

الآخر المسلم: الأسطورة، الخوف، والهوية في فيلم Cleanskin

The Muslim Other: Myth, Fear, and Identity in Cleanskin

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الملخص:

تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل فيلم الجاسوسية البريطاني (2012) Cleanskin من تأليف وإخراج هادي حاجيج، باعتباره نصًا بصريًا يختزن مجموعة من الخطابات المتداخلة حول الإرهاب والآخر المسلم في المتخيل الغربي. وقد تمّ تحديد الهدف المركزي للبحث في تفكيك البنية السردية والسينمائية التي يوظفها الفيلم لإعادة إنتاج بعض التمثيلات النمطية، مع التركيز على كيفية بناء صورة الإرهابي من خلال حركة الكاميرا وأداء الشخصيات وأقوالها، وذلك في ضوء مقارنة نقدية تحليلية تستند إلى المنهج التحليلي النفسي.

من الناحية المنهجية، اعتمدت الدراسة على مقارنة مزدوجة: الأولى سينمائية تقنية، اهتمت بتفصيل دور الكاميرا وزوايا التصوير في خلق معانٍ إيحائية مرتبطة بالخوف والتهديد، والثانية نفسية تحليلية، سعت إلى تفكيك الدوافع العميقة التي تؤطر فعل العنف والإرهاب، بما في ذلك عمليات غسيل الدماغ التي تُسهم في إعادة تشكيل وعي الفرد وتحويله إلى أداة أيديولوجية. هذا التوظيف للمنهج التحليلي النفسي سمح بالكشف عن الارتباط الوثيق بين تمثيلات التطرف وآليات الإقناع النفسي التي تجعل الفرد ينخرط في أفعال عنيفة.

أما النتائج، فقد أظهرت أنّ الفيلم يعيد إنتاج صور ذهنية متجذّرة في المخيال الغربي، تقوم على الربط الحصري بين الإسلام والإرهاب، من خلال إظهار "الآخر المسلم" كتهديد وجودي دائم. كما أبانت الدراسة أنّ هذا التمثيل السينمائي لا يقتصر على سرد قصة فردية، بل يتجاوزها ليعيد تثبيت أساطير قديمة تعكس صراعًا حضاريًا مبطنًا. إضافة إلى ذلك، أبرز التحليل أنّ الفيلم يُظهر ازدواجية في تمثيل العنف، إذ يتم تقديمه أحيانًا كوسيلة دفاع شرعية، وأحيانًا أخرى كفعل إجرامي مرتبط بالآخر المختلف.

وتوصي الدراسة بضرورة تبني قراءات نقدية أكثر وعيًا لمثل هذه الإنتاجات السينمائية، من أجل تفكيك خطابها الموجه للرأي العام، والكشف عن أبعاده الأيديولوجية التي قد تُسهم في تعزيز الصور النمطية وتعميق الفجوة بين الثقافات. كما تدعو إلى تعزيز مقاربات عابرة للتخصصات تجمع بين النقد السينمائي والتحليل النفسي والدراسات الثقافية، بما يسمح بفتح نقاش أكاديمي معمق حول دور السينما في صياغة تصورات الجماعة عن الذات وعن الآخر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: كلينسكن، السينما البريطانية، الأساطير، النموذج التحليلي النفسي، الآخر.

Abstract:

This paper is a reflection upon Cleanskin, a 2012 English spy thriller film, written and directed by Hadi Hajaig. In our approach to the movie, we concentrate on the movement of the camera by analysing the actors' speeches and actions. The whys and wherefores of terrorism are also elaborated on, following the psychoanalytic model. Later, the relationship between brainwashing and the process of radicalization is accounted for to better grasp the terrorist ideology. Last but not least, confusion and confrontation, along with the investigation of the terrorist mind-frame are juxtaposed to account for some stereotypes and old fixations that turn associated exclusively with the Muslim "Other".

Keywords: Cleanskin, British Cinema, Myths, the Psychoanalytic Model, the Other.

Introduction:

The movie, *Cleanskin* (2012), serves as the subject of reflection in this research paper. The focus of our analysis lies in the camera movements, actors' speeches, and actions depicted in the movie. By examining the reasons behind terrorism through a psychoanalytic model, this research paper aims to shed light on the complexities surrounding this problem. The relationship between brainwashing and the process of radicalization is also explored to enhance our understanding of the terrorist ideology. Furthermore, this research paper investigates the perpetuation of stereotypes and old fixations associated exclusively with the Muslim "Other" by examining instances of confusion, confrontation, and the exploration of the terrorist mind-frame. Thus, the research paper tries to challenge preconceived ideas and promote a more nuanced awareness of the many realities within the Muslim community by dispelling these myths. For this, we are going to probe into how the camera movement in *Cleanskin* affects the portrayal and behavior of the characters. Moreover, according to a psychoanalytic paradigm, we are going to scrutinize the underlying motives and psychological aspects of the terrorist acts depicted in the movie by analyzing how the protagonist's character development reflects the indoctrination influences of the radicalization process? By the end, we are going to see to what extent *Cleanskin* maintains certain outdated notions and stereotypes that are only applicable to the Muslim "Other". That is to say, in what ways can confusion, conflict, and the study of the terrorist mindset contradict or strengthen the preconceived notions about the Muslim community?

To answer the above-mentioned research questions, our study will employ a qualitative analysis approach. Hence, the film will be closely examined, with a particular focus on the camera movement and its impact on the character's portrayal. The speeches and actions of the actors will

also be analyzed to identify the primary motivations and psychological factors that contribute to acts of terrorism. The psychoanalytic model will help as a framework for understanding these complex dynamics. What's more, an examination of the account of brainwashing and its role in the process of radicalization will be conducted. By analyzing specific scenes and character development, this study will identify examples where stereotypes and old fixations associated with the Muslim "Other" are disseminated and faced. The themes of confusion, confrontation, and the investigation of the terrorist mind-frame will be explored in the film to provide insights into the existing perceptions of the Muslim community.

Film Overview:

Cleanskin is a 2012 English spy thriller film written and directed by Hadi Hajaig. The movie turns around Ewan, who is screened as a special agent and finds himself in a relentless pursuit of one London-bred Islamic terrorist called Ash. While the first can be delineated as an articulate patriot and a military veteran who worked in Iraq and Afghanistan, the second (the protagonist) can be described as an articulate convert. Since a suicide bomber has killed his wife, he decided to fight terrorism, yet he figured out that he was manipulated by some upper-class figures, who exploited the war on terror for the benefit of party politics. Ash, on the other hand, was brainwashed and recruited to a terrorist movement led by a self-declared cleric named Nabil, who tracked down hopeless and discontented youngsters.

The plot of the movie investigates the intentions and deeds of both the protagonist and the antagonist, illuminating the intricacies of terrorism and the ideologies that support it. *Cleanskin* combines psychological thriller, suspense, and action components to produce a compelling narrative that defies stereotypical depictions of terrorism and encourages in-depth examination of the Muslim Other in the context of radicalization.

Cleanskin gives viewers a glimpse into the complexity of terrorism and the exploitation of people for political purposes through its complicated plot and character development. Identity, loyalty, and the effect of outside influences on the human psyche are among the issues explored in the movie. *Cleanskin* encourages critical thought on the representation of Muslims and the continuation of prejudices associated with the Muslim Other by fusing personal narratives with more significant socio-political themes.

Besides the characters Ewan (played by Sean Bean), Ash (played by Abhin Galeya), and Nabil (played by Peter Polycarpou), we also have Kate (played by Charlotte Rampling) and Mark (played by James Fox), a wealthy and influential figure who manipulates the war on terror for personal and political gain. He represents the upper-class figures that exploit societal fears and divisions for their own agendas.

With their distinct roles and objectives, these characters contribute to the complex narrative of *Cleanskin*. Through their interactions and experiences, the movie examines the psychological, intellectual, and sociological aspects of terrorism as well as how Muslims are portrayed as the Other. The film encourages audiences to reflect critically on the complexities of radicalization, the consequences of the outside influences on people, and the challenges of combating terrorism without fostering prejudice and stereotypes.

Setting and Context:

The majority of *Cleanskin*'s scenes take place in London, a city renowned for its dynamism and diversity. London's metropolitan setting enhances the narrative by highlighting the complexity of modern civilization and the existence of numerous communities through its recognized monuments and multicultural neighborhoods.

The film is set in the years that have passed since September 11, when the global war on terror heightened security concerns and societal conflicts. The background of the film is shaped by the pervasive fear and suspicion surrounding terrorism, which has increased surveillance, political posturing, and public uneasiness. Against this backdrop, the individuals navigate a society that has been profoundly influenced by the aftermath of terrorist acts and the accompanying counterterrorism operations. The movie also examines how terrorism is used for political and personal benefits, as well as its socio-political aspects. The existence of affluent individuals like Mark, who use the war on terror to achieve their own interests, draws attention to the linkages between politics, power, and terrorism. Moreover, the setting of *Cleanskin* offers an ideal environment for delving into the ways in which Muslims are represented as the Other, the complexity of radicalization, and the effects of terrorism on society. The film forces viewers to confront the reality and difficulties of combating terrorism while traversing the precarious balance between security and civil liberties by setting the story in a modern and well-known city like London.

Revenge and Recognition:

The movie starts with the news about Iraq. The camera projects an intimacy scene between an English arms dealer and a brownish-skinned prostitute named Rena. The news is aired on TV while the fat and yet strong British arms dealer continues his hysterical sex affair with the prostitute. Later on, the viewer is exposed to a young man, Ash, who was too immersed in doing physical exercises. Though he does not look like a purely British citizen, Ash would stop exercising to watch the news about the Arab world. Strikingly, the news dish mentions two controversial Arab figures: Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden. These men have been

contrasted from the beginning to hook the viewers and create suspense along the movie.

In a medium shot, the camera captures the brownish girl playing with the gun of the English arms dealer. In a while, the spectators are also introduced to Harry's bodyguard, Ewan, who is an English Secret Service agent. Harry and Ewan intend to go to a bank to transport a briefcase of the Semtex. Within this very confusing scene, there is a low-pitched sound of music suggesting the intricacy and mystery of the upcoming events. In an extreme-close-up shot, the camera displays the gun of the English arms dealer and how he excels in playing and using it. The medium shot also shows that Ewan does not like to see the prostitute around.

Outside the hotel, there are two "terrorists" that descend from an Arab genealogy: Ash and Ibrahim. The two would follow the two British agents that are very cautious while getting out from the hotel. With the bird's-eye technique, the camera shows how civilized London is. The non-diegetic music goes hand in hand with this positive rendering of the British metropolitan city London. When the British arms dealers were heading to London Central, the camera screens London as being attractive, for most of its streets, parks, and principal roads seem tidy and clean. Passers-by look elegant and well-dressed, whereas the buildings and skyscrapers appear magnificent and splendid. This self-representation is particular to the orientalist discourse that prides itself upon its glorious image and opulent life. From the outset, the moviemaker is creating numerous myths about the West as a place of power, dominance and stability (Said, 1978). From Gramsci's notion of "hegemony", which explicated the Western myth of power and dominance, Said came to see his task as that of a "contrapuntal critic" who takes a stance of ideological resistance. (Newberg, 2012: 7)

As the British secret agents get into the bank, Ash follows them with a very bad mood while having a pistol in his right hand. When a security agent tries to stop him, he beats him hard and drops him from a high level to the courtyard of the bank. This makes the British agents and the people in the building suspect that there is something abnormal going on. Therefore, excessive violence and gunshots emerge along with the cries and screams of the people. When Harry –

one of the British agents—wanted to defend himself – he found his gun empty; so, the young Arab terrorist killed him with one shot on the head. However, the other one regains a little bit himself and was able to shoot the Arab terrorist on his left arm. When Ewan tries to unmask him, he is shot again. Then, the Arab terrorist leaves with Harry's briefcase of Semtex. The ringing bell of the bank just urges the Arab terrorist to run away with the briefcase of Semtex. The camera focuses on the many casualties and the fear produced because of this bloody terrorist incident.

Cleanskin employs camera movements to effectively immerse viewers in the intense action scenes and heighten the suspense of the espionage thriller genre. In particular, tracking shots provide a sense of urgency and dynamic energy during chase scenes or tense verbal exchanges. The smooth camera movement that follows the actors' actions allows the audience to experience a sense of personal investment in the events as they unfold. This tactic increases the movie's suspense and emotional effect. The camera movement, in this cinematic scene, is used to depict the characters' subjective experiences and emotional states. For example, the use of handheld or shaky camera shots submerges spectators in the performers' perplexing and confusing perspectives during times of tumult or fear. It is a strategy that helps the audience comprehend the characters' inner suffering by increasing the sense of realism and emotional resonance.

Following this tragic scene, Ash appears half-naked with an injury on his arm. He sews the stolen Semtex items into a jacket using a detonation device and photos that seem to be taken at Abu Ghraib prison. He seeks to take revenge for the humiliation of Iraqi soldiers in that prison, so he gives the jacket to Adel, who goes to a London restaurant and detonates the bomb. The music in this scene is very low as it anticipates a certain horror and tragedy, yet what is so attention-attracting is that Ash starts to manufacture explosive belts in jackets for masterminding future terrorist attacks. This negative and pejorative image of the Arab sounds biased and politically loaded to justify the war on terror. The question that goes almost unnoticed in the movie episodes is, "Why do they hate us?" The answer will be given by Ash as the movie discloses. Another question that is equally important here goes as follows: Why do terrorists conduct and mastermind acts of violence in the metropolitan West?

The Whys and Wherefores of Terrorism:

- The Identity of Ash Crisis as an Alienation Site:

The intersection of systemic estrangement and cultural belonging, which is commonly recognized in academic discourse as crucial to the radicalization process, is exemplified by Ash's story. In his groundbreaking book, *The Psychology of Terrorism*, Horgan (2008) emphasizes that radicalization is rarely solely attributable to ideological indoctrination. Rather, it arises from a confluence of psychological susceptibilities, personal crises, and socio-political alienation—conditions that are evidently etched in Ash's experience.

Ash, who was raised in Britain but is constantly labelled as an outsider, lives in a transitional state where both structural marginalization and cultural stigmatization prevent him from fully assimilating into British society. This feeling of exclusion is consistent with what Horgan calls existential dislocation, a psychological state in which intense feelings of

alienation are produced by the contradictions of hybrid identity. This is also the case with Ash, whose diasporic background, coupled with public discourses of Islamophobia and foreign policy grievances (such as Western military interventions in Muslim-majority countries), creates a fractured sense of self. Roy (2017) also examines this phenomenon, arguing that identity crises exacerbated by social exclusion rather than religious fundamentalism are often the cause of radicalization among European-born Muslims.

Furthermore, academics like Moghaddam (2005) have conceptualized this process using metaphors like the “staircase to terrorism,” in which people are propelled upward through stages of radical engagement by perceived injustice and alienation. This model is supported by Ash’s university years, which were characterized by intellectual disillusionment and exposure to extremist narratives. They show how unresolved identity fragmentation can make people more susceptible to violent ideologies.

- **Alienation as a Radicalization Catalyst:**

As it was previously stated, Ash’s development can be critically examined using Horgan’s (2008) distinction between behavioral radicalization—the shift to violent action—and cognitive radicalization, which is the internalization of extremist ideas. Crucially, his early engagement with extremist networks is portrayed as a consequence of alienation and the pursuit of meaning rather than as the outcome of ingrained theological beliefs.

This is further supported by empirical research by Marc Sageman (2004), which finds that social networks and ties, not just ideological indoctrination, are the main causes of radicalization. Ash’s vulnerability is increased by his alienation from both the majority British society and some members of his own community, making him a prime candidate for radical

organizations that provide a sense of purpose, belonging, and a streamlined moral code.

According to Branscombe et al. (2002), this trajectory is consistent with the idea of collective victimhood, in which marginalized people reinterpret their own feelings of alienation by telling stories of injustice and suffering experienced by the group. Extremist ideology offers Ash a compelling model of explanation that turns his marginalization into a weaponized sense of purpose by redefining it as a component of a larger historical grievance.

- The Boundaries of the Film's Investigation:

Cleanskin ultimately reduces the complexity of radicalization to a binary of counterterrorism versus terrorism, even though he refers to Ash's socio-psychological struggles. Scholars like Shaheen (2001) and Alsultany (2012) have noted a larger cinematic trend in which Muslim characters are either portrayed as dangerous or deprived of complexity in favor of action-packed plotlines, which is reflected in this narrative decision.

Diasporic alienation, Islamophobia, socioeconomic disenfranchisement, and Britain's foreign policy are among the systemic conditions that Horgan and others identify as essential to understanding radicalization, but the film's invocation of "Why do they hate us?" through characters like Ewan (Sean Bean) lacks the intellectual depth to examine these issues.

In the narrative framework of *Cleanskin* (2012), the question "Why do they hate us?" reflects a reductive yet politically charged inquiry commonly used in post-9/11 Western discourse to examine the origins of anti-Western sentiment and Islamist extremism. This question functions in the movie as a reflection of widespread concerns about cultural identity, national security, and perceived ideological conflicts between radicalized

groups within Muslim communities and Western democracies, in place of an invitation for nuanced socio-political analysis.

Cleanskin places the roots of “hatred” in both geopolitical grievances and individual disillusionment, creating a dichotomy between radical Islamist violence and Western liberal ideals. Thus, the movie depicts radicalization through Ash’s character as a complex response as opposed to just an organic result of religious doctrine. Through Ash’s character, the movie illustrates radicalization as a complex response to systemic marginalization, socio-political disenfranchisement, and the shortcomings of both domestic and Western governance structures, rather than as an organic result of religious doctrine alone. Clearly enough, Ash’s journey from an assimilated student to a militant exemplifies the psychological effects of exclusion, cultural alienation, and unresolved tensions inherent in diasporic identity formation.

The movie noticeably falls short of providing a thorough or historically accurate response to the title query, though. Instead of directly addressing the legacy of imperialism, foreign intervention, or structural inequality that underlie anti-Western sentiment around the world, *Cleanskin* reflects the larger post-9/11 cinematic trend of presenting terrorism within personal narratives of betrayal and retaliation. Therefore, “Why do they hate us?” serves as a rhetorical device that emphasizes fear, mistrust, and the cyclical nature of violence between perceived cultural opposites. By doing so, *Cleanskin* reflects the shortcomings of a large portion of Western media, which frequently reduces complicated sociopolitical realities to emotionally compelling but analytically flawed “us versus them” dichotomies.

- **The Mindset of a Terrorist:**

Miller (2006) has also endeavored to understand the mindsets of those who perpetrate the acts of terrorism; he has found out that the

phenomenon includes both psychological and sociological factors. Psychologically, Miller notices the intrinsic linkages between ideology and identity, asserting that the former safeguards the latter in those rendered vulnerable by experiences of chronic helplessness, humiliation, and frustrated social aspirations. This is in congruence with Wenger and Wilner (2012), who posit that identity provides the base and organizational vector, and ideology provides for identity mobilization and the heart of organizational dynamics. Any strategy analysis of terrorism must proceed from a deep understanding of the critical foundation of identity and ideology (p. 165).

In fact, Miller's (2006) thesis is debatable, for psychological theories that understand motivation as an expression of internal factors within the individual stress the potential inclinations that urge one to violence and transgression. While it is too hard to measure the amount of bigotry needed to turn a radicalistic thought into violence, security experts agree to a large extent that rage and hatred remain among its drivers.

In his seminal work, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek (1989) digs into the complex relationship between ideology and fantasy, throwing light on how ideology serves as a captivating and illusory construct that fills the void within our social reality. He argues that ideology acts as a form of collective fantasy that not only masks inherent contradictions but also exerts a powerful grip on individuals and societies. He expounds on the concealed nature of ideology, stating:

"In our daily lives, we do not experience the antagonistic social relations that underpin our reality. Instead, we are immersed in a fantasy world constructed by ideology, which obscures the contradictions and tensions inherent in the social order. This ideological fantasy functions as a shield, offering us a false sense

of unity, coherence, and meaning, thus filling the void in our social reality" (p. 32).

He argues that ideology operates as a mechanism that provides a semblance of stability and harmony, allowing individuals and societies to handle the complexities of existence. However, Žižek contends that this illusory construction perpetuates the status quo and prevents critical engagement with the contradictions and injustices embedded within the social fabric. Through a combination of psychoanalytic insights and rigorous social analysis, Žižek (1989) unearths the hidden mechanisms of ideology and its impact on individuals and societies:

“By examining the underlying fantasies that sustain ideological systems, we can begin to unravel the intricate web of illusions and delve into the contradictions that lie dormant within. Only by confronting and challenging these ideological fantasies can we hope to break free from their hold and strive for a more emancipated and authentic existence” (p. 127).

Thus, social psychologists attempt to explain this problem of armed violence by reference to situational variables alone. For example, Zimbardo famously declared, “There are no bad apples, only bad barrels”. (Qtd. in Naso and Mills, 2016: 97) Put differently, rather than being driven by purely intrinsic motivations, evildoers are themselves the products of social influences and religious/political ideologies that sometimes contaminate their minds. Rangell (1996) has written extensively about the impact of group influences on personality and human character, and he has highlighted the corruption of moral values. Briefly stated, it was his view that personality remains susceptible to outside influences throughout the lifespan; personality may be influenced not only by corrupted leaders but also by group processes that are prone to transform moral values.

Owing to such exogenous influences, actions originally perceived as wrong are viewed as good and desirable. For individuals who underwent traumatic experiences in the past, they are more likely to take refuge in influential leaders that impart hope, however ideologically loaded it might be. It is unsurprising that actions once seen as wrong now may be experienced as good. Personal agency is hardly erased since group identifications and conformity pressures often trump the experience of choice (Miller, 2006).

In the sequel of the above-mentioned scene, people are sitting peacefully in the restaurant, waiting to be served. With such courtesy, the waitress asks a man with black curly hair and a jacket if he wants to be served; the answer is a press on the explosive belt that killed several innocent people. In this scene, one observes a non-violent discourse that is smartly employed against and juxtaposed to a violent discourse that praises martyrdom and death. It is noteworthy that the entire movie pictures the antiquated conflict between peace and war, good and evil, love and hate, and so forth.

The analysis of how the camera movement affects the development of stereotypes and the representation of the Muslim Other in *Cleanskin* sheds light on the visual methods used in the movie and their consequences for the portrayal of the Muslim characters. One can see how specific approaches either challenge or support prejudices related to the Muslim Other through a sophisticated analysis of the camera movement. The camera movement significantly influences how Muslim people are seen in *Cleanskin*, particularly how they are described as the Other. The movie affects how viewers perceive and interpret these people by using particular camera movements and angles, which helps to create and reinforce preconceptions.

Politics and Love/Hate Conflict:

The conflict between love and hate has always served as a fundamental plot type in the thrillers. In one café, Ash sees Kate, his former lover, and they exchange phone numbers. Flashbacks were foregrounded to point to the fact that Ash and Kate were dating at the university, where they studied law. In one flashback, Ash was presented in a love scene with his girlfriend, Kate. He treated her kindly and mildly, unlike Harry's deportment, which was rude. They were having fun and listening to music. The light was clear, and there was only the sound of slow romantic music. The two lovers talk about their relationship and whether or not they will marry. Kate asks him when she will meet his mom and if she will like her, as she was not a nice Muslim girl. She believed that his mother did not know he was used to eating bacon and drinking all the time and that he was a sex maniac. Ash was, however, no different from her. The double standards and hypocrisy of the two were focalized to vehicle the idea that some preachers (i.e., Muslims) themselves lack what they are preaching for.

In the university, the camera moved in an extreme-close-up shot to focus on the heads of the students who were sitting in rows while their professor was standing before them. They were taking a course on law, and they were discussing political issues:

Ash: "John Major signed a peace treaty with Jin Fein because the IRA's actions forced him. Gery Adams changed from a terrorist to a politician but it was violence and legal action that forced the change. No lawyer was involved."

Nick: "Grey Adams is a murderer" (*Cleanskin*, 2012).

The professor interrupted them and stressed that it was a law class. It was not a political forum for students to debate political convictions.

However, Ash kept interrupting him. This is clearly expressed in the following excerpt:

Ash: Actually, in today's context, he is recognised and accepted. He is being invited to have tea with the prime minister for... (*Cleanskin*, 2012).

In the last statement, the student starts to laugh, and the professor asks Ash to keep it civilized. Then, he corrects himself, "Cos he matched them with violence." Consider the following statements by Ash and Nick:

Ash: "I mean, look at Israel, created through a violent struggle, and now it is an internationally recognised state. In America, the forefathers fought the British, beat them hands down, and now what are they? They are the biggest superpower on this planet. Why? Because violence is the supreme authority. All authorities derive their power and their legitimacy from. Laws are completely irrelevant in the face of true force that applies to any country."

Nick: "And what is your country?" (*Cleanskin*, 2012).

Since 9/11, cultural diversity, or multiculturalism, has been a debate for nations and their politicians. Several questions have been raised about the pros and cons of this burgeoning phenomenon in Great Britain and beyond. The crucial question that was asked has been whether cultural differences can be harmonized and brought together, whether a multicultural society can be created and sustained. The movie under scrutiny is pregnant with controversies about multiculturalism, the question of race and culture, the problem of minority rights and majority wants, and so on and so forth. It is a reproduction of the reinforcing dynamic existing between politics and media coverage. The newspaper and television reporting following the aftermath of the 7/7 London attack provides appropriate instances that can help one understand this polemical

phenomenon. When the course comes to an end, the professor asks Ash for a word:

Professor: “You may be smart, but you are close to failing. It is a “D.” I am afraid.”

Ash: “I can handle this.”

Professor: “Do you really practice law? Ash?”

Ash: “Do not worry” (*Cleanskin*, 2012).

Interestingly, one can note that the board behind the professor was full of theories about law and how it can solve world issues. However, the camera displays the professor being left alone with empty seats of the students as if no one was interested in studying law or listening to his lectures.

Discourse, Radicalization and Brainwashing:

In the university, while looking for his classmates, Ash heard a man with an Arab outlook. In a two-shot technique, the Arab man introduced himself as Nabil. He was pigeonholed as a Muslim extremist. He laughed when he heard the young Arab man’s name, Ash, because he knew that it was not his real name but rather an abbreviation of the name “Ashraf.” He told him not to be ashamed of who he was. Then, he starts brainwashing him:

“Look how they’ve killed Muslims, huh, In Bosnia, Chechnya, and Kosovo. And now they’ve invaded Iraq for the bloody oil.”
(*Cleanskin*, 2012)

The young man found that the speech was so suitable to feed off his hunger for violence. Nabil thus invited him to come to one of his gatherings and to bring with him his friends for more brainwashing. It is believed that this is an unethical method of persuasion, which aims to

indoctrinate and convert a human being into an ideology and a new system of thought. In the words of Rapaport (2006, p. 341), “Brainwashing is this forcible indoctrination to induce someone to abandon his basic beliefs and adopt fewer desirable ones instead (...). It is the twentieth-century form of mind control, like the Middle Ages’ domestic possession, the eighteenth century’s mesmerism, and the nineteenth century’s hypnotism.”

In his influential book, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Appadurai discusses the intricate relationship between globalization and subjectivity, shedding light on how the expansive forces of globalization impact the formation of individual and collective identities. He probes into the ways in which global flows of people, ideas, and media shape subjective experiences and the role of the unconscious in these transformative processes. Appadurai (1996) asserts:

“Globalization not only reconfigures the physical landscapes of our lives but also profoundly impacts the landscapes of our minds. Through global flows of people, ideas, and media, individuals are exposed to new cultural influences, alternative worldviews, and diverse modes of being. These encounters have a profound impact on the formation of subjectivity, as individuals negotiate their identities within a complex global tapestry” (p. 17).

He also argues that globalization creates a dynamic interplay between the local and the global, wherein individuals navigate their sense of self and identity in response to the influx of global influences. Appadurai highlights the active role of the unconscious in this process, as it shapes the desires, fears, and aspirations that underpin subjective experiences. Appadurai (1996) further explores the transformative power of globalization on subjectivity:

“The unconscious, with its hidden desires and conflicts, becomes a crucial site for understanding the ways in which globalization molds subjectivities. As individuals encounter and assimilate global flows, their unconscious processes play a central role in mediating and negotiating new cultural inputs, giving rise to novel forms of selfhood and identity” (p. 92).

Through his examination of global flows and their impact on subjectivity, Appadurai emphasizes the complex interplay between cultural exchange, identity formation, and the unconscious processes of individuals within the context of globalization.

The Dynamics of Language, Power, and Identity in Interactions between 'Self' and 'Other':

The language used at the pub is very significant, as it can be interpreted in many ways. For example, when Kate and Nick ask Ash to get off, it may somehow mean that he is not welcome in their society, as he is an outsider from a very different background. Later, Ash's girlfriend would follow him, apologizing, for she knew a little about his mode of thinking and his cultural and religious background. He kept insulting her and did not stop until she appeased him and promised to stay loyal to him. When they embraced each other, Ash sounded deprived of love and care. Kate, on the other hand, was the provider of such love and care. It is fair to assume that Kate is representative of Great Britain, which tends to bring order, civilization, and stability to its colonies.

The clash between Great Britain and the “Other” is recurrent almost all the scenes of the movie. The power of discourse, as opted for by the moviemaker, is played on, repeatedly, to create divisions and hostilities instead of paving avenues of friendship and amity between Islam and the Judeo-Christian West. Note, for example, the presence of certain

ideological labels (i.e., pigs, extremist, a dog, a bone, etc.) that are utilized in the next statement:

We must rise up against these Western pigs who occupy our lands, who come at us with smiles to take what is ours and turn us against each other. In this so-called democracy (...) if you speak up about Muslims being slaughtered, you are an extremist. Yes? (...) But, if you are passive, silent, and easy to control, you're a good Muslim (...) just like a dog; they throw you a bone but keep you on a leash. You know the type of Muslim I am talking about. He's ashamed of who he is. He gives himself a Western name; he tries to think and feel like his Western master, live like him, and be him (*Cleanskin*, 2012).

In fact, this previous statement divides the Muslim Other into groups: On the one hand, there are the so-called "extremist" Muslims who are resolute enough to denounce violence and speak against massacres. On the other hand, there are those "good" Muslims who are viewed as docile and passive, for they cannot speak; such a category has been subject to the process of "Westernization", as they seem to live and behave like their Western masters.

Decades ago, Michelle Foucault (1926–1984) had looked at discourse as a precursor to understanding systems of representations. Discourse would simply mean textual passages that are connected by writing or speech. Foucault, however, argues that there are rules and practices that produce meaningful statements and regulate discourse within given historical conditions. As he states,

"Discourse means you have a range of statements that provide a language with the way of talking out something. It provides a language with a way of representing language about a particular

subject matter at a particular given historical juncture.” (qtd. in Hall, 1992: 291)

In a similar vein, Hall notes that all social practices entail meaning and that meaning seems to shape and influence what human beings do. In the movie, Nabil tried to inject another discourse into the young Muslims’ minds; this is the discourse of radicalism, enmity, and revenge. He therefore seeks to not only alter their thoughts but also influence their actions and behaviour as well. The principal message here is that words, and by extension ideas, are like weapons, for they can be devastating and destructive as long as they can corrupt people’s ethics and demeanour.

When Ewan and Mark, his new colleague, went to an abandoned building, they were informed that it is the home of a terrorist. Ewan confronts the man they find there and interrogates him. The man begs for mercy, yet Ewan sets him on fire and leaves him to burn to death. Certainly, the act betrays inhumanity and barbarism—two traits that become exclusive to and associated with Arabs and Muslims in the Western imagination. The repetitious nature of such representations “has a negative impact on public discourse and policy. Films that offered audiences a humane and humanized understanding of Islam and Muslims were rare.” (Rane, 2010: 104).

A series of flashbacks were cut to three years, where Nabil sensed Ash’s willingness to do more for the cause. Nabil told Ash to participate in the punishment of Sgt. Glen Conlan, an ex-soldier living alone on a farm, who he said made Muslims suffer in the Middle East. An experienced foreign operative named Amin was flown into the UK, whereas, Ash and his friend Yussif were taught to act as his local guides and assistants. When they travelled to Conlan’s farm, Yussif confronted Conlan and was stabbed in the face. Ash then chased Conlan and knocked him unconscious; he searched the house and found a woman with a baby,

both of whom met a tragic end that did not differ in its intensity from that of Conlan.

Afterwards, Ewan and Mark moved to a housing estate, where Ash and another man spotted them. The unknown man takes off running, and Ash gets away on his motorcycle while Mark chases the unknown man and shoots him dead. Mark and Ewan are informed by Charlotte that the Secret Service has discovered their schemes and is hunting them. When Ewan was sleeping in a hotel, Mark crept in to kill him. After a fierce fight, he killed Mark, but the former realized he is now alone and must abdicate the terror cell before he would be killed.

Confusion, Confrontation and Mindset:

After six years of being apart, Ash and Kate get back together; nevertheless, Ash believes his work with Nabil is so important and leaves Kate for a final suicide mission. Nabil then assigns Ash to kill the head of a pro-Iraqi war think tank whilst celebrating his daughter's wedding in London. Ash holds the picture of his British girlfriend, Kate, and, for a while, reflects on her charm and beauty. He burns the picture after shaving his chest and sets himself ready for a suicide attack. In a low-angle shot, the camera shows Ash kneeling down praying on the ground near his bed in an isolated place.

Whenever a terrorist incident occurs, the question that beats the minds is as follows: How could they commit this horrendous attack when there is nothing that can justify it? Certainly, psychoanalysis can help us fathom the terrorist mindset and recognize their esoteric motivations and ideologies. Terrorists are defined as non-state groups that use violence against civilians and non-combatants to earn political gains. Their prime goal is to instil fear through the targeting of innocents of all ages and genders. Such brutality, or inhumanity, in other words, is

incomprehensible, as some may reason that a terrorist must be deranged and mentally unstable.

As it was previously mentioned, Johan Horgan, who has written multiple books on terrorism and global security, and psychologists have tried to identify the personality disorder that defines a terrorist, asking if they are psychopathic or anti-social or whether there is one defining characteristic that unites them. He claims that recruits are often driven by external impetuses like disenfranchisement, social injustice, and alienation. Since they may be frustrated by other methods, they resort to terrorism to trigger political change even at the expense of the state. According to academic studies, certain adolescent males have a propensity to be drawn to a life of violence as they look for a feeling of purpose and connection. The “us” vs “them” mentality they frequently take on after being recruited permits them to disengage from feeling compassion for the people who are the targets of their attacks. These people could view taking other people's lives as a form of enjoyment, treating victims like objects. Taking other people's lives as a form of enjoyment and treating victims like objects has been explored by Jessica Stern (1958) in her book, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill*. In the book, Stern studies the motivations behind religious extremism, examining five broad categories: alienation, humiliation, demographics, history, and territory. Through extensive interviews conducted with terrorists from diverse religious backgrounds, including American Christian fundamentalists, Palestinian Hamas members, Indonesian Islamists, Jewish redemptionists, and Kashmiri mujahideen, Stern provides invaluable insights into their personal stories and the fundamental factors that drive them towards committing acts of violence (Stern 87). Stern's work also raises important considerations about the impact of democratization in the Middle East and the shift of terrorist activities toward softer targets abroad.

Discourse, Identity, and the Representation of Terrorism:

Along the movie, the viewer feels that Ash's speech does not differ from the speeches of the infamous terrorist figures of the world. He uses his own camera to record himself and his speech to the British society. There is an extreme close-up shot of the recording camera as it functions as the last witness for the incoming terrorist attack. In this respect, Ash says:

For those of you looking for my reasons, then I suggest you pay attention to what I have to say. For too long, you have ignored what is happening around you. You have not seen the inevitable that is coming to you, the inevitability of my actions. You'd never opened your mouths in protest of my people's suffering. Your silence has been deafening; words have had no impact on you. Politics has had no impact on you. Look at Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine... The list goes on and on, and you continue to ignore it (*Cleanskin*, 2012).

Significantly, Ash discourse seems to be full of revenge and retaliation. He positions himself as a mouthpiece of the Muslims who have been brutalized and oppressed. Furthermore, he seems to divulge the motivations prompting him to resort to violence in the Judeo-Christian lands. Equally important, he levels a harsh criticism on the Western media, which has been depicted as "corrupt" and "degenerate", and whose sole aim resides in fulfilling the government agenda and complying with its policies and dictations. Now consider the following excerpt that underscores the West's confusion and puzzlement as regards terrorism:

You seem confused at our actions, lost in your decadent world unable to act, unable to move, frozen in time. So, now I am going to communicate to you in a language that you can understand. My words are dead until I give them life with your blood and mine. I am sure by now your newspapers and television have depicted me as a

madman, an evil outsider, hell bent on destruction. Your corrupt and degenerate media will spin my actions to suit the government agenda. They want you misinformed, scared, and docile so that you continue to ignore their murderous actions (*Cleanskin*, 2012).

In such a sadistic manner, Ash talks about his life, his past, and his motivations for violence, and by implication, his orientation towards terrorism:

You must understand that things do not happen without a reason. There are no coincidences. The material world that you worship is meaningless and empty. It means nothing to me. I leave it behind gladly. I have sacrificed myself for something higher than what this world has to offer. I strive for higher ground (*Cleanskin*, 2012).

It is obvious that Ash's speech is a mirror for his troubled mentality and disordered psyche. It is also a signifier of his yearning for recognition in his group; confusingly, he projects the world into two categories: the material and the immaterial. In fact, this projection is another reiteration of the discourse of division and fragmentation that plagued the world because of political interest and ethnocentric beliefs.

The Spectacle of Confrontation in the Wedding Reception Scene:

When Ash goes to the wedding reception, Ewan confronts him. The two men are both wounded in a fight, yet Ash manages to escape. He disguises himself as a waiter, and he makes his way to the reception's head table. Before he detonates his jacket bomb, Ewan shoots him down dead. This scene is also significant because it demonstrates the expertise of the security agents, their professionalism, and, perhaps most important of all, their self-sacrifice for the common good.

Again, with the bird's-eye view, the British and American guests symbolize the civilized world, while Ash symbolizes the savage and barbarian world. As a matter of truth, the music that accompanies the confrontation between Ewan and Ash is full of melancholy, a sense of depression, and the like. In the meantime, it is a signal for anxiety and worry—that what is coming next is more awful and outrageous. Hence, after disabling the detonator, Ewan leaves the hotel, yet a bomb hidden in luggage detonates in the hotel lobby, killing Nabil's targets.

As discussed earlier, Ash's extremist discourse seems like that of Osama bin Laden and his ilk. Discourse here does not consist only of one statement or one action or even one source of information because it englobes everything and almost nothing. It is characterized by a way of talking or a way of thinking in a state of knowledge that can cross a range of texts, leading to different forms of conduct within different institutional sites within society. Whenever these forms of discourse come together and they refer to the same topic, they possess the same style, and they support the same strategy; they then become what Foucault (2002) thinks of as discursive formations. By discursive formations, he actually means the institutionalization of a particular way of thinking and acting about a particular topic. This often goes in support of particular political ideologies or institutional ways of thinking about things. Stuart Hall posits that:

It is not the subjects, who speak it, who produce knowledge; subjects may produce particular texts, but they are operating within the limits of the episteme, the discursive formation, and the regime of truth of a particular period and culture. Indeed, this is one of Foucault's most radical propositions: the subject is produced within discourse. This subject of discourse cannot be outside discourse because it must be subjected to discourse. It must submit to its rules and conventions, to its dispositions of power and knowledge (Hall, 1997: 55).

The end of the movie is indeed worth probing into since it reinforces a wide range of stereotypes about the Muslim Other and reiterates the perturbations of the Self and its traumatic experience with the so-called phenomenon of terrorism.

Conclusion:

The analysis of the film *Cleanskin* and how Muslims are portrayed in British cinema adds to a larger scholarly discussion on the representation of Muslims as the “Other” and the maintenance or dismantling of stereotypes. Thus, the research debunks preexisting prejudices and biases common in British cinema by critically assessing the film’s themes, characters, and narrative components. It also provides insights into the intricacies of these representations. The analysis of the confusion highlights the challenges in understanding terrorism and the potential for stereotypes to be reinforced when based on incomplete or misleading information. Conflict studies, on the other hand, show that ideological and cultural clashes can perpetuate or challenge stereotypes through the humanization of characters and the display of different perspectives. The study also acknowledges that the film’s nuanced portrayal disrupts its oversimplified narrative, offering a more multi-layered understanding of the Muslim community. The research incorporates academic frameworks such as psychoanalytic models and radicalization theory to advance our understanding of the basic psychological and sociocultural factors that influence the portrayal of Muslims in British cinema. Thereby, our analysis reveals the complexities of radicalization, the impact of trauma and identity formation, and the impact of power dynamics on shaping the film’s narrative. Our study also addresses the broader cultural and social impact of depictions of Muslims in British cinema. It emphasizes the role of the media in forming and reforming public perception, challenging stereotypes, and fostering dialogue and understanding.

Through critical analysis of films such as *Cleanskin*, this research contributes to the discussion of the responsibility of filmmakers and the media industry to promote accurate and inclusive depictions of marginalized communities, including Muslims. *Cleanskin*'s analysis shows that addressing stereotypes and promoting understanding can make a big difference. First, it plays an important role in combating the negative effects of misrepresentation and discrimination. By doing so, we will actively contribute to building a more inclusive society. Furthermore, we recognize that accurate and differentiated representation is of utmost importance and recognize that the media has a significant impact on shaping perceptions. Accordingly, the results of this research have the potential to make a valuable contribution to ongoing efforts focused on promoting more correct, diverse, and inclusive cinematic representations of Muslims in British society. These efforts are ultimately aimed at promoting greater cultural understanding and empathy among people.

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