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The evolution of Hollywood's representation of Arabs before 9/11: the relationship between political events and the notion of 'Otherness'

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ABSTRACT

This article will deliberate on the political motives behind the stereotypical image of Arabs in Hollywood in the period before 9/11. Hollywood has always played a propagandist as well as a limitative role for the American imperial project, especially, in the Middle East. This study suggests that the evolution of this representation has been profoundly influenced by political events such as the creation of Israel, the Iranian Islamic revolution and the demise of the Soviet Union. Hollywood's presentation of Arabs through a distinctive lens allows America, through Hollywood, to present the Middle East as 'alien' and so helps to make it an acceptable area for the exercise of American power.

The interpretations of Hollywood's representation of Middle Easterners involve different, often contradictory, types of image. They also suggest that the intensification of the Arabs' stereotypical image over the last century from 'comic villains' to 'foreign devils' did not occur in a vacuum but, certainly, with the intertwinement of both political and cultural interests in the region. It is believed that this was motivated indirectly by U.S imperial objectives.

KEYWORDS

Imperialism, Propaganda, Hollywood, Arabs, Politics and Others.

Introduction

The Middle East has long been ubiquitous in American cultural rhetoric; topics featuring Arabs and Muslims appear in various American media including discussions, news coverage and, most accessibly and influentially, in films and television entertainment programmes.

From the earliest days of Hollywood, filmmakers have portrayed Arabs and Middle Easterners in exotic ethnic terms (Steinberg, 2002, p.206). This has served as the perfect backdrop for film industry productions in which they have played the villain opposite American 'good guys' and so created a stereotypical image of 'Otherness'. Many attempts have been made to analyse this negative Arab stereotype by showing how American cultural fears, which stem from challenges to national ideologies and myths, have led to the creation of the dangerous 'Arab Other'.

Initially this chapter will trace the evolution of Hollywood's representation of the Middle East dating from when the camera started cranking to the first years of our current century, wherein the stereotypical image is highly negative. It is useful to study the origins of this defamation as described by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* (1987). He pointed out how Orientalism contributed to the creation of the dichotomy between the West and the East, whereby the first dominates the second, and where the East was depicted or identified as the West's 'Other' and the source of its identity.

In order to justify their imperialist activity in the East, Said shows how eighteenth-century British officials embraced 'Orientalism' as a self-serving view of Asians, Africans, Arabs and Muslims in terms of their perceived deficiencies and inferiority, a view that was used to rationalize their own imperial activities along with those of most other imperialist countries. For the British Orientalist, 'Ottoman despotism, Islamic obscurantism and Arab racial inferiority had combined to produce a backward culture that was badly in need of Anglo-Saxon tutelage' (Little, 2004, p.10). With power shifting from Britain to America after 1945, Said followed the subconscious transfer of this image and discourse to American popular attitudes and foreign policies towards the Middle East (Said, 1978, p.284).

Said mentioned that Orientalist work or the representation of the East were intimately entangled with the military, economic and political strategies of western countries. This work was also pertinent to literature, where Said provided a significant framework for Orientalism as practised in the West, with particular attention to the United States. However, he presents no specific criteria for the evolution of this negative image in the western media, chiefly in cinema, where some examples would have been welcome.

Said presented Orientalism as a multifaceted discourse, a 'textual relation' (McAlister, 2001, p.9) focusing on the characterization of Arabs and Muslims according to three major dogmas, the first of which was to create a systematic difference that distinguished the civilized West from the backward East. This can be seen for example in American films, especially the earliest productions where Egyptian Arabs are comically portrayed as villains, cowardly and barbaric, awful and sinister (Khatib, 2006, p.5). Later, Hollywood proceeded to represent Middle Easterners not only as villains but also as lacking in morals and honour as is obvious in movies like the *Hostage* series (1986-1992), in which we see Arabs on a plane brutally raping and killing not only females but mothers and the elderly on board. Also we traditionally see that the Arab criminals are captured by the American hero. The most important point is that these Arabs really need, and will still need, American assistance as represented in *Three Kings* (1999), where the American Army protects Iraqi civilians from their oppressive government. In this way Orientalism reduces the 'Other' in a systematic process of distortion to justify the American role in the region. As Said described, the American media repeats the political line that 'they must be foreign devils, otherwise what is our gigantic military machine doing there?' (nd).

The second dogma Said presented is that Orientalism tends to generalize the Western perception of the Orient and purposefully ignores the diversities between Middle

Eastern countries. Thus, the presentation of the East was 'scientifically objective' and this is another way by which the West tries to justify its hegemony over the East (Said, 1978, p.301). Said shows that Arabic culture was decisively distorted by mixing the myth with the heritage and the reality with history as portrayed in early Hollywood productions in terms of harems, magic lamps, desert dwellers, mastery and decadence, irrationality and backwardness. Said's Orientalism actually traced the relationship between these historical images and imperial objectives in the region (McAlister, 2001, p.9).

Finally, Orientalism produces the idea that the Orient is a perilous place that should be controlled and this is presented clearly in Hollywood movies, wherein, Arab associations continue to be a threat, not just for the West but also for the East itself. Thus, Said states that the relationship between the Orient and the Occident is that of imperialism, domination and hegemony and it 'is hegemony (...) that gives Orientalism (...) durability and strength' (Said 1978, p.7).

Unlike Said, Jack Shaheen (2001) deliberated on the Arab stereotype as shown in 900 films in his huge documentary book *Reel Bad Arabs*. Shaheen scrutinized the slanderous history dating from the cinema's earliest days to the year 2001 and concluded that Hollywood rendered the Middle East in exotic terms that stoked ill feeling, distrust and loathing. Shaheen emphasized that Hollywood's presentation of Arabs as a pestilential threat was wildly alienating, he writes, the Muslim Arabs continue to surface as the threatening culture 'Others' (Shaheen, 2000, p.23). He believed that this depiction has been changed and fluctuates according to the evolution of world politics. The consistent movie representations of Middle Easterners that he has documented include:

Bearded Mullahs, billionaire sheiks, terrorist bombers, black Bedouins, and noisy bargainers. Woman surface either as gun toters or bumbling subservients, or as belly dancers bouncing voluptuously in palaces and erotically oscillating in slave markets. More recently, image-makers are offering other caricatures of Muslim women: covered in black from head toe, they appear as uneducated, unattractive and enslaved beings, slowly attending man, they follow several paces behind abusive sheiks

(Shaheen, 2000, p.23).

In his documentary work, Shaheen dissected the perpetuation of this malignant stereotype and how and why it had grown and spread in the film industry. He also warned of the deleterious effect of the alienation process on the American social construction asking what may be done to change Hollywood's defamation of Arabs. Although Shaheen's earliest research was on U.S. Television, he finds that motion pictures use images of the Middle East quite like those he observed in television depictions. On the 'silver screen', as he put it, the Muslim Arabs continue to surface as foreign 'Others' (1987, p.23).

In fact today's 'Reel Arabs' are more stereotypical than yesteryear's, the portrayal of Arabs in the cinema hasn't changed, and maybe is getting worse, and that is the problem, Arabs are presented in racial and religious forms (Muscati, 2002, p.132). Shaheen argued why Hollywood seems averse to staging the more positive side of the Arab heritage, he pointed out the Arab contribution to America and other civilizations

in science, arts, architecture, agriculture and literature. He argued that it is hard to find any Arabs represented as talented and hospitable citizens: lawyers, bankers, doctors, homemakers, engineers and environmentalists. From 1896 until today filmmakers have projected all Arabs as a public enemy bent on terrorizing civilized Westerners, (Shaheen, 2001, p.3-4).

Jack Shaheen pointed out that he is not saying that Arabs should not be portrayed as villains, but it is unjust that all Hollywood depictions of Arabs are bad ones; the slanderous image of Arabs literally maintains these adverse portraits across generations without even one exception. The image of Arabs as detestable is continued to include not only women and older people but also youths and children who participate in sporting events. They are usually projected as grimy children, killer's assistants, and robbers. These, along with many other examples, simply maintain the rigid, repetitive, scurrilous and stereotypical image. Shaheen's book aimed to guide the reader by presenting more than 900 films in which Arabs, either on the screen or printed in the scenarios, are grouped into five defamatory Arab character types - Villains, Sheiks, Egyptians, Palestinians and the members of a Harem - many of which overlap.

However, Shaheen's *Reel Bad Arabs* can be seen as an indispensable reference tool to help find films that abuse Arab characters. Shaheen's work is capable of expansion in order to investigate the source of propaganda images, despite his assertion that the perpetuation of the attitudes he describes was purposeful and politically motivated.

Tim Jon Semmerling (2006) argues that Shaheen's cumulative work does not reveal what it could about these films. He adds that the construction of 'evil' Arabs as an evolution of exoticism should be explored in greater depth, for example Shaheen's discussion of *Rules of Engagement* takes up only two inches of text, which is 'by far too little' (Semmerling, 2006, p.3). While the films drive the audience to be aware of their obsessive cultural use of 'evil' Arabs, Semmerling suggested that Shaheen should add a section to his book exploring the use of the Arabs as a replacement threat for the Soviet Communists.

Brian Edward, Assistant Professor of English and Comparative Literary Studies at North-western University is one of the few authors to have made a direct link between the end of the Cold War and a shift in Hollywood, leading to Arabs and Muslims playing the 'enemy role' instead of Soviet communism. 'With the end of the Cold War (*sic*),' he writes 'a new foe quickly took the place of Soviet communism in the imagination of many Americans, much of the same energy that animated American fear of the "red" menace (allegedly the Soviets) shifted during the 1990s to panic in response to the "green" terror (which is the use of terrorism by militant Islamic fundamentalism)' (2001, p.13). Edwards draws on his experience as a literary critic and finds that the negative stereotype of the Middle East - designated as 'Hollywood Orientalism' - is persistent and insidious.

In his study, *The Evaluation of Hollywood Portrayals of Soviet and Middle Easterners 1980-2000*, Jamie C. Fries criticises Edward's work, describing it as lacking in historical documentation with conclusions that 'lean toward the overwrought' because the exotic elements of the depiction of Arabs were already in existence. Fries sees the real questions as being the way in which this stereotype was

amplified and why (2005, p.33). He points out that the different stages of substituting the Middle Easterners served American foreign policy objectives and he tried to examine the link between U.S. diplomacy and popular film's portrayal of both the Soviets and Arabs. Fries claims that this determination, although hard to prove, is true (2005, p.33).

Fries agrees with Michel Suleiman, who questioned the image of Arabs and Muslims in the American media, that Hollywood's representation of the Middle East 'ebbed and flowed with the foreign policy realities of the United States across time' (2005, p.320). Fries addressed various examples of Hollywood productions and posits that, whether it facilitated its mission or not, the American evaluation of countries and political events, such as the Iranian revolution and the Arab oil embargo of the U.S., was observable. He categorized two levels for these depictions: the early depiction of Middle Easterners showed the absence of a diplomatic strategy in the region before WW2, focusing only on ethnic and stereotypical exoticism rather than politics; the second depiction of the region gained in popularity after the Iranian revolution, when the Middle East took on the role of enemy in American films. As time wore on, the growing numbers of attacks by Middle Eastern terrorists gave Hollywood ample opportunity to show Middle Easterners in a strongly negative light (Fries, 2005, p.320).

Suleiman asserted that Hollywood's stereotype of Arabs purposefully persists with the concept of 'Otherness' in order to segregate them as primitive, backward and dangerous people that need, and will continue to need, American help. He believed that the U.S. has used propaganda to facilitate its political objectives inquiring why Hollywood for more than a century has been perpetuating a hostile relationship with most of the Middle Eastern world (Suleiman, 1999, p.34). He concludes that this has been purposeful and highly motivated, especially when it comes to the Arab-Israeli conflict. In addition, he traced the origin of American stereotypes of the Middle East to when U.S. superpower and oil interests clashed with Arab Nationalism and collided with the Iranian revolution and Islamic influence (Suleiman, 1983, p.340-341).

To obtain a considered and wide-ranging view, the research will also lean on one of the most comprehensive treatments of the Middle Eastern stereotypes, the book *Split Vision, The Portrayal of Arabs in the American Media*, which is edited by Edmund Ghareeb. The book's complicated form offers a variety of sources and information and reveals previously unknown aspects of American media policy towards the Middle East, through a variety of opinions, including interviews with considerable and influential media personalities, such as Richard Valeriani, Jim McCartney and Peter Jennings, besides scholarly analyses.

In her study *Images of the Middle East in Contemporary Fiction*, Janice J Terry, the Professor of History at Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti agrees with Suleiman's assessment that Arab stereotypes are politically motivated. She noted that portrayals of the Arab-Israeli conflict are obviously unbalanced. She writes that 'pro-Zionist supporters quickly recognized the effectiveness of popular fiction as a vehicle to establish and reinforce sympathy for Israel' (1983, p.315).

In her study *Arab/Muslim 'Otherness'* Sina Muscati asserted that the American media, including Hollywood, always orchestrates its outputs to serve American Foreign Policy objectives in the Middle East, thus the concept of Otherness is amplified accordingly (2002, p.131-132), and this opinion has been explored in detail by Lina Khatib in her book *Filming the Modern Middle East*. Khatib asserted that the alienating picture of Arabs as threatening 'Others' is profoundly linked to political events associated with the Middle East (2006). Thus, in this chapter the research will illuminate the evolution of this stereotype from the early stages to the present day.

First, the early stages

Dating from the earliest days of the movies to the period of the Cold War, the Arab image has been badly blurred, the image of the Arab had been formed by magic lantern shows of various epics and Crusades against the 'murdering infidel', by the sultan of the Arabian Nights and by the Sheik films of Rudolph Valentino in the 1920s (Ghareeb, 1983, p.ix). McAlister reminds us of the influential role of Orientalism, especially in this period, in creating a certain type of lens through which Americans have represented the Orient as the stuff of children's books and popular movies (2005, p.8), a world of fantasy bundled with funny caricatures of Arabs (2005, p.9).

Sumiko Higashi agrees with McAlister that Americans drove the Arab image in the Orientalist world which was highly supported by Siegel-Cooper productions such as a six-week-long 'Carnival of Nations' and an 'Oriental Week' which was a classic representation of Arabian fantasy (1994, p.89-90) in which the Orient became a 'highly visible symbol in the emerging structures of a consumer culture' (McAlister, 2005, p.21). Conquering new markets was an essential requisite to improve both production and consumption in the American economy (Jacobson, 2001, p.6). Many of these narratives found their way onto the Big Screen, for example, *Garden of Allah*, was transformed into silent films in 1917 and 1927. It is about an English woman who finds sexual adventure in the Sahara with an Arabian Sheik, wherein Arab life was satirically characterized. With such themes, Arabian fantasy consequently became a phenomenon in the cinema (Leach, 1993, p.111).

Garden of Allah, exposed the classic features that were embodied in Orientalist work about the Middle East, where most of the action takes place in the desert and the Arabs function as 'mystics and dimwits' (Shaheen, 2001, p.215). Most of the films that followed such as, *Flame of the Desert* (1919), *An Arabian Night* (1920), *Arabia* (1922), *Tents of Allah* (1923), *Fleetwing*, (1928), and of course the famous versions of *Aladdin*, *Ali Baba* and *The Mummy*, were repeating or even documenting the stereotypical portrait of Arabs and Muslims.

Hollywood productions in this period show a great desire to expel or expose Middle Easterners as 'Otherness,' - 'the white men's burden' - in movies like *The Desert Song* (1929) and *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad* (1934). These show white Western men rescuing the Eastern people from primitive barbarian sheiks (Judith, 1993, p.34). Another side of the defamation is to be seen in *Hollywood Harems* where Diya Abdo illustrated that, while Arab males are typically portrayed by Hollywood as disgustingly sinister and ruled by their sexual desire, Arabian females appeared in stereotypical representations as being humiliated, demonised and eroticised (2002,

p.235-236). Another point in *Hollywood Harems*, is Hollywood's paradoxical portrayal of the Arab female as either bosomy belly dancers leering out from diaphanous veils or as shapeless Bundles of Black driven by their males (Shaheen, 2001, p.22). Abdo claimed that this delusive representation was complementing 'some concepts in postcolonial theory, the most relevant of which is Orientalism' (2002, p.229).

Another stereotypical idiosyncrasy of this period of Hollywood movies is the representation of the Arabian Sheik. Shaheen pointed out those American films began to present the image of a typical sheik. Instead of presenting a sheik as an elderly man of wisdom, screenwriters damaged the real values of Muslim religious leaders as sheiks through 160 films portraying them as a 'stooge-in-a-sheet', slovenly, hook-nosed, dwelling in tents, always intent on capturing pale-faced blondes for their harems. In *Sheik Hadj Tahar Hadi Cherif* (1894), *Power of The Sultan* (1907), *The Sheiks* (1921), *The Fire and The Sword* (1914) and *The Sheik's Wife* (1922) and *The White Sheik* (1928) Arab Sheiks move to swiftly and violently deflower Western maidens. Edward Said explained that 'the perverted sheikh can often be seen snarling at the captured Western hero and blonde girl...and saying 'My men are going to kill you, but they like to amuse themselves before they do'' (Said, 1997, p.19-20).

Plus, these films tend to defame or destroy the Middle East culture by mixing its heritage with Islamic principles. Shaheen claims that 'producers have tarred an entire group of people with the same sinister brush' (2001, p.11). He mentions hundreds of movies that call Arabs: 'jackals', 'rats', 'bastards', 'pigs', 'devil-worshippers' and show them in ruthless, uncivilized and filthy images (2001, p.11).

The basic strategy is to improve American superiority, brutal Arabs versus heroic Americans. Actually this was indicative of the interplay between U.S. policy and U.S. businesses that was based on economic interests (McAlister, 2001, p.30). In this period, America was replicating its model of economic, political and cultural 'development' (Raines, 1983, p.69) and later this strategy shows suitable preparation for a second period of military expansion.

Second, after WW2

The best illumination for this period comes from Melani McAlister in her book *Epic Encounters* (2005). She is uniquely placed to reveal what she calls 'the often invisible significance of the Middle East to American policy' and claims that Hollywood reconfigured American investment in the Middle East through Biblical constructions. She pointed out that with the creation of Israel, Hollywood released epic films such as, *The Ten Commandments* (1956), *Exodus* (1960), *El-Cid* (1962), *The Prodigal*, (1955), *Solomon and Sheba* (1959) and *Ben-Hur* (1959), and she described it as an overlapping between religious and political interests on one side and seeking to repulse Soviet influence in the region on the other.

This period witnessed the beginning of Hollywood's substitution for the U.S. propaganda machine (Robb, 2004, p.15). Cultural, economic and political conditions in America led to a further extension of the Orientalist model of the Middle East to the American audience. With the creation of Israel in 1948, the representational dynamic became associated with the meaning of the Middle East as a historical

construction besides (of course) societal depiction, thus, biblical and historical stories were used to define the original rights for Arabs and Muslims in the 'Holy Land' (McAlister, 2005, p.55-56). These three films support the allegations that the 'Holy Land', in particular Palestine (which had been ruled by the Ottoman Empire since 1517), was connected to the West through Jewish and Christian history (McAlister, 2005, p.13). In *The Ten Commandments*, the film is staged as described in the Bible; Moses frees the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, leading them to the Promised Land (Shaheen, 2001, p.473). The film was religiously inflected with moral and political lessons about freedom and revolution and slave states.

Alan Nadel claims that the Biblical form of these movies should be read in terms of both the policy of containment and American foreign policy in the Middle East, (Nadel, 1993, p.421). The strategic importance of the Middle East required a full containment of the Soviet influence in the region, based on the Truman Doctrine declared in 1947, by which the U.S henceforth committed itself to providing military assistance for any country threatened by oppression or outsider force. In his study *The United States and the Middle East, 1945-1993*, H.W Brands proposes that the Truman Doctrine, 'amounted to an American declaration of the Cold War' (1994, p.17). Later, President Eisenhower wrote, 'no region in the world received as much of my close attention and that of my colleagues as did the Middle East' (Brands, 1994, p.19).

U.S. commitment to the Middle East referred to three essential interests that heighten its strategic importance - religious origins, support for Israel and access to oil wells as an irreducible material interest (McAlister, 2005, p.35). America started its project in the Middle East by separating the region from European imperialism (the process of decolonisation) on one side and the control of the threatening influence of communism on the other. The Hollywood production *Exodus* employs very similar strategies in describing the Israeli struggles against Nazi oppression. The story, which was based on Leon Uris' book of the same name (Shaheen, 2001, p.189), deliberates the Zionists' perspective of the founding of Israel. The film shows Jewish endurance under the British Mandate and in Nazi Germany in order to reach Palestine. While the film includes a moral message about revolution against oppressive power, it was heavily weighted towards Israel in its conflict with the Arabs and (of course) with the same form of depiction, confirming the 'American impressions of Israelis as heroes, and of Arabs as villains' (Shaheen, 2001, p.189). Also this film reflected the American involvement in the Middle East because it did more to polarize American public opinion in favour of Israel than any other presentation by Hollywood or the Media in general.

The other example was in one of Hollywood's greatest productions of the last century, *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), with its unforgettable performances by some of the greatest actors in this period, Alec Guinness, Anthony Quinn and Omar Sharif. It shows the adventures of the British hero played by Peter O'Toole in the colonized Arab states, which, ironically, gave the movie unexpected popularity, especially with Middle Eastern audiences. The title character strives to unify the Arab tribes to fight the brutal and self-serving Turkish imperialism (Fraser, 2006, p.131-132). Although the film included an unrepresentative depiction of the Middle East, the notion of exoticism did not vanish from the screen; the old feature was painted with moral lessons.

In *Ben-Hur* (1959), Charlton Heston played the title role showing both Arabs and Jews suffering from the oppression of ancient Rome.

The U.S. defined itself as the alternative power during the colonial period. In 1956 President Eisenhower decisively refused to support Britain and France in their attack on Egypt, moreover, the President threatened to stop shipments of American oil to Britain. The U.S. worked to eliminate the British influence in the Middle East. For many years after Britain granted the country nominal independence in 1948, Britain considered Egypt as a part of the British Empire, but, when Nasser came to power in 1952, they failed to maintain the same political influence which led the former colonial powers - Britain and France – to make a military intervention after the nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956. For the Americans, it was crucial to replace the imperial powers and gain what they felt to be appropriate access to the Middle Eastern oil (Lenczowski, 1990, p.40-55).

The representation of the Middle East has been drawn via Biblical themes, the foundation of Israel in the Middle East, the Arab-Israeli conflict and separating the Middle East from the colonizing powers. All these issues were deliberated with a stressing of the region's Otherness. Hollywood's representation of Arabs kept them in the same stereotypical image, which was actually an extension of the Orientalist perspective on the Middle East, as inferior and backward and with a very minor role. However, movies were beginning to show the Middle East in story lines with a political bent (Fries, 2005, p.7).

Third, the 1970 Arab oil embargo

The Hollywood offensive against the Middle Eastern countries was ratcheted up dramatically in the early 1970s with the Western oil crisis. The Arab-Israeli conflict produced unexpected problems when OPEC, an organization of mostly Arab Oil Petroleum Exporting Countries, announced an embargo on oil shipments to Israel's allies, in October 1973. Arab leaders declared their solidarity with Egypt and Syria in their confrontation with the West by embargoing the oil until Israel pulled out of the occupied territories. When Saudi Arabia imposed its oil embargo against the U.S., Hollywood came to see the Middle East as a growing threat (Brands, 1994, p.19). In this period the American media and Hollywood represented the Arabs outside their Biblical context with more emphasis on their 'Otherness' (Khatib, 2006, p.10).

Arabs were viewed as primitive people living in the desert but where Arabs were found, so was oil and this indispensable energy source gave them the power to control Western livelihoods. Michael W. Suleiman believed that Hollywood was repeating the governmental line of showing that Arabs are a real threat but that they are united only in their hostility to the West and in their opposition to Israel (Suleiman, 1983, p.389). In this period a new breed of 'politically minded' films made their way to the big screen, (Fries, 2005, p.144), especially after 1972, when political events followed the already distorted image of the Middle East as a strike force of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), calling themselves 'Black September', hijacked and murdered eleven athletes at the Olympic Games in Germany, boosting the general idea of the radical Arab opposition to Israel. Later, Hollywood released *Black Sunday* (1976), a film that shows how terrorism was becoming removed from the Middle East into the Western world itself (Shaheen, 2001, p.104-105).

In the film, a group similar to Black September is planning to use the Goodyear Blimp to blow up Miami's Florida Stadium where the American President and the audience are attending a game. It was obvious that the massacre at Munich and the furious public response to it had damaged the Palestinian cause to the extent that the PLO leader pledged to end all guerrilla or terrorist activity outside Israel. However, for Americans, the propaganda machine was working to bridge the gap between worldwide security and Arab terrorism and Hollywood often began to fictionalise terrorism within the Islamic context (Semmerling, 2006, p.99-101). Although *Black Sunday* involved the same genuine incidents and realities, the film showed a real extension of the Orientalist practice of obscuring other realities and distorting the image of the Middle East in a way that obviously served the American imperial objectives in the region (Fries, 2005, p.144).

America's presence in the Middle East was censured for many reasons, such as helping to overthrow the Iranian elected government to impose the brutal dictatorship of the Shah to guarantee the oil supply from the region; their intervention in the Lebanese civil war to support the beleaguered pro-Western (mainly Christian) groups against an increasingly turbulent and radicalized Arab majority (Lockman, 2004, p.119-110) and most importantly, their partiality with Israel in her ideological conflict with Arabs. In all this, Hollywood presented the U.S. role in the region as the power of 'protection' rather than 'invasion' by releasing *The Ambushers* (1967), *Black Sunday*, *Operation Thunderbolt* (1977), *Slavers* (1977), *The Jerusalem File* (1973) and *Embassy* (1973). These films often showed how America protects the region from the growing threat of Middle East terrorism and radicalism.

These movies support Israel in her conflict with clear ignorance of the Palestinian perspective and a lack of concern for their sufferings under the occupation authority. The movies represent the Zionist effort to ensure U.S. support for Israel as an American ally by presenting it as a civilized country surrounded by radical nations. In *Operation Thunderbolt* for example, Arabs are presented as an extension of the Nazi threat, and all Westerners stand side-by-side with Israel against the Arab hijackers. In the film, an Israeli tells a German who does not believe him 'I don't trust Arabs they are really dangerous they will kill us like the Nazis' (Shaheen, 2001, p.358), and the film shows later that this was true.

The Middle Eastern terrorism increasingly became fact through Hollywood's films, and the American-Israeli alliance was also vindicated in *Prisoner in the Middle* (1974), in which the U.S. took the decision to save the world from Arab terrorism when they sent one of her heroes, Tony Steven, to find and disarm a missing nuclear weapon. The film explicitly shows Hollywood's partiality against the Arab and Muslim world (Shaheen, 2001, p.380). With the same theme as *Black Sunday*, *Rosebud* (1975) shows a CIA agent, trying to save three wealthy young Greeks who had been kidnapped by PLO terrorists (Shaheen, 2001, p.402-403). *The Next Man* (1976) shows even more inclination to associate terrorism with the Arab-Israeli conflict; in the film the Arabs opposing peace kill the Americans and the Palestinians kill the Israelis (Shaheen, 2001, p.349). The film provides a clear example of the Orientalist practice of obscuring other realities about the region.

Marouf Hasian explains that these movies were serving the government's political line and giving the justification for the American presence and activity in the Middle East. Hence, the Arabs should be depicted as a filthy and backward nation that needs, and will continue to need, Western aid (1998, p.210-215). Michael W. Suleiman asserted that the manipulation process involves not just media moguls who control most of the Hollywood output, but also the American government via an FBI project, the so-called 'Abscam Operation' (1983, p.340). Suleiman emphasized that this project aimed to reinforce the popular image of the Arab Sheik as a filthy person who is living by oil well revenues, a liar and a cheat, lusting after women and one who may resort to bribery and corruption to get what they want from American legislators. Suleiman believes that the implication of the 'Abscam Operation' was the first indication of the collaboration between the American Administration and the media moguls, including Hollywood. He added that, via this project, a negative Arab image was implanted in the American public consciousness whilst Israel's importance as an American ally was emphasised and strengthened (1983, p.340-341).

The presentations in this period relied on the theme of Arab exoticism and the alienation process with the same portrayal being continued to include for the first time the Arab involvement in political events.

Fourth, after the Iranian revolution

In 1980 events in the Middle East hit the United States as never before. In 1979 America regretfully watched as its long-time Iranian ally, Shah Muhammad Reza, was toppled by the Islamic revolution, the situation was exacerbated dramatically when the leader and spiritual guide of the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, declared that the revolution should be exported to the region and that Israel should be destroyed. Hence, America believed that military and/or cultural containment was required (McAlister, 2005, p.2) and terrorism and the oil threat served as the perfect backdrop for Hollywood movies. The tension between the U.S. and the Middle East heightened, reaching a peak when Khomeini and his supporters denounced the United States as a satanic enemy of Islam (Donovan & Scherer, 1992, p.146).

In 1980 a group of militant students managed to break into the American embassy in Tehran, taking the fifty-two employees inside as hostages. The 444 days of their captivity not only strengthened Khomeini's power to control Iran but also helped to topple American president Jimmy Carter who failed to release the hostages (Donovan & Scherer, 1992, p.147). Whatever the impulses were, this action was a significant moment that authenticated the Orientalist discourse regarding the image of the Middle East. The best illumination of the impact of this crisis is represented by Edward Said in his text *Covering Islam* (1981), where he argued in 'how the media and experts determine how we see the rest of the world' that Muslims are associated with militancy, danger and anti-Western sentiment, because, in all reports, the Iranian revolution symbolized the Muslim world and resulted in the perception of Muslims as terrorists holding the US hostages (1981, p.42-43).

Said pointed out that the media and 'cultural apparatus' of America and the West, presented a concept of Islam based on their ignorance, cultural hostility and racial hatred, thereby, Islam was already 'covered up' (1997, p.43). Said believed that the media images received are 'informed by official definitions of Islam that serve the

interests of government and business' (1997, p.9). The process of labelling the region was driven by the American authorities and emphasized the Orientalist ideological framework to justify their imperial objectives (Dahlgren & Chakrapani, 1982, p.45). Also Kellner has shown how the Western governments were involved in managing the media, covering, manipulating and driving public consciousness in order to convey distorted depictions that were consistent with imperial objectives and government ideologies (1992, p.12, 544-7).

This spectacle was consistent with tragic events like the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the attacks against a group of American marines in Beirut in 1983, the increase in the PLO's military operations against Israel and the Arab support for these activities along with the appearance of Islamic fundamentalist organizations such as Hezbollah, Amal and Hamas with their anti-Israeli operations, including bombing and the hijacking of airplanes. The growing role of Libya's Muammer Qaddafi and his support for anti-American activity, especially the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie in the U.K. in 1988, which followed the U.S bombing of Libya in 1986 and was a source of Arab-U.S. tension. In addition, the Iran-Iraq War and the concerns for the oil supply, as well as the expansion of arms sales to Saudi Arabia, were also significant events (Herman, 1989, p.44). These events all helped to underline the association of the Middle East with the concept of terrorism, and this concept was reflected visibly in American foreign policy and available plot devices for films and novels. Ironically, these events did not use the characteristic plot effects, for example, instead of Israelis, Americans were brought into the primary position as victims of, or eventually as fighters against, terrorism, which is believed to be a new substitution within the Orientalist discourse and an extension of the concept of the dangerous 'other' (McAlister, 2005, p.199).

With the demise of the Cold War, Hollywood focused on the Middle East where Arab/Muslims were locked in battle with America's ally Israel. Thereby, Hollywood released a new genre of thriller movies that not only authenticated the Arab image as being ruthless and dangerous, but also showed them in the main part of the plot. Actually, Arab instructional descriptions worked to contrast the greatness of the American hero with the mediocrity of his Arab counterpart as represented in movies such as the *Delta Force* series (from 1986 to 1991) which were made in Israel and either financed or backed by Israelis (Boggs & Pollard, 2006, p.338). The terrorist enemy was seen as atrocious, religious fanatics who showed no mercy to families and were capable of horrendous crimes, which classes them as being suitable for extermination.

The film fictionalized the 1985 TWA hijacking, of course with Hollywood's intensification, showing that the Arab terrorists are on a mission to attack Miami using a nuclear weapon. The terrorist leader, who was following Khomeini's Fatwa, considered his hijacking to be a 'jihad' against Zionism and American imperialism. Within the thriller framework, the American rescuers released the passengers and destroyed the terrorists. Lee Marvin, cast in the first *Delta Force*, is quoted as saying: 'I like what the picture says...Audiences love to see the bad guy get it. We start blowing up everybody. That's good old American revenge' (Shaheen, 2001, p.158). *Delta Force* was part of a new wave of unprecedented movies that associate Islam directly with terrorist activities, perhaps the most provoking part for the Middle Easterner is the association of the shouting of 'Allah Akbar' with awful actions.

However, McAlister believes that the film reflects U.S foreign policy concerns in the Middle East noting that '*Delta Force Entebbe* functions as the successful (Israeli) model that could revise the U.S failure in Iran' (2005, p.227).

Hollywood developed the theme of terrorist activities in the *Hostage* series (1982-1986-1990). Here, Arab terrorists, showing no mercy towards woman and children, are brainwashed into being ready to blow up not just Westerners but also the Middle Easterners themselves. These two films show an illustration of the Orientalist discourse, whereby the Orient is seen as a vulnerable society and presented as needing the Occident to rescue it from itself (Khatib, 2005, p.75). Such themes were widely featured in movies like *Navy Seals* (1989), which justifies American involvement in the Lebanese civil war by making a great deal of the oppression in the country and distorting it so that it could be considered to be the 'Swaziland of the Middle East', while Beirut is described as a 'shithole' filled with 'rag heads' (Shaheen, 2001, p.14-15). The film shows Charlie Sheen coming to disarm Arab/Palestinian fanatic groups (Hezbollah, Amal, Druze) of their US-made Stinger Missiles; in his mission he manages to rescue Israelis and Americans who have been brutally hijacked by Arabs.

In Roman Polanski's *Frantic* (1988), a platoon of drunken Arabs sets out to obtain a stolen device used for a nuclear weapon when they encounter Harrison Ford who stops the terrorist mission (Shaheen, 2001, p.210). Commenting on the common themes within these and related films, Douglas Kellner pointed out that 'such racist caricatures of Arabs were hauntingly similar to earlier fascist and Nazi depictions of Jews in European popular culture during WW2' (Kellner, 1995, p.86). In his book *Hollywood Goes to War* (2000), Koppes argued that Hollywood was similar to the German propaganda machine in its use of stereotypical frameworks for the manipulation and general mobilization in favour of the war to support the Nazi's war (Koppes & Black, 2000, p.40-44).

Hollywood equated the Middle East with the Nazi threat in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), starring Harrison Ford as a professor of archaeology who sets off to Egypt to prevent the Nazis and Arabs stealing the valuable ancient Ark of the Covenant. This film relied on religion and the Mummy theme; however, it shows the development in Hollywood's representation of the relationship between Nazis and Arabs, especially when compared with *Lawrence of the Arabia* (1962), which shows Western efforts to unify Arab tribes against the German/Ottoman threat during WW1. This indicates the growing desire to exclude Arabs and Muslims as 'others' by featuring them as a secluded society (Khatib, 2005, 74-75). In *Not Without My Daughter* (1990) starring Sally Field, the picture depicts a brutalized Iranian social system through an American woman and wife of an Iranian-born doctor (Betty Mohmody) who refuses to allow her or her daughter to go back to her country. She then starts a dangerous plan to escape from the country; the film sees Iran as being back in the dark ages (Shaheen, 1999, p.35).

In this period Hollywood rendered the Middle East with a hint of exoticism, which was essential for its ideological and cultural containment and it is hard to deny the interplay between Hollywood and U.S. foreign policy to drive the public consciousness. In his book *The Mind Managers* (1973), Herbert Schiller pointed out the growing desire of the controllers of the American media to monopolise and

restrict informational choice wherever they operate, to offer one version of reality which should meet the interests of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East (1973, p.19-20). The Middle Easterners in this period were seen as a brutal nation, aggressive, lacking in sympathy and, most importantly, presenting a cultural and ideological threat that should be contained militarily and culturally. Mustafa Faheem describes it as a new generation of movies that amplified the concept of 'otherness' and served the American imperial objectives in the region (Faheem, 1988, p.24).

Fifth, after the First Gulf War and the end of the Cold War

Many scholars agree that, with the end of Cold War, Hollywood's defamation of Arabs was becoming increasingly frequent and extreme. Russians as the traditional enemy disappeared from action movie plots, instead, a Muslim peril increasingly dominated the cinema, and this shift was in keeping with both American interests and political developments. However, the depiction of the Middle East remained qualitatively different from those movies that had shown the Russians as screen villains. Brian Edward is one of the prominent writers who have made a direct link between the end of the Cold War and the shift in Hollywood which replaced the Soviets by Arabs and Muslims as the growing threat and new rivals. As he puts it 'with the end of the Cold War a new foe quickly took the place of Soviet communism in the imagination of many Americans. Much of the same energy that animated Americans' fear of the "red" menace (the allegedly inexorable and atheistic plot for world domination on the part of the Soviets) shifted during the 1990s to panic in response to the "green" terror (the unpredictable use of terrorism by militant Islamic fundamentalists)' (Edward, 2001, p.13).

Like many scholars, Edward referred the distorted image of Arabs and Muslims to a new genre of Orientalist discourses and the highly persistent notion of exoticism (2001, p.15). Carl Boggs agreed with Edward that Middle Easterners were a replacement for the communist threat and the chosen foil for the American heroes of the U.S. motion picture industry (2006, p.338). McAlister argued that it is essential for the U.S. to keep the image of its soldiers and its ability as a morally superior nation in the public eye (McAlister, 2005, p.250). Also, Daniel Mandel believed that both the 1990 Gulf War and the appearance of Islamic fundamentalist movements, served as the perfect backdrop for the film industry with a new cycle of violent high-tech spectacles (2001, p.22-23). Salam Al-Marayati wrote that the State Department was leading public opinion toward the notion of 'Islamic terrorism'. She said that after the Cold War 'Muslims and Arabs are unfairly singled out' (n.d).

Mandel asserted that 'Islamic terrorism' is a media invention and the allegation that all terrorism is committed by Muslims is propaganda without any basis in fact. He gives a few examples of U.S. government cooperation in media performances ranging from the NBC television series, *The West Wing* to Hollywood productions such as *The Siege* (1998), which depicts a 'series of terrorist bombings by 'Muslims'' (Mandel, 2001, p.20). The clear implication for this film is that terrorism is associated with Islam. Hollywood's productions in this period showed clear ties to Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* motif.

Arabs as terrorists appear once again in the action film *True Lies* (1994), which starred Arnold Schwarzenegger and was directed by James Cameron. The film

tackled the terrorist threat with a Bond-style combination of gangster, western, thriller, comedy action, action, and romantic styles. It reflects the American concerns with being increasingly targeted by Islamic terrorism, as we see Schwarzenegger (Harry) playing an undercover agent who works with his sidekick to foil the machinations of a ruthless Arab terrorist group (Crimson Jihad). Harry manages, with his friend Tom, to follow the criminal plans of the splinter group's leader (Salim) by hacking into computer data at his mansion. The plan was to obtain the stolen nuclear weapon from Kazakhstan, and force the American government to respond to his demand to pull out its troops from the Arabian Gulf or he will blow up an American City each week (Shaheen, 2001, p.55).

Indeed, the film is not just extolling American triumph against 'Islamic Terrorism' but presents the Americans themselves as victims. Actually U.S. policy was in a critical situation, the coalition of the first Gulf War was increasingly disjointed, because of the effects of the American-enforced UN sanctions regime that caused the deaths of hundreds of Iraqis and helped impoverish the Iraqi nation to this day (Muscati, 2002, p.131). The film shows that America is there to foil the 'bad guys' (Shaheen, 2001, 501), so Harry will satisfy the audience and tackle the terrorists and give them their just desserts. In one scene, Harry flies a Harrier, and wipes out all the Arab terrorists, Salim ends up hanging by his gun belt, and the rest are 'squashed' in droves. In familiar Bond style the film ends with sexual shots of Harry with his assistant Helen.

The film exports the notion that Western global interests are threatened by Crimson Jihad, who will show no hesitation in using weapons of mass destruction, hence the Arab portrayal is an authentication of Said's 'Orientalism': civilized Occident versus primitive Orient. *True Lies* perpetuates the ruthless image of Palestinian Muslims as dangerous fanatics wearing traditional 'kuffiyeh', which is symbolic of their struggle with Israel. The film also tried to label all Arabs as being like 'Crimson Jihad' (Shaheen, 2001, p.501).

Arab-American groups objected to the film, which they described as a 'distortion machine'. They said that the association between terrorists and Islam in the movie was based on the fact that they were Arabs (Fries, 2005, p.205). Commenting on this picture, Janet Maslin noted, 'the terrorists are crude, outrageously unflattering ethnic stereotypes; the action and the dialogue are sometimes needlessly vulgar; the body count is high: like it or not, those are the rules of the game' (Maslin, 1994, p.1-column.1). Even if Hollywood was not following the U.S. political agenda, the cooperation between them has been observed many times. The government supported the movie with all its apparatus, and that led the director, James Cameron, to remark 'I think the nature of how we create movies is really changing now. The studio thanks for their cooperation, the US "Department of Defense" and the "United States Marine Corps Aviation"' (Shaheen, 2001, p.500).

In the same style, Hollywood released *Executive Decision* (1996) continuing with Middle Eastern terrorist-themed action and highly censored by the Pentagon (Robb, 2006, p.146). The film shows Kurt Russell as a civilian consultant to Army Intelligence who saves the nation's capital from Arabic-Islamic terrorists who have managed to hijack a Boeing 747 with 406 passengers aboard *en route* to Washington DC. They then begin to show the real face of Arabs when they randomly beat and kill

all the passengers on board, including families, while chanting 'Allah Akbar'. The plan was to use the plane as a weapon to deliver a nerve gas attack to kill as least 40 million people, and with familiar action solutions, Russell's crew managed to get into the hijacked plane through the remarkable manoeuvring of an F-117 stealth fighter, using a special hook-up device that, once the fighter secretly docks with the hijacked plane, allows the commandos and Russell to board and swiftly tackle the hijackers (Shaheen, 2001, p.187-188). Despite the fact that no airplane in the military's arsenal has such capabilities, the Pentagon supported the filmmakers with all assistance to achieve these scenes, on the essential condition that 'fictional portrayals must depict a feasible interpretation of military life, operations and policies.' Thus, the military's image was a main concern for the Pentagon and the State Department, while the 'approved' portrayal of the Middle East was satisfied (Robb, 2006, p.146).

The film is considered to reflect Hollywood's assault against Islam (Boggs, 2006, p.341) by again representing the Middle East in Anti-Arab clichés and depicting Palestinians and Muslims as international thugs. The film showed the terrorists holding the Holy Koran in one hand and a bomb in the other, showing no regret at blowing up the civilians in the name of Allah and saying nothing to explain their hatred; it exists, apparently, because they are Arabs and Muslims. Another comment by Maslin, describes the movie's terrorists as 'unexplained Arab fanatics who draw on every known ethnic cliché' (1994, p.3 Column 1).

In 1998 Hollywood released *The Siege* which is considered to be the most bizarre foreshadowing of September 11, which dramatizes a harrowing conspiracy to attack Manhattan by an Islamic extremist organization (which is close to al-Qaeda) which is distributed in secret cells. The terrorists are followers of their spiritual leader, Ahmed Ben Talal (which is a Saudi name and bears a close resemblance to Osama Bin Laden). When he is captured by the CIA for his anti-Western activities, his followers begin to set off high-explosive bombs across New York City, a situation very similar to what happened on September 11. American politicians are united to face the threat, one Senator demanding 'find out who they are and bomb the shit out of them.' The film also shows investigation into, or speculation about, the terrorist connection outside America, such as in Syria, Iran, Iraq and Libya. The film also reflects American anxiety at the rising dangers from the fanatical organizations like al-Qaeda, which began their activities by bombing American interests in Saudi Arabia and different parts of the world.

Jack Shaheen described his meeting with the Council on Arab Islamic Relations (CAIR) and the producer of the film Edward Zwick, which proved to be almost worthless. Shaheen asked him not to portray 1.1 billion Muslims and Arabs as ruthless gangs, but Zwick responded that he is having one 'good guy' fighting with the FBI, (2001, p.431). This could be efficient only in one situation, if the story was not about Islam at all. Shaheen persisted that it reflects the strategy of Hollywood, and it happened later in the Hollywood productions *Rules of Engagement* (2000), *The Mummy* (2000) and *The Sum of All Fears* (2001). All these films persisted in the use of Orientalism's recognizable elements, which depicts a dichotomy between the civilized West and the backward Orient. The concept of exoticism was highly achieved by a process of alienation, showing Middle Eastern brutality as well as woman's vulnerability. It shows how the situation in the region is badly in need of Western, and in particular American, help. Arabs are politically characterized as

'soldiers of Allah' with no mercy and who do terrible things; they are not just villains but also dangerous and they need to be politically and militarily contained.

In his study *'Muslim Arab,' the Muslim World*, Jack Shaheen commented that alienating Muslims, in particular as a growing threat throughout the world, reflects more 'the bias of Western reporters and image-makers than the realities of Muslim people in the modern world' (2001, p.23). Indeed, the notion of 'otherness' has been extended to ever-higher levels and the Middle East represented as a place of corruption in a way that serves American imperial objectives. As Said described it, the American media, especially Hollywood, repeats the political line that 'they must be foreign devils, otherwise what is our gigantic military machine doing there?' (nd)

In conclusion

It should be considered that Hollywood's representation of the Middle East was outlined using multifaceted factors that shape the relationship between the stereotypical portrait and American imperial objectives in the region. The previous evolution of Hollywood's stereotype shows strong emphasis on Said's Orientalism, which suggests that Arabs and Muslims are staged with a set group of characteristics identifying them as 'Others' for filmmakers and their audience, as well as helping to cement the two unequal halves, Occident and Orient, the first versus the second, a cognitive construction for the region and a certain type of lens that allows America, through Hollywood, to alienate the Middle East and helps to make it an acceptable area for the exercise of American power.

It is significant to analyse Hollywood's portrayal of the Middle East within its historical framework; this means that evolution of political events provides different, often contradictory, interpretations in Hollywood's representation of Middle Easterners. The interplay between American films and Arab stereotype was bounded by the American-Russian Cold War and marked by the Arab-Israeli conflict, it suggest that this intensification in the Arabs' image over the last century from 'comic villains' to 'foreign devils' did not occur in a vacuum but, certainly, with the intertwinement of both political and cultural interest in the region. It is believed that this was motivated indirectly by U.S imperial objectives.

Both the American authorities and corporate media helped to outline the Middle East within an ideological bias that shapes the public understanding of the region. Such a cultural discourse has stressed an epic struggle between the civilized, democratic, modern West and the brutalized, barbaric, primitive East. As Said and his colleagues pointed out, this manipulation should be processed to maintain the notion that these nations need, and will continue to need, American protection not just from their enemy but from themselves as well.

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