywood has influenced the global film industry by applying American's culture and ideology in the movies. Moreover, movies produced outside America are under the impact of Hollywood in one way or another.

Hollywood movies present to the world American culture, society, beliefs and positive aspects such as prosperity, freedom and equality. Conversely, Hollywood's success has affected other cultures outside America, and these countries are afraid of losing and changing their identity, culture and beliefs. Nevertheless, religious ideology is not without this influence; more specifically Islam (Bi, 2012).

Eventually, Islamophobia is a form of racism that manifests through fear, hatred, and systemic discrimination against Muslims is evident in Hollywood through the following concepts:

- The "Muslim terrorist" figure (e.g., villains in action films).
- The "white savior" narrative (e.g., Western protagonists liberating Muslims).
- The destruction of Muslim agency (e.g., Muslim characters lacking depth or autonomy).

2.4 Critical Discourse Analysis

The term 'Discourse Analysis' (henceforth DA) was introduced by Zelling Harris in 1952 in his work titled "Discourse Analysis". Harris (1952) regards DA as a method to analyse connected written or spoken forms of language that extends descriptive linguistics beyond basic sentences. Hence, DA is the analysis of discourse i.e. language in use, since discourse is basically defined as language in use (Brown and Yule, 1983; Cook, 1989). According to Kamalu and Osisanwo (2015), language in use refers to a group of preferences, expectations and norms that connect language to context. Furthermore, DA does not only examine

the formal properties of language but also examines the way language is used in social and cultural contexts.

Among other branches of DA, Critical discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) is one of the main branches. According to Van Dijk (2015), CDA is a type of discourse that examines how power, social abuse, domination, and inequality are portrayed and challenged via texts and speeches in both social and political contexts. Along with this dissident purpose, CDA adopts a clear vision and perspective in order to investigate, expose and eventually resist social inequalities. Furthermore, CDA is an interdisciplinary approach to language studies, which assists to better comprehend how discourse influences social processes, structures and changes. One of the advantages of CDA lies in its ability to bring social and linguistic analyses of discourse at the same time. Further, it emphasizes social theories and critically contextualized approach to linguistics, which sheds light on the central issues of the field such as, power, ideology, and inequality. Hence, CDA seeks to uncover implicit ideologies in texts. As Widdowson (2007: p.70) states, “those who follow this approach are particularly concerned with the use (and abuse) of language for the exercise of socio-political power.”

2.4.1 Fairclough’s framework of CDA: Dialectical relational approach

Norman Fairclough is a British sociologist and is considered one of the most prominent figures in the field of CDA beside Ruth Wodak, Gunther Kress, and Van Dijk. It was in the early 1980s when he first started working on CDA and was the pioneer of laying a theoretical framework that became the basis for research in CDA. Because his approach is a combination of linguistic and sociological standpoints, hence he regards taking into account various aspects of language that mirror reality when conducting any textual analysis (The Lingwist, 2020).

Norman Fairclough’s publications in 1990s (e.g. Fairclough, 1992a, 1992b, 1995a, 1995c) significantly influenced the field of CDA. His perspective on CDA is that certain linguistic aspects of a text can convey specific behaviors and social attitudes. Hence, CDA focuses on power dynamics and how they impact language and discourse (Fairclough, 1992). Further, in his book titled *Language and Power* (1989), there is more concentration on how and why texts are described and interpreted rather than what i.e. how and why a speaker/writer selects specific expressions or forms? According to him, these choices are never innocent but ideological. Thus he (1989, p.110) states that he is not prescriptive but rather providing a ‘guide not a blueprint’ in order to conduct CDA.





A Critical Discourse Analysis of Islamophobia in Selected 21st Century Hollywood Movies



Furthermore, Fairclough defines (CDA) as the study of how discursive practices, events, and texts are influenced by power dynamics, social and cultural structures, and processes. CDA further investigates how these practices, events, and texts are often unresolved in their causal relationships (Fairclough, 2001). Unlike van Dijk (2001), Fairclough (2001) believes that CDA is both a theory and a method as well as a theoretical perspective on language and semiosis, consisting of visual and body language. Hence, it paves the way for analyzing language or semiosis within broader social process analyses. He argues that discourse is “constitutive” or “constructive” of social structure, rather than just being tied by it. In other words, Language is an inseparable part of society, and they are, language and society, connected internally rather than externally. Accordingly, language is a ‘social process’. (Fairclough, 1989).

Fairclough (1989) introduces the CDA paradigm, which considers language as discourse and social practice, as well as the connections between language, ideology, and identity. Moreover, CDA lays out chances to consider the relationships between discourse and society, between text and context, and between language and power. Later, Fairclough (1995) proposed a three-dimensional approach based on discourse ideas consisting of three levels; first, a linguistic text, spoken or written; second, discourse practice (text creation and text interpretation); third, a sociocultural activity (Fairclough, 2001). These levels correlate with the three stages of analysis in CDA, Description, Interpretation, and Explanation. As stated by Fairclough (1989; p.24), language is a kind of social practice and “Discourse refers to the whole process of social interaction of which a text is just a part”. Thus, critical analysts should examine the interaction between texts, production processes, and social contexts, rather than just the texts themselves.

According to Fairclough (1995b) the first step in the three-dimensional model is text covering both spoken and written discourse. Texts might be “written or oral, and oral texts may be just spoken (radio) or spoken and visual (television)” (p.57). This stage of analysis is concerned with the examination of language structure, which is produced in a discursive or social event. The study of word choice, semantics, cohesion and grammar...etc. are of great importance, thus, this step aligns with the description stage.

Moreover, the second step is discourse practice that needs to be comprehensively analyzed since it consists of three fundamental steps: text production, text distribution, and text consumption. At this step, the CDA analyst derives certain themes, ideologies and ideas from the text.



Later, the audiences are determined who decode the meaning of the text depending on their knowledge, prior experience, and beliefs. Therefore, this stage correlates with the interpretation stage. Hence, the text shapes or reshapes the audience's point of view (Fairclough, 1995b).

Finally, sociocultural practice is the last step of CDA communicative event. By 'sociocultural practice', Fairclough (1995b) "means the social and cultural goings-on which the communicative event is a part of" (p. 57). This step observes the ways that discourse functions in different parts of a community and society, and how this discourse is linked with social power and dominance. Hence, the sociocultural analysis relies on the occurrences of sociocultural framework, so it demands the combination of Discourse Practice with the Text. Edward Said through his work, *Orientalism*, critically studies how West, throughout history, constructed a negative image of Muslims and the Islamic world and faith as dangerous, backward and threatening. These portrayals have been present in colonial ideologies, which in return have grown and appeared in contemporary media including Hollywood Movies. Norman Fairclough's works evolve around the same notion of embedded ideologies, prejudice, and stereotypes in any type of text. His three stages of analysis offer a practical framework for unveiling these representations by examining the textual features of such portrayals, the processes through which they are produced and consumed, and the broader sociocultural practices they reflect and reinforce. Hence, by examining the Orientalist discourse that Said described with the Fairclough's lenses of CDA, it can be uncovered that Islamophobic narratives are not only linguistically embedded in film scripts and visual cues, but they are also inserted within institutional practices of filmmaking and ideological structures of Western society. Therefore, Fairclough's model functions as a methodological tool to trace the continuity of Orientalist ideology from literary texts to modern cinematic discourse.

3. Methodology and Data Collection

This study employs CDA to analyze Linguistic choices (dialogue, labeling, framing of Muslims), and Narrative structures (hero-villain binaries, justifications for violence). The selected films are chosen for their post-9/11 narratives and their engagement with Muslim identities. The films, originally produced in English language and by Hollywood, are required to meet the objectives of the study. Moreover, movies of similar length are chosen to achieve balance in the weight of data samples and to seek representativeness. The adopted method for the present research is thematic analysis (henceforth TA). Clarke and Braun (2017)





A Critical Discourse Analysis of Islamophobia in Selected 21st Century Hollywood Movies



define TA as a “method for identifying, analyzing and interpreting patterns of meaning (‘themes’) within qualitative data” (p.1). TA offers systematic methods for identifying codes and themes from qualitative data. Codes are short and usually single words or phrases, which are used to categorize data sets, and they reflect a particular notion or concept discovered in the data. The themes are broad patterns capturing significant aspects of the data in terms of the study topic. In our research a theme represents a unified, underlying concept that connects similar codes. A code stands for the smallest unit of analysis, capturing potentially significant data properties for the study in question, and forms patterns of meaning based on a shared underlying notion. Themes, on the other hand, assist in organizing and reporting the researcher’s analytic insights. In the current research, codes stand for the data samples, which are numbered so that they are easily referred to, and themes refer to underlying meaning created by the codes. Due to limited time and space, the researchers have worked on three movies only. Table 1 presents the profiles of the selected movies.

Table 1: Movie profiles (<https://lookmovie.pn/>) (<https://www.imdb.com/>)

| Movies | Genre | Release date | Length | Director | Production company | Main Themes |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|--------|-----------------|--|--|
| <i>Septembers of Shiraz</i> | Drama thriller | 2015 | 1h 50m | Wayne Blair | Millennium Media- Millennium Film- Ambi Pictures- G-BASE- Eclectic Pictures – NU BOYANA film Studios | Identity and belonging- loss and displacement- family and sacrifice- political and oppression- religious intolerance and power dynamics. |
| <i>Kandahar</i> | Action Drama thriller | 2023 | 1h 59m | Ric Roman Waugh | G-BASE/Dutch FilmWorks/ MBC Studios/ Capstone Studios/ Thunder Road Pictures | Cultural and Religious Extremism-Identity and Belonging- human suffering and survival- war and its aftermath |
| <i>Dirty Angels</i> | Action Drama thriller | 2024 | 1h 44m | Martin Campbell | Millennium Media/ Nu Boyana Film Studios | Cultural and political tensions/ sacrifice and duty/ Conflict with extremist ideologies/Symbolism of good vs. evil: |

In the following section, the data samples are presented in tables to capture the codes for analysis.

**A Critical Discourse Analysis of Islamophobia in Selected 21st Century
Hollywood Movies**



This table presents the samples used for the analysis:

| Movie | s.n | Sample | Speech time |
|------------------------------|-----|--|-----------------------|
| September s of Shiraz | 1 | ... the Ayatollah Khomeini and his Islamic revolution have consolidated power and transformed the country. | 03:58 |
| | 2 | You are all hypocrites who have suddenly come to power and do not know how to handle it. | 33:26 |
| | 3 | They will try and break him, Fernaz, then we will all be at risk. | 14:15 |
| | 4 | ...you sat in the same chair as me, then you must know my fear. | 01:6:30 |
| | 5 | Why am I being interrogated? I am not charged with anything | 19:11 |
| | 6 | Don't you dare to stand there and threaten me like some thug. If you want to report me then just do it. | 01:21:59 |
| | 7 | And since when stealing people's possessions is a call of God? | 33:18 |
| | 8 | You already have all the Jewels, and you took everything, what else could you possibly want? | 01:17:41 |
| | 9 | Why should some people live like kings, and the rest like rats? | 20:43 |
| Kandahar | 10 | Say hello to the free world to me. | 20:01 |
| | 11 | You risk your lives for us and then we tell you exactly what your country should look like and how you should act. Half the time we don't even say thank you. | 1:16:8 |
| | 12 | ...these guys are still living in the past. | 23:05 |
| | 13 | You have been given a gift from God. You have slayed the American dragon. | 22:13 |
| | 14 | A violent act must be met with another. | 01:24:52 |
| | 15 | But what you are worried about is the dangers of little girls going to school. | 21:33 |
| | 16 | Can't have you pull this crazy shit all over again. Chopping heads off, beating women in public. | 21:17 |
| | 17 | It was only business, a higher bidder paid me for it. I will do it again just like I did for the Russians, I did it for ISIS. I did it for the Americans and now I will do it for | 1:23:56>> 01:24:03 |





A Critical Discourse Analysis of Islamophobia in Selected 21st Century Hollywood Movies



| | | | |
|---------------------|----|--|----------------------------|
| | | Taliban. | |
| | 18 | The target is mine. | 01:44:03 |
| Dirty Angels | 19 | There is a civil war here. | 46:11 |
| | 20 | The safest that's left. I am afraid Pakistan is no longer the friendliest of allies. | 22:01>> 22:04 |
| | 21 | If you are ISIS, you know your founder couldn't even read his own names. | 11:33 |
| | 22 | To save my daughter from being publicly beheaded. | 29:39 |
| | 23 | Amir sliced the throat of a village woman. He let her bleed out, kicking on the dirt. | 01:11:42 |
| | 24 | You are the daughter of the whore. | 11:27 |
| | 25 | If I was afraid of the American, I wouldn't make plans to marry you. I need a strong woman to give me children who are fighters. | 01:01:40> > 01:01:58 |
| | 26 | For the daughters of the American diplomat and for those who are beyond redemption, ten million dollars each, and the release of sheik al-Shimali. | 12:21 |
| | 27 | Won't be pleasant, but you'll eventually be traded. | 01:04:27 |

The data sets are collected from *Lookmovie* website using non-probability data sampling techniques. The data is equally selected from the movies even though some movies possess more Islamophobic phrases. The reason is for the data to be representative and balanced among all the movies. The movies are chosen via the purposive data sampling technique starting from watching each movie multiple times and then taking notes while watching. The website used for watching the movies consists of various subtitles including English. The researchers used the subtitles to take accurate notes. The notes include the timing of the speech, the context and the actual subtitle. The reason why the movies' scripts are not downloaded is that the scripts might not be accurate, and they do not provide timing of the speech. Therefore, the researcher depends on watching the movie and using the subtitles at the same time. It is worth mentioning that more than one English subtitle is available each functioning in a particular way, for example, some subtitles even provide the translation of other languages used in the movie such as

Arabic. This is of great importance, since the movies chosen include scenes in which another language other than English is used. After that, the researchers transcribed the relevant scenes and later certain targeted samples were chosen for analysis, due to the length of the movies, only some of the relevant samples were chosen.

4. Results and Discussions:

4.1 Description and Interpretation Stages

4.1.1 The Impact of Islamophobic Cinema

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) critiques how Western media constructs the Muslim world as an exotic, irrational, and threatening "Other." Hollywood films frequently reinforce these stereotypes, shaping public perception in ways that justify Western dominance. Below is a detailed breakdown of how *Kandahar* (2023), *Septembers of Shiraz* (2015), and *Dirty Angels* (2024) perpetuate Orientalist tropes, with specific examples from each film. Cinema has not refrained from constructing negative stereotypes and prejudice of Muslims leaving the impact on the targeted audience. According to the analysis, one major influence has been normalizing military intervention through framing Muslim nations as chaotic; hence, they justify Western intervention.

For example, in *Septembers of Shiraz* (2015) "... the Ayatollah Khomani and his Islamic revolution have consolidated power and transformed the country." in which the country, i.e. Iran, is presented as a chaotic place due to the recent changes in the throne. As soon as the Muslims take the throne and get rid of the Shah's regime including America's prior role in government, the country faces cultural, social and economic crises as in "*Why should some people live like kings, and the rest like rats?*" in which the people suffer, who are compared to 'rats'. The revolution was partly a reaction to the perceived Westernization of Iranian society under the Shah, and a rejection of the influence of the United States and other Western nations in Iranian affairs.

Besides, in *Kandahar* (2023), the line "*Say hello to the free world to me*" illustrates that the only safe and free place is West, and the chaotic ones are the Muslim countries. This is because West attempts to intervene and keep the peace in these areas, otherwise they are not able to protect themselves as in "...we tell you exactly what your country should look like and how you should act...". These samples employ the idea of the 'White Savior' narrative in audience's mind, meaning the American protagonist is the only competent figure in a land of chaos, and the only one who can bring peace and solve the tensions. It further reinforces the stereotype of Muslims as helpless victims who cannot protect themselves





A Critical Discourse Analysis of Islamophobia in Selected 21st Century Hollywood Movies



but need western involvement. Consequently, Afghanistan is portrayed as a lawless Wasteland, and the setting reinforces the idea that Muslim-majority nations are inherently unstable.

In *Dirty Angels* (2024) the samples apparently indicate that the Muslim majority countries are instable and require aid from powerful nation as in “*there is a civil war here*” referring to “*Pakistan*” that “*is no longer the friendliest of allies.*” to survive the internal conflicts and struggles within Islamic society and Muslim individuals specifically. Again, West’s justification in intervening Middle Eastern matters is depicted via aiming to spread peace and reduce violence, since these nations alone are not able to control themselves but require more powerful nations. The fear is stereotyped when USA removes Pakistan from its allies due to the instability and chaos present in the Islamic country.

Moreover, Muslims are further depicted as unintellectual individuals who are not yet modernized but live with the old mindset. This leaves the image of Muslims in the mind of viewers as people lacking knowledge and wisdom.

In *Septembers of Shiraz* (2015), for instance, “*You are all hypocrites who have suddenly come to power and do not know how to handle it*” this sample indicates that Muslims are *hypocrites* and ambitious towards power and money yet unintellectual, as they do not know how to manage their affairs; they lack knowledge and intuition.

In addition, in *Kandahar* (2023), the sample “*...these guys are still living in the past*” indicates that Muslim individuals, referred to as ‘*these guys*’ in the text, still adopt the fixed and traditional mindset in the sense they do not know how to live and adjust to the modern world. This reinforces the idea of comparing West as modernized, advanced and refined culture and values with the uncivilized, old-fashioned, outdated and unintellectual notions of East, in particular Muslim countries and individuals.

Further, samples from *Dirty Angels* (2024) such as “*If you are ISIS, you know your founder couldn’t even read his own names*”, portray Muslims as a community who are illiterate and hence framing them as ignorant, focusing on the idea of illiteracy. By mentioning that the founder “*couldn’t even read his own name,*” the quote reinforces the idea of incompetence or a lack of basic knowledge, which plays into a larger stereotype about Muslim communities being uneducated or primitive. This portrayal influences the audience’s perception of Muslims and contributes to the narrative of Islam and Muslims as backward and unintelligent, thus reinforcing bias and existing prejudice.

4.1.2 Demonizing Muslim Men as Violent and Irrational barbarians

Hollywood films amplify the portrayal of Muslim men as violent and irrational barbarians by depicting them as one-dimensional villains or extremists. The analysis illustrates that the most common theme implemented in the discourse of Islamophobic Hollywood movies is the idea of Islam and Muslims as inherently violent and extremist. Throughout the three selected movies, there are various samples and scenes perpetuating the image of Muslims as terrorists and troublemakers. In *Septembers of Shiraz* (2015), for instance, the sample “*They will try and break him, Fernaz, then we will all be at risk*” clarifies the fear that the Jewish family feel of Muslims is tied to preconceived notions about Muslims, specifically that they are barbaric. This is a common stereotype that frames Muslims as violent, ruthless, and inhumane toward those who are not part of their religious community. In this context, the quote suggests that the Jewish family sees Muslims as a threat who would harm them or destroy their family unit, which further supports the idea of Muslims as cruel or harsh. The motive of breaking someone and the potential for the family to be “*at risk*” aligns with the stereotype that Muslims are violent and driven by an unrelenting ideology. Consequently, the Muslims not only want to harm or punish, but to completely eradicate the Jewish family, thus presenting Islam as inherently ruthless religion. Besides, the fear is further presented in “*...you sat in the same chair as me, then you must know my fear.*” The Jewish gemologist expresses his fear to the antagonists who are the Iranian Revolutionary Guards who imprison and torture him. The reason of the fear is that the Muslim religious slogans beat prisoners, reducing them to fanatical monsters i.e. they construct the evil Muslim trope. Moreover, *Kandahar* (2023) portrays Taliban fighters as faceless killers who execute civilians indiscriminately. In one of the speeches, “*You have been given a gift from God. You have slayed the American dragon.*” the ideology of Muslims as criminals and savages is apparent, in which they insert their faith with their killing actions, giving the justification that the irrational barbarism they carry out is a call of God, stating they are rewarded by God for killing Americans and eradicating non-Muslims. This prejudice is further depicted in the following sample “*A violent act must be met with another.*” in which the usage of ‘must’ denotes Muslims’ strong ideology of taking revenge solely via force and thus spreading fear. They have no faith and belief in peace and negotiation, reflecting the mindset called ‘cycle of violence’ in Middle Eastern conflicts (Dawes et al., 2005). It suggests that violence is the only





response to aggression, reinforcing stereotypes of Middle Eastern societies as inherently vengeful and war driven.

Lastly, samples from *Dirty Angels* (2024) present extreme violence of Muslims towards the foreigners such as in “*To save my daughter from being publicly beheaded.*” Based on the context of the movie a mother is willing to sacrifice everything only to prevent her daughter from being slaughtered. This statement highlights the extreme violence and reveals the way women are disproportionately subjected to brutal punishments in the oppressive faith. Hence, it is used to paint the entire religious group as barbaric, reinforcing negative stereotypes and justifying exclusion or hostility toward humans, females in particular. Similarly, “*Amir sliced the throat of a village woman. He let her bleed out, kicking on the dirt.*” also reinforces negative, prejudiced views of Muslims as violent and inhumane. The action of slicing denotes extreme cruelty of Islamic regime, resulting in bleeding out i.e. Muslims show no mercy to humans. The scene focuses on graphic violence in connection with a character who is linked to a Muslim-majority culture that could be seen as part of a broader cultural narrative that portrays Islam as inherently dangerous. This can perpetuate a climate of fear and hatred toward Muslims, reinforcing Islamophobic sentiments.

4.1.3 Exoticizing Muslim Women as Oppressed Victims

Said critiques how Western media frames Muslim women as passive victims of their own culture, requiring liberation by the West. Hollywood often reduces them to silent, veiled figures or idealized exotic objects. Moreover, the depiction of a vulnerable, powerless woman serves to imply a broader cultural or religious conflict, which intensifies Islamophobic assumptions about power dynamics between Muslim men and women.

For instance, *Septembers of Shiraz* (2015) portrays the ‘Westernized Iranian Woman’ vs. the ‘Oppressed Muslim Woman’. The protagonist’s wife is portrayed as educated and refined, while women in hijabs are background extras, who are living in grief or silently obeying male authority. For instance, “*Why am I being interrogated? I am not charged with anything*” shows that a non-Muslim is speaking for her rights and demanding justice, she is confidently speaking with the Muslim guards defending herself. The woman in the passage is portrayed as a victim of violence, a trope that is used to amplify the idea that Muslim men are inherently violent or oppressive toward Muslim and Non-Muslim women. Islamophobic narratives sometimes depict Muslim women as oppressed and in need of rescue, while framing Muslim men as their oppressors.

Besides, Muslim Men are depicted harming women physically and verbally as in that sample “*Don’t you dare to stand there and threaten me like some thug. If you want to report me then just do it*” in which after the son verbally and almost physically hurts his mother, she responds him with that sample. Hence, female individuals are not respected even at their own homes’ contrary to the Jewish protagonist, who highly respects his wife.

Besides, the movie *Kandahar* (2023) depicts images of women who are deprived of education as in “*But what you are worried about is the dangers of little girls going to school*”. This fear comes from the preconceived fear of the power of knowledge; if women are educated, they can speak for themselves and demand their rights, opposite to those who refrained from education. The idea of Muslim men oppressing Muslim women is to keep them ignorant so to obey them as showcased in the verb ‘worry’ that establishes the fear of very young and educated females and their success in education i.e. a well-documented form of oppression. Their roles are limited to certain tasks in the community and their voices are suppressed and unheard, presenting the patriarchal control over women’s intellectual and social growth. It further contributes to Islamophobia by homogenizing multiple societies and reinforcing the notion that Islam is incompatible with education and women’s rights, and is perceived as threatened by them. Furthermore, the movie narrative along with the visual images present extreme public violence towards women as ‘*Chopping heads off, beating women in public*’ presenting Hollywood’s frequent depictions of these groups as dangerous, violent, and in need of Western intervention. The mention of ‘*Can’t have you pull this crazy shit*’ referring to ‘*beating women in public*’ suggests that violence against women is a cultural norm, reinforcing orientalist and Islamophobic discourses that display Muslim societies as oppressive and regressive, contrary to an implied civilized Western standard. So, it is reinforcing the idea that Islam itself (rather than political extremism) is the root cause of their suffering.

Similarly, *Dirty Angles* (2024) include various speeches and conversations tackling the brutality, disrespect, abuse, aggression and oppression towards women as in “*You are the daughter of the whore*”, this sample sheds light on underestimating Women’s values, further focusing on female characters as lacking morals and virtuousness. The use of ‘*whore*’ as an insult can be linked to the Western stereotype that Islamic societies are deeply misogynistic, and that a woman’s worth is tied to her sexual purity or family honour. Based on the context, the Muslim actress is referred to as “... *the daughter of the whore..*” because



she is married to a non-Muslim American. Thus, the dialogue reinforces a patriarchal discourse in which women are devalued and reduced to their sexuality, highlighting oppression through verbal humiliation. Moreover, the idea of Muslims challenging American women by forcing them to marry Muslim fighters is depicted in this sample *“If I was afraid of the American, I wouldn’t make plans to marry you. I need a strong woman to give me children who are fighters”*. Therefore, it demonstrates that women of Islamic community not only suffer but those outside as well, in this case Americans or foreigners. A woman’s role is reduced to a reproductive role and is valued for her ability to *‘give me children who are fighters’* rather than as an individual with agency. The mention of *‘fighters’* aligns with the militant ideology of Muslims being aggressive and forceful. The overall message lies in the portrayals of Middle Eastern or Muslim societies as inherently patriarchal and oppressive toward women. The overall ideology of the movie discourse revolves around ‘The white saviour’ rescue fantasy i.e. the film’s climax involves the Western protagonist saving a trafficked Middle Eastern woman, supporting the trope that Muslim women need external protectors.

4.1.4 Materialistic Individuals

The theme of materialism associated with Muslims is another vital ideology and stereotype aligned with Islam generally as a religion. Throughout the selected movies, it is noted that each one of them, to varying degrees, focuses on Muslims as finance seekers who would carry out various plans to achieve their materialistic desires.

Septembers of Shiraz (2015) through visual imagery and linguistic units displays Muslims as finance seekers. The protagonist of the movie, i.e. the Jewish gemologist, is a wealthy man who has built his huge fortune legally, leading the Muslims to seek his fortune illegally as presented in various scenes in the movie. In the end, he abandons his entire savings and wealth to the Muslims just to rescue his family. This sample better illustrate this materialistic stereotype of Muslims as in *“You already have all the Jewels, and you took everything, what else could you possibly want?”* in which portrays the ability of Muslims in achieving more ‘Jewels’, since they are people of excessive greed or accumulation of power. The opposing party, who is the non-Muslim, is the victim of the robbery and oppression, thus, the clause represents resentment towards those who exploited them. Moreover, Muslims’ justification of stealing is presented as a call of God as in *“And since when stealing people’s possessions is a call of God?”* used as a rhetorical question in which Muslims are depicted as people disobeying their God for their

materialistic desires. There is an accusation rather than an actual inquiry, assuming the act being questioned is wrong and unjustifiable. It also determines that followers of Islam use their religion to justify their actions such as confiscation of property that are deceitful and morally corrupt.

Furthermore, in Kandahar (2023) *“The target is mine.”* refers to the American protagonist who is wanted by the different Islamic tribes, each one is striving to apprehend him alive or dead since there is a precious reward for it. Thus, the clause perpetuates the notion of commodification of human life especially during warfare, the influence of Western intervention in the Middle East and the fragmented nature of power among Islamic militant groups. The American protagonist becomes a symbolic trophy who represents both a material reward and an ideological victory. His body is no longer just a person, but a prize, a political statement, and a means of asserting dominance over rival groups or even the West itself. Besides, *“It was only business, a higher bidder paid me for it. I will do it again just like I did for the Russians, I did it for ISIS. I did it for the Americans and now I will do it for Taliban.”* establish the materialistic mindset of individual Muslims who disregard the ethical and religious values just for their benefits and portraying their strong desire towards their immoral actions. They are people of no dignity or morality but untrustworthy; their desires are prioritized, rather than their rightness. Their intention lies on gaining more power and money regardless of the group they are trading with and ethical constraints.

Similarly, In *Dirty Angels* (2024) the depiction of Muslims extends beyond the basic image of a foreign enemy i.e. it extends into a long-lasting narrative that perpetuates Islamophobic themes. On one hand, Western victims are framed as innocent, white, and politically significant “daughters” of a diplomat, which invokes immediate moral superiority. On the other hand, the antagonists are Muslim figures who are portrayed as brutal and materialistic. This dichotomy reinforces a colonial discourse in which the West is rational, moral, and humanized, while the East, particularly the Islamic world, is chaotic, barbaric, and threatening. Muslims do not only trade people or foreign hostages, but also demand *“ten million dollars each”* for the *“daughters of the American diplomat”*. The reference to *“daughters of the American diplomat”* also portrays a contrast between the innocent Western victims and the dangerous Muslim antagonist, which is a recurring theme in Islamophobic narratives. The sample not only stereotypes Muslims as materialistic but terrorists, reinforcing a common Islamophobic stereotype that Muslim figures are



linked to extremist activities and orientalist fears of the “dangerous other”. Likewise, the following sample with double usage of the modal verb ‘will’, one negative “*won’t be pleasant*” and one positive “*but you will eventually be traded*” serves as a linguistic marker of inevitability and powerlessness. It tackles a broader narrative that reduces human lives, especially those of hostages, to commodities in a transactional system. It also demonstrates that Middle Eastern communities are involved in human trafficking, ransom demands or prisoner exchanges as a routine, thus, it normalizes and essentializes criminal attitude as part of Muslim identity.

4.2 Explanation stage

The sociocultural and political context of each of the selected movies mirrors the hidden ideologies inserted. *Septembers of Shiraz*, for instance, is based on the true story of a Jewish family in Iran who were caught up in the aftermath of the (1979) Islamic revolution. Hence, the discourse along with the visual elements display the family’s struggles as they attempt to escape persecution ‘*They will try and break him, Fernaz, then we will all be at risk*’. The film primarily focuses on the dangers faced by non-Muslims under the new Islamic regime. It also portrays The Islamic power of Islamic Republic negatively after the overthrow of the Shah. Ayatollah Khomeini who led the new government “*...and his Islamic revolution have consolidated power and transformed the country*” sought to remove Western influence and targeted those associated with the old regime, including elites, intellectuals, and religious minorities like Jews. The revolution resulted in a chaotic, violent, and oppressive society, reinforcing a Western narrative of Iran as a dangerous, extremist state, as stated by Bakour (2018; p.3) that “This age-old fluctuating relationship created or helped to create a growing sense of unease and anxiety. The atmosphere of mutual suspicion, paving the way to the present, and somewhat persistent, antipathy between Islam and the West, has been coloured by earlier encounters. These encounters include the phenomenal spread of Islam ... the Iranian Revolution”. The film highlights Iran’s hostility towards minorities, presenting Western fears about Islamic governments by shedding light on Jewish persecution. Therefore, the revolutionaries are ruthless and anti- sentiments, which contributes to the stereotype of Middle Eastern nations as intolerant and oppressive. Moreover, the movie aligns with the post-9/11 vision of depicting Middle Eastern countries as threats to freedom and migration reinforcing Islamophobic and xenophobic discourse. The film appeals to Western fear and anxieties about religious extremism via concentrating on Jewish

family suffering under Islamic regime. The Islamic country, Iran, is the place of violence and persecution reinforcing fears about Muslim-majority countries. Thus, Hollywood has historically depicted Iran as a hostile, extremist nation, particularly after the 1979, it also continues to frame Iran as an authoritarian, oppressive state, aligning with Western geopolitical interests (Al-Ghamdi and Safrah, 2020). For instance, the image of Muslims burning an American flag and attacking their Embassy inserts the ideology that Islam as a religion does not embrace peace but extremism, and they are the party who begins war. They are also associated with dirty and chaotic cities where living conditions are not very appropriate. In contrast, the image given to the West is clean and peaceful cities where people live in harmony and away from wars and fires. The vital role of lexical choices is apparent when East is described negatively via using words such as “*violence, criminal, hypocrite, barbarians, thief, coward, thug*”, on the other hand, West is depicted positively in a total of 19 words consisting of “*royal, kind, proud, impeccable, good, innocent*”.

Dirty Angels is a 2024 film centering on a group of female commando unit attempting to rescue “*the daughters of the American diplomat and for those who are beyond redemption*” who are taken as hostages by terrorists in Afghanistan during the U.S. military withdrawal. The sociocultural and political context unveils how historical events influence their portrayal of xenophobia and Western power dynamics. Afghanistan is shown as the base of Taliban, the depiction of that country as a dangerous environment as in “*There is a civil war here*” being dominated by extremist parties; the film reinforces stereotypes of the region as inherently violent and oppressive. The Muslim community is presented to be monolithic and hostile where diverse cultures and tribes having conflict with each other are common (Bakour, 2018). The Western’s justification for spreading peace is seen as reducing and eliminating barbarism and terrorism, thus the West is superior and more powerful. However, Western intervention as the sole solution to all destructions of indigenous groups, who are also seeking change, is displayed as justification of their actions. This is because the Middle Eastern societies are unable to protect their vulnerable populations. Additionally, the focus lies on presenting women’s rights of education and their unheard voices, as being rescued only by Western intervention i.e. West is more powerful, “Following 9/11, Western-led interventions were linked to global concerns over terrorism and security” (Middle East Studies, 2020). The non-Muslim characters are referred to as ‘*Rangers, proud, magnificent*’,



A Critical Discourse Analysis of Islamophobia in Selected 21st Century Hollywood Movies



meanwhile the Muslim ones are described as *'Taliban, ISIS, traitor, corrupt, terrorists, monstrous, devil, demon'*. Therefore, xenophobic and Islamophobic stereotypes are shown via power dynamic, superiority and authority. As a result, the discourse emphasizes the conflict between the two parties rather than commonality. In addition, Hollywood presents Muslims in *Dirty Angels* as barbaric individuals based on the existing pictures in which Muslims use caves as their hidden spots where extreme crimes, weapon creation and forced marriages are arranged. Whereas West carries out legal action in formal offices. American cinema industry has attempted to keep the balance between negative and positive images using discourse and visual images. Muslims are not all shown as negative people causing troubles, there is someone holding Islamic faith and being a good person at the same time helping West in achieving their goals in middle east as the two Afghani brothers helping the female commandos.

The time when *Kandahar* (2023) was released was when Western narratives on the Middle East were shaped by the U.S. withdrawal from the country in 2021, particularly Afghanistan. The film centers on an American hero who navigates a dangerous foreign land while being pursued by Islamic local forces. This idea is relevant to Hollywood's long-standing tradition of presenting the Middle East as a lawless, violent, and anti-Western region. The event that influenced the xenophobic discourse of *Kandahar* was U.S withdrawal from Afghanistan that resulted in showing the country as collapsing into chaos, and as an inherently hostile and dangerous place. According to Gavriely-Nuri (2010) media in general has played a pivotal role in perpetuating negative depictions of Afghanistan via invoking religious, political and orientalist discourse that establishes Taliban and other similar groups as dangerous and terrorist enemies serving the interests of powerful nations. Relying on the context, the struggle is not only between the West and East, but within Eastern countries too. Taliban and Iranian operatives, the film's antagonists, play into prevailing stereotypes of Middle Eastern and Muslim characters as oppressive, violent, and anti-Western. The linguistic choices determine vs "them" discourse in using words such as *'Good, elite, patriot, fantastic, clean, free world, proud, martyr, lifer, good, beautiful, honor'* in describing West, and *'assassinations, ISIS, hypocrisy, traitors, revenge, drug dealers, hostiles, dangerous, enemies'* in describing East. Nevertheless, the title itself, *Kandahar*, reduces a historically and culturally rich city to a symbol of war, extremism, and danger. Besides, the tensions also date back to the nuclear negotiations, which has been growing between Iran and U.S, leading to a discourse that

positions Middle Eastern nations as perpetual threats to Western security (Haimed, 2024). The ideology of Western justification can be seen in displaying Western intelligence and military forces as noble warriors in a dangerous world where survival of unstable and threatening countries depends on Western actions as in “...we tell you exactly what your country should look like and how you should act...”.

5. Conclusions

In the light of findings and discussions in this thesis, the most important conclusions are the following:

- A critical discourse analysis of the three selected movies has shown that Islamophobic language is used in Hollywood movies. Fairclough’s three stages of analysis on the one hand and Thematic Analysis on the other have unveiled the linguistic elements implemented in the discourse that perpetuate xenophobic stereotypes of Easterners in general, Muslims in particular.

- These linguistic units with the aid of Fairclough’s model of analysis have unveiled that the selected Hollywood movies portray Islam as inherently oppressive to women and they are considered as subjugated figures, particularly in relation to practices like forced marriage, wearing the hijab, victims of public violence, gender segregation. Not only towards female Muslims, have the non-Muslims also encountered such practices while being with the Muslims.

- The selected movies present Easterners, particularly Muslims, as poor communities who always chase power and money. These materialistic individuals are in an endless quest to achieve wealth illegally and mostly through violence and unethical actions towards their own people and the foreigners.

- The lexical choices along with power structures, and ideological positioning, construct “the Other” i.e. Muslims as violent and oppressive, reinforcing Western superiority. The American cinema industry dominates the discourse of these movies in which they portray themselves as peacemakers, kind and superior compared to the Muslims. These portrayals align with orientalist and Islamophobic tropes in Hollywood, where the East is depicted as backward and in need of control or rescue, and they are unintellectual and ignorant individuals who have not yet modernized.

- The West, through Hollywood’s manipulation, treats Islam as a monolithic religion with one uniform set of beliefs and practices, ignoring





A Critical Discourse Analysis of Islamophobia in Selected 21st Century Hollywood Movies

the diversity of cultures, sects, and interpretations within the Muslim world. Islam is usually depicted as intolerant of other religions and cultures, with Muslims portrayed as hostile toward Christians, Jews, or other non-Muslim groups.

- The language employed by the actors is never neutral but rather serves as a conduit for ideology, perspectives, beliefs, and attitudes. It is apparent that the Hollywood movies utilize positive language, in which they describe West positively and provide it favorable images such as the peaceful place, whereas the Muslim individuals and their areas are given pessimistic images and described negatively.

- Cinematic narratives shape public perception i.e. these representations in mainstream cinema contribute to shaping and normalizing public perception of Muslims as threats, therefore, it can influence societal attitudes and even justify discriminatory policies.

- The discourse of the five selected movies is not haphazardly organized but based on previous events. That is to say, the socio-cultural context of each of the movies influenced the language used and each of the movies reflects the historical and prior events such as the attacks of 9/11, Iranian revolution, U.S military withdrawal from Afghanistan, and the on-going tensions between America and the rest of the world. Hence, it indicates that language is highly ideological and under the impact of certain motives and notions of those who construct it.

- Orientalist tropes maintain in modern storytelling, which draws from Said's Orientalism, the study highlights that modern films continue to portray the West as a 'civilizing' force, while Muslims are depicted as exotic, oppressed, or dangerous others.

6. References

- 1.Abbas, T. ed., 2005. *Muslim Britain: communities under pressure*. Zed books.
- 2.Abbas, T., 2021. Reflection: The "war on terror", Islamophobia and radicalisation twenty years on. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 14(4), pp.402-404. Available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/17539153.2021.1980182> (accessed on 3 April 2025)
- 3.Alford, M., 2017. A propaganda model for Hollywood. *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture*, 6(2). Available at: <https://www.westminsterpapers.org/article/id/134/download/pdf/> (accessed on March 15, 2025)



A Critical Discourse Analysis of Islamophobia in Selected 21st Century Hollywood Movies



4. Ali, S., Youssef, E. and Qamar, A., 2020. Analyzing the news media practices concerning sexual exploitation of women. *Multicultural Education*, 6(4), pp.90-99. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345417982_Analyzing_the_News_Media_Practices_Concerning_Sexual_Exploitation_of_Women (accessed on March 1, 2025)
5. Allen, C. (2010) *Islamophobia*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing.
6. Alsultany, E., 2012. *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation after 9/11*. nyu Press.
7. Bi, Y., 2012. For Hollywood, the medium is a message. *China Daily*, 28, pp.2012-02. Available at: <https://www.pressreader.com/hong-kong/china-daily/20120228/282600259805654> (accessed on December 23, 2025)
8. Bleich, E., 2011. What is Islamophobia and how much is there? Theorizing and measuring an emerging comparative concept. *American behavioral scientist*, 55(12), pp.1581-1600. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228195168_What_Is_Islamophobia_and_How_Much_Is_There_Theorizing_and_Measuring_an_Emerging_Comparative_Concept (accessed on March 6, 2025)
9. Borah, P., 2016. Media effects theory. *The international encyclopedia of political communication, 2016*, pp.1-12. Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314119579_Media_Effects_Theory (accessed on March 13, 2025)
10. Brown, G. and Yule, G. (1983). *Discourse Analysis*: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
11. Clarke, V. and Braun, V., 2017. Thematic analysis. *The journal of positive psychology*, 12(3), pp.297-298. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311801765_Thematic_analysis (accessed on April 4, 2025)
12. Cook, G (1989). *Discourse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
13. Cowen, T., 2001. Why Hollywood Rules the World (and Should We Care)?. *Correspondence: An International Review of Cultural and Society*, 8, pp.6-7. Available at: <https://www.coursehero.com/file/22427299/Why-Hollywood-Rules-the-Worldhumu3452013/> (accessed on January 20, 2025)
14. *Dirty Angels* Available at <https://www1.lookmovie.pn/movies/view/23872640-dirty-angels-2024> (accessed on December 8, 2024)
15. Edvardsson, L., 2009. Islamophobia—Features of Islamophobia and Strategies against it. Available at <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1481161/FULLTEXT01.pdf> (accessed on January 1, 2025).



A Critical Discourse Analysis of Islamophobia in Selected 21st Century Hollywood Movies



16. Eissa, E.A., Guta, H.A. and Hassan, R.S., 2022. Representations of Arab women in Hollywood pre-and post-9/11. *Journal of international women's studies*, 24(5), p.21. available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/363090163_Representations_of_Arab_Women_in_Hollywood_Pre-_and_Post-_9_11 (accessed on 3 April 2025)
17. Elver, H., 2012. Racializing Islam before and after 9/11: From melting pot to islamophobia. *Transnat'l L. & Contemp. Probs.*, 21, p.119.
18. Esposito, J. L., & Kalin, I. (2011). *Islamophobia: The challenge of pluralism in the 21st century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
19. Fairclough, N. (1995a). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. Harlow, UK: Longman.
20. Fairclough, N. (1995b). *Media Discourse*. London: Arnold
21. Fairclough, N., 1989. *Language and power*. Routledge.
22. Fairclough, N., 1992. Discourse and social change. *Polity*.
23. Fairclough, N., 2001. Critical discourse analysis as a method in social scientific research. *Methods of critical discourse analysis*, 5(11), pp.121-138.
24. Fairclough, N., 2001. Critical discourse analysis as a method in social scientific research. *Methods of critical discourse analysis*, 5(11), pp.121-138.
25. Harris, Z. (1952). 'Discourse Analysis.' *Language*, 28, 1-30. Available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/409987> (accessed on April 13, 2025)
26. Helen, G. 2023. Discrimination against Islam in America: A Comprehensive Analysis. *International Journal of Science and Society*, 5(3) p.300-309. Available at: <https://www.ijsoc.goacademica.com/index.php/ijsoc/article/view/749> (accessed on April 3, 2025)
27. Ibbi, A.A., 2013. Hollywood, the American image and the global film industry. *CINEJ Cinema Journal*, 3(1), pp.93-106. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273031517_Hollywood_The_American_Image_And_The_Global_Film_Industry (accessed on February 13, 2025)
28. Itaoui, R. and Elsheikh, E., 2017. *Islamophobia in the United States: A reading resource pack*. Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/41270396/Islamophobia_in_the_United_States_A_Reading_Resource_Pack_2018 (accessed on 25 March, 2025)
29. Kamalu, I. and Osisanwo, A., 2015. *Discourse Analysis in Issues in the Study of Language and Literature*. Ibadan: Kraft Books Limited.
30. Kandahar available at <https://lookmovie.digital/movies/view/5761544-kandahar-2023> (accessed on December 8, 2024)
31. Kaya, A., 2011. *Islamophobia as a form of governmentality: Unbearable weightiness of the politics of fear*. Malmö University, Malmö Institute for Studies of Migration, Diversity and Welfare (MIM). Available at

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Islamophobia in Selected 21st Century Hollywood Movies



https://www.academia.edu/1625703/Islamophobia_as_a_form_of_governmentality

(accessed on February 2, 2025)

32. Kiran, U., Qamar, A., Adnan, M. and Youssef, E.Y.M., 2021. Muslims depiction in Hollywood movies: A qualitative study. *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, 18(08), pp.1126-1136. Available at:

<https://www.readkong.com/page/muslims-depiction-in-hollywood-movies-a-qualitative-study-6227115> (accessed on

33. Maisuwong, W., 2012. *The promotion of American culture through Hollywood movies to the world* (Doctoral dissertation, Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University).

34. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Islamophobia. [online] Available at: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/islamophobia> [Accessed 15 October 2024]

35. Muschert, G.W. and Budd, K.M. eds., 2020. *Agenda for Social Justice: Solutions for 2020*. Policy Press.

36. Noureen, A. and Paracha, S.A., 2019. Muslims and Islam: Freeze Framed Discourses in Hollywood during 1978-2013. *Global Regional Review*, 4(4), pp.37-43.

Available at:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345383369_Muslims_and_Islam_Freeze_Framed_Discourses_in_Hollywood_during_1978-2013 (accessed on March 10, 2025)

37. Qamar, A., Irtaza, S. and Raza, S.Y., 2024. Islamophobia in Hollywood Movies: Comparative Analysis of Pre and Post-9/11 Movies. *Journal of Development and Social Sciences*, 5(1), pp.529-537 available at:

<https://ojs.jdss.org.pk/journal/article/download/922/864> (accessed on 10 march, 2025)

38. Said, E., 1978. Introduction to orientalism. *Media studies: A reader*, pp.111-23. Available at:

<https://archive.org/details/6-said-1978-orientalism-introduction>

(accessed on 7 March, 2025)

39. Sayyid, S., 2014. A measure of Islamophobia. *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, 2(1), pp.10-25. Available at:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303578753_A_Measure_of_Islamophobia

(accessed on February 20, 2025)

40. Senanayake, H., 2021. Hollywood and wicked other: the identity formation of “western us” versus “muslim others”. *Open Political Science*, 4(1), pp.64-67.

Available at:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349306422_Hollywood_and_Wicked_Other_The_Identity_Formation_of_Western_Us_Versus_Muslim_Others (accessed on

December 8, 2024)

41. *Septembers of Shiraz* available at:

<https://lookmovie.digital/movies/view/septembers-of-shiraz-2015> (accessed on

December 8, 2024)





A Critical Discourse Analysis of Islamophobia in Selected 21st Century Hollywood Movies



42. Shaheen, J.G., 2012. *Guilty: Hollywood's verdict on Arabs after 9/11*. Interlink Publishing.
43. Shohat, E. and Stam, R., 2014. *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the media*. Routledge.
44. The Lingwist, 2020. *Fairclough's Framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)*. [online] Available at: <https://thelingwist.net/faircloughs-framework-of-critical-discourse-analysis-cda/> [Accessed 3 March 2025].
45. Trust, R., 1997. Islamophobia: A challenge for us all. *London: Runnymede Trust*, 41(3). Available at: <https://www.scribd.com/document/28822108/The-Runnymede-Trust-Islamophobia-a-challenge-for-us-all> accessed on (April 3, 2025)
46. Van Dijk, T.A., 2001. Multidisciplinary CDA: A plea for diversity. *Methods of critical discourse analysis*, 1, pp.95-120.
47. Van Dijk, T.A., 2015. Critical discourse analysis. *The handbook of discourse analysis*, pp.466-485.
48. Véron, L., 1999. *The competitive advantage of Hollywood industry*. Center for International Studies, University of Southern California
49. Widdowson, H.G., 2007. *Discourse analysis* (Vol. 133). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

