



## THE REPRESENTATION OF ISLAM: A SEMIOTIC STUDY OF THE DOCUMENTARY FITNA AND THE PURSUIT OF AN ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVE

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### Abstract

The present study is primarily grounded in the hypothesis that the documentaries on Muslims and Islam especially originated in Europe in the wake of 9/11 are misrepresenting Islam and Muslim' identity and generate a discourse of "Othering" of Islam and Muslims in general as well as those living in the European countries, having far reaching implications. A semiotic analysis of the signs used in it by employing the triadic model of sign given by Charles Peirce with giving particular focus on Indexical signs brought into light the referential and causal relations various signs generate with regard to Muslim identity and Islam. The applications of semiotic practices brought into light significant latent themes in the documentary where Muslims are framed as the "fundamentalist Other". The current study also attempts to put forward an alternative Muslim narrative based on the scholarly discourse of Muslims in the contemporary era. This study also reveals as to as to how the construction of Muslim identity has been depicted by deconstructing the canonical texts as well as the selected discourse generated by some Muslims. Moreover, it brought into light the significant trends in the western digital discourse viz-a-viz Muslims and Islam.

**Keywords:** *Media Representation Of Islam, Muslim Identity, Othering, Semiotic Analysis, Islamophobia.*

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## 1. Introduction

The phenomenon of representation of Muslims is by no means a new occurrence rather its genesis can be traced in the past many centuries especially when the power centre was shifted in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries in the wake of Renaissance and Enlightenment. Since then, Arabs and Muslims have had the special 'place' in the western literature and that place was duly divulged by Edward Said in his *Orientalism*. While discussing the relationship between the east and the west and construction of 'Orient' in the western literature, he comments on Islamic Orient in the following words:

Much of the personal investment in this study derives from my awareness of being an "Oriental" as a child growing up in two British colonies. ... In many ways my study of Orientalism has been an attempt to inventory the traces upon me, the Oriental subject, of the culture whose domination has been so powerful a factor in the life of all Orientals. This is why for me the Islamic Orient has had to be the centre of attention.

(1978, pp. 25-26)

While Said has exhaustively mapped the literature that was produced by the emergence of the book, the phenomenon of representations is still going on rather it has increased its value as well as magnitude. Though Said confined himself to the written text, the phenomenon of the construction of Orient was expanded to the other forms of discourses as well. In the preface of his book *Orientalism*, Ziauddin Sardar (2002) observed 'after retrenching itself in scholarship and literary imagination, Orientalism has moved on to conquer film, television and CD-ROMs.' (p. vii).

It, therefore, needs to be seen in the global power relations. The role of Hollywood in this whole backdrop is very significant. Before discussing its role it seems important to mention here that "Innocence of Muslims" has been also been screened by Hollywood, the world's largest film industry based in the United States, which, though, is termed by some as an outrageous and isolated attempt by some zealots and may not be bracketed with any propagandist or stereotypical discourse generated in the west but framing the film into entire digital discourse of Hollywood and otherwise provide an insightful understanding of the phenomenon.

Jack Shaheen (2006), in his critically acclaimed book *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* maps the history from the earliest days of cinema to the contemporary Hollywood films blockbusters that feature machine gun wielding and bomb blowing "evil" Arabs. While carrying out an exhaustive analysis of the one thousand films he identifies the tendency in the movies that Muslim Arabs are portrayed in the films as

the public enemy number one, brutal, heartless, uncivilized others bent on terrorizing the civilized westerners.

Similarly, Rezayee Yazdi (2006) studied the representation of Muslim image in one hundred Hollywood movies of 20<sup>th</sup> century and showed that what they did is, in fact, misrepresentation. He also divided the Hollywood Cinema in three historical phases: a) The first phase starts from the creation of Hollywood to Zionist regime b) The second phase starts from Zionist regime to Islamic revolution of Iran c) The third phase starts from Islamic revolution to the after effects of 9/11 attacks. In the first phase, the Hollywood Cinema misrepresented Muslims by portraying them primitive, uncivilized and stupid. In the second phase, they were portrayed looters and wild besides making their representation either as rich stupid or powerful cruel. Similarly, in the third phase, Muslims were portrayed as religious fundamentalists who had deep-seated hatred against Judaism and Christianity.

Observing the attitude of Hollywood in representing the Muslims and Islam, Ziauddin Sardar, a London based leading cultural critic observes in his famous book *Orientalism*:

The representation of Muslims as evil terrorists is so deeply etched in Hollywood consciousness that they are now used as standard plot devices even in narratives that have no connection with the Orient whatsoever. (p. 151)

The mentioned studies on Hollywood duly divulge the trends based on the repetitive patterns and also suggest that the latest release of “Innocence of Muslims” seems a continuation of the litany of the attempts made earlier reflecting their well thought out and consistent approach towards the themes related with Muslims. While the phenomenon seems rather obvious by looking at its production over the past many years, it is no more confined to the Hollywood movies and the world of fiction but its manifestations are increasingly becoming visible in other form of mainstream media that significantly included television, newspapers and magazines with a tremendous increase in the wake of 9/11 incidents. For instance, making caricatures of the prophet Muhammad by a Danish Cartoonist Kurt Westergaard and publishing it in *Jyllunds-Posten*, Quran-burning by the US Pastor Terry Jones on March 20, 2012, launching the movement “Burn the Quran”, setting on fire over 100 copies of Quran on Bagram base in Afghanistan, teaching of a course at the US Joint Forces Staff College carrying the contents which say the ‘enemy of US is Islam in general and suggesting that the country might ultimately have to obliterate the Islamic holy cities of Mecca and Medina without regard for civilian deaths, following second world war precedents of the nuclear attack on Hiroshima.’ publishing caricatures by French magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in 2012, publishing a drawing that showed prophet

Muhammad driving a Ryder truck, with a nuclear rocket attached by Doug Marlette in December 2002, mailing toilet papers stamped with the Quran to mosques and media in 2006 by a German political activist Manfred van H and the exhibition profaning the prophet held in July 2007 are some of the attempts taken place in the recent past.

Besides the mainstream media it is also observed that such thematic discourse is also generated and disseminated through making documentaries. Some of the documentaries formed in the recent past include Prophet of Doom: Islam's Terrorist Dogma in Muhammad's Own Words (2004), Submission (2004), True Lies (1994), Kingdom (2007), Obsession: Radical Islam War Against the West (2006), Terror Islam in Its Own Words (2007) Islam What the West Needs to Know (2007), Undercover Mosque (2007), Aching Heart (2007), Undercover Mosque: The Return (2008) and Fitna (2008).

## 2. Significance and Justification of the Study

In this backdrop, the current study seeks to analyse a documentary as a case study which is very significant to understand the whole phenomenon of misrepresentation and stereotyping of the Muslims in the contemporary global political and cultural milieu. For some it may be an extreme example to study the patterns and trends of stereotyping and misrepresentation of Muslims, however, as a matter of fact, there are a number of significant factors that make the choice for analysis plausible:

1. The documentary got international attention (Miller et al, 2010), and its distribution is continuing for quite some time now by Ruder Finn, a public relations firm, based in the United States; 2) In a two day-long conference titled 'Facing Jihad' held in Jerusalem, this movie was shown to the conference participants and it was announced there that it would be shown in several European parliaments (Kalai-O-Waha, 2011); 3) It was made not by an ordinary filmmaker or producer but a very influential political figure of one of the important European countries, Netherlands; 4) The filmmaker – Geert Wilders, wields significant influence in Netherlands as well as other Scandinavian countries. A few developments indicate his popularity and influence: a) 54% of the population of Netherlands express their wish in a poll conducted by TNS NIPO for RTL television to show this film b) Wilders came in second in two polls held in the Netherlands in December 2009 for Politician of the Year. In addition, though in the recent polls his party won 15 seats out of 150 but in the general elections of 2010 'his party surpassed even Christian Democrats (CDA) who, de facto, ran the Netherlands since World War II.' Apropos of the influence of his discourse

in other Scandinavian countries, he became a source of inspiration for Anders Behring Brevik, a Norwegian citizen who bombed the government building in Oslo and killed 69 people saying that he did so in order to save Western Europe and Norway from Muslims takeover. In his manifesto titled as '2083: A European Declaration of Independence' Brevik greatly admired the Geert Wilders, producer and director of *Fitna*; 5) *Fitna* is perhaps the first documentary film which claims that the Quran, the holy book of Muslim community across the globe, gives license to kill and the real source of intolerance among Muslims and the cause of terrorism in the world.

Keeping this backdrop in view a semiotic analysis of the contents of the documentary has been conducted to understand as to how the interplay of the signs constructs the reality and how Muslims and Islam are represented in the documentary *Fitna* through employing various verbal and visual signs. The semiotic framework employed in the current study is the triadic model of Charles Peirce, according to which all the signs are classified into Icon, Index and Symbol. Icon is a sign that resembles the referent or the object. It looks like the referent it represents, and sounds like the referent or retains an image similar to the referent (Kim, 1996). Indexical sign, though, does not represent its signified through resemblance, has associations and inherent connections between the signifier and signified. Often this relation between signs and their referents are causal in nature. A symbol is a sign that is made in an arbitrary manner and has neither resemblance nor existential relationship between the signifier and signified, however, these signs come to existence through social conventions or agreement which provide the basis for meaning. The interplay of all these signs in the documentary carries out the meaning making process in the documentary and constructs a *reality/truth* for the audiences of the documentary. Based on this classification, the analysis will bring into light the referential and causal relations various signs generate with regard to Muslim identity and Islam, significant latent themes in the documentary as to how Muslims are framed and significant trends in the western digital discourse *viz-a-viz* Muslims and Islam. The study also attempts to put forward an alternative Muslim narrative based on the scholarly discourse of the Muslims in the contemporary era.

### 3. Semiotic Analysis of *Fitna*

The first part of the documentary has been divided into five scenes and each scene starts with the verse of the Quran and ends with another verse that also serves as the onset

of another scene. The documentary shows five extracts from the three chapters of the Quran which include Surah Al-Anfal (The Spoils of War), Surah Al-Nisa (The Women) and Surah Muhammad that have been juxtaposed with some other textual extracts spoken or displayed on the screen as the visual images. The general structure of a scene in the documentary includes the audio visual display of a Quranic verse, followed by the speech excerpt(s) of the cleric, comments of some individuals, images mainly reflecting and substantiating the argument explicitly and implicitly stated in the verse.

The documentary starts with appearance of a two-page slide: On the one page the word Qur'an appears while on the word "FITNA" written on it which indexicalise that the violence allegedly perpetrated across the globe is primarily motivated by Quran and thus Islam and dissention are bracketed together in a causal relations signifying that Quran fuels fire and terror in the world. This sign does not create a relation between Muslims and terrorism alone; it primarily brings into surface the relation between Quran and terrorism which is very significant and has far reaching fallouts and implications especially for those who would subscribe to the views presented in the documentary. Among many other this causal relation creates an interpretant in the minds of the viewers that Islam will always remain at war with the rest of the world.

After recitation of the verse by an anonymous cleric the visuals of the twin towers attacks on 9/11 and scenes from the 7/7 Madrid bombing were shown. This was followed by a number of other signs which included the visual images of destruction of infrastructure, screaming of the people present on the occasion, that was followed by a video clip of a cleric who is shown delivering a speech in Arabic and the corresponding English translation is appeared as:

What Allah makes happy? Allah is happy when non-Muslims get killed; annihilate the infidels and the polytheists; Your (Allah's) enemies and the enemies of the religion; Allah count them and kill them to the last one; and don' leave even one.

This video clip was immediately followed by the images of the dead mutilated bodies lying on the ground and a young man smeared in blood, and the badly destroyed image of the train.

It is indexicalised that these two attacks were a direct effect of verse quoted and a threat to the American and European political, strategic and military structures as the World Trade Centre in New York was not just one of the tallest buildings but it was in fact symbol of America's robust economy and resilience and the sign of plane which crashes with this building indexicalise the Muslims and Islam which are going to crash the economic structure and financial prowess of the country. Similarly, the images of the destruction in the wake of the Madrid bombing shown immediately after the display of the

sign on the screen indexicalise Muslims efforts to conquer Spain, one of the important European country and the member of European Union and the country where Muslims ruled 781 years from 711 AD to 1492 AD.

The second scene starts with the words of the Quran ‘Fight them until there is no dissension and the religion is entirely Allah’s’ followed by video clippings of the interviews of some Muslim individuals, clerics and Iranian president who is quoted as saying ‘Islam is a religion that wants to rule the world. It has done so before and eventually will rule it again.’ It is indexicalised that Islam encourages its followers to conquer and rule the world especially by the use of force and Muslims are hell bent upon to materialize this principle into reality creating a referential relation between Islam and hegemony. The reference of Iranian president coupled with comments of other Shia clerics in this scene may also refer the Iranian revolution of 1979 signifying that and that Islam does not only urge its followers to bring only radical change it urges them also to bring violent revolution and Iranian revolution of three decades ago is a case in point, which may repeat in other Muslim countries as well that need to be impeded. Such collage of the signs indexicalise those Muslim political leaders as well as their religious scholars are on the same page with regard to hegemonise the world with the ideology of Muslims and there is no difference between the sentiment on the ground and the structures of power in the Muslim states.

The sign creates an interpretant that Islam commands its followers to carry out a perpetual war against the non believers until every inhabitant of the planet becomes Muslims and the religion of Muslims prevails across the globe and they are urged by their God to unleash a never ending war against all the religions, ideologies, systems and communities of the world particularly the western world and the violent actions by allegedly some Muslims in the west are not isolated acts but manifestation of many signs of Quran including the one mentioned above. It also indexicalises that that the confrontation between Muslims and the west and Europe is not the result of some political and other concomitant dynamics, but it is primarily inspired and motivated by their book that is by and large the agreed document among all the Muslims of the world and hence every Muslim especially one who practices the divine guidance is duty bound to exterminate all the religions and their followers from this planet in order to please their God.

Besides, there are number of other signs which emphasize that the threat comes from within. For instance, Ibrahim Mudeiris, a Palestinian preacher speaks these words to a congregation:

We have ruled the world before, and by Allah, the day will come when we rule the entire world again!

The day will come when we rule America.

The day will come when we rule Britain and the entire world

This image is followed by followed by the clip delivered by a cleric, seemingly an Arab Muslim who says in Arabic ‘Allah commanded us to spread this religion worldwide that subsequently followed by fiery speech of Abdul Rahman Saleem in English having British accent, a British-Iranian activist, not a cleric by his qualification but an engineer by profession and former spokesperson of Al-Muhajiroun a Britain based organization that is banned in the UK. His words are

You will take over the USA!

You will take over the UK!

You will take over Europe!

You will defeat them all!

You will get victory!

You will take over Egypt!

We trust in Allah!

This is immediately followed by the signs (images) of the protest demonstration before Danish embassy in Britain where demonstrators are shown holding signs that read: "Islam will dominate the world" and "Freedom go to hell."

it is important to mention that the speech delivered by none other than a native British Engineer cleric signifies that the threat Europe is facing with regard to Islam is not external only, the real threat comes from within which is further fuelled by Islamic vision of power. While the cleric is an engineer by profession, the appearance of the cleric while delivering his speech also create the interpretant that ‘Conquering Europe’ and ‘Conquering Globe’ mindset is not confined to the Muslim clerics and religious people among them alone, the modern educated Muslims not only share the mindset but propagate publically and urge their fellow beings to translate this vision into a living reality.

Through this extract coupled with the subsequent images appeared in the documentary the systematic relations between Islamic ideology and some of the European Muslim’s conduct in Europe have been brought forth signifying that they seek to impose their ideology on the world especially in the Europe and the United States. Through these signs especially the quadruple repetition of ‘take over’ in the above extract creates and underpins the interpretant of threat that the Muslims are set to take over Europe in particular and world in general.

The third scene of the documentary with the verse of the Quran ----- which is immediately followed by a footage of a bunch of waving daggers smeared with blood are juxtaposed with the image of the beheading of American hostage Eugene Armstrong and display of slaughtered head, newspaper clipping of a news story titled as ‘HITLIST: and names of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Theo van Gogh and Geert Wilders are mentioned along with their photographs. Though these signs it is indexicalised in the documentary that that all the converted or non-practicing Muslims are necessarily to be killed. Through the image the interpretant is created that Islam commands its followers to kill all those who do not subscribe to the Islamic law. Islam and rigidity and intolerance are associated through this sign, and by Salman Rushdie and Hirsi Ali it is signified that there is no room for dissent in Islamic framework and it bars the freedom of expression.

The second part of the documentary titled as “The Netherlands under the Spell of Islam” is characterized with a number of images signifying Muslim population of the country characterized with their cultural signs and demonstrating their adherence to the ideals of Islam as the emerging threat to the demographic composition and political representation of the country. The selected images, photographs and video clips include burqa clad and scarf wearing women, statistical graphs indicating the rise in Muslim population in Europe, the security personnel setting off their shoes before entering the mosque, blood smeared children and a man pointing gun at Afghan style Burqa clad woman who is about to be shot for committing adultery are the prominent ones.

The collage of the signs suggests that this rise which is primarily caused by conversion would soon change the demographic composition of the country that would have serious political implications as due to this change Muslims would occupy the political and other state institutions in the country and the natives would be at their mercy.

The signs in this part of the documentary also equate Islam with Nazism and communism, creating an interpretant that the west is at war with Islam as it was in the past with Nazism and Communism. It does not make parallels only between Nazism and any specific group within Islam but it indiscriminately equates it with Islam per se with Nazi ideology. It in a way equates the Quran with *Mein Kampf* (1926) (My Struggle/My Battle), a book that is written by Nazi leader Adolf Hitler and mainly deals with his life and political ideology.

The analysis carried out so far brought into light the major themes along with the added emphasis as to how they were constructed by employing various signs in the documentary. The indexicality of the selected signs used in the documentary has remained the dominant thread, as it has been identified in the course of analysis that it was the main

technique employed in the documentary for the meaning making process. It suggested that through a very careful selection of verbal and visual signs a systematic referential and causal relation between the Muslims canonical texts especially the Quran coupled with the discourse of some selected Muslim clerics and violence, terrorism, misogyny, sadism and other concomitant themes discussed above. It is also observed the cause and effect structure of the signs, in fact, constructs a 'truth/reality' for the audiences of the documentary that the manifestations of the problem as depicted in the documentary is deeply rooted in the perennial genesis of the Muslims' primary texts and their scholars' discourse and this phenomenon will remain so as long as the genesis/roots are intact. This indexicality necessitates to look into the alternative narrative of the whole phenomenon.

#### **4. The Alternative Narrative to Representation and stereotyping in *Fitna***

The major themes emerged in the analysis may not be termed as the new ones as most of them are rooted in history and recurrent in the discourse generated by the orientalists from time to time in the past as well in the contemporary era but their timing especially in the post 9/11 period, as this study also focuses, gives them credence to interpret and discuss them in the present timeframe and global political and cultural weather. However, it seems significant to mention that while the discourse generated by the Orientalists in the history with regard to Muslims and Islam has got parallels with the contemporary efforts in this regard and the documentary *Fitna* is seemingly a part of it but the most significant aspect of the current wave is that it aims to target one of the core canonical texts of Muslims in a very blunt and abusive manner and links it with whatever bad the planet is witnessing.

The identified themes are very broad and wide ranging and recurrent in the contemporary ideological, political, cultural and mass media discourse, it may not be possible nor is the scope of the present study to cover each theme and its concomitant aspects, we would, however, confine our discussion to the selected significant themes emerged in the analysis and their implications. They are as under:

#### **5. Terrorism: Quran Gives License to Kill?**

This is one of the fundamental arguments and recurrent motif of the documentary presented through a number of signs that the canonical texts of the Muslims are responsible for violence. While Muslims and terrorism are frequently bracketed in the mass media discourse especially in the post 9/11 period and it has almost become axiomatic in some quarters to repeat the cliché that "not all Muslims are terrorists, but all terrorists are Muslims, clubbing Islam, as a religion per se, with terrorism and saying the documentary

that it is none other than the Quran that gives license to kill. By this link it is conveyed that the fault primarily lies with the book and not the followers and it is the book which gives license to kill who don't subscribe its views. However, the same book condemns killing of a single innocent man and equates the killing of an innocent man with the killing of the whole humanity.

... He who slays a soul unless it be (in punishment) for murder or for spreading mischief on earth shall be as if he had given life to all mankind (32 Al-Maidah)

As one may not construct the overgeneralization for Christianity by referring from the Bible 'Make war on them until you have wiped them out (Samuel, 15:18), the same may not be done in the case of any other religion including Islam.

Islamic code of war prohibits Muslim combatants to bring collateral damage. Prophet Muhammad says 'Do not kill women, Children and the old.' At the victory of Makkah the Muslim army were instructed not to attack any injured, nor to chase who runs for his life and give assurance and safety for one who sits in his homes and keeps the door shut.

Similarly Abu Bakar (632-634 AD), the first Khalif of the Muslims while giving instructions to the army that was leaving for Syrian expedition that women, children and aged should not be murdered, dead bodies would not be disfigured; monks and devotees would not be harassed, worship places would not be demolished, fruit bearing trees would not be cut down and harvests not to be set ablaze, towns would not be ruined (Kadduri, 2010, p. 102). This suggests that the religion which does not allow its followers to damage even trees, how it could urge the believer to bring destruction to the world. So it does not seem a balanced approach to construct a reality that Islam is going to explode the planet. As far as the use of force is concerned Quran at various occasions allows exercising the force but in this case Quran may not be singled out as the only scripture giving this right for self defence, rather almost all the primary scriptures of the major religions of the world significantly included Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and modern international law not only grant this right but the glorification of violence can also be observed in many scriptures. Besides, having the similarities with other faiths and contemporary international legal order, Quran does allow the use of force but it does not encourage it rather permit it as a last resort, perhaps that is why there are 70 such occasions in the Quran where prohibitions against warring are found (Pandya & Laipson, 2009). Likewise, the Prophet Muhammad also states 'Never desire war and aggression. Always ask God for security and peace; but when peace is threatened, heaven is beneath the shadows swords' (Muslim, 1998). In addition, in case of war the Quran does not allow the unproportional use of force and confine the Muslims armies to its minimum use in order to attain the

objectives among which significantly included the establishment of peace. So the argument that terrorism is fuelled by Quran and Quran gives license to kill may not be substantiated by the contextual reading of the book.

While there are a number of aspects related to this debate but the limited scope of research they may not be covered. The researcher, however, does suggest the readers to study *Fiqh of Jihad* (Qaradawi, 2009), *Jihad: Mazhamat and Baghawat* (Ahmed, 2012) and *Islamic Code of War and Peace: A comparative Study of Major Civilizations* (Maududi, 2011), *Islam International Law and the World Today* (Ghazi, 2011) as these recent works provide the alternative paradigm and largely address the issues emerged in the debate regarding Islam and terrorism and the concomitant aspects of this debate.

## 6. The Mystery of 9/11

9/11 is indeed a watershed in the contemporary history which marks a new epoch in Islam's or for that matter Muslims relations with the West. There is no denying the fact that 9/11 episode was very tragic and perturbing act but bracketing it with Quranic teachings and Muslims and constructing the negative stereotyping of Islam and Muslims, as is done in the documentary, may be termed as the sweeping overgeneralisation. With regard to the incidents of 9/11 that practically became the turning point in the global political landscape, much has been discussed on almost every significant aspect of the tragedy and there are a number of theories which reject the official position of the United States that this act was done by Al Qaeda especially the research carried out by an American physicist and Professor Emeritus Steven Jones (2006) of Brigham Young University, and Griffin (2007) seriously shroud the official claims of the State Department. So the counter narratives against the United States official narrative especially the 9/11 Commission Report released on July 22, 2003 are too much significant to be ignored. Michael Meacher (2003), former minister of the state for environment in the Tony Blair's cabinet in a detailed article 'This War on Terror is bogus' remarked that '... plans for military action against Afghanistan and Iraq were in hand well before 9/11'. He maintained in the same article:

...The BBC reported (September 18 2001) that Niaz Niak, a former Pakistan foreign secretary, was told by senior American officials at a meeting in Berlin in mid-July 2001 that "military action against Afghanistan would go ahead by the middle of October". Until July 2001 the US government saw the Taliban regime as a source of stability in Central Asia that would enable the construction of hydrocarbon pipelines from the oil and gas fields in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, through Afghanistan and Pakistan, to the Indian Ocean. But, confronted with the Taliban's refusal to accept US conditions, the

US representatives told them "either you accept our offer of a carpet of gold, or we bury you under a carpet of bombs. (Meacher, 2003, para. 2)

Having said so and besides putting all the theories aside, if the claims of the state department are even taken on the face value, this act whosoever carries out cannot be justified by the Muslims' canonical texts especially the Quran as well as the discourse of the mainstream Muslim discourse both in history and the contemporary world. That is why the 9/11 tragedy was condemned across the Muslim world and Muslims scholars expressed the deep sympathies with the near ones of the victims of the incident. So to portray that this incident is motivated by Quran or the mainstream discourse of the Muslim scholars and Muslims were in euphoria over this incident many not be substantiated and this stereotypical representation through this depiction seems an attempt to create an 'Islamophobic reality' for the viewers.

### **7. Islam, Colonialism/Imperialism and Universalism**

One of the significant themes of the documentary is Islamic Imperialism and Muslims' ambitions to rule the world and impose their world order and worldview in the world. The global and universal approach of the religion was projected to reflect the colonial mindset of the Muslims and implicitly the reference is made to the Muslims history of ruling the various parts of the world since the mid seventh century which significantly included Arab World, North Africa, and Middle East. The notable Muslims regimes included Caliphates, Ummayyads (661- 750 AD), Abbasids(750-1258 AD), Fatimids (909-1171), Ajuuraan( 14<sup>th</sup> Century to 17 Century AD), Gazanavids (963-1187 AD), Seljuqs (1037- 1194 AD), Safavids (1301-1736 AD), Mughals (1526 -1857 AD) and Ottomans (1299- 1922 AD) and this series of regimes testify the claim that that Muslims ruled the larger part of the world and they may aspire to restore the leading role in the world. The argument of Muslims' aspiration to rule the world is not new especially in the literature produced by the orientalist, but it is indexicalised in the documentary that the terrorist incidents in America and UK in particular were primarily caused by Muslims ambition to rule rather conquer the world but the violent acts in the world are deeply rooted in political dynamics and not precisely ideological ones. According to Robert A. Pape and James K. Feldman (2010), in their recent well researched book *Cutting the Fuse: The Explosion of Global Suicide Terrorism and How to Stop It* (2012), conclude that it is the foreign military occupation that drives suicide terrorism and this phenomenon has extended at the transnational level.

Although existing theories contend that it is a product of religious fanaticism or economic alienation, this volume shows that the logic of military occupation should be extended to account for transnational suicide terrorism. (p. 11)

Islam is indeed universal in approach and its message is for the whole world and humanity and perhaps this vision of universalism, cultural plurality and other concomitant characteristics appeal a larger population of the world to adopt it in their individual life as well as their political system.

### **8. Islam, Nazism and Communism**

With regard to Islam's causal relations with intolerance and fanaticism, some discussion has already been made, there is however need to discuss the indexicality which is created through bracketing Islam with Nazism and communism and equating Quran with *Mein Kampf*. While the scope of the study may not allow the researcher to extensively deliberate upon this glaringly faulty equation between the two ideologies as Nazism is primarily based on the biological racism and antisemitism while Islam does not share this vision of Nazism, it would briefly touch upon the significant aspects of the debate. As far as the comparison of the two books are concerned, one may draw some parallels by doing some surface reading and practices of some individuals, but the careful contextual reading of Quran and life of Prophet Muhammad may not help deciphering the vision and approach of the book written by Adolf Hitler rather it reveals that there are little parallels between the two in the strict sense as Islam by its vision, approach and strategy is generically different. Racial superiority is the cornerstone of Nazism while Islam categorically turns down this notion as the Quran states:

Human beings, we created you all from a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes so that they may know one another. Verily the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most God fearing of you. (Quran, 49:13)

Abul'Ala Maududi while commenting on this verse observes:

... through the present verse mankind is being warned about the major erroneous notion that has always led to the spread of evil around the world; namely the notion of prejudice based on race, colour, language and homeland and nationality... While this diversity is quite natural, it does not provide any justification for some people to claim any inherent superiority over others; to consider some on these grounds as high and others as low, some as noble and others as ignoble. Considerations of colour, race or nationality do not warrant people of any particular colour, race or nationality to regard themselves as superior to others. God created such diversities to foster greater cooperation and enable these different entities to become mutually introduced. There is only one basis for

regarding one as better than the other and that is on account of their moral excellence. (Maududi, 1998, pp. 1055-1066)

Likewise, such vision is also reflected in the farewell sermon of the Prophet Muhammad delivered in 632 AD in the Mount of Arafat. He says:

All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non Arab nor a non Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over black nor does a black have any superiority over white except by piety and good action. (Shamim, 2011, p. 168)

Similarly, anti-Semitism had been one of the most important characteristics of Nazism but Islam is not inherently an anti Jew religion, as if it were the case it would not have asked the Jews to come to terms what is common between Islam and Judaism (3:64).

Besides, Islamic ideology is equated with communism and it is signified that what communism was to the western ideology and ethos, Islam is to the contemporary west. And by bringing out this comparison the European masses in particular and all those who do not share the ideology of Islam are being educated that Islamic ideology is an emerging threat to the sustenance of the western world. Such parallels seems to have been constructed and augmented for 'Europe experienced a unity vacuum and needed a new *bête noire* against which to align: Islam filled that gap' (Esposito & Kalin, 2011, p. 58) and also it is believed in the power echelons of the west that 'fear of the Green Menace (green being the colour of Islam) may well replace that of the Red Menace of world communism' (Esposito, 1992, p. 5). So the analogy between Islam and Communism needs to be seen in this context.

Moreover, the parallels between the two may be drawn on some aspects but fundamentally and in terms of their vision and approach they are quite different. Similarly, by doing some surface reading parallels of Communism with Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism might be drawn, but generically and in all contents and purposes they are very different if not poles apart.

### **9. Islam, Pluralism, Freedom of Speech and Apostasy**

The analysis also brought into surface the theme that Islam is inherently against pluralism and freedom of speech and the Muslims who deviate from the religion is destined to be killed. In the course of the analysis it has also been brought into light that Islam commands its followers to kill those who do not subscribe to the vision and views of Islam. The killing of Theovan, Eugene Armstrong's beheading and his disembodied head displayed in the documentary juxtaposed with the verse 89 of the chapter 4 of the Quran and the word *Tauheed* (Oneness of Allah) accompanied with the beheaded image of

Eugene and the references to Hirsi Ali, and Salman Rushdie in the documentary convey Islam's refusal to tolerate the dissenting voice and this image refers to Islamic concept of Apostasy.

While the concept of apostasy does exist in Islamic jurisprudence and plethora of literature on its various dimensions is also available, it needs to be understood and looked into the right context. As far as the punishment of an apostate is concerned it is by and large the unanimous view of all the mainstream Muslim jurists and scholars that he should be punished, but the death penalty is not the only punishment; he should also be imprisoned till he repents, as some scholars view.

It is also important to point out here here that bringing someone in the category of an apostate and awarding the punishment is sole prerogative of Islamic state and individual and groups do not have the authority to determine and execute any Muslim who they think is an apostate. According to Muhammad Hamidullah (1977), the capital punishment to apostasy is given on the grounds of treason and such punishment may not be confined to any one religion or ideology.

To wage war against apostates is justified on the same principle as that on which the punishment of a solitary apostate is based. The basis of Muslim polity being religious and not ethnological or linguistic, it is not difficult to appreciate the reason for penalising the act of apostasy, for it constitutes a politico-religious rebellion. The greater the harm of a given rebellion to a polity, the greater is the severity of repression. Every civilisation, not the least the modern Western one - both in the communistic and capitalistic manifestations - has provided capital punishment against violating the integrity of what it considers its very *raison d'etre*; and one cannot deny that right to Islam. As an independent organic community, Islam will have the liberty to determine what points should be dearer to it: colour of one's skin, language spoken by its subjects or ideology which animates its existence. As a passing remark, let us recall that the Byzantine law of the epoch of the Prophet also punished with death the apostasy from the Byzantine sect of Christianity. (p. 6)

As far as the discourse generated by Hirsi Ali and Salman Rushdie is concerned, one needs to look at the issue objectively and in the proper context. Even the surface analysis suggests that 'The Satanic Verses' and 'Submission' are not in fact the critique of Islam and Muslims; they rather abuse one of the largest communities and the second largest religion of the world disregarding even all the canon of freedom of speech codified none

other than European governments and International bodies.<sup>1</sup> ‘Infidel’, an autobiography of Ayan Hirsi Ali, is one such example that is highly provocative regarding the prophet Muhammad, the most sacrosanct personality for Muslims, and in fact incites the members of the Muslim community for the violent response.

With regard to the theme that Islam does not allow freedom of expression, the careful reading of Islamic texts and the practices suggests that Islam does encourage its followers and mankind to speak truth, as Quran states ‘Believers, fear Allah and speak the Truth’ (Quran 33:70), and in other occasion sates ‘There is no compulsion in religion’ which indicates Islam considers right of freedom as the fundamental human right and Muslims vision of plurality and dissent. Similarly the second Khalif of Muslim Umer Farooq remarks ‘Since when did you take people as slaves when their mothers gave birth to them free.’ These all statements came before the world had got acquaintance with the views of Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466- 1536), Galileo (1564- 1642), Voltaire (1694-1778) Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1788) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) regarding freedom of speech and expression. However, Islam like other religions and the contemporary international legal covenants do not encourage the unbridled freedom that ultimately brings anarchy in the society. So in this context to single out Islam as the ‘other’ may not be balanced approach to be put forward before the wider audiences to project that Islam is antithesis to the notion of freedom as is done by the documentary at hand and portrayed through the extract mentioned above.

It is also signified in the documentary that Islam allows perpetual war against infidels. Although among Islamic jurisprudence some scholars hold this view but their opinion in this regard does not seem in conformity with one of the important injunctions of Quran that ‘Let there be no compulsion in religion...’ (2: 256) and ‘to you is your religion, and to me, my religion (109: 6). In another occasion Quran says ‘(O Prophet!) exhort them your task is only to exhort; you cannot compel them to believe’ (Quran 48:28).

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<sup>1</sup> The Second para of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948 delimits the right to freedom saying ‘in the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.’(The Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/history.shtml>)

## 10. Islam and Women with special reference to Netherlands

While portrayal of Muslim woman as a subjugated and victimized object, as is done in the documentary, is not the recent phenomenon, according to Edward Said 'Muslim women are special object of western representation, always shown as victimized and vulnerable', such portrayal has been tremendously intensified in the recent years both in terms of magnitude as well as thrust of the argument.

It seems very paradoxical that on the one hand the theme of women's oppression and subjugation is conveyed through verbal as well as visual images in the documentary while on the other hand there is a tremendous rise of women's embracing Islam in Europe. This fact on the ground is not reconciling with one of the significant themes brought out while carrying out the analysis of the documentary. The scholarly study based on empirical research titled as *Women Embracing Islam: Gender and Conversion in the West* and edited by Nieuwkerk (2006) of Nijmegen University Netherlands sought to investigate this paradoxical phenomenon and understand what primarily caused the women of the west especially of the USA, UK, Netherlands and some other European countries to convert to Islam. The book, which is based on the joint contributions of leading historians, anthropologists, sociologists and theologians, concluded that a single factor may not be determined for this trend, however, the study, however, brought into light some common motivations which included 'attraction to Islam's high regard for family and community, strict moral and ethical standards, rationality and spirituality of its theology as well as a disillusionment with the Christianity and with the unrestrained sexuality of so much western culture.' This comprehensive study demystifies the implicit argument in the documentary that Islam is not only a misogynist religion but it also oppresses the women in a very brutal and cruel manner which the documentary sought to reflect through various images.

## 11. Islamophobia and Stereotypical 'Reality'

While the signs in the documentary dealt with the number of themes, discussed earlier, they are integrated, have an underlying link and share the thematic unity that Islamic ideology and Muslims are emerging threat to the world especially Europe. Though the threat narrative that 'the Muslims are coming, the Muslims are coming' (Pipes, 1990, pp. 28-33) is not a new phenomenon, it can be traced back especially to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when Islam was started being taken as the 'real threat' (Esposito, 1992, p. 51) but this was in fact the Muslims' reaction and rebuttal to the European colonialism and imperialism that challenged Muslims identity and their political role and for many of them colonialism even conjures up memories of crusades (ibid). This

phenomenon having roots both in near and far history has been greatly intensified after the incidents of 9/11 and since then Muslims were being aggressively demonized in the academic discourses and mass media representations. However, the facts on the ground make this whole discourse of Muslims representation questionable as they do not subscribe to the views portrayed in the mass media. The massive multilayered empirical research study whose data has been collected from the 35 predominantly Muslim nations and conducted by The Gallup titled as *Who speaks for Islam: What a billion Muslims really think* is a case in point. In this study, when asked what they (Muslims) most admired in the west. The sizable number of Muslims mentioned the three spontaneous responses (1) technology (2) the west's value system, hard work, self responsibility, rule of law, cooperation and (3) fair political systems, democracy respect of human rights, freedom of speech, gender equality (p. 80). Likewise, the majority of the respondents of the predominantly Muslim countries condemn the twin tower attacks, while only 7% view these attacks justified (p. 97) that can obviously be termed as the negligible minority and may not be taken as the views of the majority.

Besides, some influential voices from the west also demystify the fabrication of causal relation between the phenomenon of threat and Islam. According to Robert Fisk (Awan, 2011):

I don't think Muslims are threat to our society or the west; a very good friend of mine met me in Dublin the other day and asked me: Isn't Islam really a threat to us Robert, after all? I replied, hold on a second please, Is the Egyptian Army in Dublin? Is the Syrian Army in the Washington? Is the Algerian Army in London? No, it is our army there in Egypt, it is our army in Iraq and Afghanistan and even going into Pakistan from time to time, they are not coming to us; we're out there but somehow we have projected this fear of ours in the case of Islam into totally an imaginative world in which armies of the Muslims world are going back past to swamp London, Vienna, Paris Washington, you name it.

George Galloway British Member of Parliament (Awan, 2011) also observes:

Muslims are not concerned about the lengths and skirts worn by the girls in the Stockholm or the existence of the red-light area in Amsterdam; Muslims are angry for what we are doing to them; they just want to live their lives they want to; they don't want to be occupied theirs or their fathers' homeland; therefore the myth created by the new cons that Muslims and Islam challenge "our way of life" is a fake polarity and fake dichotomy.

Most importantly the confession of one of the producers of *Fitna* and former vice president of Party for Freedom, Netherland, Van Dorn who embraced Islam in 2013 is a significant acknowledgment to understand as to how the facts have been distorted to carry out misrepresentation and stereotyping of Muslims and Islam. He acknowledged that the stereotyping and prejudices in the media over the last 10 to 15 years constructed his negative view about Islam, saying ‘For me, Islam was a violent religion that oppressed women and was no good for society.’ (Arab News, 2013). However, when he started a determined study of Quran, Hadith and biography of the prophet Muhammad he came to know that Islam was the total opposite of what he had thought it was, and it then became easy to embrace the faith’. (ibid)

## 12. Conclusion

While the study mainly confined itself to the rigorous analysis of a significant documentary of the recent time which is a purposive sample of the documentaries and films being produced recently on Islam and Muslims in the west, it does provide us an insight to understand the whole phenomenon of misrepresentation of Muslims and Islam in the current global context bringing into light some significant trends in the western digital discourse *viz-a-viz* Muslims and the bearings it has for the global peace and harmony.

The depiction of Muslim and Islam in the popular discourses seems an effort to enrich the discourse on new Orientalism and reinforcement of the binary between “us” and “they”. This new revival of Orientalism by demonising Islam and Muslims and terming them as “Other” and creating a false fear especially in Europe that Muslim are ready to take over the world would widen the rift between the cultures and religions. As the phenomenon of stereotyping and misrepresentation served as an ideological tool in the history to sustain the colonial projects, the same can be true for such discourse which is being generated through misrepresentation of the contemporary Muslims in the digital media in order to advance the project of new imperialism.

Misrepresentation, stereotyping and Othering of the community which is over 1 billion in number and spread out in almost all the parts of the world, and generate a discourse to substantiate the argument that Muslims and their religion are inherently dogmatic, violent, fanatic and anti rational not only far from reality on ground; it may not bring any good for the world but as it likely to have the negative implications for the peace of the world and harmony between the religious communities.

The (mis) representation and stereotyping mapped in the current study have far reaching implications. It is likely to have construct, augment and solidify the binaries such

as Islam and human rights, Islam and Democracy, Islam and Peace, Islam and Plurality and Islam and Freedom. In addition, it may fuel further the theses of clash of civilizations and perpetual confrontation between Islam and the west and may dent heavily to the efforts being made to maintain global peace and justice. Such stereotyping and representation may increase further discrimination against Muslims in Europe which has also been reflected in a report published by Amnesty International in 2012 (Amnesty International, 2012). Moreover, such hate filled discourse may become fuelling force to create more Breviks<sup>2</sup> and Alex Wiens<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Anders Behring Brevik, a Norwegian citizen who bombed the government building in Oslo and killed 69 people at the Campy of Worker Youth League on July 22, 2012. He confessed that his purpose of killing was to save Western Europe and Norway from Muslim takeover. He admired Geert Wilders in his manifesto titled as '2083: A European Declaration of Independence.'

<sup>3</sup> Alex Wiens, a German citizen and Russian immigrant stabbed a Muslim woman wearing headscarf to death in the German court. In a quarrel between Alex Wiens and Marwa El Shirbini in a park in Germany on August 21, 2008 Wien began abusing the lady saying her 'terrorist', 'Islamist' and 'slut'. On these charges when Wiens was charged and called in the court, he said Muslims were monsters for him and why they were not deported after 9/11. After giving these statements, he attacked her in the court with a knife and assassinated her with 15 stabs in the presence of her child, husband and other people present in the court room.

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