



Viewing guide for *Obsession*

Dina Sayyed (dsayyed@trinity.edu)
Trinity University, December 2006

Obsession: Radical Islam's War Against the West

Pre-viewing guide

Dina Sayyed, December 2006
Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas

1. Overview / Introduction

Supposedly stemming from the heightened emotions of the Western world after a stream of terrorist attacks hit their soil, *Obsession: Radical Islam's War Against the West* (Kopping, 2005) was produced under a cover of objectivity and factual reality in regards to the issue of radical Islam and its danger to society. It encapsulates all the modes and techniques that we as an audience prescribe necessary for classification of a documentary film: interviews with a collection of authority figures, archival footage and a narration to lead us through the barrage of "facts" and information. To help us along the way, it is sectioned off into clear and distinct points of interest, making for an easy to follow, essay like depiction of the dilemma they seek to portray. From the high paced, music video like introduction to the onslaught of graphic and brutal imagery emblazoned with the faces and bodies of the tragic victims of a terrorist's regime, *Obsession* does not cease to keep its audience's senses in gear.



Unfortunately, this in effect, manipulates the viewer into a state of stimulated disregard, distracting them from what the filmmakers are subtly doing. Through its heart pounding and disturbing displays of violent behavior, they quickly drop the "radical" portion of Islam, and the film, ever so carefully, becomes a critique on the religion and people as a whole. *Obsession* forms an argument that the totality of the culture breeds hatred and hostility. There is a consistent trend of showing outspoken children emitting aggressive speeches of detestation towards various "western states," like the U.S., Britain and, quite interestingly, Israel. Though the violence is said to be occurring all over the world, the film makes sure to propose that these three are the hardest hit of all and need to come together to strike against their opponent.

The film is an abhorrent misuse of propaganda, disgustingly portraying all Muslims as dehumanized beasts and villains. It uses the techniques of symbol distortion, rhetorical exploitation and the imposition of fear to confuse its audience into conformity to the argument at hand. Ironically, the film ends up berating the Arab media for persuasive and propagandist tactics that it itself uses in the film. With luck, by following this viewing guide, one can carefully interpret *Obsession* honestly and look at the truth behind its supposed impartiality and unbiased presentation. With the facts, the audience will work to fight the real crisis in sight: hatred being used to fight hatred. A detestation coming from all sides of the spectrum, one needs to look at how to relinquish this world wide stereotyping of groups and come together to fight the underlying geo-political concern.

2. Questions to keep in mind before watching the movie:

- Pay attention to the music and editing choices the filmmakers use, particularly during the first five minutes of the film. How does this clip set up where the film is headed, does it match in conjuncture to the disclaimer at the beginning of the film, and what emotional applications are the filmmakers hoping to appeal to?
- Be sure to be aware of the rhetorical and semantic changes that occur throughout the film. Where does this start to happen and how does this affect the implications of the film?
- The makers of this film, director Wayne Kopping and director Raphael Shore, collaborated and were funded by Honestreporting.com, an online news site that strictly works towards promoting and ensuring the state of Israel. How is this film being edited and assembled to support their message?

3. Where to obtain copies of this film:

- The [OCLC World Catalog](#) identifies 14 libraries worldwide that contain this item.
- New and used copies on [eBay](#).
- Purchase it via the [film's official website](#).
- View it online via [Google video](#) or [You Tube](#).

Obsession: Radical Islam's War Against the West
Post-viewing guide

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1. Overview

This post-viewing guide is intended to deepen the audience's critical engagement with the film *Obsession: Radical Islam's War Against the West*. With luck, it will encourage the viewer to put aside the tricks of this documentarian's trade, be it their careful manipulation of rhetoric or their clever editing techniques, and see the film more clearly: through a true documentary critic's eyes. It is targeted at anyone who is questioning the blanket statements presented by the film. For those who are open minded and willing to see the reality behind the glitz. Most certainly, those involved in film, communications and speech studies should be interested, for this guide delves right up their expertise, and they are sure to pick up on the unjust propaganda methods used, perhaps even without this guide's help.

That saying, this viewing guide really aims to educate the everyday viewer, who may not have the background information on propaganda to assist in their assessment of the film. It includes articles and ideas from the likes of Chomsky, Nichols and other experts on the broad topics of religion and film displayed. The resources included are all chosen with regards to this particular film's message, in hopes to enlighten those drawn into its display of misinformation.

This viewing guide has a plethora of possibilities for its use. Shown in classrooms and used in presentations, this film is in need of having an accompanying guide in the direction of discussion and analysis. Unfortunately, though it grows in popularity, the film does not have many critical examinations out for others to see that pinpoint its particular strategies towards making a piece of obvious propaganda. Most often, any articles found on the film online praise its uncovering of this great religious scheming. It is a frightening thought, that so many can be so easily persuaded, particularly with its trend of large showings to Jewish communities around the U.S. With extraneous connections drawn from Islam to Nazism, here, indeed, is a group that, with its politically and historically bleak ties to Islam, is easily pushed into a fear driven manipulation by the creators of the film. Everyone needs to be informed on what this documentary is attempting to do and how to appropriately treat its call to action. This guide should stir up debate, promote dialogue and open the doors to understanding the underlying problem of how hate continues to spawn and be spread among all peoples.

2. Useful resources

a. Related resources on Islam and the Palestinian Israeli conflict

About: Islam

<http://islam.about.com/>

A brief overview on the religion of Islam and offers up easy access to understanding the rudiments of Muslim beliefs. This also gives a good look at the Qur'an's views on terrorism, giving specific verses and facts on Jihad, under the "essentials" headline via the sidebar.

POV: History of the Israeli- Palestinian Conflict

<http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2001/promises/promises-timeline.pdf>

A descriptive and informative timeline, documenting the history of this region of conflict. In an interesting twist, the problem with objectivity in dictating events regarding this matter is addressed, so the timeline includes both Palestinian and Israeli perspectives. Since the film fails to do so, this page is a helpful tool to use in order to grasp the historical motives behind both groups actions.

Terror and Just Response

<http://www.chomsky.info/articles/20020702.htm>

Though this Noam Chomsky database furnishes a plethora of articles by the infamous political critic, this choice in particular focuses on the drive behind radical terrorist attacks, particularly those that occurred on September 11th and emphasizes the need to address the foundations of the problem.

b. Related resources about the documentary film genre

Barnouw, Erik, "Documentary: A History of the Non-fiction Film," US: Oxford University Press, 1993. Google Book Search. 11 December 2006. (<http://books.google.com/books?id=qtZ91DNvgBMC&dq=Documentary+film&psp=9>)

An entire book dedicated to the genre of documentary, some interesting chapters can be found online via Google that focus on the role of the documentarian, from explorer to reporter. It also touches on the history of the genre, from 1895 to modern times, and gives great examples of important documentaries to take note of.

Nichols, Bill. "Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant-Garde," Critical Inquiry, Volume 26, Issue 4, Summer 2001.

A go to author when it comes to documentary, Nichols speaks of the historical and political changes that has occurred within the genre since its

conception, as well as taking great lengths to detail the structural pursuits of modernist's documentaries and their rhetorical strategies.

Rabinowitz, Paula. "Wreckage Upon Wreckage: History, Documentary and the Ruins of Memory," History and Theory, Volume 32, Issue 2, May 1993.

"Dissecting the history and rhetoric of the documentary," Rabinowitz makes the connections between the strategic structuring of media and the historical interpretations of the public. She makes an interesting argument that "documentary cinema is intimately tied to historical memory...functioning as a historical document itself," ensuing a shaping of the actual reality of the audience in tow.

c. Glossaries of useful film terms

The International Movie Database Film Glossary
<http://imdb.com/Glossary/>

Established by a database trusted and loved by so many, this glossary is an all encompassing reference for most of ones film term needs. Slightly overwhelming, this site cross-references and offers links to films and organizations that encompass whatever terminology spoken of.

Cinematic Terms: A Film-Making Glossary
<http://www.filmsite.org/filmterms1.html>

A user friendly listing of the most basic and common terms needed to understand film. This site further assists its reader by giving precise examples of the terms, along with colorful pictures and diagrams to turn to for precise understanding.

Screen Online's Glossary Education
<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/education/glossary.html#P>

The British Film Institute's listing of film terms presents its glossary plainly and to the point. Its descriptions are in depth and quite lengthy, and it offers up many filmmaker specific definitions that are pivotal in understanding this film's structural and editing techniques.

d. Film reviews

Obsession: Radical Islam's War With the West?
http://theamericanmuslim.org/tam.php/features/articles/obsession_radical_is_lams_war_with_the_west/

Written by Sheila Musaji, this review gives a Muslim's perspective on viewing the film and goes into the negative repercussions that it is bound to insight. She describes how it grossly affected herself and those around her while also going into the film's emotional propaganda and demonization strategies.

Obsession Generates Applause and Controversy

<http://www.stljewishlight.com/news/329641547498626.php>

An examination of a screening of *Obsession* that was shown in conjunction with a presentation done by one of the film's interviewees, former "PLO terrorist" Walid Shoebat. Written by Jill Kassander, this review was taken from a Jewish newspaper and truly shows how diverse the audience's reactions were that formed from watching the documentary. It also goes into the background of Shoebat and asks whether we should trust the authenticity of his remarks.

The Threat to Western Civilization

http://www.ctsastl.org/site/more.php?id=386_0_1_0_M

Another screening of *Obsession* combined with a question and answer portion dedicated to Walid Shoebat. Besides pointing out that the goal of the film and the speaker was to appeal to fear, and to equate Arabs/Muslims with Nazis, this review by Mark Chmiel considers the motives behind "radical Islam" and proposes that *Obsession* was in need of some historical background information to decipher why these outbursts of violence occur and how we must work together to make it stop.

e. Scholarly treatments of the film

Dina Sayyed, "Objective Obsession?" 2006.

<http://www.trinity.edu/adelwich/documentary/d.sayyed.2006.obsession.pdf>

This treatment is to be examined with this viewing guide particularly because it comes from the same author and involves the same arguments presented. It focuses predominantly on propaganda techniques, such as loaded rhetoric and symbolic maneuvering, used by the film to misrepresent and dehumanize the culture of Islam.

Phil Coleman, "Obsession with Propaganda," 2006.

<http://www.trinity.edu/adelwich/documentary/p.coleman.2006.obsession.pdf>

This presents another look at *Obsession's* propaganda techniques, specifically those of fear, generalization and demonization. This is a good source for concrete definitions and underlining issues in regards to propaganda and the documentary genre as a whole.

Lizz Glomb, "Loose Change: The Persuasion Techniques of Dylan Avery," 2006.

<http://www.trinity.edu/adelwich/documentary/l.glomb.2006.loose.change.pdf>

A look at the controversial conspiracy film that questions the legitimacy of the attacks that occurred on September 11th. Though it does not discuss *Obsession* specifically, this treatment covers yet another distorted and manipulative documentary peppered with transparent propaganda. The essay offers up similar tactics to those used in *Obsession* and points out the power of emotional appeals in film.

3. Video-clip analysis

a. Explanation

The video clip below is actually a link to the entire *Obsession* film, via Google Video. This analysis, however, is only going to look at a portion of the documentary, from 1:04:36 to 1:06:36. Of course, one is encouraged to view the film in its entirety, in order to see the vast strategies and structuring used by its filmmakers to construct a convincing argument. The clip begins with an interview with former PLO terrorist Walid Shoebat and ends with a collection of images of destruction and terror at the hands of radical extremists. Approximately two minutes long, this snippet of the film truly says a lot about the motives behind its production and how that goal is to be achieved.

b. Link to clip (click on picture)



c. Analysis

Previously in the film, we are introduced to the idea that Islam's culture and beliefs are not far off from those of Hitler and the Nazis before the Holocaust. With an ominous underlying soundtrack to keep the mood in tow, Shoebat is shown here, addressing the film's viewer with the idea that radical Islam is more dangerous than Nazism, for it is growing in 55 different countries. Shoebat states that "potentially we could have a success rate of several Nazi Germanys, if these people get their way." The small population of radical Islam is lost to the implication that this spawning group of budding Nazis is expanding across the globe, just as the opening sequence of the film illustrates. After this shot, as the music continues, the former Nazi Youth is shown, speaking in front of a bookcase, this background subconsciously solidifying his role as an expert. The camera comes in for a closer shot as he states, "if the Muslims had their way...they would exterminate all Jews," and that he is convinced of that. Once again, the "radical" portion of Islam is lost to the general issue of Muslims as a whole.

Each consecutive interviewee continues to propose the ridiculous idea that all Muslims wish to rid the world of its Jewish members, just like the Holocaust. Just like Hitler. These are all loaded accusations that have no basis for truth. After another collection of horrifying images of destruction, combined with a hard hitting, heartbeat like soundtrack, we come down to the real issue at hand: "whatever happens to Israel...is going to be the fate of the world." The summation of this film lies in this moment. By persuading the audience to believe that Muslims are the problem, and that Palestine is the chief breeding ground for these terrorists, Honestreporting.com and the film's creators have solidified a supportive argument for western countries to unite against Palestinians and their cause.

4. Discussion questions

- A large assortment of archival footage is used as visual aid and support to the film's argument that the radical group of Islam is widespread and growing. Also, interviews are used with supposed authority figures on radical Islam, like Shoebat and Nonie Darwish. What are the sources of such clips? Are they legitimate? Are the interviewed individuals reliable?
- The film emphasizes the use of propaganda used by the Nazis, and later by Muslims, in the media. Ironically, how does *Obsession* use these same techniques and how do the ideas presented continue the historical tradition of anti-Muslim propaganda?
- The film displays an onslaught of images of violence and unimaginable behavior by Muslims, from outlandish outbursts of brutality to clips of children marching and declaring death to the West. How does this movie dehumanize Muslims and how does it incite paranoia?

- There is a prevalent call for the United States and other western countries to stand together with Israel against “the Muslims.” Is this film a good example of an “us vs. them” mentality? Does it generalize or stereotype? Who exactly is to be trusted and who is to be fought against?

5. Closing thoughts

Taking advantage of a time when our senses are heightened, *Obsession: Radical Islam's War Against the West* successfully makes a very compelling and persuasive argument that Muslims are seeking to destroy Western civilization as we know it. Could they have wished to, the filmmakers could have presented an objective look at Radical Islam, through examining its basis for foundation and the historical backgrounds of its members. Instead, they resort to generalizations, blanketing the religion and its people as a whole as demonic and inhuman. With ulterior motives in mind, this documentary churns out a powerful form of propaganda that supports the state of Israel.

It is a poisonous example of hate attempting to fight hate and we, as viewers, need to carefully examine *Obsession*, as well as all media that we ingest. Do not simply point the blame at one culture or another because it is different or hard to understand. Question that which is placed in front of you and seek to eliminate boundaries, for the betterment and understanding of our world.

6. About the author of this guide

- a. Dina Sayyed is a currently an undergraduate student at Trinity University, double majoring in Communications and Religion. She is the president of Trinity's Muslim Student Association and a member of Trinity's Multicultural Network. In her free time she enjoys hosting a college rock radio show on KRTU 91.7 f.m. and hopes that upon graduation, she will find a job that mixes all the things she loves about religion and the media.
- b. **Contact information**
Email: dina.sayyed@trinity.edu
- c. **A note to teachers, students, and anyone who uses this material in a group setting:**
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