

Research Article

## **The Media Framing of Islamists in Arabic Cinema: Adel Imam's Movies as a Model**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigated the media framing of Islamists in Arabic cinema analyzing Adel Imam's movies as a model in order to identify the character, theme, and role frames through which Islamists were depicted. The qualitative method was used employing thematic analysis to yield results. Media frame analysis was utilized to study three frames: the "character frame," the "theme frame," and the "role frame." A number of conclusions were reached, the chief among which was that the sub-frames *exploitation*, *naivety*, and *pragmatism* were the

most salient “character frames” in Adel Imam’s movies. As for the “theme frame,” *exploiting religion* was the most frequent theme in the movies sample, followed by *contradiction*, *terrorism*, and *unreality*. In the “role frame,” it was discovered that most of the Islamist roles in the movies sample were secondary roles.

**Keywords: Media Framing. Islamists . Arabic Cinem**

## **Introduction**

Egyptian cinema was launched by the French Lumiere brothers in 1896, and it has subsequently become the most popular in the Arab world to the point that it is considered the representative of Arabic cinema. Across its history, Egyptian cinema has gone through several stages: from presenting patterns of Egyptian aristocracy during the monarchy to covering the daily life of the post-revolution Egyptian community as well as focusing on national and Arab concerns.

In the following stage, Egyptian cinema was dominated by commercialism as it started in the 1980’s and 90’s presenting a certain image of Islamists and religious people, particularly Muslims. This image was evident in Adel Imam’s movies early in his career, but it noticeably intensified in the amount and way of portrayal from 1992-2008.

Adel Imam is considered a phenomenon in Arabic cinema as he is the undisputed most popular actor, nicknamed by critics “The Star of the Box Office” in reference to being the highest-grossing actor ever. And despite being in his 80’s, he still gets leading roles unlike many actors of his generation who have had to accept minor roles with younger leading actors. Even though he has made a shift to TV since his last movie *Zahaymer*(2010) (English: Alzheimer’s), he is still the most influential actor, nicknamed by fans “The Leader” which is the title of one of his famous plays.

## **Study Problem**

Cinema is a powerful tool which influences the awareness of people and can be used for social reconstruction and attitude shaping. As the most popular and influential Arab actor, Adel Imam has always been accused of attacking Islamists through his movies. This study’s problem was encapsulated in its main question: “what is the media framing of Islamists in Arabic cinema based on Adel Imam’s movies as a model?”The following sub-questions were branched from the main one:

- 1- What are the “character frames” of Islamists in Arabic cinema based on Adel Imam’s movies?

- 2- What are the “theme frames” through which Islamists were presented in Adel Imam’s movies?
- 3- What are the “role frames” for Islamists in Arabic cinema based on Adel Imam’s movies?

### **Study Objectives**

This study aimed at identifying the following:

- 1- the “character frames” of Islamists in Arabic cinema based on Adel Imam’s movies
- 2- the “theme frames” through which Islamists were presented in Adel Imam’s movies
- 3- the “role frames” of Islamists in Arabic cinema based on Adel Imam’s movies

### **Importance of the Study**

The importance of this study stems from:

- 1- the peculiarity of Adel Imam as an actor, his powerful presence, his overwhelming success at the box office, and his strong influence on Arab audience in general and Egyptian audience in particular
- 2- providing an insight into the image of Islamists in Adel Imam’s movies while being especially comprehensive in the movies analyzed and the period covered which is expected to yield more accurate results than studies with partial samples
- 3- investigating the media frames of Islamists in Arabic cinema through cinematic scripts which sheds light on the relationship between the political order and Islamists in Egypt
- 4- being one of the first studies that covered a significantly large amount of cinematic production

### **Study’s Procedural Definitions**

This study includes the following procedural definitions:

**Islamist(s):** any person who belongs to an Islamic party; works towards the establishment of an Islamic state; is a member of an organization that supports Islamists in elections; advocates the Islamic way of life in society; or exhibits any sign of being religious such as praying, speaking of Islamic do’s and don’ts, or trying to implement Islamic Sharia (law)

**Adel Imam’s movies:** the movies that focused on Islamists by criticizing them and presenting them in stereotypical images. These are 17 movies from 1992-2008 of which 15 were chosen for analysis.

**Egyptian cinema:** the sum of movies which was produced in Egypt, whose roles were played mostly by Egyptian actors, and was released first in Egypt

### Literature Review

Alsnaidi (2019) attempted to answer the main question, “does Egyptian cinema perform its expected role in instilling sound religious values within Egyptian families and Eastern societies in general?” The descriptive method was used, and the study sample was formed of five of the most famous movies produced between 2005 and 2010, namely *Dam Alghazal* (2005) (English: Deer Blood), *ImaratYaacubyan* (2006) (English: Yaacubyan Apartment Building), *Murjan Ahmad Murjan*<sup>1</sup> (2007), *Ana Mesh Maahum* (2007) (English: I Am Not with Them), *BelalwanAltabeyeh* (2009) (English: In Natural Colors). The study concluded that there was a distortion of religion and religious people by reducing them to repulsive stereotypes such as extremism, hypocrisy, cowardice, negativity, charlatanism, and duplicity without providing alternative positive models.

In another study, Zafar(2018) aimed at exploring the portrayal of Muslims in Bollywood movies from 2009-2013. The study pointed out that after 9/11, Muslims were portrayed in Bollywood as negative characters where a Muslim is presented as a traitor, harmful, ruthless, villain, terrorist, untrustworthy, and anti-national. The study used media frame analysis on ten Bollywood movies with 90 Muslim characters. It was concluded that 24.66% of the Muslim characters were portrayed positively, 31.81% portrayed neutrally, and 43.23% portrayed negatively.

A study conducted by Belkhairy (2016) sought to unveil the references, signs, and connotations related to the Muslim character in Hollywood movies. It also highlighted the themes and treatment of Muslim and Arab characters in these movies. Semiotic analysis was used to study a non-representative purposive sample of post-9/11 movies where Muslims were treated, and the movies *Traitor* (2008) and *The Kingdom* (2007) were chosen. The Study concluded that Muslims were presented as traitors, untrustworthy, deceitful, dishonest, violent, and killers of innocent people, especially Americans.

Qaderi (2011) sought to reveal the image of Islamists in Egyptian cinema by analyzing the movies *ImaratYaacubyan* (2006) (English: Yaacubyan Apartment Building) and *Murjan Ahmad Murjan* (2007). Semiotic analysis was utilized in identifying the hidden signs and

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<sup>1</sup>This movie title is an Arabic name that cannot be translated into English.

references in these movies. It was concluded that both movies presented a negative stereotype for Islamist leaderships and portrayed them as violent, extremists, hypocrites, and exploitative. The study also pointed out that the movies' directors relied in their depiction of Islamists on the Egyptian society's perception of Al-Jama'a Al-Islamiyya (English: The Islamic Group)<sup>2</sup> which was very well-known in Egypt. Finally, the study stated that the movie *Imarat Yaacubyan* (2006) (English: Yaacubyan Apartment Building) was more objective as it provided an interpretation of the effect of poverty and deprivation on Islamists whereby their violence could be understood as a reaction to the marginalization they suffered.

The study conducted by Aguayo (2009) examined the representation of Muslims in Hollywood through analyzing the movie *The Kingdom* (2007) which tells a story based on terrorist attacks that took place in Saudi Arabia. The study criticized the racist narrative in the movie whereby Muslim characters were presented as dangerous and uncivilized. The study investigated how Hollywood presented a guided rhetoric to its audience through a coding process. This process was evident in the treatment of the movie characters: the dangerous Muslim man, the endangered Muslim woman, and the civilized, white American woman. The study concluded that Hollywood still presented Muslim characters in a negative way as dangerous, uncivilized, unsuccessful, and outdated.

### **Comment on Previous Literature**

Previous studies had movies as their population and inquired into the Muslims image in these movies. Most of the studies used content analysis methodology as in (Alsnaidi, 2019), (Zafar, 2018), and (Belkhairy, 2016) while semiotic analysis was employed in (Belkhairy, 2016) and (Qaderi, 2011). Some studies depended on media framing analysis such as (Zafar, 2018). All of these studies concluded that Muslims were presented in a negative image and reduced to negative stereotypes. The previous studies, however, did not attempt a comprehensive analysis of all of Adel Imam's movies which framed Islamists in spite of his significance and influence in the Arab World. Moreover, these studies did not utilize the qualitative methodology in analysis, and this methodology can yield more reliable results and lead to a more comprehensive study.

### **Study Methodology**

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<sup>2</sup>Al-Jama'a Al-Islamiyya (English: The Islamic Group) was an Egyptian Islamist movement that operated in Egypt from 1992-1998.

The qualitative methodology was implemented using thematic analysis. Qualitative research is interpretational research which tackles symbolic materials that are subject to analysis. It usually answers questions but does not test hypotheses.

Gary (2014) states that qualitative research answers the questions of “how” and “why” things happen. It offers a profound understanding into the researched subject not just a fleeting glimpse at it. Thematic analysis is one of the methods used in analyzing qualitative data. In thematic analysis, data is organized into themes or categories then analytically interpreted to answer the research question. Thematic analysis may also be done through focusing on common denominators between data; however, commonalities may not necessarily be significant.

### **Unit of Analysis**

Media frame analysis was adopted as the unit of analysis to study the “character frame,” the “theme frame,” and the “role frame.” Out of these frames, a number of sub-frames were studied and used as the categories of analysis:

- 1- the “character frame” including *exploitative, naive, negligent, and pragmatic* as sub-frames
- 2- the “theme frame” with the sub-frames *contradiction, lust, degrading women, stupidity, terrorism, unreality, charlatanism, exploiting religion, psychopathy, and inhumanity.*
- 3- the “role frame” which included the following sub-frames: *a main character, a secondary character, a minor character, a rich person, a member of the middle class, a poor person, the emir of an Islamist group, a member of an Islamist group, the president of an Islamic association, the president of a students’ union, a lawyer, and a candidate for parliament.*

### **Definitions of Sub-Frames (Categories of Analysis)**

- *a main character*: the character of the protagonist in a movie
- *a secondary character*: a character which is not central to the movie but has an effect on the plot
- *a minor character*: an insignificant character which has a complementary purpose in the movie

- *a rich person*: someone who works at a high-paying job or demonstrates wealth by owning a luxurious house or living in an upscale neighborhood
- *a member of the middle class*: works in middle-class professions and shows no signs of wealth or poverty
- *a poor person*: unemployed or works in a low-income profession and demonstrates poverty through clothes, life style, and inability to self-sustain
- *the emir of an Islamist group*: the leader of an Islamist group
- *a member of an Islamist group*: appears in the movies sample wearing a white thobe (an ankle-length attire worn by Arab men) and ghutra (rectangular headdress) without iqal (an accessory worn to hold the ghutra in place on the head)
- *the president of an Islamic association*: the head of an Islamic association that works for Islam or in humanitarian aid who publicly calls for adopting the Islamic way of life in society
- *the president of a students' union*: the leader of a students organization at a university
- *a lawyer*: someone who practices law
- *a candidate for parliament*: someone running for parliament
- *contradiction*: discrepancy between what Islamists or religious people preach in the movies and their actual behavior or between what Islam teaches and what these characters do in reality
- *lust*: any action by an Islamist or a religious Muslim indicating sexual desire, interest in women, or sexual harassment of women
- *degrading women*: the perception that a woman is inferior to a man or that she is suited just for sex, household labor, or menial roles in society
- *stupidity*: any action that shows dim-wittedness or shows the character doing naive, unexpected things
- *terrorism*: actions that show hatred for others or violent behaviors towards others to force them to do things they do want or prevent them from doing what they want as a result of the terrorists' conviction that society has to be religious according to their interpretation of Islam
- *unreality*: behaviors, actions, and ideas which Islamists and religious Muslims advocate to change society for the better without having real positive effects such as

the implementation of Islamic sharia, fixating on Islamic attire, refraining from certain utterances, or ascribing life hardships to the disobedience of Allah (God)

- *charlatanism*: resorting to unscientific interpretations of events and providing unrealistic solutions for problems such as burning incense in a place to protect against envy
- *exploiting religion*: taking advantage of Islam, its teachings, and rituals to achieve material gains, or making others do things under the pretext of serving Islam where in fact they serve personal interests
- *psychopathy*: any description that refers to mental and psychological disorders or personality imbalances
- *inhumanity*: behaviors and actions that violate human rights such as separating a mother from her child or being cruel to the weak

### **Study Population and Sample**

A purposive sample of 15 Adel Imam movies was chosen spanning 1992-2008. This period was chosen because it represents the peak of Adel Imam's treatment of Islamists and religious Muslims in his movies, and this choice reflects the researchers' intimate knowledge of the study's population and sample. Two movies were excluded for being irrelevant to the study, namely *Almansi* (1993) (English: The Forgotten) and *Attajruba Adenamarkyeh* (2003) (English: The Danish Experience).

### **Study Instruments**

The study used a content Analysis Questionnaire as its instrument. The validity of the study's instrument was verified by five referees from the faculty members of the College of Media at the Middle East University, Jordan and the College of Media at the University of Petra<sup>3</sup>. Their feedback was utilized in verifying the instrument's ability in measuring the study's questions. As for the instrument's reliability, it was verified by applying the Analysis

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Guide to a part of the study sample twice, one month apart. Then, Holsti method was used to calculate the reliability coefficient which was found to be 0.8787%.

### **Media Framing Theory**

Media framing theory investigates the effect of manipulating media content whereby the overarching angle of how news or media content is presented (called “the frame”) places them in a field of meaning which influences the audience’s perception of that content. This theory facilitates the measuring and interpretation of media content by deconstructing the frames of this content, i.e. revealing the angle through which this content is presented and ultimately the effect intended by the communication source on the audience. Makkawi and Assayed (2001) point out that media framing theory allows the measuring of the implicit media content and offers a systematic interpretation of the media role in shaping the audience’s values and attitudes. “According to media framing theory, a communication source ‘foregrounds’ certain aspects of media content while de-emphasizing others based on the source’s ideological background in a way that makes the audience receive this content as intended by the source and not through their own convictions” (Naseera, 2019).

(Tankard as cited in Aldbaisy, 2017) posits that media frame analysis explains how the media shapes and steers public opinion about some events. This theory has several assumptions. One of these assumptions is that events carry certain meaning by being presented in frames that accentuate certain aspects of these events through selective emphasis. Another assumption of this theory is that news in itself is not meaningful but rather gains meaning and significance when framed in a certain way (Naseera, 2019).

According to (Najim, 2007), the media rhetoric and content have an impact on the audience. Through the media’s framed contents, the audience are implicitly told what to think about the news. This framing affects the audience’s perception of the news in a way that reconstructs their attitudes towards the news and ultimately their reactions and decisions about it.

Media framing theory was used to explain the findings of this study. It was observed that Adel Imam’s movies selected some behaviors of Islamists and religious Muslims and highlighted them in certain frames in order to construct a certain image in the minds of the audience. Consequently, this framing influences the audience’s attitudes and perception of Islamists and religious Muslims.

### Connecting the Theory to This Study

Three frames were selected for analysis: the “character frame,” the “theme frame,” and the “role frame.” From these frames, a number of sub-frames were derived based on which the study sample was analyzed.

### Findings

The study’s main questions were:

- 1- What are the “character frames” of Islamists in Arabic cinema based on Adel Imam’s movies?
- 2- What are the “theme frames” through which Islamists were presented in Adel Imam’s movies?
- 3- What are the “role frames” for Islamists in Arabic cinema based on Adel Imam’s movies?

To answer the first question, the frequencies and percentages of the “character frame” were calculated in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. The Frequencies and Percentages for Identifying the “Character Frame” of Islamists in Arabic Cinema based on Adel Imam’s Movies**

	“Character Frame”	Frequency	Percentage
1	<i>exploitative</i>	6	35%
2	<i>naive</i>	4	23%
3	<i>negligent</i>	2	11%
4	<i>pragmatic</i>	5	29%
Total		17	100%

The Islamist characters in the movies sample were 17 with four character sub-frames detected. Table 1 shows that *exploitative* characters appeared six times in the movies sample with a percentage of 35%. These characters were Ali Alzenati and Maolana in *Toyor Althalam* (1995) (English: Birds of the Dark); the emir of the Islamist group in *Imarat Yaacubyan* (2006) (English: Yaacubyan Apartment Building); Brother Saif, the emir of the Islamist group

in *Alirhabi* (1994) (English: *The Terrorist*); sheikh Shukri Assayed in *Hello America* (2000); and Mahmoud in *Murjan Ahmad Murjan* (2007). The movies sample highlighted the affluence of the Islamist characters with nine rich characters out of 17, four middle class, and four poor. This depiction of rich Islamists, however, is contrary to reality. It is meant to show that Islamist leaders exploit their simple and naive followers where the leaders are rich and live comfortably while the low-ranking Islamists struggle and are taken advantage of.

In the movies sample, one way *exploitative* characters benefited themselves was by utilizing Islamic texts that promise Muslims to be rewarded in the afterlife. This was demonstrated by the characters of Ali Alzenati and Maolana in *Toyor Althalam* (1995) (English: *Birds of the Dark*). In the movie, Maolana tempts the lawyer Ali with leadership in return for visiting the prisoners from his group. This temptation with leadership was also observed in *Alirhabi* (1994) (English: *The Terrorist*) where Brother Saif, the emir of the group, tantalizes Ali Abduthaher with the possibility of becoming a big leader.

The movies sample contained some simple characters with religious passion who got exploited by their Islamic leaders to achieve personal interests. Examples of such characters were Taha Alshathili in *Imarat Yaacubyan* (2006) (English: *Yaacubyan Apartment Building*) and Ali Abduthaher in *Alirhabi* (1994) (English: *The Terrorist*). There was also the character of the simple-minded religious Muslim: a naive person who venerated sheiks (Muslim leaders), asked for blessing from the "righteous," and was easily deceived. This was reflected through the characters of Abidrabuh in *Imarat Yaacubyan* (2006) (English: *Yaacubyan Apartment Building*) and Bilal in *Hassan and Murqus* (2008)<sup>4</sup>.

*Exploitative* characters were further detected in the movies sample. The emir of the Islamist group in *Imarat Yaacubyan* (2006) (English: *Yaacubyan Apartment Building*) exploits the anger of Taha Alshathili for being denied a job as a policeman due to his poor background. The emir directs Taha to join his group, abandon his love for a girl, and focus on jihad as a path to prove himself. Furthermore, Sheikh Shukri Assayed in *Hello America* (2000) takes advantage of Bakheet and Adeela's eviction from their relative's house and coerces them into working for his Islamist group. In addition to presenting *exploitative* characters, these movies showed Islamists as they transformed into powerful and *exploitative* figures.

The *exploitative* character sub-frame discussed above is in accordance with the findings of (Belkhairy, 2016) and (Qaderi, 2011).

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<sup>4</sup>This movie title is an Arabic name that cannot be translated into English

The *negligent* character was another sub-frame of the character frames of Islamists and religious Muslims in the movies sample. *AlirhabWalkabab* (1992) (English: Terrorism and Barbeque) presents two characters that work in the public sector. The first is Mr. Rashad, an employee at an education administration who spends most of his time praying while neglecting his job and delaying clients. The other one is a female employee at the same education administration who wears hijab (a sign of being religious) but is gossipy; neglectful of her job; interested only in cooking; provokes her colleagues against their husbands; careless about her looks; and learns how to use make up from a prostitute. Through these characters, the movie painted a negative picture of religious Muslim employees who contradicted their faith by neglecting their jobs instead of being dedicated and productive. It is noteworthy that previous studies did not discuss negligence as a character frame of Islamists and religious Muslims in movies.

According to Table 2, being *pragmatic* was another trait of Islamists and religious Muslims in the movies sample. In *BakheetwaAdeela 2<sup>5</sup>* (1998), the character Fathallah is an Islamist candidate for parliament who is presented as pragmatic and contradictory since all he cares about is achieving his personal interests regardless of what he preaches. Likewise, Mahmoud in *Murjan Ahmad Murjan* (2007) allies with Murjan for money in a clear contradiction to what he supposedly believes in.

Presenting Islamists and religious Muslims as *pragmatic* is supported by (Alsnaidi, 2019) which pointed out that Islamists were portrayed as pragmatic when dealing with other people.

It should be pointed out at this stage that one of the 17 characters presented in the movies sample was presented as a positive character and that was the character of Hassan in *Hassan and Murqus* (2008). However, this positivity is attributed to the plot of the movie which tells the story of a Muslim sheikh and a Christian priest whose lives are threatened by extremists on both sides. They go into a witness protection program and unwittingly end up living in the same building where a friendship between them starts to develop. This finding contradicts what Zafar (2018) found where 24.66% of the Muslims portrayed in Bollywood movies were positive characters.

To answer the second question, the frequencies and percentages of the “theme frames” were calculated in Table 2 below.

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<sup>5</sup> This movie title is an Arabic name that cannot be translated into English

**Table 2. The Frequencies and Percentages for Identifying the “Theme Frames” through which Islamists Were Presented in Adel Imam's Movies**

	“Theme Frame”	Frequencies	Percentage
1	<i>contradiction</i>	14	16.0%
2	<i>lust</i>	5	5.7%
3	<i>stupidity</i>	6	6.8%
4	<i>charlatanism</i>	6	6.8%
5	<i>inhumanity</i>	5	5.7%
6	<i>degrading women</i>	6	6.8%
7	<i>terrorism</i>	11	12.6%
8	<i>unreality</i>	11	12.6%
9	<i>exploiting religion</i>	21	24.1%
10	<i>psychopathy</i>	2	2.2%
Total		87	100%

Table 2 shows that *exploiting religion* was the most frequent theme in the movies sample appearing 21 times at 24.1%. In *Toyor Althalam* (1995) (English: Birds of the Dark), Saif, the emir of the Islamist group, demands blind obedience from Ali Abduthaher without any discussion or even thinking, and he explains that this obedience is a form of worship. In another scene, Saif gives money rewards to members of the group after carrying out a terrorist attack which implies that jihad is purely a materialistic practice. In *Resalaela Alwali* (1998) (English: A Message to the Governor), the titular message carried by the character Harfoosh from the people of Rasheed City to the governor states that the people of the city were going to fight a group of bad, deceptive people who exploited religion.

*Exploiting religion* was a theme in other movies. In *Imarat Yaacubyan* (2006) (English: Yaacubyan Apartment Building), different people interpret Islam as they please in a way that serves their personal interests. In *Hello America* (2000), *exploiting religion* is clearly manifested in taking advantage of people in need of help. When Bakeet and Adeela are in need of shelter while in America, they go to the mosque seeking help. They are told they have to become religious and work for the Islamist group in return for helping them. Furthermore, the emir of the group, Sheikh Shukri Assayed, threatens them of cutting off help if they object to his orders. In *Essifara fi Alamara* (2005) (English: The Embassy in the

Building), Islamists exploit people's religious passion and make them sacrifice themselves to serve Islamist agenda while promising martyrdom for those who comply. As a result, random killing is justified as can be seen in the intention to blow up the whole building which contains the Israeli embassy even though the building has many innocent residents who have nothing to do with the embassy.

Table 2 demonstrates that the *contradiction* sub-frame was repeated 14 times with a percentage of 16%. This can be seen in *Alirhabi* (1994) (English: The Terrorist) where the Islamist Ali Abduthaher drinks alcohol to prove that he is not a terrorist while Brother Saif, the emir of the Islamist group, reneges on his promise to Ali to marry his sister-in-law even though he carried out a terrorist attack as a dowry for her. In *ToyorAlthalam* (1995) (English: Birds of the Dark), the lawyer, Ali Alzenati, turns his back on the members of a terrorist cell which he created when they seek a hideout at his place after carrying out a terrorist attack. Moreover, Islamists were presented as negligent at their jobs which clearly contradicts what they advocated about sincerity at work. This is evident in the characters of Mr. Rashad and the hijab-wearing female employee in *Alirhabi* (1994) (English: The Terrorist). In *ToyorAlthalam* (1995) (English: Birds of the Dark), the lawyer, Ali Alzenati, refuses to eat the food brought by the prostitute, Samira, because of what she does. He strongly opposes representing her as a client even though he has drug dealers as clients. However, later when he finds a personal interest, he takes her case and gets her acquitted.

*Contradiction* could be further detected in the movies sample. In *BakheetwaAdeela 2* (1998), Islamists bribe others to give up running for elections. Mahmoud in *Murjan Ahmad Murjan* (2007) criticizes premarital relations while he is fine with members of his Islamist group being in fake, non-Islamic marriages. In *Hello America* (2000), the sheik character who lives in America continuously attacks America and describes it as the great devil which every Muslim should fight. In *AreesMimJihaAmniyah* (2004) (English: A Bridegroom from a Police Agency), a religious Muslim lustfully looks at a girl and praises Allah in wonderment while in *Murjan Ahmad Murjan* (2007), a woman in hijab is seen at a night club. Furthermore, in *ImaratYaacubyan* (2006) (English: Yaacubyan Apartment Building), the religious Muhammad Azzam works with the authorities (whom Islamists generally consider to be stray and blasphemous) and conducts unlawful deals. In the same movie, Islamists denounce democracy while they run for elections as they consider them a path to power. In *Alirhabi* (1994) (English: The Terrorist), Ali Abduthaher and his fellow members of the Islamist group loot gold from jewelry shops without any moral inhibition.

Based on the above, it is clear that *contradiction* was a dominant theme in the movies sample. It was the second most frequent sub-frame with 14 occurrences in seven movies of the sample. This dominance is corroborated by the findings of Belkhairey (2016), Alsnaidi (2019), and Zafar (2018).

According to Table 2, *terrorism* was a recurring theme in the movies sample appearing 11 times at 12.6%. *Alirhabi* (1994) (English: The Terrorist) shows how Islamists kill in cold blood. This can be seen when the emir of the group orders Ali Abduthaher to kill any policeman who stops him and to burn and destroy jewelry and video stores. In the same movie, any Islamist who thinks of leaving the Islamist group is threatened with death as seen when the emir of the group threatens Ali before he is actually assassinated at the end of the movie. In *Hello America* (2000), Arabs and Copts ask Bakheet for help, but when Islamists do, they threaten him with assassination if he does not comply. In *ToyorAlthalam* (1995) (English: Birds of the Dark), Ali Alzenati directs his lawyer followers to file lawsuits against different institutions such as television, universities, and the government to neutralize those who object to the Islamists' conception of Islam.

Extremism as an antecedent of *terrorism* was present in the movies sample. In *Hassan and Murqus* (2008), we see Islamist extremism but this time along with Christian extremism. However, it is important to note that the movie does not provide an equal portrayal of Christians and Muslims as it tries to present a more positive image of Christians. Hatred for art, culture, and literature as signs of extremism are present in *Alirhabi* (1994) (English: The Terrorist) where the Islamist Ali Abduthaher attacks video stores; does not listen to music; and criticizes those who watch TV.

*Terrorism* as a theme through which Islamists and Muslims were presented in movies sample is supported by all the literature reviewed in this study: (Zafar, 2018) (Belkhairey, 2016), (Alsnaidi, 2019), (Qaderi, 2011), and (Aguayo, 2009).

According to Table 2, *unreality* was as frequent as *terrorism* in the movies sample with 11 occurrences at 12.6%. In *ToyorAlthalam* (1995) (English: Birds of the Dark), the lawyer, Ali Alzenati, assigns his lawyer followers to lawsuits that must be filed against art, culture, and literature instead of dealing with actual problems in society. In the same movie, Islamists unreality and passivism in dealing with societal problems can be seen in how they deal with the prostitute Samira. While they vilify and shun her, it is the unreligious, alcohol-drinker lawyer, Nofal, who offers Samira a practical alternative by employing her at his law practice.

The theme *stupidity* was detected 6 times in the movies sample with a percentage of 6.8%. In *Alirhabi* (1994) (English: The Terrorist), Ali Abduthaher mindlessly obeys the emir

of the Islamist group. In *BakheetwaAdeela*(1995), when Bakheet and Adeela enter a cemetery to hide drugs and are discovered by some religious Muslims, Adeela immediately starts crying as if she were at the cemetery to bury a loved one. The religious men are fooled, and they start praying for the dead person. In *AmeerAlthalam* (2002) (English: Prince of Darkness), we are presented with the character of the naive Sufi (an ascetic Muslim) who walks around naked because he is told that it is the time of the “Naked Saint Festival” and Muslims should celebrate by walking around naked. There is also the character of Bilal in *Hassan and Murqus* (2008) who appears throughout the movie following Islamists and sheikhs without thinking.

As frequent as stupidity, *charlatanism* was present 6 times in the movies sample with a percentage of 6.8%. In *ToyorAlthalam* (1995) (English: Birds of the Dark), incense is burned in Ali Alzenati’s office to protect against envy, and in *Alnowm fi Alasal* (1996) (English: Sleeping in Honey), simple people resort to charlatan religious Muslims who claim they treat sexual impotence.

*Lust* a characteristic of Islamists was another theme in Adel Imam’s movies occurring five times with a percentage of 5.7%. This can be seen in *Alirhabi* (1994) (English: The Terrorist) when the emir of the Islamist group lustfully looks at a girl. Similarly, in *AlirhabWalkabab* (1992) (English: Terrorism and Barbeque), the religious Mr. Rashadogles the thighs of a prostitute. In addition, the religious Muhammad Azzam in *ImaratYaacubyan* (2006) (English: Yaacubyan Apartment Building) only wants to get married for sex.

With the same frequency as *lust*, *inhumanity* was noticeable in the movies sample. In *ImaratYaacubyan* (2006) (English: Yaacubyan Apartment Building), the religious Muhammad Azzam deprives his wife of her son from a previous marriage because he is possessive of her and wants her to be completely dedicated to satiating his lust.

With two occurrences at 2.2%, *psychopathy* was discovered in the movies sample. Generally speaking, the sample movies depicted Islamists and religious Muslims as gloomy, paranoid, and anti-social. This theme can be discerned from a passing shot that focuses on a psychiatric ward at a hospital where most of the patients are wearing white thobes and have long beards which is a symbol of Islamists in Adel Imam’s movies.

To answer the third question, the frequencies and percentages of the “role frames” were calculated in Table 2 below.

**Table 3. The Frequencies and Percentages for Identifying the “Role Frames” for Islamists in Arabic Cinema based on Adel Imam's Movies**

	“Role Frame”	Frequencies	Percentage
1	<i>a main character</i>	2	3%
2	<i>a secondary character</i>	13	23%
3	<i>a minor character</i>	2	3%
4	<i>a rich person</i>	9	16%
5	<i>a poor person</i>	3	5%
6	<i>a member of the middle class</i>	5	8%
7	<i>a member of an Islamist group</i>	9	16%
8	<i>the president of a students' union</i>	2	3%
9	<i>a candidate for parliament</i>	2	3%
10	<i>the emir of an Islamic group</i>	8	15%
11	<i>lawyer</i>	2	3%
12	<i>the president of an Islamic association</i>	2	3%
	Total	59	100%

Table 3 shows that most Islamist and religious Muslims characters in the movies sample were secondary characters except for two *main characters*: Ali Abduthaher in *Alirhabi* (1994) who abandons his Islamist ideology at the end of the movie and Hassan in *Hassan and Murqus* (2008). As for the character, Hassan, it is the only character presented in a somewhat positive light due to the movie's plot which tries to send the message that there are some friendly religious Muslims and Christians. The remaining characters are 13 *secondary characters* and two *minor characters*. These numbers reflect a negative image of these characters presenting them as insignificant and fleeting.

A striking finding was that most of the Islamists characters presented in the movies sample were *rich*: nine rich characters as opposed to five *middle class* and three *poor*. This might be contradictory to reality especially since one of the movies, *Imarat Yaacubyan* (2006) (English: Yaacubyan Apartment Building), pointed out the role of poverty in pushing young people towards joining Islamist groups. However, since all the rich characters are those of the leaders of Islamist groups, this sends the message that the leaders of these groups take advantage of the poor and recruit them based on false promises.

Other Islamist and religious Muslim characters included *demir of an Islamist group* (eight), *a member of an Islamist group* (nine), and *a president of an Islamic association* (two).

## Conclusions

A number of conclusions were reached:

- 1- The study showed that the most frequent “character frames” were *exploitative, naive, and pragmatic*. These frames can be contextualized in two domains. The first is that of the leaders of Islamist groups who were depicted in the movies sample as exploitative and pragmatic while the second is that of the members of Islamists groups who are exploited by their leaders due to their naivety. It is worth mentioning that one out of the 17 characters in the movies sample was portrayed positively, and that is the character of Hassan in *Hassan and Murqus* (2008).
- 2- In the “theme frame,” *exploiting religion* was the most recurring theme followed by *contradiction, terrorism, and unreality*.
- 3- As for the “role frame,” it was concluded that most of the characters played by Islamists and religious Muslims were *secondary characters* so as to imply that Islamists and religious Muslims are marginal in society. In addition, most of these characters were presented as rich particularly the characters of the Islamist leaders to establish the dichotomy of the rich leaders and the exploited followers.

## Recommendations

The study recommends the following:

- 1- a more comprehensive treatment of Islamists which is unbiased and grounded in reality since extremism cannot be faced and solved without objective treatment
- 2- It is important to break from the norm in the treatment of societal problems, including terrorism, in Arabic cinema. A constructive treatment of such problems would be to focus on the causes of these problems and try to offer tangible solutions for them.
- 3- Further investigation into the way Islamists are presented in Arabic cinema is required to provide a scientific reference for writers and movie makers.

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