

The Ethics of Representation: Documentary Film and Islam

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Introduction

In the words of Bill Nichols, a documentary film is one of the “discourses of sobriety” that covers numerous topics related to culture, science, economics, politics, and history discourses that lay claim to tell the “truth.” Nonetheless, a documentary film like any other filmic material presents entertainment and knowledge, art and document. Most importantly, a documentary film stands on both sides of fact and fiction. The famously elusive definition of documentary film set by John Grierson is worth mentioning here: a documentary film is the “creative treatment of actuality,” Brian Winston wrote “Surely, no ‘actuality’ (that is, evidence and witness) can remain after all this brilliant interventionist ‘creative treatment’ (that is, artistic and dramatic structuring) has gone on. Grierson’s enterprise was too self-contradictory to sustain any claims on the real, and renders the term ‘documentary’ meaningless” (Qtd. in Breitrose 2002: 9-10). Hence, the very idea of documentary is impossible; objectivity is also impossible, and the ethical responsibility of documentary is undermined and questioned. The acts of framing and editing are acts of selection, and selectivity is necessarily biased. The act of editing alone has made documentary film indefensible. Any documentary film claiming to be factual is but a discourse and all discourses are equally privileged.

The Ethical Responsibilities of the Documentary Filmmaker

The issue of documentary ethics is seriously discussed by a number of documentary film theorists such as Bill Nichols, Brian Winston, etc. One of the major problems of documentary ethics occurs when a documentarist tends to decontextualize, for instance, some aspects of their film by involving some archival footages that belong to different contexts. Some documentaries fall into this ethical problem such as *Obsession: Radical Islam’s War against the West* and *Islam: What the West Needs to Know*. In these two particular films, documentarists use archival footages that never relate to the stated contexts.

Bill Nichols argues that every film—including those of fiction—is but a documentary, since any film, be it a documentary or a fiction film, represents the particular aspect of culture which emanates from (Nichols 2001: 1). He differentiates between two types of documentary representations, those of the imaginary world and the historical world or what Nichols terms as “documentaries of wish-fulfillment and documentaries of social representation” (1). The imaginary or ‘wish-fulfillment’ documentaries, according to Nichols, are those which one can call “fiction” while documentaries of social representation are the “non-fiction” ones. However, both types of fiction or non-fiction documentaries have a story, and both “call on us to interpret them, and as “true stories,” films call on us to believe them.” (2). Thus, the documentary’s impact on viewers questions the documentary film’s ethics, and undermines film’s authentic claims of revealing reality.

In the first Chapter of Nichols’s *Introduction to Documentary* entitled “Why Are Ethical Issues Central to Documentary Filmmaking?” Nichols explains that some instances of the ethics of documentary filmmaking are called into question such as distortions or modifications of behavior of the social actors, and the reinforced stereotypes that some documentary films tend to highlight on “Other” cultures (6-9). Some filmmakers of some documentaries under study know nothing of Islam, and their knowledge of either the faith or its adherents is non-existent. Consequently, they tend to misrepresent, distort and exploit the issues raised in their films: “Filmmakers who set out to represent people whom they do not initially know but who typify or have special knowledge of a problem or issue of interest run the risk of exploiting them” (9).

The participant consent or, to use Nichols’s term, the “informed consent” is one of the ethical problems of documentary, since the nature of the consent is questioned. When documentary producers and directors do not provide subjects with a complete and clear idea of the nature of their film, subjects agree to be filmed. Yet, the resulted film undergoes ethical problems, due to naïveté and ignorance of the participants who do not recognize the true nature of the film being involved in.

Only little account of documentary makers’ aims and intentions are disclosed to participants. The latter is not told the whole truth behind the film; consequently, a filmmaker gains consent and maintains cooperation with filming (Chapman 2009: 164). Brian Winston asserts that a written and signed consent form by participants “furnishes the documentarist with ethical armour” (Winston 2000: 149). Hence, the right of participants is not protected and sacrificed by documentary makers. Beside, the right of audience to know the “truth” of the represented event or people is exploited as well. Furthermore, lack of the informed consent and the audience’s

right to know sacrifices the documentary objectivity and causes destabilizing neutrality of the documentary film in its visual representation of people or events. If the audience's right to know is sacrificed and the text is not representative of what it claims, the documentary ethics is questioned, as the documentarian does not consider "public expectations about integrity, fairness, and good taste in documentary" (Butchart 2006: 428).

The subject is also exploited and victimized by the filmmaker's unconcerned and indifferent argument. Nichols points out that participants are "placed in a *mise-en-scene*...they become a documentary stereotype in the filmmaker's argument" (Nash 2011: 1-13). Some documentary makers intentionally or unintentionally show their indifference towards their participants; the former "often [do] not feel obliged to protect subjects who they believed had themselves done harm" (Aufderheide 2009). Additionally, a documentary maker sometimes uses very intense investigative advances "by asking 'provocative questions' which lead eventually to make the subjects uncomfortable, embarrassed, and angry. Exceedingly, a subject, who could not bear this kind of questions, asked the filmmaker to turn the camera off" (Alshehri 2011). Here, filmmakers sacrifice and manipulate two different rights, the participant's right and the audience's right to know the "truth" of a particular event or group of people. Because of the 'provocative questions' that lead to interviewees' embarrassment and anger, "viewers may create an impression that some subjects are accused of being responsible for [a] crisis" (Alshehri 2011). Thus, a documentary maker is obliged to avoid harming the participant, and introduce a fair represented image to the audience.

Many people still believe that "the camera never lies," states Brian Winston, "It seems to me that many people still believe it. Most people believe pictures, particularly those accompanied by a well-respected voice on the television" (Winston 1989: 53). Lack of documentary maker's ethical responsibility—through their intervention and manipulation of images—encourages them to distort reality by using certain techniques that can affect the context of images, and "manipulations...of lighting and objects and framing selectivities, there are the inevitable further selectivities of lenses, angles, shutter speed and aperture" (56). Some documentary images are seen superimposed and manipulated after the "Other" peoples and their faith. Thus, the absence of documentary filmmaker's ethical duties and the influence of the documentarian subjective tendency do not lead to impartial representation of people, events or religions.

As mentioned above, Winston considers the claim that the eye of the camera does not lie, asserting that “the limitations of the relationship that any photographic image has to the reality it reflects are beyond everyday experience” (Winston 2005: 182). This relationship between the image and the reflected reality is further distorted by means of manipulation and modification. The “sincere” construction of documentary is therefore clashing with viewers expectations. Whilst Winston questions the claim that the camera never lies, Jay Ruby in his article “The Ethics of Image Making,” agrees with camera’s authentic imaging of reality arguing that “we have already witnessed the demise of ‘our native trust that since the camera never lies, a photographer has no option but to tell the truth’” (Nash 2011: 3-4). Ruby’s point of view of the camera’s ability to record reality is at odds with other views of documentary film theorists. The sole aim of filmmakers is not just to produce a documentary as a vehicle for knowledge; however, the greater end is to create a spectacle for audiences.

The ethical duty of documentary filmmaker is undermined and questioned by the nature of the relationship between him/her and the participant; according to Kate Nash, this relationship between the two is understood in terms of an imbalance in power relations: “Power is most often understood to be something that the filmmaker possesses by virtue of their access to media institutions, social status, control of the documentary image and knowledge (of both filmmaking and the participant)” (Qtd. in Nash 4). Here, we understand that the documentary filmmaker practices power over his/her subjects, and exploits such advantage—actually through manipulation and “conning”—for creating a desired spectacle. “At the level of the text, Nichols (1991) encourages us to read the absence of the filmmaker from the documentary frame as a trace of their power over the participant” (Qtd. in Nash 5). Imbalance of power between the two “remains the besetting ethical problem of the documentarist/participant relationship even in the most casual, normal and undeviant of circumstances” (Winston 147). Consequently, Winston suggests a “renegotiation of the traditional balance of power between filmmaker and participant” (162). The documentarist, Winston also suggests, “must give up their controlling position and take the stance of advocate or enabler” (Qtd in Nash 5). However, Winston optimistic suggestions are inapplicable, since documentary makers seek to create a spectacle for viewers, i.e., an impressive and exciting view that could appeal to the latter, or an image that could arouse intense feeling and stress.

In her introductory essay, “The Spectacle of Actuality and the Desire for Reality,” Elizabeth Cowie argues that “the documentary film involves more disreputable features of cinema usually associated with the entertainment film, namely, the

pleasures and fascination of film as spectacle. As a result, there is a desire for the real not as knowledge but as image—as spectacle” (Cowie 2011: 2). The documentary is therefore not distinguished from fiction films, since the documentarian does intentionally aim to create a spectacle that is able to entertain some viewers on the account of the exploited participants of documentary. Jean Baudrillard also contends, “There is a kind of primal pleasure...in images, a kind of brute fascination unencumbered by aesthetic, moral, social or political judgments. It is because of this that I suggest they are immoral, and that their fundamental power lies in this immorality” (Redhead 2008: 94). A documentarian sacrifices all ethical duties, manipulates film techniques and aesthetics, and controls participants to his/her own advantage—by artful or indirect means—for the sake of entertaining a particular group of audience. Thus, the relationship between the documentary maker and participants is problematic, as the former has all possible means of power that enable him/her to achieve his/her subjective ends.

Michael Foucault points out that “power is understood as a modality of action in which actions act on actions throughout social systems” (Qtd in Nash 7). Actions do not sometimes impose actions; rather, makes new paths for other actions possible. Members of any society exist in complex power relations that are central to the creation of subjects. Nash asks, “How then are we to understand the complex power relationships at play in documentary production?” The relation here is highly dominated by the documentary maker who keeps his/her voice prevailing in documentary, and manipulates, if not distorts, the participant’s voice. Undermining, manipulating and distorting the voice of the documentary participant consequently problematizes the issue of the documentary ethics.

Power exerts itself through the discourse of documentary, or what Nichols calls, in his landmark book on documentary *Representing Reality*, the “discourse of sobriety.” He writes that the documentary discourses are “sobering because they regard their relation to the real as direct, immediate, transparent...Through them things are made to happen. They are the vehicles of domination and conscience, power and knowledge, desire and will” (Borda 2008: 57). Nonetheless, discourses of documentary cannot be seen as a “full-fledged” discourse of sobriety, since they contain images, “and images, as Plato taught us long ago, are deceiving. This situation is something of a paradox, because photographic images generally are apprehended as having a special relationship to reality that Nichols calls indexical” (Terrill 2008: 133). The indexical relationship between the documentary images and reality is recognized and perceived through signs which possess a physical hint to what they refer to. Though documentary photograph appears to capture reality and supports the impression of authenticity, Nichols argues that documentary

cannot be entirely “sober,” because “documentary is a hybrid genre, providing both visual pleasure and logical argument...Documentary film, therefore, is not distinct from fictional film in any absolute sense but does display the evidentiary reasoning of the sober discourses” (133). Jean Baudrillard draws attention to the imminent danger of media images stating, “it is the reference principle of images which must be doubted...they always appear to refer to a real world, to real objects, and to reproduce something...None of this is true” (Baudrillard 2000: 444). Thus, a documentary’s ‘logical argument’ is contaminated by the image that distorts and appropriates reality for its own ends.

Nichols draws our attention to think of aspects of fact and fiction in the documentary film. Like any fiction film, documentary adopts all possible styles and effects such as film techniques and aesthetics. Like fiction film, documentary cannot provide transparent and direct access to reality, “but because of its impression of authenticity, it directs the attention of its audience to reality in ways unavailable to fiction film” (Terrill 134). That is, the documentary rhetoric.

Nichols centers on the issue of rhetoric and asserts that documentary is “a simultaneously aesthetic and argumentative form of discourse, but he defines “rhetoric” as “the means by which the author attempts to convey his or her outlook persuasively to the viewer” and the “means by which effects are achieved” (134). In his article “Mimesis and Miscarriage in Unprecedented,” Robert E. Terrill draws attention to the simplicity of Nichols’s “instrumental understanding” and “narrowly rational” of documentary rhetoric that appears not to be adequate in analyzing the complex mode of documentary discourse, “and its shortcomings might be traced to Nichols’s reliance upon Aristotle” (134). The latter concentrates on the means of persuasion for achieving the desirable effects.

In his book *Representing Reality*, Nichols has pointed out in a section entitled, “A Fiction (Un)Like Any Other,” that there are fictional aspects inherent to the documentary project. According to Nichols, the *focus* on specific actions, circumstances and individuals clearly indicates fictional features of documentary; “Use of re-enactment, a firm narrative design to the commentary and the presence of an on-screen presenter who is shown to be ‘finding things out’ before the camera (thereby telling a story about telling the story) are some of the ways” (Corner 2006: 92) of documentary fiction. The documentary reference to reality lacks objectivity and “sobriety” because of the fictional features that intervene into the documentary discourse. In his book, *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* Nichols explains that “Reference to the real no longer has

the ring of sobriety that separates it from fiction. Such reference now is a fiction” (Nichols 1994: 54).

Documentary films, those with plot, characters and events, are fictions; “they offer introductory lacks, challenges, or dilemmas; they build heightened tensions and dramatically rising conflicts, and terminate with resolution and closure” (Dornfeld 1998: 213). Nichols seeks to distinguish documentary from other films’ narrative modes by examining the fictional aspects of some documentary modes such as the performative and observational documentary modes of representations, and he “clearly sees ideas of ‘fiction’ as a useful way into the exploration of documentary, against the naïve, assertive usage of ‘fact’” (Corner 89). To illustrate, one needs to look at the ambivalence of a documentary film in the following way:

An image is a copy of reality. A reproduction, however, does have a dynamic touch with reality. In a film a person’s relationship with the world becomes magical. A documentary film is a creative interpretation of reality. Every documentary contains the seeds of fictional elements...A documentary film includes pieces of reality, but not the whole stream of reality (Antikainen 1996: 30).

The “creative treatment of actuality” turns fact to fiction in the root sense of finger; to shape or fashion this “creative treatment” is not recorded or registered, but is authored (Nichols 2001: 592). That is, The concept of authorship moves from indexical reference of a preexisting fact to the semiotics of a certain represented meaning and the address of the authorial (593) Thus, it is not just a simple recording of a certain reality; rather, it is the personality of the documentarian that “creates” a distinct between a certain reality and a constructed fiction.

This “dramatic turn” in documentary undermines its authentic claims and opens the way for “the temptations and contaminations of fiction and ‘mere’ entertainment” (Austin 2008:2). Some documentary makers seek to make a spectacle of an issue, event or a crisis, sacrificing their ethical duties and responsibilities for the sake of profitability or gaining fame. Consequently, the documentary crafting as a tool for transmitting and documenting actual issues and events is questioned by some critics:

What makes a film “documentary” is the way we look at it; and the history of documentary has been the succession of strategies by which filmmakers have tried to make viewers look at films this way... To see a film as documentary is to see its meaning as pertinent to the events

and objects which passed before the camera; to see it, in a word, as signifying what it appears to record (3).

Lack of documentary pertinence to issues and events encourages the analogy between documentary and fiction. Nichols notes that there is “no absolute separation between fiction and documentary. Some documentaries make strong use of practices or conventions, such as scripting, staging, reenactment, rehearsal, and performance, for example that we often associate with fiction” (Nichols xi). Thus, form and content of the documentary film is questioned by a number of critics who tend to call it a “mockumentary” or a “rockumentary.”

Some documentary films are no longer documentaries, due to distortions that deeply touch their form and content. A documentary becomes “a mockumentary; that is, a self-satirizing documentary” (Nash & Ross 1988: 2). In his article, “Mockumentary: A Call to Play” Craig Hight defines mockumentary as one “consisting of those fictional texts which employ a sustained appropriation of documentary codes and conventions...mockumentary is little more than a ‘parasitic’ form” (Hight 2008: 204). One can contend that the “mockumentary discourse deliberately engages with documentary’s rhetorical address” (211) incorporating the fiction film’s elements and, consequently, aims at misleading audiences by a distorted “truth”. Alexandra Juhasz and Jesse Lerner believe that “the term “mockumentary” more effectively works to signal skepticism toward documentary realism, rather than to reauthorize documentary’s ‘truth’” (Juhasz & Lerner 2006: 224). In a word, a documentary film deviates from its presupposed function as a vehicle of transforming and revealing reality, and is rendered a biased and subjective tool of reflecting ideological messages and largely negative images.

Hight explains that the digital media such as the DVD and the world wide web is a crucial factor to the emergence of mockumentary “to suggest the potential of mockumentary discourse to inspire new forms of cyber drama” (Hight 215-216). Hight also notes that many mockumentaries have online presence and promotional sites (216). Some documentary films under study such as *Islam: What the West Needs to Know* and *Obsession: Radical Islam’s War Against the West* are present online and have websites with their exact names.

Mockumentary texts are distinguished from other documentary texts by deliberately engaging to parodic and satiric agenda. Parody essentially involves “the process of recontextualizing a target or source text through the transformation of its textual (and contextual) elements, thus creating a new text” (207). Looking at the documentary *Jihad in America*, we find it a clear example of “mockumentaries,”

since, we can trace how manipulated it is to have some issues recontextualized and detached from their real contexts. In this film, the filmmaker, from the one hand, exploits the Western audience's ignorance of Arabic language by presenting two stills of an Arabic text with a two-line English translation. The meaning of the English translation is extremely different from the original Arabic text's meaning; we can easily find out the huge difference by pausing the film at these stills and comparing both the Original Arabic text and the translated-into-English quote. On the other hand, the context of the Arabic text is Palestine; however, the film maker recontextualizes it into an imagined context, that is the United States. The Arabic text explains the sufferings of the Palestinian people caused by the Israeli occupation; the document also indicates some of the plans by which the Palestinian people may encounter the occupier with. Yet, the filmmaker decontextualizes Arabic text by impressing the American viewers into believing that there are terroristic actions planed to blow up American skyscrapers. Thus, the mockumentary discourse oscillates between fact and fiction, and "has involved a variety of often conflicting strategies and intentions" (208). The example mentioned above shows how the filmmaker's conflicted and biased constructions turn his film into a mockumentary *per excellence*.

Framing Islam and Muslims in Two American Documentary films

The documentarist of *The Third Jihad: Radical Islam's Vision for America* (2008) invents two types of jihad in Islam: "violent jihad" and "cultural jihad," so as to reinforce a coercive and fierce perception of Islam in the western viewers' conscious. The latter type of jihad is explained in this film by a Muslim narrator as "working against the western societies through the involvement of explicit means that the Islamists are using in the American society," (Kopping & Werth 2008) since, according to him, "they are given the laws and rights in our society to try to work against society and overthrow it" (TJRIVA). Interestingly, the Muslim narrator—by suggesting that Islamists are dedicated *laws* and *rights* to act against the American community—tends to suit and satisfy people behind the production of the film such as the "Israeli lobby" and many people in the United States as detailed by Hamid Naficy:

The film was part of the increasingly integrated public diplomacy campaign by right wing Israelis, Israeli lobby in the United States, American Jewish neocons, certain Iranian opposition members, defectors from the Iranian regime, and evangelical Christians and their supporters' against Islam (Naficy 2012: 289).

The director, Muslim narrator as well as the producers of the film tend to satisfy the people mentioned above, since “the film is funded mainly by Clarion Fund, whose president Ralph Shore, a co-producer of the film, is a Canadian-Israeli film producer and Rabbi who belongs to the Jewish-Orthodox nonprofit organization Aish HaTorah” (289). Three documentary films—*The Third Jihad: Radical Islam’s Vision For America* (2008), *Obsession: Radical Islam’s War Against the West* (2005) and *Iranium* (2011)—“seek to amplify the danger of Islam to the world” (289). All these films along with, *Islam: What the West Needs to Know* (2006) dedicate the worst and most antagonized picture to Islam and Muslims. “Those interviewed,” in these films, Naficy contends “are likewise part of the rightwing Israeli-American lobbies and organizations,” (289) because these films “ascribe almost all the major terrorist attacks against Western interests in the world to the Islamic Republic [of Iran]” (289).

The main narrator of the film, Mohamed Zuhdi Jasser, who is a Muslim, contributes to other three documentary films, *Islam v Islamists: Voices from the Muslim Center*, *America at Risk: The War With No Name* (2010), *Fox Reporting: A Question of Honor*. All the four documentary films provide one of the worst images to Islam and Muslims in the United States and throughout the world. The documentary film *The Third Jihad* though opens with Jasser’s statement, “This is not a film about Islam. It is about the threat of radical Islam. Only a small percentage of the world’s 1.3 billion Muslims are radical. This film is about them,” the film has been traced as biased, negative and apart from the claimed objectivity. In this film, viewers are exposed to hear, for instance, one of the Orientalists, Bernard Lewis, stating, “the Islamic terrorism starts very earlier since the advent of Islam” (TJRIVA). This sweeping generalization leaves no room for peace throughout the history of Islam and Muslims as the statement clearly suggests. Lewis supports this prejudiced over-statement by stating another one which appears more harmful than the previous one as he does not only deny peace from Islam and Muslims. Rather, he reinforces and confirms his thesis of the clash of civilizations, stating, “The clash between Islam and Christendom is going on for 14 centuries since the advent of Islam” (TJRIVA).

The American viewer is exposed not only to hear such generalized statements, but also to see what seems like publications on terror acts and hate ideologies that fill American mosques against Americans. The documentarist is not ashamed to impose this very racist slur towards American mosques and imams. The director hesitates not to fill the screen with several stills which show no more than decontextualized notes. The so-called “documents” simultaneously contradict the film’s thesis of Muslim hatred for the West and, rather, reverse to work against the

film's intent. A non-prejudiced critic views the several stills as clear signs of cultural hatred towards American Imams and Muslims in general.

Like the documentary film, *America at a Crossroads: The Muslim Brotherhood*, this film also shows Orientalist fears of establishing an Islamic State in North America.

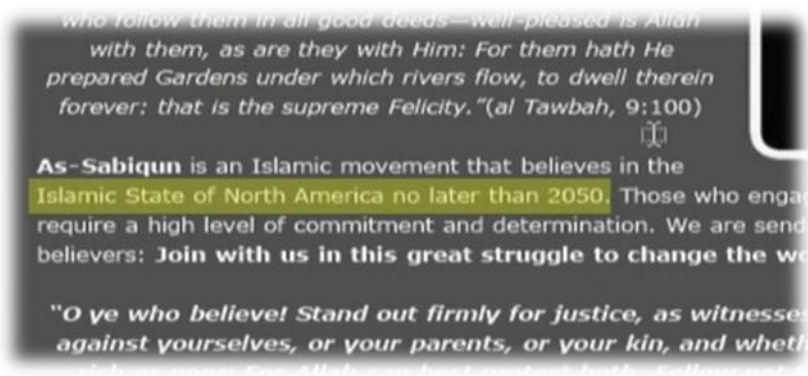
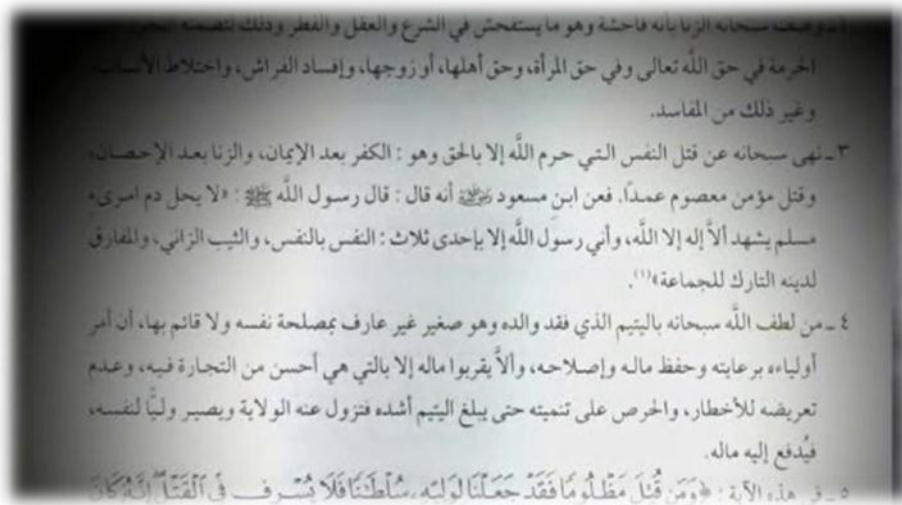


Fig.1, *The Third Jihad*: American fears of establishing an Islamic state in America

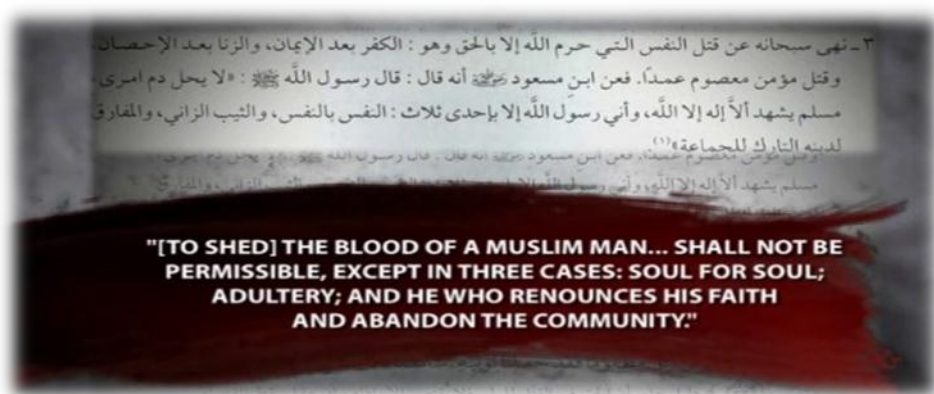
This decontextualized still or so-called “document” is deprived from any reasonable sense, since it may only reveal the dream of a handful of people who do never represent more than a billion Muslims.

If we consider another still (figure 2) that has been taken from a school book taught for the Saudi high school students in America, the image works against the grain of the film's argument rather than supporting it.



(Fig. 2): Resisting the claims of violent Islam in the film *The Third Jihad*
 The film's intent is to insert it as a document that supports and encourages violence and terrorism. However, if one pauses playing the film and read its content word by word, one will find that the film's proclaimed "document" is very peacefully translating some excerpts from the Holy Quran and Tradition. For instance, it recommends taking care of the young orphan and keeping her/his wealth. The still also explains the forbiddance of shedding the blood of any human being; even for those who are unjustly killed, their inheritor is not allowed to take killer's life himself but a judge. The above still does only show a part of the verse 33 in Surat Al-Israa in the Quran (17:33): "And do not kill the soul which Allah has forbidden, except by right. And whoever is killed unjustly, We have given his heir authority, but let him not exceed limits in [the matter of] taking life. Indeed, he has been supported [by the law]" (The Holy Quran 17:33). The film, through presenting the above still too, implies that Islam is violent to those who commit adultery. The film does not state that Islam only punishes those who commit adultery outside marriage, but the film overstates this issue to include all people either single or married. It is not even easily, in Islam, to punish those who commit adultery outside marriage unless there are simultaneously four people who clearly observe the adulterers practicing adultery, and it is impossible to have four people attesting this kind of act.

The director of the film only traces any word that mentions killing and crosses out the rest of the still (Figure: 3). The director's methodology of selectivity is never objective, since it distorts the true essence of Islamic Sharia, and hides kindness and care toward all human beings.



(Fig. 3): Distorting the above text in (fig. 2) by hiding some statements and replacing the English translation.

The issue of the orphan is crossed out using a dark red color to hide Islam's great concern for the orphan, and tends to highlight violence, since the dark red color can be read by viewers as a signifier that refers to the signified, i.e. shedding blood, terror and violence. However, the director fails to conceal the Islamic attention to the orphan, as the previous image (figure: 2) maintains its complete content.

A voice-over is heard over-generalizing that the Islamic textbooks in America promote religious intolerance and the Islamic schools teach violent actions against the Jews and Christians. The film contradicts itself: when commentators and interviewees insist that Muslims in America and their systems of education promote religious intolerance and call for terror actions, they interestingly mention that there are centers for Muslim-Christian Understanding. Therefore, if there are centers for Muslim-Christian Understanding, this contradicts the film's claims of promoting religious intolerance by Muslims in America. It is also interesting to hear one of the commentators stating that Arab and Saudi influence on the American policy reaches to a particular degree in the American universities through the establishment of Middle Eastern Studies departments in well-known and respected American universities. This indirectly shows these people (interviewees and commentators) hate and reject to build any bridges for understanding between Muslims and Americans.

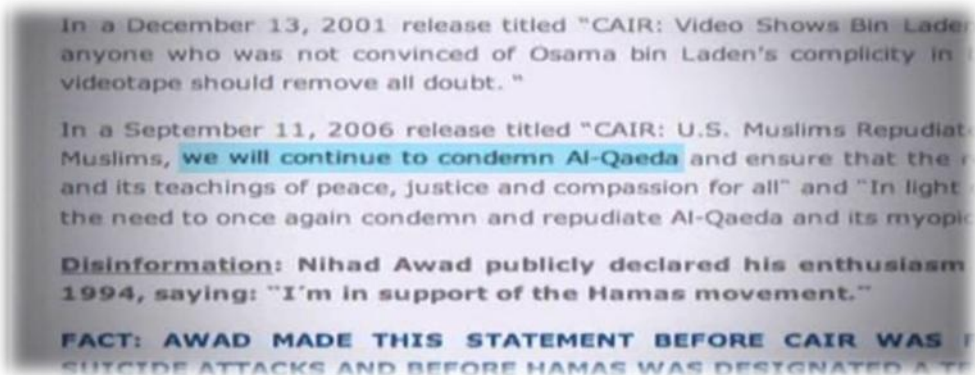
One of the film's interviewees tries to leave viewers with the impression that the Saudi influence on education at the American Universities is a negative one when she says "students who go to these universities are then being taught the Saudi point of view on Islam" (TJRIVA). However, the narrator of the film directly contradicts her statement when he says "many of the Saudi funded courses professed a noble aim of bridging the gap between Islam and Christianity" (TJRIVA). Though he adds that the Saudi support to the courses that try to bridge the gap between the two faiths "is absurd when one considers that there is not even a single church in all of Saudi Arabia," (TJRIVA) this addition does not conceal his confession of the real and noble aim that seeks bridging the gap between the two heavenly faiths.

This Muslim narrator is sad to know that entering Makkah is only for Muslims. The image presented to support his statement contradicts his claim. If we come back to the same image, we will clearly find that it is only the holy places of Makkah that are not permissible for non-Muslims not all places in Saudi Arabia. Many peaceful images throughout the whole film contradict the violent thesis of Islam that the film strives to prove. If we consider (figure 4) of CAIR, we will find that Muslims in America establish centers for Muslim-Christian understanding.



(Fig. 4), *The Third Jihad*: Building bridges of Muslim-Christian understanding.

Figure 5 functions against the will of the film and its producers and directors who, from the beginning till the end of the film, endeavor to demystify and distort the picture of Islam and Muslims. One of the ends of the film—as clearly seen in this film—is to reinforce hatred and animosity between Islam and Christianity. Nonetheless, this image resists this end and speaks against the efforts of the film’s producers and directors.



(Fig. 5), *The Third Jihad*: Imposing violence to CAIR is contradicted in this still

There is a lack of a unified argument in this film, since what a viewer is exposed to see and hear are some fragmented scenes, stock footages and unaccomplished ideas taken from several TV channels. For instance, the film’s commentator and interviewees claim that Muslims are not as moderate as western people. Viewers are expected to understand how Muslims cannot be moderate. Instead of clarifying their claims, they jump to other incomplete arguments: they speak about how CAIR approves the idea that war is deception and so forth.

The film is thus full of gaps and silences which undermine and turn it into a set of fragmentations and unasserted arguments that show the documentarist's as well as his "social actors," to use Bill Nichols's term, prejudiced stances towards Islam and Muslims. Several images in the film speak against the point of view that Muslims in the United States are not moderate and supporters of terrorism. However, if we stop playing the film at some images,—and at what the film pretends to show as "documents" against Islam and Muslim—we will clearly notice that Muslims in America condemn Al-Qaeda and terror acts committed in the name of Islam. For instance, the film strives to prove that CAIR and its members are supporters of terror. Nonetheless, if we consider (figure 5) above, it undermines and contradicts the film's argument. It clearly reads, "We will continue to condemn al-Qaeda, etc" (TJRIVA). The reporter of the film when meeting one of the CAIR's members insists that the latter should announce that Hamas in Palestine and Hezbollah in Lebanon are terrorist groups; the CAIR's member resists the film's reporter's claim by very powerfully and confidentially responding: "I am telling you in a very clear fashion that CAIR condemns terrorist acts whoever commits them, wherever they commit them and whenever they commit them" (TJRIVA).

Exploiting the western audiences lack of Arabic language, the film's reporter—when failed to impose his violent thesis on CAIR and its members—says that the FBI has a secret document that "seems" to answer this question and many others; the director presents an image that has nothing but an Arabic title which reads, an Explanation Letter: For Muslim Brotherhood strategic aim in North America (figure 6). We expect to see the film's elaboration on this; however, the documentarist jumps to other unasserted fragments that only display an atmosphere of fear and hatred to Islam and its adherents.



(Fig. 6) *The Third Jihad*: Inflicting violence to Muslim Brotherhood

The film also establishes negative attitudes against Muslim Imams throughout the United States by describing them as radicals and supporters of terror actions. The Muslim narrator of the film is astonished when declaring that thousands of American prisoners convert to Islam every year. He strives to prove that the

Islamic movements in America are encouraging terrorist acts giving the example of Al-Fuqra movement in Islamberg. However, the negative impression he has given about al-Fuqra movement is undermined when he declares that such Muslim movements are monitored by the FBI. Thus, if these Muslim communities and movements are controlled and monitored, they will not be complicit or participated in any questionable acts or crimes as they are aware of the fact that they are observed.

Some Muslims believe that Islam is supreme and will dominate. This kind of belief has nothing to do with terrorism and violence. Many Muslims who has this kind of belief condemn terrorism and violence. Yet, this kind of belief is upsetting many people in the West amongst them are the documentarist and his social actors. Sheikh Qaradhawi's statement that appears towards the end of the film undermines the violent thesis of Islam and Muslims that the film establishes: "The conquering of Rome and the conquering of Italy and Europe means that Islam will return again to Europe. It is not necessary to conquer by war. No. There is a peaceful conquest" (TJRIVA). Thus, if some Muslims in Europe and America believe that Islam is supreme and will dominate, it does not necessarily mean that they want such supremacy by means of violence and terror. The film attributes the martyrdom of Palestinian children and youth to violence, terror and political ends; however, a stock footage drawn from a Palestinian TV channel resists the film's argument by presenting a mother of ten children who is willing to sacrifice them all for the sake of resisting the Israeli occupation, not as terrorists who are willing to commit terror acts and violence in America and the West in general as the film strives to impress viewers, but as martyrdom in their homeland and against the real terrorist, the occupier.

This film's violent message established in this film against Islam and Muslims is enough to be delivered to the western audience by two Muslim commentators in the film (M. Zuhdi Jasser, the narrator and Tawfik Hamid). The latter declares towards the end of the film that "the real war is between the values of freedom and democracy [of the West] and the values of barbarism [of Islam]. This is the real war that is happening now" (TJRIVA). He goes on to say "Islamism is like cancer; you either defeat it or it will defeat you." In fact, the film needs not anymore commentators or interviewees; these two Arabs and Muslims are enough to convey the generalized, distorted and antagonized messages of the film against Islam and Muslims.

Jasser, at the end of the film, sums up his distorted and antagonized thoughts toward his own faith by stating that he only finds freedom and liberty in the west

and does not find it in his homeland, Syria; he and his western friends have to find alternatives to oil and radical Islam. According to Jasser and his western friends, they must insist on demanding human rights for children and citizens of the Muslim world and must ask Muslim leaders to replace the Sharia by the Western law, etc. (TJRIVA). Jasser is highly criticized not only by Muslim Americans and Islamic centers in the United States but also by a number of American citizens. The Washington Post has this to say about Jasser:

In some ways, Zuhdi Jasser doesn't match the profile of the typical Muslim American. He's an active Republican who has supported the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, is an advocate for Israel and says his faith harbors "an insidious supremacism." (Boorstein 2011)

One of the first Muslims who has been elected to the US Congress, Congressman Keith Ellison, has debated Jasser telling him, "you give people license for bigotry. I think people who want to engage in nothing less than Muslim-hating really love you a lot because you give them freedom to do that. You say, 'yeah, go get after them'" (*IPT News* 2009). The American media group, Media Matters for America, in an article, criticizes Jasser's right-wing rhetoric and his alleged lack of credentials (Powell 2011). However, Jasser is encouraged by a number of neo-Orientalists amongst them is Daniel Pipes who praises Jasser as "truly moderate and as someone whose activities demonstrate the falsehood of phony moderates" (Pipes 2009).

The documentary film, *Third Jihad: Radical Islam's Vision for America* (2008) is never different from any Hollywood film that depicts Arabs and Muslims as "brute murderers, sleazy rapists, religious fanatics, oil-rich dimwits, and abusers of women" (Shaheen 2001: 2). The narrator of the film attributes the major funding of terror to Saudi oil; one of the film interviewees is heard stating "Saudi Arabia is making hundreds of billions of dollars every year in oil revenues and in 2006 for example they made over 150 billion dollars" (TJRIVA). The neo-Orientalist Bernard Lewis who is seen in more than a documentary film confirms the documentarist's Orientalist tendency: "They use money for a variety of purposes, one of which for the dissemination of their peculiar version of Islam... it is also used to fund an arm for terrorist movements" (TJRIVA).

The opening frame of the documentary film, *Islam: What the West Needs to Know*, is a twenty-second black screen with the voice over of the call to prayer. The black frame cuts into three close-ups of three leaders of America and Britain, Bill Clinton, George W Bush and Tony Blair, who all repeat the statement that "Islam

is a peace-loving and tolerant religion.” The screen is again blackened to hear a voice over of someone stating that “he does not like to die...” Then, very shortly after the voice over, a spectator reads this on screen: “Kenneth Bigly, kidnapped and executed in Iraq, 2004.” This statement is followed by a voice over of one of the mujahidin stating that the mujahidin in Iraq will slaughter all the infidels till Iraq would come back to its owners free and honored. The voice over of many loud voices stating in chorus, “Allah is the Great, Allah is the Great” cuts again into black screen on which the documentary title reads, *Islam: What the West Needs to Know*.

Like Gregory Davis and Bryan Daly’s *Islam: What the West Needs to Know*, Wayne Kopping’s *Obsession: Radical Islam’s War against the West* lines itself up in the list of films that openly and directly rot and distort the picture of Islam in America. This documentary film along with *Islam: What the West Needs to Know* are more treacherous and jeopardous than any other films, since they are both pregnant with the idea that Islam is not only at war with America and the West in general, but is also at war with the entire globe. These films strive to show the animosity of Islam to any part of the world that is non-Islamic. In *Obsession: Radical Islam’s War against the West*, a spectator is exposed to view several close-up shots of Palestinian *mujahidin* carrying guns and facing the viewers, so as to provide the message that the whole world and particularly the Americans are targeted.

The claimed images of jihad and mujahidin are detached from their context and are, rather, given a new imagined one, that is the United States. The documentary film *Jihad in America*, for instance, presents Sheikh, Tamim Al-Adnani while talking about the necessity of establishing jihad against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Nevertheless, Al-Adnani’s message is blurred in the documentary in a way that encourages a spectator to imagine real dangers of jihad and mujahidin being prepared to target America. What enhances the viewer’s imagination is two things: first, a close-up of the facial features of Sheikh, Al-Adnani that reveal his anger and dissatisfactions (of the situation in Afghanistan). Second, the verbal expression of Al-Adnani which also reveals extreme hostility not against the American society as the documentary *Jihad in America* endeavors to make, but, rather against the invaders in Palestine and Afghanistan. Al-Adnani’s words, “we solve our problems in the trenches not in the hotels” help the documentarist of *Jihad in America* construct a frightening image of Muslims who violently deal with their “problems” and leave no room for peaceful attempts of establishing peace.

Jihad in America's exaggerated images of jihad and mujahidin give the very impression that Islam is finally splitting its way into the American soil. This film endeavors to search for more evidences that prove his proclaimed thesis of jihad in America; the film presents Sheikh Abdullah Azzam, Sheikh Tamim Al-Adnani, Sheikh Al-Asi speaking about the necessity of fighting the invaders in Palestine and Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the film's hyperbolized image of these sheikhs and others goes to a further extent: it tends to impact average spectators that these people's "militant rage is not limited to their enemies in the Middle East." "Increasingly," this film adds, "the Islamic holy warriors focus their anger on the West, especially America" (JIA). The documentarist's Orientalist fears lead his camera to centralize on several close-up shots of turbaned Muslim sheikhs whom he accuses of "encouraging members to wage jihad wherever they are, even in America" (JIA). However, a clear sign of resisting Emerson's thesis of the existence of jihad in America is seen when he interviews the Palestinian Sheikh, Al-Asi. The latter refutes Emerson's claims of jihad in America and resists such pretensions by stating, "we are not thinking about the United States; we are not thinking of anyone; we are just dealing with people (Israelis) who are coming and causing us all these problems. Why is the U.S. placing itself in the middle of these problems?" (JIA).

The presupposed ethical responsibility of documentary filmmaker is undermined and questioned by targeting Muslim children in their films. The converge of the eye of the camera on Muslim children is not innocent. In Wayne Kopping's *Obsession: Radical Islam's War against the West*, one of the interviewees claims that the Palestinian child is crying for *shahadah*, i.e. wishing to be a martyr. Supported by a full shot of the child crying while performing on a stage in an Arabic TV channel, the Western viewer is negatively impacted when viewing this scene and hearing the commentary of the Palestinian interviewee, Nonie Darwish that even Arab and Muslim children are violent-loving. However, if we render this scene to its real context, the ideology of the documentarist will be disclosed since this scene is taken from a Palestinian TV channel and this scene and many similar ones are being broadcasted every day as a means of expressing the suffering of the Palestinian population because of the continuous Israeli violence and terror. Hence, the Palestinian children's acting to be a martyr is not something secret or hidden as the documentary implies. Rather, it is always being broadcasted to the world; this racial prejudice of the documentary maker towards little children discloses the neo-Orientalist perspective which does not even exempt Muslim kids from the myth of terrorism which is always attributed to Islam and Muslims.

Similarly, in Steven Emerson's *Jihad in America*, the eye of the camera zooms into a Palestinian camp for children and suddenly freezes while capturing a Palestinian child looking aggressively at the camera in a threatening way and seems to be ready to attack. This freeze-frame is seen for a while and is supplemented by a voice over of the *muezzin*, i.e. the call to prayer. The implication is clear that Islam brings up those little children to be as fanatic and violent as their elders.

Conclusion

There are three central and related ethical problems that some documentary films suffer from: the participant consent, the audience's right to know, and the objectivity claims (Donovan 2006: 9). Though a filmmaker has the right to artistically represent events and people, the latter has also the very right to be protected in the process of representation. The ethical responsibility in some American documentary films is undermined and questioned, since both the documentaries *Jihad in America* (1994) and *Third Jihad: Radical Islam's Vision for America* (2008) are traced to be biased and unfavorable towards Islam and Muslims. These two particular films give the American viewer the impression that Islam is a violent religion and its adherents are but terrorists. These films' sweeping generalizations again impress spectators that the West spreads democracy, while Islam produces terror.

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Summary

The Ethics of Representation: Documentary Film and Islam

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The great artistic potential of the documentary film photograph as well as the filmmakers' intervention and manipulation impact viewers as well as interviewees to believe that the camera is able to capture a "real" moment in time. Both viewers and documentary subjects are exploited: the latter's "informed consent" is not built on true, honest and clear relationship. That is, informing subjects, before camera proceeds, about the possible consequences of their participation is absent. For instance, interviewees know nothing of the overall goals of the project and have no idea about the intended audience. Consequently, both documentary subjects and the targeted audience are exploited, since many documentary filmmakers are not interested in approaching a 'real' image of something. Rather, documentary filmmakers' use of sex, violence and controversial issues for sensational purposes is often produced under the guise of "education" or "investigation." This paper attempts to trace the serious ethical issues in two American documentary films which represent Islam and Muslims. These documentary films are Steven Emerson's *Jihad in America* (1994) and Wayne Kopping's *The Third Jihad: Radical Islam's Vision for America* (2008).

Keywords: documentary, Islam, Christianity, Orientalism, Quran, Hadith