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كلمة العدد

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

يسعد هيئة تحرير مجلة المقالات الدولية أن تقدم للباحثين والمهتمين بين أيديهم هذا العدد الخامس، الذي يندرج ضمن الجهود الرامية إلى تعزيز البحث العلمي الرصين، وترسيخ مكانة المجلة كمنبر أكاديمي محكّم يواكب التطورات العلمية والمعرفية في مختلف التخصصات.

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وإذ نقدّم هذا العدد بما يزخر به من بحوث ودراسات متنوّعة، فإننا نجدد التزامنا بخدمة المعرفة الأكاديمية، ودعم الباحثين في مسارهم العلمي.

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Besieged Identities in the Aftermath of 9/11: The Role of the Media in Demonizing and Humanizing Muslims

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Abstract:

The 21st century has witnessed Islam increasingly portrayed as a target of hate, with Islamophobic crimes rising, largely fueled by biased media representations. While often seen as new, anti-Muslim hostility has deep historical roots. After 9/11, despite official efforts to separate Islam from terrorism, fear-driven narratives persisted, triggering violence against Muslims, even extending to mosques and schools. In response, cultural productions like Little Mosque on the Prairie provide an alternative space to challenge stereotypes. By humanizing Muslims and presenting them as relatable, the sitcom subverts entrenched prejudices, encouraging audiences to question misconceptions and fostering dialogue through humor and representation.

Keywords :

Islamophobia, media bias; Muslim representation; post-9/11; stereotypes.

المستخلص:

شهد القرن الحادي والعشرون تصاعداً في استهداف الإسلام بخطابات الكراهية وارتفاعاً في جرائم الإسلاموفوبيا، مدفوعةً إلى حد كبير بالصور النمطية التي تروجها وسائل الإعلام. ورغم أن هذا العداء يبدو حديثاً، إلا أن جذوره التاريخية عميقة. فبعد أحداث 11 شتنبر، ورغم محاولات رسمية لفصل الإسلام عن الإرهاب، استمر الإعلام في إذكاء الخوف، مما أدى إلى اعتداءات طالت المسلمين، بل وحتى المساجد والمدارس. وفي مواجهة ذلك، جاءت أعمال ثقافية مثل مسلسل المسجد الصغير في البراري لتوفير فضاء بديل يقاوم الصور النمطية، من خلال إنسانة المسلمين، وتشجيع الجمهور على إعادة النظر في الأفكار المسبقة.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

الإسلاموفوبيا؛ التحيز الإعلامي؛ تمثيل المسلمين؛ ما بعد أحداث الحادي عشر من سبتمبر؛ الصور النمطية.

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Introduction

The turn of the twenty-first century, the new American century so to speak,[1] was especially marked by the rise to 'prominence' of Islam as the public enemy as exemplified in the proliferation of hate crimes labeled Islamophobic. While this neologism may seem new, the phenomenon it alludes to is as age-old as xenophobia itself (Mastnak 29). Differently put, "anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic expression and hostility were as much a distinctly pre-9/11 phenomenon as a post-9/11 phenomenon" (Allen 2). Though politicians sought to counteract the backlash and exempt Islam from involvement in the hideous and heinous attacks which somehow castrated the World Trade Center,[2] injurious and biased reports saturated the media only to find an outlet in the behaviors of quite a few incensed individuals, who lashed out indiscriminately at their neighbors and fellow citizens for no reason other than they happened to be wearing a beard, a turban or a veil, "visual identifiers" at which was directed "the venting of rage, revenge, or any other denigratory sentiment or action" (Allen 4). Even places such as mosques and schools came under attack for what they stood for. In fine, through fearmongering, the mediocracy pulls the strings as best fits the interests of certain privileged groups and to the detriment of the underdogs.

This article explores the following central research question: How do Western media play a dual role in both demonizing and humanizing Muslims in the aftermath of 9/11, and how can humor—particularly as expressed in the sitcom *Little Mosque on the Prairie*—serve as a means of resistance and dehumanization?

To answer this question, the paper first contextualizes the rise of Islamophobia and media narratives following 9/11. It then develops a theoretical framework by drawing on postcolonial critique and humor theory to establish the ideological mechanisms at play. A

[1]. Initially coined by Henry R. Luce, this concept rests on the premise that America is called upon to assume its role as a world leader and to intervene where necessary to put things back into order, the American order.

[2]. British and German Prime ministers, Tony Balair and Gerhard Schroder, spoke firmly against confusing the perpetrators with the rest of Muslims. They foresaw a possible retaliation against innocent Muslims whose views did in no way tally with those extremists.

close analysis of selected episodes of Little Mosque on the Prairie follows, showing how the sitcom reframes Muslim identity through satire and narrative resistance. Finally, the paper concludes by reflecting on the broader implications of such media portrayals for intercultural dialogue and representation.

Literature Review

It is only fair then to posit that "the central site of contestation over Islam and Muslims is the media" (Oktem 1). In a context fraught with fear, anxiety and retaliation, images have become so powerful they can trigger rage that soon exacerbates into violence once they find their way into mainstream media. One reason why images grow rampantly like leaves on trees is ascribed to the infinite possibilities the Internet/television collusively afford for their dissemination and circulation on a large scale. In this way, the pictorial representations of the prophet caused a huge ripple, echoes of which reverberate up till now.

The caricaturization of Mohammed (PBUH) as a potential terrorist is sure to offend moderate Muslims and infuriate Muslim fundamentalists, but the controversy would have gone down unnoticed had the media not blown it out of proportion. It is precisely because the Danish cartoon controversy was internationalized that the debate heated up. "Cultural polarization began assuming irreconcilable proportions" insofar as the cartoonish drawings were "perceived by the majority in the Arab and Muslim world as an offence against symbols of religious belief, and by most in Europe as an instance of freedom of expression" (Ebeid 101). What unleashed so much fury is not the act of representation itself as did the message behind the cartoon explicitly showing Muhammed and his disciples to be innately blood-thirsty. Among the twelve drawings deriding the prophet, the one depicting Muhammad, "with a turban in the shape of a ticking bomb" standing at the gates of heaven imploring and pleading with would-be suicide bombers: "Stop, stop, we have run out of virgins" (Kimmelman) spread like fire through the Internet not only because of its satirical content, but because it reduces Islam to being what it is not, a religion of the sword, as Orientalists picture it. What the cartoonists fail to realize, or perhaps realize thoroughly, is that, in "painting Islam and every Muslim in the conclusive colors of absolute darkness" (Sardar), they were only fueling hatred

and sowing fear. No matter what they say to justify their end, "no culture or people can accept such representation" (Sardar).

There is no denying that Muslim sensitivities were deeply moved, not to say raked up, by such a depiction, but there is no excusing the overreaction of some Muslims who exceeded extreme lengths in demonstrating their disapprobation. One may argue plausibly that protesting is also an act of free speech, but the violence and death threats made loud and clear on Arab and Western media during such protests only reconfirm what the caricatures were meant to express. As a matter of fact, it is such outrage that prompted many newspaper editors across Europe and North America, but not all,[3] to republish the cartoons in support of what they call "freedom of speech" and in solidarity with the Danish paper (Asser). For Sardar, one thing that is crystal clear is that "this is not an issue of freedom of expression. It is about power, domination and demonisation" (Sardar). Flemming Rose, the editor of the paper in question, believes that "as a nonbeliever" if a Muslim beseeches him to "observe his taboos in the public domain, he is not asking for my respect, but for my submission" (Kim 197), a statement worthy of note because it clearly exposes the whole matter as an exercise of power rather than "a journalistic exercise", as Rose insists it is (Rose). Sardar goes on to add that Islam is in no way opposed to the ideals of free speech, as Rose and his like-minded compeers like to think, but the truth is that "the Danish cartoons are part of a common rhetoric of deliberate misconstruction of Islam" (Sardar).

Recent scholarship has continued to explore the intersection of Islamophobia and media representation in the digital era. For instance, Bayrakli and Hafez's European Islamophobia Report series (2018–2023) documents the transnational spread of anti-Muslim sentiment through mainstream and online media across Western democracies, offering essential insight into the cultural backdrop against which *Little Mosque on the Prairie* aired.

Several studies have also directly examined the show's impact. Hirji notes that the sitcom's humor is "strategically deployed to unsettle viewers' expectations about Islam and normalize

[3]. Some American papers voiced their disagreement with the publication of such offensive cartoons and hiding under the blanket of free speech. For more on their views, read Edward Drachman and Robert Langran, You Decide: Controversial Cases in American Politics, pp. 88-92. USA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008.

Muslim-Canadian experiences" (56). Meanwhile, McFarlane and Ahmed argue that the show performs "narrative repair" by fostering "intercultural contact zones" through comedy.

More broadly, post-2018 work such as Ali and Dika's analysis of Muslim identities in Western television, and Shams's ethnographic studies of audience reception, affirm that media still play a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions of Muslims (Ali and Dika 2020; Shams 2021). These newer voices complement the foundational critiques of Said, Sardar, and Mastnak by updating the media landscape and demonstrating continuity between older Orientalist tropes and newer digital-age Islamophobia.

Theoretical framework

To discuss Islam in relation to humor when times have become so sober and solemn is to run the risk of blasphemy, but it is our firm belief that humor, when taken seriously, can pave the way to squarely facing up to divisions pulling us/them asunder. "There is only one way left to escape the alienation of present-day society: to retreat ahead of it" by interrupting the sameness and seamlessness of discourse as it stands today and inventing in its stead a new discourse of difference, and why not deference, of resistance and humor (Barthes 40-2). The kernel of humor resides mainly "in its practices of violation … [of] expectations and rules" (Westwood and Rhodes 6), in its seizing upon immediate circumstances to make its point. Those who are liable to take offence, and many will, at the humour comedy contains should be reminded that in the world of comedy, the forbidden is trampled, and it is within the confines of such a reversal that the "the pleasure of the text" (Barthes 26) develops. As Dudden notes, humour can "be barbed, disconcerting, intimidating and even downright vicious," serving simultaneously as a benign and acrimonious corrective (82). As long as touchy topics are draped in the comic attire, boundaries can be constantly tested, fixed representations persistently contested, and threats safely blunted. In matters of humor, it is that which appears "to be fixed and oppressive … that should be mocked and ridiculed" (Critchley 18). As such, "laughter often allows something that is routinely disallowed to be seen or spoken of" (O'Doherty 184). In his exploration of the mechanics and dynamics of humour, Westwood comes to the conclusion that, albeit offensive, "unsettling and even subversive", humour can

also contain "subversion within the safe confines of the merely comic" (Westwood 68). Located at such a disjunction, the comedic effect is best attained by feeding on tension, without which there can be no laughter (Rappoport 19), to attenuate and, better still, we hope, to relieve the neurosis at work.[4] The sitcom we intend to engage with represents a counter-site where a humourously engaging debate takes shape and reshapes the way Muslims are being conceived and perceived.

By inviting on the screen and elevating to the center stage the marginalities whose views go unheard, humor represents the unpresentable (Johnson et al. 113-139), carrying within the antidote necessary to unthinking staunchly-held prejudices, undermining dogmas all the while subverting stereotypes on both ends of the spectrum, that is, the minority's and majority's side. Though or, perhaps more correctly so, through being subversive, humor "offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world" (Bakhtin 34). As unexpected as this invitation is, it still makes perfect sense once one takes account of Critchley's miniature strategies of humor (Critchley 28). An efficient and effective strategy in this regard is defamiliarization, a reference to that state where "common sense is disrupted, the unexpected is evoked, familiar subjects are situated in unfamiliar, even shocking contexts in order to make the audience … conscious of their own cultural assumptions" (Driessen 227). Humor attends to defamiliarization as a miniaturist strategy for it to exercise the aforementioned effect and much more. In "defamiliarizing the familiar, demythologizing the exotic and inverting the world of common sense", humor introduces us to the world "as if we had just landed from another planet" (Critchley 65-66). At its best, humor can beset the familiar and even construct "an alternate world, one at odds with our normal way of viewing things" (Westwood 49). In Critchley's appraisal, humor tickles the mind "by producing a consciousness of contingency" (24), thus changing the status quo and critiquing the social [dis]order.

Though solicited by the public for the fun they provide, sitcoms are often left out of academic circles, perhaps even denigrated, thus seldom garnering the attention they deserve from intellectuals whose overriding concern is to dig into canonical works such as novels,

[4]. In my approach to dealing with humour, I find Freud's psychoanalytical tools of much use. For Mary Douglas, humour is seen both as a rite expressive of collective values and an anti-rite questioning those values.

poems and films to the detriment of so primordial a genre. This is then a bold, if not risky, attempt to come to terms with this genre, treat it with respect, acknowledge the artistic merit of situational comedy in its own right, and see the ways in which the lives of those on the screen relate to and resonate with those off the screen. The location of these productions, the voices the characters adopt, the types of structures the creators of these texts build, and the themes they tap into will constitute the skeleton we will flesh out in our endeavor to make sense of these signs and meanings (Said 20).

Little Mosque on the Prairie is a Canadian sitcom created by Zarqa Nawaz that aired on CBC Television from 2007 to 2012. Starring Zaib Shaikh as Amaar Rashid and Sitara Hewitt as Rayyan Hamoudi, the show was groundbreaking in its portrayal of Muslim characters as ordinary Canadians navigating faith and culture in a small prairie town. With widespread media coverage and a diverse audience base, the sitcom sparked both praise and critique, particularly for its role in normalizing Muslim identities post-9/11. The show's reception ranged from enthusiastic support within Muslim communities to cautious endorsement by mainstream critics who appreciated its counter-stereotypical narrative.

Methodologically, this paper draws on critical discourse analysis and cultural theory to interpret narrative elements in selected episodes of the show. It examines how humour operates as a rhetorical and ideological tool to dismantle stereotypes, using frameworks developed by Barthes, Critchley, and Westwood. Rather than a quantitative or content analysis, the approach is qualitative and interpretive, engaging deeply with scenes, dialogue, and character development to explore how meaning is negotiated on screen. This methodology enables a close reading of the sitcom as a text that refracts postcolonial tension through comedic form.

In this sense, *Little Mosque on the Priarie*, the sitcom under analysis, proffers not only pleasure but also profit (Said, *Orientalism*, XIV) in that it comments on a tragic situation couched in humor (Mintz 91). This visual production may be construed as a site of 'jouissance,' but behind all the uproars of laughter lies hidden a tragic reality we want challenged or, even better, changed in accordance with the aims humor seeks to obtain.

Ethnic comedy,[5] under whose heading this comic avant-gardist oeuvre may be rightly subsumed "aims to bridge the divide that separates Muslims from the rest" by taking the viewers on "a journey from fear to laughter" (Bilici 196) in an enactment of the belief that "we laugh at that of which we are frightened" (O'Doherty 185). The humorous rendition/domestication of the hitherto frightening Muslim scarecrows works to turn them into the humanized and normalized beings they are. They are shown to have concerns akin to ours or perhaps worse than ours. In a word, what this sitcom seeks to impart and impress on the viewer is that Muslims are only human with a sense of humor to be appreciated.

The question that poses itself forcibly is whether or not Muslims can laugh.[6] Little Mosque on the Prairie purports to answer this question and may thus be viewed as a postmodernist text in nature, one that experiments with issues hitherto untouched. In so doing, it pushes the boundaries for the permissible and impermissible by breaking down new walls in an extension of its narrative scope and confrontation with formerly established canons. As such, this response creates not only knowledge but also a novel reality, a discourse as it were, disputing and contesting widely circulated/circulating misconceptions (Said, *Orientalism*, 94).

While Said laments "the almost total absence of any cultural position making it possible either to identify with or dispassionately to discuss…Islam" (Said, *Orientalism*, 26-27), *Little Mosque on the Prairie* makes up for such a deficit in representations widening and broadening our/their scope of knowledge on "Islam …as a vitally lived experience" (Said, *Covering Islam*, 163) in the West and conferring newer meanings to the material/spiritual world of Islam in what one may describe as "an oppositional critical consciousness" (Said, *Orientalism*, 326) to the proclaimed "positional superiority" (Said, *Orientalism*, 7) of the West. In the same vein, humour, Critchley explains, "might be said to be one of the conditions for taking up a critical position with respect to what passes on for everyday life, producing a change which is both liberating and elevating" (Critchley, *On Humour*, 41). Those formerly absented, muted and

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5. Leon Rappoport settles on defining ethnic groups as "any racial, religious, national origin or regional category of sub-culturally distinct persons." Leon Rappoport, *Punchlines: The Case for Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Humor,* p. 4. USA: Praeger Publishers, 2005.

6. This is reminiscent of Spivak's question as regards subalterns. Similarly, Muslims caught in the West can also be viewed as subalterns.

muffled voices are now being lent back their voices to speak from within. Given the changed and still changing world we live in today, "newly empowered voices are asking for their narratives to be heard" (Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, XX), and, in our case, to be seen. An organic intellectual, Nawaz, the director of *Little Mosque on the Prairie,* believes firmly that, so long as the Muslim community is underrepresented, misrepresentations will persist. So, her *raison d'être* is to intervene to the best of her ability to address issues of concern to the Muslim community and to redress the situation as far as could be done to break, what she calls, this bubble of isolation Muslims find themselves ensnared in. "As a community," Nawaz militantly says, "we are realizing that rather than sit back and complain about our representation, we have to be proactive in creating our own image."[7]

Textual Analysis

The identity of an individual or a group of people is mainly "shaped or misshaped by the recognition or non-recognition [they] receive from others" (Melich 171), namely from police officers and journalists among others. This being the case, a community "of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves" (Taylor 25). The apprehension of the new Imam Amaar upon his arrival at the airport on his way to Mercy town speaks volumes about the hardships Muslims face while in transit. Border crossing, as is amply documented, has become a nightmare for Muslims, and this is "most acutely felt at the long delays at border points" (Adelman 5). In a reversal of the legal register, Muslims are thought guilty until they prove themselves innocent. While many Muslims chafe and choke under racial profiling, Amaar, the lead character, evinces composure, an unparalleled sense of humor, and an intelligence that stand in stark contrast to the anxiety, edginess, and gullibility the two policemen exude. Humour is his modus operandi. His only charge, as he ironically puts it, is "flying while Muslim".[8] Every utterance he makes to account for every single voyage he has undertaken, whether to Pakistan or Egypt, together with every decision he has made, is farcically misconstrued. Even the smallest move he makes to reach out for his wallet to

[7].http://www.boloji.com/index.cfm?md=Content&sd=Articles&ArticleID=2106#sthash.rngf2fcS.dpuf

[8]. This was the title of a documentary produced in 2007 showcasing racial profiling in its most outrageous forms. For more on the documentary, log on to http://cutv.ws/documentary/watch-online/play/2034

produce evidence in support of his words is suspected, misjudged, and mistrusted, thrusting the officer behind to pull out his gun frantically. Jalal Al-Azm's understanding of *Orientalism* as an enterprise that is "shot through and through with racist assumptions… reductionistic explanations and anti-human prejudices" (Al-Azm 55) very much permeates this scene. This is so much the case that Amaar's "true calling" is, according to the interrogating officer, "explosives". As Amaar jokingly answers in the positive, the officer pens his 'yea' down. In a hilarious exchange, Amaar urges the cross-examining officer to call the Masjid he will be working in to check his side of the story out, all the while vowing to pay the price of deportation to Syria if he is found guilty. The officer is too stern to get the punchline, adding to the humour of the scene, but he gives Amaar the benefit of the doubt. As though the officer had only heard the last part of what Amaar has said and assuming him to be guilty as charged, the officer storms out: "You do not get to choose which country you'll be deported to". Much to the delight of the officer, that message on the answering machine "about blowing people away" leads him to jump to the foregone conclusion that Amaar is guilt-ridden. While this may sound satirical, the incident Amaar faces reminds us of the fate many Muslims were subjected to upon being suspected and maligned simply for being Muslim.[9] Caught in a whirlwind, Amaar feels slighted and slandered, but he contains his emotions and maintains his equanimity. Through her rendering of Amaar as a well-composed and self-restrained character, the director provides the viewers, notably those at the receiving end, with stratagems and tactics to resist oppression and vilification. The policeman should not be blamed for carrying out to the letter the provisions of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, which arrogates to him the right "to identify suspected terrorists without the higher evidentiary standards required under criminal law" (Muyinda 13). In an encroachment on the basic right of freedom, a suspect could be kept under surveillance and even held in custody, if

[9]. For more on similar stories, read Darcy Zabel, ed, *Arabs the Americas: Interdisciplinary Essays on the Arab Diaspora*. Mr. Arar is a case in point. He is an example of a Canadian-Syrian citizen who was unjustly repatriated to Syria while he was in America trying to reach his family in Canada. There was nothing against him except his Arab name and identity. The rest of it was forgotten in the haste to have him cast away. What is even more injurious is that his family the American authorities did not take any pains to inform his family as they should of his forced disappearance into air space on his way to Syria. I'd say he was guilty by association.

need be, for as long as it takes the police to interrogate them, and could eventually be deported if that same policeman decides on it.[10] Such empowering of the police force not only disempowers the citizenry, but it also puts them at the mercy of abusive state apparatuses. Upon his release, Amaar realises, much to his dismay, that being a Canadian Muslim not only causes one to be detained, but it may also cause one to be stranded, prejudiced against, and listed as undesirable.

Amaar, like any other Muslim trapped in what has become "the wild West" post 9/11, cannot book a flight ticket the way an ordinary citizen would without him being required to wait unduly and the employee having to call their supervisor as episode one illustrates. The freedom Fred boasts of on his radio show is not a delicacy that comes the easy way for Muslims. Upon his arrival in the village, Amaar, having miraculously worked his way out of the frying pan, falls headlong into the fire. Only this time a journalist who can scantily differentiate between journalism and detective work keeps 'shooting' him with his camera and bombarding him with questions of this sort:

What is your relationship with this mosque?

What is your comment on the scandal?

What do you have to say about the terrorist allegations?

Suffice it for Amaar to mention a word or two for the journalist to make his rash misinterpretation, pestering the newly arrived Imam with yet more outrageous questions no one would take. The litany of questions being thrown at Amaar tells much about this journalist and betrays the essence of journalism in general. It seems as though the journalist has the outline of his story prepared beforehand and is only digging up ways to flesh it out. The situation exacerbates when Yasir and Amaar, unaware of the implications of their words, discuss that message on the answering machine about "blowing people away". The inquisitive and intrusive journalist barges in with an accusatory tone, inquiring if Yasir and his family are "part of a sleeper cell." Yasir's imprudence encourages the journalist to take his impudence to a higher level with his provocative accusations: What is your connection to Al Qaeda? Raayn takes it on herself to stall him by answering this one: "What is your connection to journalism?"

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[10]. For more facts on the scale of racial profiling Muslims endured, read *Presumption of Guilt: A National Survey on Security Visitations of Canadian Muslims archived by CairCan:Canadian Council on American-Islamic Relations.* Retrieved from www.caircan.ca.

Undaunted, the journalist will not stop there. He wants to know if Amaar is from Saudi Arabia, as if people from Saudi Arabia were all terrorists. We expect him to be disappointed when it turns out that Amaar is from Toronto, but this only adds to his ecstasy. "This story is huge," the journalist is already thinking of an appropriate headline for his too short inquiry to be worth publishing, but all that seems to matter is that this is a story that will definitely sell well and sit well with the readership.[11] Muslims, it seems, are high on the news agenda. The next thing we see is a black and white photograph of Amaar occupying much of the space of the front page. As he gets off his taxi, Amaar has his fist raised up as if bracing himself for the next punch, and we, the viewers, feel exposed and so have to put up our arms to prevent the blow to our face. The headline "Holy Terror" not only captures our attention, but it also raises our eyebrows the way Amaar's are. The caption "Transplanted Toronto Cleric "Lands" in Hot Water" further disorients our reading of the photo, confirming the fear the word terror has set in motion. This accords well with the Islamophobic and public discourse that has been on the rise since 9/11, constituting the core of "a politically and socially constructed process by which governments and the media present threats to national or state security in a highly dramatized and persuasive form of public discourse" (Murphy 3).

In this respect, radios fare no better than newspapers. No wonder, because airtime is entrusted to people like Fred Tupper, who, instead of spreading mutual understanding, disseminate fear and terror, little aware of the damage accruing from their ill-founded, over-sweeping generalizations. Nothing could rival Baber's sickening thoughts about the community he lives in, except perhaps Fred. We may hate Baber for thinking of others as little more than "infidels," "heathens," "crusaders," and so on, but his epithets mean naught in his entourage, where he becomes harmless. While addressing a larger audience, Fred, the pesticide, cloaks his morbid thoughts with a magic that pierces the ear and hence proves more

[11]. This story reminds me of another almost similar story that engrossed me while I was in my first year at Ibn Tofail University and has stayed with me ever since. Here is a summary of the story: A dog pounced on a kid in a park in New York while a man happened to be passing by. The man jumped at the dog and saved the kid. A journalist who has seen it all went to the man. "Congratulations, you are an American hero", said the journalist. The man said "I am not American". The journalist smiled at him saying "you must be a European, then", but our hero said "I am an Arab". The next day the papers were full of images of the man, and his story read "Arab terrorist attacks and kills dog".

detrimental and consequential. In a battle of wits, he questions Amaar, or rather stalks Amaar, with his constant and incessant blunt accusations. As he sounds the bell, Fred calls upon the people of Mercy to wake up to the impending peril:

Fred: Are you a terrorist?

Amaar: No, I'm…

Fred: You object to the term?

Amaar: Of course I do.

Fred: Well, you prefer, uh…Mujahideen?

Amaar: Yes…No! I mean, look, Fred… I came here to clear the air. You're not letting me get a word in.

Fred: That's the privilege of living in a country with freedom.

Amaar: Freedom? to do what, to fan the flames of hatred.

Fred: Oh-ho-ho, isn't it Muslim preachers like yourself who do that? Huh? I got news for you Johnny jihad. That's…folks around here will not sit back and let that happen. You can bet your falafel on that.

Fred's questioning of Amaar, his continued interrogation, lays bare the prejudicial, antagonistic, and hostile discourse with which the Muslim minority has had to grapple post 9/11. Despite accounts to the contrary, Muslims were presented as the sworn enemies of the public good, "the alien, the fanatical other[s]," the newcomers who are "unaccustomed to the freedoms and tolerance of Western civilization" (Measor 116). The all-domineering voice of Fred overshadows the presence of Amaar on the show. On a straight radio talk show, the host is supposed to ask questions and wait for answers, but this is a twisted case where the guest-speaker is bereft of his right to free speech in a country that prides itself on the freedoms it showers its citizens with, not all of them, though. The voice of subalternity is drowned in the noise that the likes of Fred create and diffuse so only their voice will be discerned.[12] Yet, upon further scrutiny, the few utterances Amaar makes deny Fred the all-authoritative presence he would have enjoyed had Amaar not invited himself to the show. The "incongruities …uncertainties and ambivalences" (Parry 25), Amaar's "No" causes upset in the seemingly seamless narrative Fred is spinning. His echoing of the words Fred has used is a sign of

[12]. This is a reminder of Spivak's controversial essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

spectacular resistance, a mimic moment, the moment newer and subtler meanings are being produced punctuating and puncturing Fred's all too familiar clichéd discourse. Mimicry, in Newell's interpretation, comes across as being "ambivalent, continually producing splitting, excess, and difference," which empowers it to subvert "the authority of the very discourse that is mimicked" (Newell 52), in our case, Fred's.

His appellation "Johnny Jihad" alludes to the double identity Muslims are thought to have and the patriotism they are thought to be lacking. In pointing out that Fred is "fanning the flames of hatred," Amaar effectively sums up the journalist's nefarious intentions. Nawaz immediately captures the reaction of one of the auditors who happens to be within earshot of the radio talk show, as he exclaims: "If he hates it so much here, why doesn't he go back to Toronto?" Words that are thrown into the air may have more collateral damage than Fred can possibly weigh. Inherent to his declamation, "folks around here will not sit back and let that happen. You can bet your falafel on that," is an audible declaration of war of all against some, an onslaught that poisons at first the airwaves and henceforth the thoughts of those precarious souls who cannot tell a horse from a pony. Fred's miscalculated shootout only serves to fuel hatred and instigate violence, both verbal and physical, which will eventually fire back with Muslims riposting through either seclusion or, worse still, through recourse to the same ways and means, a tit for a tat, as Fred advocates. Luckily, for Amaar and the Muslim community, the people of Mercy give no heed to Fred's hallucinations. This coordinated attack on Amaar is so fierce that the only fiercer campaign would be the US-led war on terror. This being said, other Christians are little thwarted by the rumors being circulated, and know better than to judge others on the basis of allegations Fred spins out. For that matter, Reverend Magee modifies the terms of his commercial lease contract in a way that allows Muslims to utilize the parish hall as they see fit. Unlike Baber and Fred, both Amaar and Magee have in them what it takes to be good ambassadors of their religions. Episode three ends with the two chattering and poking fun at the passers-by. Humor can elevate souls to such heights and purge them of petty squabbles that mar our co-existence. More often than not, Amaar, a novice to the métier, asks the experienced priest for spiritual guidance. This is evidenced when Amaar tries to meditate but cannot because of Baber's and Rayyan's untimely and impromptu visits. He finds solace in the insight the Reverend lavishly offers him. It is all part of his spiritual

duty as an Imam. These same words he reiterates in the presence of the heartbroken Rayyan to soothe her in her troubles. What Nawaz is trying to convey through these affable characters is that religious differences can be set aside to allow community life to thrive. After all, the two religions may not be that different. Even when they are, these differences should be seen as salubrious.

Amaar has an ingenious, though untimely, idea of bringing the people of Mercy together to polish the blemished image of Islam and Muslims by inviting the townsfolk to the mosque to see and judge for themselves. As the people gather in the mosque, we cannot help but chuckle as people from both communities collide. The only serene voices are those of Reverend Magee and Amaar, who observe from a distance as people meet up. Misunderstandings ensue when Rayyan tries to teach a local about the scarf.

Local: If you're a feminist, why do you cover your hair?

Rayyan: Well, it's about modesty. Hair is part of your sexuality so you'd only Show it to other women.

Local: so you're gay?

Rayyan: No! I'd show it to my husband.

Local: Okay, so you're married!

Rayyan: No…Not yet.

Local: So you can show it to your boyfriend?

The misunderstandings this exchange captures can persist indefinitely, highlighting the confusion people on either side of the issue live with. This is yet another barrier Muslims and Christians ought to dismantle if cohabitation in peace and harmony is ever to happen. It seems that not much is known about Muslim life, and so opening up to others, as the new Imam has been doing, is likely to "clear up the air," "make peace," and "create trust," in conformity with his mission. Things do not go according to plan because of an electrical problem that Yasir fails to fix in time for the "Open House" to open its doors. The air Amaar wants to clear up fills up with smoke, sullying relations between the two communities. Yasir has proven himself more committed to promoting his business relations than to keeping his promise of doing charitable work for the mosque, which will not bring him financial gain. Reckless people like Yasir stand in the way of kindhearted people like Amaar.

Far from the happy ending we all crave for, Fred rings the bell with his promises never to give up and his vulture-like posture as he seeks every opportunity that presents itself to stir black water and steer the audience down the path of hatred. So paranoid and hateful is Fred that he alone sees in the flickering lights of the mosque "some kind of signal" being sent to 'God knows whom' and tirelessly warns the people of Mercy to "keep your eyes open." Just as Fred worries to death about the safety of his people, Baber, a fanatic on the Muslim side, is dead worried about his safety. Only people with no light in their brains seem to entertain such portending thoughts. It is no coincidence, then, that episode three is just about lights coming on and going out.[13] It is as if it were not just the light that needed fixing, but these people's brains too need repair and rewiring. What Huntington would have said after 9/11 is exactly what Fred said after the electrical incident that, once more, proved them, Fred and Huntington, to be right like prophets.[14] Fred defusing hate on air: And I hate to say: "I told you so, people of Mercy, but I told you so, people of Mercy."

Without taking the pain to investigate the cause of the incident, Fred, as most journalists did after 9/11, hops to the conclusion that luckily the bomb, which this ragtag bunch of jihadorists were trying to make, did not detonate as was planned. The bottom line, he confidently says, is that while "you try to act neighborly, they try to blow you up". His words, "those infidels", recall the words of Baber. In speaking the same tongue, both turn out to have more in common than meets the eye. In fine, the incident is blown out of proportion by Fred, who leans on the rampant fear of the other compounded by the threat of terrorism to manipulate media consumers and to frame Islam as a faith where heinous and hideous atrocities are licensed, a religion to which horrendous acts of terror are endemic (Ismael and Measor 124).

[13]. Across cultures, light has come to be synonymous with knowledge whereas its absence signals ignorance.

[14]. Many prophets, including Noah and Moses, came with warnings to their people, and yet nobody would believe them until it was too late.

Conclusion

If one forgets awhile the huge chasm, the two-way channel, separating East and West, North and South, and calls into question post-colonialism itself, one would come to the sad conclusion that there is no such thing as post-colonialism "because in reality oppositions and restraints continue to govern people's lives" (Huddart 102) everywhere they go irrespective of gender, class or religion. Postcolonialism, however, comes into account for the situation the underdogs find themselves in, offering them a way out. This situation can only be overturned if all people take matters into their own hands, as Zarqa has done, to write a corrective history from their perspective, where every human being is both a participant and a spectator. Much of the popularity and momentum the sitcom has gained is to be primarily attributed to the fact that Nawaz steps out of the bubble, as it were, and breaks free from conventionally coded modes of representation that pin Muslims down to being little more than walking bombs, portraying them in lieu of this as only human with flaws and laughable imperfections. These Muslims are endowed with the capacity to appeal to us on a plane higher than that of religion, the plane of universal values, that of humanity. Were these same characters to weep and whimper, they would not appeal to us as much?

Nawaz humanizes Muslims by humorously demystifying the myths woven into their mundane lives, thus taming the paranormal and turning the extraterrestrials into lay people with problems akin to ours, people with a heightened sense of humor who can laugh and make us *explode* with laughter, as it were, people whose itinerary in life reveals their normalcy, unveils their ordinariness and 'humorousness,' hence setting ablaze many a stereotype. The irresistible power of laughter, Nawaz's weapon of choice, blunts "the threats implicit in differences" (Boskin and Dorinson 97) by highlighting the human and humorous side of our existence. According to Goodman, the sitcom may be considered as a counter-narrative to mainstream discourse, showing "Muslims to be utterly normal…They're not terrorists, they're not religious freaks. There's nothing odd or menacing about the Muslim characters on *Little Mosque on the Prairie* - they're just like any other Canadian citizens" (Anderson).

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