

Channel 4's 'Complicit', a drama about terrorism, torture and race, has been broadly praised by reviewers in the British press. Though it has been suggested as offering an extra edge of complexity than other shows in the genre, Muslims seem framed as duplicitous, violent and in opposition to British values.

Edward (David Oyelowo) is an MI5 agent involved in investigating a terrorist group with international links, believed to be plotting a terrorist attack in Britain. Waleed (Arsan Ali) is then arrested in Egypt in connection with the plot. Complexity is added to the drama by the consideration of whether torture would appropriate way to extract information from Waleed, as well as by Edward's belief that institutionalised racism is holding back the progress of his career, and his investigation in to the terror plot.

'Complicit' sheds light on the effects the perception of institutional racism might have, but the drama pays no attention to the reiteration of cultural stereotypes of Muslims. What viewers see are the effects that being reduced to a racialised 'other' might have for black people, but Muslims are not given the same complexity of narrative.

Complicit starts with an air of suspicion, the call to prayer, followed by Muslims burning poppies in YouTube videos. The cinematography lends an air of suspicion, where the camera zooms in at the Qur'an swinging in the rear-view mirror of the taxi of an informant. There is the impression of ominous threat when Muslims are shown. Later, in the scene when Waleed beckons on MI5 agent Edward with a racist slur, the language of 'us' versus 'them' is ever present in Edward's speech. Britain is described as having given social services to 'those' Muslims, with terror the only gift offered in return. It renders Muslims outside of British identity, and incapable of any form of criticism.

This point is disputed by Arsan Ali. Stating that dramas such as '24' and 'Homeland', invoke a "mythology that every single dark-skinned guy is a baddie", the ambiguity of Waleed's character offers "a refreshing change". Yet neither Waleed, nor other Muslims in the programme, are ever seen outside of a prism of mistrust, of questionable allegiances and of threat. Interestingly, Channel 4's scheduling department decided to broadcast 'True Lies' directly after the airing of 'Complicity', suggesting the Sunday night tonal unity of terrorist bad guys who speak Arabic trying to destroy things.

This drama cannot be blamed as the sole source of fear of Islam and Muslims, but as a reiteration of a narrative that frames Muslims negatively.