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Beyond the Illusion of Hope: The Objectification of Muslim Women in Hollywood Cinema

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Abstract

Hollywood representations of the Muslim woman as oriental have long been gendered through Western narratives with enough orientalist discursive frames of the margins. As some new positive portrayals of her rise to the forefront, demeaning portrayals still persist in new releases. This paper examines how these recent representational shifts reflect a genuine change and/or whether they remain confined to aesthetic adjustments. Based on a gender perspective, this paper adopts a qualitative approach using visual analysis of two Hollywood films produced in different historical eras. The discussion focuses on examining both figurative and visual strategies through which Muslim women are portrayed on screen, including framing, narrative positioning, and visual tropes. The comparative analysis highlights that although cinematic styles and discourses evolve, Muslim women continue to be framed in reductive and objectifying ways that reverberate classical and Orientalist cinematic narratives. The paper challenges progressive narratives of feminist progress in Hollywood cinema and contributes to remaining debates on gender, culture, and representation within film studies.

Keywords: American cinematic production, Feminist film theory, Muslim female representation, visual analysis.