

The Media and Religion

When we examine all the diverse cultures in society, we will notice that almost every culture suffers from certain stereotypes. These stereotypes affect the views and opinions people have about that religion. After which, people often tend to adhere to those stereotypes, to those generalizations made about that religion. Most of these stereotypes, misconceptions often arise from the way those religions are represented in the media. In my reflection paper, I am going to discuss how the *Time* magazine table of contents page given in class is an example about how the media often times supports the generalizations many people have regarding various religions and how those generalizations are often made for the benefit of the west .

When we discuss religions, we discuss their traditions, their philosophy, their rites and rituals. However, after reading the content descriptions of the various sections of the table of contents page, I concluded that the media may think otherwise. The table of contents page was divided in to sections representing some of the major religions of the world. Under each section there were articles that were focused on certain aspects of the religion. I noticed that each of the articles contained some or the other things about the religions and its tie to politics or war. Under the Buddhism section, the article "Buddhism in America" was described as "ancient religion [that is] grow[ing] stronger roots in the new worlds, with the help of movies, pop culture and the politics of repressed Tibet"

(*Time Magazine*). By reading this description, I felt as if that observations about the religion were limited to movies, which are often times biased, or through the political situation of Tibet, creating an the image that essence of Buddhism is engrained in the politics, the pop culture or the movies created by Hollywood for the public. The article did not find it important to discuss how and why Buddhism is what it is today, what the philosophy of Buddhism is about. They found it more important to go along with what has been stereotyped and create more rather than clear out misconceptions that may cause further rifts. This glorified the west because it made the movies in the west seem as if they care about the rest of the world and are interested in sharing that information to the American public, be it true or false.

I saw similar reflection in the Islam section where there was an article about Jihad called "A Jihadi's Tale" (*Time Magazine*). The description about Jihad is described as "the holy war" (*Time Magazine*). This description gives the reader the idea that Jihad only means holy war, a materialistic war, when it is the meaning of Jihad that has been changed so that it can accommodate certain political excursions. Jihad is a spiritual war, a war with ones inner self. The magazine should instead clarify what the real meaning of Jihad is, of the essence of Jihad. This misconception infact creates the idea that Islam is a religion of war. This idea especially forms in the minds of the people who have not had a sufficient enough background to think otherwise than what the media is presenting. Issues like these often lead to stereotypes that people associate with different cultures and different religions.

By reading the descriptions of other articles in the various sections, I also noticed how some religions were stereotyped to be "suppressive," "restrictive." One article in the

Islam section titled "The Women of Islam," contained a description that said "nowhere in the Muslim world are women treated as equals" (*Time Magazine*). It is my belief that women nowhere are treated as equals. Women are always suppressed either physically or verbally. However, to make a generalization like that is to state to the readers that all Muslim women are suppressed. This creates a bad image for Islam almost labeling it as a suppressive religion thus once more creating the stereotype that Islam is a violent, restrictive and suppressive religion. Also under the same sections, there was another article called "As American As" which was described as "Muslims, Sikhs and Arabs are patriotic and growing" (*Time Magazine*). The first error made in this description is that the author of the article made a generalization that all Sikhs and Arabs are Muslims. This is a common stereotype that has been created because of certain assumptions people make about Sikhs and Arabs, but Sikhs are not Muslims and not all Arabs are Muslims. It is just another generalization people have made about the Muslim religion. Instead of trying to break the stereotypes, the media is enhancing it. This also glorifies the West because it created the idea that the Western culture understands the traditions of the East and also understands their "suppression."

Under the Christianity section, I noticed this in the description of the article "The Lords Business," in the Christianity section that says "promises of wealth are luring Africans to Christianity." This creates a stereotype that Africans are primitive, or wealth hungry. Above all it creates the stereotype that Africans have no religions at all because their identity is limited to the continent they reside it. This also benefits the west because it justifies their decision to spread Christianity in Africa and glorifies them as saviors.

After glancing over the table of contents page, I realized how much I really never paid attention to many of the stereotypes because I had seen them play a role in society so much. Almost every media source glorifies the West and puts down the west as a primitive and backward part of the world. It helps when one critiques what they read. However, I believe that the media has the power enough to change the misconceptions that people have about many religious traditions, but instead they choose to go along with those stereotypes. Stereotypes and misconceptions like these are what cause rifts between religions. The media should be more careful when speaking about a certain religion because there are so many aspects of it that the person writing that article may not even know about and proper research may help make this world a better place.

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A nuanced reflection: your observations are accurate and show your own, improved, critical analysis skills. Can you offer a final conclusion as to how we all can improve?

References

- *TIME Magazine Special Edition: World Religions (2004)*