

Islamophobia: Picking the Black Sheep in Hollywood

It turned out that as I was watching “Wonder Woman,” I also happened to be reading Eugene Roger’s “The Fall of the Ottomans; the Great War in the Middle East” book. In Wonder Woman, set in the WWI period, it was said that Doctor Poison from the German army (which in the history of WWI it was recorded that German army was fighting together with Turkish troops) was trying to create a dangerous chemical weapon, hence an American soldier named Steve Trevor, later helped by Wonder Woman, stopped the chemical weapon from being used and he died as a martyr. However, Roger’s book said that in the Gallipoli war, while both sides of the war produced chemical weapons, its use was only recorded when General Murray from the UK army stocked up to 4000 gas artillery and used it for its initial attack on the Ottoman position in April 1917. I did not think much about it because at that time I thought that it was only a movie. Perhaps the twist of history was made purely for entertainment. And it was not presented as the main point of the movie. It is not a significant thing, or is it?

While that might be true, one should look at how the Independent writes that “...between 1911 and 2017, more than 800 feature films received support from the US Government’s Department of Defense (DoD)...”, it also explains that the support was ‘traded’ with change of scripts. From this, it is no wonder that movies can no longer be viewed simply as a matter of entertainment.

A movie titled “World War Z” depicts a situation in which “...the Israeli army and “security” agencies are portrayed as the guardians of Jerusalem who built the Apartheid wall in order to keep zombies locked-in behind it.” So this movie is trying to say that the Palestinians are zombies, and the creation of the wall is made simply for protection. History has shown that it was Israel that came invading then peaceful Palestine with the help of Balfour Declaration 100 years ago, not to mention about what has been happening until today.

Why would the US, along with its government go this far? If the reason is to counter terrorism or Daesh narrative-as tweeted by John Kerry on 16 February 2016 while displaying a photo of himself in a meeting with executives from Universal, Warner, Fox, Disney, Sony, Dreamworks among others-then why is the demonizing had been done earlier than that? Even before the term “war on terror” existed? Why is Hollywood so seriously creating a bad image of Islam and Muslims?

The New York Times writes that Michelle C Pautz, an associate professor of Political Science at the University of Dayton said that movies “...contribute to the political socialization...and so what audiences watch and how certain institutions are portrayed over time can be very significant..” in terms of providing influence to public opinion. Pautz’s theory appears to be accurate.

Jack Sheehan did a research regarding public opinion on Islam and Muslims in its relation to Hollywood movies. The Guardian writes how Jack Sheehan who wrote “Reel Bad Arabs” surveyed around 1200 people and concluded that 97% of the respondents believes that Arabs and Muslims “...are unfavourable, coloured by orientalist myths, racist demonising and xenophobia panarolia,” adding that American cinema is to blame for this survey result, given its stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims, for being presented”...as the most vilified group in the history of Hollywood.”

This looks like Islamophobia by design. Hollywood has a lot to do in developing Islamophobia worldwide. And the result is beyond imagination. Hatred towards Islam and Muslims have and will definitely harm Muslims worldwide. Islam and Muslims have been subjected to terrorism. When the reality is, Aljazeera shows that The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) at the University of Maryland found that it is Muslims who “...are in fact the most likely victims of terrorism worldwide,” and not the other way around as it is often portrayed. And Time writes that given the fact that most Americans know very little about Islam or Muslims, as stated by Barack Obama when he was the US President, “...the Bush administration could sell the Iraq war to a fearful and unknowing public.”

Yes, Iraq, among other Muslim populated country is presently a big mess. This mess was caused by a lie about the country’s Weapon of Mass destruction. And until today, no Weapon of Mass Destruction has been found in the country. The war in Iraq serves as an example of how we have been chosen as the black sheep.

Yet, it also cost the United States thousands of lives of American soldiers, and at least \$2 trillion dollars. Soldiers returning from Iraq suffered from the exposure of Depleted Uranium and mental illnesses just to name a few of the impact of Iraq war. Is the war really worth it, even for the United States?

So while Islamophobic messages in Hollywood movies may serve its intended purpose at first, it is worth remembering that it could work like a boomerang to the United States. However, with the current government, this Islamophobic climate might as well continue for some time. And as Reza Arslan said, "Islamophobia has become so mainstream in this country that Americans have been trained to expect violence against Muslims – not excuse it, but expect it. And that's happened because you have an Islamophobia industry devoted to making Americans think there's an enemy within."

Resources

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