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Entextualizing History through Archives: Representation of Muslim Identity in Post 9/11 Documentaries

Abstract:

Representation of Muslims in media post the Sept 11 attacks in the US largely focused on themes of terrorism and extremism. Such homogenized representation was particularly problematic in non-fiction media such as news and documentaries which use archival footage to create 'reality'. The consequent circulation of these images across the globe is one of the many examples through which Muslim representation has been constructed through stock footage and sourced media images in media post the 9/11 attacks. In this paper, I examine stock images in documentary films in the form of archives to examine the representation of Muslim identity in the post 9/11 world. Using Malitsky's framework of entextualization to analyze archival material in post 9/11 documentaries, I argue how stock images create a power differential between the East and the West (Said, 1979) reinstating imperial domination. Therefore, this paper intends to examine the use of archives that have been entextualized and re-present history to shape representation of Muslims across spatial and temporal differences through documentary films. To do so, I critically examine two post 9/11 documentaries – *Secret Pakistan* (2011) and *Turning Point: 9/11 and the War on Terror* (2021) – to study how these films position the role of Pakistan as an Islamic nation in the Global War on Terror.

Key words: post 9/11 media, documentary, entextualization, Muslim representation

In September 2001, a collection of moving images was broadcast on renowned news channels across the globe such as Fox News, CNN, and BBC World. The images consisted of a group of people in a Muslim country as the men were speaking in Arabic and women were wearing hijab (veils), while celebrating on streets. Some images show people eating cake in a small restaurant, a man distributing cake and sweets for free, a woman smiling enthusiastically outside the restaurant, kids dancing on the streets, and cars passing by playing loud music and screaming "Allah Akbar!" (God is Great). In one of the images, we see two white men, seemingly news reporters, filming these activities while smiling at the crowd. These images are juxtaposed together in a single video which did not have any supporting information about the cause for celebration, exact dates, time or location of the on-going activity. However, the information that is available refers to the spatiotemporal and socio-political context under which the moving images were broadcast.

These different images were released on September 11, 2001, hours after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. They were aired on CNN, FOX News and BBC World juxtaposed with headlines such as "Palestinians celebrate at Damascus Gate" and "Muslims Celebrating after Attack on World Trade Center". Today, these images have become part of a larger archive, presumed to represent Palestine and the Muslim world's reactions to the attack on the World Trade Center. The story broadcast on various news channels is a part of the wide range of archives that show the reactions and hatred of Muslims towards the United States which speak to their role in the Twin Tower attack on September 11, 2001. The images and the reactions are still circulated widely till now on the internet under similar headlines as in 2001.

The example of Palestinians celebrating after the September 11 attacks is just one of the many examples in which videos and images have been circulated globally to represent Muslims in Western Media post-9/11 attacks (Bail, 2012: 855). The dominant tropes about Muslim representation in Western Media since the 9/11 attacks have been Muslims as terrorists (Corbin, 2017), Muslim women as subjugated and oppressed by hijab and Islamic laws, also known as Shariah (Wagner et. al, 2012), and most Muslims belong to an Arabic country in the Middle East despite the region being macro-ethnic and multiracial with multiple ethnic minorities (Ghareeb, 1983). Such stereotyping of Islamic states, including Pakistan, has been common in post 9/11 media practices. This form of representation stigmatizes a perception of Muslims in a war with the West, Muslims as enemies, and it is used to justify the radical actions taken by the US government under the label of War on Terror (Kabir & Bourk, 2012: 325). While Western

representations of the East have been used to justify colonialism and imperialism (Said 1981), there is a need to update and expand upon analysis to account for contemporary events, particularly the post-9/11 world (Dabashi, 2015).

In this paper, I examine stock images in documentary films in the form of archives to examine the representation of Muslim identity in the post 9/11 world. Negative stereotypical and homogenous representations of Muslims in media related to the Sept 11 attacks is particularly problematic when it comes to non-fiction media such as news and documentary which use archival footage. The use of stock images in documentary films has particular consequences as it is limited in the indexical representation of conveying meaning and value of the event (Rosen 230). Therefore, the image alone may not fully capture the significance of the actual moment or presence and requires additional context or interpretation through other forms of narrative devices.

The process of taking a piece of discourse from its original context and framing it into a historical text is what I will refer to as entextualization in this paper. This is a fundamental process of power and authority because it allows for certain voices and perspectives to be privileged over others. By extracting discourse from its original context, those in power can control the narrative and shape public discourse in a way that serves their interests. The concept of entextualization was first introduced by linguistic anthropologists Erving Goffman (1967) and Dell Hymes (1986) and has been further developed by scholars such as Bauman and Briggs (1990), who explored its implications for power and authority in various contexts. Entextualization is a complex and dynamic relationship between the text, its original context, and the various contexts in which it is being received and interpreted. Therefore, it is important to consider both the relationship between the viewer and the text as well as the historical context in which the text was created and is being interpreted.

Entextualizing Muslim Identity through Archives

Malitsky (2010) argues that the process of entextualization can be understood through the notion of indexicality both as a "trace and deixis" that creates a visual image (p. 358). Indexicality refers to the physical connection between an image and the object or scene that it represents. This connection is created by the fact that the photograph is produced by the direct action of light on a light-sensitive material, such as film or a digital sensor (Gunning, 2008). This imprint creates a direct link between the image and the object or scene it represents, and this link is what gives the image its unique historical claim in the form of an archive. Indexicality as trace indicates a past event while deixis connects to

a spatial context in which the image is created (Malitsky, 2013). The spatio-temporality of the process of entextualization formulates a representation for the viewer to comprehend how representation is formulated through moving images.

In this paper, I build on Malitsky's framework of entextualization to analyze archival material in post 9/11 documentaries arguing how stock images contribute to an oriental gaze – which creates a power differential between the East and the West (Said 1979) - further stereotyping Muslim representation. Therefore, this paper intends to examine the use of archives that have been entextualized and re-present history to shape representation of Muslims across spatial and temporal differences through documentary films. To do so, I examine two post 9/11 documentaries – *Secret Pakistan* (2011) and *Turning Point: 9/11 and the War on Terror* (2021) – to explore how these films position the role of Pakistan as an Islamic nation in terrorism and Global War on Terror. In doing so, my goal is to highlight the oriental gaze embedded in media images that have been reproduced over the years to create a Muslim social imaginary that is extremist, violent, and follows Islamic orthodoxy. I further use the example of these two documentaries to identify the visual techniques through which the archives are entextualized to essentialize Muslim identity.

One such example is the case of *Secret Pakistan* (2011), a two-part documentary by the BBC which aired on 26 October 2011. The documentary revolves around the representation of one of the most controversial and sensitive events of the 21st century, that is the killing of Osama bin Laden, the founder of the world's most infamous terrorist organization, Al-Qaeda, in 2011 by United States Navy SEALs while he was hiding in a remote city of Pakistan. The documentary further argues that Pakistan 'double-crossed' the US despite being an ally in the War on Terror by claiming that Pakistan's intelligence-services helped the Taliban by providing them with training and support for terrorist activities. In doing so, the documentary uses archival footage, omnipresent narration and interviews of American officials to support its claims and thus create an "imaginary" historical reality. The two-part series is an influential documentary produced in the past two decades as within 24 hours of its release, it received an audience of 1 million (4.1%). The series also generated controversy after Pakistan blocked BBC World News claiming it contained anti-Pakistan content and that the program was one-sided. To consider the role of indexical representation of Muslims as terrorists, I will be focusing on the first part of the documentary in this paper.

Following the documentary and other similar forms of non-fiction representation in Western media, a general assumption prevailed that Pakistan betrayed

the US by hiding the world's most notorious terrorist. Without any concrete evidence, this assumption developed into a historical event or fact through the use of moving images which functioned as an archive in the documentary. Such claims and assumptions rely on the medium of documentary film due to the tendency of archival documents having a more influential representation of history on screen. Robert A. Rosenstone (2019), an American historian, wrote widely on the reconstruction of history on screen. His book titled, *History on Film/Film on History*, specifically looks at the complications of recreating a historical fact on screen as he argues that documentaries can invoke feelings, emotions, and responses from audiences. He states:

> This is done in a variety of visual and aural ways — not just through the images used, but also in the way they are framed, colored, and edited; as well as through the soundtrack, the quality of voice of both narrators and witnesses, the words spoken, the sound effects, the music from found sources, or composed, to heighten the impact of the images. Like the dramatic film, the documentary wants you to feel and care deeply about the events and people of the past (74).

As illustrated in Rosenstone's argument, historical facts as represented through documentary are not just situated in the past but also have a relationship with the way the audience perceives and interacts with the moving images. Malitsky identifies this relationality as a negotiation between "the speaker, the addressee, and the time and place of enunciation" (p. 360). For instance, in *Secret Pakistan,* the opening sequence consists of a montage of shaky and unclear images which are edited together at a fast pace. The various images are of police patrolling the streets with guns, bearded men arguing with armed forces on a road, a woman wearing a blue veil, and various images of terrorists with guns, bombs falling on landscapes, and members of the US army fighting in Afghanistan. These images are backed by an omnipresent narration which raises many questions over the role of Pakistan in giving terrorists refuge in the country. A few of the many similarly spoken words by the narrator in the opening sequence are:

> …this series tells the hidden story of how for a decade Pakistan deceived America and the West and was then found out…Above all it is the story of how Pakistan, a supposed ally, stands accused by top Western intelligence officers and diplomats of causing the deaths of thousands of coalition soldiers in Afghanistan.

As illustrated through this narration, supporting the fast-paced editing of stock images, in the first two minutes of the film, the culture of Pakistan is de-

picted as an extremist, fundamentalist, and conservative nation. Words such as 'double game', 'betrayal' and 'deceived' supported by the visuals build on moving images of local marketplaces and men holding guns depict Pakistan as a nation that has collectively provided refuge and shelter to terrorists. The process of entextualization here provide visual images that are juxtaposed together as indices which function as an archive for Muslim culture in Pakistan. Such a representation of Pakistan in the documentary led to a criticism that it presented a biased narrative which conformed to the political and ideological need of the West (USA) to justify the breach of sovereignty and borders of a foreign nation to carry out an armed mission.

Such incentives behind the documentary, *Secret Pakistan,* come as no surprise given that Rosenstone argues that documentary "encompasses both the notion that the documentary refers to an actual world of the past, and is at the same time always positioned, ideological, and partisan," and that "on screen we see not the events themselves, and not the events as experienced or even as witnessed by participants, but selected images of those events carefully arranged into sequences to tell a particular story or to make a particular argument" (72). Here Rosenstone's arguments help shed light on selected images referring to a particular temporality regardless of the profilmic space - the space in which images are filmed. (Jaikumar 2019).

As a result, to maintain a critical view of the arguments and claims made in *Secret Pakistan*, what becomes important is not the context provided by the voiceover in the documentary (Lee, 2012), but the context in which the film was produced and the context behind the archives. This leads to the second documentary that I use for analysis in the paper that concerns talking head interviews as voiceovers which complicates the process of entextualization by personalizing stock images as representative of the interviews. *Turning Point: 9/11 and the War on Terror* (2021), directed by Brian Knappenberger and produced by Netflix, depicts the role played by various Muslim states in the Global War on Terror. This is a five-part documentary series that looks back at twenty years of 9/11 and the Global War on Terror by building on archival material and interviews with government officials, journalists, and civilians to dig deep into contextualizing twenty years of 9/11 through a global lens that has roots in imperial domination through proxy wars. For my arguments in the article, I will be particularly referring to Pakistan as a Muslim state and its role in the Global War on Terror.

In the first episode of *Turning Point: 9/11 and the War on Terror* the portrayal of the creation of the Taliban is narrated through an interview with Ahmad Rashid, a senior journalist from Pakistan and also the author of the book *Tali-*

ban. In the interview, he describes the context of third-world proxy wars during the Cold War and points out how billions of dollars were spent in training the mujahedeen for war against the Soviet Invasion in the late 1980s. As Rashid further narrates the context of the creation of the Taliban through militant training by US armed forces, the archives portray a narrative of the process. Shots of Muslim men praying collectively in outdoor spaces are juxtaposed to photos of men in the armed struggle carrying and transporting weapons. As the interview further describes how this was an act of Islamic resistance for the natives supported by the US army, we see people getting prepared with heavy machinery and jets being a part of the resistance movement. The archives in this scene do not only depict the historicity of the creation of the Taliban but also bring in spatial connections to the barren land and underground training camps in which the mujahidin were initially mobilizing people for Islamic resistance to the change in location in more urban local spaces where aid and support with heavy machinery was a changing factor in their successful struggle against the Soviet Invasion.

Samuel Sieber (2016) in his study of the politics of the archive in the 'representation' of archived newsreel footage in news and documentary argues that "through retrospectively constructing and restaging significant events and cultural identities, media demonstrate more than a stipulating power to determine discourses and shape visual regimes" (25). Sieber's argument here demonstrates that entextualization has the power to shape and influence cultural memory, national consciousness, cultural difference, ethnic identities and religious beliefs. In this way 're-presentation' of archival images can also create and shape representation of the Others, and the way oriental gaze is constructed. Thus, *Turning Point: 9/11 and the War on Terror's* use of a native informant, such as Ahmed Rashid, indexes an authenticity of the narrative of Muslim identity. Although, the interview avoids biased claims of Muslim extremism, the stock images that visually guide the narrative function as deixis that builds a relationality between the referent and the indexical origin (p. 360). This relation creates an oriental gaze as it essentializes a spatial connection of the stock images to the production of a historical image about a non-Western identity, as in this case the "secret" Pakistan.

Politics of the Archive

Bauman and Briggs (1990) in their essay on "Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life" examine the social and cultural contexts in which texts are circulated. This according to them works on four levels: access, legitimacy, competency, and value. Thus, the institutional

structures that legitimate archives are also adding value to it by making it accessible for distribution. As Jamie Baron (2012) argues, archives should not only be understood as documents that are proof of history but also that reproduce history through circulation of archival images. A stock image in the form of a document becomes "archival" precisely because within a new film it is recognized by the viewer as "found" and is thereby endowed with some form of evidentiary authority" (Baron 104). In arguing this, Baron helps highlight the use of archives as evidence for viewers to prove the claims made by a documentary. Baron further suggests that an archive is understood as a relationship between viewer and the text. She states that "I am calling for a reconceptualization of the "appropriation film" as not merely the manner and matter of the text but also as a matter of reception, dependent on the effects the film produces, namely, what I refer to as the 'archive effect' (104).

The notion of reception is evident through the dialectic reception in which *Secret Pakistan* was received locally and internationally. Critics of the documentary claimed that the images and the interviews in the documentary support a one-sided and biased opinion that Pakistan supported Al-Qaida and helped Osama bin Laden seek refuge in the country. These claims are articulated in the documentary by using stock footage and archival materials obtained from various sources to support the arguments of the documentary. The images which mostly consist of Taliban soldiers training in Afghanistan, images of men in beards in rural areas and streets, shaky and dark footage of everyday traffic, footage of wanted terrorists, and armed police forces on streets. Moreover, a large part of this consists of such images which do not relate to the specific spatiotemporal events and claims being made in the documentary. These images are backed by an ominous soundtrack and interviews of American CIA officials, terrorists and a narration, all of which together creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and dangers that loom over Pakistan. These images acquired through sources such as Getty Images, AP Archives and National Archives (US) are juxtaposed and presented in a way that they, as stated by Sieber, "reveal a political mediality in which the articulable as much as the visual remain volatile constructs subjected to intervening transformations" (25). As a result, the way the archival materials in the film are selected to represent spaces of daily life activities in Pakistan and their consequent interpretation as well as reuse signify the institutional processes and politics underlying the collection processes of media archives.

Although *Turning Point: 9/11 and the War on Terror* provides a more comprehensive contextual narrative of the emergence of Muslim extremist groups, it fails to engage with the politics of authenticity in the interviews by having

former director of the National Counter-Terrorism Center narrating the story of the execution of Osama bin Laden. In *Turning Point 9/11 and the War on Terror,* the archives similarly lack spatio-temporal significance by juxtaposing shots of troops in mountainous areas and military training centers in Pakistan that depicts the landscape of Pakistani support for Al-Qaeda. Craig Whitlock, one of the interviewees, and the author of *The Afghanistan Papers: A Secret History of War*, specifies how this was a 'double game' played by Pakistan as they took aid from US against Al-Qaeda while internally supporting and providing shelter to Al-Qaeda members. Similar patterns of archival footage of marketplaces and daily life activities of Muslims in Pakistan is juxtaposed to the interviews which further reinstates a universalist representation of Muslim in the nation.

The archives used in the first part of *Secret Pakistan* comprise of a mountainous terrain, a building with bullet holes in walls, bombings in an open field. The images alone do not hold any specific information which signifies the spatiotemporal settings under which they were captured. What establishes their representation is the context in which they are used. Juxtaposing bombings in the field with narration describing US military might and juxtaposing images of a building with bullet holes with narration describing the failure of Taliban militants, is what gives context to the images and thus allow filmmakers to use images as, to use Malitsky's (2012) term, "visual pointers". Though the image of a mountainous terrain alone does not represent the areas of terrorist hideouts, rather their contextual use as a mountain range in Afghanistan is what represents the historical relevance of the image. In this way, the stock images act as indexes and bring 'aliveness' to signs when these moving images are juxtaposed (p. 250).

The institution processes and politics of archives is also evident in *Secret Pakistan* through the list of sources mentioned in the ending credits through which the archives were collected. The list includes a variety of sources such as online stock image galleries Getty Images and BBC Motion Gallery; archives from AP archives and Reuters news agencies, and US national institutions such the US Department of Defense and UK Ministry of Defense. Although the documentary does not refer to the original location and dates in which the images were captured, the variety of platforms through which the images were acquired signifies the institutional politics and geopolitical goals embedded in their reuse in the process of entextualization in the documentary. As a result, the archives do not signify a contextual reference to the original events and circumstances in which they were obtained, instead as Jaikumar (2019) notes, the reuse of archives refers to "the politicization, commodification, memorialization of images that have temporal associations" (239). Juxtaposing the material and spectral,

Jaikumar builds an argument of how images are in a reproduction cycle that is in entanglements of spatial and temporal configurations changing from one context to another due to colonial and imperial ideologies.

It is also interesting to note here the images were acquired from sources outside of the geographical and national boundaries of Pakistan, yet the narrative of the documentary represented an imagined national community of Pakistan with the aid of archives acquired from transnational resources. Such an inclination to rely on archival media is partly due to the lack of access documentary filmmakers have in certain parts of the world, hence, archival footage provides a way to offset the geographical and temporal limitations faced by filmmakers while reducing production costs such as on-site crew and re-creation of historical events (Kalow 5). Furthermore, it provides filmmakers with the margin to add desired contextual references to the narrative and arguments of the documentary in an attempt to improvise with visual storytelling (Kalow 36). Such a practice complicates the indexical relationship of archival representation as it relies on visual techniques to define Muslim identity discourse.

Conclusion

The circulation of archives in the form of stock images across the globe is one of the many examples through which Muslim representation has been constructed in media post the 9/11 attacks. The underlying themes of much of this representation is to frame Muslims around the globe as perpetrators of terrorist activities in the world. In this paper, I have argued that such themes and practices problematize representation of Islamic nations such as Pakistan by analyzing stock images as a unit of analysis to study Muslim representation. To uncover the politics of archive in the use of stock images to create Muslim representation, the process of entextualization is useful as it historicizes Muslim identity beyond stock images as documents of archival material.

Nazia Kazi (2021) reiterates this notion of Islamophobia by situating it in a larger discourse of systemic power and authority. Kazi is reflective of the global networks of power that place Muslims in opposition to white supremacy, thus, racially acquiring certain traits and characteristics. Media texts in the form of movies, television shows, and news are avenues of global circulation that work towards stereotyping the Muslim as the other, in this case, the terrorist other. Similarly, Khaled Beydoun (2019) explores 'American Islamophobia' and situates it in structures of power exerted by law and foreign policy regarding nation and citizenship. Beydoun's notion of global law is significant to realize the potential of imperial regimes in the execution of Islamophobic racism. Islamophobic rac-

ism thus is created through such images in which universalistic claims about an identity is historicized, such as locals in Abbottabad in *Turning Point: 9/11 and the War on Terror* were depicted as supportive of extremist ideologies through audio-visual juxtaposition. In the case of *Secret Pakistan*, the archival images, and interviews recontextualize the Muslims in Pakistan and Afghanistan. It not only questions Muslim belief systems but also projects them as deceitful people in the region. In doing so it further essentializes Muslim stereotypes by universalizing this trait amongst a larger region in which Muslims from both countries were supportive of the acts.

Archival visual storytelling of the creation of the Taliban contextualizes Muslim extremist groups indexing the rituals and practices of such groups that are embedded in specific religious belief systems. Other than creating a narrative arc through the spatial significance of Afghanistan's Muslim struggles, the archives also portray a global phenomenon. The use of archives in the interview with Ahmed Rashid in *Turning Point: 9/11 and the War on Terror* shows how the Arab world supported the armed struggle of the *Mujahidins* (freedom fighters) in the following years. Kris Manjapra (2021) examines the history of colonialism through a global lens as a form of resistance as the local articulation of colonialism articulates the binary opposition of the colonizer and colonized. To move away from these binaries Manjapra proposes a global perspective of rereading history to situate it amongst the transnational exchange of capital, warfare, and freedom struggles. From this perspective, *Turning Point: 9/11 and the War on Terror's* approach to documentary is of a global lens that resists universal narratives of representing religious fundamental beliefs. What is lacking are accounts of historically situated archives that could lead to a more nuanced understanding of post 9/11 trauma in the region.

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