The Representation of Arabs and Muslims in Western Media

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Every subject, whatever its objective may be, does not stem from nothing, nor does it come out of the blue, but it is the product or rather the synthesis of different criteria that instigate its various points and blend them into one single channel. This paper does not indeed diverge away from the aforementioned framework as it outlines the thesis and antithesis which stand respectively for the Western media and Arab and Muslim thinkers. At the same time, this paper sheds light, though laconically, on the way Arabs and Muslims are represented in the Western arts, aiming at drawing an analogy between the past view and the present conceptualization. The objective of juxtaposing two different eras is to demonstrate that the West had been perpetuating the stereotypical images of Arabs and Muslims and that the sole difference between the past and the present lies chiefly in the means and not in the content.

This article also seeks to outline the way Muslims and Arabs are conceptualized in the Western media together with the drastic effect which scars the Western people. The main concern will focus on the analysis of the distorted images, fabricated views, overgeneralization which typically characterize the Western representation of Muslims with reference to some particular incidents chiefly the Gulf War, the bombing of Oklahoma and the bombardment of Twin Towers. Also this paper is the outcome of different sources namely articles, books, movies, and cartoons. To give the devil his due and also not to disapprove of biased views and then be partial, my reading and analysis comprises both Western and Arab thinkers and it includes also biased and moderate or rather fair views of Western media.

The Western representation of Muslims and Arabs is not a recent fabrication but it had been operational and deep-rooted in the West conceptualization ever since the first contacts with Arabs and Muslims. Down to the Middle Ages, especially during the Crusade Wars and along the Arabs expansion in Europe until the very days of the Third Millennium, the West promotes almost the same stereotypes for Arabs and Muslims. Whether the contact took place in the foregone centuries or it happens recently, the West preserve a persisting conceptualization of the Arabs and Muslims as an alien "Other" or rather "Enemy", though both the means of communication and ascribing

terminologies have known some changes. Edward Said once noted that the West promotes a deep-rooted hatred for Islam:

The term Islam as it is used today seems to mean one simple thing, but in fact is part fiction, part ideological label, part minimal designation of a religion called Islam. Today Islam is peculiarly traumatic news in the West. During the past few years, especially since events in Iran caught European and American attention so strongly, the media have therefore covered Islam: they have portrayed it, characterized it, analyzed it, given instant courses on it, and consequently they have made it known. But this coverage is misleadingly full, and a great deal in this energetic coverage is based on far from objective material. In many instances Islam has licensed not only patent inaccuracy, but also expressions of unrestrained ethnocentrism, cultural, and even racial hatred, deep yet paradoxically free-floating hostility (Agha 2).

 If the West resorts to fictional and non-fictional writings or to travel literature and annals in earlier confrontations with Arabs and Muslims, recently the West has recourse to Media. The ascribed terms to the Arabs, though they change in accordance with times, not surprisingly, they converge in disparagement. For example, in the past Arabs and Muslims were largely recognized in the West as "erotic", "primitive", "ignorant", "slave traders" among other many derogatory terms. Lately, the terms such as "terrorist", "fundamentalist" and "blood-thirsty" are the terms that are over-generally ascribed to the Arabs and Muslims. Jack G. Shaheen recapitulates Esposito (Islamic Threat, pp. 203, 180.) and affirms that:

Research verifies that lurid and insidious depictions of Arabs are staple fare. The Arab Muslim continues to surface as the threatening cultural "Other." As John Esposito says, "Fear of the Green Menace [green being the color of Islam] may well replace that of the Red Menace of world communism. . . . Islam is often equated with holy war and hatred, fanaticism and violence, intolerance and the oppression of women.

  The general opinion of American converges matches that of the Europeans: Islam constitutes a threat to the West. In this connection, the West has the right to defend itself against such a 'menace' and thus it mobilizes all sorts of materials: military, economic, and media.

Distortion of Islamic concepts and identity

Whether they are televised or printed, it is not surprising that Western media reports maintain a constant distorted image of Arabs and Muslims. Fabricated stereotypes of Islam are omnipresent in Western media through all means of communication. What is lamentably odd is that Arabs and Muslims are seen as one and unique entity with the aim to be arbitrarily regarded collectively as anti-rational, barbaric, anti-democratic, etc. To achieve this aim the western media deliberately distort many Islamic concepts.

Basically, as it is embedded in the term itself, Islam means peace and it is considered an essential precondition for maintaining the mainstream harmony and amity with non-Muslims. On this basis, Jihad comes as second alternative when peace is not respected. However, the concept Jihad has undergone a series of deformations. In the first place, it links Muslims to bloodthirsty people and makes them a love-violence nation. Then, stripping it from its religious and spiritual connotation, the West reduces the concept Jihad to a mere act of terrorism.

Literally, the concept "jihad" is not confined in violent acts and war as it is conceptualized and recognized in Western world, but it is open to different acts and performances that a Muslim can perform. Jihad, for example, can be applicably related to an individual "refraining from wrongdoing", to a "woman agonizing in child-birth", to a "man struggling and endeavouring to up-bring his family", besides, of course, taking a "holy war" as a defence but never as an attack. In this respect, the analogy between the principles of Islam and violent acts is a distortion of facts that is caused primarily by the Western deliberate ignorance of Islamic principles.

Central to the fact that Western media creates inaccurate preconception about the principles of Islam, the news reporters distort the true meaning of the term fundamentalism. According to Webster's New World Dictionary, the term fundamentalism is "religious beliefs based on a literal interpretation of everything in the Bible and regarded as fundamental to Christian faith and morals". The definition shows that the term means to take the religious creed as it is and thus it is the normal and accepted way of worshiping God. If this is true for Christianity, why should it be otherwise for Islam? It seems that fundamentalism is entirely related and even restricted to Islam and Muslims while Western media turn the blind eye towards Christian and Jewish fundamentalism and more particularly what is called "Christian Zionism" under whose emblem G.W. Bush fought in the Middle East. On this basis, when applied or related to Muslims, fundamentalism is stripped from its literal meaning and granted a pejorative one, connoting mainly extremism and terrorism.

Similarly, in conjunction with the distortion of facts and the creation of stereotyped images of the Orient's culture, Arabs costumes do not escape the target of contempt of the Western media. Hence, the scarf and the veil are reduced to the level of masks worn by terrorists in order not to be recognised. In this way, the Islamic veil and scarf are divested from their religious and cultural symbolism of chastity. Hidden behind their scarf and veil, Muslim women are thus equated to masqueraded terrorists and evil doers. Some claim that putting a veil has nothing to do with religious principles, but it is simply a method to cover their "ugly faces". On the other hand, bearded Muslims (other bearded religious people are not of course included) are usually equated to prehistoric and barbaric persons who are likely disposed to perform any irrational act. Either sex, be it male or female, raises doubts why does he/she look so "exotic" in his/her Islamic clothes.

The Kaba is veiled. The Kaba, a huge cube belived to be built by Abraham, is the holiest shrine in the Islamic world. Once a year Muslims make a pilgrimage to Mecca. Everyone wears white to represent group unity and a shared belief in Islam, but no one wears a face veil. This is because, according to the Quran, nothing should come between Muslims and God during the pilgrimmage. The Kaba, however, is veiled, which further

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If we consider the pictures above it is strikingly noticeable that both in picture 2 and 3 the veiled Muslim women are looked at suspiciously by the other women. In picture 2 a Western women forget to concentrate on her delicious apple while giving great interest to the veiled woman sat next to her. In picture 3 the passer-by modern woman does not heed the modern lady walking in front of her while turning around to contemplate the veiled woman walking at a distance from her.

The fact of associating Arabs and does not discriminate among gender. The curiosity that bearded Muslim may raise touches also fair sex. As it exemplified in pictures 2 and 3 above, the Muslim women in their "khimar" do not only attract the attention the of the other women but they also rise their doubt and become suspicious of their identity.

Along with fabricated images ascribed to Arabs clothes, the Arabs' turban or any piece of cloth with which they cover their heads becomes the target of contempt in Western media. Because of this habit, Arabs are nicknamed "ragheads", a derogatory word used to designate Muslims. Shaheen summarizes aptly the stereotyping of Western media especially movies stating that

For more than a century movies have dramatized myth making. Ever since the camera began to crank, the unkempt Arab has appeared as an uncivilized character, the cultural Other, someone who appears and acts differently than the white Western protagonist, someone of a different race, class, gender or national origin. The diverse Islamic world is populated solely with bearded mullahs, shady sheikhs in their harems, bombers, backward Bedouin, belly dancers, harem maidens and obsequious domestics. Image makers cover women in black from head to toe and have them follow several paces behind abusive sheikhs, their heads lowered, as mute, uneducated, unattractive, enslaved beings, solely attending men.

The Western woman's curiosity and suspicion in picture 1 do not reflect her personal decision and conduct but rather they are stimulated and oriented by the preconceptions that are collectively worked up the West.

The naming has even more vicious and dangerous repercussions especially when it is related to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) once caricatured hiding time-bomb under his turban. On this basis, the same strategy of distorting the true meaning of Arab Muslims' costumes is maintained whether they are worn by females or males.

In the same way, Arabic and Islamic art does not escape the process of distortion and modification. The operation is meant to actualize multi-dimension objectives. The Western media allocate Arab Muslims in three Bs: "billionaire", "bomber", and "belly dancer". The sole aim is either to make fun of Arabs' art, or to obliterate it, or to make it valueless in comparison with the West's.

1 - Disney's Orientalism. Aladdin presents the highly sexualized belly-dancer as its one mode of representing Arab women. Even Princess Jasmine is sexualized in similar terms.	2 - The lascivious Arab man: note how the man has a darker skin color than the woman, pairing race with unbridled sexuality.
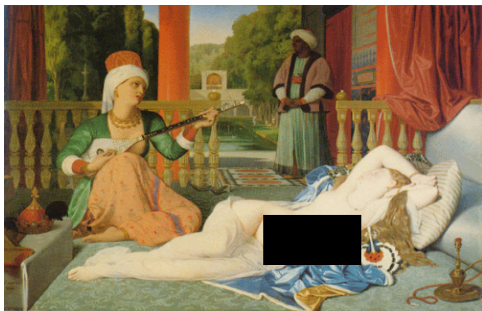
The image above by Ingres deals with similar themes to those of Gerome's work. Although Ingres also uses props such as architecture, fabric, and a hookah to fabricate authenticity, his images are much more eroticized. His inspiration often came from Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's letters, which he quotes in his sketch books. He exploits her descriptions of the female spaces she encountered to create a stereotypical sexy and exotic scene for the European viewer.	One of the ways photography was used by Colonists in Algeria was to produce postcards that often depicted women in contrived settings, wearing clothing and using props that the photographer included to "authenticate" the images.

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In Gerome's works he commonly utilized Islamic architecture and material culture to falsely authenticate fantasies

Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, "The Grand Odalisque" (1814)

Ingres's "Odalisque" is an outstanding example of the way in which the Western disfiguring of women is merged with and projected as fantasies of the Islamic world, disguised as historic portrayal, curiosity about, or even criticism of the Islamic treatment of women. Ingres is often noted for the manner in which he portrays the "ideal" and here he uses the occasion of the female harem slave to project his fantasized ideal. revoltinthedesert.blogspot.com/2006/11/gaze-and-muslim-women.html

The distortion of Arabs identity comprises also their complexion. To portray Arabs, some Western artists resort diametrically to their imagination rather than to practically empirical view. The cases are variously different as the subjects themselves. As a case in point, we can consider the physical portrayal of Arab males and females. What is strikingly odd is the considerable discrepancy between the dark complexion of the man in comparison with the white complexion of the female though they stem both from the same geographical and climactic environment (see picture 5). Such extreme notion of complexion that distinguishes the white female from the dark male may exist nowhere in the world but the Western imagination both in the sender and receiver. The sender forges an imaginary and fabricated image of Arabs and Muslims and the receiver literaly and blindly believe it.

Still within the framework of distortion of Muslims identity, the other outstanding legendary figure who largely undergoes deliberate change in her personality is "Jasmine" (see picture 4 above). The change covers different points of her identity ranging from her name down to her character, ascribing to her all the features that are allegedly believed to characterize Muslim and Arab women.

To begin with, her true Arabic name is Badr AlBuddur, but she is introduced as Jasmine under the pretence that the Western viewer could neither remember her original name nor could he pronounce it properly. Though the claim may seem justifiable, the distortion of her name leads to a misrepresentation of her identity, disparaging both her character and her behaviour. The depiction of Badr AlBuddur (the renamed Jasmine) matches the preconceived view of the Western artists about Muslim harem, focussing chiefly on her sexual fascination to appeal to the male's lasciviousness. With her white complexion, with her foregrounding sexual fascination, with her undulating wavy gate of belly-dancer, with her heavily make-up face, Jasmine is presented as a sexual product. Jasmine's portrayal is, indeed, a continuation or rather a renewal of the past conceptualization of the notion of the harem. (see how Muslim harems are portrayed by Western painters in

pictures 6, 8, 9, and 10). To justify their claim about the Muslim harem, the Western view is authenticated by a photograph of fully naked breasts of an Algerian lady (see picture 7).

In conjunction with the Western media's target to disdain Arab's literature and writings in general, Walt Disney's famous animated cartoon Aladin delineates Arabs in a negative way. Despite the story deals with an Arab cultural background, the cartoon of Aladin, is so worked up that it looks more American than Arab. It does not only Americanize the characters' names, but it also westernizes their appearances. Her clothes also undergo a radical change; her attire makes her look more like a "belly-dancer" than a princess. Hence, instead of preserving her royal chastity and nobility hence her true identity, she seems sexy in her traditional dress.

The Western painters violated bluntly the conception of the Muslim harem. While the Arabs were reputed for taking great and even excessive care of their wives – harems, taking minute precaution not even to call them by their first names so as not to reveal their identity to his clan and kinship, the Western painters' representation is largely pornographic, presenting the harems as totally naked. It is against logic to believe that an Arab Muslim who is haunted by the secrecy of his wife's name can condescend to allow a stranger to make a pornographic portrait of her. To deal with this issue from another angle, the pornographic portarayal of Arab Muslim women confined them strictly to sexual commodity while stripping them from all sorts of social roles. For instance, Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres and Eugène Delacroix (see the pictures above) among others are the best examples to be introduced in this connection. The endeavour of the Westerners to retain the ideological framework and to rule the gender space of the Islamic world push the Neo-orientalists to bridge the past with the present so as to preserve the same perception that had been traced ever since the West discovered the Orient.

Rapacious, lustful, bloodthirsty are the exemplified and fixed images of Arabs and Muslims whose premeditation disposition to perform any devilish act is touched in the Western cartoons on a large scale. The examples are numerously various, ranging from legendary figures to realistic ones and targeting both Middle-East people together with North-Africans without heeding the different ethnicities, races and faith. What is astonishing odd is such a fixed inflexible homogeneous characteristics that identify them all and make them look like one single person. In this connection whether we say an Arab or a Muslim as a grammatically singular item, or whether we say Arabs and Muslims in the plural form it is always the same since the same branded name is stuck to them in the singular form as well as the plural form. Such an image covers also Western cartoons, especially fictitious figures.

 To deal with this issue, it is enough, I think, to introduce the cartoon show of Ali Baba as a case in point for it is widely shown in different Western channels. It is also useless to go into details about the different episodes of the cartoon because stratagems become and are the recurrent features that typify and exemplify the personality of Ali Baba in ALI BABA THE MAD DOG OF THE DESERT.

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1 - This stunningly violent image from Aladdin shows a hateful Arab merchant swinging a sword to cut off Princess Jasmine's hand, since she doesn't have money to pay for an apple she gave to a hungry boy.	2 - Ali Baba, The Mad Dog of the Desert is another cartoon depiction of Arabs, painting them as buffoons or fools.

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3 - the greedy Arab trader who narrates the opening of Aladdin.	4 - Disney animators gave a menacing palace guard stereotypical facial features including a heavy brow, hooked nose, thick lips, and missing teeth.

Ali Baba, an Arab of origin and a Muslim of faith, is demonized from head to foot to the extent that there is not the least part of his body that may show that he a decent being. Accordingly, his reputation does not lie in his thoughtful, wise, generous, altruistic intentions as he is famous for his mean, deceptive, spiteful gluttonous inclination. The lineament of his face becomes the screen which betrays his malice. Thus his hawk-noise suggests that he appears in the guise of a bird of prey, meaning that he indiscriminately takes everything and everybody for a prey. Similarly, his large, round budged-eyes reflect his covetousness to encroach upon the others' belongings. His large flat and sharp teeth give the impression that his mouth looks like grinding machine that can crash whatever it comes across. In the same way, his limbs are figuratively symbolic as his lineaments. Ali Baba's long, fleshy fingers look like iron clippers which once he ceases something, it will not escape him. Nevertheless, his rather thin legs grant him swiftness to perform his demonic acts. His mind is also as satanic as the part of his body. His devilish thoughts are externalized in his quick and sketchy monologues whenever he targets a victim.

The representation of this Arab-Muslim legendary fictitious figure is vicariously correlated with the real people of Middle-East and North Africa. Once the images are invoked, they are associatedly identified and ascribed to this race. In this vein, the distorted ideas that are falsely attributed to imaginary figures are factually concretized

as real characteristics of Arabs and Muslims. The Western reader or viewer blends the imaginary and fabricated ideas with the actual state of Muslims and Arabs. Jack G. Shaheen once remarked that:

I still recall the rationale for stereotyping offered in 1982 by James Baerg, Director of Program Practices for CBS-TV: "I think," he remarked, "the Arab stereotype is attractive to a number of people. It is an easy thing to do. It is the thing that is going to be most readily accepted by a large number of the audience. It is the same thing as throwing in sex and violence when an episode is slow."

Ever since the cinema becomes a fashionable and effective tool of entertainment it does not only provide multifarious information but it contributes much in reshaping values, and even worse, it develops and convince viewers to integrate certain views of "the Other(s)". The movies direct and orient one's feelings and thoughts and dictate to one who one "may abhor", who "may sympathize" with, who "may trust", and who "may have misgivings about". If the viewer is accustomed to see repetitively persistent and recurrent images about whatever subject, his judgement, decision, and reaction will take place out of conviction because the images will be mythologized. Shaheen quotes President John Fitzgerald Kennedy who said that "The great enemy of truth is very often not the lie, deliberate, contrived and dishonest, but the myth, persistent, persuasive and realistic." Western movies mythologize the identity of Arabs through confining their lives in some everlasting clichés that are recognized by the Westerns viewer. "They live in mythical kingdoms of endless desert dotted with oil wells, tents, run-down mosques, palaces, goats, and camels"

Point of No Return (1993) Cloak and Dagger (1984) , Puppet Master II (1990), American Samurai (1992) Reds (1981), and Power (1986), to name but a few, are movies where producers forcefully interleave stereotypical dialogues that abusively smear the Arab identity and their ethos , though these films have nothing to do with them at all. Among all Arabs, the Lybians are allotted the portion of the lion; they are targeted as such because in part they are Arabs and partly they are pro-Reds. Back to the Future (1985), Broadcast News (1987), and Patriot Games (1992) are movies where Lybians are shown committing assassination in "cold blood", manipulating other terrorists and most extravagant stage-managing to attack USA.

  Furthermore, Motion pictures' target is to attack Islam and its adherents. The image, therefore, which had been traced by Mark Twain in Innocents Abroad (1869) in mid-nineteenth century where he represented "Muhammadeans" as "savage", "pagan" and 'infidel" has shown up once again in motion western pictures with a slight modification such as "fundamentalists", "terrorists", "destroyers", "kidnappers", "hypocrites" and "liars". Shaheen cogently summarizes the stereotypical and overstated images of Arabs in the Western motion pictures:

Hollywood's sheikh of the 1920s became the oily sheikh of the 1970s and 1980s, and now the fanatical "fundamentalist" terrorist who prays before killing innocents. Today's sheikhs are uncultured and ruthless, attempting to procure media conglomerates (Network, 1977), destroy the world's economy (Rollover, 1981), kidnap Western women (Jewel of the Nile, 1985), direct nuclear weapons at Israel and the United States (Frantic, 1988), and influence foreign policies (American Ninja 4: The Annihilation, 1991).

Just as Western cartoonists advocate the fabricated views of the 19th century Western painters in presenting Muslim women as sexualized entities, so the Western producers promote the stereotypical views of their predecessors chiefly novelists and travel literature. Though the abusive terms are changed so as to fit the historical context, the negative aspect of their connotation persists. For example, since the term "slave-trader" will appear anacronic if used to designate an Arab recently it is simply replaced by "kidnapper", a term is commonly used nowadays; the same thing happens for the term "savage" which is substituted by "terrorist". Rayan El-Amine in "The Making of the Arab Menace" points out that "Hollywood films have played an important role in perpetuating and amplifying these racist caricatures. Arabs in films are portrayed as being terrorists, fanatics, dirty, irrational, violent and above all disposable." And further in her article she concludes that "The backward and seemingly static image of the Arab that Oliphant, Hollywood and the Bush administration have projected comes from classic colonial notions of Western superiority", relating and at the same time stressing the continuity of the old stereotypes of the West.

To relate the 20th century Arab Muslims with the act of terrorism is rather believable and ostensibly credible on the strength of the available factors and criteria that facilitate the practice of this phenomenon. The Western media attribution of such acts to Arab Muslims is taken for granted for it becomes unavoidably part of their daily practice. However, the issue of terrorism becomes a problematic when it transcends the last years of the 20th century and went back to the 7th century. The fact to ascribe terrorist act to someone who died 14 centuries ago is highly anachronous. The Danish media (in September 2005, the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten published 12 cartoons that depicted the prophet Mohammed one of them is replaced by a bomb with a lit fuse) relate the act of terrorism to Prophet Mohammed who lived at a time when even the concept of terrorism is coined yet. It seems that the idea of terrorism freed itself from historical constraints and becomes an ahistorical aterritorial concept. The Western media sacrifice both history and geography so as to quench and satiate the thirst of an audience that is pleased with the distortion of facts. Therefore it provide an accurately rigorous discourse and pictures of what it seeks to delineate and portray and finally present it to an audience whose long-cherished target and wish is to promote its preconception of demonisation of Arab Muslims altogether. J. A. Progler, Assistant Professor of Social Studies at the School of Education in the City University of New York, Brooklyn College affirms reproachfully that:

The long history of encounters between Western civilization and Islam has produced a tradition of portraying, in largely negative and self-serving ways, the Islamic religion and Muslim cultures. There is a lot of literature cataloguing (and sometimes correcting) these stereotypes… Western image-makers, including religious authorities, political establishments, and corporate-media conglomerates, conceptualize for their consumers images of Muslims and/or Arabs in sometimes amusing and other times cruel or tragic ways.

Sometimes the western picture-makers resort to the techniques of contrary opinion in the make-up of their films in order to make the irony quite striking and critical as it is the case of a young Moroccan in Beautiful. The altruistic and good benevolent intentions of Omar are turn up-side-down when he becomes a real selfish and spiteful kidnapper. Shaheen develops the scene cogently when he states that

During 1995, Prince Omar of Morocco appeared in CBS's "Beautiful" as the benevolent protector of Taylor, the seriously ill Western heroine. Omar rejects all eligible Moroccan maidens; only Taylor is suitably beautiful and intelligent to become his mate. Thanks to Omar's attentiveness, the ailing Taylor recovers, but loses her memory. Instead of continuing to assist her, Omar capitalizes on her memory loss, acting like a typical TV-Arab Muslim hostage-taker. Not only does the Muslim potentate dupe Taylor into marrying him, he prevents her from flying home to her loved ones. Omar has imprisoned Taylor in the palace.

Scapegoating ideology

The predominant concept that captivates Western media and becomes a fore-grounded set is terrorism whose performance is randomly and allegedly attributed to Arabs and Muslims regardless to tangible evidences. Terrorism is presented within the framework of Western ideology that preconceives Muslim Arabs as "absolutist", "patriarchal", "unreasoning", "punitive" (Said, 1978, 1997). It is an inveterate and inculcated Orientalist preconception of Arabs held by the West to the extent that Arabs and Muslims are spontaneously stereotyped and identified or rather equated with the word terrorism. L. John Martin demonstrated that word "terrorism" was commonly used in Western media whenever they portrayed the individuals or actions they deprecated. Surprisingly, media use the word terrorism with great reservation when dealing with individuals who are not Arabs. Rather, they substitute it for other milder words such as "attack", "incursion", "offensive". The best example that can be introduced in this case is the bombing of Oklahoma City in 1995 when media presented the facts in a biased and prejudicial way, taking a regressive strategy all along the investigation from the very minutes of the operation until the involved criminal was identified. Few minutes after the bombing, the USA news reporters, propelled by prejudices against Arabs, triggered the first insinuation towards Muslims, reporting that it was a terrorist act. The same immediate measure was taken by CNN, one of the main news channels in USA, giving hurriedly the names of some suspected Arabs terrorists who were arrested for investigation. However, after the detention of an American citizen (of course he was not of Arab origin), the word terrorists was withdrawn and it was replaced by "offensive" in order to cope with the mainstream ideology of the Americans; they mitigate the act of the non-Arab citizens. Shaheen reported the reaction of the American newspapers and other sources of media and their unanimous agreement about scapegoating Arab Muslims:

To give examples of how some journalists create "social scapegoats" and some newspapers perpetuate distortions, consider the reports following the April 19, 1995, bombing of Oklahoma City's Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, resulting in the deaths of 169 men, women and children and the injury of 500 more. Though no Arab or Muslim was involved, they were instantly suspect. Only hours after the terrorists destroyed the Murrah building, journalists, law enforcement and government officials, and terrorism experts reported that "Arabic-looking men in jogging suits [were] running from the scene." Without hard documentation and credible witnesses, journalists accepted the supposition that the suspects were "Middle-Eastern-looking men." Some reporters began questioning the loyalty and integrity of America's Arabs and Muslims..

The unbalanced coverage of Western media is also concretized in Arabo-Israeli conflict where there is a plain distortion of facts between distinguishing who is the aggressor

and who is the victim. As representatives of terrorism, Palestinians are always presented stereotyped as aggressors, while Israelis, being victims of Palestinians' "aggression", have the right to defend themselves. The same strategy is maintained in Iraq where the American army is simply defending and protecting itself against terrorism.

Scapegoating policy of news media plays an effective role in convincing the American public to take the Arabs for terrorist and that any military operation against an Arabic country (e.g. American air raid against Libya in 1986) is publicly justified.

Arabs are not only stereotyped and vicariously embody all acts of violence, but they are also scapegoated as dominating the world's wealth and oil richness. The insinuation of controlling the world's economy is allegedly inflicted upon Arab Muslims. The West, if not the world at large, draws an analogy between OPEC and Arab countries, believing that OPEC is an Arabic Organization though only seven of thirteen countries that are members and only Saudi Arabia which is considered one of the largest oil-producing in the world. The Western prejudices could be summarized in the editor of The Washington Post proclamation who claims that "the world's supplies of oil and price levels are manipulated and controlled by greedy Arabs (Ghareeb, 1983). Such a preconception makes the world sees that Arabs are responsible for the skyrocketing prices of oil. As oil producers, Arabs become archetypes of wealth-exhibition and money-wasting people.

Holistic view

The sense of recognizing the real identity or rather identifying Arabs and Muslims is really a problematic issue in Western conception. Roughly they do not discriminate among the different ethnic groups, different races, different dialects, and even worse different religious beliefs. The Arab world is so complex that it could not be compressed or simplified in one term as it has been ignorantly conceived by the West. However, a succinct analysis of the reason why the West generalize the Arab world in one specific term, in the sense that what can be attribute to one person it can be related to "All Arabs". Or Shaheen pointed out

Muslims are lumped together and our expectations are based more on stereotyping than on empirical research, according to Esposito. All too often the "coverage of Islam and the Muslim world concludes there is a monolithic Islam out there somewhere, believing, feeling, thinking and acting as one." The stereotypical Muslim presented to Americans resembles Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini, Libya's Moammar Gadhafi, or Iraq's Saddam Hussein; the imagery "has profoundly affected American perceptions of Islam and the Middle East.

The identity of Arab Muslims is unified in one particular term; such overgeneralization engenders very critical repercussions chiefly when the West fails to notice the different ethnicities and different religious beliefs. When referring to the geographical territory that expands from the very shores of the Atlantic Ocean in North Africa to the Gulf in Asia, the Western media designates it racially as Arabs and religiously as Muslims, excluding thus radically the different racial and religious minorities. Racially this territory includes Amazigh race especially in North Africa and religiously it coexists with Christians especially in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Palestine.

One may wonder why the Western media overlook such multi-differences for which the Arab world is reputed. Is it out of the West ignorance of the multi-race and multi-religion of this territory? How can the West ignore these plain facts while it did subdue this territory for more than half century (it lasted for more than a century i.e. Algeria)?

To generalize the identity of such large territory in two terms Arabs and Muslims is a deliberate and conscious strategy which makes things easy for the West t stereotype both the race and its religion. This population, despite its multi-race, multi-culture, multi-language and multi-religion, is racialized as Arabs and religionized as Muslims. Not surprisingly, these two terms are archetypes of negative attributes which represent a threat for the West.

The maintained cliché that says, "seen one seen 'em all" divests Arab Muslims from their diversity while compressing them in one individual. The stereotypes created by the Western media do indeed have dangerous effect on Western public in producing a holistic conception of Arabs and Muslims. Once a name of a political or religious leader is invoked, allegedly all Arabs and all Muslims are incarnated and personified in that name. In view of the West, all Arabs think in the same way, react in the same manner, respond holistically. In this respect, they are all, like Saddam Houssein, think and plan to destroy the world with 'mass-destruction weapons' which G.W. Bush – petromaniac – is still looking for, but he finds petrol instead and he is satisfied and calmed down ; all Muslims organize and plot terrorist acts, in other words they are all someone called Ben Laden. They are also all as religiously fanatic as Ayatollah, refusing to coexist with the other religions, be they monotheist or polytheist.

Despite the different races that are included under the banner of Islam (Arabs, Persians, Asians etc.), in view of the West all Muslims are Arabs. In other words, far from being a multicultural, multiracial, and multiethnic groups, Muslims are stereotypically embodied in one persona which is endowed by all sorts of devilish deeds.

Conclusion

The Arab spectators will not be surprised when watching a film about Arabs, nor do the readers who go through the columns of newspapers or magazines that treat a subject concerning Muslims, nor the listeners who follow the news that deal with Arabs, because the Western media preserve unanimous stereotypes for the Arab Muslims whether they are televised, printed or broadcasted. These problems are so amassed, so ramified that they are jeopardized and problematized. The question is not confined in a casual unnoticed stereotypes and distortions of reality, but it is extended to the rationalization of the issue. The Western media endeavour at whatever costs and power to legitimize the prejudices and give the sense of credibility. It is noticeable, therefore, that the Western media shore their claims up with "evidences", "arguments" and "facts" in order to demonstrate that the Arabs' "actions", "thought" and "intention" are demonic. The Western media, then, is responsible for infusing and inculcating the Western public with biased and fabricated preconception about Arabs and Muslims. If the Western media change their minds towards the Arab Muslims, they will get a reciprocally mutual response from their public.

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