

Ideological Representations of Muslims in Hollywood Movie ‘The Kingdom’: A Study of Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

The significance of movies in information dissemination and ideological creation through language is undeniable. This study aims to investigate how Hollywood movies and documentaries depict Muslims. Specifically, this study examines the different forms of language expressions of Muslims based on the film directors' and writers' descriptions and justification for their actions and beliefs. This study also explores ‘The Kingdom’, a movie produced after the 9/11 twin tower attack. Critical discourse analysis is a research tool used to analyze the movie content. This movie is a terrorism genre, where Muslims have negative roles and are depicted as terrorists. The 3D model of Fairclough is utilized to reveal the ideological manipulations and representations of Muslims in Hollywood movies. Also, the three levels of this model, namely, descriptive, discursive, and social practices, are used to analyze the text on each level independently. Results show that terrorism discourse, which tags Muslims as terrorists, is embedded in the text. Muslims are depicted and labeled as terrorists through latent ideologies and the use of manipulated language, which is an example of their biased representation in Hollywood movies. When the media internationally draw a negative coverage and an exaggerated picture towards Muslim, refining, and drawing the true side of the picture is extremely difficult.

Keywords: CDA, Hollywood Cinema, Terrorism, Fairclough’s 3D Model

Introduction

The academic and mainstream media are obsessed with Muslims, terrorism, and the west since the tragic incident of the 9/11 twin tower attack. This obsession is often associated with the global media’s predominantly negative portrayal of Islam and Muslims. Muslim casts are overwhelmingly portrayed as violent, irrational terrorists (Manning, 2006). Previous analysis of different Hollywood movies shows that Muslims are depicted with a negative bias. The media have misrepresented Islam by associating Muslim religious obligations with terrorism. In general, the media seem to portray Muslims as barbaric, backward, violent, and uncivilized (Gamson et al., 1992).

This misrepresentation is not limited to Hollywood movies, where various cartoons, such as Sinbad, also depict Muslims as barbaric. Previous studies have shown that Hollywood cinema is focused on making movies with images presenting their manipulated truth rather than providing evidence of their negative portrayal (Gamson et al., 1992). This description is unreliable given that no proof can justify whether the image being portrayed by the media is true. However, spectators still believe in what they see.

The significance of this study is to examine to what extent the negative image of Muslims is being portrayed in Western films. This study is also for the general masses to know about the hidden propaganda in Hollywood movies and the question of whether Muslims are portrayed as terrorists will be answered.

(Shaheen, 2003) examined more than 900 movies and found that the negative depiction of Arabs is due to some old movies. The current negative image perpetuated in modern Hollywood movies is not just created by the present society but was imposed by the west in the past. Generally, Muslims in Hollywood cinema is portrayed sarcastically. In general, Hollywood movies rarely

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describe them as common people living a routine life. Subjugation, oppression, and dominance are the factors that constitute the negative image associated with Muslims and Islam. The dominant societies impose this image on Muslims as they consider them subjugated.

Al Mannan and Al-Af, (2017) examined the western media that tag Islam as a promoter of violence, and he focused on the role that the media play in exaggerating and spreading the Islamophobia concept. He used the propaganda model theory of Chomsky and Edward to criticize the biased nature of media against Muslims. Case studies have also used this theory to analyze the biases of the media in portraying a community according to their will. Fatima (2016) explored Muslim misrepresentation in Hollywood cinema and analyzed six movies, namely, 'The Dictator' (2012), 'Clear Skin' (2012), 'Lone Survivor' (2013), 'Java Heat' (2013), 'Camp X-Ray' (2014) and 'Honor' (2014). Generally, these movies specifically portray the negative images associated with Muslims. He obtained the percentage of scenes in these films that portrayed the negative side of Muslims. His study highlighted the Hollywood perception for radicalizing Muslims globally through movies.

Although the number of movies that present distorted concepts or terrorism has not been formally calculated, Cettl (2009) found more than 285 movies with terrorism as the main theme released from 1960 to 2008. (Shaheen, 2007) discovered approximately more than 1,000 instances where terrorists are depicted as Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood cinema. After the 9/11 incident, the ratio of Muslims tagged as terrorists have increased as the west. This portrayal of cinematic terrorism is presented in the same manner, showing similar negative images associated with Muslims and their cruelty through cinema. (Shaheen, 2012) recently examined the characters of Muslims in historical movies and showed that a slight change occurred in films. However, the same negative depictions of Muslims are repeatedly followed by all productions.

Khan and Bokhari, (2011) examined the '*Indian cinema and Muslim image*' from 2002 to 2008. This research was carried out to explore how and to what extent Indian cinema was distorting the Muslim image. This study was done by using the content analysis method on 50 Indian movies, which were taken out from 350 Muslim-characters, based on movies. The result indicated that Indian cinema was distorting the Muslim image and anti-Muslim propaganda has been carried out, not only in India but also at the international level. (Latiff Azmi et al., 2016) have also analyzed the movie *The Kingdom* to know the portrayal of Muslim image in this movie by using content analysis. They also concluded that Muslims were portrayed as a negative entity and terrorist that affect the image of Islam.

Researchers have contributed to change the perpetrated negative images of Muslims that are found in Hollywood movies produced before and after the 9/11 attack to address the considerable number of Hollywood movies presenting a distorted concept of Muslims. Scholars have discussed the attacks discursively to argue against negative depictions of Muslims. In Hollywood movies produced before the 9/11 attack, Muslims are represented without any sympathy. Specifically, these movies have depicted Muslims as dangerous people who want to take revenge and kill people without hesitation because they hate western people. In Hollywood movies produced after the 9/11 attack, young Muslims are depicted as people who received Islamic teachings and are manipulated and directed to Islamic terrorism. A slight change in films has occurred, where Muslims are now represented as inheritably innocent people showing hesitation when they get caught at the end of the movies.

Numerous methods have been utilized to analyze Hollywood movies. One popular example is the critical discourse analysis (CDA). Many experts used CDA as an appropriate tool and theory for studying movies, as it can analyze scenes and dialogues on a broader level. CDA is a collection of various socio-theoretical methods in social discourse, (Blommaert, 2010; (Fairclough, N. et al., 2010); (Graham, P. W. & Luke, A., 2013); (Pennycook, 2001); (Wodak & Meyer, 2015), where the relationship between discourse and society is discussed. Besides, CDA is used to examine the role of discourse in the construction and representation of the social world and how discourse is shaped by the relationship between power and ideologies (Fairclough, 2006).

CDA is primarily used for describing, interpreting, and explaining the relationship between languages in a context of society. According to Fairclough's (Fairclough, 2006) model, critical descriptions are included in discourse analysis (DA). CDA explains the discursive practices and shows how numerous discourses are shaped by the relationship between power and ideologies.

Therefore, CDA shows the role of discourse in building social identities, social relations, beliefs, and ideologies. CDA implies the opaque relationships of causality linkages that are unclear to those involved (Norman & Wodak, 1995). The relationship between social theory and the critique of social formations is justified through CDA.

According to Fairclough's model (Fairclough, 2001), texts exhibit unequal power relations, either spoken or written; thus, texts are the subject of CDA review, including court communication, policy documents, and asylum interrogations and applications (Blommaert, 2010). CDA focuses on the production, circulation, and interpretation of texts in which the relationship between power and control is observed ((Fairclough, N. et al., 2010).

In CDA, critical is used to describe a hidden power relationship. This perception of power and ideology legitimizes the relationship between domination and inequality in society. Accordingly, ideology can be described as referring to definite and vocal opinions which may then be consistent with the implicit, presupposed, and often naturalized world view, or overarching perspective on the reality in which it is practiced.

Fairclough et al. (2010) stated that ideologies are regarded as a form of power, which constitutes and maintains power relations through generating consent or at least acquiescence, power through hegemony rather than through violence or force. Hence, the media upholds a significant place in every society. Media is also considered as the power of a state which reflects the current situations through various mediums, such as newspapers and movies. Movie producers depict an image of society through words to produce different ideologies. This case is observed through semiotics on verbal and nonverbal use of language. Cinema in any society shows the issues based on the relative ideology of that society.

Abbas and Zohra (2013) analyzed five Bollywood movies, namely, 'Tahaan' (2008), 'Fanna' (2006), 'Mission Kashmir' (2000), 'Lamha' (2010), and 'Haider' (2014). He recruited 150 Kashmiri students through sampling and found that Kashmiri Muslims are generally depicted as terrorists.

In the present study, a Hollywood movie is analyzed by using Fairclough's 3D model to explore the movie contents' underlying meaning. This movie is based on the issues faced by Muslims after the 9/11 incident in which they are tagged as terrorists. This research aims to analyze the ideological representation of Muslims and explore how they are labeled as terrorists in Hollywood movies and the rationale behind this negative portrayal. Muslims are generally depicted as terrorists, and this representation influences the negative ideology regarding their image globally. Fairclough's 3D model is employed to interpret the dialogues of the selected Hollywood movies.

Objectives

- To explore how the verbal expression of language integrates ideology and the strategy of Hollywood film producers manipulate the audience's perception accordingly.
- To examine Muslim images portrayed in Hollywood movies and why Hollywood films need to show anti-Islam movies and Muslims' poor situations.

Methodology

Fairclough's 3D model has been utilized for data analysis. This study conducts the following: (i) context analysis, (ii) text production processes, and (iii) text interpretation and analysis. The description focuses on formal properties of text in which discourse and the relationship between production and uses are analyzed. This process is a discursive practice. Interpretation focuses on the relationship between text and interaction in which text is perceived as the result of production and as a recourse in the process of interpretation. Explanation focuses on the relationship between interaction and social context, the social determination of the process of production and interpretation, and their social effects.

Background of Target Content

'The Kingdom', an American movie released in 2007, is selected because its language is religiously and politically inclined. The language used seems to be manipulated to portray Muslims as terrorists. This movie shows how the ideology of Muslims has been set and imposed on people's minds.

'The Kingdom' (2007) is replete of scenes and dialogues which can be used for the analysis. Various scenes and dialogues in this movie portray a subjective image of Muslims. However, only four scenes are selected for the analysis due to time and space constraints. Purposive sampling design is adopted to select the specific scenes that best suit the objectives of this study.

The Kingdom is a film directed by Peter Berg in 2007 and it involves famous U.S actors such as Jamie Foxx, who portrays FBI Special Agent Ronald Fleury, and Jennifer Garner, who plays Janet Mayes, a forensic examiner. While other main characters include a bomb technician played by Chris Cooper, an intelligence analyst played by Jason Bateman, and Colonel Faris Al-Ghazi, a member of the Saudi State Police (SSP), played by Israeli actor Ashraf Barhom. This story is inspired by two bombings in Saudi Arabia a few years back then.

The story follows a team of FBI agents investigating the terrorist bombing of an American foreign workers compound in Saudi Arabia. The afore-mentioned four U.S. Special Agents are deployed to investigate the bombing but have only five days to catch the criminals, giving the film a sense of urgency and ticking time-bomb logic.

Data Analysis

The analysis focuses on the dialogues from ‘The Kingdom’ (2007). These dialogues have been chosen based on the negative portrayal of Muslims. In the analysis, a transcription of the movie has been provided. so that readers can verify whether the given transcription is biased.

Results

Plot: The movie begins with commentary about oil drilling and its legal ownership. The main conflict revolves around the issues arising from oil partnership. The issues are about the terrorism brought by Muslims, in which 80% of the hijackers of the 9/11 attack are Arabs. A terrorist set off a bomb in an American oil company in Saudi Arabia and the western compound where families from the USA are settling. This tragic news leads the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents in the USA to investigate. To protect Saudi agents, they investigate the incident and the entire crime scene. They have been granted permission to investigate the case within five days. These agents are receiving help from Colonel Al Ghazi. When these agents went to the airport after their five-day stay, terrorists attacked and chased them. After reaching a random door, these agents have found the criminal they were looking for. An American diplomat tried to send these agents back to their country, but they have been convinced the Prince of Saudi Arabia to permit them to investigate properly. In the end, these agents have caught the criminal through the cooperation of Colonel Al Ghazi. The end of the movie is a bit open-ended, given that the terrorists and the agents have shared their sentiments of killing each other.

Scene 1: [*Sunlight shines tight on Fleury’s face: stitches on his cheek remain. PULL OUT: Fleury and his son throwing a baseball. Lyla watches, standing by a tree. Father and son are throwing the ball back and forth.*]

KEVIN FLEURY

Did you get the bad guys, Daddy?

There's a lot of bad people out there... aren't there, Daddy?

RONALD FLEURY

Yeah, there are...

But you want to know something?

KEVIN FLEURY

What?

RONALD FLEURY

You're not one of them.

Analysis: Fleury, an FBI agent, is back to his home after completing an operation in Saudi Arabia. In the conversation of FBI agent Ronald and his son, Kevin Fleury, an endophoric reference was observed, that is, ‘there’ and ‘aren’t there’, which refers to something in the situation. Kevin has his perception of good and bad, which is shaped by society and his immediate environment. Thus, when Kevin said, ‘bad people out there’, he is referring to Muslims. Kevin’s father further clarified this negative conception of Muslims by telling him that ‘he is not one of them’. In this movie, the term ‘them’ pertains to the terrorists shown as Muslims. Ronald Fleury’s response ‘*you are not one of them*’ makes a clear distinction between us and them. This distinction is generally created by emphasizing the different characteristics, such as religion, ethnicity, and race. This dialogue is a

positive self-representation or overt negative other representation. The speaker implies that ‘they’ are bad, the wrongdoers and the terrorists, whereas ‘we’ are being different from ‘them’ are good. From these statements, a negative impression has been drawn in the audience towards Muslims considering that an American cinema is a big platform and plays an important role in shaping or reshaping the ideology of the mass.

Scene 2: *[An eight-year-old grandson: tears in his eyes, standing in front of fresh graves. His aunt kneels next to him, tears flowing.]*

AUNT

Will you tell me what Grandfather
whispered to you before they took
him?

The boy quietly answers, in Arabic:

GRANDSON

"Don't worry: we'll kill them all."

Analysis: This scene shows the conversation between Abu Hamza’s grandson and his aunt. They are standing in front of Abu Hamza’s grave. The aunt asked him about his last conversation with his grandfather and the things his grandfather had whispered in his ears. Thus, he told her that his grandfather had told him that they will kill them all. In this scene, ‘them’ represents all the non-Muslims. Again, all Muslims have been tagged as terrorists. Muslims are portrayed with mysterious negative characters in a mysterious setting where religious belief prevails, and Islamic rules and system is ruling throughout the world. People were praying, and women wore gowns. In sum, all these factors will inevitably create a suspicious Muslim image in the viewers’ minds. Terrorists are particularly present in Saudi Arabia, a Muslim country, which implies that this land is making and preparing terrorists who support Islam.

Various scenes in this movie convey the same mysterious Muslim image and religious practices. These scenes implicitly strengthen the relationship between Muslims and terrorism. However, the real situation of Islam is very different from this fictional situation because Islam does not promote terrorism or any criminal activity in the name of Jihad. Hollywood is the world’s largest source of entertainment and will undoubtedly have a great impact on the audience. Thus, with the release of this movie, the biased picture of Muslims has been propagated globally, which in turn will help generate ideological conceptualizations of Muslims’ identity and a shared set of beliefs about them.

Scene 3: Ronald Fleury

One, the F.B.I. Has evidence that
two Royal Family wives donated
\$10 million to three
Arab-American cultural centers
right outside of Boston,
and that some of that money
got to Jakarta
and these mosques, and they have
training camps right next to them.
It's just weird to see
little kids playing

and then not-so-little kids
playing with guns right next door.
It's just odd.

Analysis: *'Not-so-little kids playing'* has been used sarcastically to emphasize its cataphoric reference to *'little kids playing'*. Ronald Fleury, an FBI agent, gave this dialogue in a threatening way to one of the royal members of the Saudi Arabia embassy, which compels the audience to perceive negatively about Muslims. A corrupted picture of Muslims has been drawn in this scene by an American agent. Moreover, not only Muslim men are depicted as responsible for spreading terrorism, but also Muslim women. In this movie, Muslim women participate in the trading system and provide financial support to terrorist training camps. The picture of Muslim children playing with guns further exacerbated the situation. Repetition of the phrase *'little kids playing'* is significant in the movie, as the Muslim children holding guns and having trained at a very young age presents a clear contrast to the scene in the movie where children (non-Muslims) are educated at school. Thus, the movie implicitly conveys that in the age where the children should play with toys, Muslim children play with guns, and instead of obtaining an education, Muslim children are training for terrorism. In this way, Muslims are depicted as the people who are responsible for the spread of terrorism globally.

RONALD FLEURY
Mr. Aaron Jackson?

AARON JACKSON
Get him away from me-

RONALD FLEURY
~~-easy, Sir,~~ He's a friend to us-

AARON JACKSON
I don't know either one a' you.

RONALD FLEURY
I'm Special Agent Ronald Fleury of the FBI. This is Colonel Al-Ghazi
with the Saudi State Police-

AARON JACKSON
You know what?
That's... Whoa, whoa.
They're the ones that attacked us.

[Al-Ghazi quietly backs away, walks away. Fleury looks after him, turns back to Mr. Jackson who stares after Al-Ghazi with hate.]

RONALD FLEURY
We don't know that just yet.
That's what I'm here for. |
I just need to ask the boys some questions about maybe something that they saw the other night.

AARON JACKSON
What do you want to ask my boys about the other night?

Scene 4: [These dialogues are between Aaron Jackson, who is a resident in a western housing compound in Saudi Arabia, and FBI agent Ronald Fleury. When the FBI visits to investigate the attack, Aaron explodes on them with this dialogue.

Analysis: Aaron's dialogue is powerful and open as he is directly blaming Muslims for all the chaos. The dialogue contains 'watching their mother bleed to death' and 'he was trying to put his mama's mouth back on' to depict his strong feelings and draw a painful picture of the tragedy that causes grief and sadness. This scene shows a sympathetic picture of the western people and the barbaric and cruel side of Muslims. This scene is an example of positive self-representation and negative other representation. Muslims are the performer of the action, playing an active role in the entire scene;

whereas the western people are the recipients, the victims, and the ones who are being acted upon. A racist picture is drawn which is bound to bring the difference between the east and west. Clash is being shown by pointing out Muslims, whereas the difference is created by asking God's willingness by stating '*Does Allah love your kids more than he does mine*'? This dialogue imprints a bad image of Islam, implying an unpeaceful religion, given that it promotes harm. Although Islamic practices are not associated with this chaos, the movie still propagates a different picture of Islam and Muslims. Muslims and Muslim countries are victims of religious terrorism. Moviemakers could have shown the loss of Muslim families during this war on terror, but they have only pictured them as criminals. Fairclough (1995b: 24) stated that 'the ideologies are primarily located in the "unsaid" (implicit proposition)'. Thus, the general idea being implied in the movie is that Muslims are terrorists. Fairclough stated, 'naturalized ideologies...a proposition which was taken as commonsensical given by all members of some community' (1995b: 30). Given that some terrorists have Islamic names, people in the west have considered all Muslims as terrorists. Consequently, Muslims are being watched with skepticism. At the end of the movie, the rivalry is inheritably forwarded to the young Muslims who must take revenge; thus, the violence continues.

Scene 5:

Grandfather: '*Our time is not a peaceful one. God has left it to us to make it so*'.

Description: This scene shows a Muslim family, comprising two men and two children, sitting together at a table under a tented canopy on a rooftop. The younger man is 32 years old, the other one is in his old age and the children are aged 8 and 15 years old. In the scene, a suicide bomber in a playground opposite to the rooftop where the family is, explodes himself amidst numerous people, killing everyone near him. The youngest boy was forced to watch that scene by his grandfather. When he tried to turn his head away from the scene, his grandfather would push his head back to the scene and uttered this dialogue. The dialogue is very contradictory to what is shown in this scene. The grandfather is talking about 'peace' whilst he is involved in terrorist activities, which he describes as something being imposed by God. This scene has drawn an extremely negative image of Muslims, wherein a grandfather is confidently teaching his grandson to kill people, specifically foreigners, in the name of religion. The grandfather is justifying his actions with the name of God, thereby imprinting an extremely negative image of Islam in the audience's mind.

The director has intentionally shown that Muslims make their children see the brutality to make them feel unreluctant in doing it in the future. The truth needs to be shown; we cannot label all Muslims as terrorists simply because some people involved in such activities have Islamic names. In this dialogue, the terrorist is trying to impose a difference by killing western people and involve God's willingness in such violence. Consequently, this image is made more critical. A biased picture is drawn intentionally in the name of Islam and its practices. Islam teaches about peace, but this fact is never shown in Hollywood movies.

Scene 6:

'Please, do not panic. Everything is okay. Come. Follow me, please. Come with me'.

(SPEAKING ARABIC)

(EXPLOSION)

Description: The model of the sentence is declarative and imperative, and the tone is in a request form as the character is pleading. The present tense is used. The first half of the dialogue is in English, and the second half is spoken in Arabic. The dialogue is spoken by a random character after an explosion. A scene depicts an Arab Muslim directing the people of the embassy who are attacked by terrorists. This character has suddenly spouted some Quranic verses before exploding himself. This scene has no specific dialogues, but the imagery, setting, and terrorists' portrayal are highly used to depict a negative image.

Explanation: In this scene, a person wearing a police uniform has tried to calm the people baffled by the attack. He gathered some people around him, spoke some Arabic words (Muslims kalma), and exploded himself as an act of terrorism. A wild cruel picture draws additional people who do these sins in the name of Allah and holy words. Speaking words related to Islam before an explosion is an example of a negative depiction of Muslims. Manipulated language is used to show how he gathered the panicked people around him before an explosion. This scene depicts that suicide

bombers are motivated and brainwashed by teachers who negatively use Islam. However, such violence is not promoted in Islam.

Discussion & Conclusion

Different forms of media, such as Hollywood movies, negatively depict Muslims and Arabs. The analysis of the film shows that the omission of facts and the portrayal of only the negative aspects of Muslims are the established goals of the western media. Wrong perceptions about Muslims are spreading globally due to negligence and ignorance. The west is taking advantage of these wrong ideologies by using such stereotypes as conflicts in their movies. Although some scattered Muslim groups are involved in terrorist activities, not all Muslims are terrorists. In this regard Mohamad (2002: 3) has opined that terrorism by others, by ethnic Europeans, by intolerant Christians and Jews, by Buddhists are never linked to their religions, because there are no Christian terrorists or Jewish terrorists or Buddhist terrorists or

Orthodox Christian terrorists. Furthermore, while talking about the negative representation of the Muslims Mohamad (Mohamad, 2002) has argued, '*Hindu attacked Muslims in the name of Hinduism (in Gujarat and elsewhere in India) but they are not called Hindu terrorists. Aum Shinrikyo, a Buddhist sect in Japan poisoned people with gas but is not called Buddhist terrorists. The Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland terrorized each other but are not called Christian terrorists. But if misguided Muslims attack non-Muslims or other Muslims they are labeled Muslim terrorists. (p.3)*'

The movie depicts terrorists as someone who brutally kills innocent men, women, and children. The western media regard Muslims as terrorists and fundamentalists. The entire Islamic community has been labeled as a terrorist due to some individuals with Islamic names who are involved in terrorist activities in the name of Islam. Linking any act of terrorism with Muslims and Islam is practiced by western media due to the preconceived stereotypical image of Muslims.

A remarkable incident linked to this negative media portrayal of Muslims in the attack on the twin towers. The 9/11 incident has provided the western media with a base to publically associate Islam with terrorism and declare Muslims as terrorists. After this tragedy, considerable movies, dramas, cartoons, talk shows, and other forms of media are produced in which Muslims are presented as barbaric, terrorists, uncivilized, fundamentalists, and militants. The media can shape or reshape the ideology of the masses and present something as positive or negative. Thus, media producers are mainly responsible for the dissemination of ideologies.

The ideologies and worldviews of producers strongly influence the way an event is expressed. As discussed above, terrorist activities of other religions are never associated with the religion itself. However, the situation is very different for Islam. According to some media depictions, modern terrorism has become the only business of Muslims. Muslims depicted as terrorists must lead to Islamophobia, racial hatred, massacre, and violence.

Hollywood is the biggest source of entertainment worldwide. Thus, when Hollywood only presents the positive western aspects and the negative image of Muslims, the audience's perspectives may be manipulated. People who do not have enough knowledge on this topic will easily believe what is shown to them. However, Muslims must not be judged simply because some individuals with Muslim names are involved in such violence.

When Hollywood, being the biggest source of entertainment, presents the positive western side and the negative image of the Muslims, it manipulates the audience's mind so the people who have not experienced anything themselves believe what is shown to them. Muslims must not be judged based on some individuals who have Muslim names and who are involved in wrong deeds.

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