# Portrayal of Muslims in the media: *"24"* and the 'Othering' process

**Abu Sadat Nurullah\***

**Abstract**

The Hollywood media in general depict the image of Muslims and Arabs in a negative way. Drawing from Edward Said's understanding of Orientalism, the current study critically analyzes the television serial "24", which portrays stereotypical images of Arabs and Muslims, and aggravates the 'othering process'.

**Keywords**: Orientalism, Muslims, Arabs, terrorism, negative portrayal

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**\*** Department of Sociology, University of Alberta, Canada. E-mail: nurullah@ualberta.ca

## Introduction

The othering process or 'us' vs. 'them' paradigm is sharply reflected in the media discourse. One common method of creating the distinction between us and them is to emphasize differing characteristics such as race, ethnicity, and religion. Edward Said (2003/1978) uses the term Orientalism, "a way of coming to terms with the orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience" (p. 1). He explores how Europeans have developed and used an exteriority or representation of the Orient, not "natural depictions of the Orient" (2003: 21). "Orientalism", he affirms, "is fundamentally a political doctrine" (p. 204). Nonetheless, Westerners believe this representation to be objective. By standardizing cultures of the Orient, these representations have developed into stereotypes. The technology of the postmodern world, such as ubiquitous media, has accelerated and solidified this process. Said explains how that this is particularly true for the way the Near East is conceived. Said further argues that the West has misrepresented the East and has made the Orient its 'Other'. In this paper, I take the case of Arab and Muslim representation as 'the Other' in the televisual media. For the purpose of analysis, I select Fox Network's popular series "*24*". By applying the Orientalism framework developed by Edward Said, I argue that the producers of media contents selectively choose a particular group to treat as 'the Other'.

It has been observed that the Hollywood media depict the image of Muslims and Arabs in a negative way. As van der Veer (2004: 9-21) points out, being a Muslim and being an Arab has been historicized instead of being understood from some perspective as an essential Islam or Arabness. This is due to the fact that some individuals with Muslim names or a few scattered groups commit hijacking or suicide bombing in the name of Islam. At present, the media in their reporting usually links *any* act of violence to Muslims and Islam based on pre-conceived stereotypes devoid of justification. However, it should be noted that the cultural clash between the West and the Muslim world is not a new phenomenon. Islam and Muslims are historically looked down upon by the West. It is a fact that Muslims had hard times to protect religion from the hand of the Crusaders from Europe during the 12th century. This was felt acutely after the First World War and with the decline of the Ottoman Caliphate. However, the negative portrayal of Muslims on media began intensively after the World War II, and particularly 1960s onwards. With the development of sophisticated media technology in the West, the misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims on media reached to masses around

the world, strengthening the phony propaganda. The media coverage of the Iranian revolution is one of such examples. Edward Said has aptly pointed out this fact in his 1981 book *Covering Islam*.

In his book *Covering Islam*, Said (1981) argued that the Western media's coverage and interpretation of Islam is extremely influential and the success "of this coverage can be attributed to the political influence of those people and institutions producing it rather than necessarily to truth or accuracy" (p. 169). Another factor is that the collapse of the former Soviet Union in the early 1990s helped the West (particularly the United States) to generate a new enemy frontier they can fight against to claim their superiority. This idea was further got into the academia with the writing of Samuel Huntington in his 'Clash of Civilization' hypothesis in 1993. Therefore, an act of terrorism happened anywhere in the world (e.g., Oklahoma City, Paris metro) was linked as with Muslims; although later many of those attacks found out to be committed by Christian and Zionist fundamentalists. In addition, the term 'Islamic fundamentalism' emerged into the scholarly as well as popular discussion, whereas no such label has been associated with Christian, Jewish, or other religion.

A crucial point in the account of negative media portrayal of Muslims happened in the post-9/11 era, where Islam has publicly been associated with terrorism, and Muslims as terrorists. There are several television movies, drama serials, talk shows, cartoons, and news coverage, where Muslims are portrayed as uncivilized, anti-modern, anti-democratic, and terrorists, fundamentalists, radicals, militants, barbaric, and anti-western. Individual violent incident or any extremist movement in Islamic countries is attributed to Islam by the western media. The continuous negative portrayal of Muslims by the media has led many Muslims to perceive the media as an enemy and conspirator against them (Siddiqi, 1999: 204). When it comes to terrorism, the media most frequently link it to the Arabs or Muslims, often treating them as the same group of people. Research has shown that terrorism is regularly connected to Islam and as a result, Muslims and Arabs have been severely 'othered'. Stereotypes and fear of terrorists have led to drastic changes in governmental practices, such as civil liberty restriction and increased support of racial profiling (Altheide, 2004; Cainkar, 2004; Norris, Kern, & Just, 2003).

The television, for example, has become 'the new state religion' where religions role in shaping and enforcing social values and ideas, and conveying the fundamental ideas of culture has been replaced by the media (Hoover, 2006: 14). The world media is enormously controlled and hegemonized by giant corporations and conglomerates based in the West (particularly in the US). The industrial western world own major news agencies, press unions, fully equipped movie-making studios, and television stations, many of which are headquartered in other countries around the world. Majority of them are either run by the Jews or are under powerful lobby of Jews and Christians who greatly oppose any positive achievement on part of the Muslims. As Mahathir Mohamad (2002: 9) has noted, 'The almost absolute power of the western media corrupts almost absolutely'. The stereotypes against Muslims had been in-build in the US media and it is really an unintelligent idea to refute it (Julian Hollick, cited in Razak & Abdul Majeed, 2002: 102). Furthermore, American media covers terrorism in a way that ignores what "we" do and focuses on the behavior of "them" (Dunn, Moore, & Nosek, 2005).

Therefore, the paper explores the othering process as depicted in Fox Network's television series "*24*". The key aspect guiding this paper is the question: whose point of view do we see the world from? The central questions are: How the television series "*24*" portrays Muslims and Arabs? To what extent this portrayal is unbiased? Is the othering process changing over time? In addition, is there any link between the background of the producer and the kind of content produced in media?

**The Discourse of Orientalism**

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (2003) is a perspective that has transformed the ways in which power relations between West and East can be understood. This explores the ideas that have become embedded in Western culture through history that justify imperialism/colonialism on the basis that the West is viewed as superior to the East. Said (2003) for example, has argued that the concept of the 'West' as a social category became distinctive only when it encountered the 'East'. In the book, Said offers three major claims. First, he describes Orientalism as an objective, disinterested and esoteric set of ideas, the overall function of which is to serve political ends. These, for example, provided an ideological justification for Orientalist scholars to allow Europeans to take over Oriental lands. Second, Said looks at

how these tools are important in helping Europe to define its image and to establish and maintain opposites and others. On this basis, Europe was given its own cultural and intellectual superiority over Islamic cultures, and this led the West to see the Islamic culture as static both in place and time. Third, Said points out that Orientalism has produced a false description of Islamic cultures, including a belief that that it is possible to unconditionally define the essential qualities of a whole Islamic culture and the people within it.

Two other media theories reiterate Said's (2003) framework: Agenda-setting theory and Cultivation theory. The agenda-setting function of the media refers to "the media's capability, through repeated news coverage, of raising the importance of an issue in the mind of mass people" (Severin & Tankard, 2000: 219). For example, repeated coverage of Muslims as terrorists in the media leads to the belief in people they are really terrorists, and thus hatred and discrimination against Muslims in general takes place. In this way, the agenda-setting role of mass media causes an issue to be elevated in importance to the public (Severin & Tankard, 2000). In addition, research has shown that the press or media is strikingly successful in telling its consumers what to *think about*. The media not only set the agenda for public discussion, but also they strongly suggest how readers should think and talk about ethnic, cultural, and religious affairs (Van Dijk, 1991). Empirical studies have shown evidence for agenda-setting perspective. For example, Wanta and Wu (1992) have found that the more exposure individuals had to the news media, the more they tended to be concerned about the issues receiving heavy media coverage. Thus, the media content has an influence on the public perception of the importance of issues.

Cultivation theory was developed by George Gerbner and his colleagues to explain the effects of television viewing on people's perceptions, attitudes, and values (Severin & Tankard, 2000). Gerbner et al. argue that heavy viewers of television are being monopolized and subsumed by other sources of information, ideas, and consciousness; which produces the cultivation or shaping of a common worldview, common roles and values most frequently depicted on TV (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorelli, 1994). They have found out that heavy television viewers often give answers that are closer to the way the world is portrayed on television (Severin & Tankard, 2000). For example, most viewers of media in the West would develop a disliking attitude towards Muslims based on the media portrayal of Muslims as terrorists or otherwise bad people. In this way, media cultivate the impression on

people's mind to look into the nature of reality based on the window of media representation of issues.

## Media portrayal of Muslims and Arabs

Cottle argues that the media hold a powerful position in conveying, explaining and articulating specific discourses that help represent (and misrepresent) minority groups (see Cottle, 2006). Most people's perceptions of Islam and Muslims in the US are shaped by media coverage through stereotyping in movies, TV shows, cartoons, and other media. In general, Muslims are portrayed as an 'alien other' within the media. It suggests that this misrepresentation can be linked to the development of 'racism', namely Islamphobia that has its roots in cultural representations of the 'other' (Saeed, 2007). Hence, recent social and political concern over Muslim minority groups can be understood as a form of cultural racism (Modood, 1997). What we know of society depends on how things are represented to us through media and that knowledge in turn informs what we do and what policies we are prepared to accept (Miller, 2002).

Various studies have examined the specific relationship between media and Islam (Ahmed 1993); the representations of Muslim minorities in the West (Poole, 2002) and other on Muslims/Islam in the global media (Poole & Richardson, 2006). Ideologically, these constructions can be traced back the expansion of Western imperialism where a dichotomy of 'West' versus 'East' was constructed (Said, 2003). As late back as 1993, Ahmed noted that many Muslims voiced concern of the negative representation of Islam and Muslims by the Western media (Saeed, 2007). However, following on from such incidents as the Rushdie affair, the first Gulf War and 9/11, interest in media representations of Islam have grown. An ever-increasing body of research has argued that on the balance the images, representations and discourses relating to Islam/Muslims in mainstream Western media tend to be negative and hostile (see Poole & Richardson, 2006). Similar findings that highlight the negativity of Islam/Muslims have been found in media research conducted in Canada (Elmasry, 2002), Australia (Manning, 2006) and throughout the European Union (Fekete, 2002).

One of the first systematic studies on the western media portrayal of Muslims was conducted by Edward Said in his book *Covering Islam*. Said (1981) critically analyzes how the media chooses to misreport or misrepresent Islam and Muslims. He provides a certain

methodological approach of how the press in the West deals with Islam. Said's early work *Orientalism* (2003/1978) provides the classical framework in understanding relationships between the 'West' (and the 'Rest') and Muslims in particular. Said (1985) focuses primarily on the Middle East – the territory occupied principally by Muslims. He argues that European domination took not only political and economic forms, but also a cultural form. He further argues that in this context, Islam was regarded as medievally backward. Islam comes to symbolize, in Said's words, "terror, devastation, the demonic, hordes of hated barbarians" (2003: 59). Said (1981: xxii) asserts:

> […] much of what one reads and sees in the media about Islam represents the aggression as coming from Islam because that is what "Islam" is. Local and concrete circumstances are thus obliterated. In other words, covering Islam is a one-sided activity that obscures what "we" do, and highlights instead what Muslims and Arabs by their flawed nature are.

Said (1981) claims that he is not comfortable of speaking of 'Islam' and 'Islamic' as the terms have been misused in Muslim and Western societies as a 'political cover' for much that is not religious. In *Covering Islam*, Said (1981) looks at how the definitions of Islam today are predominately negative saying that the West is radically at odds and this tension establishes a framework radically limiting knowledge of Islam. In fact, Said argues that, through ignorance, cultural hostility and racial hatred, the true nature of Islam is not allowed to be known to others; it is 'covered up'. However, it is the media that form 'cultural apparatus' through which Europeans and Americans derive their consciousness (Poole, 2002; Said, 1981). For example, this was highlighted when a Danish newspaper published caricatures of Prophet Muhammad suggesting he was a terrorist, among other things. It could therefore be argued that these publications suggest that Islam is the root of terrorism (Saeed, 2007). Various authors have noted that Islam and Muslims are treated homogenously in Western media and depicted as the opposite of the West (Akbarzadeh & Smith, 2005; Poole, 2002). Saeed and Drainville (2006) argue that with the 'other' constantly described as inferior, even barbaric, it is easily accepted by a Western audience that terrorism stems from Islam.

In *Covering Islam*, Said (1981) identifies three factors that inform the Western scholars' perception of the Oriental world. First, Said points out that the view of Islam today is still structured by remnants of the historical encounter where knowledge was produced within a

framework motivated by passion, prejudice and political interests. The second factor Said levels against the mainstream discourses about Arabs is the ideology of modernization which posits that the Third World could be saved from its underdevelopment only if it accepts modernization. As the recent history of the US intervention in the Third World reveals, modernization has been primarily about promoting United States trade, backing pro-US native allies and fighting native nationalism (Said, 1981: 29). In this context, Said argues that the discipline of Eurocentric Orientalism and the ideology of modernization fit together nicely for Orientalists. The third factor Said points out is the role of Israel in mediating Western and particularly US views of the Arab and Islamic world since its creation in 1948. Israel, even though an occupying power, is heralded as the 'only democracy' in the Middle East. Its security in American judgment has become identical with "fending off Islam, perpetuating Western hegemony, and demonstrating the virtues of modernization" (Said, 1981: 34).

Amir Saeed (2007) argues that the media do indeed present negative images of Muslims and Islam, and such images are transferred to the public at large; therefore the media is guilty of reinforcing anti-Muslim racism. On the other hand, if one looks closer at the religion of Islam one can find that it is interpreted in multiple ways in the universe of Islamic cultures, societies and history, ranging from China to Nigeria, from Spain to Indonesia, etc. (Said, 1981: 56). Moreover, Said (2003: 286) notes that "if the Arab occupies space enough for attention it is as a negative value", that is, that 'they' are portrayed as a constant threat to the Western's free and democratic world. It is further argued (Said, 1981: 26) that "it is only a slight overstatement to say that Muslims and Arabs are essentially covered, discussed, apprehended, either as oil suppliers or as potential terrorists".

Prior to the events of 9/11, Madrid bombing and the current ongoing War on Terror, Ahmed (1993) argues that very often the news shown about Muslim centers around negative stories. Van Dijk (1991; 1993) links the idea of 'primary definers' to the notion that media constitute an 'elite' in society. In is obvious that issues such as the Rushdie affair and international matters such as the 1991 Gulf War, a series of events brought Muslims into the media spotlight and adversely affected the Muslim population of the world. In the process, new components within racist terminology appeared, and were used in a manner that could be argued were deliberately provocative to bait and ridicule Muslims and other ethnic minorities

(Saeed, 2007). Osama bin Laden has been associated as the sole representative of Muslims all around the world by labeling Muslims as terrorists, whereas there are about 1.3 billion Muslims living in the world. Gerges (1999) notes that Americans have quite readily accepted the notion that acts of violence committed by some Muslims are representative of a fanatic and terrorist culture.

Ahmad Yousif (2002) identifies several reasons for the prejudice against Islam in the western media as well as in the Muslim media. For the western media, he contends that the primary reason for this is the historical conflict between the three Abrahamic faiths. Since the early period, Islam has been perceived as a threat to the political, economic, and religious interests of the polytheists, Jews, and Christians, who continuously plotted and conspired against Muslims (Yousif, 2002). The second reason is political. He asserts that the creation of the state of Israel in the middle of the Muslim heartland, the subsequent struggle between the Arabs and Israeli, the ability of the powerful Jewish lobby to influence western politicians and policy makers, all have contributed to the negative image of Arabs and Muslims in the media. The third reason is the stereotypes and prejudice based on pre-conceived ideas, which has led to a misunderstanding of Islam in the western media.

Another term employed to describe discrimination, prejudice, and harassment against Muslims is Islamophobia. It also denotes the non-reporting or non-disclosure of violent acts committed against Muslims, and the failure to present the true teachings of Islam. Shaheen (2000: 22-42) examines the stereotypes and biases used in the portrayal of Muslim Arabs in American motion pictures and television programs by depicting Muslim Arabs as violent religious radicals which unfairly affect policymaking, encourage hate crimes, and promote divisiveness by exaggerating ethnic differences. Jack Shaheen (2003) presents an excellent analysis of Arab portrayal in Hollywood movies based on his review of about 900 selected movies. He shows how moviegoers are led to believe that all Arabs are Muslims and all Muslims are Arabs. He asserts that the onslaught of the cinematic representation of Arabs conditions, in his term "Hollywood's *reel* Arabs – billionaires, bombers, and bellydancers", influences young Arabs and Arab-Americans to perceive themselves as bad people, since young people learn from the cinema's negative and repetitive stereotypes. In this way, people do not know *real* Arabs. He argues that it is not saying an Arab should never be portrayed as the villain, but rather that almost all Hollywood depictions of Arabs are bad

ones, which is a grave injustice. In hundreds of Hollywood movies, the western protagonists call Arabs by slurs such as, 'assholes', 'bastards', 'camel-dicks', 'pigs', 'jackals', 'rats', 'rag-heads', 'scum-buckets', 'buzzards of the jungle', and 'son of whores' (Shaheen, 2003: 11). These repetitious and negative images of the *reel* Arabs literally sustain adverse portraits across generations (Shaheen, 2003: 7).

Wagge (2002) examines the relationship between Hollywood fictional media and non-fictional events based on the review of sixteen movies released in 1991 or later, which contains the story of a terrorist event or a terrorist's mission. She found that in some cases, Hollywood movies closely resemble and even parallel terrorist events; in other cases, the movies portray terrorists and terrorism as entities that have no basis in real-life events. In the sample of 16 movies, the victims were Americans in 14 cases, Irish in one case, and British in one case. This portrayal is inaccurate, because in reality, very few terrorist events actually occur within the United States. In 1996, Europe was the location of more terrorist events than any other region (121 out of 296), and in the same year, no terrorist events took place within the boundaries of North America (Wagge, 2002). Therefore, she concludes that Hollywood movies inaccurately portray both the ethnicities of the victims and locations of attacks.

On the contrary, there are others Orientalist scholars who assert that the Media portrayal of Islam and Muslims is justifiable. One of them is Daniel Mandel, who argues that the depiction of Muslims and Arabs is variable and not necessarily insensitive or untruthful; since action films depicting Arab and Islamist terrorists reflect observed reality that accords with the knowledge and experience of the viewing public and are not to be condemned on that account (Mandel, 2001). He provided with seven observations to justify his claim that Hollywood should not be blamed for portraying Muslims and Arabs as such. He also affirms that to accept the criticisms against Hollywood movies is to demonize the U.S. government and Jews while valorizing Islamism and terrorists (Mandel, 2001). However, in our view, his ideas are shallow and unidimensional, which does not lead us to the reality. In Hollywood depiction, Arabs' humanity and culture is all erased; since more often than not Arab males all ride camels and are out to abduct the blue-eyed blonde, while women in the Arab world are seen as 'bosomy belly dancers' or 'mute and submissive; and we never see Arab children unless they are out to steal your wallet (Shaheen, 2000: 22-42). In reality, most Arabs have

never slept in a tent nor ridden a camel nor owned an oil well, and most Arabs are family people (Shaheen, 2000: 22-42).

The selective representation of events and news in globalized media is clearly linked to the US foreign policy in the pre-and –post-9/11era. Starting from the coverage of Gulf War in the global (particularly American) media, the question of objectivity in journalistic report reemerged in the press. There was general problem of war propaganda, media coverage as 'cover-up', and the orchestration of the news by the Pentagon (van der Veer, 2004: 9-21). It was reflected in the spreading of disinformation or white lies, such as the famous story that Iraqi soldiers have killed Kuwaiti incubator babies by stealing the incubators and bringing them as war booty to Baghdad (van der Veer, 2004: 9-21). This was possible because of the domination of mediascape by the West and thus the lack of challenges from Arab media (van der Veer, 2004: 9-21). As one author noted, the Gulf War was local in terms of its battlefield, but was a global war in terms of its representation and its textual and visual satellite communication and perception among masses around the world (Virillio, quoted in van der Veer, 2004: 9-21).

In any case, following 9/11 attack, words like 'terror' and 'terrorism' again started becoming a linguistic staple in US broadcast media, particularly television (Munshi, 2004: 46-60). Based on her account of being in the US just before the 9/11 incidence, Munshi (2004: 46-60) notes that the war in Afghanistan was reported on US television very differently than other television networks around the world. She mentions that in the US, media presented 'grainy, green images' of 'precision' air strikes with 'little collateral damage'. While other global media networks illustrated pictures of large parts of Afghanistan being bombed and reduced to rubble, the civilian casualties caused by US bombing, the suffering of the Afghan people with the chilly winter weather of 2001, and the United Nations help with food and medicines being slow to reach them (Munshi, 2004: 46-60). In short, the media coverage was once again 'covered-up' by the US media. The incident of 9/11 has strengthened the binary concept of 'us' and 'them'. Here the concept 'we' refers to the democratic, civilized world, whereas 'they' indicates the uncivilized, terrorist, and Muslims in general. It is reflected in the United States' policy that 'either you are with us or against us'. The world has nothing to choose but to support the US or oppose it about the decision on war on Iraq. Thus, it is the concern of the US of its superiority over others who do not support pre-emptive attack on

Iraq to destroy the weapons of mass destruction, which in reality does not exist. As mentioned above, the war has resulted in the massacre of innocent civilians, including women and children, in the name of the US-defined concept of justice and democracy.

Another point to note is the media extension of terrorism to all Muslims on earth. Taking few scarred terrorist incidences committed by Muslim-named individuals, and appointing Osama bin Laden as the representative of Muslims, the media has put a serious question mark on its objective nature. In reality, majority of the world's Muslims and Arabs are peace-loving people, and denounce terrorism violence in all form. It should be emphasized here that Osama bin Laden is not the representative of 1.3 billion Muslims around the world. There is another failure of media in distinguishing the real teachings of Islam and the behavior of people who are supposed to obey its teachings. At present there has been a huge difference between Muslims' behavior and Islamic principles. Many Muslims simply do not follow the real teachings of Islam, but rather deviates from it, although they may have Muslim names. The blame should not be on Islam as a religion, but rather the people who fail to follow the principles of Islam correctly in their life.

Conte (2001) asserts that the British media have used value-loaded and inaccurate language, portraying Osama Bin Laden as a 'Muslim fanatic' and Islam as a dangerous religion rooted in violence and irrationality. The use of emotive language linked to racial and religious identifiers has been prevalent in the media; for example, Osama Bin Laden and his followers have been described at various times as 'Muslim Fundamentalists', 'Muslim Extremists', 'Muslim Terrorists' and 'Muslim Fanatics'. Conte (2001) suggests that the media should drop the word 'Muslim' in conjunction with any of these terms or at least explain that Bin Laden's beliefs fall well outside the scope of Islam. He argues that the Irish Republican Army is not called Catholic terrorists; the Ulster Freedom Fighters are not called Protestant terrorists; America's White Aryan Resistance is not Christian terrorists; South Africa's AWB were not called Calvinist terrorists; and Uganda's Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments was described as a cult by the media after it massacred 780 of its followers, though its name alone points at Jewish influences. Conte (2001) goes on to argue that we interpret Bin Laden's distorted imaginings as 'true Islam' whereas other religious cults with charismatic leaders are regarded as beyond the scope of Judaism and Christianity; and yet

American TV evangelists are derided as fraudsters but Bin Laden is regarded as a true representative of Islam.

For political interests of the United States, a group of Middle East/terrorism 'experts' have made careers out of demonizing Islam and Arabs for America, whose 'expertise' was simply formulation of the thesis that the Muslim and Arab world is waging a '*jihad*' against the West (Akram, 2002). Mahathir Mohamad (2002: 3) notes that terrorism by others, by ethnic Europeans, by intolerant Christians and Jews, by Buddhists are never linked to their religions; because there are no Christian terrorists or Jewish terrorists or Buddhist terrorists or Orthodox Christian terrorists. Regarding the negative labeling Mahathir Mohamad (2002: 3) argues, "Hindu attacked Muslims in the name of Hinduism (in Gujarat and elsewhere in India) but they are not called Hindu terrorists. Aum Shinrikyo, a Buddhist sect in Japan poisoned people with gas but is not called Buddhist terrorists. The Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland terrorized each other but are not called Christian terrorists. But if misguided Muslims attack non-Muslims or other Muslims they are labeled Muslim terrorists." Edward Said (2000) has pointed out:

> Never mind that most Islamic countries today are too poverty-stricken, tyrannical and hopelessly inept militarily as well as scientifically to be much of a threat to anyone except their own citizens; and never mind that the most powerful of them – like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and Pakistan – are totally within the U.S. orbit. What matters to 'experts' like (Judith) Miller, Samuel Huntington, Martin Kramer, Bernard Lewis, Daniel Pipes, Steven Emerson and Barry Rubin, plus a whole battery of Israeli academics, is to make sure that the 'threat' is kept before our eyes, the better to excoriate Islam for terror, despotism and violence, while assuring themselves profitable consultancies, frequent TV appearances and book contracts. The Islamic threat is made to seem disproportionately fearsome, lending support to the thesis that there is a worldwide conspiracy behind every explosion.

The media report of the bombing of the Federal Government Building in Oklahoma City in 1995 is a clear example of how media can be prejudiced. The media immediately announced that Muslims are the perpetrators of this action, since it was the preconceived idea that the terrorists who placed the bombs must be Muslims. For example, CBS newswoman Connie Chung declared, "US government sources told CBS News that it (the bombing) has Middle East terrorism written all over it" (Allen, 1995: 20-24). However, later it was found that the perpetrator was two non-Muslim Americans (named Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols), and Muslims were judged by the media as being "guilty until proven

innocent" (Yousif, 2002: 119). In this way, the media practices dualism instead of being objective to the situation.

## *"24"* and representation of Muslims

The popular television series *"24"*, broadcast in the Fox Network in the US, is analyzed here to illustrate the media representation of 'Others' — in this case the Muslims and Arabs. Directed by Jon Cassar, and produced by Joel Surnow, Howard Gordon, and Robert Cochran, *"24"* takes place in 'real time' (including advertisement time). This Emmy Award wining series portrays the story of a day (24 hours) in which terrorists plan to attack (often with nuclear bombs and bio-weapons) on the United States, and the attempt made by a fictional Counter Terrorist Unit (CTU) based in Los Angeles to stop the attack. In each season, the lead CTU agent Jack Bauer (played by Kiefer Sutherland) attempts to protect the nation from terrorist threats, and tries to unravel the conspiracy of the terrorists, often resorting to torture as a method of interrogation. In each season, either the president of the United States or/and the innocent civilians is the target of the terrorist attack. However, Bauer usually violates the direct order from CTU in the process of unraveling the plan of the terrorists.

Jack Bauer rings his cell phone
Bauer: Did you tell anyone at CTU where we are supposed to meet him?
O'Brian: No! What are you doing Jack? Driscoll just announce you operating outside her authority.
Bauer: We don't have a choice. She [Driscoll, CTU director] is not handling this the right way.
O'Brian: What if you are wrong?
Bauer: I'm not. This is the best chance to find Secretary Heller.
O'Brian: Jack if anything happens to Andrew…
Bauer: Chloe, I'm doing the best I can, but right now we need to find these terrorists.
O'Brian: So why the hell are you calling me?
Bauer: Our hostage headed to the canyons, I'm gonna need satellite surveillance without being tracked by anyone.

["24", season 4, 9:00 am to 10:00 am]

"24" first aired on November 6, 2001, about two months after the September 11 attack by the terrorists. In the show, the world is observed through the eyes of Jack Bauer, with the help of

other CTU agents, government officials, and terrorists associated with the plot. This real-time nature is highlighted by an on-screen digital clock appearing before and after commercial breaks, with a discrete beeping noise for each second. Each one hour episode (24 in total for a season) ends with a climax in the narrative of the story. *"24"* frequently uses split-screen action to follow multiple plots, phone conversations, and shots leading into and out of commercial breaks. Currently, the series is in its seventh season (as of April 19, 2009).

In season one, which depicts the day of the California presidential primary, the narrative revolves around the assassination plot of Senator David Palmer. Jack Bauer becomes professionally as well as personally involved when his wife Teri and daughter Kim are kidnapped by the people behind the assassination. At one point, Bauer is forced by the terrorists to assassinate Senator Palmer, but managed to protect him. This season shows the involvement of Senator Palmer and Bauer in killing of Victor Drazen (who was working for former president Slobodan Milosevic) in Kosovo two years earlier.

In this paper, "24" season four is analyzed critically. The season four was premiered on January 9, 2005 on Fox, and ended on May 23, 2005. Unlike previous seasons, which focused on a singular threat, multiple enemies, and conspiracies, this season is based around one main enemy: a terrorist named Habib Marwan who controls a chain of Middle Eastern terrorist cells that launch a series of nuclear attacks on the United States. The story begins with the terrorist attack and assassination of Secretary of Defense James Heller and his daughter Audrey Raines. The terrorists manage to kidnap Secretary Heller, and plan to broadcast of the execution of the Secretary of Defense. In the meantime, the group manages to bomb a commuter train which allows the theft of a device known as the 'Dobsen-type Override' which could be used to take control of United States nuclear power plants. Afterwards, a young computer hacker named Andrew Paige who discovers a secret transmission code on the internet which as being used by the terrorists to melt-down the nuclear power plant of the US. Later, the terrorists kidnap him. The terrorist who was carrying Paige on the car engaged in the following dialogue:

Omar [terrorist] driving a car, and Paige is handcalfed at the back seat.
Omar: I'm gonna pull over; so that we are gonna talk. Ok?

Paige: [nods his head with fear]
Omar: Good. There's something's I need to know. Today is not about me… or you. It's about something's bigger. What I need to know with certainty is that whatever you saw on the Internet will not interfere with what have planned. [his face is filled with rage and hatred]
Later Omar and his men torture Paige for telling CTU about the secret codes.

["24", season 4, 9:00 am to 10:00 am]


At the same time, the Iranian Araz family is shown to be responsible for helping the terrorists accomplish the mission. Behrooz, the son of Dina Araz, discovers that his mother is willing to kill his girlfriend Debbie ensure that the secret mission is successful. However, Jack Bauer uses Dina to get to Marwan. When they reach Marwan's place, Marwran kills her:


Dina Araz: We weren't followed, I was careful.
Marwan: You are a good liar Dina.
Dina Araz: What?
Marwan: Fayed martyred himself. The men who are following you are dead.
Dina Araz: What men?
Marwan: Enough for the lies. [pointing gun at Dina]
Dina Araz: [crying voice] Marwan, please believe me. I *did not* betray you.
Marwan: [pointing gun at Dina's head] Prove it to me. Kill him [Jack Bauer]
Dina Araz: [tries to shoot Jack Bauer, but can't, and then rather points the gun to Marwan]
Marwan: Just what I thought. [and then shoots her on the head]

["24", season 4, 9:00 pm to 10:00 pm]


The main antagonist, Habib Marwan, who is the mastermind behind the terrorist attacks of season four, has maintained and funded a number of terrorist sub-cells in nearly five years, primarily in Los Angeles. Marwan is shown as a Middle-Eastern Muslim terrorist, similar to Osama bin Laden. Marwan used his funds and position in a company named McLennan-Forster to create sleeper cells and acquire technology needed to implement his plans. Besides placing himself at the defense contractor, he puts several personnel in successful completion of a nuclear attack on the US soil. Habib Marwan plans to attack a nuclear weapon on US soil. He talks to one of his men over the phone:

Marwan: [on phone] Is the [nuclear] warhead in place?
The man: Yes, but I have a problem. I can't jam their satellite.

Marwan: You assured me that you could handle it.
The man: The CTU must have just installed a new software. This wasn't in place last week.
Marwan: We are gonna have to move our schedule forward [nuclear attack] by now.
The man: There won't be many as casualties if people aren't at work [this is happening between 3 am and 4 am]
Marwan: If you can't jam this satellite signal, they'll find us. We can't let that happen.
The man: I understand.
Marwan: I'm going to upload [on computer] a new location.
The man: Ok, go ahead.
Marwan: [types on computer a new coordinates for nuclear attack]
The man: Alright, we'll reprogram the sequence for the unload [of nuclear warhead]

["24", season 4, 3:00 am to 4:00 am]

Through information gathered from Navi Araz at the beginning of the day, Marwan and his terrorist cells have been planning for the day's attacks for nearly 5 years. Each attack, starting with the train bombing in Santa Clarita early in the day, is diversions for larger, more devastating attacks against the United States. The train attack is a cover for the kidnapping of James Heller and Audrey Raines. The kidnapping is cover for the nuclear power plant attack.

In a series of events, Secretary Heller and his daughter manage to escape from the terrorist group's cell controlled by Omar, a Middle-Eastern terrorist. Marwan manages to convince Anderson to blow up the Air Force One.

Marwan: [on phone to Anderson]
Marwan:  It's time for you to go. Are you ready?
Anderson: Yes, of course.
Marwan:  Proceed as planned. The president of the United States is on a tight schedule. We can't be late….
Marwan: [on phone] How long will it take?
Anderson: I don't know yet.
Marwan: Resolve this now. It's time to earn some money Mr. Amderson. The window of opportunity closes within an hour.
Anderson: I understand. [both turns off the cell phones]

["24", season 4, 8:00 pm to 9:00 pm]

Anderson successfully steals a stealth fighter from an Air Force base in Southern California, and in the process shoots down Air Force One, which crashes into the Mojave Desert, almost killing President Keeler in the process and elevating the Vice-President Charles Logan under the 25th Amendment. Later, Terrorists manage to steal the nuclear

football from the Air Force One crash site. At the end of the day, Bauer manages to stop the terrorists from launching nuclear warhead by shooting down the missile.

Marwan has one of his cells hijack a train to acquire the Dobson Override, a device which would bypass security codes and melt down each reactor while changing the kill codes. The goal is to melt down 104 separate nuclear reactors in power plants around the country. During the execution of this plan, Navi Araz contacts Marwan with help in finding his wife, Dina, and son, who have betrayed the group. Marwan detests this distraction but had one of his subordinates give Navi the requested personnel and resources needed to silence the two. When CTU shuts down all but six of the reactors, Marwan poses as an IT technician, snicks into IDS Data Systems, and tries to personally work the override into melting the remaining cores. He is stopped by Jack Bauer and Curtis Manning however, when they arrive at the office building and spot him, Marwan fires his gun to create a panic, and uses the resulting chaos to escape. Marwan kills a field agent and puts on his gear to pose as the agent to escape from the building.

When CTU has found another lead to Marwan, Joseph Fayed, Bauer decides to use a sting operation to get his location by letting Dina Araz and Fayed take Bauer hostage and bring him to Marwan. He catches onto the plan, however, and abducts Jack and Dina while Fayed makes a martyr of himself. While captive at a nearby warehouse, Marwan, suspecting that Dina is working with CTU, tests her loyalty by giving her an unloaded gun and telling her to shoot Bauer. When she pulls the gun on Marwan, however, he has one of his men kill Dina and restrain Bauer. Marwan, needing another distraction to sway CTU from his next planned attack, calls Michelle Dessler. He offers CTU an exchange of Bauer for Behrooz Araz. While being captured, Marwan tries to cut a deal with Bauer:

Marwan: I have a few simple questions. If you answer there is a chance you might survive today.
Bauer: [grins] You are wasting your time.
Marwan: You located me through a man named Joseph Fayed, who you would be interested to know, has since martyred himself. He was the only link to me.
Bauer: Whatever you plan next today is going to fail. Just like everything else you tried today.
Marwan: Fail?! Almost 40 dead in the train crash, many more near the Saint Gabriel nuclear plant.

Bauer: [laughts at Marwan] That wasn't really a plan, was it? We managed to stop the other 103 power plants from melting down. That's what America will remember that we stopped you.

Marwan: No, they'll remember the image of Secretary of Defense Heller held hostage on your own soil. And it will burn in their psyche. This country will forever be afraid to led their leader's be hated in public.

Bauer: For all the hatred that you have for this country, you don't understand it very well. Whatever you throw at us, I *promise* you, that will never happen.

["24", season 4, 9:00 pm to 10:00 pm]

With the wreckage of the plane included the nuclear football, a briefcase that contains all the firing codes for the US nuclear warheads. Marwan gets to the football in time to take one of the codes from the briefcase, but has to leave the Football behind, as he was being perused by Bauer. After escaping and returning safely back to Los Angeles, Marwan goes in a back room of The Hub nightclub. There, he records a tape to be leaked to the media in which he explains the meaning of the day's attacks, including the nuclear warhead attack that will happen before the end of the day, to the American public:

> People of America, you wake up today to a different world. One of your own nuclear weapons has been used against you. It will be days and weeks before you can measure the damage we have caused. But as you count your dead, remember why this has happened to you. You have no concern for the causes of the people you strike down or the nations you conquer. You follow your government, unquestioning, toward your own slaughter. Today, you pay the price for that ignorance. ... Unless you renounce your policies of imperialism and interventionist activities, this attack will be followed by another... and another after that. ["24", season 4, 1:00 am to 2:00 am]

Marwan next places some calls to Robert Morrison in Iowa, where Sabir Ardakani and another sub-cell secured the nuclear warhead tracked by Marwan's stolen nuclear football intelligence. Morrison and Ardakani successfully launch the warhead. He then met with his helicopter pilot at the Global Centre parking lot, where he planned to escape LA with Mandy and Gary, two of his mercenaries. Because Mandy gave up this location for a full presidential pardon, Bauer and CTU agents engaged him in a running gunfight in the parking structure. When faced with his own capture, he moved to martyr himself and avoid interrogation concerning the target of his missile, which was threatening Los Angeles. Marwan believed that American people should see their enemy and refused to have his face

covered when he made the video about the day's attacks. At the end, when Jack Bauer finds

Marwan's location and gets him, and points his gun at Marwan, he replies:


Marwan: You are too late.
Bauer: [shoots him]
Marwan: Kill me. I won't stop the [nuclear] missile. …
Marwan: Agent Bauer, after this day, every elected official and citizen's of America will know that America cannot intervene in our [Arab] lives, in our countries, with impunity. You saw it. Your president sees from one dimension — Evil.
Bauer: Yes you see us.
Marwan: Yes, and vulnerable.
Bauer: [asking CTU agents] Take him back to CTU now.
Marwan: Doesn't matter where you take me
Bauer: Yeah, we'll see about that.

 ["24", season 4, 4:00 am to 5:00 am]



Habib Marwan is one of the three Muslim main antagonists in any season of "24", along

with Syed Ali of Season 2 and Abu Fayed in Season 6. In season six, it is shown that United

States has been targeted coast-to-coast in a series of suicide bombings. A man named Abu

Fayed agrees to give the U.S. the location of Hamri Al Assad, the supposed terrorist

mastermind of these attacks, in exchange for CTU Agent Jack Bauer with whom he has a

personal grudge.


Fayed: I'll keep the end of the deal, you keep mine. I've [Hamri al]Assad's location. …
Fayed: CTU is about to kill the wrong man. Assad isn't behind this attack. He's come here to stop them [attacks]. He's come here to stop *me*.
Fayed's man: We have to go.
Fayed: Not until we find Bauer.
Fayed's man: We are not here to kill one American, we are here to kill thousands.
Fayed: But he knows the truth.
Fayed's man: It doesn't matter. By the time he'll [Bauer] find out, it'll be too late. Assad will be dead and we'll be free to finish what we started. Fayed, listen to me, if we don't leave now, we'll jeopardize the mission. Yallah…

["24", season 6, 7:00 am to 8:00 am]


However, while under torture from Fayed, Bauer finds out that Assad is actually

trying to stop the attacks, and Fayed is the true mastermind. Jack manages to escape, and

saves Assad from being killed in an air strike. Jack and CTU, with Assad's help, discover

Fayed's true intention: to detonate nuclear bombs on U.S soil. President Palmer wants to use the Middle-Eastern ambassador to request Assad for appearing on television to make comments about Fayed's plan. President Palmer says to his cabinet members:

President Palmer: The American Muslim community is our best line of defense against these terrorists.
["24", season 6, 1:00 pm to 2:00 pm]

Taken together, there is a change in narratives in season six of "24". Hamri Al Assad who committed terrorist activities before, now comes to stop terrorism in the United States. Assad is initially suspected of instigating the wave of suicide bombings that have plagued the United States at the beginning of season six, but Bauer comes to trust that Assad has renounced terrorism and works with him to track down the real terrorist, Abu Fayed. Assad receives a Presidential pardon and agrees to make a televised statement with the President in which he will make a plea to Muslims across the world to seek peace with the West. However, before the telecast occurs, Assad spots a bomb in the Presidential podium and tries to push the President away; the bomb detonates and kills Assad. At the end, the Russians and the Chinese are found to be conspiring against the United States. One of the former Russian General, named Gredenko, mediates the terrorist operation to destroy the relations between Arabs and the West:

Gredenko: If we succed today, the Arabs and the West will destroy each other.
["24", season 6, 5:00 pm to 6:00 pm]

On the other hand, as the attacks continue to worsen, Karen Hayes, the Head of the Department of Homeland Security, agrees with President Palmer's Chief of Staff Tom Lennox, proposing to create detention centers for anyone of Muslim descent. When asked by Bill Buchanan, the CTU director, why Muslims must be placed in the detention centre, Karen Hayes replies that, "precisely because they are Muslims".

In season six too, Nadia Yassir is one of the Arab-Americans designated to be victimized by racism and prejudice. Though a U.S. citizen who apparently has high level security clearance, her Middle Eastern background subjects her to tenuous suspicion of being a spy. Special controls are imposed on her alone in the CTU office because she is of Arab descent. However, Nadia Yassir is not just a "good" Arab-American, but a top

counterterrorism agent dedicated to protecting the United States against terrorists (Yin, 2009).

Clearly, the season four of "24" portrays Arabs and Muslims as terrorists. However, at the beginning of season five, after a January 2005 meeting with Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), Fox aired a commercial in which the show's star, Kiefer Sutherland, urged viewers to keep in mind that the show's villains are not representative of all Muslims, saying:

> Hi. My name is Kiefer Sutherland. And I play counter-terrorist agent Jack Bauer on Fox's "24". I would like to take a moment to talk to you about something that I think is very important. Now while terrorism is obviously one of the most critical challenges facing our nation and the world, it is important to recognize that the American Muslim community stands firmly beside their fellow Americans in denouncing and resisting all forms of terrorism. So in watching "24", please, bear that in mind.

Together with this discretion, there is a change in the storyline in the following season five. Although in season six, Arabs and Muslims are portrayed as terrorists as well as patriotic. Beginning from *24: Redemption* and season seven, the narrative portrays a terrorist in an African country named Sangala. Therefore, it can be assumed that the pressure from the Islamic Council has an effect on the misguided portrayal of Muslims and Arabs to shift away.

However, Tung Yin (2009) argues that with regard to the portrayal of Arabs and Arab-Americans, "24" may not be as negatively biased as some critics complain it is. The terrorists are not always Arabs; in fact, even in the seasons when the terrorists are Arabs, there are usually other, non-Arab villains as well (Yin, 2009). Yin (2009: 295) asserts:

> In short, the problem with the depiction of Arabs as terrorists in 24 lies less in that Arabs have in fact been cast as the villains. Rather, the problem lies in the one-dimensional nature of the Arab terrorists as nihilistic ciphers—they are essentially dehumanized, which in turns makes the torture inflicted upon them by Bauer more palatable than if they were seen as persons.

**Conclusion**

For all its narrative structures, "24" appears to be one of the major television serials to portray Muslims and Arabs as terrorists. The series depicts Islamic terrorists as the villains who launched a stolen nuclear missile in an attack on America. For all its fictional liberties, "24" depicts the fight against Islamist extremism much as the Bush Administration has defined it: as an all-consuming struggle for America's survival that demands the toughest of tactics by waging war against Muslims. It comes no coincidence as the show's producer Joel Surnow is an outspoken Republican, and even John McCain has done a cameo appearance in the series. Furthermore, "24" appears just after the 9-11 attack, which further strengthens the hatred against Muslims in America and other parts of the world.

I argue that there is a need to separate out the distinction that, though there are Arabs and Muslims who are terrorists, and yet not every Muslim is a terrorist. Imposing the fact the Muslims *are* terrorists lies the problematic. As a result, "24" has also come under fire from various groups for its portrayal of Arabs as stereotypical crazy terrorists and Arab-Americans as not altogether trustworthy and insufficiently patriotic. Arabs or Arab-Americans have been the show's primary villains in three of its seven seasons.

How well does "24" fare in terms of its portrayals of Arabs and Muslims? Seasons two, four, and six do involve Middle Eastern terrorists intent on setting off nuclear devices in Los Angeles—Syed Ali (season two), Habib Marwan and the Araz family (season four), and Abu Fayed (season six)—thus appearing to fit the common stereotype of portraying Arabs or Muslims as the villains (Yin, 2009). Furthermore, the terrorists are shown torturing innocent men and women ["24", season 2, 4:00 pm to 5:00 pm], poisoning a teenage girl to death, where Dina Araz gives her son's girlfriend poisoned tea after discovering that the girl had followed the son to the secret location where Marwan's men were holding the Secretary of Defense ["24", season 4, 10:00 am to 11:00 am], and torturing Bauer and a CTU computer technician ["24", season 6, 6:00 am to 7:00 am, and 1:00 pm to 2:00 pm].

Of course, ruminations on "24" would be just an entertaining diversion if it were not for the fact that the show has slowly seeped into the national debate on antiterrorism tactics (Yin, 2009). Former Office of Legal Counsel attorney John Yoo referenced "24" in his recent book

defending the Bush Administration's interrogation policies (Yoo, 2006). During a debate among Republican presidential candidates in 2007, Republican Tom Tancredo answered a hypothetical question about the appropriate response to a captured would-be suicide bomber with, "I'm looking for Jack Bauer at that point, let me tell you" (Page, 2007: 149). Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff has said that "24" "frankly, …reflects real life" in presenting scenarios with "no clear magic bullet to solve the problem" (Chertoff, 2007: 160), and former CIA Director James Woolsey has said that "24" is "quite realistic" about the threats that it depicts (Woolsey, 2007).

Another aspect of "24", the use of torture during interrogation, is widely debated, although beyond the scope of this paper. Scholars argue that Jack Bauer is a criminal (Yin, 2009). Bauer, the counterterrorism agent, is also viewed as an archetype of the Bush years. Bauer invariably chooses to some rather extreme methods of interrogation, insisting that torture is a necessary tool to combat terror. With unnerving efficiency, suspects are beaten, suffocated, electrocuted, drugged, assaulted with knives, or more exotically abused; almost without fail, these suspects disclose critical secrets.

However, *"24"* is unlike other television series, such as *Little Mosque on the Prairie* or *Aliens in America.* The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's new situation comedy series, "*Little Mosque on the Prairie*" shows a small group of Muslims in a prairie town in Saskatchewan where the group was trying to establish a mosque in the parish hall of a church. A passer-by, seeing the group praying, rushes to call a "terrorist hot line" to report Muslims praying "just like on CNN," which touches off a local firestorm. Hoping to avoid making a swirl in the town, the group hires a Canadian-born clean-shaven-jeans-wearing imam from Toronto who quits his father's law firm to take the job — career suicide. On the way, he is detained in the airport after being overheard on his cellphone saying, "If Dad thinks that's suicide, so be it," adding, "This is Allah's plan for me." Overall, the series portrays life of a Prairie Muslim community by using comedy.

Therefore, it can be argued that the US media depicts Islam and Muslims negatively by linking them with terrorism and violence based on a few accounts of individuals who commit suicide bombings in the name of Islam. Another obvious evidence of ignorance is that many movies and television shows, and undoubtedly many Americans, make the

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mistake of equating Arabs with Muslims (Goodstein, 1998). In fact, only about 12 percent of the world's Muslims are Arabs, and far more Muslims live in Malaysia, Indonesia and India than in the Middle East; while contrarily many Arabs, particularly Palestinians, Lebanese and Egyptians, are Christians (Goodstein, 1998). The portrayal of Muslims can be expressed in the following equation by the media:

$$\text{Muslims} = \text{Arabs} = \text{fundamentalists} = \text{terrorists} = \text{Muslims}$$

The media is linked to religion in the way that it portrays the expression of religion to its devoted adherents as well as to the people 'out there'. It also enhances the understandings of a particular religion through meaningful manifestation of it. As such, the media are the channels through which the principles and message of religion gets perceived to the public. In this process, the media can play two roles in the representation of religion: to positively portray it or depict it negatively to the masses. Hence, it depends on the gatekeepers or editors who select the contents to be broadcasted in the media. The ideologies and worldviews of those gatekeepers strongly affect the choice of news and events. As mentioned earlier, acts of terrorism committed by individuals of other faith are not linked to their religious identity. According to the media depiction, terrorism in modern times has become the sole business of Muslims. This wholesome attribution of Muslims as terrorists has resulted in Islamophobia, racial hatred, massacre, and violence. Therefore, John L. Esposito (1992: 261) asserts,

> Today new forms of orientalism flourish in the hands of those who equate revivalism, fundamentalism, or Islamic movements solely with radical revolutionaries and focus on a radicalized minority rather than the vast majority of Islamically committed Muslims who belong to the moderate mainstream of society

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