

The Role of Cinema in Reflection of Political Ideologies

NAYYER MUSTAFA

Ph.D. scholar, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad

Email: Nayyarmustafa@hotmail.com

Tel: +331-7045748

Dr. ABIDA NOUREEN

Assistant Professor, Department of Media Studies, the Islamia University of Bahawalpur.

Email: dr.abida@iub.edu.pk / Abidas84@gmail.com

Tel: +92-333-8803784

Dr. SHEHLA JABEEN

Assistant Professor, Department of Mass Communication,

Lahore College for Women University, Jhang Campus

Email: shehla_ashraf86@yahoo.com

Tel: +333-4056061

Abstract

Robert Gregg asserts that films provide an insight into the real picture of international relations. (Gregg, 1998,P.10) Films serve as an important tool in manufacturing the consent of the target audience. By remaining loyal to the narrowest lines of foreign policy of a government, film makers urge to define and redefine friends and foes on silver screen. Sticking to above context, film may be taken as an important manuscript of socio-political history of a nation. Every film continues to be political as its basis lies in some ideology. In the words of Merrill, a film is not only an instrument of communication but it also serves as an organ of propaganda to build or rebuild one's image.

Keywords: Film, Politics, Ideology, US, Policy.

Film and Reflection of Political Ideology

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Hollywood and its reflection of political ideology

From the researcher's bay more important fact is that right from the advent of Nazism and Marxism, Hollywood has got the reput of a strategic partner of US government. Vide its political and cultural photo play; Hollywood successfully differentiates between friends and enemies. The evidences of above notion lie in the historical factography of Second World War. Dozens of the movies released in that era were containing anti-Nazi element. Similarly, during the cold war period (1945-1990), Hollywood movies were aiming to target the communist ideology. (Senguel & Ali fuat, 2006).

Apparently, collapse of USSR and the fall of Berlin wall ensured the annihilation of enmity for US government but a trail of intricate melodrama was in store for the humble spectators across globe. The incident of 9/11 happened; US government came up with a new set of policies which were directed against Al-Qaeda and Taliban primarily and against Muslim world secondarily. History repeated itself and Hollywood was again standing side by side with American Government producing the bulk of movies against Al-Qaeda and the Muslim world in the awe of war against terror. (Shaheen, 2001).

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study are here under;

1. To grasp the utility of film as a medium in portrayal of international relations.
2. To interpret the importance of films in understanding foreign policy of a country

Film as a vehicle to determine international relations

Sengul (2005), in his project “cinema and representation in international relations: Hollywood cinema and cold war” has tracked the connection between Hollywood film industry and the government of USA. He narrated that cinema is very suitable as ideological organ because of its ability to offer visuals and present the content in a narrative style. Sengul further clarified that using cinema as an instrument for the sake of propagation of certain ideas may not be labeled as a fresh act. Rather, Soviet cinema holds the repute of institutionalizing the propaganda in line with state ideology and policy since early 20’s.

Nazi German cinema reiterated the same phenomena in 30’s to incorporate and inculcate state version among masses. Sengul, after offering historic insight into the issue, draws a sharp line between Hollywood and Soviet/Nazi cinema and enlightens us by the fact that both Soviets and Nazi’s targeted the matter of identification of a person with the state, whereas, Hollywood pushed and propelled its audience to appreciate the notion of “being American”

Sangul concludes his study by describing that in cold war era Hollywood industry and American government were tied in a very intimate bond. During this era, Hollywood was eager to set the nationalist signature and thus, American foreign policy steps were presented as important, meaningful and even as a necessity.

Finally, the researcher has identified two remarkable features of the movies of this period:

- 1) Hollywood movies, in the era of cold war were purely nationalistic.
- 2) Hollywood movies in the era of cold war serve as an international relation document of American foreign policy and all the initiatives taken during this period.

Totman(2009) in his study “How Hollywood projects foreign policy? ” has elaborate that films provide the identification of America’s enemies throughout 20th century. In the period of Second World War, German and Japanese were presented as foes. In cold war era, this negative portrayal was shifted towards Russians, who were villains across the universe. Interestingly, they were not only portrayed as villains on earth, but they were also villain in space.

Totman further asserts that in contemporary times, “Terrorists” and “Rogue States” are new villains in the context of Hollywood cinema. Totaman vide the case study of Iran, Cuba, Libya, Iraq, North Korea, Sudan and Syria, finds the American policy statements on these new labels, discovering a connection between America’s foreign policy and Hollywood cinema. He further discovers that the only difference is that American foreign policy identifies Islamic state of Iran as a rogue state with the intentions for funding and

sponsoring the terrorists; whereas, Hollywood cinema portrays Iran only as a rogue state and “funding the terrorists” phenomena does not seem to be receipted or at least presented by Hollywood.

Totaman is of the view that, Hollywood portrayed republic of Cuba as proxy state of USSR during the cold war era and when this come to an end, Hollywood was quick enough to re-label Cuba as rogue state, hence Hollywood seems to change its stance or notions in strict following of the American foreign policy. Similarly, portrayal of Libya has also been changing throughout the time keeping in with the pace and heat taking place between Tripoli and Washington (P.158).

Totaman concludes that Hollywood cinema is a representation of popular culture and serves as an important tool and apparatus in shaping perception of its audience about the rivals of USA. Waldes(1999) in his article, “Going Cultural: Star Trek, State action and popular culture”, incorporates that it is not only state action which influence popular culture and mindset of the public, but mass culture also puts plays its role in the reproduction of official foreign policy stance by making it more and more popular. Waldes , comes forward with the discourse analysis of “star trek” drama series and films by concluding that films emerge as an apparatus of bringing common sense among the masses about the international relations.

Waldes(2003) in his book “To seek out News world: science fiction and world politics” offers the approaches to study international relation through science fiction genre of movies. This book implicates the ties between pop-culture, science fiction and global politics describing this bond as complicate, delicate and diverse in nature.

Conclusion out of his discourse is that films are source of generating wide scale understanding of international relations among the large segments of public through its popular culture. Stefan and Alexander(2009) in their research article “International Relations at the movies: Teaching and learning about international policies through film”, advocate the application of movies in IR classes as an education tool.

They offer four different ways to utilize movies as a pedagogical tool.

- 1) The first approach uses movies to go through history.
- 2) The second approach offers the utility of movies in opening a debate on important affairs in global politics such as genocide etc.
- 3) In third approach, films are taken as the tool of understanding and grasping various cultural narratives.
- 4) Fourth approach deals with presentation of films in elaborating and critically appreciating IR theory.

Stefen and Alexander continue this discussion by drawing out the advantages and disadvantages of using movies as teaching stuff in the IR classes.

They conclude that the use of film serves better purpose in terms of teaching if it is duly coupled with the reading material. This reading material increases and fortifies the leaning capacities of the students. The above researchers offer a caution in the conclusion by stating the fact that the films are not produced for teaching global politics, they just present one aspect of a certain issue and it should never be expected that multi-aspect scenario will be offered by the movies. Some aspects are definitely going to be neglected in movies.

Gul(2013) in her study on “Representation of American policy on war against terror in Hollywood movies”, derivates that Hollywood movies are intended to move forward the American governmental agenda on “war on terror” . Gul has conducted content analysis of Hollywood movies on “war on terror” from 2008 to 2011. Through her research, she concludes that the American movies represent the American

policy on “war on terror”. Gul has pointed out a biased behavior on behalf of the Hollywood motion picture industry.

While deconstructing the technique of such movies, she has concluded that representation of American foreign policy is carried out through the theme, characters and events of a movie.

Research Questions

1. What is the role of cinema in reflection of Political ideologies ?
2. Is there any significance of Film to understand the foreign policy of a country?
3. What is the linkage of US Film and US Government?

Theoretical Frameworkl (The Chomsky’s Propaganda Model)

Herman & Chomsky (2000). presented the propaganda model describing it as a model which elaborates media as a tool for the political elite and corporate sector which assert complete and absolute control over media contents. Herman and Chomsky further propose that media depends on the stance offered by the official and government sources and hence it facilitates them in advocating and implementing their policies.

Above mentioned researchers identified few structural aspects that were determining the media patterns. They discussed five filters through which power and money stand side by side and become capable of filtering out the news fit to print. The opposite version or not suitable version is killed in the meantime, however government and dominant private interests successfully communicate their messages across the public.

- a) Size and Ownership
- b) Advertiser
- c) Sourcing
- d) Flake

Anti-communism/Anti-ideology

Propaganda Model is a significant aspect to understand how media content is channelized while serving the interests of powerful elite.

Secondly, it describes how anti-Muslim ideology serves as a filter in contemporary America and western media.

Given the facts, the representation of Muslim in Hollywood cinema becomes easier to be understood and grasped after going through this theory.

Sampled Movies

Below is the movie list which was selected for further analysis on the basis of Oscar award winning and nominated categories.

Table No 1

Sr. No.	Movies	Year	OSCAR Nominations
1.	Crash	2004	6(3 win)
2.	Syriana	2005	2(1 win)
3.	Munich	2005	5(0 win)
4.	United 93	2006	2(0 win)
5.	Babel	2006	7(1 win)
6.	The kite Runner	2007	1(0 win)
7.	The Visitor	2008	1(0 win)
8.	The Hurt Locker	2009	9(6 win)
9.	Argo	2012	7(3 win)
10.	Life of Pi	2012	1(4 win)
11.	Zero dark thirty	2013	5(1 win)
12.	Lone Survivor	2013	2(0 win)
13.	Iron-Man 3	2013	1(0 win)
14.	Captain Phillips	2013	6(0 win)
15.	American Sniper	2014	6(1 win)

Unit of Analysis

a. Theme

Theme

Theme may be defined as central idea of the movie around which a story line is built. Theme provides us the complete ideology and the philosophy of a film; Theme is categorized as positive, Negative and Neutral.

Positive

The movie theme is categorized as positive if Muslim are portrayed as peaceful, progressive, tolerant towards Americans, educated and civilized

Negative

The movie theme is categorized as negative if it depicts the Muslim as violent, fundamentalist, intolerant towards Americans, uncivilized and un-educated.

Neutral

The movie theme is categorized as neutral if the depiction of Muslim is neither positive nor negative or there is a mixed depiction.

Role of Hollywood in Reflection of the Political Ideologies

Film “United 93” depicts the incident of 9/11 by presenting Native American Muslim characters as terrorist and un-loyal to USA.

Film “American sniper” depicts the American invasion on Iraq affirming the stance of America on this war while presenting American soldiers as Hero and Iraq Government and its officials as villains. “Argo” and “Zero dark thirty” affirms the stance of America to launch pre-emptive strikes and violating the tetragonal jurisdiction of other centuries in order to self-guard its strategic interests us government successfully

executed a semi-rescue, semi-military operation to help its hostages from Iran in Argo; whereas, it operates in Pakistan to kill Osama bin Laden in “Zero dark Thirty” by launching a secret military operation.

“The Hurt locker” is another representation of American stance on Iraq war whereby USA government and US army is portrayed as righteous, brave, professional and competent whereas Iraqi Government as well as its public is represented as barbaric, ignorant and incompetent.

“Lone Survivor” is depiction of contemporary US Afghan war where a single surviving soldier is portrayed as one-man army who successfully dominates the battalions of Al-Qaeda and Taliban. It is nothing but sheer glorification of America as nation and we find hereby representation of a nationalist agenda which is being framed at the cost of the Muslims.

“Captain Phillips” is repetition of the same phenomena despite the only difference is that its stage has been prepared in Somalia where the Muslims are represented as pirates and terrorists. Eventually we find the antagonists at the mercy of US army and CIA which emerge as the savior.

“Syriana” is another movie from this list which seems to protect and safeguard the American foreign policy in Gulf region and its intrusion in the affairs of sovereignty of other countries sticking to its very notion of New world order and oil politics.

The west and America have always been misrepresenting the Muslim and the Islam on the account of religion, culture and intellectual biases. Colonization of the east by the west further added fuel to the fire and the Muslim as a race and the nation were misconnected, misperceived and misrepresented ; New world order is not different at all. Certain stereotypes have been assigned in identification of the Muslim which is definitely an inadequate and inappropriate way to understand any nation or the race.

This research was theoretically linked with Chomsky’s propaganda model which pursues that after the end of the cold war, anti-communist filters have been replaced by anti-Muslim filter. The findings of this study suggested that the Muslim portrayal was highly negative in the Hollywood movies and there was a remarkable distance and difference between positive depiction and the negative depiction of the Muslim identity. The characters assigned to the Muslim were negative in their orientation and presentation. The majority of roles of the Muslim characters were quite ordinary having low category profession and education. They were mostly bomb-makers, suicide-bombers, student of madarassahs and store-keepers.

They were least pluralistic, democratic and tolerant towards America and the west. They were extremist and the fundamentalist in their religious and cultural understanding of the overt world. They were aggressive, volatile, militant, superficial, mosaic, emotional, irrational, uncultured and uncivilized. Ignorance and stubbornness is their trade of mark. In the meantime, Islamic rituals were presented in an offensive and derogatory stylistics which was quite misleading and mischievous in its nature. Especially violent and anti-American depiction of the Muslim was the favorite among the movie-makers. Muslim characters were endorsed as barbaric and cruel who were conspiring everywhere for global power and in this course, they were looting, shooting and killing women, children and innocent people in the name of the god.

The researcher has analyzed that selected Hollywood movies are portraying Muslim characters from all the geographical regions suppressing their original nationalistic identities and playing up the “crude Muslim-hood”. It has been further evaluated that major focus of Hollywood cinema is revolving around Iran, Afghanistan, Morocco, Egypt, Pakistan and Saudia Arabia.

After the analysis of selected movies, it is quite easier to conclude that different Islamic countries were presented in the line with US Foreign policy. “American sniper”, “Argo”, “Zero dark thirty”, “Lone survivor” and “united 93” are classical examples of above-mentioned fact.

A paranoid picture was drawn in the film “zero dark thirty” as the USA establishment identifies and recognizes some faction of ISI as an ally and well-wisher of ALQAEDA and TALIBAN. At the same time, there is lack of trust between USA and Pakistan in order to slay ALQAEDA leadership and Osama bin laden. It can be concluded that this film is an indicative of fact that film-maker is applying US foreign policy of that time as a pivotal instrument. In nutshell, Pakistan was represented as running with the hare and hunting with the hounds. It may be labeled as an alarming representation of Pakistan by depicting Pakistani officials as dual, dichotomous and not sincere at all to take down the terrorism in “war on terror”. Likewise, “Argo” presents Iran as a negative entity and a hawkish place after 1979 revolution. The very basis of this negative portrayal may be traced in hostile US-Iran relationship after the emergence of Ayat Ullah Khomeini.

The overall impression of selected Hollywood movies entails that Hollywood directors and producers by and large consider the stance of USA while creating a movie).

Conclusion

New millennium has arrived with altogether new challenges for the Islam and the Muslim world. Media coverage of Islam related affairs has been dramatically altered since the onset of new millennium, on both qualitative as well as quantitative grounds. The incident of September 11, 2001 has pushed the Islam and the Muslim world into the global war on media fronts. It is pertinent to mention that framing of the Muslim in various media forms has been changed.

This research study is an attempt to determine the portrayal of the Muslim in Hollywood movies. The basic purpose behind this study was to conduct a critical study of the phenomenon under which different themes and characters are revolving around the new disseminated and proposed Muslim identity and persona on global locale.

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