

Truth Over Fear: Countering Islamophobia



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EXPOSING “OBSESSION”

Summary:

- The film opens with the statement that most Muslims do not support terrorism, but immediately sets to work undermining this idea, eventually dropping the pretense altogether.
- The intent of the film to promote fear and hatred is absolutely clear. *Obsession* is a shameless piece of anti-Muslim propaganda.
- The effect of *Obsession* is to produce anxiety, mistrust, and deep unease in the average American viewer about the presence, activities and attitudes of millions of their fellow Muslim American citizens.
- Large parts of the film present themselves as exposing Arab and Muslim hate-speech, but by misrepresenting fringe and marginal discourses as mainstream views, *Obsession* perpetuates the very hate speech it claims to denounce.
- *Obsession* presents a mirror-image of Osama bin Laden’s world view, in which all conflicts involving Muslims are fronts in a global crusade. The film’s assertions are both a-historical and absurd, revealing a mindset of reductionism, chauvinism and paranoia.
- The film *Obsession* was initially produced by an organization called Honestreporting.com, which has direct ties to the Israeli Foreign Ministry. Honestreporting.com’s U.S. Executive Director admitted to the *Minnesota Monitor* in spring 2007 that the *Obsession* “pushes the buttons too far.”
- *Obsession* should be exposed at every turn for the hateful propaganda that it is. It is shocking that at least 70 mainstream newspapers around the country would actively choose to profit from hate, and allow themselves to be used to promote fear mongering as a means to influence the outcome of the presidential election. A DVD produced by the KKK aimed at

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detailing the ‘threat’ posed by African Americans, homosexuals, or Jews would never have been distributed this way – and neither should *Obsession* have been.

How “Obsession” Promotes Hate

Obsession is an anti-Muslim film made by an organization called Honestreporting.com. The organization was established by a group of British supporters of Israel as a website in the early stages of the second Intifada. These founders became immigrants to Israel and the organization is now based there. It is headed by Ephraim Shore, who also serves as the co-director of the Israel Office for Hasbara Fellowships, which is a creation of the Israeli Foreign Ministry.

Obsession is an elaboration of a theme that was developed by Israeli propagandists during the second Intifada, an idea alleging that there is something pathologically wrong with Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim culture.

Obsession serves two purposes: the first is to spread fear and hatred of Muslims in general; the second more indirect but fundamental purpose is to stigmatize Palestinians, paint their national struggle as a primal form of global terror, and to cast Israel as part of a besieged yet wholly innocent Western world under barbarian attack.

Despite the fact that the film opens with a disclaimer that it is not about all Muslims in general, but about a radical worldview and ideology - *Obsession* argues that Muslims are, in effect, Nazis, and that radical Muslims have embarked on a campaign of world conquest inspired directly by Adolf Hitler. The disclaimer at the start of the film is undermined from the outset, the film moves rapidly to blur any such distinctions. *Obsession* argues that millions of Muslims are completely interpolated into the discourse of terrorists, and that Arab media consists of a tirade of anti-American and anti-Israel incitements. The film-makers illustrate their points using footage from propaganda sources such as the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) and Palestinian Media Watch. By painting that footage as being typical of the Arab media, Arab discourse, and Arab attitudes - the filmmakers deliberately misrepresent entire populations while moving their discourse into the realm of hate-speech.

The film’s dishonesty extends to its use of Arab commentators, almost all of whom are converts to right-wing evangelical Christianity. There is no indication to the audience of the religious and political background of these people, several of whom have represented their life stories in a manner that makes it appear as if they are Muslim. At best, the commentator’s narratives are wildly fantastic and at worst patently false.

The most troubling aspect of *Obsession* is the extent to which its exercise in hate-speech and defamation has been promoted and publicized by both Fox News Channel and CNN. Fox ran most of the film as a special, including an interview with the film’s director, who assured the audience that this kind of speech is mainstream in the Arab media. CNN’s Glen Beck has also tirelessly promoted the film and has shown several clips from it in his primetime special “Exposed: The Extremist Agenda.”

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Upon skeptical observation, it is clear that *Obsession* is a film designed to promote fear and hatred of Muslims in general. Many groups across the U.S. have already identified the film as such. The film has no distributor for theatrical release and a number of universities have prevented it being screened on campus due to its inflammatory content. However, the film plainly has its champions, and it must be exposed for the destructive force that it is.

In-Depth Summary & Analysis of “Obsession”

Opening

Obsession opens with the disclaimer that most Muslims do not support terror. However, the thrust of the film contradicts the unconvincing gesture. Once the link between Muslims and Nazis is firmly cemented, the pretense that the film is about radicals or extremists only is altogether dropped. The natural distinction between the majority Muslim mainstream and radical terrorists is sharply and immediately undermined by maps moving from east to west towards the U.S., suggesting a clash of civilizations and a general conflict between East and West. Shots of taxis in New York suggest danger within immigrant communities in western cities.

The film opens with the title, “Tuesday morning.” The frame refers to 9/11, though it does not yet say so. Followed by a shot of a yellow taxi – this sequence seems to be an unobvious, but irresistible motif for the filmmakers – as if to say that terrorists “drive our taxis during the day.” That sequence is followed by commentary from converts from Islam to evangelical Christianity such as Walid Shoebat and Nonie Darwish. The film gives no indication that these are converts to fundamentalist sects of Christianity, leaving the viewers to assume that these are simply Muslim Arabs who understand the subject and are willing to speak.

After the commentary, is footage of the Madrid bombings, 7/7 in London, and other terrorist atrocities. Beslan is included, even though this was part of the Chechen war. Added to this sequence is Caroline Glick of the Center for Security Policy, saying that all the wars involving Muslims are seen as multiple fronts in the same battle for global dominance. Further, Glick leads her list of conflict zones with Palestine, even though international jihadists have played virtually no role in the Palestinian struggle and committed no major acts of violence in Israel or the occupied territories. A map later shows Israel to have been the target of numerous attacks of this kind, though none are specified. Already *Obsession* has folded the Palestinian, Chechen and other nationalist struggles in with the specter of international Muslim extremism.

Nonie Darwish declares that “we need to understand the culture that produces terrorism”. That statement obviates the role of history, politics, social conditions, and all other contexts that lend themselves to the very nature of such violence. Instead the film places the issue squarely within the confines of the Arab and Islamic world. Such pathologization is one of the many irresponsible outcroppings of this film.

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Further in the film, Daniel Pipes speculates that “10-15 percent of Muslims worldwide support militant Islam.” This statement is utterly unsubstantiated. It should be noted that Pipes, a known Islamophobe, has accused virtually every prominent Arab and Muslim American of being an extremist and a jihadist. Walid Shoebat points out that this is a huge number, bigger than the population of the U.S., and that “they are all spread out.” Such conjecture, however unfounded, allows the film to establish blanket fear and mistrust of all Muslims.

The Culture of Jihad

The next section, “The Culture of Jihad,” begins with simple shots of women wearing headscarves followed by men praying, again suggesting, contrary to the opening disclaimer, that terrorism is somehow built into the Muslim faith and mindset. Darwish declares that “in the Middle East” Islam dominates all aspects of life. She claims, quite unconvincingly, that during the Nasserite 1950s, in an Egyptian run Gaza elementary school, she was taught that “jihad” was a sacred, holy war to conquer the world “for the sake of Allah.” This, of course, runs wholly counter to the rhetoric of the era, which was nationalistic but largely secular. The language of “jihad” was generally the provenance of a fairly marginal Islamist opposition groups (which the left-nationalist majorities and governments tended to view with deep suspicion, and which were frequently accused of being proxies of western influence). An interview with Itamar Marcus – from the Palestine Media Watch – assures the viewer that Jihadist views are “mainstream” in Arab and Muslim culture today, not radical as is sometimes thought.

The film does admit that “jihad” originally and fundamentally means self-struggle, struggle to be a better person, but Shoebat immediately follows that with “so does ‘Mein Kampf’”. This analogy introduces what becomes a fully-developed comparison of Muslim extremists, Muslims in general, and Nazis.

The Culture of Hatred

In the film, Khaled Toameh says that “the main theme in most of the Arab media is hostility to Israel and the United States”. This is at least as ridiculous as saying “the main theme in the American media is hostility towards the Arabs and Islam.” Indeed, there is a lot of alienation between Arab and American societies, mistrust and mutual antagonism, which is expressed in the media on both sides of the divide. However, there is a lot of diversity of opinion in both media junkets, and such simplistic statements are inaccurate and deliberately misleading. They serve the interests of those making the argument – that terrorism is a function of Islam and contemporary Arab political culture – but are indefensible as analysis of the actual state of journalism in the Arab world. Moreover, a lot of the footage used in the film is not Arab, but Iranian, although the commentary tends to focus on Arab peoples. Never is there any discussion of the differences and similarities between Arab and Iranian political cultures or whether the films cross-polonization of the two might be relevant.

Obsession explains that propaganda is used to recruit terrorists, that it is needed to upset people so they have a reason to fight the West. This is followed by a clip of an Arab saying that the

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Arab channels are the “media of terrorism” - a statement that would seem to undermine rather than confirm the idea that there is only one point of view on Arab televisions. This featured clip is a rare piece of actual programming from a mainstream Arab television station (Bahrain national television), as opposed to the majority of the footage used in *Obsession*. The film frames this clip as an Arab intellectual “admitting” that there is extremist propaganda in the Arab media, as opposed to its actual context – an Arab complaining in the Arab media to an Arab and Arabic-speaking audience. The genuine context of the footage points to the diversity of opinion available to the Arab public via their media, something that film chooses not to acknowledge.

Further in the film, Daniel Pipes falsely claims that on 9/11 there was a “general response in the Muslim world of delight,” which is completely false. In fact, Muslim expressions of shock and grief dwarfed any evidence of glee. The film supports Pipes’s claim by presenting footage of a couple of dozen Palestinians, mostly small children, cheering. As small children, the group likely had no clear sense about what it was that they were cheering for. It is clear the filmmakers used those images of children to support Pipes’s claim of “delight” because there was nothing to support his contention otherwise.

Jihad in the West

This section of the film opens with footage of extremists from the now-defunct pro-al Qaeda British organization “Al Muhajiroon“ demonstrating in London. Former Prosecutor John Loftus then tells us that the “infiltration of radical Islam in the West is so deep, it’s shocking,” as if this were not the discourse of the extreme fringe. Brigitte Gabriel declares Hamas to have the largest infrastructure in the U.S., and Darwish says “they are here with an agenda to make Islam the law of the land.” Darwish does not define who “they” are who harbor this intention. Is it Hamas? Some Muslims? If so, which? All Muslims? Again, this charge continues to be leveled at each and every prominent American from the Muslim community, including self-declared secularists, atheists and agnostics. The film then displays footage of the only known pro-al Qaeda rally in the U.S. post-9/11, which was held in New York by a tiny group of individuals, perhaps as small as five, calling themselves the “Islamic Thinkers Society.”

“Not all Muslims are like that,” says Darwish, “but we have been infiltrated and we have to wake up because we are strangling ourselves with our political correctness.” Such a formulation can only imply that Muslims are generally a danger to the U.S., and that oppressive measures are required to deal with the threat. Steven Emerson then discusses the practice of “saying one thing publicly and another thing privately,” which he immediately associates with the late Palestinian President Yasser Arafat. The film is extremely careful never to let the focus stray too far from Palestinians as its central target. Emerson says that, “the deception is so high that I’m afraid we are losing the battle,” again arguing that it is impossible to believe what any Muslim says, and therefore all Muslims pose a danger or a potential danger.

The film then shifts to a long section about extremist Muslims in Britain – an undeniable problem, but again hardly representative of the British Muslim community as a whole. The film explores these individual’s links to groups like the Taliban and radicals in Pakistan. There is no acknowledgement that similar conditions simply do not exist in the U.S. The film falsely links

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the French riots of 2005 with religious extremism. This is yet another demonstration of the film's bad faith and dishonesty. The French riots were typical of frustrated urban youth, such protests have a long history in France, and elsewhere. Many of the rioters were Muslims and Arabs, but many others were from Africa and non-Muslim, and there is no evidence, as French authorities asserted at the time, that religious or even ethnic consciousness - let alone extremism - were factors. The film depicts Brigitte Gabriel's invective on how "they" use "our laws and our democracy against us." At this point in the film, the viewer is meant to be in a fully-fledged panic about these radical Muslims infiltrating, threatening, lying, and attacking "us" with "our own democracy." Yet again, half truths and blatant falsehoods are used to perpetuate fear and Islamophobic sentiments.

The Culture of Denial

This section of the film opens with Martin Gilbert's analogy of Islam to Nazism. All efforts to think independently or critically about the "all wars are functions of jihad" argument of *Obsession* are condemned as denial due to fear. Gilbert states that people don't want to face the fact that Islam is a global threat. He discourages viewers from trying to think about the phenomenon in terms other than what the film proposes. What the makers of this film do not acknowledge is that by following Gilbert's prescription, viewers are in danger of the same complacency that led to World War II and the Holocaust. This is followed by a long and mystifying detour into the history of the origins of World War II. Then, fade to black.

The film returns with Itamar Marcus condemning "the press" for not alarming people in the West sufficiently about "what they should be alarmed about." "History is repeating itself," declares Shoebat. According to the film, Muslims, especially the Palestinians, are simply and exactly... Nazis.

A veteran of the Hitler youth is then interviewed about the effects of extremism on the minds of young people, a set of obvious and valid observations that would apply to any youths interpolated into radical politics of any kind. It is a pattern that is generic, not specific to Nazis and Muslims, as the film suggests. He asserts that one can only understand "the radical Muslim world today" through the prism of Nazi Germany, but provides no arguments to sustain the contention.

Next, the film shores up its argument by depicting images of Palestinian youths with outstretched arm salutes, falsely implying that these are Nazi gestures. The same sort of imagery is shown for Hizbullah fighters in Lebanon, and others.

Common Denominators [between Nazis and Muslims]

In *Obsession*, the first common link mentioned to prove that Muslims are neo-Nazis is that they both "demonize the Jews." This is followed by a montage of terrorism and incitement against Israel – but no mention of the occupation, Israeli violence, or incitements against Palestinians. In doing so, the film has become everything it purports to condemn: incitement, racism and the

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violent condemnation in the most dishonest terms of an entire people. Shoebat says “this comes literally out of Nazi Germany.” It’s not clear what “this” refers to, but the comment is in line with the overall vagaries, half truths and falsehoods throughout *Obsession*.

The Hitler Youth veteran, indicating that he has not grown as much as he may think he has since his Nazi past, blames the involvement of Palestinian youths in the conflict with Israel on “the Muslims”. He says Hitler committed a crime against German children, “but what the Muslims are doing to their children is much, much worse.” Darwish states plainly “the propaganda of Islam is the same as the propaganda of Nazis”. This statement is no longer framed as radical Islam or militant Islam, but simply Islam. This clearly illustrates that the discourse of *Obsession* has shifted away from its disclaimer, that Muslims have been equated to Nazis, and Islam to Nazism.

Hitler and The Mufti

The film discusses Nazi efforts to reach out to Arabs and Muslims in the 1930s and 1940s, as if similar efforts were not made with regard to the other colonized peoples in the British and French empires. These policies are not presented as predictable attempts to cause problems for global rivals, but as demonstrating some kind of special affinity between Arabs and Nazis. The alliance between Amin al-Husseini and Hitler is not presented as one between political figures brought together by mutual enemies, but as an inevitable linking of kindred spirits. Loftus claims that “Arab Muslims from all over the world” served under Croatian officers in SS units in the Balkans – as opposed to the truth – which is that only a small group of Bosnian Muslims served the SS. The film implies that Muslims, above all Palestinians, were Nazis during the WWII, and were clamoring to serve Hitler’s agenda. Obviously, no mention is made of the tens of thousands of Muslims who served in the allied armies and played a role in the defeat of Germany.

To add insult to injury, Shoebat instructs the viewer that Nazism is “less dangerous than Islamofascism,” which is “way more dangerous.” He warns of the emergence of “several Nazi Germanies” in the Islamic world.

What Do Radical Muslims Want?

Loftus says that radical Muslim goals are the “same as Hitler’s goals: kill all the Jews, crush democracies, destroy western civilization.” The film continues with footage of an unidentified British extremist rant on about the superiority of Islam intercut with images of “Muslim desecration” of non-Muslim holy sites around the world. The film then cuts to extremists proclaiming the need for the world to come under some form of Islamic rule follow. These images, interspersed with Loftus’s critique, only serve to further drive the false fear of all Muslims as potential extremists into the minds of the viewer.

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We Have Been Here Before

In what is possible the most dishonest section of *Obsession* – the filmmakers mix and match freely between sounds and images that do not actually correspond with each other in order to reinforce the ideas that Muslims are Nazis and that Palestinians are the epitome of Muslim extremists. The film again depicts the Second World War era - more images of Hitler and a world enveloped by swastikas. Sounds of Roosevelt promising to resist Nazism are laid over images of young Palestinian children with weapons. Sounds of Tony Blair denouncing the 7/7 London bombings are cut to give the impression he is referring to Palestinian suicide bombings.

The film goes back to Brigitte Gabriel, demanding opposition to terrorism, followed by the accusation that “very few” moderates speak out against extremism. Daniel Pipes then warns of the dangers of throwing moderates in with “the barbarians”. Unfortunately, both Pipes and Gabriel commonly engage in such behavior, which is yet another red flag to the viewer with regard to the honesty of this film.

Ironically, the film closes with a final montage of invocations of freedom. Due to its heavy anti-Palestinian message, one must ask whose freedoms are being promoted. Given the filmmakers ties, and the film’s subject matter - one can only assume that the freedoms being referred to are only those of the Israeli people.

In the final analysis, *Obsession* provides a very elaborate explanation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as the roots of a campaign by a demented and camouflaged Muslim extremist movement, that is similar to and worse than the Nazi movement, with sights set on world domination.

If that sounds preposterous, that is because it is. The majority of Muslims, both in the US and abroad, are moderate and mainstream citizens who are strong proponents of democratic values. One need only look at past films touting anti-Semitism, misogyny, or racism, to see that this film has no more value than a historical footnote, documenting the Islamophobia that existent in this era.