

Truth Over Fear: Countering Islamophobia



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EXPOSING “OBSESSION”

- The film opens with the statement that most Muslims do not support terrorism, but immediately sets to work undermining this idea, eventually dropping the pretense altogether.
- The intent of the film to promote fear and hatred is absolutely clear. *Obsession* is a shameless piece of anti-Muslim propaganda which aims to produce anxiety, mistrust, and deep unease in the average American viewer about the presence, activities and attitudes of millions of their fellow Muslim American citizens.
- Large parts of the film present themselves as exposing Arab and Muslim hate-speech, but by misrepresenting fringe and marginal discourses as mainstream views, *Obsession* perpetuates the very hate speech it claims to denounce.
- *Obsession* presents a mirror-image of Osama bin Laden’s world view, in which all conflicts involving Muslims are fronts in a global crusade. The film’s assertions are both a-historical and absurd, revealing a mindset of reductionism, chauvinism and paranoia.
- The film *Obsession* was initially produced by an organization called Honestreporting.com, whose U.S. Executive Director admitted to the *Minnesota Monitor* in spring 2007 that the *Obsession* “pushes the buttons too far.”
- The Clarion Fund – a shadowy non-profit organization that does not publicize its officers, office location, or source of funding – financed the distribution of some 28 million DVDs containing *Obsession* in what many political analysts describe as ‘swing’ states in the upcoming presidential elections. According to the website for the Secretary of State for New York, Clarion Fund Inc. is incorporated in New York as a Delaware-based foreign not-for-profit corporation. According to the Delaware Department of Corporations, Robert (Rabbi Raphael) Shore, Rabbi Henry Harris and Rebecca Kabat incorporated Clarion Fund. All three of whom are reported to serve as employees of Aish HaTorah International, an organization apparently based in Israel. Also according to the Delaware Department of Corporations, the incorporators of the Clarion Fund used Aish HaTorah’s New York City address.

- Editorial and letter writers nationwide have called the film “propaganda” and even compared it to Leni Riefenstahl's 1935 pro-Nazi film "Triumph of the Will." One writer called it “misleading and dangerous” (Broward-Palm Beach New Times, 9/20/08). Jeff VanDenBerg, director of Middle East Studies at Drury University, called the film “a blatant piece of anti-Muslim propaganda” (News-Leader, 9/17/08). An editorial in the *Raleigh News & Observer* says "Although the film took pains to say that most Muslims are not violent, that disclaimer was buried in the avalanche of anti-Islamic images, slogans and interviews with experts of dubious credentials."
- *Obsession* should be exposed at every turn for the hateful propaganda that it is. It is shocking that at least 70 mainstream newspapers around the country would actively choose to profit from hate, and allow themselves to be used to promote fear mongering as a means to influence the outcome of the presidential election. A DVD produced by the KKK aimed at detailing the ‘threat’ posed by African Americans, homosexuals, or Jews would never have been distributed this way – and neither should *Obsession* have been.

How *Obsession* Promotes Hate

Despite the fact that the film opens with a disclaimer that it is not about all Muslims in general, but about a radical worldview and ideology, *Obsession* argues that Muslims are, in effect, Nazis, and that radical Muslims have embarked on a campaign of world conquest inspired directly by Adolf Hitler. The disclaimer at the start of the film is undermined from the outset, the film moves rapidly to blur any such distinctions.

Terrorism and radicalism are real dangers we all face. Mainstream Muslims, who constitute the majority of Muslims in the United States and around the world, share a commitment to oppose and prevent terrorism and radicalization. The makers of *Obsession* are interested in created widespread fear and hatred toward Muslims by using classic propaganda tactics. Propaganda is information, ideas, or rumors deliberately spread widely to help or harm a person, group, movement, institution, nation, etc. It has historically been used to promote publish fear, disdain and dehumanization of a particular group of people for terrible purposes. Recall the use of classic films, cartoons and posters of Jews, Japanese, Black and other groups in the United States.

Obsession argues that millions of Muslims are completely interpolated into the discourse of terrorists, and that Arab media consists of a tirade of anti-American and anti-Israel incitements. The film-makers illustrate their points using footage from sources such as the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) and Palestinian Media Watch. By painting that footage as being typical of the Arab media, Arab discourse and Arab attitudes, the filmmakers deliberately misrepresent entire populations while moving their discourse into the realm of hate-speech.

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

A sample of the problem with these commentators:

- **Walid Shoebat** is a member of Christians United for Israel (CUFI) and a self confessed "ex-terrorist" has stated, "Islam is not the religion of God – Islam is the devil." At other times as reported by the *San Francisco Chronicle* he has stated that Islam is a "Satanic Cult." He argued that Israel should retake the Gaza Strip and resettle Jews there, arguing that Gaza is Jewish by right. "If a Jew has no right to Gaza, then he has no right to Jaffa or Haifa either," he said. He advocates that the government of Greater Israel introduce a law exiling anybody who denies its right to exist, "even if they were born there."
- **Brigitte Gabriel** was described by *NYT Magazine* as a "radical Islamophobe," and believes that "the difference between Israel and the Arab world is the difference between civilization and barbarism. It's the difference between good and evil... They have no soul!" She has also said that "a practicing Muslim who goes to mosque every Friday, prays five times a day, and who believes that the Koran is the word of God, and who believes that Mohammed is the perfect man... is a radical Muslim."
- **Daniel Pipes**, head of the Middle East Forum, has stated "Western European societies are unprepared for the massive immigration of brown-skinned peoples cooking strange foods and maintaining different standards of hygiene... All immigrants bring exotic customs and attitudes, but Muslim customs are more troublesome than most" and that "In its long history of immigration, the United States has never encountered so violence-prone and radicalized a community as the Muslims who have arrived since 1965."
- **Steve Emerson** is a discredited self-styled terrorism expert whose prime goal according to a *Wall Street Journal* story is "to whitewash Israeli governments and revile their critics." Emerson claimed in a March 1995 article in *Jewish Monthly*, that Islam "sanctions genocide, planned genocide, as part of its religious doctrine."

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

Upon skeptical observation, it is clear that *Obsession* is a film designed to promote fear and hatred of Muslims in general. Many groups across the U.S. have already identified the film as such. The film failed to gain a distributor for theatrical release, and a number of universities have prevented it being screened on campus due to its inflammatory content.

The movie ends with the statement of Edmund Burke, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." This is indeed a fitting conclusion for this propaganda film. Those who view this DVD must take a stand against the producers and the funders of this fear-mongering nonsense whose agenda it is to spread fear of Islam and Muslims and equate Islam with Nazism, all the while ignoring real terrorism and extremism.

What You Can & Should Do...

1. Visit www.obsessionwithhate.com (produced by the Hate Hurts America Coalition) to get more information about the DVD, its makers, the controversial figures included as experts, and a thematic rebuttal of the *Obsession's* content. Also, get a scene-by-scene rebuttal of *Obsession* and find out more about the "Truth Over Fear" campaign at www.mpac.org.
2. **Contact your local newspaper or magazine.** If you have received an *Obsession* DVD with your newspaper or magazine, write a letter to the publisher expressing your concern over their decision to distribute hate-filled propaganda. Visit your newspaper's website and click on 'Contact Us' to find out whom to address your letter to. Please cc: truthoverfear@mpac.org.
3. **Contact your interfaith coalitions, local human relations commissions,** minority organizations to inform them of what has happened and ask them to speak out against "Obsession" to their communities and sign a joint letter to the newspaper publisher.
4. **Contribute to MPAC's "Truth Over Fear: Countering Islamophobia" campaign.** We need your financial support now more than ever to expand our campaign to end these bigoted attacks against American values. Donate today by visiting www.mpac.org/donate and help us put an end to intolerance.