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Representations of Muslims in Post-9/11

American Cinema: Images of Imperial Hegemony

in *American Sniper, Babel and 24*

A Dissertation Submitted in Fulfillment of the Requirements for a Doctoral Degree in Arts

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to:

My parents and siblings

My wife and newborn baby girl

Lina.

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Abstracts

This study investigates portrayals of Muslims in post-9/11 American cinema. The motion pictures and television series selected for analysis perpetuate an Orientalist discourse that is aimed at legitimizing the West's hegemony over Arabs. Hollywood's support for the draconian, unprecedented measures the Bush Administration introduced in the tumultuous aftermath of 9/11 does not only reinforce the perception of Muslims as primitive savages deserving of every cruelty inflicted on them, but also goes further to suggest that even Americans who are suspected of espousing views that undercut their country's national security ought to be subjected to similar mistreatment, thus creating a narrative that conflates patriotism with unquestioning support for the government's agenda. Hollywood's anti-Muslim discourse post 9/11 was designed to shape public opinion and lay the groundwork for policies that encroach upon civil liberties. As a point of departure, this thesis draws on a litany of assertions Edward Said made regarding Orientalism, particularly his contention that when the United States emerged as a dominant superpower in the aftermath of World War II, supplanting the once mighty and far-flung French and British empires, it inherited a vast repertory of derogatory stereotypes and essentialist tropes about the Islamic Orient. The films and television series selected for this study abound with familiar Orientalist imagery about Muslims, which aim to lock the public in a perpetual state of patriotic hysteria and lend credence to an imperialist discursive tradition that has for long presented the Orient as a benighted savage that needs to be kept at bay at all costs.

Keywords: Hollywood, Muslims, Orientalism, Hegemony, Post-9/11, Nationalism

تروم هذه الدراسة إلى فحص التصورات التي روجت لها السينما الأمريكية عن المسلمين بعد أحداث الحادي عشر من شتنبر/أيلول. ينتهي هذا البحث الى أن الأفلام والمسلسلات التي تم تحليلها تكرس لخطاب استشراقي يسعى إلى تبرير هيمنة الغرب على العرب. ويتمثل هذا في الدعم اللامسبوق الذي لاقته الإدارة الأمريكية في عهد الرئيس الأمريكي الأسبق جورج بوش من هوليود للقوانين المجحفة والسياسات الراديكالية التي سنتها على ضوء الهجمات الإنتحارية التي شهدتها البلاد في الحادي عشر من شتنبر/أيلول، والتي عكفت من خلال أفلامها على تصوير جل المسلمين كأشخاص بدائيين ومتعطشين للدماء. بالموازاة مع هذا الخطاب، عملت هوليود على كبح أي انتقادات من شأنها أن تشكك في تدبير الإدارة الأمريكية للأزمة التي عصفت بالولايات المتحدة ، عبر الترويج لخطاب يخلط بين الوطنية والدعم اللامشروط لسياسات الأمن القومي التي اتخذتها الدولة بعد أحداث 11 شتنبر/أيلول الإرهابية. يعتمد هذا البحث على مجموعة من الحجج التي قدمها ادوارد سعيد في عمله الإستشراق، خصوصا في الشق الأخير من كتابه الذي يؤكد فيه أنه عندما برزت الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية كقوة عظمى بعد الحرب العالمية الثانية، متجاوزة بذلك الإمبراطوريتين البريطانية والفرنسية، ورثت عن الغرب رصيدا زاخرا من الصور النمطية عن الشرق الإسلامي. يكشف هذا البحث عن المفاهيم الخاطئة التي روجت لها السينيما الأمريكة حول المشرق والمسلمين، والتي كانت تهدف إلى تأليب الرأي العام وجعل العامة رهينة حالة من القومية الهستيرية حتى تبرر بذلك مجموعة من السياسات التي عارضت القوانين الأمريكية وانتهكت سلسلة من المعاهدات الدولية.

الكلمات المفاتيح: هوليود، المسلمون، الاستشراق، أحداث ما بعد الحادي عشر من أيلول، سبتمبر، القومية

Cette étude examine les représentations des musulmans dans le cinéma américain poste-11 septembre. Les films et séries télévisées sélectionnés pour l'analyse perpétuent un discours orientaliste qui vise à légitimer l'hégémonie de l'Occident sur les Arabes. Le soutien d'Hollywood aux mesures draconiennes et sans précédent mis en place par l'administration Bush dans les séquelles du 11 septembre renforce non seulement la perception des musulmans comme des sauvages primitifs méritant toutes les cruautés qui leur sont infligées, mais va également plus loin en suggérant que même les Américains soupçonnés d'adopter des opinions qui portent atteinte aux intérêts de la sécurité nationale de leur pays devraient recevoir le même traitement. Le récit anti-musulman d'Hollywood après le 11 septembre a été conçu pour façonner l'opinion publique et jeter les bases de politiques qui empiètent sur les libertés civiles. Comme point de départ, cette thèse s'appuie sur une litanie d'affirmations d'Edward Said concernant l'orientalisme, en particulier son affirmation selon laquelle, lorsque les États-Unis ont émergé en tant que superpuissance dominante au lendemain de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, supplantant les empires français et britannique qui étaient anciennement puissants, ils ont hérité d'un vaste répertoire de stéréotypes dérogatoires et de tropes essentialistes sur l'Orient islamique. Les films et les séries télévisées sélectionnés pour cette étude regorgent d'images orientalistes familières sur les musulmans, qui visent à enfermer le public dans un état perpétuel d'hystérie patriotique et à accréditer une tradition discursive impérialiste qui présente depuis longtemps l'Orient comme un sauvage inférieur et ignorant.

Mots-clés : Hollywood, musulmans, orientalisme, hégémonie, post-11 septembre, nationalisme

Introduction

For more than a century, Hollywood has projected Muslims through distorted prisms. Like many other ethnic, racial and religious groups, Muslims and Arabs have been relentlessly maligned and unsparingly derided in a plethora of American motion pictures, film serials and television series. The reasons behind Hollywood's unflattering portraits of the "other" are multifarious. The prevalent myths and enduring tropes that have come to define minority groups in the U.S. have historically fostered an atmosphere of fear and hostility, one that aggravated racial tensions and gave the political establishment legal cover to enact restrictive, discriminatory laws. Indeed, as far back as the 1900s, Hollywood has worked in unison with a succession of American governments to promote policies that target the cultural "other". More than any other group, the Islamic Orient—exotic, foreign and distant—failed to break free from the negative stereotypes and reductive clichés that have pervaded American cinema since the beginning of the twentieth century.

The suicide, mass-casualty attacks of 9/11 attracted extensive press coverage. Cohorts of political pundits, foreign policy analysts and former government officials flocked to major media outlets to opine on the unfolding national security crisis. The gravity of the attacks provoked a vociferous outcry, prompting world leaders to pledge their unequivocal support for America's uphill battle against terrorism. The mayhem, shock and confusion that the attacks had triggered created a strained, highly charged atmosphere. An anti-Muslim rhetoric, freighted with sinister overtones and racial innuendo, quickly began to gain traction. The terrorist attacks provided endless fodder for the American

media. Demands for military retaliation crept into the American political discourse. The public, outraged and grief-stricken, clamored for tough and decisive action. Enlisting the help of the media to legitimize its swift and heavy-handed response, the Bush-Cheney administration set off on a course of action that severely eroded America's moral standing, fueling geopolitical tensions and unleashing a war that drained the treasury of trillions of taxpayer dollars. The abrogation of civil liberties that accompanied the aggressive military response came to define George W. Bush's tempestuous tenure, adding to the country's long history of relentless persecution and systemic racism against the "other".

In addition to mainstream media, the American film industry also offered the newly elected Republican government a platform to promote its foreign policy agenda. In the wake of 9/11, Hollywood stepped into its traditional role of propagating narratives that align with the objectives of the ruling establishment. The silver screen became increasingly saturated with imagery that vilified Muslims. The incendiary rhetoric that the American media deployed in the aftermath of 9/11 instigated a wave of frenzied attacks against Muslim Americans.[1] The national security overhauls that had been undertaken sparked intense controversy, but the pressing need to ensure public safety outweighed all other considerations. The contentious policies that had been pushed through had a profound, long-lasting impact on Muslims[2]—many of whom are American patriots who roundly denounced the terrorist attacks. In an attempt to halt the rise of extremism and foil future

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[1] See Alsultany, E. (2012). *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation after 9/11*. New York: New York University Press. See also Chapter One.

[2] Ibid

terrorist plots, the Bush administration scrambled to enforce a raft of drastic measures—such as launching the NSA warrantless surveillance program, the enhanced interrogation program and the USA Patriot Act[3]. In an effort to dampen the controversy of these measures—which severely curtailed individual freedoms and circumvented the rule of law—Hollywood released films that championed an ends-justify-the-means approach to national security.

Despite its questionable moral underpinnings and devastating human toll, America's military campaign was projected as the sole possible route to keep the homeland safe. To justify the government's decision to invade Iraq, for instance, Hollywood constructed apocalyptic scenarios and created ominous plotlines that conflated moderate Muslims with the radical fringe. Indeed, the threat of terrorism—always present and imminent—was a central theme in numerous films that were released after 9/11. To persuade the public to support Washington's war efforts, Hollywood peddled a narrative that encouraged religious discrimination and inflamed patriotic passions. Critics who opposed the government's harsh measures faced fierce, heavy criticism.[4] Keeping in line with the vitriolic discourse that characterized the post-9/11 era, Hollywood produced motion pictures and television series that echoed official rhetoric. Anti-war sentiment was dismissed as moral cowardice. Sympathy towards the plight of Muslims was viewed as misplaced loyalty. Even more pernicious was Hollywood's unrelenting effort to lump

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[3] See Bush G. W. (2010). *Decision Points* (1st ed.). Crown Publishers.

[4] See Chapter Two

religious extremists with Americans who disapproved of their government's militaristic approach to national security.[5]

The first chapter lays out the theoretical foundation for this study. Edward Said's detailed critique of Orientalism exposes the insidious nature of the hegemonic discourse that permeated European scholarship and paved the way for French and British imperial endeavors. Said's deconstruction of the Orientalist literary canon underscores the endurance and potency of essentialist representations. The myths that persisted for centuries about the East were resurrected with the advent of film, giving birth to a vast body of visual work that seared the Orient into the American popular imagination. This study employs Said's critical analysis to uncover the Orientalist overtones embedded in the films *Babel* (2006) and *American Sniper* (2014), and the television series *24* (2001-2010). The first chapter presents a brief synopsis of Said's *Orientalism* (1978), highlighting the critic's key arguments and identifying the fundamental similarities between European imperialist narratives and American Orientalist discourse.

Said's book has been the subject of intense critical scrutiny. Bernard Lewis, Ibn Warraq, and Robert Irwin, to name but a few, published critiques that vehemently disputed Said's characterization of the Western literary canon. The criticism that the aforementioned authors leveled at Said's work is examined in the first chapter. Lewis' review of *Orientalism* is scrutinized more closely because of his implacably hostile attitude toward Islam and determined attempts to influence high-ranking government officials to pursue a

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[5] See Chapter Three

hawkish foreign policy toward the Middle East. In a blatant conflict of interest, the British American historian—who famously blamed the 9/11 terrorist attacks on a decaying Islamic civilization— held several briefings at the White House and actively encouraged former Vice President Dick Cheney to adopt a hardline stance against Arabs, compromising his scholarly integrity and cementing his standing as one of the most influential Orientalists of the twentieth century[6]. Said's critique features prominently in this thesis. Indeed, *Orientalism* established a robust theoretical framework for postcolonial and subaltern studies. The enduring legacy of Said's work bears testament to his rigorous analytical methods and cogent, compelling reasoning.

Noam Chomsky's *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda* also provides the theoretical basis for this study. The social critic's theories about wartime propaganda offer deep insights into the close relationship between news media and the political elite. His critical analysis of the warmongering discourse that pervaded American media during the Vietnam and Gulf wars underlines the profound impact propaganda has on public discourse. Chomsky's arguments are utilized to deconstruct *American Sniper*'s narrative about the Iraq war. His work is also instrumental in exposing the government's weaponization of the media to instill fear and suppress anti-establishment narratives. *24*'s justification for the use of torture against American dissidents—some of whom are accused

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[6] See Chapter One

of sedition, but later exonerated—is illustrative of Chomsky's propositions about the dangers of state-sponsored propaganda[7].

The second chapter examines *American Sniper*'s depiction of the Iraq war. The film exemplifies Hollywood's concerted effort to frame the 2003 military invasion of the country as a moral and national security imperative. Despite the bitter backlash that the Iraq war had generated—both at home and abroad, films like *American Sniper* continued to champion the government's bungled military response. Instead of redirecting its focus to the ill-fated trajectory of American foreign policy, Hollywood promoted a discourse that incited more hostility and urged more confrontation. *American Sniper* encapsulates Hollywood's long-standing tradition of producing films that excite jingoistic sentiments and glorify gratuitous military conflicts.

The third chapter investigates portrayals of torture on the television series *24*. The enhanced interrogation program that the Bush administration sanctioned following 9/11 was met with intense blowback. To placate public opinion, Hollywood made films and television series that endorsed, indeed glamorized, the use of torture against terrorist suspects—innocent and guilty alike. The ticking time-bomb scenario that was routinely employed by television series like *24* amplified the narrative that extreme measures are necessary to win the war on terror. Although public opinion is split on the moral legitimacy of state-sponsored torture, it is remarkable that the series went so far as to attempt to justify the practice against Americans whose views and actions undermine their government's

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[7] See Chapter Three

credibility. The third chapter shows how *24* created a narrative that painted American dissidents, Islamic terrorists and innocent Muslims with the same broad, sinister brush.

The fourth chapter examines *Babel*'s representations of Moroccans and their cultures. The "us vs. them" dichotomy that the film seeks to perpetuate suggests that not even America's traditional allies—such as Morocco—are exempted from Hollywood's Orientalist discourse. Depictions of Moroccan women in Iñárritu's *Babel* accentuate the tyrannical patriarchy plaguing Muslim societies. Children—clad in rags and living in squalor—engage in practices that provoke horror. The film capsulizes Hollywood's decades-long vilification of Muslims. The American characters featured in *Babel* provide a complete contrast to their Moroccan counterparts. Representations of the natives borrow from a discourse that has for long presented the "other" as a threat to Western civilization. The eventful journey that the American couple embark on inspires a sense of urgency that *they* cannot be allowed to run amok. The Orientalist tropes that films like *Babel* reinforce about Muslims underscore the inherent superiority of the West, lending a veneer of credibility to an imperialist discourse that urges hegemony and legitimizes subjugation of the natives.

Several considerations influenced the choice of the films and television series selected for this study. The broad audience reach of *Babel* (2006)*, American Sniper* (2014) and *24* (2001-2010) is one important consideration. The films *Babel* and *American Sniper* have both achieved commercial and critical success. Together, they grossed hundreds of millions of dollars at the box office, a testament to the profitability of films set in the

Muslim world. The films received wide critical acclaim and won a series of prestigious awards at various film festivals.[8] Similarly, *24* drew universal critical praise[9] and attracted a large audience throughout its run. More importantly, the series caught the attention of former presidents, supreme court justices and prominent journalists,[10] infiltrating the political discourse and fueling vigorous debates about American foreign policy.

The films and television series examined in this study encapsulate the xenophobic and patently anti-Muslim rhetoric that Hollywood employed—with unprecedented ferocity—following 9/11. They are illustrative of a hegemonic discourse that influenced public opinion and advanced a radical political agenda, the ramifications of which still reverberate to this day. The choice of *Babel, American Sniper* and *24* is meant to underline the pernicious and pervasive effects of ideologies that preach racial bigotry and traffic in religious stereotypes. Furthermore, they are intended to call attention to Hollywood's long-established exploitation of nationalistic sentiments and manipulation of patriotic fervor to foment hatred of the "other."

Like Edward Said's *Orientalism*, this thesis makes use of Michel Foucault's discourse theory and Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony.[11] The Foucauldian discourse analysis, which guides this study, emphasizes the connection of language to power. Foucault's genealogical approach to history illustrates how discourse can be

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[8] See Chapter Two and Chapter Four

[9] See Chapter Three

[10] See Chapter One

[11] See Chapter One

utilized to produce regimes of truths, which help govern social practices and impel individuals to adhere to expected norms.[12] Foucault's arguments about power and its relationship to the formation of discourse are used to investigate the reasons behind Hollywood's persistent misrepresentations of Muslim. Antonio Gramsci's contentions about hegemony also influence this study[13]. The impact that Hollywood had on public perception after 9/11 is a testament to the potency of cultural hegemony. Gramsci's proposition that the ruling class weaponizes cultural institutions to advance their interests and encourage public conformity provides revealing insights into Hollywood's hegemonic, anti-Muslim discourse.

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[12] See Khan T. H. & MacEachen E. (2021). Foucauldian Discourse Analysis: Moving Beyond a Social Constructionist analytic. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*.

[13] See Chapter One for further elaboration.

Chapter One: Orientalism, Media and Propaganda

1. Edward Said's *Orientalism*

Said's *Orientalism* is widely credited with laying the foundation for postcolonial theory, revolutionizing the humanities, and inspiring a paradigm shift in various academic disciplines such as media studies, politics, history, anthropology, and arts.[14] In essence, Said's magnum opus traces the genesis of Orientalism and explores its complex workings. Although Said acknowledges that the Germans, Russians, Spanish, Portuguese, Italians, and Swiss all contributed to the West's understanding and consciousness of the East. he emphasizes that France and Britain's colonial expansion was more impactful in that it left behind a long-standing tradition of imagery about the Orient, which helped "define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.[15]" The Orient, according to Said, is a European creation that evokes haunting landscapes, an odd juxtaposition of romance, exoticism, and eerie memories.[16] As an academic discipline, Said's definition of Orientalism extends to a wide range of fields such as anthropology, sociology, history, and philology. An Orientalist, by extension, is anyone who "teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient.[17]" The academic field of Orientalism, which informed and influenced a diverse array of poets, novelists, political theorists, and imperial

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[14] Burney, S. (2012). CHAPTER ONE: Orientalism: The Making of the Other. *Counterpoints, 417*, 23-39. p. 23.

[15] Said, E. W. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Random House. pp. 1-2

[16] Ibid, p: 1

[17] Ibid, p.2

administrators, made the distinction between the Orient and the Occident abundantly clear and formed the basis for future political accounts and theories about the East.[18]

In his seminal work, Said contends that the West's cultural representations of the Orient are not only willfully distorted, but also inextricably tied to imperialism. From the eighteenth century onward, Said examines the role that Western scholarship had in imagining, creating, and presenting the East. Orientalism, he argues, is an ideological creation that laid the necessary groundwork for 19th-century European colonialism and later facilitated and helped justify US imperial endeavors. Furthermore, he maintains that much of the Western literature that purports to know the East is not only politically and ideologically tainted, but also aims to affirm and bolster a superior European identity.[19] Said's work discusses in painstaking detail the structures and workings of the power relations that characterized and informed the West's colonial discourse about the Orient. According to Said, Orientalism is:

> a built-in system … by which the West not only socially
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> constructed and actually produced the Orient, but controlled
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> and managed it through a hegemony of power relations,
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> working through the tropes, images, and representations of

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[18] Ibid, pp: 2-3

[19] Said, E. W. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Random House. p. 3.

literature, art, visual media, film, and travel writing, among

other aspects of cultural and political appropriation.[20]

Said's iconoclastic critique of Orientalism draws on Michel Foucault's theories about discourse, as detailed in *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1969) and *Discipline and Punish* (1975). The French philosopher, Michel Foucault, was among the first scholars to explore the relationship between power and knowledge. Foucault's interest in the history of knowledge has been well established in many of his writings well before shifting focus to questions about power.[21] During the 1970s, his writings, most notably *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and *The History of Sexuality* (1976), postulated that the reconstruction of knowledge was intimately tied to forms of power and domination.[22] Foucault's interest, it should be noted, was not simply to investigate how different branches of knowledge were compiled during different periods of time, but rather to delve into the epistemic[23] and social contexts which conferred legitimacy on them, thereby rendering them both intelligible and

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[20] Burney, S. (2012). CHAPTER ONE: Orientalism: The Making of the Other. *Counterpoints, 417*, 23-39. p. 23.

[21] Gutting, G. (2006). *The Cambridge companion to: Foucault*. Cambridge: Cambridge university press. P. 96

[22] Ibid, p.95.

[23] The term "episteme" was first discussed by Foucault in his book, *The Order of things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (1966). Foucault maintains that every historical juncture is characterized by an episteme; the total set of structures and rules which enable the production of knowledge and formation of discourse. Foucault's notion of episteme has been compared to Thomas Kuhn's concept of paradigm shift. (See Piaget, J. (1968) *Structuralism*. New York: Harper & Row. p. 132)

authoritative.[24] Based on Foucault's archeological study of knowledge and its relation to power, Said argues that "knowledge of subject races or Orientals is what makes their management easy and profitable; knowledge gives power, more power requires knowledge and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control.[25]" Foucault's theory that discourse constructs "truth," produces systems of representations and regulates social practices underscores the inextricable relationship and interdependency between knowledge and power. It is within this Foucauldian framework that Said seeks to deconstruct Orientalism. "My contention," he writes, "is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient.[26]"

Although Foucault's work has profoundly influenced Said's critique of Orientalism, the two diverge on a few key issues. One fundamental disagreement that Said points to in his analysis concerns the impact individual writers have on their respective fields of study. Unlike Foucault, who does not attribute much significance to individual authors or their work, Said "believe[s] in the determining of [their] imprint … upon the otherwise anonymous collective body of texts constituting a discursive formation like Orientalism.[27]"

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[24] Gutting, G. (2006). *The Cambridge companion to: Foucault*. Cambridge: Cambridge university press. p. 96

[25] Said, E. W. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Random House. p.36.

[26] Ibid. p.3.

[27] Ibid, 23.

His inquiry, therefore, aims to highlight the lasting and far-reaching impact individual texts and authors have on the entire Orientalist canon. Their contributions lend weight and add to the authority of previous work. The homogeneity and unity of Orientalist writings are largely due to their marked tendency to draw on and refer to each other. Said contends that illustrious Orientalists, such as Edward William, had an indelible impression on a vast array of writers who drew on his unparalleled expertise in the Orient to craft their narratives. "Edward William Lane's *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*," Said notes, "was … an authority whose use was imperative for anyone writing or thinking about the Orient, not just about Egypt.[28]" It is this wide circulation of Orientalist ideas by individual writers, such as Lane, that render their work perennial, authoritative and indispensable. Their texts are frequently cited,[29] their expertise is deferred to, and their breadth of knowledge is largely uncontested. The considerable authority of their work is precisely what makes Orientalist discourse entrenched and durable. "Knowledge," Said writes, "… gets passed on silently, without comment, from one text to another. Ideas are propagated … repeated without attribution. … they are *there* to be … echoed and re-echoed uncritically.[30]"

In addition to Foucault's argument about power and knowledge, Antonio Gramsci's pioneering theories about cultural hegemony also provided the basis for Said's critique of

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[28] Ibid, 23.

[29] Said references such Orientalists as Nerval, Flaubert, and Richard Burton whose work on the Orient drew on Edward William Lane. See Said, E. W. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Random House. p. 23.

[30] Said, E. W. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Random House. p. 116.

Orientalism. The Italian philosopher is noted for his departure from the orthodox Marxist framework, which postulates that the ruling class was able to assert control and maintain power through the use of violence and economic coercion. Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony is an attempt to account for Marx's failed prediction that a proletarian revolution was likely inevitable in all capitalist societies. Gramsci maintains that in addition to brute force and economic control, the bourgeoisie relied on social institutions such as the media, schools, and religion—manifestations of cultural hegemony—to justify their rule and seek public consent.[31] Physical force, therefore, is rarely warranted and only employed when the subaltern rebels against the ruling class or attempts to unsettle the hegemonic structures of society. Gramsci argues that in order to legitimize their rule and ensure social order, the dominant class seeks to persuade the working class that their interests are aligned, thereby prompting a union of all forces and guaranteeing the continuity of the status quo.[32] The power the ruling class has to guide social institutions and construct cultural narratives that engender public support for established rules is what obfuscates class structures and makes any meaningful resistance unlikely.

Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony largely informed Said's analysis of European Orientalism. Said argues that cultural manipulation was instrumental in conquering the Orient. "To speak of Orientalism," he writes, "… is to speak mainly,

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[31] See Cole, N. L. (January 6, 2020) "What Is Cultural Hegemony? ThoughtCo. See also Perry, A. (November-December 1976). "The Antimonies of Antonio Gramsci". New Left Review

[32] See Sassoon, A. S. (1991). "Hegemony". In Bottomore, T. *The Dictionary of Marxist Thought*. Blackwell Publishers Ltd. pp. 229-231

although not exclusively, of a British and French cultural enterprise.[33]" To dominate the Orient, France, and Britain sought to manufacture collective consent and encourage support for their colonial designs, appealing to the idea that European identity is superior to that of other races:

> Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient … It also tries to show that European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self. … To believe that the Orient was created—or, as I call it, "Orientalized" —and to believe that such things happen simply as a necessity of the imagination, is to be disingenuous. The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony.[34]

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[33] Said, E. W. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Random House. p. 4.

[34] Said, 2003, pp. 3-5

The potency of cultural hegemony does not only manifest itself in the Orientalist's ability to persuade Europeans of the legitimacy of, indeed moral obligation to, conquer the East, but also to convince the natives that their colonization serves their interests as they are backward and incapable of self-rule. "Orientalist notions," Said asserts, "influenced the people who were called Orientals as well as those called Occidental, European, or Western.[35]" Based on Gramsci's conceptual framework, Said describes how Orientalism facilitated the dissemination of ideologies that gave rise to a hegemonic culture:

> Gramsci has made the useful analytical distinction between civil and political society in which the former is made up of voluntary … affiliations…, the latter of state institutions. …Culture, of course, is to be found operating within civil society, where the influence of ideas, of institutions and of other persons works not through domination but by what Gramsci calls consent. … It is hegemony, or rather the result of cultural hegemony at work, that gives Orientalism … durability and … strength. … There is in addition the hegemony of European ideas about the Orient, themselves reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness[36].

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[35] Said, E. W. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Random House. p. 42.

[36] Ibid, 6-7.

The unrivaled European ascendency at the turn of the eighteenth century made of the Orient a terrain for colonial conquest and academic inquiry. Said notes that Western hegemony gave birth to a "complex Orient suitable for study in the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office.[37]" Indeed, Gramsci's rigorous analysis of the intricate workings of cultural hegemony offers an intriguing insight into the durable, persistent, and deep-rooted tradition of 18th-century European scholarship about the Orient. Said suggests that Orientalist texts are not written in a vacuum. Every cultural production about the East builds upon and refers to past scholarship, which retains its strength and authority through the reproduction of common narratives.[38] Said's examination of Orientalism as an authoritative discourse deals principally with the Orient's representation in political, journalistic, literary, and scholarly texts.

The term "Orient," which encompasses Asia and the East, was used by a broad range of eminent literary figures, including Chaucer, Shakespeare, Mandeville, and Dryden.[39] Orientalism emphasized the sharp, inherent differences between the Oriental and European. "The Oriental," Said writes, "is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, "different"; hence the European is rational, virtuous, mature, "normal.[40]" These irreconcilable differences were not only highlighted in European literary texts, but also fostered by the imperial powers as they administered their colonies. In the nineteenth

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[37] Ibid, p.7

[38] Said, E. W. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Random House. p. 20.

[39] Ibid, p.31.

[40] Ibid, 40.

century, Britain went to great lengths to preserve the perceived purity, racial superiority, and unique strength of the Anglo-Saxon race:

> It became common practice during the nineteenth century for Britain to retire its administrators from India and elsewhere once they had reached the age of fifty-five, … no Oriental was ever allowed to see a Westerner as he aged and degenerated, just as no Westerner needed ever to see himself, mirrored in the eyes of the subject race, as anything but a vigorous, rational, ever alert young Raj.[41]

The demarcation and dichotomy between the East and West, which became more pronounced and distinct through countless encounters of trade, war, and voyages, stretch back centuries. Said argues that it is inaccurate to assume that the work of Orientalism began after the European expansionist campaign in the East. In fact, the vast reserves of knowledge about the Orient, which were centuries in the making, laid the foundation for colonial rule well in advance.[42] Modern Orientalism, which is considered to have begun in the late eighteenth century, brought forth a wide array of artists, politicians, and scholars who turned their attention to the Orient, which stretched from China to the Mediterranean. Napoleon's military invasion of Egypt in 1798 set a model for a "truly scientific appropriation of one culture by another ….Egypt and subsequently the other Islamic lands

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[41] Ibid, 42

[42] Ibid, 39.

were viewed as the … laboratory, the theater of effective Western knowledge about the Orient.[43]"

The rivalry between France and Britain reached its zenith in the nineteenth century, as the two empires competed to widen their spheres of influence and expand their territorial control, especially in the Near East, where Islam was predominant. It was during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Said maintains, that Orientalism metamorphosed from a body of literary and scholarly texts into an imperialist institution.[44] This metamorphosis was enabled and accelerated by an inexorable European expansion. The French and British imperial powers, however, suffered a precipitous decline following World War II. As they no longer commanded the awesome military might and enormous political influence they once exerted, the United States emerged as a new military and economic superpower, replacing the crumbling empires and inheriting "a vast web of interests … [a] massive, quasi-material knowledge stored in the annals of modern European Orientalism.[45]" Following in their European predecessors' footsteps, representations of Arabs borrowed heavily from a rich, familiar reservoir. American literature and media reduced the Islamic Orient to "a camel-riding nomad … an accepted caricature as the embodiment of incompetence and easy defeat.[46]"

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[43] Ibid, 42-43

[44] Ibid, p. 95.

[45] Ibid, p. 285

[46] Ibid.

Said maintains that following the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, slander and ridicule of Arabs appeared to pervade American cultural discourse. Cartoons consistently portrayed Arabs as mustachioed, hook-nosed sheiks lurking behind gasoline pumps.[47] Their leer and malice were especially accentuated to indicate that the vicissitudes of oil markets and acute gas shortages, which hobbled the US economy in the 1970s, were to blame entirely on Arabs. Their moral corruption rendered their access to the enormous reserves of oil illegitimate and unjust. The wealth Arabs accrued seemed even more obscene and underserving after they joined forces to strain an already sagging US economy. "The question most often asked," Said recalls, "is why such people as the Arabs are entitled to keep the developed (free, democratic, moral) world threatened.[48]" In addition to cartoons, Said argues—albeit in passing—that films perpetuate the same reductive generalizations and clichés about Arabs and Muslims. In the chapter he devotes to deconstructing American Orientalism, Said writes:

> In the films and television the Arab is associated either with
> lechery or bloodthirsty dishonesty. He appears as an oversexed
> degenerate, capable, it is true, of cleverly devious intrigues, but
> essentially sadistic treacherous, low, slave trader, camel driver,
> moneychanger, colorful scoundrel: these are some traditional
> Arab roles in the cinema. The Arab leader (of marauders,

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[47] Ibid, p.285-286

[48] Ibid 286

pirates, "native" insurgents) can often be seen snarling as the captured Western hero and the blond girl (both of them steeped in wholesomeness). "My men are going to kill you, but –they like to amuse themselves before." He leers suggestively as he speaks. …the Arab is always shown in large numbers. No individuality, no personal characteristics or experiences. Most of the pictures represent mass rage and misery, or irrational (hence hopelessly eccentric) gestures. Lurking behind all these images is the menace of *Jihad*. Consequence: a fear that the Muslims (or Arabs) will take over the world.[49]

Indeed, as Said points out in the final section of his critique, American Orientalism has considerable and far-reaching implications for the Arab world. The US interest in the Middle East brought forth experts, such as Bernard Lewis, whose rhetoric on the Muslim world has been consistently imbued with Orientalist assumptions[50].

It is important to note that although Said's criticism of Orientalism is essentially meant to expose an entrenched system of thought relating to the Orient, the author emphasizes that there are individual scholars, such as the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz, whose work is not tainted by political or ideological considerations. Despite its marginal impact, such scholarship is valuable and worthy of examination as its "allegiance

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[49] Ibid, p. 286-287.

[50] Ibid, 321.

is to a discipline defined intellectually and not to a "field" like Orientalism defined either canonically, imperially or geographically.[51]" In addition to the seemingly inexhaustible list of Orientalist writers whose work perpetuates colonial narratives, Said suggests that there exists another category of scholars who are oblivious to the impact their discourse has on scholarly integrity. According to Said, the danger of Orientalism is that it can take hold of writers who are susceptible to *idées reçues*.[52] Unable to guard against the cumulative, subtle, and corrosive nature of Orientalist discourse, such scholars are reduced to propaganda agents whose loyalties lie not with the truth, but rather with a discourse that is propagated by the political and intellectual establishment.

This study builds upon Said's in-depth critique of Orientalism. The theoretical background and analytical approach that Said employs in his work to uncover the close and long-lasting relationship between colonialism and Orientalist scholarship may be adopted to deconstruct American political discourse vis-à-vis the Muslim world. This thesis is partly informed and guided by the myriad of contentions Said makes in his book, especially as it relates to the rise of American Orientalism in the twentieth century. It is important to note, however, that although Said's analysis had a seismic impact on various fields of study, his opponents dismissed his critique as a diatribe against an otherwise revered and canonical scholarship. Considering that this study borrows from Said's

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[51] Ibid, 326.

[52] Ibid

Orientalism, it is crucial to examine the validity of some of the criticism directed toward

his work.

Critiques of *Orientalism*

2.1. Ibn Warraq

The publication of Said's *Orientalism* in 1978 generated a great deal of polemical commentary. The salvos of critical opprobrium the book provoked prompted Said to offer a few additions and corrections in later editions.[53] One of Said's harsh critics is the prolific writer and outspoken secularist Ibn Warraq. His book, *Defending the West: a Critique of Edward Said's Orientalism* (2007), dismisses Said's work as destructive and factually dubious. He roundly criticizes it for its flawed methodology and fundamental mischaracterization of Western civilization. In his vitriolic, long-winded review of *Orientalism*, Ibn Warraq argues that while Said scrutinizes the scholarship that accompanied the expropriation and subjugation of the East, he conveniently glosses over the political status quo and intellectual bankruptcy that has dogged the Arab world:

> [Orientalism] taught an entire generation of Arabs the art of
> self-pity –"were it not for the wicked imperialists, racists and
> Zionists, we would be great once more." … The aggressive
> tone of *Orientalism* is what I have called "intellectual
> terrorism," since it seeks to convince not by arguments or
> historical analysis, but by spraying charges of racism,

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[53] Huggan, G. (2005). (Not) Reading "Orientalism". *Research in African Literatures*, 36(3), 124-136. p.124. In a 1994 afterword, for instance, Said asserts that he is not anti-Westerner. He also emphasizes that he has "no interest in, much less capacity for, showing what the true Orient and Islam really are." (1994, p.331)

imperialism, and Eurocentrism from a moral high ground. …

The moral high ground is an essential element in Said's tactics

… his position is morally unimpeachable …. using any means

possible to defend it, including the distortion of the views of

eminent scholars, interpreting intellectual and political history

in a highly tendentious way.[54]

Ibn Warraq's criticism of Said's work calls attention to the abiding and "pernicious

influence"[55] *Orientalism* had on the perception and study of European scholarship. The

author suggests that Said's work exposes a profound misunderstanding of the West's

intellectual history. Ibn Warraq's review aims to restore the credibility of Orientalist

scholarship and undermine Said's attempt to discredit the work of a broad array of

renowned artists and scholars[56]:

A part of Said's tactic is to leave out Western writers and

scholars who do not conform to his theoretical framework.

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[54] Ibn, W. (2007). *Defending the West: A critique of Edward Said's "Orientalism."*. New York: Prometheus Books. P.18

[55] Ibid

[56] Ibn Warraq devoted an extended appendix at the end of his review to discuss the significance and merit of 18th and 19th-century Orientalist music, literature, paintings and sculpture. Part three of his book focuses on the scholarship Said singles out in his critique.

Since, for Said, all Europeans are a priori racist, he obviously

cannot allow himself to quote writers who are not[57].

Despite the book's bold assumption that the review constitutes the "first systematic critique"[58] of Said's *Orientalism*, much of Ibn Warraq's analysis appears to take stock of Islamic civilization as opposed to its Western counterpart. Throughout the second part of his book, the author highlights the defining values that Western civilization has been built upon: rationalism, universalism, and self-criticism. Conversely, he launches into a ferocious tirade about the dark history of the East as he revisits "Islamic imperialism and Islam's participation in the slave trade."[59] According to Ibn Warraq, his defense of Western civilization is designed to expose and rectify the injustice perpetrated by Said and his epigones.

Another critical point of contention that Ibn Warraq details in his critique of *Orientalism* concerns methodology. According to the secular critic, Said's focus on specific writings reflects a strong, obvious bias towards the entire body of Orientalist literature. Said's selection of cultural productions that only align with his specious propositions is meant to advance his ideological agenda and dismiss the whole academic field of Orientalism as a purely political exercise. In an attempt to demonstrate the West's

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[57] Ibn, W. (2007). *Defending the West: A critique of Edward Said's "Orientalism."*. New York: Prometheus Books. P. 33

[58] See the book's cover (2007)

[59] Ibn, W. (2007). *Defending the West: A critique of Edward Said's "Orientalism."*. New York: Prometheus Books. P. 12

systematic vilification of the Orient, Said undercuts his premise by resorting to the very reductionist approach he vehemently opposes in his critique:

> **S**aid attacks not only the entire discipline of Orientalism, which is devoted to the academic study of the Orient and which Said accuses of perpetuating negative racial stereotypes, anti-Arab and anti-Islamic prejudice, and the myth of an unchanging, essential "Orient," but also accuses Orientalists as being a group complicit with imperial power and holds them responsible for creating the distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority, which they achieve by suppressing the voice of the Oriental … In other words, much of what was written about the Orient in general, and Islam and Islamic civilization in particular, was false. … Thus, European writers of fiction, epics, travel, social descriptions, customs, and people are all accused of Orientalism[60].

Ibn Warraq maintains that the charge Said and his acolytes led against Orientalism brought the entire scholarship into disrepute. The very term Orientalism has come to carry pejorative connotations. It is important to note, however, that despite its controversial content and combative style, Said's compelling case prompted a wave of academicians to

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[60] Ibid, p. 19

adopt his propositions and mount a front against the corrosive discourse of Orientalist

scholarship.

2.2. Bernard Lewis

The publication of Ibn Warraq's review, which came years after Said's death, reignited a vigorous debate over the legitimacy of Orientalism as an established field of academic study. However, long before the publication of Ibn Warraq's 2007 book, Said's *Orientalism* had provoked an uproar in academic circles. Almost immediately after its release, several scholars joined in denunciation of the book's pointed criticism and negative assumptions about the West. Bernard Lewis, a British American historian, was one of the leading intellectuals to contest Said's deconstruction of Orientalism. His military background as an erstwhile soldier in the British Army, coupled with his expertise in Islamic history and Oriental studies offered a perspective that was unique, though not entirely dispassionate. Noted for his scholarly authority and numerous publications, especially about the Middle East, Islam, and the West, Lewis reached mainstream prominence as he engaged Said in several public debates, back-and-forth critical commentary, and frequent media appearances. The stridency of Lewis' statements about Islamic civilization raised the ire of Said who cast doubt on his impartiality and castigated him for his "demagogy and downright ignorance.[61]"

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[61] Edward, S. (October 4, 2001) "The Clash of Ignorance" The Nation. Retrieved August 1, 2021.

In a similar criticism that Ibn Warraq echoed decades later, Lewis had accused Said of confining his critique to scholarship which is not reflective of the entire Western intellectual canon:

> The limitations of time, space, and content which Mr. Said forcibly imposes on his subject, though they constitute a serious distortion, are no doubt convenient and indeed necessary to his purpose. They are not, however, sufficient to accomplish it. … Even for those whom he does cite, Mr. Said makes a remarkably arbitrary choice of works. His common practice indeed is to omit their major contributions to scholarship and instead fasten on minor or occasional writings.[62]

In the same vein, Lewis, who is credited with coining the term "clash of civilization,"[63] argues that Said reduces the Orient to the Middle East and makes no mention of other Orientalists whose countries had no interest in colonial expansion.[64] He also faults him for failing to include German Orientalists whose scholarly corpus predates the late eighteenth

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[62] Bernard, L. (June 24, 1982 issue). "The Question of Orientalism". The New York Review of Books. Retrieved August 3, 2021

[63] See Bernard, L. (September, 1990 issue). "The Roots of Muslim Rage". The Atlantic

[64] Bernard, L. (June 24, 1982 issue). "The Question of Orientalism". The New York Review of Books. Retrieved August 3, 2021

century; the era Said credits inaccurately with the rise of Orientalism.[65] Moreover, Lewis calls into question Said's understanding of history and philology, two branches of knowledge crucial to any comprehensive and rigorous study of Orientalist scholarship. "A historian of Orientalism," Lewis writes, "should have at least some acquaintance with the history and philology with which they were concerned. Mr. Said shows astonishing blind spots.[66]" The validity of Said's thesis, he maintains, is contingent upon his misrepresentation and reshuffling of history. Lewis cites several gross historical inaccuracies in Said's *Orientalism*, such as his claim that England annexed Egypt[67], which was in fact occupied but never annexed, and his suggestion that the Muslim conquest of Turkey preceded North Africa, "that is to say, that the eleventh century came before the seventh.[68]"

In addition to Said's deficient knowledge of history and philology, Lewis also disputes some of the assumptions he makes about Islam and Arabic. Said's failure to accurately translate important theological concepts from Arabic into English reveals a blatant and profound misunderstanding of the very religion and cultures he strives to defend. An example that Lewis points to in Said's critique, which casts doubt on his knowledge of Islam and Arabic, is his interpretation of "the Islamic theological term *tawhid*

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[65] Ibid

[66] Ibid

[67] See Said, E. W. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Random House. p 35.

[68] Bernard, L. (June 24, 1982 issue). "The Question of Orientalism". The New York Review of Books. Retrieved August 3, 2021

as meaning "God's transcendental unity" (p. 269), when in fact it means monotheism , i.e., declaring or professing the unity of God, as the form of the Arabic word indicates.[69]" German, Lewis points out, is another language that Said similarly abuses. His poor command of Arabic and German render his analysis flawed and misleading.

In his sharply-worded response, Lewis goes on to question the significance and relevance of some of the authors examined in Said's critique. In addition to the arbitrary choice of countries and scholarship Said excoriates in his book, Lewis points to a series of texts that contradict their authors' intentions.[70] Lewis also criticizes Said for including writers who had a vested interest in perpetuating certain Western values and presenting them as bona fide Orientalist scholars. "To prove his case," Lewis remarks, "[Said] bring[s] into the category of "Orientalist" a whole series of … litterateurs, … imperial administrators … whose works were no doubt relevant to the formation of Western cultural attitudes, but who had nothing to do with the academic tradition of Orientalism.[71]" Thanks to Said, Orientalism has devolved from a reputable and authoritative academic discipline with literature that dates back to the Renaissance era to a stigmatized, diminished, and discredited scholarship. "The word [Orientalism]," Lewis asserts, "was poisoned by the

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[69] Ibid

[70] Ibid

[71] Ibid

kind of intellectual pollution that in our time has made … [it] unfit for use in rational discourse.[72]"

In response to Lewis' 1982 vitriolic critique of *Orientalism*, Said published a rejoinder in The New York Review of Books, in which he sought to defend his work and address his opponent's critical observations. Said first exposes several inconsistencies in Lewis' reasoning. On the one hand, Lewis maintains that Islamic Orientalism is an "innocent and enthusiastic department of scholarship; on the other he wishes to pretend that Orientalism is too complex, various and technical to exist in a form for any non-Orientalist … to criticize.[73]" Said accuses Lewis of constructing his critique in a way that suppresses critical historical facts.[74] The rivalry that still exists today between Christianity and Islam, he argues, can be traced to the earliest European writings about the Orient, which advocated resisting the religious, cultural, and military threat of Islam. Said also criticizes Lewis for failing to address the rise of Orientalist scholarship that accompanied and facilitated France and Britain's takeover of the East.[75] To further refute Lewis' claims, Said points to the ongoing working relationship between governments and Islamic scholars whose advice is routinely sought to help subjugate and exploit the Muslim world. The fact that scholars, such as Lewis himself, regularly and passionately attack modern Arabs and

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[72] Ibid

[73] Edward, S. (August 12, 1982 issue). "In response to: The Question of Orientalism". The New York Review of Books. Retrieved August 7, 2021

[74] Ibid

[75] Ibid

Muslims, and offer expertise on foreign policy and national security undermine their professed commitment to scholarly impartiality:

> It is therefore not surprising that the field of Islamic and Arabic Orientalism … [is] always ready to deny complicity with state power … [Lewis'] defense … is an elaborate confection of ideological half-truths designed to mislead non-specialist readers. … it is when Lewis tries to hide politics behind the umbrella of academic respectability that he is at his most unscholarly, and most overtly the active policy, lobbyist and propagandist.[76]

In response to Lewis' criticism that *Orientalism* conveniently excluded a wide range of significant Orientalists whose work had little, if anything, to do with European colonialism, Said stresses that his critique is not to be misconstrued as an indictment of the West or taken as an indication that every text written by Orientalists is meant to conspire against the East. However, Said retorts, "it is rank hypocrisy to suppress the cultural, political, ideological, and institutional contexts in which people write, think, and talk about the Orient.[77]" In an attempt to explain why many Arabs and Muslims reject Orientalism, Said postulates that the reason is that it is rightly viewed as a discourse of power.[78] The

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[76] Ibid

[77] Ibid

[78] Ibid

discourse that Orientalism promotes about Islam, presenting it as a stagnant and monolithic religion, deprives its followers of humanity and invites foreign interference. "In this discourse," he writes "…Islam is … marketable by "experts" for powerful domestic political interests; neither Muslims nor Arabs recognize themselves as human beings or their observers as simple scholars.[79]" In response to Lewis' criticism that the book, *Orientalism*, made no mention of German Orientalists whose scholarship about the Orient is vast and notable, Said explains that his critique was primarily intended to expose the direct relationship between Orientalism and the two major colonial empires: Britain and France.

Lewis' trenchant criticism of the East extends well beyond his strong disagreement with, indeed indignation at, Said's indictment of Orientalism. Considering that this study examines Hollywood's representations of Muslims in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, it is worth noting that Lewis was a vocal and effective advocate for regime change in Iraq, pressing for military intervention and arguing that the danger of inaction far supersedes that of action[80]. His expertise was sought by the top echelons of the Bush administration[81]. In a meeting he held with former Vice President Dick Cheney, the chief architect behind the Iraq imbroglio, Lewis opined that "one of the things you've got to do

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[79] Ibid

[80] See Bernard, L (September 27, 2002). "Time for Toppling". Wall Street Journal. Retrieved August 2, 2021.

[81] Martin, K (June7, 2018). "The Conflicted Legacy of Bernard Lewis". Foreign Affairs. Retrieved July 15, 2021.

to Arabs is hit them between the eyes with a big stick. They respect power.[82]" This belligerent attitude is palpable in his critique of Said's *Orientalism* and permeates many of his writings on the Middle East and Islam. Indeed, suffice it to examine the sinister undertones embedded in some of his books and essays. The very title of his 1990 article "The Roots of Muslim Rage," for instance, is freighted with dark and menacing connotations. It betrays a degree of hostility and adds to a climate of fear, distrust, and alarm. His assertion that *all* Muslims are consumed by rage solidifies Said's propositions about scholars whose work builds upon and reinforces narratives that either trivialize or dehumanize the Orient. An examination of the title alone reveals the author's confrontational tone and skewed representation of an ethnically and culturally heterogeneous group. It is this vilification of the "other" and eagerness "to speak for a whole religion or civilization[83]" that makes Lewis and his acolytes Orientalists par excellence.

In his 1982 book, *Covering Islam*, Said singles out Lewis for his consistently biased views about Islam. Throughout Lewis' academic career, his harsh and vigorous criticism of the East showed no signs of waning, as evidenced by his regular publications in The New York Review of Books, Atlantic Monthly, and Foreign Affairs. "Over many decades," Said asserts, "his [Lewis'] views, which have remained unchanged and indeed have become more strident and reductionist over time have seeped into the discourse of the

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[82] Jeffery, G. (October 23, 2005). "Breaking Ranks" The New Yorker. Retrieved July 15, 2021

[83] Edward, S. (October 4, 2001) "The Clash of Ignorance" The Nation. Retrieved August 1, 2021

"think" pieces and books.[84]" Said goes on to point out the striking similarities between Lewis and 19th century French and British Orientalists who share deep concerns about the dangers Islam poses to Christianity. Indeed, much of Lewis' work reveals an implacable animosity toward Arabs. a pernicious penchant for capitalizing on a few isolated incidents to condemn the entire religion of Islam:

> All of Lewis's emphases in his work are to portray the whole Islam as basically outside the known, familiar, acceptable world that "we" inhabit. … As I pointed out in my book *Orientalism*, his methods are the snide observations … to make huge cultural points about an entire set of peoples, and, no less reprehensible, his total inability to grant that the Islamic peoples are entitled to their own cultural, political, and historical practices, free from Lewis's calculated, political, and historical practices, free from Lewis's calculated attempt to show that because they are not Western (a notion of which he has an extremely tenuous grasp) they can't be good. … Lewis's methods suggest that all Muslims – all one billion of them– have read, absorbed, and totally accepted "the rules" … if there

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[84] Edward, S (1997) [1981]. *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World.* New York Random House. p.xxx

was ever an occasion to apply the word preposterous, it is

here.[85]

Lewis' analytical methods and philological conclusions about the East have been intensely scrutinized. Said criticizes Lewis' contention that present-day political events in the Muslim world are attributed to an unwillingness to depart from seventh-century Islam.[86] Lewis' insistence on citing medieval Islamic scholarship to make sense of contemporary affairs is meant to highlight the fundamental discordance and inherent contradictions that exist between the Western and Muslim minds.[87] Indeed, it is the misleading notion that all Muslims are unable to break free from their past is what "disallows [them] historical change, or human agency, or the possibility that … [they do not] all think alike.[88]"

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[85] Ibid, p.xxx –xxxi

[86] Ibid p. xxxii-xxxiii

[87] Ibid

[88] Ibid

2.3.   Robert Irwin

In addition to Ibn Warraq and Bernard Lewis—whose stock-in-trade is the vilification of Muslims, British historian Robert Irwin is another critic who bridled at Said's harsh denunciation of Orientalism. His book, *Dangerous Knowledge: Orientalism and its Discontents*, delves into the long and complex history of European Orientalism, specifically as it relates to the Near East. Irwin offers a witty and detailed account of British, French, and German Orientalists in his riposte, which was published nearly thirty years after Said's Orientalism. The book's main sections primarily deal with the achievements, quirks, and predispositions of numerous Orientalists whose work helped shape Western perceptions of the East. In the brief, final chapters he reserved for reviewing *Orientalism*, Irwin attempts to uncover the many flaws, misinterpretations, and inconsistencies contained in Said's analysis. Irwin first argues that Said's work is not an accurate account of Western Orientalism. "*Orientalism*," he states, "is not a history of Oriental studies, but rather a highly selective polemic on certain aspects of the relation of knowledge and power.[89]" Another error that Irwin points to is Said's failure to provide an analysis of French Orientalist writings on North Africa. Furthermore, Irwin occasionally resorts to ad hominem, suggesting that Said's focus on Jewish academics and journalists in the last chapter was fueled by his festering resentment over the Palestinian plight. Said's

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[89] Irwin, R. (2008). *Dangerous knowledge: Orientalism and its discontents*. Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press. P. 281-282

searing indictment of Israeli scholarship, Irwin concludes, overshadows his self-declared mission to expose the workings of European Orientalism:

> It is obvious that bitterness about what has been happening to the Palestinians since the 1940s fuelled the writing of this book. But rather than British, American and Soviet politicians, Zionist lobbyists, the Israeli army and, for that matter, poor Palestinian leadership … were presented as largely responsible for the disasters of Said's own time.[90]

Irwin's review of Said's work also identifies several inconsistencies and inaccurate claims pertaining to the origins of Orientalism. While Said frequently suggests that Orientalism began with Bonaparte's 1798 invasion of Egypt, he also argues, at times, that Herbelot's 1697 *Bibliothèque orientale* formed the cornerstone of and paved the way for Oriental studies. Another possible date that Said offers for the origin of Orientalism, adding to the reader's confusion and skepticism, is 1312, the year noted for a decree issued by the Council of Vienne to create chairs (professorships) in Hebrew, Arabic, Greek, and other languages[91]. What Said fails to mention, however, is that the Council's decree for teaching Arabic was never executed, thus making his entire proposition inaccurate. Moreover, Irwin calls into question Said's argument that Orientalism is closely linked to Western imperialism. Until the end of the seventeenth century, Irwin explains, Ottoman imperialism

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[90] Ibid, 282

[91] Ibid. 284

still posed a threat to Europe, a fact that debunks any hypothesis that "date[s] Western economic dominance of the Middle East to earlier than the late eighteenth century.[92]" In actuality, Britain and France's political and military control of the Near East was not effectively established until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Their grip over Arab territories was only consolidated following the First World War.

Apropos Said's claim that the largely negative views that prevailed in the twelfth century about Islam are still relevant and consistently echoed in the twentieth century, Irwin suggests that such an assumption undermines the very foundation of the book's premise. If there is no fundamental difference between the way Islam was viewed in the twelfth and twentieth centuries, it follows that Orientalism, which Said claims to have begun in the eighteenth century, had no significant impact, be it negative or positive, on contemporary European views about Muslims and their religion.[93] In addition to these inconsistencies which point to a faulty line of reasoning according to Irwin, there are other historical realities that Said conveniently neglected to consider in his critique. The Persians, who built an empire that encroached upon Greece, for instance, were not condemned for their imperialism. In fact, they received a great deal of sympathy; Said portrays them as innocent victims of misrepresentation in Greek literature[94]. Similarly, such vast and

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[92] Ibid, 285

[93] Ibid, 285

[94] Ibid, 286

sprawling Muslim empires as the Umayyads, Abbasids, and Fattimis were spared Said's

harsh rebuke.

Irwin calls into question Said's contention that Orientals have always been denied

the opportunity to represent themselves. Arab scholars, Irwin points out, did not escape

Said's condemnation either in *Orientalism* or in his other publications.[95] Although there

exist many Arab writers who are credited with influencing the way the West viewed the

Orient, their scholarly contributions are mostly brushed aside in Said's work:

> It is worth noting that [Said] was no less hostile to Arab
> scholarship. In many cases, the contributions of Arab
> academics were simply ignored: among the many are the
> modern political historian Philip Khoury, the economic
> historian Charles Issawi, the Lebanese historian Kamal Salibi,
> the papyrologist Nabia Aboot, the political scientist Ibrahim
> Abulughod, … Said did not want the Arabs to represent
> themselves and it is he who wishes to deny them permission to
> speak.[96]

The outcry that Said's work drew from such scholars as Ibn Warraq, Bernard Lewis, and

Robert Irwin appears legitimate. In fact, many of the arguments made against *Orientalism*

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[95] Ibid, 292

[96] Ibid

seem, at first glance, compelling and irrefutable. Upon close examination, however, it becomes evident that much of the criticism leveled at Said's work focuses on details—significant as they may be—rather than the fundamental premise, which seeks to expose the symbiotic relationship between European scholarship and imperial expansion. There is no denying that *Orientalism* is replete with historical gaffes and spurious arguments. Despite its lucid prose, Said's critique is marred by factual errors and blatant inconsistencies. However, the work in its entirety is novel, cogent, and substantive. The numerous inaccuracies the critics painstakingly detailed do not take away from the validity of Said's central thesis. As will be shown later, Orientalism has and continues to play a pivotal role in legitimizing imperial hegemony. The rebirth of Orientalism, as it were, in the aftermath of World War II, resurrected old tropes and helped shape American foreign policy vis-à-vis the Muslim world.

3. Chomsky: *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda*

Noam Chomsky's book *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda* (1991) examines the impact propaganda has on public perception, especially during times of political upheaval and national discord. Chomsky maintains that the prevailing and operative framework for democracy dictates that the flow of information be rigidly regulated and strictly controlled.[97] This conceptual framework, which has been in use since the seventeenth century, helped governments launch major propaganda operations that proved enormously successful. In an attempt to expose the inner workings of wartime propaganda and demonstrate the profound impact it has on society at large, Chomsky references the 28th U.S. President (1913-1921) and scholar Woodrow Wilson whose administration created the Creel Committee in 1917 to elicit public support for the war:

> The Wilson administration… succeeded, within months, in turning a pacifist population into a hysterical, war-mongering population… the same techniques were used to whip up a Red Scare … which succeeded pretty much in destroying unions and eliminating such dangerous problems as freedom of the press and freedom of political thought. There was very strong support from the media… State propaganda, when supported

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[97] Chomsky, N. (2002, 2nd edition). *Media control: The spectacular achievements of propaganda*. New York: Seven Stories. P. 10

by the educated classes and when no deviation is permitted

from it, can have a big effect.[98]

Chomsky criticizes theorists, like Walter Lippmann, who urge the political

vanguard to make use of propaganda to control thought and engineer consent, thus ensuring

that common interests—which may elude or not be apparent to the public— are

safeguarded. Lipmann and his epigones hypothesize that in order to maintain social

cohesion, the public's role needs to be relegated to that of a passive spectator rather than

an active participant in the political process. The "big majority," Chomsky explains, "…

the bewildered herd have to [be] tame[d]…. The logic is clear. Propaganda is to a

democracy what the bludgeon is to a totalitarian state.[99]" Chomsky argues that the political

establishment consistently employs scaremongering tactics and fronts public relations

campaigns to tamp down dissent and prompt public support for military action. "To whip

them up," he writes, "you have to frighten them.[100]" The Vietnam War, for instance,

illustrates the serious and far-reaching effects of state-sponsored propaganda. In an effort

to suppress political dissidence and respond to the mounting public criticism of the U.S.

military debacle in Vietnam in the second half of the twentieth century, national media

sought to discredit peace movements and disparage activists who questioned the legitimacy

of the war. Chomsky references the prominent neoconservative Reaganite and political

propagandist Norman Podhoretz, who argued that the Vietnam War clearly exposed "the

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[98] Chomsky, *Media Control*, p. 11-13

[99] Ibid, p 17-20

[100] Ibid, p. 30

sickly inhibitions" of skeptics and pacifists who had been vociferous in their opposition to the use of military force.[101] "If you want to have a violent society that uses force around the world to achieve the ends of its own domestic elites," he concludes, "it's necessary to have a proper appreciation of the martial virtues and none of these sickly inhibitions.[102]"

Chomsky contends that in order to stave off social unrest, the State manufactures military conflicts, which serve to divert focus from failed or unpopular policies and lock the public in a perpetual state of hysteria. The 1991 Gulf War is a prime example of how propaganda is used to justify military confrontation and keep public dissent in check. Chomsky notes that the United States rebuffed diplomatic efforts and failed, indeed refused, to consider imposing economic sanctions which were likely to reverse Iraq's blitzkrieg invasion of Kuwait, avert an environmental catastrophe, and avoid tens of thousands of unnecessary deaths.[103] Saddam Hussein, whose repressive regime routinely carried out summary executions of political opponents and—in flagrant violation of international law—used chemical weapons on defenseless civilians, could have been contained had the opposition been propped up and enough diplomatic pressure been exerted. Although the regime in Iraq was intolerant of dissent, leaders of the opposition in exile called for a peaceful resolution to the territorial dispute and vehemently opposed the U.S. decision to wage war against their country.[104] Chomsky argues that the media's

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[101] Ibid, p. 33

[102] Ibid, p. 34

[103] Ibid, pp. 60-61

[104] Ibid, p. 55

unabashed bias, blatant disregard for the objections of the Iraqi opposition, and near-unanimous consensus that the U.S. government had a moral imperative to commit U.S. troops to the Gulf are a clear testament to the remarkable workings of propaganda.[105] "It takes a really deeply indoctrinated population," he writes, "not to notice that we're not hearing the voices of the Iraqi democratic opposition… the Iraqi democrats have their own thoughts… therefore they're out.[106]"

One of the extraordinary achievements of state propaganda is that it prompts individuals to question their own reality and doubt their sanity. If appropriately utilized, propaganda can rein in public skepticism and dissuade people from sharing their views, which they erroneously perceive as unorthodox and unpopular, thus unlikely to have any real, meaningful impact.[107] Chomsky suggests that the prevailing narrative in the months leading up to the 1991 Gulf War was compelling, forceful, and focused. The great majority of U.S. media outlets made the case that military action was vital to reversing Iraq's annexation of Kuwait. Therefore, voices that were in favor of pursuing diplomatic avenues to resolve the conflict were discouraged from speaking publicly against the political establishment lest they be treated as pariahs or incur ridicule. As evidenced by the Vietnam and Gulf wars, the government has repeatedly demonstrated its unique ability to manufacture political attitudes and work in lockstep with the media to ensure that any potential opposition is kept at bay. In times of turmoil, fealty to the State is often regarded,

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[105]Ibid, p. 55

[106]Ibid, p. 55-56

[107]Ibid, p. 58-59

indeed framed, as an affirmation of one's patriotism. Mass media provides a perfect platform for the State to address public concerns. State-sponsored propaganda, which primarily aims to reinforce social cohesion and deals in psychological warfare, is vital to winning military conflicts. Chomsky explains:

> The issue… is not simply disinformation and the Gulf crisis. The issue is much broader. It's whether we want to live in a free society or whether we want to live under what amounts to a form of self-imposed totalitarianism, with the bewildered herd marginalized, directed elsewhere, terrified, screaming patriotic slogans, fearing for their lives and admiring with awe the leader who saved them from destruction, while the educated masses goose-step on command and repeat the slogans they're supposed to repeat and society deteriorates at home.[108]

It is important to dispel the misconception that the first time the United States declared war on terrorism was in 2001. Chomsky remarks that 20 years prior to the horrific attacks of 9/11, Republican President Roland Reagan had promised to address the growing threat of international terrorism in the Muslim world, making it one of his signature foreign policy goals.[109] Much of the rhetoric Bush and his political allies adopted is evocative of

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[108] Chomsky, Media Control, p. 64-65

[109] Chomsky, Media Control, p. 70

Roland Reagan's pledge to tackle the scourge of state-supported terrorism in the Middle East. Interestingly, the media's focus on the issue of international terrorism in the 1980s intensified sharply in 2001. In many respects, Reagan's foreign policy agenda is indistinguishable from that of George W. Bush. Chomsky observes that several political advisors to Reagan, such as Donald Rumsfeld and John Negroponte, were reinstalled by Bush in 2001, which explains the remarkable similarities—in tenor and policy—between the two administrations.[110]

In the last chapter of his critique[111], Chomsky draws parallels between state and group terror as he examines the U.S. disproportionate response to terrorism. He criticizes the government for providing political cover and military assistance to nations that have consistently flouted international law and engaged in overt, unremitting hostilities against other nations. He also upbraids the media for failing to report on US interference in foreign elections, disrupting the political process, and fomenting unrest in countries—such as Nicaragua and Cuba—that refuse to accommodate American interests.

Chomsky's work shines a light on the long-standing relationship between media and American politics. This thesis draws upon his contention that propaganda plays a fundamental role in cultivating uniformity of thought and quelling public skepticism. His critical analysis of media provides revealing insights into Hollywood's anti-Muslim discourse, especially in the wake of 9/11, a turbulent period that saw an outbreak of racial

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[110] Chomsky, Media Control, p. 71

[111] Chomsky, Media Control, p. 69-100

animus and a spike in hate crimes. In the chapter devoted to examining *American Sniper*'s portrayal of the Iraq war, Chomsky's arguments about the pernicious effects of propaganda are adopted to deconstruct the film's narrative. As will be discussed later, his analysis of the media's coverage of the Vietnam and Gulf wars reveals striking parallels to the alarmist rhetoric deployed by Hollywood in the aftermath of 9/11.

Chapter Two

Hollywood's Depictions of the Other:

Arabs, Muslims, Blacks and Native

Americans

1. Jack Shaheen: *Reel Bad Arabs*

Influenced by Edward Said's 1978 critique of Orientalist scholarship, Jack Shaheen published a compendium of more than a thousand American films that mischaracterized Arabs and Muslims from 1896 to 2000. Shaheen's work, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People,* posits that misrepresentations of Arabs date back to the early days of silent films. For more than a century, cinematic portrayals of Arabs did very little to dispel the cultural misconceptions that persisted in Orientalist writings. In fact, Hollywood continued to perpetuate damaging stereotypes and reinforce common myths about Arabs and their cultures well into the 21st century. Shaheen's critical examination revealed that the overwhelming majority of films featuring Arabs demonstrated a strong, systematic bias, confirming ingrained prejudices and promoting cliché-ridden narratives that have gone unchallenged for centuries. In his lengthy, comprehensive review of American cinema, Shaheen attempts to explore the underlying reasons behind the cultural and racial stereotypes that have been affixed to Arabs on screen for several decades. His work also draws attention to Hollywood's profound impact on shaping narratives and distorting perceptions of the "other."

The very first pages of Shaheen's book emphasize the insidious nature of negative stereotypes and the role constant repetition plays in cultivating discriminatory behavior and reinforcing hostile attitudes. "Hollywood," he writes, "… has tutor[ed] movie audiences by repeating over and over, in film after film, insidious images of the Arab people. …

Slanderous stereotypes have affected honest discourse and public policy.[112]" To illustrate the detrimental and long-lasting effects of repetition, Shaheen draws comparisons between film techniques and pedagogical strategies.[113] The use of repetition to influence or alter public opinion is an effective tool akin to drilling, a common teaching method employed by instructors to introduce new lessons and help students memorize key pieces of information such as facts, mathematical and physics formulae, and dates. Shaheen explains:

> By repetition even the donkey learns. This Arab proverb encapsulates how effective repetition can be when it comes to education: how we learn by repeating an exercise over and over again until we can respond almost reflexively. A small child uses repetition to master numbers and letters of the alphabet. Older students use repetition to memorize historical dates and algebraic formulas. For more than a century Hollywood, too, has used repetition as a teaching tool.[114]

Shaheen's study covers hundreds of motion pictures. The feature-length films he probes mostly portray Arabs as the embodiment of evil, making no distinction between men, women, and children. The daunting, large-scale project Shaheen undertook was

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[112] Shaheen, J. G. (2015). *Reel bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*. Northampton, Massachusetts: Interlink Publishing group. P.7.

[113] Ibid. P. 7

[114] Ibid. P. 7

intended to "expose an injustice: cinema's systematic, pervasive, and unapologetic degradation and dehumanization of a people.[115]" To this end, the author surveys virtually every motion picture featuring Arabs from Hollywood's inception to 2000. Throughout its history, Hollywood's one-dimensional, stereotypical representation of Arabs has been too entrenched to allow for nuanced, complex portrayals. Despite the great historical events that unfolded throughout the 20th century, the myths surrounding Arabs only gained in strength and popularity. Shaheen writes:

> Much has happened since 1896 –women's suffrage, the Great
> Depression, the civil rights movements, two world wars, the
> Korean, Vietnam, and Gulf wars, and the collapse of the Soviet
> Union. Throughout it all, Hollywood's caricature of the Arab
> has prowled the silver screen. He is there to this day –repulsive
> and unrepresentative as ever. … Arabs are brute murderers,
> sleazy rapists, religious fanatics, oil-rich dimwits, and abusers
> of women. "They [the Arabs] all look alike to me," quips the
> American heroin in the movie *The Sheik steps out* (1937). "All
> Arabs look alike to me," admits the protagonist in *Commando*
> (1968). Decades later, nothing has changed. Quips the US
> Ambassador in *Hostage* (1986), "I can't tell one [Arab] from

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[115] Ibid

another. Wrapped in those bed sheets they all look the same to

me." In Hollywood's films, they certainly do[116].

To undergird his thesis, Shaheen invites the reader to consider the last time Hollywood offered a sympathetic portrayal of Arabs or Americans of Arab descent. In the absence of a fair and accurate representation of the cultural "other," xenophobia and racial animus gradually take root. Shaheen suggests that Hollywood's persistence in framing Arabs as enemies invites hostility and fosters a climate of fear. "Would you want to share," he asks, "your country … with any of Hollywood's Arabs? … Would you enjoy sharing your neighborhood with … crazed terrorists, airplane hijackers, or camel-riding Bedouin?[117]" Given the ubiquity of these gratuitous slurs and derogatory stereotypes on screen, it is not surprising for anti-Arab sentiments to not only appear pervasive, but also turn into acts of violence[118]. The biased and irresponsible media coverage of the 1995 Oklahoma bombing, for instance, falsely implied that Muslims were behind the terrorist attack:

> …in the Oklahoma bombing, where more than one hundred
>
> innocent victims died … "a law enforcement source said that
>
> several factors suggested a link, including the size and
>
> sophistication of the bomb and the fact that several militant

116 Ibid. p.8

117 Ibid

118 The release of the film *American Sniper* (2014), for instance, brought about an surge in anti-Muslim threats in the US. See the next chapter.

Middle Eastern groups are based in Oklahoma," the focus of the investigation was mostly on international terrorism, particularly Islamic groups. Interestingly, after Timothy McVeigh and James Nichols, both White Americans, were identified as suspects, the language shifted swiftly from terrorism to militia groups, but the media and the "experts" did not demonize and dehumanize the whole White American culture as they usually do Arabs. … This differential treatment was evident in the numerous media analyses that explored what leads angry White men and militia groups to acts of terrorism[119].

The media's misleading and dangerous accusations in the aftermath of the Oklahoma bombings, coupled with the steady stream of cinematic misrepresentations, resulted in a spate of hate crimes against Americans of Arab descent[120]. Images of Arabs brandishing their weapons, indoctrinating their children, and subjugating their women make them an intolerable nuisance. Their unsavory practices threaten to undermine the moral fabric of American society.

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[119] Tai, R. H., & Kenyatta, M. L. (1999). *Critical ethnicity: Countering the waves of identity politics*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Maryland. p.79

[120] Shaheen, J. G. (2015). *Reel bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*. Northampton, Massachusetts: Interlink Publishing group P. 13

Shaheen's analysis was prefaced by a brief summary that outlines some of the remarkable achievements attributed to Arabs throughout history. In an attempt to counter the anti-Arab narrative that Hollywood has been vigorously promoting for over a century, Shaheen provides an alternative perspective, one that contradicts the prevailing assumptions about Arabs and their history. Among the myriad of invaluable contributions Arabs made towards the advancement of Western scholarship and civilization, Shaheen argues, algebra, astronomy and geography reign supreme. "The Arabs," he writes, "invented algebra and the concept of zero. … In astronomy Arabs used astrolabes for navigation, star maps, celestial globes, and the concept of gravity. In geography, they pioneered the use of latitude and longitude. … in agriculture, they … pioneered … irrigation.[121]"

Shaheen equates the impact Hollywood has on audiences to that of mythology. If myths are allowed to go unexamined, their authority and weight in society will only be solidified with the passage of time. Considering the ever-increasing popularity and continued cultural reach of Hollywood films on the global stage, the issue of misrepresentations of Arabs has become predominantly American[122]. Shaheen underscores the burgeoning reach of Hollywood's motion pictures and the ripple effect cinematic representations have not only on Americans, but also on international audiences and filmmakers[123]. Recent technological advances helped refine cinematic techniques and

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121 Ibid. p. 9

122 Ibid, p. 10-11

123 Hollywood's films reach large numbers of viewers in more than 100 countries. Ibid, p. 11.

facilitate access to endless films and television series. Thanks to the ever-expanding market of cable television, video stores, and streaming services, films dehumanizing Arabs have become ubiquitous. Shaheen maintains that since the mid-1980s, scores of feature-length films appeared every week on TV screens to indict Arabs. Films such as *The Sheik* (1921)[124], *The Mummy* (1932)[125], *Cairo* (1942)[126], *The Steel Lady* (1953)[127], *The Black Stallion* (1979)[128], *The Delta Force* (1986)[129], and *Rules of Engagement* (2000)[130] were repeatedly recycled on cable television. The Arab in such films is projected as a ravenous sexual deviant, a scimitar-wielding buffoon prone to aggressive outbursts and violent behavior.

It is essential to underline the remarkable similarities between depictions of Arabs in Hollywood and Jews in German cinema, particularly during World War II. Because Arabs and Jews are Semites, it is hardly surprising that their characterization on screen followed strikingly familiar patterns. The Third Reich's ethnic cleansing campaign against the Jewry was accompanied by of a plethora of films that sought to justify the pogrom and lend a veneer of credibility to the state's anti-Semitic narrative. Shaheen cites films such as *Robert and Bertram* (1939), *Die Rothschilds Aktien von Waterloo* (1940), *Der Ewige*

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[124] Ibid, 454

[125] Ibid, p 358

[126] Ibid, 132

[127] Ibid, 490

[128] Ibid, 113

[129] Ibid, 173

[130] Ibid, 434

Jude (1940), and *Jud Süss* (1940)[131] as some of the most notable cinematic productions that reveal obvious parallels between Jewish and Arab characters. Lechery, depravity, and unbridled greed are among the defining features that distinguish the Semites. Shaheen states:

> Hollywood's image of hook-nosed, robed Arabs parallels the image of Jews in Nazi-inspired movies. … In the past, Jews [like Arabs] were projected as the "other –depraved and predatory money-grubbers who seek world domination, worship a different God, and kill innocents. Nazi propaganda also presented the lecherous Jew slinking in the shadows, scheming to snare the blond Aryan virgin. Yesterday's Shylocks resemble today's hook-nosed Sheikhs[132].

It is particularly striking that anti-Semitic portrayals quickly faded away from the silver screen following World War II, as it was no longer acceptable to dehumanize or disparage Jews. In the wake of the untold suffering that was inflicted on the Jewry in Nazi-occupied Europe, the West came to the sobering realization that tolerating any rhetoric that targets minorities is dangerous and can lead to catastrophic consequences. However, it is curious to note that while Jews were largely spared negative portrayals on television post World War II, Arabs were afforded no such courtesy. In his review of the 1999 motion

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[131] Ibid, p. 11

[132] Ibid. p. 11-12

picture *The Mummy*, renowned British journalist and film critic Anthony Lane alludes to the unfair and discriminatory treatment Arabs receive in cinema. Despite Lane's objections, Universal Pictures went on to produce a sequel in 2001 —*The Mummy Returns*[133]— that similarly mocks Arabs. In a 1999 review published in The New Yorker, Lane remarks:

> Finally, there is the Arab question. The Arab people have always had the roughest and most uncomprehending deal from Hollywood, but with the death of the Cold War the stereotype has been granted even more wretched prominence. In *The Mummy* (1999), I could scarcely believe what I was watching. … So, here's a party game for any producers with a Middle Eastern setting in mind; try replacing one Semitic group with another —Jews instead of Arabs—and THEN listen for the laugh.[134]

Even though both are considered Semites, biased representation of Arabs only continued to grow in frequency and virulence following World War II.[135] Shaheen's study shows that an increasing number of anti-Semitic films targeting Arabs were made in the

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[133] Ibid, 363

[134] Anthony, L (May 10, 1999). "Changelings". The New Yorker.

[135] More than 100 motion pictures featuring Arab characters were released in the fifties. See Shaheen, J. G. (2015). *Reel bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*. Northampton, Massachusetts: Interlink Publishing group, p. 15

last third of the twentieth century, a time when Hollywood demonstrated a genuine willingness to actively confront and combat discriminatory portraits of other racial and ethnic groups[136]. Arabs, it appears, were specifically singled out by Hollywood for purely political reasons. Hollywood's bold and crucial steps to tackle and redress the injustice perpetrated against historically marginalized groups seem to have excluded Arabs by design. Unlike Jews, African Americans, and other persecuted minorities who were able to effect change, Arabs have and continue to bear the brunt of Hollywood's malicious stereotypes.

Shaheen suggests that Hollywood's misrepresentations have an especially damaging impact on Arab Americans. Given the misguided perception that American cinema created about Arabs—portraying men as suicide bombers or wealthy oil barons and reducing women to either exotic, lascivious belly dancers or subservient concubines—it has become hard for Arab Americans to openly celebrate their heritage and take pride in their roots. Such shame and unease are felt and expressed even by prominent Hollywood magnates and celebrated film stars from an Arab background. Syrian-American F. Murray Abraham, for instance, is one of the most prolific actors alive to the considerable career risks an Arabic name entails for aspiring actors in the film industry. "When Academy Award winner … F. Murray Abraham was asked about what the "F" …. stood for," Shaheen recounts, "he said: "F" stands for Farid. … I couldn't use Farid because that would

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[136] Ibid, p 12

typecast me as a sour Arab out to kill everyone. … As Farid … I was doomed to minor roles.[137]""

Shaheen's study finds that more than 900 films portrayed Arabs unfavorably. The vast majority feature "notorious sheikhs, maidens, Egyptians, and Palestinians. The rest are devious dark-complexioned baddies … such as Algerians, Iraqis, Jordanians, Lebanese, Libyans, Moroccans, Syrians, Tunisians, and Yemeni.[138]" Shaheen concludes that among the hundreds of motion pictures displaying Arab characters, very few departed from the prevalent mischaracterizations and egregious images that saturated American cinema for decades. These films, which emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, include *Lion of the Desert* (1981)[139], *Hanna K* (1983)[140], *The Seventh Coin* (1992)[141], *Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves* (1991)[142], *The 13th Warrior* (1999)[143] and *Three Kings* (1999)[144]. Especially notable is the 1981 epic war film *Lion of the Desert*, which chronicles the protracted armed conflict between the colonial forces of Italy and indigenous rebels in Libya, otherwise known as the Second Italo-Senussi War (1923-1932). The historical events dramatized in the film "make a strong statement about occupied peoples seeking self-determination on their own

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[137] Ibid. 13

[138] Ibid, p 19

[139] Ibid, p. 323

[140] Ibid, p. 251

[141] Ibid, p. 450

[142] Ibid, p. 430

[143] Ibid, p. 515

[144] Ibid, p. 519

land.[145]" The film features the Libyan Bedouin leader Omar Mukhtar who mounted a fierce

guerilla resistance that sought to bring an end to the Italian occupation of Libya. Although

the film ends with the capture and public hanging of the tribal leader, Libyans are depicted

as true patriots who fought ferociously against Benito Mussolini's fascist forces. Also

notable is the 1999 anti-war film *Three Kings* which draws a humane portrait of Iraqis, one

that helps "erase damaging stereotypes, humanizing a people who for too long have been

projected as caricatures.[146]" The critically acclaimed film takes place following the end of

the Persian Gulf War (1991). It follows the story of four American soldiers who embark

on an arduous journey to steal a cache of gold bullion that Saddam Hussein's troops

plundered from Kuwait. The black comedy film displays the humanity of regular Iraqis

and highlights their vulnerability. Regrettably, such films are too few and far between to

make a meaningful impact on an otherwise deep-seated tradition of negative portrayals of

Arabs and Muslims.

Fig. 1: Anthony Quinn as Omar Mukhtar, the Libyan leader who fought the Royal Italian Army

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[145] Ibid, p. 323

[146] Ibid, p. 519

Shaheen stresses that it is not his intention to lobby for a sympathetic or flattering portrayal of all Arabs in American cinema. He recognizes that, like any other given group, Muslims and Arabs are capable of committing horrific atrocities. Obviously, filmmakers are within their rights to explore and capture the sinister side of extreme, warped ideologies on screen. Cultures, practices, and peoples should not be immune to scrutiny or exempt from criticism. Ideally, filmmakers ought to be allowed to exercise their creative freedom without the constraints of censorship. However, denigration and demonization of an entire religious, ethnic or national group is not only unjust, but also dangerous and insidious. Shaheen explains:

> I am not saying an Arab should never be portrayed as the villain. What I am saying is that almost *all* Hollywood depictions of Arabs are *bad* ones. This is a grave injustice. Repetitious and negative images of the reel Arab literally sustain adverse portraits across generations. The fact is that for more than a century produces have tarred an entire group of people with the same sinister brush. Hundreds of movies reveal Western protagonists spewing out unrelenting barrages of uncontested slurs, calling Arabs: "assholes," "bastards," "camel-dicks," "pigs," "devil-worshippers," "jackals," "rats," "rag-heads," "towel-heads," "scum-buckets," "sons-of-dogs," "buzzards of the jungle," "sons-of-whores," "sons-of-unnamed

goats," and "sons-of-she-camels. … other movies contain the word "Ayrab," a vulgar Hollywood epithet for Arab that is comparable to dago, greaser, kike, nigger, and gook.[147]"

As previously stated, Shaheen classifies Hollywood's Arab characters into five major categories: Villains, Sheikhs, Maidens, Egyptians, and Palestinians. He discusses every category at length and references a wide range of films to justify his classification. Shaheen asserts that the first category—villains—permeate hundreds of Hollywood films about Arabs. From the silent drama film *Imar the Servitor* (1914)[148] to the adventure horror film *The Mummy* (2001)[149], "a synergy of images equates Arabs from Syria to the Sudan with quintessential evil.[150]" Hollywood's Arabs are villains by nature; no one can escape their vicious and frenzied attacks. It makes no difference if you are an American, European, Israeli, legionnaire, African, or a fellow Arab. Even Samson[151] and Hercules[152] are seen as foes and come under attack[153]. It should be noted that the portrayal of Arabs as amoral villains is often accompanied with ridicule and mockery. Throughout the history of Hollywood, countless film stars have uttered lines that deride Arabs: Will Rogers in

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147 Ibid, 17

148 Ibid, p. 278. This film portrays Arabs as rapists, leering at Western women and plotting to rape them.

149 Ibid, 363

150 Ibid, 20

151 See Ibid, 442-443

152 Ibid, 264

153 Ibid 20

Business and Pleasure (1931)[154], Bob Hope and Bing Crosby in *Road to Morocco* (1942)[155], Abbott and Costello in *Abbott and Costello in the Foreign Legion* (1950)[156], Phil Silvers in *Follow that Camel* (1967)[157], Dustin Hoffman and Warren Beatty in *Ishtar* (1987)[158] and Jim Varney in *Ernest in the Army* (1997), to name but a few, have all cracked jokes about Arabs.

The stereotype of the Arab buffoon and villain came into sharp relief in the mid-1980s, especially as eminent and popular African American actors such as Eddie Murphy, Samuel L. Jackson and Denzel Washington were cast to engage and ultimately subdue Arabs.[159] Shaheen suggests that the film studios' use of African American actors was meant to increase viewership and confer further legitimacy on the stereotypes ascribed to Arabs.[160] The 2000 American war film *Rules of Engagement*[161], starring Tommy Lee Jones and Samuel L. Jackson, for instance, epitomizes Hollywood's sweeping characterization of Arabs as villains. The motion picture was described by the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee as "probably the most racist film ever made against Arabs by Hollywood.[162]" The film follows the court-martial of Colonel Terry Childers who ordered

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[154] Ibid, p. 131

[155] Ibid, p. 428

[156] Ibid, p. 45

[157] Ibid, p. 226

[158] Ibid, 287

159 Ibid, 21

160 Ibid, 21

[161] Ibid, 434

[162] Brian, W (August 11, 2000). "The 'Towel-Heads' Take on Hollywood". The Guardian.

his unit to fire at an unarmed crowd of civilians outside the U.S. embassy in Yemen, killing 83 men, women, and children. As the film progresses, the audience learns that the crowd demonstrating outside the embassy was armed and even opened fire on the marines. Women and children, who were previously painted as innocent victims of Colonel Childers' killing spree, appear to have participated in the unprovoked attack against the embassy. Indeed, films such as *Rules of Engagement* "reveal… egregious, false images of … children as assassins and enemies of the United States, … promot[ing] a dangerously generalized portrayal of Arabs as rabidly anti-American.[163]" Like *Rules of* Engagement, Hollywood produced numerous war films that portrayed Arabs negatively. *The Lost Patrol* (1934)[164], *I Cover the War* (1937)[165], *Sirocco* (1951)[166], *Fort Algiers* (1953)[167], *Lost Command* (1966)[168], *Terror Squad* (1988)[169], *Frantic* (1988)[170], *True Lies* (1994)[171], and *The Siege* (1998)[172] are few notable examples that fall into Shaheen's first category of Hollywood's Arab villains.

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[163] Shaheen, J. G. (2015). *Reel bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*. Northampton, Massachusetts: Interlink Publishing group, p 21

[164] Ibid, p. 335

[165] Ibid, p. 276

[166] Ibid, p. 470

[167] Ibid, p. 228

[168] Ibid, p. 332

[169] Ibid, p. 510

[170] Ibid, p. 232

[171] Ibid, p. 535

[172] Ibid, p. 461

Fig. 2: The film *Rules of Engagement* (2000) portraying Yemeni men, women and

children as terrorists

Shaheen goes on to discuss the second category that defines Hollywood's Arabs: Sheikhs. The word sheikh, which has come to acquire pejorative connotations, is commonly used by Arabs to refer to an elderly man, the patriarch of a family, or a religious leader. Filmmakers, however, use the word in an entirely different sense. In films such as *The Arab* (1915) [173] and *The Sheik* (1921)[174], *Ali Baba Goes to Town* (1937)[175], *Aladdin and His Lamp* (1952)[176], and *The Adventures of Hajji Baba* (1954),[177] Arab sheikhs are portrayed as indolent, violent and lecherous. In more than 60 silent and sound films,

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[173] Ibid, p. 81

[174] Ibid, 454

[175] Ibid, p. 68

[176] Ibid, p. 61

[177] Ibid, p. 52

Sheikhs lust after female westerners and either shun or demean Arab women[178]. Even the popular animated cartoon character Bugs Bunny picks fights with Arab Sheikhs. Indeed, American cinema brims with images of fat, bumbling sheikhs in their burnooses. Their unkempt appearance, uncouth manners, and strange habits invite ridicule and provoke revulsion.

Fig. 3: Bugs Bunny taunting an Arab sheikh (see episode: Sahara Hare)

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[178]Ibid, p. 26

Shaheen's third category of Hollywood's Arabs—maiden—addresses portraits of women. By and large, Shaheen contends that Arab women have been grossly misrepresented in American cinema. In more than 50 feature films, Arab women have been "humiliated, demonized, and eroticized.[179]" The roles they have been assigned on-screen range from scantily-clad belly dancers to enslaved beasts of burden. Shaheen maintains that women have been thrust into a variety of pitiable roles that reduced them to over-sexualized harem, terrorists[180], and vampires[181] who enacted black magic rituals[182]. Throughout its history, Hollywood has primarily consigned Arab women to the margins. Very few Films, such as *Anna Ascends* (1922)[183], *Princess Tam Tam* (1953)[184], *Bagdad* (1949)[185], and *Flight from Ashiya* (1964)[186] offered portrayals that elevated and empowered women. Dressed either in midriff-baring apparel or long black cloaks, Arab women are objectified, debased, and rendered mysterious. The costume Arab female characters routinely wear, it should be noted, is in and of itself a "political statement." "By covering the reel Arab woman in black," Shaheen observes, "… the costumer links her with oppression. … her mute on-screen non-behavior … serve to alienate the Arab woman …

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[179] Ibid, 28

[180] See *The Leopard Women* (1920) and *Nighthawks* (1981)

[181] See *Saadia* (1953) and *Beast of Morocco* (1966)

[182] Shaheen, J. G. (2015). *Reel bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*. Northampton, Massachusetts: Interlink Publishing group, p. 28-29

[183] Ibid, p. 76

[184] Ibid, p. 407

[185] Ibid, p. 93

[186] Ibid, p. 224

Not only do the reel Arab women never speak, but they are never in the workplace.[187]" It is safe to argue that Hollywood's Arab and Muslim women have suffered more injustice than their male counterparts. For more than a century, they have been relegated to lamentably subordinate roles.

The fourth category covers Egyptian characters who appear in more than 100 films. A survey of American films featuring Egyptians reveals Hollywood's fixation, indeed obsession, with enchanting tales of mummies, pharaohs and queens. The seductive queen of the Ptolemaic Kingdom of Egypt, Cleopatra, for instance, was portrayed by numerous screen stars such as Ava Gardner, Theda Bara, Vivian Leigh, Sophia Lauren, Claudette Colbert, and Elizabeth Taylor[188]. In films such as *Made for Love* (1926)[189] and *Sphinx* (1981)[190], Egyptians ogle Western women and scheme to rape and murder them. Their inveterate hatred for Westerners and Israelis, in particular, features prominently in several storylines. In Israeli-made films such as *Cairo Operation* (1965)[191] and *Trunk to Cairo* (1965)[192], Egyptians are depicted as Nazi sympathizers and crazed terrorists plotting to launch atomic missiles against Israel. Furthermore, trickery and depravity seem common traits among Egyptians and, by extension, Arabs. "Interspersed throughout the movies,"

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[187] Ibid, 29

[188] Ibid, 30

[189] Ibid, 338

[190] Ibid, 486

[191] Ibid, p. 133-134. This film was the first to promote the stereotype that Arabs intend to attack Israel with nuclear weapons.

[192] Ibid, p. 539-540

Shaheen remarks, "are souk swindlers as well as begging children scratching for backsheesh.[193]" Shaheen concludes that American films reduce Egypt to pyramids and curses. While Hollywood regaled audiences with an endless supply of magical tales about Ancient Egypt, Modern Egypt was painted with the same broad brush. Framed as a hotbed of violence, poverty and superstition, Egypt has come to embody everything that is wrong with the Arab world.

Shaheen reserves the fifth and last category for Palestinians. In an effort to expose Hollywood's institutional bias towards Palestinians, Shaheen selects forty-five films for analysis. The majority of films featuring Palestinians were released during the 1980s and 1990s[194]. The portrayal of Palestinian characters stands in sharp contrast to that of their Israeli counterparts. Films like *Sword in the Desert* (1949)[195], *Cast a Giant Shadow* (1966)[196] and *Judith* (1966)[197] promoted the popular misconception that Palestine was "a land without a people for a people without a land.[198]" Films such as *Exodus* (1960)[199],

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[193] Ibid

[194] Ibid 32

[195] Ibid, 497

[196] Ibid, p. 141

[197] Ibid, p. 295

[198] This phrase is attributed to William Eugene Blackstone, a Christian Zionist who advocated for the return of the Holy Land to the Jewish people. See Davis, M. (1995). *America and the Holy Land*. Westport, Conn: Praeger. Pp:65-66

[199] Shaheen, J. G. (2015). *Reel bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*. Northampton, Massachusetts: Interlink Publishing group, p. 209

Prisoner in the Middle (1974)[200], *Wanted: Dead or Alive* (1987)[201], and *True Lies* (1994)[202]

projected Palestinians as ruthless terrorists who must be brought to their knees. Especially

noteworthy is the 1994 action film *True Lies*, which was written, directed, and produced

by the Canadian filmmaker James Cameron. The film perpetuates "sick images of

Palestinians as dirty, demonic and despicable peoples…. Cameron presents Palestinian

Muslims as fanatical kuffiyeh-clad terrorists[203]." *True Lies* was the first feature-length film

to show Palestinian Muslims conspiring to detonate nuclear bombs on US soil.

Hollywood's prejudicial portrait of Palestinians strips even women and children of their

humanity. The insatiable appetite they appear to have for excessive violence eclipses their

shared pain and trivializes their aspirations. Their longing for peace and stability is never

displayed on the silver screen. In the eyes of Hollywood, the Palestinian character is

beyond redemption. Shaheen explains:

> Never do movies present Palestinians civilians as innocent
>
> victims and Israelis as brutal oppressors. No movie shows
>
> Israeli soldiers and settlers uprooting olive orchards, gunning
>
> down Palestinian families struggling to survive under
>
> occupation, living in refugee camps, striving to have their own
>
> country and passports stating "Palestine. … is there an

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[200] Ibid, p. 408

[201] Ibid, p. 556

[202] Ibid, p. 535-539

[203] Ibid, 536

unwritten cinematic code stating Hollywood will present all

Palestinians as irrational and *bad*, all Israelis as rational and

good?[204]"

Indeed, Hollywood's vilification of Palestinians is by no means fortuitous. Shaheen states that the majority of motion pictures maligning Palestinians were filmed in Israel, which is in and of itself remarkable.[205] These films' apocalyptic scenarios are primarily designed to spread contrived propaganda rather than provide entertainment. There is no denying the fact that studio companies have always been mindful of the powerful impact cinema has on public perception. As early as the 1900s, studio magnates adroitly capitalized on the power of film to advance political agendas. Shaheen references Adolph Zukor, one of the founders of Paramount Pictures and pioneers of feature-length films, who publicly acknowledged that cinema made for an effective vehicle to disseminate propaganda[206]. Given the fact that one of cinema's—perhaps most overriding—objectives is to shape and influence thought, it is safe to assume that Hollywood's unrelenting demonization of Palestinians aims to reinforce an anti-Arab, pro-Israel narrative. The depiction of *all* Palestinians as Muslim terrorists serves to rationalize the harsh measures Israel takes to impose order and ensure its security.

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[204] Ibid, 32

[205] Ibid, 33

206 Ibid

In addition to the hundreds of American films featuring villains, sheiks, maidens, Egyptians, and Palestinians, Shaheen lists 250 films that inject Arab characters into storylines that have nothing to do with Arabs or the Middle East[207]. Interestingly, even veteran and renowned filmmakers such as Stephen Spielberg, Francis Ford Coppola, and Ridley Scott made films that gratuitously thrust Arab characters into cameo roles.[208] Like Edward Said, Shaheen recognizes that negative stereotypes are not easy to overturn due to their self-perpetuating nature. "Filmmakers," he writes, "grew up watching Western heroes crush hundreds of reel "bad" Arabs. Some naturally repeat the stereotype without realizing that, in so doing, they are innocently joining the ranks of the stereotypes' creators[209]."

Shaheen's seminal study helps illuminate the considerable damage Hollywood has caused in its demeaning and unjustifiable mischaracterization of Arabs and Muslims. However, while it is crucial to recognize *Reel Bad Arabs* for its scholarly merit and meaningful contributions, it is worth noting that Shaheen's analysis failed to thoroughly examine the direct relationship between Hollywood and American politics. Although the author briefly discusses the DOD's frequent collaboration with the film industry[210], he does

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[207] Ibid, 33.

[208] See *The Black Stallion* (1979), *Back to the Future* (1985), *Young Sherlock Holmes* (1985), and *G.I Jane* (1997)

[209] Shaheen, J. G. (2015). *Reel bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*. Northampton, Massachusetts: Interlink Publishing group, p. 34

[210] Shaheen's investigatory review shows that among the many films showing Americans killing Arab characters, at least 18 motion pictures credited the DOD and the US Marine Corps for providing technical assistance, equipment and personnel. See Shaheen, *Reel Bad* Arabs. P. 21-22

not explore Hollywood's pivotal role in promoting controversial policies and rationalizing questionable political agendas. Indeed, throughout its history, Hollywood has been inescapably beholden to the political establishment. Studios' requests for military equipment were routinely approved. Heavy, state-of-the-art machinery was offered in bulk. As long as American wars—real and imaginary, just and gratuitous— were justified and won on the silver screen, Hollywood had privileged access to military hardware and assistance. As Bob Herzberg writes:

> For the decades that the U.S. military has been depicted on American screens, the portrayal of the Armed forces has generally been positive, and with good reason. … Usually, whenever Hollywood made war films or service-themed dramas or comedies, it was a given that they needed the cooperation of the Armed forces. This was mandatory; war dramas and service comedies needed permission to shoot on battleships, Navy piers, Army installations, forts, Marine boot camps, Air Force hangars, airfields, tarmacs, submarine ports, barracks, firing ranges, and even mess halls. …Audiences never knew of the behind-the-scenes bureaucratic pissing matches between Columbia Pictures [and other film studios] and the … [military]. … Seeking the backing of the military, Hollywood went along with much of the censorship. …

Though many of them were unfailingly patriotic and uncritical of the military, some films concealed military mistakes, misconstructed orders, tragic incidents that could have been avoided, or battles that went wrong with a nitpicking Department of Defense and the film offices of the various branches of the armed forces services frowning on certain projects that did not present a spotless depiction of American fighting men.[211]

One of the main reasons why Hollywood vilifies Arabs, as will be shown later, is to elicit public support for potential military entanglements. The dehumanization of Arabs and Muslims is first and foremost intended to portray them as a danger that must be confronted. This belligerent attitude became more pronounced in the wake of the 9/11 suicide attacks as Hollywood released numerous feature films and television series to help persuade the public of the necessity to wage war so as to preempt further aggression. The decades-long demonization of Muslims and Arabs made for an easy and compelling case. Notwithstanding the controversy surrounding the policies that the political establishment put in place to combat terror, Hollywood presented scenarios and crafted storylines that sought to promote an ends-justify-the-means narrative. As will be discussed later, Hollywood's mischaracterization of Arabs and Muslims helped paved the way for some of

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[211] Herzberg, B. (2021). *Hollywood and the Military Bureaucracy: Depicting America's Fighting Forces at Their Best and Worst*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers. Pp: 1-4

the draconian measures the U.S. implemented in its self-proclaimed war on terror. Films such as *American Sniper* and television series like *24* peddled blatant propaganda on behalf of the ruling elite. In an effort to gain public support for the war, Hollywood made films that obfuscated the distinction between patriotism and jingoism.

2. Jack Shaheen: *Guilty: Hollywood's Verdict on Arabs after 9/11*

Jack Shaheen's *Reel Bad Arabs* was followed by another critique in 2008 entitled *Guilty: Hollywood's Verdict on Arabs after 9/11*. The book examines roughly 100 films released after 9/11. As the title indicates, Shaheen concludes that the majority of films he reviewed condemned Arabs. Screen representations of Arabs post-9/11 undergirded the assumption that *they* are all guilty by ethnic association. However, it should be noted that Shaheen's survey also concludes that a total of 29 motion pictures cast Arabs and Arab Americans in refreshingly favorable terms[212]. Shaheen remarks that the Israeli-Hezbollah conflict and the U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq brought about a representational transformation of Arabs in American cinema. The bumbling oil sheiks, and slave-owning, camel-riding nomads Hollywood often featured in its films were replaced by raving Islamic fundamentalists seeking to wreak destruction on the United States[213]. This shift in cinematic representations was designed to render Arabs and Muslims easy targets for military aggression. Shaheen writes:

> Long before the United States launched real expeditionary
> operations against Iraq in March 2003, Hollywood was already
> launching a reel war against reel Arabs. … Kill'em-all films
> like *Navy Seals* (1990), *True Lies* (1994), *Executive Decision*

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[212] Shaheen, J. G. (2008). *Guilty: Hollywood's verdict on Arabs after 9/11*. Northampton, Mass: Olive Branch Press. P. XV

[213] Ibid, p ,XV- XVI

(1996), and *Rules of Engagement* (2000) projected our GIs,

civilians, secret agents, the American president, Israeli troops,

even cowboys, terminating reel barbaric Arabs. … After seeing

our reel Western heroes shoot those bad Arabs dead in their

sandals, some viewers stood and applauded[214].

Shaheen notes that the reassuring speeches Bush had delivered after 9/11 were soon

overshadowed by a rancorous narrative—advanced by well-known politicians such as Tom

Tancredo[215], Virgil Goode[216], Peter T. King, Sam Brownback, Donald Rumsfeld, and Rudy

Giuliani—that solidified outrageous "stereotypes that historically have damaged an entire

people.[217]" The president's infamous comparison of the war on terror to the crusade

conjured up painful memories of Christian armies invading the Holy Land in the High

Middle Ages[218]. In addition to politicians, several religious leaders, authors, and journalists

also adopted dog-whistle tactics to fan the flames of racial and religious resentment.

Shaheen observes:

Publishers released books such as *Antichrist: Islam's awaited*

Messiah, *Terrorist*, *Allah's Torch*, *Allah's Scorpion*, *Allah's*

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[214] Ibid, p. XIX

[215] Colorado representative Tom Tancredo, who ran for president in 2008, suggested that the United States must threaten to attack Mecca and Medina, Islam's holiest cities, in order to prevent future terrorist attacks.

[216] Virginia representative Virgil Goode advocated for stringent immigration policies to address the growing number of Muslims in the United States.

[217] Ibid, p. 4

[218] Ibid, p. 4

Bomb, and *Allah's Sword*. Author Robert Spencer said Muslims were threatening Catholics … Syndicated columnist Mona Charen wrote: "Every Middle-Eastern looking truck driver should be pulled over and questioned wherever he may be in the United States… On Fox's *Beltway Boys*, Fred Barnes advocated profiling: "If people are of Middle Eastern extraction," he said, they "should be treated a little differently, just for the security of the United States. … On C-SPAN, Ann Coulter declared: "We need to invade their countries, kill their leaders, and convert them to Christianity. … Several Evangelical Christians labeled Islam as evil. … Jerry vines said the Prophet Mohammed was a "demon-possessed pedophile." … Reverend David Clippard said "The Muslims … are after your daughters… if you don't convert, your head comes off[219]"

In an effort to shed light on Hollywood's insidious narrative post-9/11, Shaheen examines the portrayal of Muslim clerics—or Imams— in the popular TV show *criminal minds* (2007). The show's attempt to paint Imams as preachers of hate and recruiters of terrorists stands in marked contrast to the commendable role Muslim-Americans play in combatting terrorism. Shaheen references Virginia's Imam Mohamed Magid, who led the funeral of two young Muslims who died in the 9/11 terrorist attacks. His words of comfort

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[219] Ibid, p. 5-6

to the bereaved family challenge Hollywood's misrepresentation of Islam: "the terrorists who kill in the name of Islam," Imam Magid says solemnly, "claim they are the martyrs… But the victims are the martyrs… The terrorists are the murderous.[220]" Misrepresentations of Muslims in Hollywood fuel Islamophobia and feed religious animosity. The perception that mosques are breeding grounds for terrorism has led to numerous acts of wanton vandalism. Across the United States and Europe, evening prayers have been interrupted, racist graffiti and Nazi swastikas have been scribbled over the walls of several mosques, and even more disturbingly, a frozen pig's head was thrown inside a mosque in Portland, Maine[221]. These egregious acts are the direct result of a noxious rhetoric that pits the East against the West, Islam against Christianity.

Of particular relevance to this study is Shaheen's analysis of the television series *24*. It is interesting to note that numerous right-wing politicians and prominent media figures—such as former Vice President Dick Cheney, former U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff and the late radio megastar Rush Limbaugh—endorsed the series wholeheartedly.[222] It is no wonder that such powerful conservative voices rushed to extol the show as it helped make a convincing case for the callous measures they advocated following the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Shaheen spotlights the adverse impact *24*'s torture scenes had on service members in the United States military. Especially noteworthy is

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[220] Ibid, p.9

[221] Ibid, p. 10

[222] Ibid, p. 50

former U.S. Army Specialist Tony Lagouranis who reported that he and other military members were "encouraged to mimic torture techniques that they had seen in movies and on TV—particularly *24*.[223]" Army Brigade General Patrick Finnegan echoed Lagouranis' statements, asserting that, indeed, the show's grisly torture scenes emboldened U.S. military service members in Iraq to flout the law.[224] "General Finnegan," Shaheen recounts, "… flew to Los Angeles to meet with *24*'s creative ream, advising them to "do a show where torture backfires." They explained that in real life torture techniques never work.[225]"

Also germane to this study is Shaheen's analysis of Alejandro Iñárritu's feature-length film, *Babel* (2006). The author lauds the film for its compassionate and multi-dimensional portrayal of Moroccan, American, Mexican, and Japanese characters[226]. "For the Moroccan scenes," he explains, "the director wisely used locals to portray villagers; they bring effective, beautiful authenticity to their roles[227]." Shaheen argues that the US embassy's hysterical reaction to Susan's near-fatal injury reflects the rampant paranoia that gripped American society following 9/11.[228] The incident, which generated an international media frenzy, was hastily characterized as a terrorist attack—a reference to the aggressive

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[223] Ibid, p. 50

[224] Ibid, p. 50

[225] Ibid, p. 50

[226] Ibid, p. 97

[227] Ibid, p. 97

[228] Ibid, p. 97

misinformation campaign and a reminder of the bedlam and hysteria that ensued after 9/11. Shaheen observes:

> The next scene brilliantly reflects irrational post-9/11 paranoia. Richard's told that no ambulance will come to their aid. Why? "The American stopped the ambulance; they want to send a helicopter." US embassy officials think the shooting was not an accident, but a terrorist act. Like the US officials, Richard's fellow travelers panic, sneak back onto the bus, and drive off. They, too, fear Moroccan terrorists are lurking behind every cup of mint tea. Meanwhile, the embassy's overzealous security behavior, combined with enormous media reports about "terrorism," prompts Moroccan policemen to use little restraint. … *Babel* reveals our common humanity. Unlike most stereotypical images about Arabs, the Moroccans in this film are a likeable, diverse group: Doctors, elderly nurses, friends, and family. They are real people—just like us[229].

This study challenges Shaheen's interpretation of the film's motives. As will be discussed later, *Babel*'s depiction of Moroccan space, men, women, and children borrows extensively from a canonical Orientalist discourse. The film is embedded with undertones of cultural

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[229] Ibid, p. 97-98

superiority. Despite its apparent attempt to contest negative stereotypes about Muslims, the film reinforces a subtle but powerful narrative, one that stokes xenophobic tendencies and promotes religious intolerance.

3. Evelyn Alsultany: *Arabs and Muslims in the Media*

Evelyn Alsultany's 2012 book, *Arabs and Muslims in the Media*, argues that U.S television saw a proliferation of flattering depictions of Arabs and Muslims after 9/11[230]. In a stark departure from Hollywood's stereotypical representations, television series such as *The Practice*, *Boston Public*, *Law & Order SVU*, *NYPD Blue*, and *The Guardian* portrayed Arab and Muslim Americans as hardworking patriots.[231] This shift was accompanied by a flurry of speeches—extemporaneous and scripted alike—then-President Bush delivered in the wake of 9/11, which assured Muslims in the United States and around the world that the government intended to target only those responsible for the terrorist attacks. Bush stressed that the radical Muslims who carried out the attacks were a fringe group that did not represent the Islamic faith.[232] By and large, the administration's preliminary response took great pains to assuage fears of a backlash against Muslims and diffuse the racial and religious tensions that threatened to unravel the fabric of American society. The government and media appeared cautious not to create a narrative that projected Islam as a threat to national security.

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[230] Alsultany, E. (2012). *Arabs and Muslims in the media: Race and representation after 9/11*. New York: New York University Press. P.1

[231] Ibid, p.3

[232] In an address George W. Bush delivered on December 17, 2001 at the Islamic Center of Washington, DC, he acknowledged that "the face of terror is not the true faith if Islam … Islam is peace. These terrorists don't represent peace."

The surprisingly positive representations of Muslims and Arabs in American media in the days and months following 9/11 appeared to herald a new era of multicultural sensitivity and racial progress. However, "such optimism," Alsutany argues, "was quickly tempered … workplace discrimination, bias incidents, and airline discrimination targeting Arab and Muslim Americans increased exponentially.[233]" The harsh measures the U.S. government introduced in the turbulent aftermath of 9/11 exacted an enormous toll on Arab and Muslim Americans who were forced to grapple with grim new realities. Alsultany maintains that fear, exclusion, self-censorship, psychological distress, social anxiety, and self-deportation are some of the post-9/11 effects reported by Arab and Muslim Americans.[234] The measures and policies put in place by the Bush administration quickly gave way to a climate of paranoia, suspicion, and rancor. Alsultany contends that the sudden increase in sympathetic representations of Arabs and Muslims on American television was meant to paint the country as "benevolent, especially in its declaration of war and … deflect attention from the persistence of racist policies and practices post-9/11.[235]"

The emergence of depictions that humanize Muslims and Arabs, according to Alsultany, spawned a new form of racism, one that appears to celebrate cultural diversity, but in fact, promotes racist policies[236]. In an effort to "project the United States as an

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[233] Alsultany, E. (2012). p.4

[234] Ibid, p.5

[235] Ibid, p.7-12

[236] Ibid, p.16

enlightened country that has entered a post-racial era[237]," Muslims and Arabs were thrust into roles that showed their humanity and celebrated their moral values. These new portraits, which, at first blush, seem to subvert Hollywood's traditional stereotypes, tropes, and misconceptions about the "other," do little more than pay lip service to multiculturalism and racial tolerance. This wave of sympathetic and nuanced characterizations appears to signal America's transition into an inclusive, tolerant, and racially sensitive society. However, in reality, they are intended to placate Arab and Muslim watchdog organizations and respond to the growing public awareness of ethnic stereotypes[238].

Television series like *24* and *Sleeper Cell* employed various strategies to create the impression that America is no longer a seething cauldron of racial strife. Laudatory portrayals of Muslims post-9/11 implied that the U.S. had reconciled with and learned from its past. Alsultany refers to these portrayals as simplified complex representations. She argues that although they are positive, such representations have no meaningful impact on the dominant discourse about Arabs and Muslims[239]. Some of the representational strategies television screenwriters employ—in an effort to construct narratives that project America as a bastion of racial diversity—include showing sympathy for the plight of Arabs and Muslim Americans, featuring characters that exhibit acts of patriotism, and

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[237] Ibid, p. 16

[238] Ibid, p. 20

[239]Ibid, p. 21

fictionalizing the names of countries that support or breed terrorism[240]. "[These] strategies," the author suggests, "… are akin to a Band-Aid over a still-festering wound. They give the impression of comfort, perhaps even of cure, but the fundamental problem remains.[241]"

In addition to TV dramas, news reporting also helped lay the ideological groundwork for the government's aggressive response to 9/11. *Newsweek*, *World Report*, *CNN*, *NBC*, and *Fox News* —to name but a few— are some of the major media companies that routinely featured stories portraying Arab and Muslim women as victims of patriarchal oppression. "The commercial news media," Alsultany notes, "produces a mantra about Islam: veiled oppression, female genital mutilation, "honor" killing, and a lack of rights.[242]" Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, news stories honed in on the horrors and grievous oppression Muslim women endure in countries like Afghanistan, Iran, Yemen, and Pakistan. These news stories sensationalized the tragedy of Muslim women, implying that their mistreatment is a common practice in all Muslim societies, thus positioning America as a purveyor of human rights and guarantor of gender equality. Their harrowing accounts, Alsultany observes, were meant to perpetuate a monolithic image of Islam, one that provokes shock, pity, and moral outrage[243]. Interestingly, even prominent female Politicians such as Hillary Clinton and First Lady Laura Bush—who are on opposite sides

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[240] Ibid, p. 21-26

[241] Ibid, p. 28

[242] Ibid, p. 75

[243] Ibid, p. 75-76

of the political spectrum— made remarks that bolstered the administration's narrative, emphasizing that liberating Afghan women from the shackles of tyranny was part and parcel of the War on Terror[244]. In the wake of the fall of the Taliban—a terrorist organization infamous for its extreme interpretation of Islam and an abysmal record of human rights violations—images of women in high heels and make-up were broadcast to congratulate the United States for "bringing "light" to the "darkness" that was Afghanistan. … Stories of Muslim women who are victims of a barbaric culture and religion rationalize the need to expel Muslims from the political community, deny them human rights, and justify detentions.[245]"

Alsultany's critique affords fresh insights into Hollywood's underlying motives. Indeed, the sudden ubiquity of flattering portraits of Arab and Muslim characters on-screen should not be interpreted as a sign of a fundamental transformation American cinema has undergone in the tempestuous aftermath of 9/11. In the television series *24*, for instance, the protagonist Jack Bauer encounters Muslim characters whose conduct, surprisingly enough, defies stereotypes and confounds audience expectations. Characters such as Naiyeer in *Day 4* create the perception of a Hollywood that preaches religious tolerance and promotes cultural coexistence. However, upon closer scrutiny, it becomes clear that these affectionate portrayals are a fig leaf designed to disguise Hollywood's ingrained prejudice against Muslims. As will be shown later, the Islamophobic rhetoric employed by

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[244] Ibid, p. 73

[245] Ibid, p. 76-84

television series—like 24—undermines any attempt to project Hollywood through a different prism.

4. Thomas Riegler: "Through the Lenses of Hollywood: Depictions of Terrorism in American Movies"

In an article entitled "Through the Lenses of Hollywood: Depictions of Terrorism in American Movies," Thomas Riegler compares representations of terrorism in Hollywood since the late 1960s. The author reconstructs the historical development of terrorism and examines the proposition that American cinema is liable to inspire terrorists "to re-enact or copy … "reel" violence—given the fact that terrorists are too subject to the influence of cinematic images and metaphors[246]." Before 9/11, Hollywood drew inspiration from the rise of Shiite fundamentalism, Palestinian aircraft hijackings, and the red scare—fear of communism—to explore the threat of political violence and address its ramifications. As "Islamic" terrorism was not a pressing issue in the United States in the 1970s, Hollywood capitalized on major international events to inform its depictions of terrorism:

> William A. Graham staged the Munich hostage massacre of
> 1972 four years later in *21 hours at Munich*. Only five months
> after the real event Marvin J. Chomsky re-enacted the
> spectacular Entebbe rescue mission in.… (*Victory at Entebbe,*
> 1976). The story was also adapted for TV in *Raid on Entebbe*

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[246] Riegler, T. (May, 2010). Through the Lenses of Hollywood: Depictions of Terrorism in American Movies. *Perspective on Terrorism, Volume 4* (Issue 2), pp. 35-45. P. 35

(1977), starring Charles Bronson. The formula for these
movies is basically the same: high-ranking politicians in crisis
centres make daring decisions, while elite commandos first
train meticulously for their mission and then free the hostages
in a climactic shoot-out sequence[247].

In the 1980s, Hollywood honed in on the threat terrorism posed to American
security, be it communism—the Soviet Union—or religious extremism—Iran. Films such
as *nighthawks* (1981) and *Invasion U.S.A* (1985) advanced the notion that democratic
countries have a responsibility to contravene their laws, if need be, to tackle threats of
terrorism[248]. "The message," Riegler argues, "is that terrorism cannot claim any "true"
political underpinning or legitimate causes—it's either the product of "loony" fanaticism
or of a criminal enterprise orchestrated by its secret paymasters.[249]" Cinema in the 1990s
saw an increase in action films—*Die Hard II* and *III* (1992-1995)*, Red Alert* (1992),
Passenger 57 (1992), *Operation Broken Arrow* (1997)*, and Air Force One* (1997) are a
few notable productions. Such films feature heroic patriots who are willing to sacrifice
their lives to protect their country. The 1990s also saw the emergence of films that focused
on the growing threat of radical Islam. Films such as *True Lies* (1994) and *Executive
Decisions* (1996) "depict jihadists as backward lunatics and potential mass murderers

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[247] Ibid, p. 36

[248] Ibid, p. 37

[249] Ibid, p. 42

whose onslaught had to be fought by all means necessary.[250]" Riegler argues that in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, Hollywood diverted its attention away from terrorism and turned its focus to "fantastical escapism, science fiction, and family entertainment.[251]" It was not until 2005 that Hollywood released a film—*The War Within*—that considers the after-effects of 9/11.

Riegler investigates the connection between real and make-believe terrorism. He cites a series of incidents that point to a symbiotic relationship between Hollywood films and real acts of terrorism. Films such as *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) were reportedly screened by several militant groups like the IRA, the Tamil Tigers and the Black Panthers to help with training. Recently, an Al Qaeda sympathizer found inspiration in John McTiernan's 1995 film, *Die Hard with a Vengeance*[252]. Riegler posits that portrayals of terrorism are reflective of the prevailing public discourse. The meaning of terrorism, therefore, is largely understood through its skewed representations on the silver screen. "This "mirror(ed) image" of terrorism," Riegler explains, "is revealing because ultimately it expresses … the specter of unspeakable atrocities, the notion of extra-legal violence…. or the establishment of a "state of siege" ending all civil liberties[253]." Depictions of terrorism in American cinema, Riegle concludes, reduce so complex and multilayered an

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[250] Ibid, p. 39

[251] Ibid, p. 40

[252] Ibid, p. 43

[253] Ibid, p. 44

issue to a struggle between good and evil, thus distorting public perception and creating a false narrative about the causes and aims of political violence[254].

Riegler's article calls attention to the impact screen representations have on public discourse and—perhaps more importantly—policy making. In order to root out terrorism, mass media has a responsibility to present a frank and unflinching portrait of the real causes that drive religious extremists to espouse political violence and commit acts of terror—acts that indeed cannot claim any legitimate causes. Terrorism is a serious and thorny issue, and any attempt to confront it must first grapple with the complexity of its roots and motivations. A simplistic view of terrorism is bound to result in serious errors of judgment on the part of decision-makers, which translate into ineffective and sometimes even dangerous policies. The decision to invade Iraq, for instance, and topple Saddam Hussein was ill-advised as it created a political vacuum that plunged the country into uncertainty and led to a grinding, protracted civil war. The full-scale invasion of the country inflamed sectarian tensions and created ripe conditions for terrorism to thrive. Such misbegotten, indeed catastrophic, decisions compound conflicts and fuel long-simmering resentment. It is important to note that since the public's perception of terrorism is largely informed by the media, it is especially dangerous to frame the conflict as a struggle between good—Christianity— and evil—Islam. Such a dichotomy, which is regrettably highlighted in

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[254] Riegler, p. 44

American cinema more often than not, adds to a growing sense of wariness and reinforces prejudice against Muslims and Arabs.

There is no doubt that the intractable issue of terrorism carries enormous and far-reaching implications both for Muslims around the world, and the West. As evidenced by the past two decades, brute military force is not sufficient to rein in, much less eradicate, terrorism. The war on terror requires putting in place mechanisms that uncover and effectively address the roots of religious extremism. The ideological underpinnings that sustain terrorism owe their durability to two key factors: cynical manipulation of mass grievances and stretched interpretations of religious texts. "Islamic" fundamentalists have proven their ability to prey on pliable minds and thrive on internecine strife. There is no denying the fact that military deterrence has clearly failed to stamp out terrorism. Therefore, it stands to reason that other—possibly less aggressive—measures should be considered. In many respects, Hollywood's monolithic portrayal of Muslims is analogous to the alarmist and inflammatory rhetoric spouted by religious extremists. They both perpetuate a pernicious narrative that heightens fears and incites hate. Hollywood's depiction of Muslims as stock terrorists alienates moderate Muslims—who routinely condemn acts of terrorism—and takes away from the indispensable role they play in promoting peace and advocating religious tolerance. Regrettably, the vast majority of Muslims who denounce terrorism and reject extremism are sorely underrepresented—if represented at all—on screen. Hollywood's determined attempts to project *all* Muslims as

a danger to US national security reinforce already sharp divisions and foster a climate of distrust and intolerance.

The Other in Hollywood

Before deconstructing Hollywood's portrayals of Muslims post 9/11, it is important to survey the history of cinematic representations of other similarly vilified minority groups. African Americans, Native Americans and Hispanic Americans—to name but a few—have all been systematically denigrated, dehumanized and lampooned on the silver screen. Throughout the history of Hollywood, Black Americans, perhaps more than any other ethnic group, have incurred ridicule and suffered extreme, virulent racism. The structural racial disparities and deep-rooted prejudice that the legacy of slavery left behind were especially reinforced by the American film industry at the turn of the twentieth century, paving the way to policies that further shunted blacks to the margins and curtailed their civil liberties.

In an effort to diminish the abject horrors of slavery, Hollywood has churned out films that reinforced grotesque stereotypes and confirmed racist tropes about Black Americans. Depicted as unattractive, stout and especially dark-skinned, black women were purposely desexualized to rewrite the dark history of slavery, an era that was particularly rife with excessive, wanton violence and sexual enslavement[255]. The mammy figure, a demeaning caricature portraying black women as dull-witted and subservient maids eager

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[255] See Moore W. E. (1980). *American Negro Slavery and Abolition: A Sociological Study*. Arno Press. See also White D. G. Bay M. & Martin W. E. (2021). *Freedom On My Mind: A History of African Americans with Documents*. Bedford/St. Martins. See also Douglass F. (1855). *My Bondage and my Freedom*. New York, Miller, Orton & Mulligan.

to oblige, was recycled on screen to suppress the brutal truth about the cruel punishments—such as lashing, branding, burning, shackling and lynching[256]—that black Americans routinely suffered at the hands of their white masters. The mammy caricature perpetuated the myth that black women were faithful, obsequious servants, suited only for menial household chores and content to take on the role of surrogate mothers to the children of white families.[257] Throughout the 20th century, the apron-clad mammy—servile, rotund and unintelligent—was a ubiquitous fixture on the silver screen.

Fig. 4: Hattie McDaniel in *Gone With the Wind*, an oft-cited example of the Mammy figure

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[256] See Moore W. E. (1980). *American Negro Slavery and Abolition: A Sociological Study*. Arno Press.

[257] See *Gone with the Wind* (1939), *Beulah* (1950-1953), *Made for Each Other* (1939), *Hollywood Shuffle* (1987), *Judge Priest* (1934) and *Imitation of Life* (1934).

The degrading stereotypes that came to define black women in the 19th and 20th centuries were also attached to their male counterparts. Instead of producing films that call attention to the great anguish black men suffered in the antebellum era, Hollywood employed imagery that romanticized slavery and lent support to policies that further exacerbated their plight. The Uncle Tom caricature, for instance, emphasized the submissive nature of black men; their role was confined to catering to their white masters' needs[258]. The endurance and ubiquity of this trope betray Hollywood's resolve to hamper African Americans' progress. The Sambo is another stock character that sprung into existence in the early 19th century. Popularized by the minstrel shows and inherited by Hollywood, the Sambo character was routinely utilized to portray black men as carefree, lethargic and superstitious simpletons[259]. Depictions of black men also mocked and distorted their appearance. The grotesque, protruding eyes and bright, rubbery lips added to their dehumanization and debasement. The happy-go-lucky demeanor and unrefined speech of the Sambo solidified the perception that Black Americans are uncouth, childlike and in need of regular supervision.

In contrast to the Uncle Tom and Sambo characters, who defended their masters and were content to be enslaved, the minstrel shows created another malicious caricature—the coon—to disparage slaves who longed to be free. Years later, Hollywood appropriated the

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[258] See Driving Miss Daisy (1989)/ Follow Your Heart (1936)/ The Littlest Rebel (1935)/ The Little Colonel (1935)/ Heavn Can Wait (1934)/ Edge of the City (1957)

[259] See Song of the South (1946)/ The Littlest Rebel (1935)/ David Harum (1934)

coon caricature to promote racial apartheid, fuel the flames of white supremacy and challenge laws that sought to redress the wrongs of slavery. In the 1915 silent film, *The Birth of a Nation*[260]—a film credited with the resurrection of the Ku Klux Klan[261]—African Americans are depicted as frenzied, sexually aggressive brutes. Noted for its pioneering techniques and cinematic craftsmanship, the epic drama film, which featured an ensemble of white actors donning black faces, weaves a cautionary tale warning of the depravity and disarray that await the country should Black Americans be granted political power. One particularly racist scene shows a newly elected majority of black congressmen eating fried chicken and drinking liquor during a legislative session. The scene—which was accompanied by an intertitle that reads, "The negro party in control in the State of House of Representatives, 101 blacks against 23 whites, session of 1871[262]"—is a testament to Hollywood's blatant complicity in promoting anti-black sentiment and inciting racial violence.

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[260] See Griffith, D. W. (Director.) (1915). *The Birth of a Nation*. [Film]. David. W. Griffith Corp.

[261] See Rampell. E. (2015, March 3). The Birth of a Nation: The Most Racist Movie Ever Made. *The Washington Post*.

[262] Griffith, D. W. (Director.) (1915). *The Birth of a Nation*. [Film]. David. W. Griffith Corp.

Fig. 5: Followed by an intertitle that reads, "The honorable member of Ulster," this scene shows an African American member of Congress drinking alcohol during a legislative session.

Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, and other Hollywood films of its ilk[263], helped justify a codified system of stringent laws that were designed to consign Black Americans to undue economic hardship and relegate them to a secondary status. In the wake of the Reconstruction era, several states, especially in the former Confederacy, passed what came to be known as the Jim Crow laws. "The negro is free," Governor Benjamin G. Humphreys of Mississippi famously declared, "whether we like it or not; we must realize that fact now and forever. To be free, however, does not make him a citizen, or entitle him to political or

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[263] See *Yes Sir, Mr. Bones* (1951)

social equality with the white man[264]." Interestingly, the Jim Crow statutes, which mandated racial segregation and disenfranchised black voters for decades,[265] derived their name from a black caricature that was invented and popularized by Thomas Darmouth Rice, a well-known American playwright and minstrel show performer. Rice—who was white—wore a black face and spoke with a mangled African American vernacular to entertain his audience and indulge their racial prejudices. His buffoonish acts inspired countless white actors and comedians to emulate his Jim Crow persona. The crude caricatures that Hollywood inherited from the 19th-century minstrel shows[266] gave legitimacy to the repressive laws that the former Confederate states implemented to keep Black Americans in check. Despite the enormous strides that African Americans have made over the past few decades, Jim Crow remains firmly etched in the American collective consciousness, a stark reminder of an era that was marked by fear, sorrow and racial oppression.

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[264] Mississippi; Message of Gov. Humphreys to the Legislature on Negro Troops (December 3, 1865). *The New York Times*.

[265] See Bartlett B. R. (2008). *Wrong on Race: The Democratic Party's Buried Past* (1st ed.). Palgrave Macmillan. See also Perman M. (2001). *Struggle for Mastery: Disfranchisement in the South, 1888-1908*. University of North Carolina Press.

[266] See *Show Boat* (1936)

Fig. 6: Billy B. Van, a popular minstrel show performer who wore a black

face to mock African Americans.

In addition to Black Americans, Hollywood has also vilified other ethnic groups to legitimize their systematic mistreatment. Early screen depictions of Native Americans, for instance, followed a strikingly similar arc, one that invited ridicule, prejudice and enmity. Throughout the 20th century, Hollywood has released scores of films and television series that whitewashed the massacre perpetrated by the colonial settlers and made light of the ruthless repression and forced displacement that Native Americans endured for many decades. Films such as *The Life of Buffalo Bill* (1912), *Drums Along the Mohawk* (1939),

and *Davy Crockett: King of the Wild Frontiers* (1955) pitted Native American characters—primitive, ferocious and bloodthirsty—against their white counterparts—pious, civilized and superior. Although Hollywood made a string of films that sought to humanize Native Americans in the last quarter of the twentieth century[267], the "savage injun" myth that dogged indigenous tribes proved too entrenched to dispel.

Hollywood's reconstruction of the natives' early encounters with the settlers is littered with blatant falsehoods. The Italian navigator Christopher Columbus, who is credited with laying the groundwork for the European colonial conquest of the Americas, has been held in high regard by Hollywood. Conversely, the indigenous people he encountered through his maritime expeditions have been consistently reduced to mere caricatures. In a letter he dispatched to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain, in which he describes his encounter with the native inhabitants of the Islands he stumbled upon, Columbus writes:

> They are very gentle and do not know what it is to be wicked,
> or to kill others, or to steal … So your Highnesses should
> resolve to make them Christians. … Without a doubt there is a
> very great amount of gold in these lands… They brought us
> parrots and balls of cotton and spears and many other things,
> which they exchanged for the glass beads and hawks' bells.

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[267] See *Little Big Man* (1970), *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975) *Windwalker* (1980), *Powwow Highway* (1989), and *Dances with Wolves* (1993)

They willingly traded everything they owned. They do not bear

arms and do not know them, for I showed them a sword, they

took it by the edge and cut themselves out of ignorance. They

have no iron. Their spears are made of cane … *They would*

make fine servants. With fifty men we could subjugate them all

and make them do whatever we want.[268] (Emphasis added)

Hollywood's portrait of the American Indian Wars rarely makes mention of the cynical exploitation and irrevocable harm that the European settlers visited upon the indigenous tribes. Their schemes to expand their empire, subjugate the natives and plunder their resources are seldom subjected to scrutiny by the American film industry. Their endeavor to compel an entire native population to convert to Christianity is often framed as morally righteous. When the Italian explorer undertook his second voyage—accompanied by 17 ships and 1000 men, he enslaved the natives and established a colony that gave the Spanish Crown a strong foothold in the newly discovered continent[269]. In his book, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, the Spanish priest and historian Bartolomé de las Casas describes the horrific atrocities that the colonial settlers carried out against the natives:

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[268] Stobaugh J. (2014). *Studies in World History.* Master Books, Green Forest, Arkansas, p. 265

[269] Minster, C. (2020). "The Second Voyage of Christopher Columbus." ThoughtCo. See also Thomas H. (2003). *Rivers of Gold: The Rise of the Spanish Empire from Columbus to Magellan* (1st U.S.). Random House.

The Spaniards found pleasure in inventing all kinds of odd cruelties, the more cruel the better, with which to spill human blood. They built a long gibbet, low enough for the toes to touch the ground and prevent strangling, and hanged thirteen [natives] at a time in honor of Our Christ Saviour and the twelve Apostles. When the Indians were thus still alive and hanging, the Spaniards tested their strength and their blades against them, ripping chests open with one blow and exposing entrails, and there were those who did worse. Then, straw was wrapped around their torn bodies and they were burned alive. One man caught two children about two years old, pierced their throats with a dagger, then hurled them down a precipice.[270]

The arrival of European settlers to the Americas led to a dramatic decline in the indigenous population. The unceasing hostilities, fatal diseases, and forced removal of the natives from their lands disrupted their customs and upended their way of life.[271] It is worth noting that the profound reverence that Columbus commanded over the past few centuries has been recently put to the test by a vocal chorus of activists who sought to remove his

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[270] Stannard, D. E. (1992) *American Holocaust. The Conquest of the New World.* Oxford University Press. P. 72

[271] See Edwards T. S. & Kelton P. (2020). "Germs, Genocides, and America's Indigenous Peoples." *Journal of American History 52–76.*

statues across the US, contending that their mere presence is an affront to Native Americans whose ancestors suffered irreparable harm as a result of European colonization.[272]

The extreme brutalities that the indigenous tribes had been subjected to continued well into the twentieth century. Hollywood, working in tandem with the political establishment, continued to make films that emphasized white supremacy and downplayed the enormity of the horrors committed against the natives. The practice of scalping—the cutting of the adversary's scalp from the head to display as a battle trophy—has been promoted, indeed rewarded, by the colonial administrators. Benjamin Madley maintains that "policymakers offered bounties for Native American heads or scalps in at least twenty-three states… New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Maryland instituted nine scalp bounty programs during the eighteenth century… During the nineteenth century, government scalp bounty programs spread south and west.[273]" Interestingly, Hollywood routinely attributed the practice to Native Americans, emphasizing their bestiality and diminishing their long-standing ordeal. In the animated short film, *Rhythm on the Reservation* (1939), for instance, the popular cartoon character Betty Boop makes a visit to an Indigenous American reservation, only to be greeted with a sign that reads, "Try our scalp treatment."

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[272] See Diaz, J. (2020, June 10). "Christopher Columbus Statues in Boston, Minnesota and Virginia are Damaged. *The New York Times*.

[273] Madley B. (February 2015). "Reexamining the American Genocide Debate: Meaning, Historiography, and New Methods." *The American Historical Review Volume 120, Issue 1,* pp: 98-139

Fig 7: Betty Boop visiting a Native American reservation. The sign in the background is a reference to the practice of scalping that was introduced by European settlers in the seventeenth century.

Indeed, Hollywood's determined attempts to project the country's history through a distorted lens only foster tribalism, deepen distrust and add to long-simmering tensions between the federal government and Indigenous Americans. During his last days in office, the former Republican President Roland Reagan made uncomplimentary remarks about Native Americans, suggesting that their grievances have been long redressed:

Let me tell you just a little something about the American

Indian in our land. We have provided millions of acres of land

for what are called … reservations… They, from the

beginning, announced that they wanted to maintain their way

of life, as they had always lived there in the desert and the

plains… We've done everything we can to meet their demands

as to how they want to live. Maybe we made a mistake. Maybe

we should not have humored them in wanting to stay in that

kind of primitive lifestyle… Some of those reservations were

overlaying great pools of oil… I don't know what their

complaint might be[274].

Hollywood's demonization of the natives makes their mistreatment—however

unconscionable—palatable. As late as 1970, former President Richard Nixon launched a

federal grant program designed to ensure that vulnerable, low-income families—especially

Latino, Black and Native American women—have access to reproductive healthcare

services such as pregnancy testing, cancer screening and birth control counseling[275]. The

Family Planning Program, also referred to as Title X, resulted in heinous crimes against

Native American women. At a conservative estimate, 25 percent of women—of

childbearing age—had been sterilized, some without the consent, knowledge or

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[274] Utter, J. (2001). *American Indians: Answers to Today's Questions*. University of Oklahoma Press. P. 75.
[275] See Public Law 91-572-Dec. 24, 1970

understanding of the surgeries they were forced to undergo.[276] Regrettably, such brutalities are often overlooked on the silver screen. Hollywood's dehumanization of the natives trivializes their pain and obscures their struggles. The harsh, punitive measures imposed on them derive their legitimacy from a deeply ingrained belief—reinforced by more than a century of insidious portrayals—that they are inherently savage, that their propensity for aggression must be restrained at all costs.

The plight of Native Americans has been compounded by policies that were designed to impede their upward mobility. Languishing in poverty[277] and ostracized from modern society, indigenous communities have also been afflicted by damaging misconceptions and demeaning stereotypes that have gone unchallenged for far too long. However, in an effort to shatter these noxious myths, several Native American filmmakers set out to recount their own stories, delving into their past tragedies and foregrounding their shared aspirations. Films such as *Smoke Signals* (1998), *Four Sheets to the Wind* (2007), *The Cherokee Word for Water* (2013) and *Te Ata* (2016) offer poignant and nuanced portrayals of Native Americans. Thanks to filmmakers like Sterlin Harjo, Chris Eyre and Shelley Niro, an alternative narrative about the history, cultures and traditions of Native Americans is beginning to take shape, challenging Hollywood's widespread stereotypes

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[276] Theobald, B. (November 29, 2019). "A 1970 Law Led to the Mass Sterilization of Native American Women. That History Still Matters. *Time.*

[277] One in three Native Americans suffer from poverty. See Redbird, B (February 24, 2020). "What Drives Native American Poverty?" Northwestern Institute for Policy Research.

and thrusting their tribes' hardships, disappointments and demands to the fore of the national debate.

Chapter Three: Representations of Iraq

in *American Sniper*

1.Portrayal of the Iraq War

In *American Sniper*, a historical war drama film directed by Clint Eastwood, Chris Kyle is extolled as the deadliest sniper in the history of U.S. military, boasting a record-breaking number of 160 confirmed kills in Iraq. He is portrayed as eerily unflappable, methodical, and intent on warding off the never-ending attacks Iraqi insurgents launch against the Marines he is entrusted to protect. The motion picture is loosely based on Chris Kyle's memoir, which chronicles his four combat tours in Operation Iraqi Freedom. His surgical marksmanship and notable military successes earned him a revered, unrivaled reputation and catapulted him to an almost mythical, folk-hero stature. Like other motion pictures and television series that are selected for this study, *American Sniper* received critical acclaim and fared well at the box office, grossing over $547 million. Film critics largely praised Bradley Cooper for his authentic performance and applauded Clint Eastwood for his directorial virtuosity, which earned the war-themed film six nominations at the 87th Academy Awards, including Best Actor, Best Picture, and Best Film Editing, ultimately winning an award for Best Sound Editing.[278]

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[278] Chumley, Cheryl (February 23, 2015). "American Sniper' wins Academy Award for sound editing". *The Washington Times*, Washington D.C. Retrieved May 1, 2019

Fig. 8: Chris Kyle training his rifle on terrorist suspects

American Sniper depicts the US-led war on Iraq as a precarious terrain in which civilization confronts bestiality. Throughout the film, Arabs are portrayed as monstrous, sub-human creatures persistently plotting, at times succeeding, to inflict unspeakable horrors on innocent civilians and American soldiers alike. The film follows Chris Kyle's patriotic and legendary service in the Iraq war. His apparent inability to leave the war behind and uncompromising commitment to the battlefield exact a heavy toll on his marriage. The film also brings attention to the mental distress that war veterans suffer and the daily struggle they face, especially as they endeavor to readjust to social life upon their return.

The opening sequence of the film carries obvious political and religious overtones. As the logo of the studio company—Warner Bros. Picture—is plastered on screen at the beginning of the motion picture, the Islamic call to prayer, also known as adhan, can be heard in the distance. From the outset, the audience is advised that the events about to unfold take place in a Muslim country. When the call to prayer dies down, a military convoy lumbers along a bumpy, ravaged road, and the camera shifts to show what appears to be an uninviting, war-stricken terrain. The choice to display dozens of U.S. troops marching alongside tanks and Humvees immediately after the Islamic call to prayer is meant to highlight the ongoing US military entanglements in the Muslim world and serve to presage the gratuitous violence and utter chaos we later see engulfing the country. Indeed, religion, politics, and identity feature prominently in the film's narrative and comprise the bedrock of a conflict that continues to loom large over the two warring cultures.

The next scene of the film shows Chris Kyle stoically taking position on a rooftop, perched behind his high-powered sniper rifle and poised to stave off any potential enemy attack as the military convoy cautiously makes its way through the treacherous paths of an Iraqi neighborhood. One of the very first lines spoken in the film shows Kyle and his marine backup trading disparaging jokes about Iraq:

> Chris Kyle: It's a fucking hot box.
>
> Soldier: The fucking dirt here tastes like dog shit.

Chris Kyle: Ah, well, you'd know, wouldn't you?[279]

It is interesting to note that the first scene in the film, which is also featured in the trailer, conflates the Islamic call to prayer with what appears to be a terrorist-infested neighborhood lying in ruin and reeking of fetid air. This scene associates Islam with vile filth, misfortune, and terrorism. Kyle's exchange with his marine backup suggests that the U.S. military presence in Iraq aims to cleanse the country of wickedness and help thrust it towards civilization. As will be shown later, the film also portrays children and women in a pejorative light. The rugged, scruffy clothes they wear reflect their abject poverty. Iraqi villages are shown as decrepit, poverty-stricken terrains that abound with grimy, primitive savages. Children are brainwashed and catapulted to the front lines of a vicious, raging war that, ironically enough, was started to free them from the shackles of a brutal, tyrannical regime.

As Kyle scopes out the neighborhood, his sniper rifle rests upon a military-aged man watching the convoy and speaking to an unidentified person on the phone. Kyle's commanding officer advises him to take the man down if he suspects that he is reporting troop movement. Suddenly, the man flees the house, and the camera shifts to show a black-clad woman emerging from a house and marching in lockstep with her child towards the military convoy. The following dialogue captures the intensity of the harrowing events about to transpire:

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[279] Eastwood, C. (Director). (2014) *American Sniper*. [Film]. Warner Bros Pictures.

Chris Kyle [radioing his commanding officer]: Hold on. I got

a woman and a kid, 200 yards out, moving towards the convoy.

Her arms aren't swinging. She's carrying something. She's got

a grenade. She's got an RKG Russian grenade. She gave it to

the kid.

Commanding Officer: You say a woman and kid?

Chris Kyle: You got eyes on this? Can you confirm?

Commanding officer: Negative. You know the ROEs [Rules of

Engagement]. Your call.[280]

Soldier: They're gonna fry you if you're wrong. They'll send

[you] to Leavenworth.

The woman proceeds to hand the RKG-3 anti-tank grenade, which she was hiding beneath her flowing cloak, to her child, who grabs it and runs towards the military convoy. Abruptly, the film cuts to a flashback of a young Kyle. The flashback scenes highlight the enormous impact Kyle's formative years of childhood had on his moral precept and life's trajectory.

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[280] Ibid

Fig. 9: An Iraqi mother handing a grenade to her son

Later, the film cuts back to the opening sequence, showing the child carrying the grenade and sprinting towards the marine convoy. Before he could reach his target, Kyle kills him. Seeing her child's lifeless body on the ground, the mother scrambles to pick up the bomb and wildly runs towards the marines. Again, Kyle swiftly—and almost mechanically—shoots her dead. This scene is particularly interesting in that it focuses solely on the moral dilemma Kyle faces as he is forced to execute a mother and her child before they can harm his fellow service members. After the threat is eliminated, the film does not attempt to untangle the reasons that might have prompted the mother to sacrifice herself and her child. Their death, filmed from Kyle's perspective, is framed as justified,

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necessary, and undeserving of any further explanation. This scene suggests that any endeavor to explore the complex nature of terrorism is an exercise in futility. "The reason for these [terrorist] attempts," Alsultany writes, "are never fully explained, leaving open two opposed possibilities: we don't need a reason—isn't terrorism what Arabs and/or Muslims do, after all?—or any such rationale would be incomprehensible to Americans.[281]" Evidently, there is no moral, political or religious justification for terrorism. Any ideology that thrives on religious intolerance and promotes indiscriminate violence is dangerous. However, it should be noted that Hollywood's systematic misrepresentation of Muslims reinforces the fallacious narrative that Islam advocates terrorism. As in *American Sniper*, this pernicious vilification helps justify military intervention and adds legitimacy to other morally ambiguous actions.

The dreadful predicament Kyle is embroiled in evokes sympathy for the hard choices he has to make on the battlefield. His overriding obligation to protect his comrades-in-arms accounts for his ruthlessness. Albeit gruesome, his actions seem par for the course given the unforgiving and perilous nature of his mission. However, it is striking to note that the film goes to extreme lengths to re-write some of the events Kyle recounts in his memoir. The scene discussed above, for instance, is replete with wild exaggerations and gross distortions. According to Kyle's memoir, he never killed any children. Throughout his four tours in Iraq, the first and only time he found himself compelled to shoot a female

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[281] Alsultany, E. (2012). *Arabs and Muslims in the media: Race and representation after 9/11.* New York: New York University Press. P.3

insurgent occurred when he spotted a woman running towards a platoon of marines with a Chinese grenade:

> The place smelled like a sewer—the stench of Iraq was one thing I'd never get used to.
>
> "Marines are coming," said my chief as the building began to shake. "Keep watching."
>
> I looked through the scope. The only people who were moving were the woman and maybe a child or two nearby.
>
> I watched our troops pull up. The young, proud Marines in uniform got out of their vehicles and gathered for a foot patrol. As the Americans organized the woman took something from beneath her clothes and yanked at it.
>
> She'd set a grenade. I didn't realize it at first.
>
> "Looks yellow," I told the chief, describing what I saw as he watched himself. "It's yellow, the body—"
>
> "She's got a grenade," said the chief. "That's a Chinese grenade."
>
> "Shit."
>
> "Take a shot."
>
> But—"
>
> "Shoot. Get the grenade. The Marines—"

I hesitated. Someone was trying to get the Marines on the radio,

but we couldn't reach them. They were coming down the street,

heading toward the woman.

"Shoot!" said the chief.

I pushed my finger against the trigger. The bullet leaped out. I

shot. The grenade dropped. I fired again as the grenade blew

up.

It was the first time I'd killed anyone while I was on the sniper

rifle. And the first time in Iraq—and the only time—I killed

anyone other than a male combatant[282].

Like the film, Kyle repeatedly makes reference to the overpowering, putrid, and unmistakable stench that is characteristic of Iraq. The acrid stench alludes to the moral decay blighting the country. The child injected in the opening sequence of the film is used as a prop to further dramatize and heighten the horrors of the conflict. The choice to alter Kyle's account serves to underscore the other's inherent backwardness and barbaric nature. The message underlined in this scene is that the act of killing children, no matter how abhorrent or morally reprehensible it might appear, can be justified and, at times, even necessary.

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[282] Kyle, C (2012). *American Sniper: the Autobiography of the Most Lethal Sniper in US Military History*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers. pp. 3-4

Although largely fictitious, this scene calls attention to the egregious use of children in military conflicts. This is a rather recurrent theme in war films. What is especially concerning about this sequence, and numerous others, as we later see in the film, is the callous indifference and blatant disregard that Iraqi families appear to exhibit, time and again, for the sanctity of human life. The film portrays the mother as a monstrous sub-human who has no scruples about sending her innocent child to his inevitable death. The portrayal of child soldiers in *American Sniper*, and many other films of its ilk, consistently strip children of their humanity and deny them their innocence. The Arab child in such films is unruly, deceitful, and threateningly different; he is not to be trusted or trifled with, and any perceived hostility must be dealt with forcefully and decisively.

The film's negative portrayal of Arab children is meant to underscore the mounting danger that the "Orient" poses to the values and ideals that the civilized West espouses and stands for. The deep and implacable enmity that Arabs harbor towards the United States, the film seems to suggest, permeates their societies regardless of age or gender. This misrepresentation lends credence to a fear-mongering discourse that frames the Arab as an ever-present threat to American national security. They are to be regarded with distrust and wariness. Throughout the film, almost every single Iraqi is perceived as a conniving, calculating enemy, constantly lurking around in the shadows in anticipation for a chance to harm American soldiers. Indeed, the Arab is so dwarfed that even though the events mostly take place in Iraq, rarely are the locals allowed to voice their concerns. Their plight is peripheral, their perspective is eclipsed, and their aspirations are dismissed.

The link between the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the war on Iraq is underscored on several occasions in the film. This manufactured link serves to deepen the dichotomy between good and evil, "us" and "them." The choice to brush aside the profound impact that the war had on Iraq is by no means random. A fair portrayal of the US-led war on Iraq would undermine Kyle's moral compass and cast doubt on the film's entire premise. The familiar stereotypes that *American Sniper* perpetuate about Arabs render the military intervention in Iraq necessary and legitimate. In this context, Said's *Orientalism* sheds light on the underlying reasons that account for the constellation of pervasive stereotypes, false assumptions, and misrepresentations characterizing Western attitudes toward the Orient. The enormous body of literature in which the Orient has been subtly but persistently sensationalized and vilified serves as an implicit justification for Westerner colonial designs. Said encapsulates his work as follows:

> My contention is that Orientalism is fundamentally a political
>
> doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker
>
> than the West, which elided the Orient's difference with its
>
> weakness … As a cultural apparatus Orientalism is all
>
> aggression, activity, judgment, will-to-truth, and knowledge[283]

Indeed, almost every line uttered on *American Sniper* either demonizes or ridicules Arabs and their cultures. It is important to reiterate that vilification of the Orient can be

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[283] Said, E. W. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Random House. p. 204.

traced to European literature. As previously discussed, the Orient is the product of a heavily biased Western scholarship first established by French and British colonialists and later built upon and reinforced by American Orientalists. The discourse *American Sniper* perpetuates draws on a close-knit, institutionalized system of knowledge that was built on erroneous cultural representations of the East in order to justify European colonial ambitions. These portrayals, which have persistently haunted the Western imagination, are meant to foster a strong sense of belonging and set the Islamic Orient—backward and primitive —apart from the Christian Occident—rational and civilized.

As the film progresses, the audience is introduced to a notorious terrorist, a rival sniper named Mustafa. He is a Syrian Olympic gold medalist, an insurgent sharpshooter infamous for making nearly-impossible long-range shots. Again, the film takes the liberty to exaggerate the role of the Syrian sniper in the Iraq war. While Kyle's memoir makes fleeting reference to Mustafa, he appears, time and again, in the film as a villain that stands in sharp contrast to Kyle. In his memoir,[284] Kyle writes only one paragraph about the Iraqi sniper, asserting that he has never crossed paths with him, much less killed him, as the film inaccurately claims. Everything we come to learn about Mustafa is concocted to add to the intensity of the conflict. Interestingly, the lead villain, who is chosen to be Kyle's nemesis, does not utter one single word throughout the film's runtime. Furthermore, he has no background story to help the viewer peel off the layers of his seemingly dark and

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[284] See Kyle, C (2012). *American Sniper: the Autobiography of the Most Lethal Sniper in US Military History*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

mysterious character. The choice to heavily fictionalize Mustafa's character and aggrandize his role in the war is designed to legitimize the film's principal premise that the battle is indeed between good and evil, and that while Chris is a paragon of righteousness, virtue, and moral rectitude, Mustafa is the epitome of darkness, savagery, and backwardness. Every time he appears, he is dressed in black, wearing a keffiyeh, camouflaged and waiting in ambush behind a rifle.

Fig. 10: Mustafa, Kyle's nemesis

Indeed, the "other" in *American Sniper* is spoken for, excessively demonized, and since clearly incapable of self-representation, it is only fair that the Orientalist renders him demystified:

Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West. He is never concerned with the Orient except as the first cause of what he says. What he says and writes, by virtue of the fact that it is said or written, is meant to indicate that the Orientalist is outside the Orient … the representation is always governed by some version of the truism that if the Orient could represent itself, it would; since it cannot, the representation does the job, for the West, and faute de mieux, for the poor Orient.[285]

Later in the film, as we come to learn that Mustafa has a wife and a child, another distortion of Kyle's account, the viewer does not see any of the warm, heart-touching family moments that we see Chris enjoy every time he returns home. Given the film's portrayal of Mustafa as Kyle's arch-rival, the cold treatment his wife and newborn infant receive suggests that affection and intimacy are foreign to Iraqi families.

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[285] Said, E. W. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Random House. pp. 20-21.

Figure 11: Kyle returning home from the battlefield

In his examination of Hollywood's representations of Arabs, Shaheen notes that family events, social gatherings, and dialogues between friends are peculiarly absent from the great majority of films he studied. Scenes of ordinary children, gifted youths, and doting parents are also virtually non-existent.[286] It is unlikely to come across scenes that feature

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[286] Shaheen, J. G. (2015). *Reel bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*. Northampton, Massachusetts: Interlink Publishing group, 19

scrupulous, run-of-the-mill Arabs. Regrettably, Hollywood films rarely give Arabs credit for their considerable achievements and scientific contributions, which helped shape and transform several civilizations.[287]

Like Mustafa, the wife is clad in black, a symbol of darkness and menace. As she cradles her baby in her arms, Mustafa remains predictably aloof, exuding austerity and authoritarianism. This unsettling scene is abruptly cut short when the infamous sniper receives a call from an unidentified insurgent informing him of Kyle's whereabouts. Before he leaves, the camera shifts to zoom in on a poster displaying a bounty on Kyle's head, suggesting that sheer greed is the only motor that drives Iraqis' actions, an assumption that is reinforced in the film as we meet other characters. It is interesting to note that while the memoir's brief account of Mustafa refers to him as an Iraqi, the film, oddly enough, portrays him as a *Syrian* Olympic gold medalist. This misrepresentation serves to blur the lines of nationality and geographical boundaries, painting all Arabs with the same sinister brush. Indeed, it does not make much of a difference if you are a child, a woman, or a professional athlete; simply being Arab carries a presumption of guilt.

In addition to Mustafa, two other villains appear in the film: Sheikh Al-Obodi, and the Butcher. Sheikh AL-Obodi makes his first contact with Kyle when he decides to leave his post and join the marines' manhunt for Zarqawi. Kyle enlists the help of an interpreter to question Sheikh Al-Obodi about Zarqawi's whereabouts. At first, the Sheikh is

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[287] Shaheen, J. G. (2015). *Reel bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*. Northampton, Massachusetts: Interlink Publishing group, 20

disinclined to cooperate with the marines, fearing retribution from the Butcher. Eventually, however, he agrees to help lure Zarqawi's enforcer, but on the condition that Kyle pays him a hundred thousand dollars. It is important to examine the significance of the names assigned to the two villains. The word Sheikh, it should be noted, is an honorific title that indicates nobility and is usually reserved for senior knowledgeable Muslim clerics. The choice to attach this noble title to an Iraqi villain, whose greed foils the capture of one of the most notorious terrorists, shows that even the social and religious elite are not above suspicion. Sheikh Al-Obodi desecrates his honorific title when he blackmails the marines who are dispatched to put an end to the suffering the Butcher inflicts on his fellow Iraqis. This scene highlights the onerous task placed on the shoulders of American troops who strive to liberate the country from the tightening vise of terrorism, but are faced with ungrateful, self-serving natives who frustrate their efforts and make their mission all the more dangerous.

While the name "Sheikh Al-Obodi" is assigned to a character who brings disgrace to the noble title bestowed upon him, the sobriquet "the Butcher" is meant to reflect the escalating, senseless violence the country is caught in. The Butcher earned notoriety for meting out gruesome punishment against locals who are suspected of cooperating with the Americans. The brutal methods he employs to keep the locals in check culminate in his use of a power drill to savagely torture and eventually kill Sheikh Al-Obodi's young son after he discovers that he has been cooperating with the marines. While the viewer might sympathize with the child's slow and agonizing death, the unflattering depiction of Sheikh

Al-Obodi, who also meets his demise violently at the hands of the Butcher, does not allow for much commiseration.

Figure 12: The Butcher, an Iraqi terrorist who uses a power drill to torture anyone he suspects of cooperating with the American marines

As the marines intensify their hunt for the Butcher, they finally receive a promising lead about where he hides. The troops stake out the terrorist-infested neighborhood and break into a house close to the Butcher's purported hideout, which they later use as a staging area. Upon interrogation, the head of the family insists that he is not aware of any terrorist activity in the neighborhood. Graciously, he invites the Americans for a meal, to which they reluctantly agree. As they are eating and chatting, Kyle notices that the host's elbows are chafed raw. Aware that snipers often spend a long time perched on their elbows,

causing abrasion that bears a suspicious resemblance to that of their host, Kyle excuses himself to the bathroom and surreptitiously combs the house. His frantic search leads him to a hidden compartment packed with weapons under the floor. When Kyle confronts the host about the weapons stashed in his house, he, visibly in fear for his life, volunteers to help the unbidden marines raid the house where the Butcher hides. At gunpoint, the host is forced to knock on the door. Surprisingly, he is allowed in, contradicting his previous claim that he has no knowledge of or ties with terrorists. As a sniper takes out the terrorist who opens the door, the host quickly picks up his gun and starts shooting at the heavily armed marines, who return fire and instantly shoot him dead, allowing the Butcher time to flee through back tunnels.

Fig. 13: An Iraqi family hosting the American marines.

The scene described above is particularly revealing. The wife, meek and unassuming, is relegated to the background. Her role—to cook, serve food and clean up after her husband and his guests—reinforces the stereotype that women are victims of oppression in Muslim societies. Initially, the viewer is lulled into a false sense of security as the host's lavish hospitality and warmth seem to disrupt the film's regurgitation of a long-established tradition of derogatory portrayals of Arabs. The Iraqi family, however, unsettles audience expectations when Kyle discovers the host's cache of weapons. This scene further cements the perception that Arabs are barbaric even when they appear to be harmless, ceremonious, and accommodating; under no circumstances are they to be trusted or underestimated. Any miscalculation may be detrimental. Indeed, Hollywood's perpetual misrepresentations of Muslims and Arabs can only render them easy prey to colonial designs. Said writes:

> So far as the United States seems to be concerned, it is only a
>
> slight overstatement to say that Moslems and Arabs are
>
> essentially seen as either oil suppliers or potential terrorists.
>
> Very little of the detail, the human density, the passion of
>
> Arab–Moslem life has entered the awareness of even those
>
> people whose profession it is to report the Arab world. What
>
> we have, instead, is a series of crude, essentialized caricatures

of the Islamic world, presented in such a way as to make that

world vulnerable to military aggression.[288]

In an interview conducted with Clint Eastwood following the film's release, he maintained that "[there are] a lot of different conflicts in this picture, the obvious one having an enemy wanting to kill you, but also ...having to maintain the relationship back and forth between family and combat."[289] Similarly, Bradley Cooper, the film star and producer, explains in an interview with NBC News that "that's really the thrust of the movie… to sort of show what that must have done … what that does do to soldiers and to the family at home."[290] In these interviews and several others, the filmmakers make no mention of the plight and undue hardships inflicted on ordinary Iraqis in a country that has been plagued by perpetual, indiscriminate violence. Although the film is loosely based on Chris Kyle's memoir, and one might argue that some of the events that take place relatively reflect his views of Iraq and the war, it is hard to imagine, indeed accept, that the filmmakers made no effort to contest Kyle's rigid, skewed vision of the war. Even more regrettable is the filmmakers' obvious unwillingness to break down the complexity of the Iraqi characters and show their side of the story. Their presence, or lack thereof, serves to lay bare the devastating toll the war had *only* on American troops and their families. Iraqis,

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[288] Said, Edward (26 April 1980). "Islam through Western Eyes". The Nation. Retrieved 6 January, 2018.

[289] See American Sniper: Clint Eastwood Exclusive Interview with ScreenSlam. January 20, 2015

[290] See Bradley Cooper, "American Sinper" Widow Join Forces to Tell Story, Today Talk Show, NBC. December 23,2014

on the other hand, are merely employed to further perpetuate and reinforce an Orientalist narrative that pins the East against the West. In this context, Film critic David Edelstein upbraids Clint Eastwood for turning American Sniper into a "Republican platform movie." He asserts that the conflict "is seen through the sight of a high-powered rifle. The movie is scandalously blinkered. .... I'm not going to fault Kyle's view of his enemies as representing a "savage, despicable evil," but I do fault Eastwood for making what is, essentially, a propaganda film."[291]

American Sniper does not only brush aside the pain and anguish Iraqis endured as a result of a gratuitous war, but also fails to call attention to the tyranny, injustice, and persecution they had been subjected to for several decades prior to the toppling of the Baath regime. Moreover, the film makes no mention of the brutal civil and proxy wars that aggravated sectarian divisions and gave birth to terrorist organizations that still continue to besiege the country. *American Sniper'*s blinkered portrayal of Iraq heavily relies on Orientalist misrepresentations that have invariably and consistently denigrated the "other." Jack Shaheen writes:

> Seen through Hollywood's distorted lenses, Arabs look
> different and threatening. Projected along racial and religious
> lines, the stereotypes are deeply ingrained in American cinema.

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[291] See David, E "Clint Eastwood Turns American Sniper into a Republican Platform Movie." Issue of New York Magazine. December 29, 2014

From 1896 until today, filmmakers have collectively indicted

all Arabs as Public Enemy #1 – brutal, heartless, uncivilized

religious fanatics and money-mad cultural "others" bent on

terrorizing civilized Westerners.[292]

The strikingly identical and caricature-like characters portrayed on *American Sniper*, and other Hollywood films, it should be reiterated, are simplistic, frivolous, and do not capture the complexity and diversity of Arab cultures, heritage, and traditions. The choice to reduce Iraqi characters to mere props adds to their dehumanization and helps legitimize the film's narrative about the war. The film's emphasis on the link between the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the Iraq war renders the narrative both disingenuous and parochial. Viewed as a whole, *American Sniper*'s damaging portrayal of Iraqis, and Arabs by extension, does not only reinforce stereotypes and promote falsehoods—which have festered for far too long and come to define Arabs and their cultures—but also titillates the viewer's nationalistic fervor and ethnocentric pride. The film, as will be discussed in the next chapter, seeks to legitimize a jingoistic foreign policy that is deeply rooted in hegemony. Evocative of the media's incendiary rhetoric after 9/11, *American sniper* conflates patriotism with blind, unquestioning support for the government's military

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[292] Shaheen, J. G. (2015). *Reel bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*. Northampton, Massachusetts: Interlink Publishing group. P.8.

response. Any attempt to cast aspersions on official policy or question the government's

narrative is framed as unpatriotic.

2. Images of Patriotism and Nationalism: Towards the Manufacturing of a Collective Identity

In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 tragedy, a torrent of films were released to not only condemn Arabs for their perceived involvement in the attacks, but also rekindle a sense of patriotism and nationalism, grooming the public for approval and mustering up support for potential military action. Having drawn upon the long history of binary representations of "us" vs. "them," films such as *American Sniper* overwhelm the viewer with inaccurate impressions and fuel erroneous perceptions of the "other." In addition to the film's obvious effort to justify the war on Iraq, Kyle's account is tantamount to a recruiting campaign. His passionate, unswerving commitment to the war is intended to romanticize and glorify military life. Every time he returns to the U.S., he wallows in nostalgia. His wife and newborn infant are unable to fill the void and darkness that envelop him when he returns home; they are no substitute for the intimate camaraderie and sheer exhilaration he experiences on the battlefield. His sentimental attitude toward the war is meant to fuel nationalistic pride and encourage military service. In his book, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*[293], Benedict Anderson examines the role of print texts and shared language in the emergence of nationalism and traces the birth of community and belonging. Language, according to Anderson, plays a crucial role in rallying people behind a unifying collective identity. Anderson notes that

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[293] Anderson, B. R. O. G. (1991). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*.

"much of the most important thing about language is its capacity for generating imagined communities, building in effect particular solidarities."[294]

Media representation is a vast and elusive concept to define. The reality, in any given media text, is cherry-picked, and the messages that reach the public and shape their understanding go through a labyrinthine route. Films and television programs are often subject to a long, drawn-out process of fastidious selection and constant refinement, which involves the scriptwriter, cinematographer, editor, producers, actors, and director, to name but a few. Media products, therefore, are constructed representations of reality. In order to form a basic understanding of the prominent role media plays in society, suffice it to examine the impact it has on shaping public perception. If properly utilized, media can be used to mold the public into a coalesced force that stands ready to serve and defend the interests of the political establishment. In *American Sniper*, the filmmakers advance the narrative that any military action the U.S. undertakes demands unambiguous and unequivocal support. Any attempt to cast doubt on the legitimacy of war calls into question one's loyalty. Nationalism, it is worth noting, is essentially concerned with promoting a narrative oriented towards cultivating and maintaining a collective, national identity based on such common characteristics as religion, culture, ethnicity, and language. Developing this sense of blind, unquestioning belonging is far too dangerous in that it reduces the individual to an unthinking and insignificant social member. Since the interests of the State usually take precedence over those of the individual, aspirations such as intellectual

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294 Ibid, p. 133.

independence or self-realization become an arduous task. In the context of war, stoking fear and nursing xenophobic grievances are key to revitalizing sentiments of nationalism and ethnocentrism:

> It's the idea that grave enemies are about to attack us and we
> need to huddle together under the protection of domestic
> power. You need something to frighten people with, to prevent
> them from paying attention to what's really happening to them.
> You have to engender fear and hatred, to channel the kind of
> fear and rage—or even just discontent- that's being aroused by
> social and economic conditions. [295]

One of the overarching themes in *American Sniper* is patriotism. As already pointed out, the emphasis placed on patriotism is fundamentally intended to engineer public consent for the Iraq war. "Constructing emotive publics," as Alsutany argues, "is central to gaining public support for the War on Terror.[296]" In their book, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass Media*, Edward Herman, and Noam Chomsky developed what they referred to as a "propaganda model" to examine the flagrant inequality of wealth and power. They argue that those who hold economic power dictate what information ought to be communicated to the public. Thus, rather than reporting factual information,

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[295] Chomsky and Barsamian cited in Matthew, Alford. A Propaganda Model for Hollywood. *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture.* 6, December 29, 2014, p. 149.

[296] Alsultany, p. 86

the interests of the billionaires who lobby vociferously for their messages to reach the public take precedence. To this end, news coverage is minutely regulated, and any information that may challenge or undermine the elite's agenda is either diminished or withheld altogether. Therefore, all that audiences perceive as reality of the outside world is no more than a carefully curated representation advanced by powerful lobbies.

Although Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model largely focuses on corporate news media, it can be adopted to explore the inner workings of Hollywood[297] and examine the immense, concentrated power film studios collectively hold and wield over large audiences. Herman and Chomsky's model can also serve as a blueprint to uncover Hollywood's role in shaping public opinion and propagating narratives that mainly benefit the political establishment. The American and international cinema markets are increasingly dominated by the five major Hollywood film studios whose distribution networks and production subsidiaries are reported to make up a significant percentage of 80-85 % of U.S. box office revenue.[298] It is important to highlight that the enormous, far-reaching powers studio companies have to produce and distribute their own film projects can only be sustainable if they offer content that is familiar to their audiences, and promote narratives that endorse policies put forth by the ruling establishment. Studio executive and

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[297] See MATTHEW, ALFORD. (2009) A Propaganda Model for Hollywood. *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture.* 6, pp. 144-156 in which he demonstrates how the five filters Herman and Chomsky use to explain their theory can be applied to mainstream Hollywood.

[298] Bettig, Ronald V.; Jeanne Lynn Hall *Big Media, Big Money: Cultural Texts and Political Economics* (2nd ed.). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. 2002 pp. 59–108

film producer Robert Evans maintains that "filmmakers don't do the unexpected, they're too scared. The prices are too high."[299] In the context of Hollywood's unflattering portrayals of Arabs, it is safe to argue that as monopolistic as they are, studio companies cannot afford to subvert their audiences' expectations. Any attempt to humanize the "other" or depart from the familiar Orientalist discourse is likely to incur criticism. "Viewers," as Alsultany writes, "have been primed to assume that Arabs/ Muslims are terrorists, and therefore writers create what viewers expect and what will sell.[300]"

Films such as *American Sniper* contribute to inflaming nationalistic passions and fueling an outpouring of blind patriotic fervor, which consequently leads to the suppression of unorthodox views and stigmatization of unconventional thinking. The film's rendering of the Iraq war illustrates the elite's unfettered access, indeed direct control, of Hollywood. Following the release of *American Sniper*, right-wing media capitalized on Kyle's black-and-white account to reinforce the narrative that the wars the US engages in, however morally ambiguous or rudderless they may appear, are key to safeguarding national security. American writer Lindy West maintains that "much of the US right wing appears to have seized upon *American Sniper* with similarly shallow comprehension—treating it with the same ... reverence that they would the national anthem or the flag itself."[301] The

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[299] MATTHEW ALFORD. A Propaganda Model for Hollywood. *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture.* 6, 2009 p. 146

[300] Alsultany, p. 27

[301] Lindy West. The real American Sniper was a hate-filled killer. Why are simplistic patriots treating him as a hero? The Guardian. Written Jan 6, 2015, Accessed March 4, 2018

film, which was released a decade after the military invasion of Iraq, does not fault the Bush administration for its ill-informed decision to go to war with a country that had no connection with the tragic events of 9/11. American film critic David Edelstein maintains that *American Sniper* makes "no indication that the two events—9/11 and the Iraq invasion—have been yoked together by unscrupulous politicians who don't have a clue what lies in store for American soldiers.[302]" Furthermore, the film makes no mention of the baseless claim that Iraq possessed and refused to relinquish weapons of mass destruction. Also conveniently left out is the unprecedented number of warring factions that the conflict unleashed, and the meteoric rise of terrorist organizations which continue to convulse the country.

The film's depiction of Kyle's childhood is especially revealing. His frequent interactions with his father serve as a model for other parents to emulate. The film underscores the profound and indelible impact religion had on Kyle and his brother. Their father impressed upon them, from an early age, to hold "God, country and family" in the highest regard. The film portrays the Kyles as punctilious and devout. Their relationship with the Church is unbreakable. As a child, Kyle never shied away from defending his brother from bullies. His upstanding character and fiercely protective nature are particularly highlighted when he is deployed to Iraq. The film's affectionate portrayal of Kyle's childhood stands in striking contrast to that of Iraqis. While the veiled, black-clad

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[302] See David, E. (December 29, 2014). "Clint Eastwood Turns American Sniper Into a Republican Platform Movie.". Issue of New York Magazine.

mother thrusts her child to his tragic, untimely death, Chris' father inculcates a sense of duty and patriotism into his sons:

> Wayne Kyle (addressing his sons): There are three types of people in this world: sheep, wolves, and sheepdogs. Some people prefer to believe that evil doesn't exist in the world, and if it ever darkened their doorstep, they wouldn't know how to protect themselves. Those are the sheep. Then you've got predators who use violence to prey on the weak. They're the wolves. And then there are those blessed with the gift of aggression, an overpowering need to protect the flock. These men are the rare breed who live to confront the wolf. They are the sheepdog. Now, we're not raising any sheep in this family, and I will whoop your ass if you turn into a wolf. But we protect our own.[303]

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[303] Eastwood, C. (Director). (2014) *American Sniper*. [Film]. Warner Bros Pictures.

Fig. 14: Kyle's father explaining to his sons the difference between sheep, wolves, and sheepdogs

The sheepdogs symbolize the American troops who keep the homeland safe from the barbaric, bloodthirsty predators—wolves—running rampant in the Middle East. The father instills in his sons courage, self-sacrifice, and tenacity, traits that anyone entrusted to protect "the sheep" must possess. He cautions them not to be heedless of the forces of evil that seek to corrode their moral principles and undermine their ideals. Later in the film, the father's worst fears come to pass. The forces of evil he warns his sons against appear to have triumphed when eight Americans are killed in a terrorist attack: "look what they did to us,"[304] Kyle mutters, staring at the TV in disbelief. His shock and sadness quickly turn into bitterness. Seething with anger, his eyes fixate on a series of poignant images documenting the calamity that befell his country. As the film cuts back to the fighting raging in Iraq, it becomes clear that the deep sense of duty the father imprinted on Kyle as

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[304] Ibid

a child inspired his decision to join the Navy Seals and hardened his resolve in the face of the enemy.

Kyle's determination to put the country before his familial obligations is a testament to his unyielding patriotism. Every time he wishes to return to the battlefield, his wife adamantly opposes him. "I have to serve my country[305]," he protests when his wife, Taya, reminds him that their family ought to take precedence over his other commitments. Kyle makes it clear that his absolute allegiance is to the country he pledged to protect. This sentiment is reinforced later in the film when he runs into his younger brother, Jeff, on an Iraqi tarmac. Combat-fatigued and anxious to return home, Jeff mutters, "fuck this place."[306] Upon hearing his brother's resigned, defeatist attitude towards the war, Kyle recoils in disbelief. The very thought that Jeff, who is a U.S. marine, would shy away from his duty to fight for his country fills Kyle with shock and horror.

It is important to examine the backlash the film generated upon its release. Interestingly, critics, who dared undermine the pro-war narrative the film propagates, have been collectively framed as anti-American. As previously mentioned, the film has been mostly hailed for its authentic portrayal of the war.[307] However, in order to legitimize the

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[305] Ibid

[306] Ibid

[307] See Travers, Peter. (December 23, 2014) "American Sniper Movie Review". Rolling Stone. Retrieved November 14,2019, Guzman, Rafer. (December 23, 2014) "American Sniper's review: Bradley Cooper nails the role". Newsday. Retrieved November 15, 2019 and Turan, Kenneth (December 24, 2014).

war-mongering discourse the film promotes, prominent talk show hosts and veteran politicians lambasted critics who used Kyle's account to take aim at U.S. foreign military adventures. Former Alaska governor and Republican vice-presidential nominee Sarah Palin, for instance, issued a statement that harshly condemned Kyle's critics:

> God bless our troops, especially our snipers. Hollywood leftists: while caressing shiny plastic trophies you exchange among one another while spitting on the graves of freedom fighters who allow you to do what you do, just realize the rest of America knows you're not fit to shine Chris Kyle's combat boots.[308]

In keeping with Sarah Palin's blistering criticism of the left's objections to the film's glorification of the war, the Parents Television Council, whose professed mission is to protect children and families from graphic violence in the media, cast aspersions on the film's critics. The advocacy group's communication director Dan Isett chastised the entertainment industry for their "callous hypocrisy[309]." Hollywood, he asserts, is

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"Review: 'American Sniper' goes above and beyond war-hero tradition. Los Angeles Times. Retrieved December 2, 2019.

[308] Tony Lee (January 19, 2015) "Sarah Palin: "Hollywood Leftists 'Not Fit to Shine Chris Kyle's Combat Boots'" Breitbart. Retrieved December24, 2019

[309] Keith Bernstein (January 1, 2015) "Parents Television Council Slams Hollywood Critics of 'American Sniper' for "Callous Hypocrisy."" Hollywood Reporter. Retrieved January 15, 2019.

"intellectually dishonest to decry the impact of one film for its violence and 'glorification of a killer' while streaming enormous amounts of violent content into every living room in the country. [310]" In addition to Sarah Palin and Dan Isett, conservative political commentator Sean Hannity—who serves as a weathervane for the Republican party and commands one of the largest megaphones on cable television—rebuked Hollywood liberals for disrespecting Kyle. In an interview that aired on Fox News, he stated that he would "be angry as a warrior that put my life on the line for as long as he did … only to get this treatment when you get back."[311]

The media's reaction to blockbuster films set in the Middle East is indeed revealing. Seemingly, not only do pro-war media outlets validate the stereotypes Hollywood thrusts upon Arabs, but they also suppress any views that may challenge their strident, incendiary rhetoric. Indeed, the role that mass media—in most of its forms—plays in driving official narratives is indispensable. Rallying the public behind military action or eliciting support for unpopular policies often warrant considerable convincing. Ultimately, whether or not the public stands behind their government—especially in matters that venture into morally dubious territory—is largely contingent upon how far the media succeeds in crafting narratives that are potent and compelling. In this context, Anil Kumar Singh observes:

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[310] Ibid

[311] See Hannity's January 23, 2015 Fox News interview "Patriotism under Attack" with retired U.S. Army Ranger Sean Parnell and retired U.S. Navy SEAL Jason Redman.

Apparently every conflict is fought on at least two grounds --

the battlefield and the minds of the people via propaganda. The

"good guys" and the "bad guys" can often both be guilty of

misleading their people with distortions, exaggerations,

subjectivity, inaccuracy and even fabrications, in order to elicit

support and a sense of legitimacy. … More often, the issue of

propaganda forms the focus of discussion in the context of

militarism, war and war-mongering; it is all around us in all

aspects of life. At times of war, or build up for war, messages

of extremities and hate, combined with emotions of honour and

righteousness interplay to provide powerful propaganda for a

cause.[312]

It is important to underline that, like many war films that dramatize U.S. military

entanglements in the Middle East, *American Sniper* draws no distinction between Muslims

and Arabs. Although the two are vastly different, one indicates religious belonging and the

other ethnic background, they are both framed as a heterogeneous group. Lumped into one

tainted stream, Arabs and Muslims are portrayed either as terrorists or terrorist

sympathizers. Indeed, for filmmakers who make use of regurgitated stereotypes and traffic

in xenophobia, it is counterintuitive to humanize the "other." Any attempt to challenge

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[312] Singh, A. K. (2006). *Military and media*. New Delhi: Lancer Publishers & Distributors. 143-144

Orientalist tropes—which have consistently and systematically dwarfed Arab characters—is an exercise in futility.

It is important to point out that Arab Christians are conspicuously underrepresented in films that take place in the Arab world. In an effort to expose some of the injustices that have gone unaddressed in Hollywood for more than a century, Shaheen outlines the reasons behind the exclusion of Arab Christians from the silver screen. Although the majority of Arabs are Muslims, some 15 million Christians live in the Arab world[313], a fact that Hollywood has consistently failed to acknowledge in the countless motion pictures and television series set in the Middle East. As regards Americans of Arab heritage, it is a little-known fact that prior to World War I, a core portion of Arabs who immigrated to the United States were Christian. In fact, Christians still constitute the majority of Arab Americans today.[314] The effort to deny Arab Christians representation is designed to put the blame solely on Muslims for the moral decadence, political turmoil and wanton violence that their societies have come to be infamous for. Another misconception that Hollywood continues to sear into the American collective consciousness is that all Muslims are Arab. Although the majority of Muslims are Indonesian, Indian or Malaysian—Arabs only make up 12 percent of all Muslims[315]—Hollywood's characterization of the Arab world perpetuates the misconception that every Muslim is either Arab or comes from an Arab background.

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313 Shaheen, J. G. (2015). *Reel bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*. Northampton, Massachusetts: Interlink Publishing group. P. 9

314 Ibid. P. 9

315 Ibid. P 10

It is interesting to point out that *American Sniper* is eerily evocative of seventeenth-century Puritan travel narratives[316] , which went to great lengths to justify the horrendous monstrosities early settlers inflicted upon the natives. Their passionate, deeply held beliefs permeate New England Puritan writings. Their extreme interpretation of the Bible served to legitimize their hostility towards the natives, whom they regarded as a savage, primitive tribe. Unlike the wild, heathen natives, the settlers were a civilized, superior people, one that followed God's word to the letter. It was their strong conviction, indeed, that they were the elect that drove their relentless wars and justified their ruthless expropriation campaign. Oddly enough, their religious creed and colonial attitudes are echoed in such films as *American Sniper*, which portray Arab land as wild and untamed, regrettably inhabited by backward and savage Muslims.

It is worth noting that Shaheen's perspicacious review sought to highlight the close similarities between Arab and Native American characters. The colonialist's expression "tribe," which is loaded with negative connotations such as savagery, violence, and disorder, is used to describe Arab and Native American communities alike.[317] Shaheen argues that despite the obvious commonalities that Arab and Native American characters share on-screen, there are some identifiable differences that point to a more adversarial stance Hollywood elected to adopt to further dehumanize Arabs. Unlike Arabs and

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[316] See, for instance, Bradford, W. (2020). *Of Plymouth Plantation*. La Vergne: Neeland Media LLC.

[317] Shaheen, J. G. (2015). *Reel bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*. Northampton, Massachusetts: Interlink Publishing group. P 24

Muslims, Native Americans have rarely been projected as greedy, dishonorable, or lustful. In fact, in films such as *Broken Arrow* (1950), *Dances with wolves* (1990), and *Last of the Mohicans* (1992), Native Americans are depicted as noble savages[318]. Noble as they may be, however, their warlike and barbaric nature was presented as a threat that had to be contained. Like Native Americans, Arabs have been portrayed as an untamed and hostile tribe. Their values, or lack thereof, were seen as inimical to those of the civilized world. The late American journalist and author William Greider observes:

> Much of what Westerners "learned" about Arabs sounds similar to what 19th century Americans "discovered" about Indians on this continent. The first crucial intellectual step is to identify anti-human qualities in these strange people. They do not think like us, they do not share our aspirations. Once one has last concluded that Indians (or Arabs) thrive on violence and disorder and stealth, it is easy to colonize them. Indeed, it is the only thing to do, the right thing to do. [319]

The inflammatory rhetoric that these Orientalist films perpetuate does not only reinforce racist stereotypes and stoke nationalistic sentiments, but also incites physical violence against ethnic and religious minorities. The release of *American Sniper* brought

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[318] Ibid. P. 24

[319] William, G (July 15, 1979). "Acceptable villains make our troubles so manageable". The Washington Post.

about a spike in anti-Muslim sentiment. The ADC (American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee) declared that the "majority of violent threats we have seen over the past few days are a result of how Arabs and Muslims are depicted in *American Sniper*."[320] These damaging stereotypes persisted for far too long in American cinema. Indeed, "When Hollywood films portray Arabs, it is often under three themes: Islamophobic, anti-Muslim and anti-Arab."[321] The claim that Muslims pose an immediate threat to the U.S. and its allies, as portrayed in a myriad of post-9/11 motion pictures and reinforced by several prominent media outlets, strains credulity. In fact, these pernicious claims are not only extravagant, but also dangerous. Edward Said explains:

> Never mind that most Islamic countries today are too poverty-stricken, tyrannical and hopelessly inept militarily as well as scientifically to be much of a threat to anyone except their own citizens; and never mind that the most powerful of them—like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and Pakistan—are totally within the U.S. orbit. What matters to 'experts' …. is to make sure that the 'threat' is kept before our eyes, the better to excoriate Islam for terror, despotism and violence[322].

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[320] "American Sniper film 'behind rise in anti-Muslim threats'" (Jan 25, 2015). BBC Retrieved 1/1/19

321 Gottschalk, Peter Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Sentiment. Rowman & Littlefield. 2011, p.197.

[322] Edward Said, cited in Tai, R. H., & Kenyatta, M. L. (1999). *Critical ethnicity: Countering the Waves of Identity Politics*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Maryland. p.79

As has been already discussed, the film's depiction of the Iraq war failed to highlight the virulent political environment and manufactured crises that put the two countries on a collision course. Kyle's account perpetuates the narrative that the military operations the U.S. undertook in the aftermath of 9/11—specifically in Iraq— were mainly intended to thwart future attacks. *American Sniper*, it is important to reiterate, lends credence to policies that, in retrospect, proved to be profoundly misguided. The film evokes nostalgia for an era that saw a dramatic rise in jingoistic nationalism. Appealing to the public's sense of patriotic duty, Kyle's memoir urges the public to vigorously support any military action that purports to keep the homeland safe.

Chapter Four: Terrorism and Counter Terrorism on *24*

1. **Framing the War on Domestic Terrorism**

24 is an American television series that ran from 2001 to 2014. The drama series, which spanned nine seasons, follows the story of highly proficient, macho counter-terrorist agent Jack Bauer, who is known for his uncompromising commitment to national security. Bauer's covert missions often make it difficult for him to operate within the restrictive confines of the law. The series dramatizes conflicts that feature Mexicans, Chinese, Russians, and Arabs. The seasons discussed in this chapter examine representations of Muslim characters, with a particular focus on how the US-led war on terror is framed in *Day 2* and *Day 4*. Throughout the series, Muslims incessantly conspire against the US, prompting CTU (Counter Terrorist Unit) agent, Jack Bauer, to go to extreme lengths to foil their terrorist plots. As will be seen later, the series' anti-Muslim narrative is intended to influence public opinion, especially as it relates to foreign military adventures and the use of extreme measures—such as torture—in the war against terror.

Like *Babel* and *American Sniper*, the release of *24* was received with great critical acclaim. The series earned several coveted awards, most notably a Golden Globe Award for Best Drama Series in 2003. It is important to note that the first time Muslim characters were featured on *24* was during season 2, which is commonly referred to as *Day 2*. The second season aired in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks—from October 29, 2002, to May 20, 2003. The plot of the series capitalized on the painful and tumultuous period following 9/11 to shape the narrative surrounding the U.S. military response. *Day 2* follows CTU's frantic attempt to dismantle a Middle Eastern terrorist cell plotting to detonate a

bomb on American soil. The series is divided into two major subplots. The first subplot follows Kate Warner's suspicions about her sister's Middle-Eastern fiancé, whom she believes to be linked to a terrorist organization. The second subplot revolves around a recorded conversation between a terrorist and high-ranking officials of three unnamed Middle Eastern countries. The audio recording is used to justify military attacks against the three Muslim countries suspected of hatching the terrorist plots. The fast-paced subplots suggest strong, patently obvious links between terrorism and Islam. Furthermore, the choice to keep the names of the Middle Eastern countries secret is not arbitrary. It implies that Muslims, en masse, should be held accountable. Even though only a small, fringe group of extremists are implicated in the attacks, the series—at least initially—lays the blame on Muslims, suggesting that anyone affiliated with the religion must suffer the same consequences.

The fourth season of the television series *24* begins with the bombing of a train after it collides with a truck packed with explosives. Jack Bauer, a former law enforcement agent—whose addiction to heroin led to his premature departure from CTU— is brought back to investigate the bombing. After learning that the train crash was a prelude to a series of attacks set to be launched later in the day, Bauer, who is now an assistant to Secretary of Defense James Heller, urges Special Agent in Charge, Erin Driscoll, to reinstate him on a provisional basis so that he can help track down the terrorists. After she agrees, Bauer quickly resorts to his old violent tactics, rushing to torture a suspect CTU has taken into custody:

Jack Bauer: (losing his temper) what is happening at eight o'clock?

Erin Driscoll: (following Bauer's interrogation through the glass window, she speaks to him through the intercom as he points his gun at the suspect) holster your weapon! Jack! I said: holster your weapon!

Erin Driscoll to Sarah: (as Jack shoots the suspect in the knee) Call Medical.

Jack Bauer: (keeping his gun directed at the suspect) what is your primary objective?

Erin Driscoll: I'll order Security to shoot you if I have to.

Ronnie Lobell: (ordering the security agents) get that door open!

Jack Bauer: (pushes his gun against the suspect's other knee cap) what is your primary objective?

Tomas Sherek: (the suspect, whining in agony) Secretary of Defense!

Erin Driscoll: (looking aghast) Heller.

Jack Bauer: Secretary Heller?

Tomas Sherek: (writhing in pain) Yes.

> Jack Bauer: (to Erin) Secretary Heller's the target, call Secret
>
> Service now.[323]

As CTU scrambles to notify the Secret Service, the terrorists ambush the Secretary's security detail and kidnap him and his daughter. Later, we learn that a Middle Eastern terrorist named Habib Marwan was behind the train bombing. His aim was to distract the intelligence agencies from discovering the theft of an override device that could be used to take control of a series of nuclear power plants.

Figure 15: Secretary Heller and his daughter held captive by Habib Marwan's operatives

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[323] Cassar, J. (Director). (2005). *24*. [Television Series]. Fox.

The very first episode of *Day 4* features the Araz family—Navi, Dina, and their teenage son Behrooz. At first blush, the Muslim family appears to be close-knit. As the events unfold, we learn that they have lived in Los Angeles for five years. The parents' unassuming demeanor and casual attire allowed them to blend in with remarkable ease. Receiving orders from their handler—Habib Marwan—the Araz family unobtrusively operated a terrorist cell, plotting and launching a series of elaborate attacks against the US. The portrayal of the Araz family and the power relations that govern their everyday interactions are worth examining. The audience is first introduced to the family when they are having breakfast and watching a news report describing the chaos the train bombing caused. It is interesting to note that the very first encounter we have with the Araz family shows the father as a cruel, unforgiving patriarch. His imposing presence brings into stark relief Dina's vulnerability and subservience. Although they both take orders from Habib Marwan, their roles are markedly different. Navi's domineering personality and violent outbursts compel her to bend to his will. Her input is rarely sought. Despite her cunning ploys, she is in constant need of adult, indeed male, supervision.

Figure 16: The Araz family

Behrooz's secret relationship with Debbie, a white American teenage girl, highlights the dilemma he has to wrestle with as he helps his parents plan an attack against the US. His infatuation with his girlfriend troubles his conscience, prompting him to compromise his father's operation and expose his family to criminal prosecution. Their whirlwind, short-lived romance dramatically alters the trajectory of the narrative. Despite his father's repeated warnings, Behrooz carries on his romantic entanglement with Debbie, putting her life in danger. The following dialogue is a distillation of the escalating tension between the teenage son and his overbearing father:

Dina (the mother): Behrooz, are you eating with us?

Behrooz (the son): I'll be right down, mom. (Behrooz leaves to his room upstairs)

Navi (the father): I'm concerned about him.

Dina (preparing breakfast): Concerned? Why?

Navi: I think he's still seeing this American girl, Debbie.

Dina: You said you'd talk to him.

Navi: I did. I told him he was no longer allowed to have contact with her.

Dina: And he agreed, right?

Navi: Hmm yes, but I think he's still seeing her behind our backs.

Dina: I'll speak to him.

Navi: No. I'll take care of it. ...

Behrooz (enters): Sorry

Navi (asking Behrooz): Who were you on the phone with?

Behrooz: My friend, Scott.

Navi (walking towards Behrooz, getting angry): You were talking to that American girl.

Behrooz: No, I told you. I don't see her anymore

Navi: (losing his temper, slamming the table with his hand):

Don't lie to me, Behrooz! I hear your phone calls at night. I

read your emails.

Behrooz (raising his voice): You read my emails? That's my

business.

Dina (intervenes): Don't you raise your voice to your father.

Navi: While you live under my roof, there is no such thing as

your business. No more communications with the girl. Do you

understand me? (behrooz looks at his mother.) Don't look at

her. You're talking to me.

Behrooz: Yes, sir.[324]

The above-quoted dialogue is the very first interaction between Behrooz and his family.

From the outset, the viewer is introduced to the power relations that set the father apart

from the rest of his family. Even before we know of their involvement in the planning of

the terrorist attack, which is most pivotal to the plot, the audience catches a brief glimpse

into the rigid structure of the Muslim family.

Later in the series, we see the father's desperate attempts to keep his family in check.

His son's rebellious streak exasperates him. His wife's betrayal fills him with rage. To

ensure that Behrooz does not continue to derail his plans, he orders one of his aides to

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[324] Ibid

execute him. When his wife challenges his authority, he plots to kill her, too. Like the unnamed black-clad mother in *American Sniper*, Navi does not hesitate to sacrifice his own family to protect the mission. His ruthlessness underscores his fierce, unswerving loyalty to his masters. His brutality is extreme, his hostility implacable. Behrooz's entanglement in his family's terrorist plots prompts sympathy for his precarious predicament. His naiveté and compunction suggest that he is not beyond redemption. Despite his father's callous cruelty, the teenage son maintains a defiant spirit. His daring attempt to save Debbie almost cost him his life. Like *American Sniper,* the Muslim child in *24* is framed as a hapless victim, an easy prey for crazed terrorists who are intent on destroying the West by any means necessary.

The antithetical characteristics that are assigned to CTU agent, Jack Bauer, and Marwan's enforcer, Navi Araz, stand out in sharp relief—especially after Behrooz's abduction. When the father realizes that his apprehension is imminent, his paranoia grows more intense. He kidnaps his recalcitrant son and uses him as a human shield, threatening to shoot him if Bauer impedes his escape. The moral scruples that guide Bauer and his adversary's actions reveal profound, sharp differences between their characters. While Navi embraces a pernicious ideology that preys on children and women, Bauer consistently puts his life in jeopardy to protect innocent Americans. Despite his unsavory tactics, Bauer routinely exhibits traits that ultimately redeem his character. In his pursuit of the terrorists, for instance, he often confronts dilemmas that test his moral compass. When Navi takes his son hostage, Bauer is faced with a stark choice: take him into custody or facilitate his

escape. Oddly enough, he opts for the latter. Bauer's decision to save Behrooz's life, allowing Navi to escape unscathed, is puzzling, yet telling. It is meant to underscore the distinct, rigid dichotomy between American characters and their Muslim counterparts. Bauer's choice marks a radical departure from his modus operandi. His actions, albeit admirable, compromise national security.

Like Mustafa—the Syrian sharpshooter— in American Sniper, Navi appears emotionally detached from his family. When he addresses his son, he adopts a brisk, unduly harsh tone. His inscrutable countenance and impassive demeanor add to his forbidding presence. Although Navi and Bauer display the same authoritarian tendencies, their fractious relationship with their families is starkly different. While Bauer fiercely protects his daughter, Kim, Navi has no scruples about killing his son.

After Navi is killed, CTU agents intensify their effort to track down Habib Marwan, the leader of the terrorist cells operating covertly in the US. His attempt to orchestrate a string of successive attacks across the country jolts CTU and other intelligence agencies into action. In a swift and grim turn of events, the terrorist leader commandeers a stealth fighter jet and uses it to shoot down Air Force One, killing the President and stealing the nuclear football. When he returns to Los Angeles, Habib Marwan uses the back room of a night club to record a tape in which he details his grievances with the US. At the beginning of his tirade, he claims responsibility for a nuclear attack he intends to launch later in the day:

People of America, you wake up today to a different world. One of your own nuclear weapons has been used against you. It will be days and weeks before you can measure the damage we have caused. But as you count your dead, remember why this has happened to you. You have no concern for the causes of the people you strike down or the nations you conquer. You follow your government unquestioningly toward your own slaughter. Today, you pay the price for that ignorance. ... Unless you renounce your policies of imperialism and interventionist activities, this attack will be followed by another... and another after that.[325]

Habib Marwan's long-winded speech is heavily freighted with ominous connotations. His address is primarily directed toward the American people. It paints a dark portrait of Islam and the dangers it poses to the civilized world. Like many post-9/11 films and television series, *24*'s treatment of terrorism is intended to provoke a strong, visceral reaction in the audience:

Post-9/11 movies resonate with highly charged emotions, along with critical examinations of intelligence and security agencies and a cynical perspective of social institutions,

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[325] Ibid

particularly U.S. corporations, military, and government. Fear verging on paranoia runs rampant through many post-9/11 movies. … Given that post-9/11 themes continue to inspire popular movies, there seems little likelihood that the movement will disappear anytime soon. Instead, movies may continue for a long time to come to reflect the events of September 11, 2011, and the violent and costly wars that followed. The post-9/11 style, as the most recent manifestation of the film noir/neonoir cycles demonstrate, should remain in vogue with filmmakers and audiences alike as long as it continues to deliver shocks and thrills and continues to depict our greatest fears and hopes in entertaining forms[326].

[326] Pollard, T. (2016). *Hollywood 9/11: Superheroes, Supervillains and Super Disasters*. London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. Pp: 181-183

Figure 17: Marwan recording a speech to be broadcast after

he carries out a mass-casualty terrorist attack

The speech's sinister undertones conjure up images of "Islamic" terrorism. The series' incendiary rhetoric brings to mind the wave of anti-Muslim hysteria that spread across the US following the 9/11 suicide attacks. Indeed, as Shaheen contends in *Reel Bad Arabs*, a cursory examination of Hollywood's treatment of the Islamic faith reveals blatant injustices. Terrorism, patriarchy, and holy war are practices regularly attributed to Muslims. "When mosques are displayed onscreen," Shaheen notes, "the camera inevitably cuts to Arabs praying, and then gunning down civilians. Such scenarios are common fare.[327]" It is important to note that like television series, film serials have also contributed

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[327] Shaheen, J. G. (2015). *Reel bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*. Northampton, Massachusetts: Interlink Publishing group p. 15

to strains of anti-Muslim sentiments and fear of Arabs. Serials featuring Arab terrorists can be traced back to as early as the silent era. Shaheen suggests that serials such as *The Black Coin* (1936)[328], *Radio Patrol* (1937)[329], and *Federal Agents vs. Underworld, Inc.* (1948)[330] are among the very first productions to frame the Arab as an implacable enemy bent on destroying the United States. *The Black Coin*, for instance, was the first serial to craft a narrative that depicts Arabs as terrorists plotting to commandeer and blow up airplanes. Given these "pervasive stereotype[s], it comes as no surprise that some … [Americans] … find it difficult to accept Egyptians, Moroccans, Palestinians, and other Arabs as friends.[331]"

24's harsh indictment of Islam is intended to justify Bauer's actions. His use of torture is a dominating thread in the series. As will be shown in the next chapter, the gruesome methods he employs to extract information and force confessions are all framed as necessary in the grand scheme of winning the war on terror. Interestingly, even Americans who are suspected of plotting terrorist attacks or withholding information vital to national security are savagely tortured. Secretary of Defense James Heller's son, for instance, is one of the prominent figures CTU agents brutalize when they suspect him of helping the terrorists kidnap his father and sister.

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[328] Ibid, p. 112

[329] Ibid, p. 418

[330] Ibid, p. 216

[331] Ibid, p. 35

As will be discussed later, *24*'s portrayal of grisly acts of torture—as not only necessary, but also morally justified even when the accused is later proven innocent—is meant to stretch the boundaries of proper conduct and peddle the narrative that the only way to win the battle against evil is if extreme measures are permitted. Bauer's unconventional tactics are born from a strong conviction that terror should be met with terror. The graphic portrayal of torture, which became a recurring theme in the series, is by no means arbitrary. It is a political statement, a testimony to the judicious and sound policies put in place to help quell terror.

2. Portrayal of Torture: Sleeper Cells and American Traitors

The US war on terror has put into sharp relief the rudderless moral compass of some of the practices carried out in the name of national security[332]. The 9/11 terrorist attacks were an act of blatant aggression which warranted an immediate, forceful response. Two wars were started to hunt down those responsible and bring them to justice. The brutal, protracted military conflict, however, saw the rules of engagement routinely bent and provoked a storm of controversy over the morality of some of the measures taken to deter terrorism[333]. Torture, or what is euphemistically referred to as enhanced interrogation techniques, is an example of a litany of contentious policies that stained the Bush administration's tenure as it wrestled to stem the tide of terrorism[334]. Although civilized society unequivocally condemns the use of torture even in extraordinary circumstances[335], the policies put in place in the aftermath of 9/11 provided a fertile breeding ground for retributive actions and gave intelligence agencies carte blanche to shed long-standing international norms and covenants. "To put it mildly," Alsultany argues, "the explicit

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[332] See Mayer, J. (2013). *The dark side: The inside story of how the war on terror turned into a war on American ideals*. New York: Anchor Books.

[333] See Ricks, T. E. (2007). *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*. London: Penguin Press. See also Fallon, M. (2017). *Unjustifiable means: The inside story of how the CIA, Pentagon, and US Government conspired to torture*. New York: Regan Arts

[334] See Fallon, M. (2017). *Unjustifiable means: The inside story of how the CIA, Pentagon, and US Government conspired to torture*. New York: Regan Arts

[335] See Burgers, J. H., & Danelius, H. (1988). *The United Nations Convention against Torture: A handbook on the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*. Dordrecht: M. Nijhoff.

targeting of Arabs and Muslims by government policies, based on their identity as opposed to their criminality, contradicts claims to racial progress.[336]"

In the wake of 9/11, Hollywood released countless films and television series to help rationalize the raft of stringent, anti-terror legislation the US government passed to avert future attacks. The USA Patriot Act, for instance, was introduced in 2001 to equip law enforcement with a host of tools that had not been legal prior to 9/11. The act, which was passed with broad bipartisan support, was criticized for its infringement on individual liberties. Evelyn Alsultany writes:

> The USA Patriot Act … legalized the following (previously illegal) and thus enabled anti-Arab and Muslim racism: monitoring Arab and Muslim groups; granting the U.S. Attorney the right to detain noncitizens whom he suspects might have ties to terrorism; searching and wiretapping secretly, without probable cause; arresting and holding a person as a "material witness" whose testimony might assist in a case; using secret evidence, without granting the accused access to that evidence; trying those designated as "enemy combatants" in military tribunals (as opposed to civilian

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[336] Alsultany, E. (2012). *Arabs and Muslims in the media: Race and representation after 9/11*. New York: New York University Press. P.6

courts); and deportation based on guilt by association (not what someone has done).[337]

Considering that this chapter attempts to expose Hollywood's complicity in advancing George W. Bush's controversial policies, and in an effort to avoid academic bias—or at least keep it to a minimum—it is important to lay out the former president's reasons for the adversarial and uncompromising stance he assumed after 9/11. In his memoir, *Decision Points*, George W. Bush staunchly defends his national security policies:

> The undertaking was daunting. To stop the enemy, we had to be right 100 percent of the time. To harm us, they had to succeed only once… Over the next five years, the PATRIOT Act helped us break up potential terror cells in New York, Oregon, Virginia, and Florida… As the Freshness of 9/11 faded, so did the overwhelming congressional support for the PATRIOT Act. Civil liberties advocates and commentators on the wings of both parties mischaracterized the law as a stand-in for everything they disliked about the war on terror… After 9/11, we couldn't afford to fly blind… conducting surveillance against our enemies in war fell within the authorities granted by the congressional war resolution and the constitutional authority of the commander in chief… I knew the Terrorist

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[337] Ibid. P.5

Surveillance Program would prove controversial one day. Yet

I believed it was necessary.[338]

In his memoir, *In My Time*, former Vice President Dick Cheney, an outspoken supporter of the enhanced interrogation program and a vocal proponent of the Afghan and Iraq wars, similarly defends the government's forceful measures:

The Bush administration put in place programs that were critical to securing the nation. We went after terrorists in safe havens… we enhanced our ability to intercept terrorist communications and track the money that financed them. And we developed [the enhanced interrogation] program to gain intelligence from detained terrorists that saved lives and prevented future attacks. As time passed after the 9/11 attacks and the threat of another attack seemed to recede in people's minds, criticism of what we had done mounted, and no program was more bitterly condemned than the CIA's procedures for interrogating high-value detainees. Amid the heated rhetoric some basic points tended to be ignored. The program was safe, legal, and effective. It provided intelligence that enabled us to prevent attacks and save American lives[339].

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[338] Bush G. W. (2010). *Decision Points* (1st ed.). Crown Publishers. Pp:155-164

[339] Cheney, D. (2011). *In My Time.* Threshold Editions. P: 363

The arguments outlined above offer ample justification for the administration's post-9/11 response. The gravity of the crisis warranted strong and urgent action. What is conveniently left out, however, is the far-reaching impact that such measures had on ordinary Muslims, the great majority of whom categorically reject the terrorists' extremist ideology and strongly condemn any violence committed in their name. Regrettably, Hollywood made little effort to highlight the deleterious effects that George W. Bush's extreme policies had on innocent and law-abiding Muslims.

It is important to emphasize that while the Bush administration passed laws that invited human rights abuses, several high-profile political figures aggressively campaigned for their repeal. John McCain, the late Arizona Senator and Republican presidential nominee of 2008, for instance, actively opposed the use of torture to extract information from terrorist suspects. Due to his harrowing experience as a prisoner of war in Vietnam, his criticism carried considerable weight. The former naval pilot, who was savagely tortured by the North Vietnamese for more than five years,[340] vigorously contested the Bush administration's rationale for the necessity of the enhanced interrogation program, repeatedly protesting that it was illegal, immoral and ineffective—rarely has torture produced actionable intelligence and several suspects were brutalized only to be proven innocent later. In his book, *The Restless Wave,* John McCain articulates his long-standing concerns about torture:

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[340] See McCain J. & Salter M. (2018). *The Restless Wave: Good Times, Just Causes, Great Fights and Other Appreciations.* Simon & Schuster.

It had always been important to me that my country act honorably in war and peace, even when our enemies did not… Some might read this and say to themselves. "Who gives a damn what happened to a terrorist after what they did on September 11?" But it's not about them. It never was… Our founding ideals… make us exceptional… [When we were captured in Vietnam], my fellow POWs [prisoners of war] and I could work up very intense hatred for the people who tortured us. We cussed them, made up degrading names for them, swore we would get back at them someday. That kind of resistance, angry and pugnacious, can only carry you so far when your enemy holds most of the cards… [But] your last resistance, the one that sticks, the one that makes the victim superior to the torturer, is the belief that were the positions reversed you wouldn't treat them as they have treated you. The ultimate victim of torture is the torturer, the one who inflicts pain and suffering at the cost of their humanity.[341]

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[341] Ibid, pp: 75-81

McCain goes on to detail some of the most brutal interrogation tactics used on high-profile detainees:

> The CIA planted false stories in the press. It lied about the value of intelligence extracted from abuse detainees. At least twenty-six of the 119 detainees held by the CIA were subsequently found to have been innocent. Many of them were tortured. Torture inflicted on detainees included force-feeding and hydrating prisoners anally, and rectal examinations using "excessive force"; mock executions and at least one instance of forcing a prisoner to play Russian roulette.[342]

The measures that had been implemented to harden America's defenses after 9/11 drew scathing criticism from human rights activists and watchdog organizations. Undaunted by the backlash, the Bush administration continued to advocate for the necessity of policies that, by many accounts, violated international treaties and contravened federal laws.[343] The chorus of moral voices—led by politicians like Senator John McCain—struggled to moderate the barrage of incendiary rhetoric that the media unleashed post 9/11 to justify the government's actions. Hollywood played a pivotal role in associating all

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[342] Ibid, p:100

[343] See Alsultany, E. (2012). *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation after 9/11*. New York: New York University Press.

Muslims with terrorism, spreading panic and legitimizing measures that targeted people based on their religious affiliation rather than reasonable suspicion.

In addition to these severe measures, the Bush administration also launched programs that gave the CIA legal cover for other unlawful practices. The release of *24* coincided with a critical juncture in US political and military history. "The controversy surrounding *24*'s depiction of torture," Alsultany explains, "arose shortly after … leaked photos showed Iraqi prisoners being physically, psychologically, and sexually abused.[344]" As will be shown later, the series benefitted greatly from a host of events to push through its narrative that the US government had an obligation to enact far-reaching, extreme policies when confronted with threats to public safety.

Since the scope of this chapter does not allow for a thorough review of all seasons, the focus will be mainly on *Day 4* which, unlike other seasons, follows a coherent storyline that revolves around one main enemy—radical Muslims and American traitors—rather than different antagonists and seemingly unending conspiracies. One particularly remarkable feature that distinguishes season 4 is its incorporation of several high-profile American terrorist suspects. In addition to its attempt to highlight the sheer complexity of navigating national security concerns, the series' choice to inject non-Muslim terrorists into the story emphasizes the need for doing away with laws that hinder agents like Jack Bauer in their efforts to protect the homeland. Furthermore, *24*'s vilification of Americans

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[344] Alsultany, p. 40

who are critical of the government's policies is meant to discourage opposition and promote a pernicious equivalence between real terrorists and the administration's critics.

Although Bauer and other law-enforcement agents are repeatedly engaged in perpetrating acts of torture and detainee abuse throughout the series, season 4's presentation of the issue is especially revealing. It is interesting to note that Hollywood's portrayals of torture increased substantially following the 9/11 suicide attacks. Alsultany explains:

> Human Rights First and the Parents Television Council … report that from 1996 to 2001 there were 102 scenes of torture. From 2002 to 2005 torture scenes increased to 624. … In addition to an increase in representations of torture on prime-time television, there also has been a shift in the identity of the torturer. In the history of U.S. television, the torturer had usually been the bad guy, not the good guy. Historically, torture was used as a technique by writers and producers to villainize a character; it was considered immoral and therefore a stock tool of the bad guys … Torture is now used for the greater good, as opposed to being used in the service of evil or power[345].

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[345] Alsultany, p. 43

Season 4 starts with the protagonist racing to identify the targets the terrorists intend to hit. As already mentioned, Bauer's attempt to foil Habib Marwan's terrorist attacks prompts him to torture Tomas Sherek, who reveals that the commuter train bombing was meant to distract intelligence agencies from the abduction of Secretary of Defense, James Heller. While the audience may turn a blind eye on Bauer's unorthodox methods and dismiss them as a necessary evil, his torture of highly placed figures who wield tremendous influence and political power, as we see later in the series, disrupts previous narratives in the series that have routinely portrayed the enemy as Middle Eastern, Chinese or Russian[346].

In an effort to hunt down the perpetrators who staged the abduction of Secretary of Defense, James Heller, and his daughter, Audrey Raines, who is also his chief policy advisor, CTU's (Counter Terrorist Unit) director, Erin Driscoll, finds herself compelled to resort to unconventional strong-arm tactics. She directs Chris Manning to coerce Richard Heller, the Secretary's son, into giving up information she believes would help CTU mount a rescue operation. Richard's potential innocence does little to deter the agency from inflicting excruciating pain on him. Later in the series, we learn that Richard's entanglement with the terrorists started when he crossed paths with a couple, Mandy and

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[346] Despite the series' use of American villains, who are mostly assigned relatively minor roles, Muslims, Chinese and Russians have all been routinely painted as formidable adversaries, posing the greatest threat to US national security. While Russian characters have been featured in seasons 5, 6 and 8, Muslims have been heavily misrepresented, especially in seasons 2, 4 and 6. Throughout the series' run, Chinese characters have also appeared in several seasons, most notably 4, 6 and 9.

Gary, at a bar and invited them to his home to take drugs. Unbeknownst to Richard, Mandy uses his cell phone to call the Turkish terrorist leader Habib Marwan, falsely implicating him in his father's abduction and diverting CTU's attention and resources away from their other terrorist plans.

Richard Heller's unlawful detainment at CTU, which lasts for almost three hours, constitutes a key development in the series' approach to torture. As will be shown later, the narrative has quickly shifted from a lukewarm advocacy for the use of illegal interrogation tactics, pursued by an agent shunned for his rogue operations, to a full endorsement of gruesome acts of torture. Interestingly, even the highest echelons of the government grow bold as more threats appear imminent. The Secretary of Defense, for instance, does not balk at authorizing CTU to use torture in the name of national security[347]. When the Secretary's son is taken into custody by Curtis Manning and his team, they force him to take a polygraph test, which revealed that he was being evasive, prompting Driscoll to order agent Manning to interrogate him more intensely. The scene that shows Curtis Manning engaging Richard in conversation before proceeding to torture him is worth examining:

> Curtis Manning: Who else knew your father would be at your
>
> house this morning?

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[347] Throughout its run, the series has gradually moved from a tacit approval of Bauer's actions, especially in the first seasons, to an open and unequivocal support for any measure—however extreme—taken to safeguard national security. The increasing frequency and intensity of torture scenes, particularly featured in season 4, serve to underscore the utility of Bauer's illegal tactics.

> Richard Heller: I told you. No one.
>
> Curtis Manning nods to another interrogator in the room who opens a briefcase full of syringes.
>
> Richard Heller (looking at the interrogator in horror): What are you, crazy?
>
> Curtis Manning: This works on a neurotransmitter level. Makes every nerve ending in your body feel like it's on your fire. … By the time you're released, the mark on your arm will be gone. It'll be just your word against mine.[348]

Before the interrogation expert, Eric, inserts the syringe into Richard's arm—who begins to scream hysterically and flail wildly—Manning suddenly intervenes. In an apparent pang of conscience, he asks Eric to stop. At first glance, Manning seems to defy the director's explicit orders to employ all means necessary to force Richard—the only suspect they have in custody—to give up the names of the kidnappers he is accused of harboring. It is interesting to note that before Manning interrupts Eric, he advises Richard that any accusations he may intend to level against CTU after his release will be called into question, especially given the secrecy of the operation and the lack of willing witnesses to corroborate his story. This intense exchange adds to an already sinister atmosphere, inspiring a sense of unease about the use of questionable tactics in the name of national security. The scene touches on the delicate balance between public safety and the rules put

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[348] Cassar, J. (Director). (2005). *24* [Television Series]. Fox.

in place to prevent abuse of authority. It is essential to point out that although the suspect, Richard, is the Secretary of Defense's son, Manning seems initially willing to carry out the director's orders before he suddenly decides to reverse course. As we see later, Manning's decision to stop the interrogation is not due to his realization that torturing suspects is illegal or immoral, but is rather due to his fear of the consequences he may face for his actions when the Secretary of Defense finds out that he has authorized Eric to brutalize his own son.

When the agency's director, Driscoll, confronts him, Manning points out that torturing suspects is illegal and demands that the order be handed to him in writing if she wants it carried out. Sensing her growing exasperation at his insubordination, Manning suggests that they try other tactics to force Richard to talk, asserting that he has "seen good results with sensory disorientation. Cut off his sight, saturate his auditory. It's noninvasive.[349]" The director agrees half-heartedly, and Manning is sent back to the interrogation room, where Richard is held, to experiment with what he sees as less physically agonizing but equally effective methods. It is important to note that CTU's decision to move forward with the interrogation of a high-profile suspect who could be telling the truth, but "maybe … protecting a friend … wasn't knowingly involved with the terrorists,"[350] reveals the elaborate pains the television series is willing to take to create the

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[349] Ibid

[350] Ibid. It is curious that Manning agrees to torture Richard despite having doubts about his involvement with the terrorists. Unlike Bauer, he seems to struggle with having to torture suspects who may be innocent.

narrative that illegal interrogation techniques are instrumental in the fight the US wages against terror. Manning's brutal interrogation of Richard suggests that mistreatment of detainees—who may well be innocent— is a small and tolerable price to pay for keeping Americans safe.

As the events rapidly unfold, the series offers a glimpse into the relatively benign but effective interrogation tactics that Manning has advocated to his superior. He isolates the suspect and places him in a dark room, cutting off his sight and subjecting his ears to constant, excruciatingly high-pitched ringing:

> Manning (enters the interrogation room): How long do you think you've sitting here like this?
>
> Richard: Three, four hours.
>
> Manning (looks at Richard intently): It's been less than 30 minutes. Time is the first thing you lose track of with sensory disorientation. It only gets worse.
>
> Richard (sobbing): This is illegal. You can't keep me here.
>
> Manning: You'll be here until you tell me what I need to know.[351]

His sense of duty, however, often prevails as he ultimately opts to disregard the law and pursue the very same course of action that Bauer always takes when national security is threatened.

[351] Ibid

It is curious to note that Manning's particularly austere and conscientious character, as portrayed throughout the series, seems to strengthen his resolve to follow through with his illegal actions. He proceeds to torture the suspect despite his earlier attempt to draw Driscoll's attention to the possibility that their course of action may be ill-advised and even potentially subject them to criminal liability, and that even though the polygraph results indicate deception, Richard may have nothing to do with the terrorists who are holding his father and sister hostage. This torture scene is meant to absolve interrogators, who take matters into their own hands, from accountably or any blame they may be assigned. Moreover, it lends weight to the notion that agencies like CTU must use every measure necessary to safeguard national security, especially when dealing with deceptive or uncooperative suspects. This rhetoric largely permeates the series and is especially highlighted when CTU agent Jack Bauer, who is infamous for his proclivity for violence and often allows his sadistic streak free rein, is brought to reckoning for his past nefarious practices.

The fourth season of *24* premiered at a time when the US anti-terrorism campaign was in full swing[352]. Curiously enough, even Hollywood, which is noted for its left-leaning tilt, churned out films that added credence to a narrative that would otherwise be excoriated in times of peace.[353] *24*'s advocacy for the utility of torture does not only reinforce

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[352] The season, which aired in May, 2005, departed from other previous seasons in its depiction of torture. While torture was a minor theme past seasons, it dominated the narrative in season 4.

[353] *Black Hawk Down* (2001), *The Stone Merchant* (2006), *The Kingdom* (2007), *The Hurt Locker* (2008), *Body of Lies* (2008), *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), and *Lone Survivor* (2013) are a few examples of many

Hollywood's familiar framing of Arabs as terrorists deserving of every cruelty inflicted upon them, but also goes further to suggest that even Americans who are suspected of bearing ill will to their own country should receive the same treatment. It is interesting to note that the reason why CTU's director orders Curtis Manning to torture Richard, besides the polygraph test he failed, is because of his critical views towards the U.S government. His decision to speak at an anti-military rally to protest the 2500 missile delivery systems the US was set to receive angers his father, the Secretary of Defense, who pleads with him not to take part in an event that is intended to embarrass President Keeler and undermine his agenda. Richard's unorthodox views are, to a certain degree, what encourages CTU to treat him as a suspect and subject him to almost three hours of intense questioning. The message that the series wishes to convey through its development and portrayal of characters, like the Secretary's son, who find themselves, time and again, caught in CTU's crossfire is patently clear: holding political views that may run counter to U.S militarism or take exception to the extreme, hawkish policies, that were especially implemented to protect America, is unpatriotic, and could be construed as a tacit condoning, if not complicity, in acts that aim to compromise national security. Richard's harsh treatment puts him and his likes on a par with the very terrorists who seek to wreak havoc on the US.

Another high-profile character who is subjected to Bauer's cruel interrogation tactics is Audrey's estranged husband, Paul Raines. He is the Secretary of Defense's son

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Hollywood motion pictures in which Arabs and Muslims are portrayed as terrorists. See Shaheen, J. G. (2008). *Guilty: Hollywood's Verdict on Arabs after 9/11*. Olive Branch Press

in law. He becomes a prime suspect when CTU discovers that his name is on the building lease that Habib Marwan used to plan his terrorist attack. Evocative of the Secretary's order to have his son tortured later on in the series, Audrey helps Jack Bauer to track her husband down in order to interrogate him for his apparent involvement with the terrorists. At the behest of Bauer, she draws him into a meeting, which he eagerly agrees to in the hope of reviving his failed marriage. When they meet, he quickly senses that Audrey has no interest in resolving their marital issues, but rather came to spy on him. A fiery confrontation ensues between the couple, and before things spiral out of control, Audrey decides to leave. When she attempts to make her way to the door, however, Raines aggressively accosts her, prompting Jack Bauer to force his way into the room and knock him to the ground.

It is important to examine the scene in which Bauer brutally tortures Audrey's husband. What makes Raines' character vitally essential to the series discourse about torture is that although he is later proven innocent, he remains unshaken and offers to help CTU track down the terrorists. Instead of bringing the danger of such tactics into focus, the show quickly shifts attention to the gravity of the day's events, downplaying Bauer's illegal actions and dismissing them as regrettable but necessary. When Raines realizes that his wife set him up, he refuses to cooperate with Bauer, who knocks him unconscious following an acrimonious exchange. As he begins to regain consciousness, Raines finds himself strapped to a chair, his head and chest wet, suggesting that Bauer is about to subject him to electric shocks. When Raines is presented with seemingly compelling evidence that directly implicates him in the terrorist attacks, he doubles down on his claims of innocence and rebuffs Bauer's demand to cooperate:

Bauer: Your name is on a lease in a building in Chatsworth that was used by the terrorists to plan today's attack. That makes you a prime suspect. I'm gonna treat you like one. Do you understand that?

Raines (looking confused): My name is on at least 50 different leases. I own 10 different corporations. I don't know anything about some building in Chatsworth.

Bauer: I don't believe you. The lease of that building was notarized. There's documentation of your I.D. CTU verified your signature. Paul, you need to start talking to me now.

Raines: I've got nothing to say to you. ….

Bauer: Paul, this is your last chance. You've got to talk to me before I have to hurt you. … Why is your name on the lease?

Paul: You're bluffing.[354] (Bauer attaches two wires onto his chest, causing Raines to scream in agony as electricity charges through his body. Bauer keeps torturing him until he agrees to look into the corporate records stored into his laptop to see if anyone has used his account to help the terrorists.)

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[354] Cassar, J. (Director). (2005). *24*. [Television Series]. Fox.

Figure 18: Bauer tortures Raines, Secretary Heller's son-in-law

Given the severity of the threats the nation faces, and CTU's desperate attempts to thwart the terrorists' plans, Bauer's decision to torture the Secretary's son-in-law appears necessary and even sensible. Audrey's approval of the illegal tactics Bauer uses is especially revealing. Her willingness to lure Raines into a meeting that could put his life at risk—by a maverick agent notorious for his violent outbreaks— suggests that even government officials have a responsibility to push the limits of lawful conduct when national security is at stake. When Raines later accuses Bauer of being "just a thug with a badge", Audrey, jumping to his defense, tartly retorts, "why is your name on that lease? …

I don't know what to believe anymore."[355] The portrayal of Audrey's character, who is not only Paul Raines' wife, but also the chief policy advisor to the Secretary of Defense, carries significant weight. Her actions, coming from a high-ranking official, are especially meant to confer legitimacy on Bauer's unlawful methods, and promote a scattershot, ends-justify-the-means agenda to combatting terrorism. Bauer's tactics make very little distinction between suspects who may be innocent and terrorists whose guilt is beyond dispute. Due process, the series seems to suggest, should not be accorded to anyone posing a threat to national security; the need to protect the homeland ought to override even the most basic individual rights.

Audrey's character is reminiscent of Manning's conscientious character. Throughout the series, almost every decision she has to make takes into account the country's best interests. Although she finds herself compelled to bend the rules every now and then to indulge Bauer's unorthodox modus operandi, her actions are mostly guided by legal considerations and ethical principles. It is remarkable, however, that she decides to stand idly by as Bauer tortures her husband notwithstanding his forceful assertions of innocence. Her unbecoming conduct marks a stark departure from an otherwise exemplary record of public service, which culminates in her self-abnegating decision to sacrifice herself for the good of the country. When she is held captive, the terrorists make her father sign a document under duress, admitting to a list of trumped-up charges. Aware that his captors intend to put him on trial—and broadcast it to the world— only to be executed in

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[355] Ibid

the end, Heller decides to take matters into his own hands. He orders his daughter to use the chain that links her handcuffs to strangle him so as to spare his country further embarrassment. Unable to comply with her father's demand, Audrey convinces him to allow her to break a gas pipe that would cause them both to choke to death. It is this very deep sense of patriotic duty, which Audrey routinely exhibits, that provokes sympathy for the actions she later takes against her husband. If Audrey is willing to sacrifice herself and her father for the sake of the country, her husband's brutal torture becomes reduced to an unpleasant encounter, a trifling inconvenience that pales in comparison.

The series' flattering portrait of Audrey's character is designed to elicit sympathy for her extreme actions. In addition to the admirable traits she displays throughout the series, her role in President Keeler's administration is worthy of examination. Besides being the daughter of the Secretary of Defense, which is in and of itself significant, she is a senior policy advisor and the Inter-Agency Liaison for the Department of Defense (DOD) with CTU. Her actions should not be simply ascribed to an unfortunate conjunction of extraordinary circumstances, but rather ought to be viewed as a model meant for other officials to emulate. As a DOD policy advisor, she is expected to review, develop and help shape policies primarily designed to increase national security. Her support for Bauer's extreme interrogation methods, therefore, reflects an effort to advocate and advance her policy agenda. Of all the CTU agents who are reluctant to work with Bauer because of his past unlawful practices and grave misconduct, Audrey takes it upon herself to facilitate his rogue operations. Although she decides to end her romantic interlude with him later in the series—apparently due to the unsettling nature of his work, she remains steadfast in her

support for the desperate actions he had to take to save the country from the looming terrorist attacks.

It is curious that Audrey's endorsement of Bauer's brinkmanship is shared, even more strongly, by her father, the Secretary of Defense. When they are rescued, they both return to CTU to be debriefed and help put an end to the terrorists' plans. Much to his surprise, Secretary Heller learns that his son, Richard, has been the subject of an interrogation that led to his torture as CTU's desperation for a lead grew more intense. When they finally meet, Heller consoles his son and promises him justice. Their warm reunion, however, quickly takes an unexpected turn as the father asks Richard to be truthful with him, demanding an explanation for the polygraph's results which show that his answers were deceptive:

> Heller: They said they were using some interrogation techniques.
>
> Richard: Totally out of line. I'm gonna sue them blind.
>
> Heller: I think it'll be a little more effective if you let me deal with it. I promise you if they were out of line, heads will roll.
>
> Richard: What do you mean "if"?
>
> Heller: Why did they think you were holding something back from them?
>
> Richard: I don't know
>
> Heller: Richard, if you know something that would shed some light on what happened to me, …

Richard (cuts him off): you don't think I would tell them if I thought it was relevant?

Heller: So there is something. … If you know anything that would help us find the people behind this, tell me now.

Richard: Dad, … I am not going to tell these people things about my private life they don't need to know.

Heller: That you don't think they need to know. Richard, these people were trying to save our lives.

Richard: These people can't be trusted, and what they did to me is proof.

Heller (frustrated, he calls Manning): Agent Manning, could you come in here, please? (Agent Manning enters the room.) Agent Manning, I am authorizing you to do whatever you feel is necessary to get this information out of my son. … I love you, son. But I have a duty to my country.[356]

The Secretary's rationale for authorizing Manning to torture his son emphasizes the utility of Bauer and Audrey's methods, which place the interests of the collective above those of the individual. During times of war, the Secretary of Defense seems to suggest, the state has a mandate, indeed a moral imperative, to operate outside the purview of the law. The sacred responsibility elected and appointed officials have to protect the country justifies

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[356] Ibid

the use of extreme measures. Moral or legal barriers should have no bearing when the nation's security is threatened. After all, if it were not for Bauer's daring rescue operation, and his courage to make hard choices that sometimes fall outside the crippling confines of the law, Habib Marwan would succeed in his endeavor to terrorize the country.

The portrayal of Heller's character bears striking similarity to that of his daughter, Audrey. They are both high-level government officials who seem willing to die for their country. Their commitment to national security makes their actions morally permissible, if not legally tenable. When Heller enjoins Manning to employ every possible interrogation technique to extract information from his son, we are expected to trust his judgment and applaud his moral clarity. His decision to put the country above his own family speaks to his ferocious loyalty. Heller, it should be reiterated, is not a petty, low-level political operative. He is at the helm of the Department of Defense, a vital and highly sensitive branch of government that oversees agencies tasked with safeguarding national security. Unlike Audrey and Bauer, who are rank-and-file government officials, Heller occupies a leadership position at the highest rung of government. The covert, legally murky operations he has CTU carry out at his behest are different from those we have come to expect from Bauer. They cannot be simply written off as undertakings that went awry, or blamed on agents who went rogue. Contrary to Bauer's unsanctioned missions, which tend to exasperate his underlings and superiors alike, Heller does not seem to believe that his actions rise to the level of unlawful conduct. He makes it clear that nothing, not even his love for his son, can prevent him from carrying out his duty to his country. As far as the

Secretary is concerned, instructing Manning to utilize every means at his disposal to compel his son to reveal information—which may not even be relevant to CTU's manhunt—is not in any way extreme. It is rather evidence of his firm commitment to fulfill his obligations to the country he pledged to protect. Subjecting suspects to intense, lengthy interrogations which often lead to bodily harm and mental anguish, the Secretary seems to argue, is a regrettable but unavoidable course of action.

It is important to examine the series' attempt to justify the use of torture against Paul Raines and Richard Heller, especially after their exoneration from all charges by the counter-terrorist agency. After Raines helps Bauer identify the mastermind behind the terrorist attacks, he gets no credit or recognition from CTU. Furthermore, Bauer shows no contrition for his brutal interrogation of Raines. As we later find out, Raines was intentionally targeted because of his close relationship with the Secretary of Defense. He was used as a pawn by Habib Marwan to advance his elaborate scheme. It is even more bewildering that after all he has endured, Audrey does not question Bauer's actions. She continues to lay the blame squarely at the feet of her husband. Oddly enough, Raines does not reject her accusations. Instead, he slips into pitiful bouts of self-recrimination. "I've been careless. I'm so sorry,[357]" he sheepishly acknowledges his guilt. In a smooth transition from the day's earlier events, the show shifts focus to CTU's thrilling pursuit of the architect behind the terrorist attacks. Raines, who has been subjected to excruciating electric shocks, agrees to work with his torturer in a startling turn of events. His attempt to

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[357] Ibid

alleviate his feelings of guilt and make up for his marital shortcomings, however, cost him his life later.

It is curious to note that as Raines partners with Bauer in an undertaking that he knows will put his life at risk, he does not appear to have nursed any animosity for the cruelty that was inflicted on him earlier in the day. His bizarre eagerness to partner with the very agent who not only falsely accused him of working with the terrorists, but also brutalized him based on information that later proved misleading is intended to extenuate the severity of his torturer's actions. The series' depiction of the duo's peculiar partnership suggests that the pain and suffering Bauer causes is justifiable. His ability to subdue Raines and enlist his help to hunt down the terrorists is testimony to the effectiveness of his methods. Indeed, if the victim can legitimize his torturer's heinous actions and even agree to work alongside him, the audience can only commend their maturity and willingness to move past their acrimony, and rise above their disagreements for the sake of the country.

Later in the series, the partnership that Raines forms with his tormentor quickly develops into a strong bond. When Bauer realizes that Habib Marwan works for an American company that may be implicated in selling arms to the terrorists, he and Raines find themselves the target of a search-and-kill-on-sight operation. Taking cover at a sporting goods store, they miraculously manage to ward off the company's highly trained mercenaries long enough for CTU to locate and rescue them. However, before they leave the store, one of the company's hostile agents who had been shot, but survived grabs a gun and points it at Bauer. Raines, standing nearby, catches sight of the agent and quickly

shoves Bauer out of the gunman's line of fire, saving his friend but sacrificing himself in the process. Just before he slips into unconsciousness, Raines looks at Bauer and faintly mutters, "I owed you." Raines' willingness to die for someone who not only savagely tortured him a few hours earlier, but also carried on a clandestine affair with his wife— which almost ruined his marriage—makes the relationship between the two extremely unusual. Their bitter enmity, which was especially palpable when they first met, has wholly dissipated the moment Raines comes to realize that everything that happened earlier in the day was, to some degree, his fault. He seems to be convinced that he deserves the agonizing pain Bauer inflicted on him. His masochistic compliance damps down the audience's reaction to the disturbing acts of violence that feature heavily in the series.

The courage Raines displays in the face of the company's mercenaries reveals the lengths he is willing to go to in order to undo some of the damage he inadvertently caused. His selfless and heroic decision to sacrifice himself so that Bauer can continue to lead the manhunt for the terrorists and bring them to justice underscores his eagerness to alleviate his guilt and make amends for his wrongs. The duo's newfound camaraderie does not only suggest that Raines condones Bauer's brutal interrogation techniques, but also underlines the absolute trust he has in his partner's ability to complete the mission. When it comes to national security, Raines is willing to lay down his life. His eventful experience on the field makes him sympathize even more with Bauer. Despite his earlier misgivings about his partner's misconduct, the friendship they have come to cultivate after their unfortunate

encounter has clearly convinced him of the absolute necessity to undertake all measures necessary against anyone who puts the country's security in jeopardy.

As Raines is rushed to CTU's medical clinic to undergo an emergency surgery for the gunshot wound he sustained at the hands of one of the mercenaries, Bauer follows another lead; a Chinese nuclear program scientist suspected of selling his expertise to Habib Marwan. When CTU confiscates a computer that belongs to the Chinese government employee, Lee Jong, they discover a trove of emails he sent to one of Habib Marwan's operatives. The emails instruct the terrorists on how to configure and deploy nuclear weapons. When CTU closes in on Jong, he seeks shelter at the Chinese consulate. In an attempt to bring the Chinese scientist to CTU for interrogation, Bauer mounts a covert operation, raiding the consulate and engaging several security guards in a shoot-out that resulted in the killing of the Chinese consul and shooting of Lee by accident. Although Bauer manages to remove Lee from the consulate and force him to admit to his involvement with the terrorists, the scientist refuses to divulge any information that would help CTU locate Habib Marwan unless he receives a presidential pardon in return. When President Logan agrees to grant him a pardon, Bauer finds out that the bullet that is still lodged in his back exacerbated his condition, putting his life in danger and diminishing CTU's hopes to find the terrorist leader. When he is transported to CTU's clinic for surgery, Dr. Besson, the only qualified surgeon, was in the middle of trying to save Raines' life. In a dramatic and ironic turn of events, Bauer puts a gun to Dr Besson's head and forces him to treat the Chinese scientist. As a result of Bauer's interference, Raines dies but Lee regains

consciousness and provides CTU with information that helped locate and capture Habib Marwan.

Raines's tragic, inexorable death serves as a reminder that an ends-justify-the-means approach is sometimes unavoidable, especially when innocent lives are at stake. The fight against terrorism does not only justify torturing suspects who may be innocent, but also killing them if the country's security is threatened. Despite his determination to help CTU earlier in the day, Bauer does not hesitate to end his partner's life in a desperate attempt to head off more attacks and bring the terrorist leader to justice. Similar to Audrey and Heller, who are always ready to sacrifice themselves for the good of the country, Bauer sacrifices his newfound friend, who saved his life from imminent death. Throughout the series, Audrey, Heller and Bauer go to extreme lengths, and routinely break every law that may stymie their ability to fulfill their duties. Given the urgency of the daunting tasks they are entrusted with, and tremendous responsibility they have to safeguard the country's security, the decisions they make often border on the extreme. When the dust is settled and threat is contained, however, we come to see that their methods are effective. The rule of law does not often apply to them, but their questionable, extraordinary conduct always proves instrumental, in retrospect, in the fight against terrorism. It is important to point out that Bauer's eagerness to carry out unsanctioned, clandestine operations, and defy his superiors' commands is meant to highlight his resolve to protect the country at all costs. The possibility that he may be held accountable for his actions does not deter him from straying into illegal territory. Indeed, it is his patriotism that guides and informs his decisions. He

does not seem to dwell on the potential consequences he may suffer for his insubordination. Whether he will have to answer for his unauthorized killing of Raines or face criminal charges for his illegal interrogation techniques is of minor importance to him. His overriding objective is to deal with the grave and immediate risks his country faces.

In addition to Raines' sado-masochistic relationship with Bauer, which is intended to justify the use of torture, the Secretary of Defense's handling of his defiant son follows a familiar pattern. After Habib Marwan is finally apprehended, CTU discovers that Richard received a phone call from the terrorist leader. Before Bauer interrogates Richard, Audrey convinces him to let her question her brother first. Aware of Bauer's interrogation capabilities, she attempts to persuade Richard to cooperate and spare him a great deal of pain. "Richard, I am begging you to talk to me, alright?" She implores him. "If you don't, there is a man who … will get the information from you. I saw him torture someone today… He won't stop hurting you until you tell him the truth."[358] Indeed, the truth, according to Audrey, can only be obtained through coercion and pain. Like Raines, she knows Bauer is capable of compelling her brother to divulge whatever information he is keeping from CTU. Despite Richard's sheer stubbornness, she has confidence in Bauer's methods. She has witnessed first-hand how his interrogation techniques, albeit illegal, helped extract vital information from terrorist suspects. Audrey's failure to reason with her brother underscores the futility of soft tactics. Following a fruitless exchange with her brother, the Secretary of Defense decides to intervene and pursue a more aggressive route.

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[358] Ibid

Seeing that his daughter is wasting time CTU does not have, he enters the interrogation room and issues his son an ultimatum, threatening to order CTU to torture him again if he continues to remain defiant:

> James Heller: All right, Richard, this has gone far enough. Either you tell us what we wanna know, or I will let them use every piece of equipment they have to drag it out of you. Do you understand that? …. Now what's it gonna be, Richard?
>
> Richard Heller: Go to hell. I didn't do anything wrong. I don't have to tell you anything.
>
> James Heller (screaming): There is a nuclear warhead gonna detonate somewhere over this country. Those lost lives will be on your head. You will be a murderer.
>
> Richard Heller (sobbing): I didn't mean to do anything wrong. … A week ago, I was at a bar and there was this girl and her boyfriend … They wanted to party and we went back to my place. Got high … there was time for one of them to make a call on my phone.
>
> James Heller: How?
>
> Richard Heller: When we were in bed.
>
> James Heller: So while you were in bed with her, he used your phone in the other room?

Richard Heller: He wasn't the one in the room, dad. I was with

him. She must have been the one that made the call.

James Heller (caught off guard): So, you were set up?

Richard Heller: Yeah, I guess so, dad. … So, now you know. I

suppose you're even more disgusted with me.

James Heller: This is not about how you choose to live your

life, son. This is about how you put this country in jeopardy.

… You should have told us everything. You made a profound

mistake today, Richard.[359]

The above-quoted dialogue between the Secretary of Defense and his son clarifies the reasons behind Richard's determination to stand his ground against CTU's coercion techniques. His refusal to tell his father about the meeting he had with Gary and Mandy was not only due to his conviction that the government should have no business encroaching on his privacy, but also—perhaps more importantly— because he felt uncomfortable disclosing his homosexual proclivities to his family. As soon as he tells his father the truth about the couple he encountered at the bar, who now become prime suspects in CTU's investigation, the narrative shifts to focus on the Secretary's disappointment in his son's misguided belief that his right to privacy overrides the need to save lives. As we come to find out later, Richard had no way of knowing that he was in possession of vital information that could help CTU thwart the terrorist attacks, but it is his unyielding, warped

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[359] Ibid

conviction that his individual liberties are inviolable, even when the country's security is compromised, that incurs the wrath of his father and compounds the disappointment of his sister. Richard's sexual orientation or political motivations are of no importance to the Secretary of Defense, but what he cannot tolerate is his naïve, utopian ideals that are at odds with the real world, his short-sighted idealism that impeded CTU's investigation and eventually cost lives.

The attempt to lay the blame on the Secretary's son, suggesting that his failure to cooperate endangered national security, is meant to accentuate the necessity of doing away with due process. It is curious to note that when the Secretary of Defense realizes that the terrorists used his son to divert attention away from their plans, he does not show the slightest compunction or offer an apology for what he put Richard through. Despite his repeated claims of innocence and later vindication, the father does not seem to consider that what he and CTU did to his son is unjustified or unlawful. In fact, the horrific acts of torture Richard suffers at the hands of Curtis Manning, Heller seems to argue, are entirely his fault as he refused to cooperate with CTU. The agency's methods are affirmed, championed, and even employed by the Secretary of Defense himself. The series' construction of extreme, unlikely scenarios in which high-ranking CTU agents, such as Bauer or Manning, and senior government officials, such as Heller or Audrey, constantly find themselves compelled to disregard the law is intended to highlight the urgency of putting in place policies that are extreme.

It is curious to note that the suspects who have been subjected to CTU's illegal interrogation techniques, namely Raines and Richard, are neither Muslim nor Arab. Their role is not central to the plot's development, but the choice to emphasize their guilt, strongly suggesting that they are in league with Habib Marwan, is by no means arbitrary. In addition to the series' attempt to weave a subplot that tackles the issue of homegrown terrorism into the narrative, a subplot that dominated *Day 2* and was revisited on many occasions in future seasons, Raines and Richard's characters are employed to call attention to the long reach of terrorist organizations. In an effort to add more legitimacy to the use of torture, the show thrusts American suspects into the conflict, suggesting that a practical and all-encompassing approach to national security should not have to take account of legal constraints or be encumbered by considerations such as race, social status, religious affiliation or political connections. If the Secretary of Defense deems it necessary to order CTU to torture his own son, and Audrey—his senior policy advisor— believes that she has a moral obligation to help Bauer ensnare and brutalize her husband, the audience is therefore likely to view the use of brutal tactics against Muslim characters through a positive prism.

The depiction of American characters, who are radicalized from an early age and brainwashed to carry out attacks against their own country, is a major, recurrent subplot that the series puts to use every time it seeks to stress the need for resorting to extreme measures against Muslims. The second season of *24*, which was released roughly a year after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, laid the groundwork for the aggressive policies the Bush

administration pursued in its fight against terror. The season follows Bauer's attempt to prevent a terrorist group called The Second Wave from setting off a nuclear bomb in Los Angeles. As he girds for his mission, he learns that Joseph Wald, a criminal he knows from one of his past undercover operations, is in league with The Second Wave. In order to gain Wald's trust and infiltrate his group, Bauer kills a witness who plans to testify against him. Although CTU's district director, George Mason, expresses his disagreement with Bauer's methods, the terrifying prospect of a nuclear bomb detonating on US soil gives him considerable leeway to forge ahead with his unauthorized plans. The dialogue Bauer has with Mason following his killing of the witness is worth examining:

> Jack Bauer (addressing the witness): You are Marshall Goren?
>
> Witness: Yeah
>
> Bauer: Eight counts kidnapping a minor, two counts child pornography, first degree murder.
>
> Witness: Yeah. Look, I already made my deal, and I don't need to hear this noise. All I got to do is testify against Wald, and I walk.
>
> Jack looks at the witness closely, then withdraws his gun and shoots him in the chest.
>
> George Mason (yelling): Oh God, Jack! What are you thinking?

Jack Bauer: I need a helicopter and a backup team ready to leave here in 15 minutes.

George Mason: Are you out of your mind?

Jack Bauer: You want to find this bomb? This is what it's gonna take.

George Mason: Killing a witness?

Jack Bauer: *That's the problem with people like you, George. You want results, but you never want to get your hands dirty.*[360]

(Emphasis added)

It is important to point out that Bauer retired from CTU at the end of season 1 following his wife's murder. He only agrees to return to CTU after his friend, President Palmer, summons him. His temporary reinstatement on such a critical day reflects the government's faith in his mettle and ability to deliver concrete results. Seemingly, the security threats the country faces cannot be taken on by agents, like Mason, who are not willing to move past the boundaries of the law in times of crisis. When Mason expresses his shock at the killing of Marshal Goren, Bauer admonishes him for his inability to appreciate the gravity of the threats they have to deal with. Indeed, the sprawling crisis Bauer seeks to avert is too dire to accommodate the director's concerns. His response to Mason's reluctance to do whatever is necessary to protect the homeland constitutes a stern rebuke to government officials who let their rigid, black-and-white application of the law

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[360] Cassar, J. (Director). (2002). *24.* [Television Series]. Fox.

hold them back. As far as Bauer is concerned, any policy that is designed to restrict his ability to do his job is not worth adhering to.

The very first episode of season 2 shows Bauer challenging his superior's authority, and repeatedly rebelling against his orders, which he sees as a hindrance to his ability to do his job effectively. Throughout the series, Bauer struggles to maintain balance between his colleagues' uncompromising resolve to hew to the rules—thus reluctance to facilitate his rogue operations— and duty to stop a relentless enemy from launching nuclear attacks against the country. This dichotomy between doing what is right and having to do what is necessary is highlighted in almost every season. Eventually, we come to conclude that Bauer's extraordinary courage to break the law and risk criminal prosecution is, ipso facto, what keeps Americans safe. His ability to coerce, torture, and kill, as he races to thwart a catastrophe in the making, is ultimately what saves countless lives. On the other hand, the director's failure to acknowledge the necessity of Bauer's extreme methods puts national security at risk. His adamant refusal to support Bauer's illegal operations endangers lives. The effectiveness of Bauer's tactics is an invitation to overhaul obsolete policies and regulations that restrict agents from carrying out their duties. The grave security risks the nation faces, Bauer seems to argue, cannot be overcome unless extreme methods are allowed.

It is important to examine some of the controversial decisions President Palmer makes as his administration tackles one of the most intractable security threats the nation has ever faced. The possibility that a terrorist organization plans to detonate a nuclear bomb on US soil tests his moral boundaries and challenges his firm belief in the rule of law. The

audience is first introduced to David Palmer in season 1 as a senator from Maryland, and the first black presidential candidate to win the nomination of a major political party. He is portrayed as a silver-tongued politician who is impervious to corruption and attuned to the needs of his constituents. His integrity, honor and charismatic personality make his presence authoritative on screen. In season 2, Palmer serves as the first black US President. He becomes a staunch ally of CTU, and develops a personal relationship with Bauer. His reverence for the constitution, however, makes him struggle to keep balance between his obligation to protect individual rights and the need to ensure national security. Palmer's struggle to find such a delicate balance is accentuated when he has to deal with a journalist, Ron Wieland, who hears rumors about a terrorist threat to the West Coast, and decides to broadcast it on TV, threatening to compromise national security and cause mass hysteria. Upon learning of Wieland's plans, Palmer invites the journalist for a private interview and tries to convince him to hold off on the story in exchange for exclusive access to a high-level briefing the next day. Sensing that Wieland is intent to go on the air with an unverifiable story that may trigger panic and incite mayhem, the President directs his secret service agents to detain him indefinitely. Later in the day, when Palmer is impeached for his decision not to take military action against the three Middle Eastern countries implicated in the terrorist threat unless he has conclusive, indisputable evidence of their involvement, the Vice President attempts to stage a take-over. He brings several witnesses in to help persuade the cabinet to vote in favor of invoking the 25th amendment to remove him from office. The testimony Wieland gives in the impeachment inquiry against President Palmer is worth examining:

Wieland: …As I was leaving, I was suddenly grabbed by a secret service agent and hustled into a room, and I was kept there under guard for several hours

Vice President Prescott: Did you feel this was a violation of your first amendment rights as a journalist as well as an American citizen?

Wieland: Of course

President Palmer: Ron, were you harmed in any way or threatened?

Wieland: No, sir.

President Palmer: Did you understand the reason for your being detained?

Wieland: I assume it was fear if word got out of a nuclear threat, panic would strike … people might get hurt.

President Palmer: Do you think the lives of thousands of citizens is less important that a couple of hours of your first amendment rights?

Wieland: No, I don't. But under the bill of rights, that decision was mine, not yours, Mr. President.

President Palmer: … I was trying to balance the need for public

safety against Ron Wieland's rights.[361]

Palmer's seemingly incontrovertible logic that the need for public safety trumps individual rights encapsulates the series' core message, yet again reiterating that the security threats the nation has to wrestle with call for extreme, extraordinary measures. Despite pushback from Wieland against Palmer's reasoning, the above-quoted dialogue seems to indicate that the president has a moral responsibility to suspend the constitution and infringe upon individual liberties during times of crisis, a supposition that is affirmed later in the series as Bauer's unorthodox methods helped CTU take the terrorists into custody and dispose of the nuclear bomb. At first blush, Palmer's decision to imprison a journalist indefinitely without probable cause or judicial authorization seems innocuous, especially given that the detainee's rights were only violated temporarily to ensure public safety. Upon close examination, however, Wieland's unlawful imprisonment appears to follow a pattern of strikingly similar subplots the series utilizes to justify CTU's mistreatment of Muslim characters. President Palmer's logic is curiously reminiscent of that of veteran politicians and—even more strikingly—Supreme Court Justices who referenced Jack Bauer and his interrogation techniques to justify their support for the use of torture. Alsultany writes:

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[361] Ibid

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Republican presidential … candidate Tom Tancredo said about the War on Terror, "I'm looking for a Jack Bauer at this point"; and Rudolph Giuliani argued that interrogators should use "any method they can think of." … Supreme Court Justice Antonio Scalia … stated, "Jack Bauer saved Los Angeles … He saved thousands of lives. … Are you going to convict Jack Bauer?" According to Dahlia Lithwick of *Newsweek*, the Bush administration lawyers who designed interrogation methods in the War on Terror and redefined torture cited Jack Bauer more often than the U.S. constitution. … Even an Arab American defended *24* in an editorial in the *Wall Street Journal*, stating, "Well, here's the hard cold truth: When Islamic terrorists stop being a threat to America's survival, viewers will lose interest in *24*, because it will have lost its relevancy. … Terrorists and their supporters continue to hide amongst us in plain sight, we need Jack Bauer, now more than ever.[362]

Reza Naiyeer is one of the very first Muslims CTU agents detain and interrogate for his supposed affiliation with a terrorist ringleader. The audience first meets Naiyeer when he speaks Farsi on the phone with an unidentified caller, suggesting that they are both of Iranian descent. He is later seen walking towards his fiancée, Marie Warner, an American

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[362] Alsultany, p.43

who lived in Saudi Arabia for an extended period of time and, unbeknownst to her family, converted to Islam. Later in the series, we find out that she became radicalized when she ran away from home following her mother's death. Feeling lost and distraught, she came into contact with a terrorist leader who recruited her. Her relationship with Naiyeer was meant to distract the authorities, and implicate him as she used his computer to embezzle large sums of money from her father's company to finance the organization's terrorist operations. When CTU uncovers evidence of Naiyeer's involvement with Sayed Ali, the terrorist leader responsible for the day's events, he is imprisoned, interrogated and even assaulted by George Mason. While CTU may have reasonable grounds for Naiyeer's detainment, Marie's sister, Kate, seems to have concluded that her future brother in law must be guilty simply by virtue of his religious background. Even before CTU links Naiyeer to the terrorists, Kate hires a private investigator to look into his financial dealings within her father's company. Every time he tries to start a conversation with her, she gets agitated, combative and at times even abusive. Although she claims that she does not know much about her sister's fiancé, and later attempts to convince her father that the unease and apprehension she feels when he is around has nothing to do with his background, her groundless suspicions and unprovoked attacks suggest otherwise. Her idle misgivings about Naiyeer's intentions confirm Hollywood's damaging stereotypes about Muslims. Kate sees Naiyeer as devious and manipulative, a threat to her emotionally dependent sister and ingenuous father.

Fig. 19: A CTU agent interrogating Naiyeer

In stark contrast to Kate's openly hostile attitude toward Naiyeer, the father appears to have a particular fondness for his future son-in-law. He grasps every opportunity to make him feel part of the family, constantly reproaching his daughter for her unwarranted antagonism, and urging her to be less confrontational, especially as her sister's wedding draws near. It is curious to note that despite the series' familiar portrayal of Naiyeer as a Muslim terrorist plotting to harm Americans, we later come to learn that CTU's assumptions about him stretch credulity. In a sharp turn of events, the already overstuffed plot injects another antagonist into the narrative. When Marie is connected to Sayed Ali, we realize that despite his dubious character, Naiyeer is not the terrorist everyone initially suspects. Kate's misguided suspicions—grounded in a deeply-held conviction that the "other" cannot be trusted—prove to have no foundation. Naiyeer's fraudulent business

schemes, however, appear to confirm her doubts that he is indeed a danger to her family. When she learns of Marie's involvement in the planning of the attacks, she struggles to maintain her composure and becomes visibly disconcerted. Unable to come to terms with the horrifying reality that her sister turned against her country, she sinks into despair. "I can't believe how ungrateful you are … Dad and I turned our lives upside down for you after mom died. This is what we did it for? So you could be brainwashed by some lunatics,[363]" she berates her sister as she desperately attempts to dissuade her from wreaking more damage. While Kate struggles to come to grips with Marie's complicity in the planning of the nuclear attack, it is curious that she remains rather collected after she is informed that Neiyeer may be working with the terrorists. The revelation that her sister's fiancé has used her father's company to funnel money to a terrorist organization alarms but does not seem to surprise her. Given Neiyeer's religious and ethnic background, Kate does not doubt that he is a terrorist. In fact, the incriminating evidence CTU finds on Naiyeer's computer only confirm her long-held suspicions. Indeed, Kate readily accepts the accusations levelled against Naiyeer precisely because of a profile he fits, a stereotypical image he embodies.

It is essential to point out that the series' portrayal of Naiyeer's character is especially remarkable in that it diverges from the usual framing of all Muslims as terrorists. Although his occasional heated interactions with Kate were meant to insinuate that he is guilty, he is later exonerated by CTU, giving way to an unlikely villain to emerge and

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[363] Ibid

hijack the narrative. Indeed, the unexpected turn of events seems to mirror an endeavor to disrupt the long-existing stereotypes surrounding Muslims and venture into unfamiliar territory. This assumption is reinforced as we meet numerous American characters who, either for ideological or financial purposes, turn against their country and side with the enemy. The Muslim character who has been the target of a relentless and unending vilification campaign is now portrayed in refreshingly sympathetic terms. Naiyeer's moral clarity manifests itself when he unexpectedly volunteers to help CTU trace the money Marie siphoned off from her father's company accounts, risking his career and exacerbating an already tenuous relationship with the Warners. His death is the ultimate sacrifice he makes to prove his innocence and help prevent the terrorist attack. The transformation of Naiyeer from an unscrupulous employee with a secret agenda to a morally upstanding character, whose voluntary cooperation with CTU saves lives, seems to challenge the anti-Muslim narrative that Hollywood has been propagating for more than a century.

Indeed, the redeeming qualities Naiyeer displays later in the series run counter to the prevalent mischaracterizations surrounding reel Muslim characters. This shift in narrative appears to contest some of the reductive stereotypes, and break away from the typically negative characteristics routinely attributed to Muslims. Contrary to familiar narratives about Muslims and the danger they pose to national security, Naiyeer's determination to help CTU stop the terrorists from carrying out their nuclear attack suggests that not all Muslims subscribe to Sayed Ali's extremist ideology. Marie's unexpected radicalization and recruitment at a time when she was most emotionally

vulnerable, by a notorious terrorist leader who preyed on her weakness and capitalized on her grief to further his cause, serves as a reminder that ethnic origin and religious background do not necessarily reflect one's ideological convictions. The depiction of Marie's character, a Caucasian American who comes from an affluent family, defies Hollywood's construction of modern-day villains. Interestingly, there is nothing about her background to suggest that she may be susceptible to radicalization, much less be targeted for a plot against her country. Her ties to the terrorist organization constitute a significant plot development, adding to a host of unpredictable turns and unexpected events, which the series has often utilized to accommodate its plot-driven, rapidly-evolving storyline and winding subplots.

The fact that Marie is well-educated, was raised Protestant, and received a seemingly privileged upbringing makes her character even more complex and layered to fathom. Her motivations, albeit briefly touched upon, are not fully explored. Her actions are obliquely attributed to her agitated emotional state, a radical transformation she underwent following the time she spent mourning and reeling from her mother's death. When her father asks her to explain the reasons that prompted her to adopt such extremist views and commit herself to a cause so antithetical to the values and principles he instilled in her, she stares at him blankly and remains silent. The father's palpable disappointment, incredulity and inability to bring himself to face up to the reality that his Protestant daughter has become so deeply embedded into Sayed's terrorist organization that she had no scruples about carrying out an attack against her country, putting her own family and scores of innocent Americans in danger, fill him with shame and anger. In a feeble attempt to salve

his guilt-ridden conscience, he pleads with his daughter to break her silence and help him understand her actions:

> The Father (addressing Marie): You lied to me. You killed Reza. You tried to kill your own sister. You were willing to set off a nuclear bomb in a city with ten million people. You tell me why, because I need to understand. Tell me that they forced you to do it, that they brainwashed you, that they threatened you. You can tell me that you didn't know what you were doing. There must be a reason. (Marie stares at him in silence)
>
> Kate (interrupts her father): there is no reason, dad.
>
> The father: (he sighs): I can't accept that.
>
> Kate: (looks at Marie): I couldn't either… until I looked into her eyes, and she pointed a gun at me and started to pull the trigger. Trust me, dad. She's not gonna give you any answers. She can't, at least nothing that we could ever understand.[364]

In addition to the few, sporadic interactions the Warners have throughout the series, most notably the short exchange Kate has with her sister as she confronts her about her actions, the above-quoted dialogue adds yet another layer of intrigue and mystery to Marie's already complex character. The exchange, which constitutes a last-ditched effort on the father's part to make sense of the day's events, offers no meaningful background history to

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[364] Ibid

help the viewer account for Marie's abrupt and dramatic transformation. Indeed, it is curious that following her arrest, the series does not attempt to delve into the depths of her character, or demystify some of the enigma surrounding it. It is particularly remarkable that the underlying reasons, which seem to have caused her to cast aside her Christian principles and pledge allegiance to a terrorist organization, are dismissed as inconsequential. Considering the increasingly dominant role she plays later in the series, the choice not to fully address her motives suggests a conscious, selective focus on particular aspects of the narrative, an emphasis on certain elements which serve to advance and reinforce an anti-Muslim discourse designed to inspire sympathy for unlawful conduct and urge support for extreme policies. Unlike the series' major protagonists, such as Bauer, whose political background and ideological motives help account for their actions, villainous characters are not fully, or at least equally, developed. They are intentionally shrouded in mystery and routinely used in a way that confirms misconceptions about Muslims.

Fig. 20: Bauer torturing Kate, an American citizen who was radicalized by terorists

It is important to note that despite being vindicated later by CTU, Naiyeer has been the subject of derision and thinly-veiled contempt on several occasions throughout the series. The encounters, or rather confrontations, Naiyeer has with the Warners bring their cultural differences, which at times appear fundamentally irreconcilable, into sharp focus. These differences also serve to reinforce the negative stereotypes and mischaracterizations Hollywood attributes to Muslims. One of the very first conflicts that erupt between Kate and Naiyeer underscores the assumption that Muslim societies repress and subjugate women, a presumption that Hollywood often regurgitates in order to underscore the differences that separate Islam from Christianity, the East from the West. "The oppressed Muslim woman," Alsultany writes, "provides insight into … why terrorism occurs: Muslim men repress their women and regard the West with contempt for their equal gender relations. As a result, they want to subjugate the rest of the world to impose their way of life.[365]" The following dialogue brings the root of Kate and Naiyeer's discord into stark relief:

> Naiyeer: Scott's coming to the wedding?
>
> Marie: Yeah, he called last night.
>
> Naiyeer: I thought the only reason you invited him is because you knew he wouldn't come.
>
> Marie: I dated him six years ago, honey. He's more like a brother to me.

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[365] Alsultany, p. 75

Kate (interrupts): Is the groom jealous?

Naiyeer: Jealous? It's not a question of jealousy. It's a question of what I'm comfortable with. All my brothers married women that had never been with another man before. That's what my family expects of us all.

Kate: Oh, I see. So, instead they have to settle for Marie, who's what? Damaged goods?[366]

The cause of Kate's disagreements with Naiyeer stems from a preconceived notion that the dichotomy that characterizes their two cultures is too rigid to allow for any meaningful communication or development of close rapport. Every time Naiyeer tries to introduce his laconic cousin to Kate, her demeanor changes. The fact that they are related makes her feel threatened, causing her to act irrationally every time she encounters them. It is this very misrepresentation of Muslim characters that makes their mistreatment by agents like Bauer less objectionable.

Although Kate's suspicions are dispelled towards the end of the series as Naiyeer proves his innocence, it is important to reiterate that his character is unique in that it seems to take exception to Hollywood's familiar narratives about the "other". However, an examination of all the Muslim characters who appear in the series reveals that his flattering portrait is an aberration. His character does very little to challenge the perennial stereotypes and misconceptions associated with reel Muslims. Interestingly, Naiyeer's innocence is

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[366] Cassar, J. (Director). (2002). *24*. [Television Series]. Fox.

revealed only after his fiancé is implicated in the terrorist attacks. Throughout the series, most of his actions suggest that he is exploiting the Warners' kindness and financial resources to fund Sayed Ali's terrorist operations. The series' portrayal of Naiyeer's character may be interpreted as an attempt to offer a fair representation of the "other", reminding the viewer that the prevalent misconceptions Hollywood promotes about Muslims can breed irrational fear and distort one's judgment. However, as previously mentioned, an in-depth study of the series' predominantly negative depiction of Muslims suggests otherwise. Indeed, the all but consistent vilification of Muslim characters on *24* undercuts the premise that the series made an earnest effort to unsettle Hollywood's perception and creation of the "Orient".

Later in the series, another plot twist disrupts the course of the narrative. We learn that several administration officials have facilitated the transfer of the nuclear bomb in order to undermine the President's foreign policy agenda and force him to wage war against three innocent Middle Eastern countries. The portrayal of such villainous characters, whose ethnic and political background seems to break from the usual stereotypes attributed to the "enemy", is meant to call attention to the dangers of other significant threats that may emanate from domestic extremism. When President Palmer learns that elements within his own administration are secretly working to sabotage him, by allowing the terrorist organization, The Second Wave, to bring a nuclear bomb into the country, his moral fiber is once again tested as he scrambles to tighten his grip on power and quash the opposition's coordinated effort to take over his presidency. The way Palmer defuses a series of overlapping crises reinforces the positive leadership attributes his character exhibits

throughout the series. However, his attempt to keep the opposition in check reveals a facet incongruous with his upstanding and self-possessed character. His treatment of high-ranking officials within his own government, who conspired to bring his presidency to a premature end, is even more remarkable. It is particularly relevant to this study to examine the circumstances and ramifications of his decision to authorize the imprisonment and torture of one of his most trusted and indispensable government officials suspected of helping the terrorists.

In coordination with Colonel Ron Samuels and Senator Bruce Gluck, Roger Stanton, the director of the National Security Agency (NSA), orchestrated a plan intended to force the president to start a war based on misleading information. The conspirators even went so far as to allow the terrorists to carry out their plans unimpeded just so they can persuade the President to go to war against the Middle East. When the President becomes aware of Stanton's involvement in the conspiracy, he orders Colonel Lamb to arrest him for treason. Later, he sends Ted Simmonds, a protective detail agent, to torture him for intelligence he believes would help CTU find the terrorists. While Palmer's determination to protect the country from an imminent nuclear attack may justify his forceful and overly heavy-handed approach to dealing with the escalating crisis, his readiness to torture the director of a key intelligence agency is particularly interesting. Considering the significance and urgency of the intelligence the President hopes to extract from Stanton, the cruelty of his tactics is palliated and the methods he employs seem rational. Although Stanton is not Muslim, and his motivations are purely political as we learn later, the President's authorization to detain and torture him marks an extraordinary development in

the narrative. The scene in which President Palmer confronts the head of the NSA for his

collusion with the terrorists is worthy of examination:

> President Palmer: We have it all, Roger. … It almost seems as
>
> if you want this bomb to go off today. But I'll tell you this. If
>
> people die, Roger, you'll be executed. And even if we find the
>
> bomb in time, you'll still get life without the possibility of
>
> parole. But, all I want is to find the bomb in time. That's why
>
> I have a deal for you. You tell me everything … and I'll bury
>
> this. …you'll be given a written grant of immunity, and nobody
>
> will ever know anything about this. Do we have a deal?
>
> Roger Stanton: I don't know what you're talking about, Mr.
>
> President. I've done nothing wrong. I don't know any more
>
> about the bomb than you do.[367]

The above-quoted dialogue is the very first interaction the President has with

Stanton after his arrest. It highlights the civil, composed nature of Palmer's character. In

contrast with Bauer's impulsive temperament, the President seems willing to negotiate a

deal with the head of the NSA, whose split allegiance almost brought Los Angeles to the

brink of ruin. Despite the gravity of his offences, which apparently carry the death penalty,

President Palmer exhibits the will and maturity required to tackle the looming crisis. It is

important to point out that in his attempt to influence the President's foreign policy agenda,

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[367] Ibid

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Stanton does not only betray his oath to protect the country, but also his commander-in-chief who appointed him to head one of the most sensitive and indispensable national intelligence agencies. Stanton's underhand dealings with other administration officials, however, seem to have no bearing on Palmer's moral clarity. Instead of pursuing a personal vendetta against Stanton for conspiring to undermine his presidency and endanger the country's security, the President attempts to reason with him, offering him immunity in exchange for his help to avert the nuclear threat. Every decision Palmer makes is motivated by a deep commitment to the greater good. Indeed, it is his sensibility and poise that make his presence both imposing and reassuring.

Stanton's rejection of the President's accusations prompts him to pursue a different route. Considering the very short window he has to prevent the terrorists from carrying out their nuclear attack, he finds it incumbent upon him to exert more pressure on Stanton. The following exchange gives a glimpse into the President's frame of mind as he seeks the help of one of his agents:

> President Palmer: Ted, how long have you been working at the
> secret service?
>
> Ted Simmons: Five and a half years, sir.
>
> President Palmer: I understand you have a background in
> special ops.
>
> Ted Simmons: Green Berets, sir. Unit 7. Out of Fort Myers. 87.
>
> President Palmer: You ever had a chance to put your training
> to use?

Ted Simmons: The Gulf, sir.

President Palmer: Anywhere else?

Ted Simmons (looking discomfited): There were some other covert ops.

President Palmer: Under the directorate of the CIA? (Ted looks in silence). It's alright, Ted, I'm not on a witch hunt here. But I do need you to answer the question.

Ted Simmons: Yes, for the CIA.

President Palmer: Good. Do you understand the gravity of today's situation?

Ted Simmons: Of course, sir.

President Palmer: And I guess you've heard by now that Roger Stanton is no longer functioning as the head of the NSA.

Ted Simmons: I heard he was arrested.

President Palmer: He was under my authority. What I'm about to ask you to do falls outside the parameters of your charge at the secret service. You won't be able to tell anyone about this without my direct consent. You still with me, Ted?

Ted Simmons: What would you like me to do, sir?

President Palmer: Extract information from Roger Stanton.

Ted Simmons: I see. If he resists, how far am I permitted to go?

President Palmer: Whatever you need to do.

Ted Simmons (nods): Yes, sir.[368]

Before examining the series' justification for the methods employed to force Stanton to cooperate, it is important to examine the President's dialogue with Simmons and bring out some of the political undertones embedded in this scene. The President's choice to tap one of his most experienced agents to conduct Stanton's interrogation is not arbitrary. His long and eventful career as a CIA and secret service agent makes him a prime candidate to undertake such a sensitive assignment. He is trusted to perform covert operations on behalf of the President precisely because of his training which requires secrecy and the ability to follow orders unquestioningly. It is interesting that the President assures Simmons that his past operations with the CIA are of no interest to him. The fact that they may have been illegally conducted does not seem to trouble him. In fact, Simmons' participation in potentially illegal operations and expertise in torture is exactly why the President chooses him to interrogate Stanton. When Simmons begins to put electric shock paddles on Stanton, the President explains to his chief of staff that "agent Simmons tells me that Roger received the same training at resisting interrogation he did. But everyone breaks eventually.[369]" His confidence that Stanton will eventually relent underscores the futility of his previous attempt to placate and reason with him. The President's statement also implies that no matter how ineffective torture may appear, it always produces results if used properly. In

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[368] Ibid

[369] Ibid

order to pry loose actionable intelligence from uncooperative suspects, the interrogator is

required to ramp up the intensity of their tactics. This sentiment is reiterated when Simmons

torments Stanton in an attempt to terrorize him into cooperating: "Time is of the essence,

Mt. Stanton. Time and intensity of the electrical current will increase substantially each

time I repeat a question.[370]"

Following a few rounds of intense interrogation, Stanton finally reaches his

breaking point. Both the President and his agent's prediction, that it is only a matter of time

before Stanton succumbs to his interrogator, come true:

> President Palmer (addressing Roger who looks visibly tired
>
> and weak): You ready to tell me everything I need to know?
>
> (Roger does not answer. Palmer looks at Tim.) Continue.
>
> Roger Stanton (cuts Tim short): we knew about the bomb
>
> weeks ago.
>
> President Palmer: (addressing Simmons): Thank you Simmons
>
> (Ted leaves).
>
> President Palmer: what do you mean 'knew'?
>
> Roger Stanton: we let it in the country. Tracked it all the way.
>
> We allowed it to sneak through customs and we allowed the
>
> second wave terrorist cell to operate unimpeded.[371]

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[370] Ibid

[371] Ibid

Fig: 21: Following a few rounds of brutal interrogation, Stanton is forced to answer the

President's questions.

Indeed, Stanton's forced confession adds legitimacy to the President's assumption that information can be extracted even from the most unyielding adversaries. If Stanton, who received intense interrogation resistance training, is not able to withstand Simmons' terror tactics, it stands to reason that torture can indeed help avert national security crises and save lives.

In conclusion, it is worth reiterating that the series' justification for the use of torture is in perfect keeping with the arguments made by the Bush administration in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Although the left flank of the Democratic Party denounced the controversial measures taken to combat terrorism[372], several right-wing politicians and political commentators continue to emphasize the need for the return of extreme Bush-era policies. When Donald J. Trump launched his campaign for President, he promised to bring back not only waterboarding, but far more aggressive interrogation techniques[373]. Over the past two decades, the controversy surrounding the use of torture has shown no sign of abating. The subject continues to generate political friction and fuel public debate. However, considering the increasing number of motion pictures produced annually by Hollywood, the biased representation of Muslim characters helps make the case for the ends-justify-the-means rhetoric that still permeates conservative media. The odd ideological convergence between conservative politics and left Hollywood, especially in matters related to foreign policy, may be intended to preserve and strengthen national

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[372] In his 2008 presidential campaign, then-Senator Barack Obama declared that he was against the Bush administration's torture of detainees. When he was elected President, he reversed a series of his predecessor's security policies and went on to end the war on Iraq. (See Indyk, M., Lieberthal, K., & O'Hanlon, M. E. (2013). *Bending history: Barack Obama's foreign policy*. Brookings Institution Press). His decision to roll back the use of detention camps and torture of captured terrorists, however, was met with widespread condemnation from high-profile Republican politicians, most notably former Vice President Dick Cheney—a vocal proponent of the so called "enhanced interrogation program". (See Cheney, R. B., & Cheney, L. (2016). *Exceptional: Why the world needs a powerful America.* Threshold editions*)*

[373] Hajjar, L. (2017). The Afterlives of Torture: Putting the US War on Terror in Historical and Global Context. *Middle East Report*, (283), p. 16.

security. However, the extreme policies they advocate threaten to corrode the very ideals

and values the U.S promotes both at home and abroad.

Chapter Five: Iñárritu's *Babel*: Approaching

Morocco

1. Morocco in the American Collective Imagination

1.1. The Barbary Corsairs

For more than a century, American cinema has misrepresented Morocco systematically and relentlessly. The American literary canon, which is replete with explicit references to North Africa, informed, to a large degree, Hollywood's representations of Morocco. Travel narratives, in particular, left a distinct and indelible impression on the American collective consciousness. To understand Hollywood's motives, it is important to examine the turbulent state of affairs that marked the history of US-Moroccan relations. The United States' interest in North Africa stretches back to the late eighteenth century when it was still a young nation. Morocco, Tunis, Tripoli, and Algiers—commonly referred to as the Barbary States—crept into the U.S. public discourse, especially during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, due to maritime piracy, which plagued European and American merchant vessels in the Mediterranean. The brutality of this epoch is extensively documented in the writings of a great number of American seamen,[374] who were brought into captivity and consigned to a life of servitude by the Barbary corsairs. Their accounts chronicle in meticulous detail the horrors they endured at the hands of their ruthless masters. Direct American encounter with the North African States dates back to the second half of the seventeenth century when Massachusetts merchant shipping came under attack

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[374] See, for instance, Riley, J. (2001). *Sufferings in Africa: [the amazing true story of an Irish-American enslaved in North Africa]*. The Long Riders' Guild Press,

from the Barbary corsairs, otherwise referred to in Morocco as customs officials.[375] These

piratical raids, which were frequently carried out to accommodate the burgeoning demands

of a lucrative slave market and extort ransom from despairing families, inflicted an

enormous toll on maritime commerce. As early as 1700, the New England Puritans of

Salam village raised money to pay a hefty ransom for the release of Robert Carver, a

seaman who was held captive at the Moroccan port of Salé.[376] Conservative estimates

suggest that "in the 250 years of peak slave-taking by the Barbary corsairs, from 1530 to

1780, at least one million, and perhaps one and one-quarter million, white Christians were

enslaved in Islamic North Africa.[377]" It was maritime piracy, indeed, that catapulted North

Africa to the forefront and seared Morocco into the American collective imaginary.

The Barbary corsairs' reign of terror continued well into the second half of the

nineteenth century. Jefferson's bombardment of Tripoli in 1801 and the shelling of Algiers

in 1830 helped forestall piratical attacks against American ships.[378] In order to secure the

Mediterranean from piracy and compel the North African States to abolish the tributes they

imposed on American and European ships, the United States focused its efforts on building

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[375] See Bouânani, A. (1996). *The Kasbah in the American imaginary: Study of the representation of Morocco in American travel narratives, fiction and film*. San Diego State University.

[376] Barnby, H. G. *The prisoners of Algiers: An account of the forgotten American-Algerian war 1785-1797*. London: Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 67.

377 Leiner, F. C. (2007). *The End of Barbary Terror: America's 1815 War against the Pirates of North Africa.* New York: Oxford University Press. P.2

[378] Bouânani, 1996, p. 60

a strong navy. No sooner had the Makhzen—Morocco's central government—come to the realization that their military capabilities were no match for America's growing naval prowess than they withdrew their support for the privateers who commanded the Mediterranean for centuries. This ushered in a new era of relative peace between the two countries, and all but brought an end to maritime piracy.

The abject enslavement of white Christians by the Barbary corsairs gave birth to a massive body of literary works. Royall Tyler's *The Algerine Captive: or the Life and Adventures of Doctor Updike Underhill: Six Years a Prisoner among the Algerines*, published anonymously in 1797, is, for instance, one of America's first novels about piracy in the Mediterranean. It recounts the story of Updike Underhill, a Boston native who was taken into captivity upon reaching the pirate-infested shores of North Africa. In addition to first-hand accounts of European and American seamen who languished in captivity for many years in the Barbary States, the growing popularity of British novels by such writers as Robert Hitchens, P.C. Wren and Edith Hull captivated America's imagination and kindled the public's interest in North Africa.[379]

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[379] Edwards, B. T. *Morocco bound: Disorienting America's Maghreb, from Casablanca to the Marrakech Express*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005, p. 7.

1.2.   The last of the Barbary Pirates: Mulai Ahmed er Raisuni

The Moroccan brigand and tribal chief Mulai Ahmed er Raisuni, otherwise referred to as Raisuli, was one of the most legendary figures to rise to infamy in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. Known as the last of the Barbary pirates, Raisuli attained considerable notoriety for opposing the Moroccan government and abducting prominent European and American figures such as Walter Burton Harris, a special correspondent for the British newspaper *The Times* and a confidant of the Sultan.[380] Raisuli, who commanded the Jebala tribe, gained lasting notoriety following a daring raid he mounted on May 18, 1904, in which he kidnapped the Greek-American millionaire Ion Perdicaris and his British step-son Cromwell Varley from their dinner table, demanding the dismissal of the governor of Tangier and a ransom of $70,000 in exchange for their release.[381] American President Theodore Roosevelt, then in the midst of a re-election campaign, informed the Sultan of Morocco that "this government must have Perdicaris alive or Raisuli dead.[382]" Confronted with a squadron of American warships Roosevelt dispatched to the Bay of Tangier, Sultan Mawlay Abd al-Aziz acquiesced to pay the ransom for Perdicaris. In an article published in the American Heritage magazine, the late distinguished historian Barbara W. Tuchman details the incident:

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[380] See Harris, W. (2019). *Morocco That Was*. Forgotten Books Publisher.

[381] Zur, M. H., & Gossman, L. (2019). *The Red Countess: Select autobiographical and fictional writing of Hermynia Zur Mühlen* (1883-1951). Cambridge: Open Book Publishers. 208-210

[382] Etzold, T. H. (1975). Protection or Politics? "Perdicaris Alive or Raisuli Dead." *The Historian*, 37(2), p. 297

On a scented Mediterranean May evening in 1904 Mr. Ion Perdicaris, an elderly, wealthy American, was dining with his family … Suddenly a cacophony of shrieks, commands, and barking of dogs burst from the servants' quarters at the rear. … The family headed for the servants' hail to frustrate mayhem. They ran into the butler flying madly past them, pursued by a number of armed Moors whom at first they took to be their own household guards. Astonishingly, these persons fell upon the two gentlemen, bound them, clubbed two of the servants with their gunstocks, knocked Mrs. Varley to the floor, drew a knife against Varley's throat when he struggled toward his wife, … and shoved their captives out of the house with guns pressed in their backs. Waiting at the villa's gate was a handsome, black-bearded Moor with blazing eyes and a Greek profile, who, raising his arm in a theatrical gesture, announced in the tones of Henry Irving playing King Lear, "I am the Raisuli!" Awed, Perdicaris and Varley knew they stood face to face with the renowned Berber chief, lord of the Rif and last of the Barbary pirates, whose personal struggle for power against his nominal overlord, the Sultan of Morocco, periodically erupted over Tangier in raids … He now ordered his prisoners hoisted onto

their horses and, thoughtfully stealing Perdicaris' best mount,

a black stallion, for himself, fired the signal for departure. [383]

Fig. 22: Sean Connery as Mulai Ahmed er Rausuni in *The*

Wind and the Lion

Based on Barbara W. Tuchman's embellished account, Mulai Ahmed er Raisuni

was portrayed by the late Scottish actor Sean Connery in the 1975 epic film, *The Wind*

and the Lion. The heavily fictionalized film—which was a financial success and drew

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[383] Tuchman, B. W. (January 1, 1959). "Perdicaris alive or Raisuli dead". *American Heritage*, p. 10.

won critical praise—depicts the Berber chieftain as an imposing, romantic Oriental

figure, a noble savage who encapsulates the Moor's wild and brutish nature.

1.3.   Morocco in American Travel Narratives: Edith Wharton

The French occupation of North Africa during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries gripped the European and American imagination. The Oriental States—untamed and primitive—came under a concerted and aggressive military campaign. The self-described *mission civilisatrice* that France embarked on was designed to justify its ruthless exploitation of North Africa. The full-scale military invasion of what came to be known as "French" North Africa ignited the imagination of a vast array of American writers, some of whom sought to glorify European imperialism. Edith Wharton, a prolific American writer and self-avowed "rabid imperialist", was, for instance, an ardent Francophile and one of the most vocal supporters of French colonial conquest.[384] In the midst of World War I, Wharton set out on an adventurous journey to French-occupied Morocco. Her enthusiastic support for French imperialist designs prompted General Lyautey, France's colonial administrator and first Resident-General in Morocco, to receive her as an official guest, allowing her to travel freely across the country—from Tangier to Rabat to Marrakech—and document her tour in a travelogue she published in 1920.[385] Wharton's account, entitled *In Morocco*, is filled with effusive praise for General Lyautey's paternalistic attitude, and ill-concealed contempt for the natives of Morocco:

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[384] See Wegener, F. (January 01, 2000). "Rabid imperialist": Edith Wharton and the obligations of empire in modern American fiction. *American Literature* 783-812.

[385] See Wharton, E. (2012). In Morocco. Project Gutenberg.

A long colonial experience, and an unusual combination of military and administrative talents, prepared him [General Lyautey] for the almost impossible task of dealing with them. Swift and decisive when military action is required, he has above all the long views and endless patience necessary to the successful colonial governor… A sympathetic understanding of the native prejudices, and a real affection for the native character, made him try to build up an administration which should be, not an application of French ideas to African conditions, but a development of the best native aspirations. … It was necessary at once to use them and to educate them; and one of General Lyautey's greatest achievements has been the successful employment of native ability in the government of the country… It will not seem an exaggeration to speak of General Lyautey's achievement during the first year of the war as the "Miracle of Morocco" if one considers the immense importance of doing what he did at the moment when he did it[386].

Throughout the travelogue, Wharton celebrates the French protectorate in Morocco and dispenses her advice on how to advance imperial interests and keep

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386 Ibid, pp: 214-220

colonies under subjugation. Her account of Morocco draws on a vast repertory of enchanting tales about the Orient. "Within the walls," she recounts, "the magic persists… Everything that the reader of the Arabian Nights expects to find is here.[387]" Her disdain for the natives is echoed in the literary works of Paul Bowles[388] and satirical travelogues of Mark Twain[389].

The birth of American cinema brought the Orient closer to Western audiences. Hollywood framed North Africa as an Oriental land, a curious blend of exotica, savagery, and eroticism. The dismissive attitude that Hollywood has come to take towards Moroccan Muslims bears testament to the entrenched tropes of Orientalist discourse. The mere mention of films such as *Casablanca* (1942), *Road to Morocco* (1942), *Outpost in Morocco* (1949), *Saadia* (1953), *The Wind and the Lion* (1975), and *The Sheltering Sky* (1990) evokes images of filth, skullduggery, and patriarchal oppression.

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[387] Ibid, p. 24

[388] See Bowles, P., & Halpern, D. (1993). *Too far from home: The selected writings of Paul Bowles*. Hopewell, NJ: Ecco Press. (*The Sheltering Sky* and "A Distant Episode" are notable examples)

[389] See Twain, M. (2003). *The Innocents Abroad*. Mineola, N.Y: Dover Publications.

Morocco in *Babel*

Directed by Alejandro Iñárritu, *Babel* is a 2006 drama film that takes the form of a multi-linear narrative. The events take place in four different geographical settings: Morocco, Japan, Mexico and the United States. In addition to its box office success, the film received great critical acclaim, garnering a string of coveted awards and accolades.[390] Notwithstanding its heavy emotional and moral overtones, the film paints an unflattering portrait of Moroccans, Japanese and Mexicans alike. Since the scope and aim of this work do not allow for a complete and detailed analysis of all different cultural representations, though all events are interrelated and blend together to weave a multi-layered narrative, the focus will be mainly on examining the film's depiction of Moroccan and American cultures. The film's convoluted storyline, I argue, enjoins the American audience, for whom these narratives are mainly intended, to never question their values or break away from their identity. The film's overriding message is that any attempt to rebel against one's identity is bound to lead to great mental anguish or, worse, brutal demise. The filmmakers' prime objective, as will be shown later, is twofold: preaching blind allegiance to a culture portrayed as morally superior, and highlighting the contrast between Moroccan and American values and traditions, thus lending weight to a canon of Orientalist writings that stretch back centuries.

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[390] Some of the most prestigious awards *Babel* was nominated for include seven Academy Awards, six Golden Globe Awards and seven BEFTA Awards.

The very first sequence of the film shows a middle-aged Moroccan trudging across a mountainous, arid land. The indigent Moroccan, who is named Hassan Ibrahim, as we later find out, is shabbily dressed. He dons a thick white headband and carries a satchel and a bundle wrapped in cloth on his shoulder. As the camera moves to show Hassan knocking on the front door of a crude dwelling, another character is introduced: a goatherd named Abdullah. Abdullah's stone, ramshackle cottage serves to highlight the harsh, sordid living conditions suffered by impoverished Moroccans. The squalid, unforgiving environment captured on-screen foreshadows the ineluctable fate that awaits the American couple.

Figure 23: Abdullah and Hassan haggle over the price of the rifle

The next scene shows Abdullah conducting a business transaction with his neighbor, Hassan. Anxious to get rid of the jackals that fall upon his herd, Abdullah buys an M70 rifle and a supply of ammunition from his neighbor. As the two haggle over the price of the rifle, Abdullah's daughter is seen in the background, cradling a baby in her arms. After purchasing the weapon, Abdullah has his two sons take turns to fire a few shots to test the rifle. Despite his young age, Youssef shows remarkable dexterity. His quick and deft handling of the weapon implies that it is not his first time using it. His brother, on the other hand, struggles to use the rifle. The father compliments his younger son's shooting skills and taunts his older brother, whose amateurish, clumsy use of the rifle causes the women— always in the background—to burst into laughter. Instructing them to kill the jackals, the father takes his lunch bag and leaves with his neighbor, who reminds the teenage brothers to be careful with the rifle and keep it away from prying eyes. The following sequence shows Youssef, the younger brother, peeking through a peephole in the disintegrating wall of their adobe as his sister, Zohra, glances at him suggestively while she strips naked. When his brother finds out, he scolds him and threatens to tell his father if he catches him spying on her again. Later, the camera moves to show Youssef hiding behind a large rock and masturbating.

Figure 24: Youssef spying on his sister as she gets undressed

Similar to *American Sniper*'s portrayal of Iraqi child soldiers, this very scene brings to mind images of terrorism, filth and child indoctrination. As the events unfold, Youssef uses his father's M70 rifle to critically wound Susan Jones, an unsuspecting American tourist from San Diego, who was travelling with her husband, Richard Jones, to the South of Morocco. The Jones' traumatic experience is intended to accentuate the natives' callousness. Susan's unwillingness to stay in Morocco does very little to dissuade her husband from venturing forth into their fraught journey. Her horrific injury is a salutary reminder that the "other" must always be approached with caution and suspicion. The film evokes the terrorist image that Arabs and Muslims have come to be associated with for decades.

Figure 25: The two brothers test the rifle. Notice how the women in the

background are excluded from the practice

It is important to note that the father's nonchalant attitude about the rifle shows

Morocco as a precarious terrain. His irresponsible actions encapsulate the perilous and fluid

nature of the Islamic world. The couple's desultory journey serves as a cautionary tale for

American viewers who may be enticed to follow suit; any attempt to desert civilization or

venture into the unknown can only end in tragedy. The Jones' endeavor to restore their

intimacy and save their tempestuous, disintegrating marriage was doomed from the very

beginning.

Iñárritu's *Babel* is strongly reminiscent of Bernardo Bertolucci's 1990 film, *The*

Sheltering Sky, an adaptation of a novel of the same title by the American expatriate author

Paul Bowles. Both productions traffic in tropes and perpetuate damaging misconceptions

about the cultural "other". Bernardo Bertolucci's representation of North Africa and Alejandro Iñárritu's portrayal of Morocco are intended to caution the audience against embarking on such impetuous journeys—as that of Port and Kit in *The Sheltering Sky* or Richard and Susan in *Babel*. Such recklessness, the films seem to suggest, only added to their self-estrangement. Susan's severe injury is the price she must pay for trusting the natives. If the couple had been more circumspect, the film seems to imply, they may have been able to escape their grisly fate. The film's portrayal of Morocco is a painful reminder of the lurking dangers that lie in ambush for Americans who venture too far outside the perimeters of their national identity.

Youssef's incestuous relationship with his sister does very little to advance the already overstuffed and labyrinthine storyline. The voyeuristic and masturbation sequences are needlessly injected to highlight the revolting, sub-human practices of the natives. These gratuitous and unsettling scenes stand in direct contrast to the Jones' exuberant, carefree home. The playful innocence of Mike and Debbie lightens the heavy, oppressive atmosphere of the film. Unlike Youssef and his brother, who are left to their own devices by an inattentive— and at times abusive— father, the Jones' children are entrusted to the care of a well-meaning and good-natured Mexican babysitter. Their refreshing ingenuousness offers the audience a brief respite from the unrelenting salvo of disquieting scenes that saturate the film. While the Moroccan teenage siblings engage in acts that prompt moral outrage, the Jones' innocent children exude warmth and radiate cheerfulness.

Figure 26: The Jones' house is a symbol of civilization and serenity, a striking

contrast to the Moroccans' crude dwelling. The

The Jones' first interaction with the natives offers a glimpse into their troubled, volatile marriage. In lieu of relieving their marital woes, their sojourn in Morocco only added to their alienation and further aggravated their pent-up tensions. The dirty local restaurant suggests that the world they thrust themselves into is inhospitable and fraught

with uncertainty. Their tense encounter with the natives highlights the unbridgeable gulf between the two cultures. When the Jones dine al fresco in the Moroccan desert, it becomes clear that their endeavor to resurrect their marriage is bound to be an exercise in futility. Their brusque exchange with the Moroccan waiter puts their marital discord into stark relief:

> Moroccan waiter (in French accent): You want to order?
>
> Richard: Yeah, I'll have the chicken couscous and a coke.
>
> Susan: What do you have that doesn't have fat in it?
>
> Waiter: Everything is delicious.
>
> Susan (reading the menu again): I'll have the fried eggplant
>
> and a diet coke.
>
> Waiter: Sorry, we don't have diet coke.
>
> Susan: then a regular coke.[391]

When the waiter brings the couple their drinks, Richard opens his can of coke and pours it into a glass containing ice cubes. Frustrated with his naivety, Susan —in a reproachful and authoritative tone— orders him to get rid of the ice, suggesting that it is likely contaminated. When Richard resists her demand, Susan snatches his glass and throws out the ice.

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[391] Iñárritu, A, G. (Director) (2006). *Babel*. [Film] Paramount Vantage.

Susan's apparent distaste for the local restaurant serves to underscore the unrefined, objectionable habits of the natives. This indictment of local practices recurs later in the film when Abdullah and his family gather around a small table to eat dinner. As the mother performs household chores, the father and his children eat couscous with their hands and constantly lick their fingertips, an off-putting habit—to the insular American viewer— that further underlines the natives' curious customs. Like *American Sniper*, the portrayal of Moroccan space and cultures is evocative of European writings, which introduced America as an uncharted wilderness, home to strange, sub-human creatures with idiosyncratic habits.

Throughout the film, the Moroccan mother is portrayed as a hapless victim. Her duties are confined to serving her husband and tending to her children. Like her daughter, she bears the brunt of a rigid, patriarchal society. Consigned to a life of servitude, she is oblivious to the cruel fate that awaits her. Her unprepossessing appearance and acquiescent demeanor further diminish her presence on screen. The film's unflattering portrayal of the Moroccan mother underscores the brutal, inescapable oppression women suffer in Muslim societies. The plight of Muslim women is a common theme in many Hollywood films. Alsultany writes:

> Stories of oppression and violence within Islam are repeated to
> the point that the most brutal acts define Islam. In other words,
> the problem is not that a viewer feels pity and outrage that a
> Muslim woman has been stoned to death but that a viewer

assumes that all Muslim men are capable of stoning their wives. The power of definition, or of associating violence and oppression within Islam, results not only from the repetition of such stories but also from the emotions they evoke. The heightened emotional state can turn the viewer into a political actor who participates in seeking to end the witnessed injustice[392].

It is interesting to note that Susan's deep distrust of the locals does not save her from the dreadful fate she suffers in the barren desert of Morocco. When Youssef shoots Susan in the neck, Richard finds it difficult to control the passengers, who become gripped by a sudden fear. Their paranoia impaired their judgment, prompting Richard to resort to bullying tactics to keep them at bay and ensure his wife's safety. Upon learning of Susan's injury, the tourists insist that the driver find shelter instead of rushing her to a hospital. When the bus comes to an abrupt halt in the middle of the road, the natives congregate to investigate the commotion. Apart from Anwar, a native who tries to help Susan get the medical care she urgently needs, everyone appears indifferent to her plight. Later in the film, the bus driver succumbs to the passengers' demands, leaving Susan and her anguished husband to the mercy of the unsympathetic natives. The cruelty of the couple's fate takes a more sinister turn when a local van refuses to take the gravely injured American to a nearby hospital. The natives' unwillingness to help save Susan's life accentuates their

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[392] Alsultany, p.73-74

monstrosity. Their lack of empathy stands in stark contrast to Richard's altruism. The dire portrait the film paints of Moroccan society is meant to emphasize the fundamental differences that exist between the West—a beacon of civilization—and the Muslim world—a paragon of moral decadence.

Figure 27: Richard carrying his injured wife to a local doctor. The lack of nearby hospitals underscores the severe hardship Moroccan villagers face in a harsh and inhospitable environment, a clear contrast to the comfort and protection that American society provides.

The tourists' hysterical reaction to Susan's injury carries strong overtones. Their acrimonious exchange is illustrative of the film's fear-mongering rhetoric. When Richard realizes that there is no hospital in the outlying village, he heeds Anwar's advice to take Susan, who is writhing with pain and bleeding profusely, to a doctor living in an adjacent town. The confrontation that erupted between the tourists and Anwar in the immediate aftermath of the shooting is loaded with obvious negative connotations. Richard's fracas with Barth fills the passengers with horror. The following dialogues encapsulate the film's blatantly anti-Muslim rhetoric:

> Barth (passenger): Marrakech isn't this way. They're going to shoot at us again.
>
> Richard: we've got to get her to a hospital.
>
> Barth: they're going to kill us all. Turn back. Turn the bus around.[393]

When Richard and Anwar reach the town, the tourists grow more agitated, bringing more xenophobic attitudes to the surface:

> Douglas (an old passenger in his seventies): How is your wife?
>
> Richard: It's bad. I can't stop the bleeding.
>
> Tom (a passenger in his fifties): Get her out of there and let's go.

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[393] Iñárritu, A, G. (Director) (2006). *Babel*. [Film] Paramount Vantage.

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Richard: where? And where do I take her?

Tom: In Egypt *in a town like this, they slit 30 German tourists'*

throats. They might do the same to us. (Emphasis added)

Anwar (intervenes): No, sir. Not here.

Tom (aggressively): What do you know? We've gotta get out

of here as soon as possible.

Lilly (an old woman): it's unbearably hot ... we have to get

back to our children.

Richard: Look, you can't leave us here.

 James (a passenger): What is the point in our staying?

Richard: In case we need the bus.

James: they can drop us off and come back for you.

Richard: No.[394]

The vast, arid desert adds to the film's stifling atmosphere. Tom's hysteria is congruous with the alarmist rhetoric that dominated American media in the early 2000s. Interestingly, the film does not explore the reasons that prompted Tom to undertake his journey, which he knew to be fraught with peril. Indeed, his willingness to venture forth into the treacherous villages of Morocco, putting his own life at risk, brings his judgment into question. Even more irrational is his assertion that the Moroccan village they are trapped in bears a suspicious resemblance to a terrorist-infested town in Egypt. His

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[394] Ibid

paranoia and hostility capsulize the film's anti-Muslim narrative. According to Tom, one must tread carefully when engaging with the natives of Morocco, Egypt, or any other Muslim country.

Tom's stern warning is layered with cultural prejudice and xenophobic bigotry. Oddly enough, Anwar's considerate gesture is met with unwarranted hostility. Indeed, it is curious that his repeated attempts to allay the passengers' fears are greeted with disdain. Tom's dismissive attitude betrays his irrational animosity towards the natives, whom he continues to disparage even when their actions subvert the stereotypes he thrusts upon them. Tom's antagonistic response to Anwar's objections is indeed revealing. He makes it plain that the natives cannot be trusted, especially when they appear to be complaisant. His extreme circumspection is intended to highlight the risks that tourists are prone to incur when encountering the "other."

It is worth noting that in his critique, *Reel Bad Arabs*, Shaheen contends that the stereotypes Hollywood promotes about Arabs and their ways of life bear little resemblance to reality. "The dress," he observes, "is traditional and Western. … most do not dwell in desert tents; none are surrounded by harem maidens; most have never seen an oil well … Not one travels via "magic carpets." Their lifestyles defy stereotyping.[395]" The stigma attached to Arabs and Muslims is bound to persist if the films Hollywood churns out every year continue to encourage bigotry and harden prejudicial attitudes. The anti-Arab rhetoric,

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[395] Shaheen, J. G. (2015). *Reel bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*. Northampton, Massachusetts: Interlink Publishing group p 9

which seems to have dominated American cinema and evaded scrutiny for decades, is difficult to combat, much less dismantle, if the spectator is oblivious to the real and lasting harm misrepresentations of the "other" can cause. Shaheen maintains that it is crucial for the average American viewer to be wary of narratives that preach hate and provoke fear. One only needs to examine the seismic events that altered the course of recent history to foresee the consequences of politically charged narratives that seek to dehumanize the "other." Shaheen warns:

> Ponder the consequences. In February 1942, more than 100,000 Americans of Japanese descent were displaced from their homes and interred in camps; for decades blacks were denied basic civil rights, robbed of their property, and lynched; Native Americans, too, were displaced and slaughtered; and in Europe, six million Jews perished in the Holocaust. This is what happens when people are dehumanized[396].

The cultural differences underscored in *Babel*—and films of its ilk— serve to bring the inferiority of the natives into sharp relief. Richard's harrowing experience, it is important to reiterate, is the result of his misguided belief that an adventurous journey to Morocco can redeem his marriage. His desperate attempt to escape the toxicity of Western civilization prompts him to seek refuge in a space fraught with danger. His desire to break loose from the oppressive confines of societal norms aggravates his suffering and causes

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[396] Ibid, p. 10

great harm to his family. His decision to leave his children behind and embark on a treacherous journey to the bleak, inhospitable desert of Morocco betrays his yearning for freedom and solitude. Indeed, his seemingly unending misfortunes, his wife's grave injury, and his children's emotional trauma are all consequences of his reckless actions. In the end, the audience is left with the stark warning that any endeavor to break free from civilization can only invite calamity.

In conclusion, it is important to stress that there is a confluence of factors that account for the remarkable longevity of negative stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims. The largely hostile coverage Arabs receive in American print and broadcast media, for instance, fuel ethnic tensions and exacerbate false assumptions. Screenwriters and filmmakers, who draw on negative news stories and biased television programs to create Arab characters, contribute to the perpetuation of clichés and harmful myths. Media outlets typically focus on events and stories that are extraordinary, controversial, or sensational. Thus, it is unjust for filmmakers to appropriate politically motivated narratives for the silver screen and capitalize on a few incidents to tar an entire religious or ethnic group. Shaheen explains:

> Consider print and broadcast "if it bleeds, it leads" news
> reports. Like most Americans, creators of popular culture
> (including novelists, cartoonists and filmmakers) form their
> opinions of a people, in part, based on what they read in print,
> hear on the radio, and see on television. Like the rest of us, they

are inundated and influenced by a continuous flow of "seen one, seen'em all" headlines and sound bites. News reports *selectively* … focus on a minority of a minority of Arabs, the radical fringe. The seemingly indelible Arab-as-villain image wrongly conveys the message that the majority of … Arabs are "bad guys[397]."

Another equally important factor that accounts for the ongoing stigmatization and systematic denigration of Arabs and Muslims can be traced to a litany of events and political upheavals that disrupted the course of recent history. Shaheen asserts that the establishment of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948, the Arab-Israeli military conflicts, the 1973 Arab oil embargo, the hijacking of airplanes, the rise of such autocratic leaders as Libya's Muammar Qaddafi and Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini, the 1979 Iran hostage crisis, the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the 1993 terrorist attack on New York City's World Trade Center have all affected public perception of Arabs and Muslims[398]. The mayhem and violence that accompanied most of these events served as an excuse for the sweeping and relentless demonization of Arabs in American media and cinema. "Taken together," Shaheen writes, "news and movie images wrench the truth out of shape to influence billions of people.[399]"

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[397] Ibid. P. 34

[398] Ibid. P 34-35

[399] Ibid P. 35-36

The paucity of serious film criticism is also a contributory factor in the tenacity and pervasiveness of ethnic, cultural, and religious stereotypes. Film critics rarely condemn Hollywood for making films and television series that blatantly promote anti-Arab sentiments. In a New York Times review of the 1938 American film *Adventure in Sahara*, for instance, Bosley Growther warns that "we know the desert is no picnic and you can't trust an Arab very far.[400]" Shockingly, even prominent and esteemed film critics partake in reinforcing false and defamatory images about Arabs and Muslims. Furthermore, the regrettable silence of Arab-Americans—especially those who hold power but are uninterested or reluctant to use it to bring about meaningful change—compounds the stigma surrounding Arabs and their cultures. Indeed, their silence only adds to the legitimacy of Hollywood's persistent misrepresentations of Arabs. Similarly, in the absence of a united, strong, and vocal opposition on the part of American actors and filmmakers, who come from an Arab background, Hollywood feels emboldened to continue to press on with its smear campaign against Arabs and Muslims. "From the beginning," Shaheen writes, "America's blacks, Jews, and Irish moved to break down walls of mistrust and suspicion. What did these diverse peoples have in common? Well, they formed pressured groups, lobbying the industry for more balanced images.[401]" Notwithstanding their increasing presence and growing influence, Arab Americans have

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[400] Ibid p. 37

[401] Ibid, p. 38

not been able to form a strong and vociferous lobby to push against Hollywood's monolithic portraits of Arabs.

Conclusion

Considering the enormous influence that Hollywood has on the American audience, it is not easy to eradicate the cultural and religious stigma that has haunted Muslims for more than a century. Although there have been attempts to challenge Hollywood's biased representations of Muslims, most films and television series still adopt a rhetoric that promotes Islamophobia and perpetuates prejudicial stereotypes. As has been already indicated, history is replete with examples of wrongs and injustices committed against religious groups and ethnic minorities. Blacks, Native Americans, Jews—and recently the Uyghurs and Rohingyas—have all endured unimaginable atrocities, accompanied and exacerbated by a discourse that openly advocates violence and fans the flames of ethnic and religious hatred. Indeed, if history offers any lessons, it is that the dangers of hateful speech and incendiary rhetoric are too dire to be ignored.

More than twenty years have passed since the United States came under attack from a group of radical extremists. The misconceptions that hounded ordinary Muslims in the wake of 9/11, however, still endure to this day. The development of a counter-narrative is pivotal to subverting Hollywood's Orientalist stereotypes about Muslims. Like Black and Native American filmmakers who were able to challenge Hollywood's unjust portrayals, Muslim directors, producers, scriptwriters and actors have a responsibility to pursue film projects that foster pride in their heritage and celebrate their cultures. Hollywood's relentless vilification of Muslims can only be curtailed if filmmakers recognize the great

damage that negative stereotypes cause and venture to craft stories that provide nuanced, humane and sympathetic portraits.

Critics also have an obligation to call out films that denigrate Muslims and their traditions. With the rise of political correctness in the United States, studio companies are taking great pains to make films that elevate minorities rather than alienate or offend their sensibilities. Fears of public backlash—or worse boycott—have forced the American film industry to tone down its rhetoric. With the exception of Muslims, films that disparage religious, ethnic, racial and sexual minorities are no longer tolerated. Regrettably, while Hollywood rectified its injustices against other groups, it continues to evade scrutiny for its negative portrayals of Muslims.

To break out of Hollywood's reductive stereotypes, Muslims around the world ought to be more outspoken in their demands for fair and balanced depictions on screen. The United States is home to millions of Muslims[402]—some of whom are elected officials, accomplished entrepreneurs, and even NASA astronauts. Their stories are seldom told, their achievements rarely highlighted. Hollywood's Muslims are mostly projected as sadistic rapists or violent extremists. Considering the essential role Hollywood plays in promoting xenophobic tropes, it is incumbent upon Muslims—especially Muslim

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[402] According to the Religion Consensus, some 4.45 million Muslims live in the United States as of 2020. See their 2020 press release.

Americans—to be more critical of films that demonize their religion and belittle their cultures.

To some degree, Black and Indigenous Americans—two of the most vilified ethnic minorities on screen—have been able to push Hollywood to alter its demeaning representations. Their gains—albeit modest—can serve as a blueprint to dismantling Hollywood's stereotypical portrayals of Muslims. Indeed, in today's environment, filmmakers cannot afford to make films that are racist—unless they are aimed at Muslims. The 1939 epic film, *Gone With the Wind*, for instance, has been recently removed from streaming services because of its romanticization of slavery and glorification of the Lost Cause of the Confederacy. HBO Max, an American streaming service owned by Warner Bros. Discovery, for instance, was compelled to remove the Oscar-winning film in response to protests from the African American community.[403] Similarly, Netflix, one of the largest streaming services in the United States, was forced to take down several comedy shows because of their use of blackface. The television sketch show, *Bo 'Selecta,* the British comedy sitcom, *The League of Gentlemen*, and the television show, *The Mighty Boosh*, for instance, have all been pulled from the popular platform because they featured

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[403] See Victor, D (2020, June 10). HBO Max Pulls 'Gone with the Wind,' Citing Racist Depictions. *The New York Times*. See also Gone with the Wind Removed from HBO Max (2020, June 10). *BBC*.

offensive, racially insensitive content.[404] As evidenced by the past few years, only persistent, unrelenting and vociferous protests can jolt Hollywood into action.

It is important to note that the responsibility of challenging Hollywood's Islamophobic narrative does not only rest with Arabs and Muslims, but also extends to anyone with an unwavering moral compass. When the celebrated American actor, Marlin Brando, was nominated for an Oscar in 1973 for his role in *The Godfather* (1972), he boycotted the ceremony and sent Sacheen Littlefeather—the Native American civil rights activist—to represent him. In a jarring and impassioned speech that the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences fought hard to suppress, Littlefeather declined the Oscar on behalf of Brando, relaying his strong objections to Hollywood's continued misrepresentations of Native Americans and spotlighting the infamous Wounded Knee standoff[405]. On a night that was supposed to offer tribute to the American film industry, Brando did not only turn down one of the most coveted and prestigious awards that the Academy bestowed on him, but also used their unrivaled platform to bring attention to Hollywood's injustice against Native Americans. In order to dispel the myths surrounding reel Muslims, influential figures—such as politicians, filmmakers and high-profile artists

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[404] See Marshall, A. (2020, June 12). Blackface on British TV Finally Faces Reckoning. *The New York Times*. See also Bakare, L. (2020, June 10). Netflix Pulls The Mighty Boosh and The League of Gentlemen Over Blackface. *The Guardian*.

[405] See Sacheen Littlefeather's speech at the 45th Academy Awards ceremony, which was held on March 27, 1973.

whose scruples are troubled by injustice—have an obligation to decry Hollywood's distorted portrayals.

One of the most injurious stereotypes that has been associated with Arabs and Muslims on screen is terrorism. As previously mentioned, the 9/11 attacks unleashed a deluge of films and television series that drew no distinction between moderate Muslims and militant extremists. To overcome this malicious and damaging charge, Muslims must speak out more forcefully against any acts of terror perpetrated in their name. In an interview that CNN's Anderson Cooper conducted with Donald Trump in 2016, the former President made a string of inflammatory statements that were designed to justify his proposal to ban Muslims from entering the United States, reiterating his sentiment that many Muslims sympathize with ISIS—which is blatantly false as several Arab countries fought ferociously to reverse the group's territorial gains and curb their ideological reach— and falsely claiming that "Islam hates us.[406]" To undercut this dangerous discourse, it is important for moderate Muslims to firmly and openly denounce the terrorists' perverted ideology, which has tarred the religion of Islam and wreaked terrible havoc across the world.

For far too long, Hollywood has enjoyed immunity for its vilification of Muslims. Pressing the film industry to correct its bias against Muslims is by no means an easy undertaking. The long-standing tradition of prevalent stereotypes and widespread

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[406] See Schleifer, T. (March 10, 2016). "Donald Trump: I think Islam Hates Us". *CNN*

misconceptions, which have gone unexamined for many decades, cannot be easily or swiftly dismantled. Indeed, the challenge is formidable. It is important to reiterate, however, that allowing Hollywood free rein in its mistreatment of Muslims is far too dangerous. The time is long overdue for Muslims to begin to lobby strongly for an end to Hollywood's sweeping, insidious and unjust misrepresentations.

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