

## **Who Put Hate in My Sunday Paper? Uncovering the Israeli-Republican-Evangelical Networks Behind the "Obsession" DVD**

**Omid Safi**

Something strange has been showing up inside the Sunday newspapers of millions of Americans the past few weeks. The material being included alongside comics, coupons, and advertisement for local stores is a controversial DVD called "[Obsession: Radical Islam's War Against the West.](#)" Some 28 million copies of this DVD have been distributed for free so far in this fashion. In some ways the scale of this campaign, and its ideological venom, are unprecedented: many newspapers state that they had never previously distributed free DVDs as inserts, certainly nothing with such a charged content. The copies were distributed not randomly across the country, but in the "[swing states](#)" (Florida, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa, Colorado, etc.) that are seen as a toss-up in the November Presidential elections between McCain and Obama. Obviously, someone is trying to influence the American electorate by playing on fear-mongering and hate-mongering themes. But who? Who is behind this massive, multi-million dollar campaign?

Answering that question proved harder than one might think, as the groups behind this DVD have worked hard to hide their tracks. The connections, which are partially concealed in the DVD and the distribution campaign, take one from groups in Israel, to pro-Israel lobby organizations in the United States, to Christian evangelical groups, and to Neoconservative think-tanks.

The "facts" presented by Obsession have already been refuted in several detailed presentations. For example, see the work of [Obsessionwithhate.com](#) and that of [Sheila Musaji](#), as well as [Altmuslim.com](#). Therefore, I am not going to make a point by point refutation of the contents of the DVD. My intention is to explore the networks that are behind the production and distribution of this DVD, with their clear goal of influencing the 2008 Presidential elections towards John McCain.

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All politics is local, as well as global. That is particularly the case here. The distribution of the DVD affected me and my family at an intimate local level: up to 160,000 copies of this propaganda piece were distributed through our local community in North Carolina. The newspaper of the nearby city of Charlotte, distributed another 200,000 copies.

Upon contacting the local newspaper, the Raleigh-based [News and Observer](#), and asking why such a hateful piece of propaganda was being distributed for free to all the subscribers, the response of the paper was less than impressive. Jim McClure, vice president of display advertising for The News and Observer, said: "[Obviously, we have distributed other product samples, whether it's cereal or toothpaste.](#)"

Really? Is this where we are? That a DVD which includes 77 minutes of propaganda footage slicing together videos of violent Muslims with those of Nazis, suggesting that Muslims are out to destroy Western civilization, is comparable to cereal and toothpaste? *Puhleeze...*

The claims of the DVD, which claims to be an educational product and part of a non-profit production, are as follows:

[\\*That the world stands today as it did in 1938. Radical Islam is as great, if not greater, of a threat than the Nazis presented to the world.](#) And action [not specified] must be taken.

\*That the attacks in Iraq, Palestine, Chechnya, and Iran present a global Muslim conspiracy against Israel and “The West.”

\*A distinctive feature of the DVD is in fact the linking together of threat of radical Islam with passionate defense of Israel. Most of the figures who are paraded in the DVD, whether they are Jewish, Christian, or Muslim, are all passionate pro-Israel speakers who have a long legacy of speaking against Palestinians, Arabs, and Muslims in general. The list includes such luminaries as:

- “Former PLO Terrorist Who Speaks Out For Israel”, [Walid Shoebat](#), who claims to have been a “former Islamic terrorist” turned Christian Evangelical Zionist. [Never mind that the Jerusalem Post has already dismissed the factuality of his claims.](#)
- Nonie Darwish, with the tell-all website: <http://www.arabsforisrael.com/> “Arabs for Israel”? Darwish also neglects to mention that she is another ex-Muslim turned both Christian and ardent supporter of Israel. In a world when virtually all Arabs and most Muslims view the Palestinian/Israeli tragedy as the burning political and moral issue of our time, how many Arabs in the world can be claimed as being passionate supporters of Israel?
- Carline Glick, a member of [Israel On Campus Coalition](#).
- Daniel Pipes. If the Pro-Israel/Neo-conservative unholy alliance had a poster-child, Pipes would be it. Pipes is the most noted Islamophobe operating in the US. Pipes is also the Director of a Pro-Israel entity called [“The Middle East Forum.”](#) As for his one-sided commitment to Israel credentials, suffice it to say that he is the [2006 recipient of the “Guardian of Zion” award.](#)

One could go on and on, but the above should give some indication that contrary to what the Clarion Fund claims on its website, the “experts” paraded on TV are not impartial and objective. They have a definite point of view, a passionate defense of Israel at all cost, even if that cost happens to be truth and facts.

### **Who Made this DVD?**

Let’s come back to the claim of the local newspaper, that the distribution of this product is qualitatively no different than putting a free sample of toothpaste in the Sunday paper. For the sake of argument, let us take that analogy and go with it. How many of us would receive an unmarked package of toothpaste, and brush our teeth with it if it carries no label, no description of who has made it, and no account of whether any agency has vouched for its safety? If we do not take unmarked material to our teeth, why would we take a product like Obsession which refuses to disclose the network behind it into our hearts, into our schools, synagogues, mosques, churches, and civic institutions?

The Obsession DVD states that it is made by "[Clarion Fund](#)". What does the Clarion Fund stand for? And *who* exactly are they? Their intentions are made a bit clearer through the use of their registered website: [www.radicalislam.org](http://www.radicalislam.org). What exactly does "radical Islam" constitute? Who stands for it, and who opposes it? We are not told, aside from this: "[Radical Islam poses a significant threat to the Western way of life. The Islamists' ultimate aim is conversion and domination of the West, which they see as the root of all evil that must be eradicated.](#)" This type of labeling without defining is as unhelpful as accusations of "Communist" in the 1950's, or "unpatriotic" and "un-American" more recently. It is a catch-all, bogey man argument that is masquerading as analysis.

Who has produced the Obsession DVD? On the [Obsession The Movie website](#), the producer is identified as Raphael Shore, who "[is a documentary producer and founder of Clarion Fund, Inc., a new non-profit organization dedicated to educating the public about national security threats.](#)" Very well. So Raphael Shore is the founder of Clarion Fund, and the producer of Obsession. But who is Raphael Shore? This required a good bit of background research:

### **Raphael Shore and Aish HaTorah**

Raphael Shore is part of a missionary Israeli "Jewish penitent" (*baal teshuva*) group, called [Aish HaTorah \("Fire of the Torah"\)](#), whose mission has been to call "assimilated" Jews back to Judaism. [They have been given 40% of the land in front of the "Western Wall" in Jerusalem by the Israeli government.](#) In other words, they are very good terms with the Israeli regime, which is responsible for the demolishing of homes, non-issuing of building permits, and occupation in Palestine. Their founder, Rabbi Noah Weinberg has received [recognition from the mayor of Jerusalem.](#)

When we dig a bit deeper, it turns out that Raphael Shore, a Canadian rabbi, is also the director of the International wing of Aish HaTorah. [His business card is available as a PDF on line:](#)

Rabbi Raphael Shore  
Director, Aish HaTorah International  
Outreach Programs

One Western Wall Plaza  
Old City, Jerusalem  
Israel, 97500

So does this Obsession DVD fall within the purview of Aish HaTorah's "outreach"? Given the intertwined nature of the political and the religious in Israel, it seems that Aish HaTorah has gone from evangelizing to Jews to waging a global propaganda campaign against Islam and Muslims, while also working hard to cover its tracks, as we shall see.

[The connections between Aish HaTorah and Clarion Fund go even deeper.](#) According to the paperwork filed with the Delaware state authorities, [Clarion uses the same address as Aish HaTorah in New York.](#) In 2006, the two directors of the Clarion Fund were Rabbi Shore and Jacob

Fetman, who was also Aish HaTorah's Chief Financial Officer. In 2007, it had three directors: Rabbi Shore, Rabbi Harris (who is the educational director for Aish HaTorah), and Rebecca Kabat, another Aish HaTorah employee.

The Israeli paper Haaretz noted that the Obsession DVD ["has a largely Jewish and pro-Israel distribution network, though Shore is trying to expand the film's appeal."](#) As we shall see, this he accomplished by reaching out to Neoconservatives and Christian Zionists, but first some more on the film's Pro-Israel distribution network.

### **Hasbara Fellowship and Honestreporting.com**

Raphael Shore is also the director of Hasbara Fellowships, a group with the transparent website: <http://www.israelactivism.com/> Here there is another connection to Aish HaTorah, as Hasbara is part of the Aish HaTorah network. And their activism on behalf of Israel is worn like a badge of honor.

The pattern is beginning to become clearer: how is it that a group with the stated goal of "Israel activism" is placing 28 million copies of a DVD warning Americans about the danger of "radical Islam"? In many of the screenings of this DVD, the audience was required to sign up for receiving material from the israelactivism.com website. How come 70 US newspapers accepted this DVD without doing the basic research to uncover the source (and prejudice) of this propaganda?

Hasbara Fellowship's own websites includes the following pieces of information about their genealogy and mission. All of the following are direct quotes:

- ["Hasbara Fellowships, a program spearheaded by Aish International, educates and trains university students to be effective pro-Israel activists on their campuses."](#)

→in other words, they freely acknowledge the link to Aish HoTorah International.

- ["Started in 2001 in conjunction with Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hasbara Fellowships brings hundreds of students to Israel every summer and winter."](#)

→ This is perhaps the most intriguing connection and startling confession, that Hasbara has a direct connection to the [Israeli regime's Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), which acts as the official and national propaganda center for the Israeli state. To recapitulate, there is a direct link between the Obsession DVD and the Israeli state through Hasbara Fellowship.

- ["So far, Hasbara Fellowships has trained over 1,400 students on over 250 campuses, providing its participants with the information, tools, resources, and confidence to return to their campuses as leaders in the fight for Israel's image."](#)

→This points to the acknowledgement that the struggle over Palestine/Israel is going to be fought—rhetorically, one hopes—on college campuses. In fact, college campuses formed the [primary site of the distribution of the Obsession DVD before the newspaper campaign](#). The primary audience on college campuses have been Jewish organizations (like Hillel) and College Republicans.

We will come back to this connection between Jewish groups and Republicans later. Shore himself has stated that: ["The evangelical Christians and the Jews tend to be the softest market..."](#).

Raphael Shore has previously [written at length about his passionate advocacy on behalf of Israel](#) on the pages of Aish HaTorah's newsletter. His earlier works had been produced alongside an entity called "Honestreporting.com", with a self-description as follows: ["Israel is in the midst of a battle for public opinion – waged primarily via the media. To ensure Israel is represented fairly and accurately 'HonestReporting' monitors the media, exposes cases of bias, promotes balance, and effects change through education and action."](#) In other words, Honestreporting.com sees itself as a media advocacy organization on behalf of Israel, with the requisite ["Fair and Balanced"](#) claims. Honestreporting.com has worked with Clarion Fund and Aish HaTorah in producing more pro-Israel material. And it is a family affair: the founder of Honestreporting is Rabbi Raphael Shore's twin brother, Ephraim Shore. [Ironically, Raphael was so concerned that his brother had become involved with Aish HaTorah that in [1992 he went to Israel to "rescue" his brother](#) from he seems to have regarded as a "big hoax", and a cult-like milieu. Instead, Raphael too became part of Aish HaTorah!]

Haaretz reported that "Obsession" is described as "Honest Reporting's newest documentary film." Honestreporting.com's own website confirms this: ["HonestReporting is proud to have been a former marketing partner during the initial production of this award-winning documentary."](#)

Shore, recognizing that the credibility of his propaganda would be undermined if its correction to Israeli-spin organizations were revealed, told Haaretz (in an unusually frank slip) that they ["have told Honest Reporting to take it off their site 'a dozen times.'"](#) The connections between Obsession and Israeli groups like Aish HaTorah and Jewish advocacy groups on behalf of Israel like Hasbara Fellowship and Honestreporting.com is beyond dispute. The producers of the documentary just don't want you to know about it.

One of the other elements that the producers of the Obsession DVD may not want you to know about is their political agenda. The article read: ["McCain's policies seek to confront radical Islamic extremism and terrorism and roll it back while \[Barack\] Obama's, although intending to do the same, could in fact make the situation facing the West even worse."](#)

The spokesperson for the Clarion Fund, Gregory Ross, did not deny that this article had appeared on their site, he was only upset that they had been caught with it! The Clarion Fund has been established as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. These types of non-profit organizations are not to endorse one political candidate over another, precisely what Clarion seems to have done, and is now busy hiding its track records. [NPR reported on this, and the possibility of a forthcoming FEC probe.](#)

### **Who is paying for the "Obsession Project"?**

We do not know for sure, and the Clarion Fund people are not saying. They admit that the names they give for the funders on their material are bogus aliases. Shore states that 80% of the funding

for the Obsession DVD has come from one source, a “Peter Mier”. Yet [he goes on to say that these are just aliases!](#) In other words, it is hard to know for sure who is paying for the production and even more importantly the distribution of what the Endowment for Middle East Truth (EMET), the main distributor for Obsession, refers to as the “Obsession Project.”

Given that EMET estimates that this project cost tens of millions of dollars, [the signs seem to point to none other than Sheldon Adelson](#), the Jewish Republican billionaire, discussed below.

### **Who Distributes the DVD?**

According the New York Times, when Shore and Co. could not find any traditional distributor for their propaganda, they formulated [a strategy of working with Neo-Conservative organizations like Heritage, College Republicans, and above all, Jewish organizations.](#)

[NPR has reported](#) that an organization called [Endowment for Middle East Truth](#) (EMET), is also responsible for distribution of the Obsession DVD. Like Honestreporting.com, the “Middle East Truth” being bandied about here is yet another self-described Zionist/pro-Israel understanding of the reality whose policies are in line with Likud militant expansionism, with the stated mission of support for Israel, and opposing any “concessions” from Israel as part of a peace agreement with Palestinians, even the withdrawal from the occupied territory of Gaza. The positions of EMET are the positions of Likud party in Israel, and that of the illegal Settler movement. It was EMET that on March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2008 [sponsored a showing of Obsession on Capitol Hill.](#)

Endowment for Middle East Truth (EMET), the distributor for Obsession, also has an open connection to the Republican Party, which they flaunt on their website: [“EMET was also requested to help the Republican Policy Committee with a Sense of the Congress resolution talking about Israel’s inherent right to defend itself...”](#) In other words, Clarion Fund claims to be non-political, but uses a pro-Israel ally of Republicans to distribute its product.

Leading the work of this Endowment has been [Sarah Stern](#), who formerly worked as the [National Policy Coordinator](#) for the [Zionist Organization of America](#) and later on served as the Director of the Office of Legislative and Governmental Affairs of the [AJC \(American Jewish Congress\).](#)

In short, the distributors of the Obsession DVD are the most ardent and fanatical supporters of Israeli Likud militant expansionism, a fact that the Obsession DVD conveniently omits, and the newspapers who spread the 28 million copies of this DVD like a virus never looked into. EMET also has a cozy relationship with the right-wing Jewish billionaire Sheldon G. Adelson, who has a proven track record of using his wealth to push both Israeli Likud-type and Republican agendas. Adelson has a [long-standing and public relationship with the arch-Likud Netanyahu](#) that Haaretz has reported on previously. A recent [investigative piece in the New Yorker](#) proved many details of Adelson’s political agenda in both the United States and Israel. Adelson, who owns many casinos in Las Vegas, has been a longtime contributor to the Zionist Organization of America, Sarah Stern’s former employer. Now that Stern is at EMET, she has sponsored lecture series and seminars on Capital Hill in name of Adelson, to extend his influence into the Congress.

Adelson is usually listed as by Forbes as the [third richest American](#), and the sixth richest person in the world. His personal wealth is estimated as exceeding \$20 billion. The Washington Post reports

that he [has already given over 200 million dollars to Jewish and Israeli causes, including the Birthright program](#), to which he makes a \$25 million annual contribution.

To place Adelson on the political spectrum, it is good to recall that he has described himself as a [critic of AIPAC—from the far right! In other words, he feels that AIPAC \(American Israel Public Affairs Committee\) has been too soft on Palestinians.](#) (!) Adelson has been a longtime contributor to Jewish and Republican causes, including the campaigns of George W. Bush. Initially, he had designs of spending [\\$250 million dollars to set up an organization called Freedom Watch to keep Obama out of the White House.](#) [Freedom Watch](#), conceived of as the Right's answer to Moveon.org, has been a meeting ground between Jewish Republicans and former officials of the George W. Bush administration. Such is the agenda of Adelson, the person whose influence is behind the EMET folks distributing the Obsession DVD.

Who else serves on the board of EMET (Endowment for Middle East), the Pro-Israeli lobby group? A who's who of Israeli officials and ultra-Zionists in the United States:

- [Ambassador Yossi Ben-Aharon](#): Formerly, the Chief of Staff for Yitzak Shamir, and Deputy Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- [Ambassador Yoram Ettinger](#). “Minister for Congressional Affairs at Israel's Embassy in Washington (with a rank of an ambassador), Israel's Consul General in Houston and Director of Israel's Government Press Office.”
- [Lenny Ben-David](#): “Israel's Deputy Chief of Mission (number two diplomat) in Washington after being appointed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu”, who in addition has “held senior posts in the [American Israel Public Affairs Committee](#) for 25 years, in both Washington and Israel.”

In addition to Israeli officials, the EMET Board also includes:

- **Neo-Conservatives** such as [R. James Woolsey](#), [Frank Gaffney](#) (another Neo-Con who has received awards from the Zionist Organization of America), [Ariel Cohen](#) (from the Neo-Conservative bastion Heritage), [David Dalin](#) (from the Neo-Con Hoover Institute and also Heritage).
- **Ardent pro-Israel lobbyists** such as: [Daniel Pipes](#), [Caroline Glick](#) (deputy managing editor of *Jerusalem Post*), [Meyrav Wurmser](#) (the former director of the [highly biased](#) MEMRI, a propaganda organization founded by members of the Israeli Defense Force), Also serving on the Board of EMET are many of the “talking heads” would-be experts of Obsession, such as [Walid Shoebat](#).
- **Christian Zionists**: EMET also reaches out to Christians—or one should specify, Christian Zionists—by featuring [Rev. James M. Hutchens](#), who founded an organization called The Jerusalem Connection International.

There are many more connections to pro-Israel organizations responsible for the distribution of Obsession:

- The producer, Raphael Shore, used [Karyn Leffel from Hasbara Fellowship](#) to establish links on college campuses. Yes, the same Hasbara of Pro-Israel media advocacy.
- The producers of *Obsession* also worked with the most lunatic fringes of the Christian evangelical movement to distribute their propaganda. This included above all else Christians United For Israel (CUFI), [who mailed out many copies of the DVD from their mailing center.](#) And the Founder and National Director of Christians United For Israel? None other than the same pastor [John Hagee](#) that [McCain had initially sought an endorsement from.](#) The same John Hagee who routinely describes Islam as evil, and sees the restoration of Israel as a necessary step towards the return of Christ. Hagee is one of the leading Christian Zionists in America today, and those who know about the tortured history of this variety of Zionism know how easily it has veered towards anti-Semitism, [even justifying Hitler as being God's hunters to drive Jews out of Europe to Israel, so that the Israeli state could be established](#) (thus anticipating Christ's return).
- Clarion Fund has also worked with other Republican groups to distribute their propaganda. NPR reported that a political consultant named Joe Wierzbicki was screening the film on 9/11 in Dearborn, MI. Who is paying for the screening and hiring Wierzbicki? Interestingly enough, [Wierzbicki is the PAC coordinator](#) for an organization called "Our Country Deserves Better", with one specific goal: to defeat Barack Obama. Their website states: ["Our Country Deserves Better than Barack Obama - and with your help we can ensure that Barack Obama is defeated on November 4th."](#)

The lines of connection between the makers of the allegedly impartial and non-profit *Obsession* and politically partial Republican groups and pro-Israeli expansionist Jewish organizations continues to grow...

- The last of the verified connections so far is between the producers of *Obsession* and the [Republican Jewish Coalition \(RJC\)](#). The RJC worked hand in hand with Christians United For Israel to mail out copies of a book titled [Standing With Israel](#) to a large number of American Rabbis and leaders of the Jewish community. [The package also included a copy of the Obsession DVD, and an approving letter from a former Israeli ambassador to Jews, encouraging them to strengthen connections with Christian Zionists.](#)

The Republican Jewish Coalition is yet another group that the Clarion Fund and the Endowment for Middle Eastern Truth has worked which has taken a partial political position for the forthcoming election. On their website, the Republican Jewish Coalition states that Barack Obama and Joe Biden and their supporters ["have handed Ahmadenijad \[sic\] a big win."](#)

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## Islam or Radical Islam?

Perhaps a word should be added here about the distinction between Islam and Radical Islam. In the last few years, we have indeed seen a number of terrorist acts around the world which have resulted in the death of thousands. While the bulk of these have not emanated from Islamic organizations, many have. (Of course the majority of the victims of acts of terrorism even in these

latter cases have been other Muslims.) No doubt, a critical look at the ideology of terrorist groups is more than called for in today's political climate. What many would object to, however, is painting all Muslims and all of Islam with the same brush.

The Obsession DVD opens by making a sharp distinction between Islam and Radical Islam. The producers of the documentary state, adamantly, that they are not anti-Islam or anti-Muslim, but that they are only against "Radical Islam." Leaving aside for a moment the debates over what constitutes "radical Islam", and how pervasive it actually is, there is an uncomfortable disconnect between this claim on their website and the claims made inside the DVD: the people paraded as would-be experts do not in fact share this neat dichotomy between Islam and "Radical Islam." The many speakers paraded here have a documented history of making blanket statements against Islam—all of Islam—and all of Muslims.

Let's take one example, the very first speaker shown on camera: Walid Shoebat.

Shoebat's claim to fame is that he claims to be an ex-"Islamic terrorist", turned Christian and lover of Zion. If he claims to have produced bombs to kill citizens, why is he not in prison? Muslims are routinely jailed for much less and indirect accusations. Nevertheless, let us examine Shoebat's track record regarding some of his more audacious claims about Islam (not just "radical Islam"):

- [That Obama is a Muslim.](#) Yes, that old myth again. Sadly, [some 13% of American citizens believe this](#) to the case, in spite of the fact that Obama is a committed Christian. Who knows how many more people are moved against Obama due to this rumor, which both Hillary and the Republicans have spread against him.
- ["The Arabic speaking communities in America, however, do indeed support Osama bin Ladin and Hamas."](#) [For some reason, Afghans and Iranians do not, he states.] Shoebat goes on to say: "The less they know about Islam the more peaceful they are." In other words, the Islamophobic assertions that peaceful Muslims are not peaceful because of Islam, but in spite of Islam; whereas "radical Muslims" are precisely radical and violent because of Islam. Something about that logic seems flawed, since it deprives human beings of the agency to actually interpret their own tradition in both beautiful and hideous ways.
- He has been even more forceful in asserting that Islam is evil. His exact words: ["Islam is not the religion of God -- Islam is the devil."](#) Let us be explicit here: The Obsession DVD claims that it is not targeting Islam, it is targeting "Radical Islam." The first person featured in the DVD sings a different tune, literally demonizing all of Islam.
- Shoebat's solution to Palestine/Israel, as told to the [right-wing "Religious Zionist" Israel National News \(the voice of the illegal Settler movement](#) in West Bank and Gaza) is as follows: tear down the Dome of the Rock, and [reestablish the Solomon's Temple on the Temple Mount.](#) The Settler radio embraced him as "the former terrorist turned lover of Zion." The question is whether this is the kind of person that one should take impartial advice from. It makes as much sense as taking advice about Judaism or African-American history from David Duke.

For one other example, we could look at another of the talking heads in the documentary, the Lebanese Christian [Brigitte Gabriel](#), who appeared before the Christians United For Israel conference on July 27<sup>th</sup> 2007 (sponsored by Pastor Hagee) and [opined](#):

*The difference, my dear Christian friends, between Israel and the Arab world is quite simply the difference between civilization and barbarism. It's the difference between good and evil and this is what we're witnessing in the Arabic and Islamic world. I am angry. They have no SOUL! They are dead set on killing and destruction. And in the name of something they call "Allah," which is very different from the God we believe in, because our God is the God of love.*

No fair-minded person would take Gabriel's hateful words as authoritative teachings of the Christian tradition, or as exemplifying Christian love. And yet the producers of Obsession want the viewers to take Gabriel as an authoritative expert on Islam and Muslims. Somehow when Gabriel describes the whole "Islamic world" as having "no soul", I suspect that we are no longer in the realm of "we are not talking about Islam, we are talking about Islamic radicals" position that the producers of Obsession hide behind. No wonder that the [NY Times described her as a "radical Islamophobe."](#)

Christ reminded us that by their fruits (and words) you shall know them. And the words of these hate-filled so-called experts speak for themselves.

### **Conclusion:**

The massive scale of the Obsession campaign raises a number of disturbing questions: it does point to the ease with which foreign groups from Israel have established non-profit organizations in the United States to sway US elections by working with fringe from the pro-Israel lobby, Republican, and Evangelical community. While their ideology is marginal, their wealth and influence is anything but marginal. Non-profit organizations seeking to exert a political influence is not illegal, but non-profits seeking to endorse political candidates and swaying elections is, and this is precisely what the network behind the Obsession DVD seeks to do.

The "Obsession Project" also does point to the eroding standards of journalism. Why has mainstream American journalism been so slow to pick up on these networks, all of which are publicly available, with some investigation?

The Obsession Project also points to the ever-increasingly poisonous political climate in our country, where demonizing an entire ethnic or religious community seems to be becoming more and more commonplace. We have seen African-Americans, Hispanic, Muslims, Gays and Lesbians, and others characterized in such a fashion. Perhaps no community in the West has been the victims of millennia-long persecution and "Other-ing" campaigns as has the Jewish community. That makes it all the more devastating, and disappointing, that centrally-situated and powerful Jewish organizations from both Israel and the United States are now deploying the same Other-ing strategies against other minority groups, with hardly a voice of dissent being heard from other

Jewish organizations. Indeed, Obsession is already tearing down bridges of dialogue between Muslim and Jewish groups across the country that had taken years to establish.

It is readily admitted that Israel remains both a rallying cry and a source of tension for many American Jewish organizations and American Jews. There are important fissures in the American Jewish community over all issues, including that of Israel. No one group speaks for all American Jews, who have often had an exemplary legacy of peace and justice activism. Indeed, one can point to many American Jews who have taken the lead in criticism of Israeli human rights violations against Palestinians. One important question that has yet to be answered is whether propaganda like Obsession will be met with silence by the Jewish community, or if it will be spoken against by all (Muslims, Jews, Christians, etc.) who are committed to peace and social justice.

Lastly, we do note from historical experience that campaigns like this tend to increasingly lower the bar of what is acceptable speech as opposed to “hate speech.” Make no mistake about it: there will be follow up projects. The Clarion Fund has already declared that its next project is a documentary titled The Third Jihad. The synopsis is as follows: [“How is radical Islam operating inside the West? Is a subversive ‘cultural jihad’ underway? How does radical Islam plan to bring America to its knees? What is the endgame?”](#) This documentary is set for an October 2008 release date. In other words, if Obsession was about the danger of Radical Islam “over there”, Third Jihad will make the case that this same threat exists “over here.” One shudders at the thought of the hate these pieces of propaganda are producing against members of the American Muslim community.

We can either keep going down this slippery slope of accusations and blanket generalizations, or we can bond together and rise up to say Enough! The point is not only that Muslims are being targeted, it is the very poisoning of our cultural discourse, and our hopes for a pluralistic American society that can welcome and embrace pluralism. To quote Martin Luther King, “Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars.” What we need now is less of the hateful heat of Obsession (and its networks), and more light from all of us who are committed to a just and pluralistic future for all of us.

Towards that day, starting today....

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