



The Representation of Islam Faith in Saudi Cinema: A Critical Discourse

Analysis of "The 13th Warrior" and "Norah"

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Introduction

In the world of movies, faith can be shown as a powerful tool for people to look at and understand cultural identity. The essay seeks to analyze how Islam is represented in Saudi Arabian films "The 13th Warrior" (1999) and "Norah" (2023), using the discourse analysis method. The reason why we chose these two movies is because they offer an opportunity to investigate the way cinema helps build up the constructs of Self and Other within the local context of Saudi Arabia.

The 13th Warrior" (1999)

John McTiernan directed "*The 13th Warrior*," the screen adaptation of Michael Crichton's novel "Eaters of the Dead." In this narrative, an Arabian poet named Ahmed Ibn Fahdhan accompanies a group of Norse warriors, leading to him becoming their hero. Setting these two religions side by side, the movie depicts Ahmed's Islamic faith and Viking paganism as incompatible systems (The 13th Warrior, 1999). The clash forms the basis for Ahmed's self-discovery while living among them as he must come to terms with his prejudices about these people whom he has never met before. However, it is through engaging in their customs that he gains respect for Vikings which eventually leads to friendship beyond any boundaries set by religion or culture.

The film explores the clash between civilizations, emphasizing the difference in religious practices and cultural norms between Islamic civilization and the Norse society. Cultural arrogance is expressed by Ahmed when he first comes into contact with Viking traditions like human sacrifices and lack of hygiene, which goes against his Islamic beliefs

(Walsh, 2022). However, over time Ahmed starts relating more with Vikings allowing them to respect each other across different faiths or cultures. His selection as the 13th warrior being an outsider can be seen as a symbol of bridging gaps between people from diverse backgrounds.

Norah" (2023)

Compared to the medieval setting in "The 13th Warrior," "Norah" is a modern-day story that takes place in Saudi Arabia during the 1990s. It mainly revolves around Nader, a new teacher, and Norah, an inspirational and artistic young lady. Self-discovery, imagination, and the fight for freedom within a conservative society are some of the themes covered by the Tawfik Alzaidi-directed movie (Norah, 2023). Even though Saudi Arabian societal standards and expectations surround them, their relationship makes them defy all odds becoming unconventional lovers who have a passion for art. While trying to adapt themselves into such kind of world, they come across love and art as transformative agents that enable them to break cultural barriers finding liberation through personal growth (Senanayake, 2021). It also presents Islam as an inspiring foundation reflecting both spiritual as well creative aspects of the faith which deeply resonate with the characters' lives.

One of the most important things about "Norah" is that it shows Islam as a source of inspiration and guidance for its characters. Norah's courage and determination to follow her dreams are represented as being consistent with her religion. Consequently, they are focused on defying the stereotype that all Muslim women are oppressed or submissive. Another character named Nader discovers comfort and meaning in his artworks influenced by Norah as well as his immediate environment (Nusrat et al., 2020). In this movie, Saudi Arabian females like Norah are portrayed as strong strong-willed people who can deal with their religious beliefs alongside cultural expectations while still striving towards what they want to achieve in life. Such portrayal challenges single storytelling about Islam and Saudi Arabia common within Western media reports by reflecting on different lived realities across Muslim societies.

Analysis

Saudi Arabian cinema's identity formation is contributed to by "The 13th Warrior" and "Norah" through unbiased portrayals of the Islamic religion. The initial cultural misunderstandings between Ahmed and the Vikings are illustrated in "The 13th Warrior,"

which examines the clash of civilizations. In this film, he embarks on a journey that shows how important it can be for people to understand each other's cultures (Kozlovic, 2007). The construct is understood when they finally find some shared values with the Norsemen who were once so strange to him but now seem almost familiar like brothers united by honor or loyalty towards one another (Eijaz, 2018). Here bravery also comes into play as a theme where different types or forms of cultural fortitude are shown such as physical courage and mental toughness.

On the other hand, 'Norah' is more concerned with personal choice-making and self-expression within an orthodox community setting. Norah herself represents a strong-willed lady who breaks free from societal expectations to follow her creative dreams even though she knows what could happen if caught doing so. Additionally, the love affair acts as a turning point for both characters as it pushes them beyond current limits (Güven, 2021). It also makes them realize just how much potential lies untapped around them when one considers all scenarios left untouched due to fear or ignorance about oneself or others. While Norah may seem rebellious at first glance, a closer inspection reveals that she draws inspiration from Islamic teachings giving it a positive light not often associated with such constructs.

Conclusion

Each movie provides useful information about how the Saudi Arabian film industry depicts Islam. These two films, "Norah" and "The 13th Warrior", contribute to the discovery of cultural identity utilizing their plots, characters, and ideas debunking myths and showing different angles of looking at this religion along with its functions within societies. The construct is achieved by the movies because they help the audience see things from various perspectives. They also make people aware that all such cultures exist within one country like Saudi Arabia where there are many Muslims but not everyone is alike or has the same beliefs about what being Muslim should mean for them. Filmmakers can use their work as a tool for enlightenment between different communities by showing realities based on lives lived according to Islamic principles.

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