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**HOLLYWOOD AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF ISLAMOPHOBIA:  
STEREOTYPICAL REPRESENTATION OF ARABS AND MUSLIMS IN POST-9/11  
AMERICAN MOVIES**

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## **Dedication**

To my mother

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## **Abstract**

This study deals with the impact of the 9/11 attacks on the portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood movies with a particular interest in tracing the Orientalist discourse in four post-9/11 released movies. For over a century, Arabs and Muslims have always been eroticized and targeted as the godless enemy in countless movies. Long before the 9/11 attacks, no single entertainment program had featured Arabs in a positive light away from being barbaric, and violent. Ever since the beginning of the twenty-first century, new representation of Arabs and Muslims has invaded the American motion picture industry. The 9/11 attacks had a profound impact on the Western perception of Arabs and Muslims and how they were represented on screen. This study reveals that Hollywood's portrayal of Arabs and Muslims is extensively prompted by political events and American cultural interests in the Muslim world. The thesis argues that despite the emergence of a more balanced representation of Arabs and Muslims, this distinctive social group is still being portrayed within the terrorist theme as the enemy 'Other' reminiscent of the pre-9/11 representation. The research also traces how the old Orientalist clichés and the neo-Orientalist discourse have contributed to trigger Islamophobia and build today's portrait of Arabs and Muslims in American popular culture. Notwithstanding that years have passed since the 9/11 attacks, yet derogatory stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims persisted, revived time and time again. The research shows that the death of Osama bin Laden neither signaled the end of the war on terror nor the break in the portrayal of Muslims as terrorists in Western movies. Such misrepresentation helped promote feelings of hatred and enmity toward Arabs, Muslims, and Islam in the Western world.

## Résumé

Cette étude traite l'impact des attentats du 11 septembre sur la représentation des Arabes et des Musulmans dans les films Hollywoodiens avec un intérêt particulier à retracer le discours Orientaliste dans quatre films réalisés après le 11 Septembre. Depuis plus d'un siècle, les Arabes et les Musulmans ont toujours été érotisés et pris pour cible comme l'ennemi impie dans d'innombrables films. Bien avant les attentats du 11 Septembre, aucun programme de divertissement n'avait présenté les Arabes dans de rôles positifs, loin d'être barbares et violents. Depuis le début du XXIe siècle, de nouvelle représentation des Arabes et des Musulmans a envahi l'industrie cinématographique Américaine. Ces attentats ont eu un impact profond sur la perception occidentale des Arabes et des Musulmans et sur la façon dont ils étaient représentés à l'écran. Cette étude révèle que la représentation Hollywoodienne des Arabes et des Musulmans est largement inspirée par les événements politiques et les intérêts culturels Américains dans le monde Musulman. La thèse soutient que malgré l'émergence d'une représentation plus équilibrée des Arabes et des Musulmans, ce groupe social distinctif est toujours représenté comme ennemi. Cette recherche retrace également comment les vieux clichés Orientalistes et le discours néo-Orientaliste ont contribué à déclencher l'Islamophobie et à dresser le portrait actuel des Arabes et des Musulmans dans la culture populaire Américaine. Bien que des années se soient écoulées depuis ces fameux attentats, les stéréotypes dégradants des Arabes et des Musulmans ont persisté. Ce projet de recherche montre ainsi que la mort d'Oussama Ben Laden n'a ni marqué la fin de la guerre contre le terrorisme ni la rupture de la représentation des Musulmans comme des terroristes dans les films occidentaux. Pendant plus d'une décennie, cette distorsion a contribué à promouvoir des sentiments de haine envers les Arabes, les Musulmans et l'Islam dans le monde occidental.

## المخلص

تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى البحث في تأثير هجمات الحادي عشر من سبتمبر على تمثيل العرب والمسلمين في أفلام هوليوود مع اهتمام خاص بتتبع الخطاب الإستشراقي في أربعة أفلام صدرت بعد أحداث الحادي عشر من سبتمبر. لأكثر من قرن من الزمن، كان العرب والمسلمون دائماً ما يعرضون على أنهم العدو الملحد في عدد لا يحصى من الأفلام الغربية و خاصة الأمريكية، حيث أنه قبل هجمات الحادي عشر من سبتمبر بفترة طويلة لم يكن هنالك برنامج ترفيهي واحد يُظهر العرب بشكل إيجابي بعيداً عن كونهم همجيين وعنيفين. و مع مطلع القرن الحادي والعشرين كان لهجمات الحادي عشر من سبتمبر تأثير عميق على النظرة الغربية للعرب والمسلمين، مما أدى الى ظهور صور جديدة في السينما الأمريكية و التي كان دورها تبرر صورة العدو العربي التقليدية التي ظهرت منذ سبعينات القرن الماضي.

توضح هذه الدراسة كذلك أن الأحداث السياسية والمصالح الثقافية الأمريكية في العالم الإسلامي غالباً ما تأثر بشكل كبير على تصوير هوليوود للعرب و المسلمين. فعلى الرغم من ظهور تصوير أكثر توازناً للعرب والمسلمين في عدد من الأعمال السينمائية الأمريكية بعد الحادي عشر سبتمبر إلا أن الحرب على الإرهاب ربطت العرب و المسلمين بالعنف وهم لا يزالون يُصوِّرون ضمن موضوع الإرهاب على أنهم العدو "الأخر" في عدد من الأفلام السينمائية.

تتبع هذا البحث أيضاً كيف ساهمت الأفكار والخطابات الإستشراقية القديمة و الحديثة في نشر الإسلاموفوبيا وبناء الصورة النمطية المهينة الحديثة للعرب والمسلمين في الإعلام الغربي على الرغم من مرور سنوات على هجمات الحادي عشر من سبتمبر ، مما يبين أن مقتل أسامة بن لادن و الذي يعتبره الغرب العقل المدبر لهجمات الحادي عشر من سبتمبر لم يشر إلى نهاية الحرب على الإرهاب ولا إلى توقف تصوير المسلمين كإرهابيين في الأفلام الغربية. لأكثر من عقد من الزمن، ساعد هذا التحريف في تعزيز مشاعر الكراهية والحقد تجاه العرب والمسلمين والإسلام في العالم الغربي.

### List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

<b>AQI</b>	Al-Qaeda in Iraq
<b>CBS</b>	Columbia Broadcasting System
<b>CIA</b>	Central Intelligence Agency
<b>CNN</b>	Cable News Network
<b>Dir</b>	Director
<b>DNA</b>	Deoxyribonucleic Acid
<b>FBI</b>	Federal Bureau of Investigation
<b>FDR</b>	Franklin Delano Roosevelt
<b>GRS</b>	Global Response Staff
<b>IS</b>	Islamic State
<b>ISIS</b>	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
<b>NBC</b>	National Broadcasting Company
<b>NSEERS</b>	National Security Exit-Entry Registration System
<b>PBUH</b>	Peace Be Upon Him
<b>R.K.O</b>	Radio-Keith- Orpheum
<b>SAALT</b>	South Asian Americans Leading Together
<b>UAE</b>	United Arab Emirates
<b>UN</b>	United Nations Organization
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>USA</b>	United States of America
<b>USS</b>	United States Ship
<b>USSR</b>	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
<b>WOT</b>	War on Terror

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## Introduction

American motion picture industry is regarded as the world's greatest entertainer and the most effective teacher of the younger generation. For years, since its early creation, Hollywood has tutored American youngsters various things and shaped their thoughts and beliefs. Lately, it became a powerful cultural force and the most dominant source of information about distinct places and cultures. A stereotype is a profitable tool for moviemakers. For that reason, Hollywood tends to stereotype and demonize various racial and ethnic groups over time, yet its representation of Arabs, Muslims, and Middle Easterners is oversimplified and malignant.

By the time Hollywood was progressively abolishing bigoted portraits of other groups, it has been fascinated with the negative Arab character. Since its early inception until fairly recently, Arabs and Muslims are the most highly misunderstood and vilified group in American cinema. Hollywood's negative personification of Arabs and Muslims exceeded all vicious visualizations of various ethnic and racial groups, including; Native Americans, Asians, Jews, Hispanics, Germans, African Americans, Vietnamese, Italians, and Russians. The Muslim/Arab Stereotype has increased in number and virulence over time. Lately, so many of the negative stereotypes that are no longer applicable to other racial and ethnic groups are still being used to personify Arabs and Muslims in a number of movies and TV shows. Certainly, Hollywood's attitude toward Arabs and Muslims is intolerant and dogmatic.

Hollywood's bigotry representation of Arabs/Muslims has been profoundly discussed in various scholarly works. The meticulously documented research into the movie and motion picture industry has helped to highlight the dehumanizing personification that moviemakers have given to Arabs and Muslims. It is eminent to mention that early European Orientalism provided the stuff for the representation of the Muslim world as a place of wonder, fantasy, mystery, and luxury life inhabited by corrupt, vicious, barbaric, harem maidens, and

oppressed females, who constituted the West's cultural 'Other'. These fictional renditions of the brutal, inferior 'Other' were accepted as valid and adopted by moviemakers to a degree that it became such an indelible part of Hollywood's representation of Arabs. Hollywood moviemakers came to consistently lambaste Arabs, Muslims, and Middle Easterners on the silver screen for over a century.

As the twentieth century drew to its end, the emergence of the Islamic militant groups and Osama bin Laden's declaration of war on the United States troubled the American government and received widespread media attention. The increase of violent attacks and verbal threats against the Western world by non-state Islamic militant groups heightened the suspicion of Muslim Arabs for all the heinous crimes, mass destruction, surprise attacks, hijacking death, brutal violence, and terrorism. The American political discourse during this period culminated in the growing hostility against Arabs, Muslims, and people who look alike. Essentially, the enduring visual representation of Islamic extremist groups and their acts of terrorism in nightly news footage, magazines, showed pictures of militant Muslims and printed famous informative articles illustrated the strong connection between Islam and terrorism. This demonstration was accessible to moviemakers who turned to headlines for inspiration and story material. Hence, late-twentieth-century Hollywood production successfully linked Islam, the religious and bodily practices such as prayers, beard for men, and veil for women with men's oppression, holy war, Jihad, violent acts, hostility and hatred toward Western civilization, peace, and democracy. Since the collapse of Communism, Muslims and Arabs are almost frequently, whether covertly or overtly, depicted as the eccentric and intimidating 'Other' in various movies, TV shows, and also video games. They are shown to be the enemy number one, violent, uncivilized, aggressive, dangerous, and unpredictable.

In view of what happened on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. Arabs and Muslims undeniably proved themselves to be America's real enemies. The incident is the biggest attack on the continental United States. Happened to be committed by Arab Muslims and amounted to a declaration of war, as described by President George W. Bush, the attacks provided another reason to further vilify Arabs and Muslims on the silver screen. Hollywood prejudicial representation of Arabs and Muslims became more insidious after the 9/11 attacks, as they met the least resistance and were vigorously defended and accepted as truth. Sweeping mischaracterizations and stereotypes equated Arabs and Muslims to violence and terrorism. This distinctive social group continues to be portrayed in pejorative terms as the threatening cultural 'Other' who earned the American prejudicial ire. After the 9/11 events and the escalation of the 'war on terror' campaign, moviemakers and TV producers have embellished the early common stereotypes with new more malicious typecasts which further downgraded Muslims and Arabs and increased anti-Muslim prejudice throughout the world. They produced images of Muslims and Arabs being described as fundamentalists, terrorists, sexist, militant, undemocratic, violent, suicide bombers, hijackers, and fanatic. That is to say, then and now, the Arab/Muslim characters are carefully crafted to alarm the viewers and impact the perception of the whole Hollywoodian audience.

In light of the above-mentioned research contextualization, how did the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon impact the manner in which Arabs and Muslims are visualized in Hollywood movies? This major research problem is investigated through the subsequent probing sub-questions: How has the construction of the Muslim/Arab character as the threatening cultural 'Other' in American cinematic production evolved to convey political messages in both pre-and post-9/11 attacks? Would the visual representation of Arabs and Muslims as terrorists in Hollywood movies change following the death of Osama bin Laden? How is Islamophobia constructed cinematically in Hollywood production? The

aforementioned sub-questions are significant in terms of their ability to address the political and ideological motives behind the negative portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood production before and after the 9/11 attacks.

The present study delves into the world of moving pictures. Its primary goal is to unfold the changes in American cinematic portrayal of Arabs and Muslims since the 9/11 attacks. In this regard, the research is set out to trace the Orientalist discourse in four post-9/11 released movies *United 93* (2006), *The Kingdom* (2007), *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), and *13 Hours: Secret Soldiers of Benghazi* (2016). It demonstrates that the 9/11 attacks were such drastic events that changed the world and impacted profoundly the American culture like no other event in contemporary world has ever done. It, also, examines through movies whether the 9/11 events helped to construct Islamophobia cinematically in Hollywood production.

Arabs and Muslims have never appeared as normal people in Hollywood movies. The widely alienating visual vilification of Arabs and Muslims has been a predominant part of Hollywood moviemaking process. Contemporary moviemakers have inherited and further ornamented the European pre-existing Arab stereotypes and misconceptions that existed long before the beginning of Hollywood enterprise. Muslims and Arabs continue to be visualized as the threatening cultural 'Other' in various movies. By continuing to visually vilify Arabs and Muslims over and over again, Hollywood is more likely to perpetuate the anti-Muslim and anti-Arab sentiments across the world and to promote violence and racial government policies in the United States.

Plenty of ink has been spilled over the question of Hollywood's portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in movies released before and after the 9/11 attacks. In this study the theory of Orientalism and its modern variants is discussed at length and used to analyze the portrayal of Arabs and Muslims as the 'Other' in movies released both pre and post 9/11 attacks. This study also sheds light on the roots of misconceptions and the origins that motivate

Hollywood's long history of prejudicial representation of Muslims and Arabs as exotic, barbaric, violent, and intimidating 'Other' through the American cinema. It, nonetheless, exposes whether the malignant representation of Arabs and Muslims through the cinematic production is employed to vindicate: the new crusade (WOT) in the Muslim world, the American military presence in the Middle East, its interference in the Muslim world policies, its support for the Jewish settlement in Palestine, and its interest in oil coming from the Middle East.

Virtually, since the dawn of cinema, Hollywood has played an influential role in impacting and shaping the public's perception about various ethnic and racial groups. Therefore, the regular placement of Arabs and Muslims in 'bad guy roles' might influence the manner they are viewed in Western societies. The research provides a study of the evolution of Hollywood's representation of Arabs and Muslims from the 'exotic comic' image to the 'foreign devil villain' in an endeavor to determine the way pejorative characterization of Arabs and Muslims envelops the intention to generate and amplify fear from Islam and Muslims, and to manufacture the public consent in favor of the government policies and the discrimination of this distinctive social group in the American society.

After the 9/11 attacks, Hollywood has protracted and fortified the presumptions and narrative of Orientalism to the extent that images of Muslims as violent, fanatics and murderous thrived in most movies. It became quite obvious that it was a tradition for moviemakers and screenwriters who wanted to portray terrorists, to link up Middle Eastern culture with the characters through giving them an accent, and making them look like Arabs. This study probes into Hollywood's very recent portrayal of Arab/Muslim character after the death of Osama bin Laden through the use of two recent box office successes *Zero Dark Thirty* and *13 Hours: Secret Soldiers of Benghazi*. These movies focus on real events that happened following the death of Osama bin Laden. The ideological indications that have

induced Islamophobia in these movies are connected to the opinions on Islam, Arabs, and Muslims that have become prevalent through news and entertainment media since the 9/11 attacks and the American-led global war on terrorism.

On the other hand, it is equally important to mention that the 9/11 attacks gave birth to a more complex, even-handed, and more balanced portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood. Such portrayal emerged immediately following the attacks. Although a shift occurred again since 2007, such a pattern of representation indicates that stereotypes can be challenged, can be refuted, and thus could one day be abolished. For that reason, more effort should be made in the field of moviemaking to approach Islam and the Muslim world with a fair humanized and unbiased mind.

This study employs the qualitative approach as its method. This approach is best used to study and explore the meaning of human behaviors, attitudes, feelings, opinions, and beliefs. The main objective to be achieved behind the choice of this research approach consists in providing insights and understanding of the impact of 9/11 attacks on the visualization of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood movies. Therefore, the study analyzes a sample of movies released after the 9/11 attacks and attempts to determine the reasons behind the negative portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in these movies. It also traces the shift from the Orientalist to the neo-Orientalist discourse in American motion picture production.

This study is by no means a census of all appearances of Muslims and Arabs in Hollywood. Therefore, within this methodological framework, the research is conducted on the basis of analytical and case-study approaches due to the fact that within the scope of this research, it would be impossible to investigate all appearances of Arabs and Muslims in post-9/11 Hollywood production. Thereby, an attempt is made to trace the Orientalist discourse within four post-9/11 released movies *United 93*, *The Kingdom*, *Zero Dark Thirty*, and *13 Hours: Secret Soldiers of Benghazi*.

These movies are selected for a thorough examination since they reproduce and focus on well-known events in American history. *United 93* and *The Kingdom* were released five to six years after the 9/11 attacks and form a perfect example of post-9/11 movies that first associate Islam with violence and fascism, and second demonstrate that the clash of civilizations is becoming more manifest in Hollywood production after the attacks. *Zero Dark Thirty* and *13 Hours: Secret Soldiers of Benghazi* focus on real events that happened after the death of Osama bin Laden. While the first dramatizes the American decade-long hunt for bin Laden and features his capture, the second retells the story of the September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2012 attack on the American diplomatic compound and CIA annex in Benghazi, Libya. The movie offers another example of how Hollywood perpetuates Islamophobic sentiments after the death of bin Laden in movies which do not have a relation to the American war in Iraq or Afghanistan. Ostensibly, the use of case-study approach with all its flaws and shortcomings develops a false sense of confidence which can create a kind of lack of objectivity when analyzing the data, and thus biases the findings. Therefore, this study cautiously selected the movies to be analyzed.

Until 2007, Hollywood was unsure how to respond to the 9/11 attacks. The attacks had an immediate impact on the moving picture production causing the delaying, editing, or even the canceling of certain movies. *United 93* (2006, dir. Paul Greengrass) was the very first movie released five years after the 9/11 to directly address the attacks. In reality, the movie was released during a period that witnessed the emergence of a kind of sympathetic post-9/11 visualization of Arabs and Muslims in cinematic production. During this period, movies created sympathetic backstories for their antagonists. Hollywood portrayed Muslim/Arab characters as tragic misguided and blinded figures seduced by the teaching of Islam into Islamic militancy.



Beginning in 2007, Hollywood returned to its pre-9/11 dehumanization of the Muslim/Arab character. Since then, Muslim villains were introduced as anti-Western and willing participants in terrorism. Hence, a decision was made to analyze *The Kingdom* (2007, dir. Peter Berg) as one of the best examples on this period. The movie contains a more complex, even-handed, and balanced representation of Arabs and Muslims, but reveals that Muslims are still being framed within the context of terrorism. After the death of Osama bin Laden, the image of Muslim villains as willing participants in terrorism became more manifest in terrorist-themed and action-thriller movies. *13 Hours: Secret Soldiers of Benghazi* (2016, dir. Michael Bay) is chosen because it retells the September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2012 attack on the American diplomatic compound and CIA annex in a Muslim country. The movie is based on a book writing by Mitchell Zuckoff which provides an inside account of the event from the point of view of the compound defenders and does not address any political controversy surrounding the attack. Even if that is the case, *13 Hours: Secret Soldiers of Benghazi* proves that the new age of terrorist-themed movies ushered by the 9/11 attacks in Hollywood is still dominant even after the death of bin Laden and the presumed victory of the Obama administration over terrorism. Within this theme, the Muslim/Arab character continues to surface not only as dangerous and fanatic, but also incompetent and easily defeated 'Other'.

By choosing movies that focus on real-life events as a sample, one can presume that the Islamophobic sentiments as portrayed in these movies mirrored what had dominated the American consciousness regarding Arabs and Muslims since the 9/11, the launch of the war on terror campaign, and the death of Osama bin Laden. Examining these four movies, which were released amid a hostile environment and reflected the American war on terrorism, provides insights into the way Hollywood constructed Islamophobia cinematically and helped to strengthen Islamophobic sentiments across the world in the twenty-first century. Within this study, a number of other movies released in pre-9/11 attacks are chosen as a sample in an

endeavor to highlight the manner in which Hollywood constructed the image of Arabs and Muslims as terrorists in both pre- and post-9/11 attacks. The reason behind using 9/11 as a midway point for the research sample is the fact that it was one of the very recent dramatic terrorist attacks committed by Arab-Muslims on the American soil in the nation's history.

This research study did not analyze movies which offer a fair image that is more reflective of real Arabs, as it attempts to trace the shift from the Orientalist to the neo-Orientalist discourse and the construction of Islamophobic representation in movies released after the Sept. 11th attacks. On that account, the conclusion achieved from this research study cannot be applicable to all the appearances of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood movies. However, the study aspires to prove that the 9/11 attacks impacted the way Hollywood movies visualized Arabs and Muslims since.

The present thesis is built on a wide range of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources chiefly consist of four main materials; *United 93* (Dir. Paul Greengrass), *The Kingdom* (Dir. Peter Berg), *Zero Dark Thirty* (Dir. Kathryn Bigelow), and *13 Hours: Secret Soldiers of Benghazi* (Dir. Michael Bay). Along with another body of primary sources which incorporates presidential speeches, government publications, and a number of other movies released before the 9/11 attacks.

An abundance of valuable academic works from books and articles to lectures and essays with specific reference to some leading newspapers and magazines form the body of secondary sources, which are vital source of information used all along this study. Edward Said's seminal book *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* published in 1978 is the basis of the inquiry at hand. Said is one of the most prominent cultural figures of the late twentieth century. He makes an influential argument that the scholarly writings from Europe and America presented inaccurate and misleading stereotyped cultural representations of the Islamic Orient. Said believes that the biased perceptions generated from European and

American scholars hindered a true understanding of the Muslim World. His argument is that when Western scholars studied the Orient's cultures they were unable to understand them; thereby the East was looked at as inferior to the West. Said goes further to claim that Western scholarship held strong ties to the domineering imperialist societies that produced it, concluding that much of the Western scholarship was inherently political and intellectually uncertain. His argument is that the West painted a picture of an Eastern world in need of civilizing which affected the present-day portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in Western media.

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said expends the argument from *Orientalism* and studies the relationship between culture and empire. Entitled *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* published in 1997 is one of Said's extremely rich books concerning the power of Western media in shaping the Western perception of Islam, Arabs, and Muslims. In this book, he questions the objectivity of the Western media claiming that untruth misleading information about Islam and the Muslim world are propagated through the media. He believes that the West and America wanted to control the Muslim world through creating the enemy image, and informs the readers that the Muslim world was disseminated as an antipathetically troubled and problematic region, a particular menace to the West and Western civilization through the mass media. This assumption, he defended once more in his preface of a republished 2003 edition of *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*.

Douglas Little's *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1948* attempts to expand on Said's *Orientalism* providing a much detailed knowledge about American Orientalism. Little believes that in order to maintain control over the Middle East and its oil fields and to protect the Jewish settlement in Palestine, the American media dehumanized the region and its people, making Arabs look evil.

One cannot study the American motion picture visualization of Arabs and Muslims without referring to Jack Shaheen. He is one of the most prominent scholars who established an entirely new field of study known as 'Arab-American Media Studies'. His meticulously documented research into the movie and motion picture industry constitute an important source of information concerning moviemakers' attitude toward Arabs and Muslims. A multitude of his research studies analyzed what promotes the ubiquitous negative image of Arabs, where it comes from, and why it persists in the American cinema.

In this manner, the present study is built on Shaheen's *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*. His book is an indispensable reference tool to find movies that insult Arab characters and to delve into why American motion pictures continue to use villain Arabs for entertainment. In this book, he proves that Arabs are the most maligned group in the history of Hollywood. The negative personification of Arabs and Muslims and the image of Arab equal Muslim equal godless enemy have been with the Hollywoodian audience for over a century. Through his study of more than 900 hundred movies released in the pre-9/11 attacks, he strove to make visible a dangerously consistent pattern of hateful Arab stereotypes that robbed an entire people of their humanity.

As one of the ever strongest voices against Arab vicious stereotypes in entertainment media, Shaheen published his *The TV Arab* book in 1984. The book is one of the very earliest research to throw a new and revealing light on the portrayal of Arabs in American popular entertainment programs on television, in which he interviewed various TV producers and concluded that the American television is full of Arab baddies; billionaires, bombers, and belly dancers. Though very few of the TV shows studied in this book would certainly be known by today's viewers, *The TV Arab* still serves as a historical reference and is another good book.

In reality, Shaheen is probably one of the best-known scholars to expose the manner in which the entertainment industry manufactured a prejudiced image of Arabs. *Guilty: Hollywood's Verdict on Arabs After 9/11*, published eight years after the 9/11 attacks, is another important source of information for this study. In this book, he addresses hundred-plus post-9/11 movies and TV shows that vilify Arabs and Muslims and proves that the stereotype is as fixed in American society as it was in an early time and even more pervasive than it has ever been before. His main thesis in this book is that entertainment is political. He found that all movies he studied, to one extent or another, are political with political point-views. He believes that cinema plays a very important role when it comes to propaganda and war and shows that media and policy reinforce each other.

Through his scrutiny of cinema texts, he found that only little had been written on American media portrayal of Arabs and Muslims. "The Arab Image in American Mass Media" is another article put forward by Shaheen to demonstrate how the Arab dehumanizing and malicious typecasts accompany the American child from early years to graduating from college through editorial cartoons, comic strips, comic books, video games, TV shows, school textbooks, magazines, novels, newspapers, and movies. His article shows that Americans have, over the years, received a host of misconceptions about Arabs and Muslims that negative stereotypes became naturalized.

Along the same line, another scholarly work entitled "*Evil*" *Arabs in American Popular Film: Orientalist Fear* published in 2006 by Tim Jon Semmerling is equally important. The book draws attention to the negative personification of Arabs and Muslims in American popular culture. It criticizes Shaheen's award-winning book *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* as being cumulative in nature with its unsatisfying analysis of certain movies. Semmerling believes that Shaheen's book overlooks some unique and significant aspects used in the construction of the Arab/Muslim character in the cinematic production.

With that being said, his book studies a limited number of movies that use Arab characters as villains and identifies what he regards as the major determinants that influence Hollywood movie stories. This book forms equally an important source of information to this study.

Melani McAlister's *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and US Interests in the Middle East since 1945* highlights how popular culture, public debates, the news media, and various social and religious movements forged a web of meaning that have often facilitated the expansion of the United States' power in the Middle East. The book documents how in the period that followed the Second World War and until the turn of the twenty-first century the cultural representation of Arabs and the Middle East was significant to the construction of the American identity as the newly emerging superpower. McAlister concurs that the struggle over oil, the debate over ancient history and religious sentiment, along with the American support for the Jewish settlement allowed the Middle East to be conceived as a center of interest for many Americans. McAlister's book stands as another important source of information and the best reference on the visual representation of Arabs and the Middle East in the post-Second World War period.

David L. Robb's *Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes and Censor the Movies* is another extremely rich reference book as it provides remarkable details about the longstanding relationship between the United States military and Hollywood moguls. As one of the most important books to be ever written about Hollywood, the book provides insights into the dark world of the Pentagon's manufacturing of public opinion and entertainment production. Through reviewing numerous documents, papers, and memos interchanged among Pentagon and moviemakers, it reveals that Hollywood production in the contemporary world became one of the most powerful opinion making machines by means of which Washington was able to transmit the image of the United States as a superpower.

*Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation After 9/11* penned by Evelyn Alsultany in 2012, provides an understanding of the changes that appeared in entertainment production in the dawn of the 9/11 attacks. In her book, Alsultany studies news coverage of Arabs and Muslims in relation to the war on terror, public service announcements, and a limited number of TV dramas, including *24*, *The Practice*, *NYPD Blue*, *Sleeper Cell*, and *Law and Order*. She explains that what appears to be a decent visual portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in American media is in fact aimed to conceal the upsurge in racial discrimination of this distinctive social group in American society by private and state actors. The book is a valuable contribution to the debate on the politics of Arabs and Muslims portrayal in American media after the 9/11 attacks.

Stephen Sheehi's book *Islamophobia: The Ideological Campaign against Muslims* put forward in 2010 is one of the most important detailed written studies that treat the subject of Islamophobia. The book demonstrates how rooted and firmly established Islamophobia is in the American public and state discourses. *Islamophobia and Racism in America* is another very recent scholarly work by Erik Love that frames Islamophobia as a form of racism unleashed by state and private actors. Michael Suleiman "*Islam, Muslims and Arabs in America: The Other of the Other of the Other...*"; Jack Shaheen's "*Hollywood's Muslim Arab*" and "*Hollywood's Bad Arab*"; and Daniel Mandel "*Muslims On The Silver Screen*" are among other important journal articles used to make my case in this study.

The present study is made up of five chapters. The first chapter is a theoretical framework that paves the way for the conceptual understanding of the succeeding chapters. It looks into Said's postcolonial theory 'Orientalism', which constitutes a theoretical approach to the study of Arabs and Muslims' representation in Western academic, intellectual, and media discourses. It deals with early and contemporary Western construction of Arabs, Muslims, and the Muslim world, and undertakes a comprehensive study of the 'Orientalism'

theory, which provides an important starting point for questioning how the American motion picture industry displays images of Arabs and Muslims through its cinematic production. The chapter first discusses the variant forms of Orientalism and accounts for its main tenets, demonstrating how the knowledge that was created to define the Islamic Orient and Orientals was self-centric and subjective. It then shows that Orientalism is still relevant and most significant to understand present-day Islamophobia or anti-Muslim and anti-Arab sentiments and racial discrimination in the West.

The second chapter delves into the origins of the negative portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood and attempts to show how the American cultural fear of the 'Other' has conditioned the creation of the dangerous 'Arab Other' in popular culture. A study of the roots of Hollywood's derogatory representation of Arabs and Muslims enables us to comprehend the post-9/11 cinematic attitude. The chapter then accounts for the different stages of the evolution of American cinematic representation of Arabs and Muslims before the 9/11 attacks. It displays how their representation was greatly induced by political events, such as the Western recognition of the Jewish settlement in Palestine as a state, the Arab-Israeli conflict and the consequential Oil Embargo, the Iranian Revolution and the subsequent Hostage Crisis, along with the collapse of the Soviet Communism, and the emergence of the Islamic fundamentalism. The main target of chapter two is to demonstrate that the conversion of the Arab/Muslim image from the exotic 'Other' to the threatening 'Other' did not occur out of the blue, rather within the context of political and cultural interest in the region.

Chapter three sheds light on the contextual background by focusing on the geopolitical and socio-cultural contexts in order to provide insights into the environment that surrounded the chosen movies' making process. The chapter demonstrates that the context profoundly influenced the representation of Arabs and Muslims in the selected movies, helping to draw an image of Arabs and Muslims as ruthless, violent, and potential terrorists. The chapter also



discusses Hollywood's role in legitimating racial discrimination against Muslims and Arabs in American society and contributing to the American imperial objectives in the Muslim world.

Chapter four probes into the huge impact of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the depiction of Arabs and Muslims in American cinematic production. It is set to critically analyze and trace the Orientalist, or more properly the neo-Orientalist discourse, in two post-9/11 released movies; *United 93* as the very first movie to directly deal with 9/11 attacks and *The Kingdom* as a movie that reflects its producers' disaffection with President Bush's war on terror campaign. Both movies' negative representation of Arabs and Muslims is used to justify the American foreign policy measures toward the Middle East immediately after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Chapter four is devoted to analyzing both *United 93* and *The Kingdom* because the two movies are released, respectively, in 2006 and 2007. That is five to six years after the 9/11 attacks, which is the period that marked Hollywood's return to producing mass destruction movies.

The last chapter delves into the representation of Arabs and Muslims ten years after the 9/11 attacks, mainly after the death of Osama bin Laden. It attempts to throw light on Hollywood's tendency to feature and associate Muslims and Arabs with terrorism in movies. The chapter is set to textually analyze two recent and most offensive movies *Zero Dark Thirty* which is based on firsthand accounts of the actual events that feature the story of America's worldwide decade-long manhunt for the world's most dangerous man and the mastermind behind the 9/11 attacks, Osama bin Laden; and *13 Hours: The Secret Soldiers of Benghazi* that tells the story of a real-life event of September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2012 when the United States Ambassador's compound in Benghazi, Libya came under a horrific attack resulting in the death of four Americans including the American Ambassador, Christopher Stevens. Through the content analysis of the aforementioned movies, the chapter stimulates the future scholars

to look with a more critical eye into the cinematic production and investigate future portrayal of Arabs and Muslims on the silver screen. The thesis ends with a conclusion that discusses the major findings in this study.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **From Orientalism to Islamophobia: Early and Contemporary Constructions of the Muslim World**

Arabs and Muslims have been regularly prone to stereotypical representation in Western intellectual scholarships and media discourses. The projection of this distinctive social group in the world of moving picture has constantly been inexplicably negative. For over fourteen hundred years, Western intellectual scholarships and media discourses portrayed Arabs and Muslims on the basis of inherited visions from the early classical Orientalism accounts. Early Orientalism accounts were self-centric, one-dimensional, and subjective. The Orient exists only in a sense as the West knows it. Western consistent domination of the knowledge about the Islamic Orient attempted to eliminate the existence of Islamic civilization. Edward Said's postcolonial theory "Orientalism" provides an important starting point for questioning how the American motion picture industry, mainly Hollywood, displays images of Arabs and Muslims through its cinematic production. He claims that there are different forms of Orientalism and different experiences with the Orient. Therefore, understanding the motivations and nature of bigotry representation of Arabs and Muslims in Western discourses and Hollywood production requires addressing Orientalism as a theoretical framework and accounting for its principal tenets.

#### **1.1. Western Conceptions of the Orient**

Various definitions, meanings, and conceptions were attributed to the Orient and Orientalism. The latter, as defined by Edward Said, a celebrated American academic from Columbia University, is a system of knowledge that has approached Islam and Muslims as a subject of study since the European old age of colonization and expansion (*Orientalism* 235-7). As a postcolonial theory, Orientalism was first introduced by Said in his seminal book

*Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* published in 1970s post-colonial world. It is regarded as a theoretical approach to the study of Islam and Muslims' representation in western's academic, intellectual, as well as mainstream media discourses. It poses constraints on academic experts dealing with the Islamic Orient,<sup>1</sup> and was used to construct and define the Islamic Orient as an essentialized, a derogatory, and a reduced monolithic entity. The concept Orientalism is closely linked to the imaginative existence of the Orient and it is vital to help explain the peculiar construction of the Muslim world in modern-day Hollywood cinematic production.<sup>2</sup>

As a distinct system of thought Westerners employed to approach Islam and Muslims, Orientalism places an emphasis on the stationary divergences that detach the West from the Orient, and the intimate relation that ties power and discourse, as the primary ingredient used to construct Western Orientalist scholarships. In *Orientalism*, Said defines Orientalism in three different pursuits that he argues are independent. Orientalism is an academic discipline that emerged during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries through which Western intellectuals approached the Orient and its inhabitants as a sort of a topic of learning, discovery and practice; it is a style of thought that is founded on the distinction between the Orient and the Occident; and a corporate institution used to allow Western domination of the Islamic Orient (*Orientalism* 73). Scholar Elzain Elgamri on her part defines Orientalism as “a discursive formation, or a field constituted through the operation of several discourses, in the sense that it does not simply reflect “real” distinctions between people, but creates them” (48). The British scholar Ziauddin Sardar, also, defines Orientalism as “the product of incremental, progressively more impartial, neutral, rational body of enquiry and learning” (13).

The distinction that is based on the Western cultural hegemony and superiority over the non-Western cultures led to the creation of the negative framework of critical rejection of the ‘Other’ as unfamiliar and dangerous, and to the emerging of the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ thinking in

Western discourse. To Orientalists, the Orient has been a place of wonder and exotic being that is inhabited overwhelmingly by primitive, cruel, and unjust people, the Orientals. The Orient was associated with backwardness, despotism, decadence, violence, inferiority, and eternity. In his book *Orientalism: Concepts in the Social Sciences*, Sardar defines the Orient as the land which is located to the east of the West, a place that invites Western imagination (1), while Said believes that the Orient that appears in Orientalism is simply a framework of representations which helped to bring the Orient into Western consciousness and empire (203).

There have been a number of efforts to locate the origins of Orientalist imaginaries in regard to the Muslim world in the European history. In fact, the initial Western studies of the Orient concentrated on its distinctive multiplicity. The Orient includes lands and inhabitants with different and nothing in common with in terms of cultures, languages or traditions. Orientalist academic experts used to make generalizations when dealing with the Orient despite its diversity. Yet, gradually, and by dint of the long history of religious and cultural rivalry that the West had with its neighbor the Muslim world, Orientalist scholars placed more emphasis on Islam and the Muslim societies. In effect, the original site of Western desire toward the Orient was Islam. The British sociologist, Bryan S. Turner, attributed early Orientalists' interest in Islam to the theological and historical ties that Islam has to the West (*Orientalism, Postmodernism, and Globalism* 38).

For centuries, Islam threatened the existence of Christianity through conquering and holding for long European lands that were inhabited overwhelmingly by Christians, especially during the Ottoman Empire expansion in Europe. During the seventh and eighth centuries, the armies of Muslim rulers posed a genuine threat to most European states. As Islam was aggressively expanding in Europe, European lands came under the Islamic power and were highly dominated by Muslims. Under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, in particular, several

European nations faced the threat of being possibly colonized and dominated by Muslims. Such a threat was hardly underestimated in Europe. Historian Zachary Lockman agreed that Islam has always been perceived as a threat to Christianity in the West. He found that the very earlier interest by Western church scholars in studying the religion of Islam and Muslims was “motivated by the kind of know your enemy attitude” (29). To Said, the Islamic Orient was the only real obstacle and unresolved challenge to Western Crusaders and expansion in the East. It was provocative in the way it is situated in the heart of the Biblical lands and lays very near to Europe geographically and to Christianity culturally. He argues that Islam that once exceeded Rome and threatened the existence of Christianity can never be easily erased from the minds of Europeans. For most of the Middle ages and during the early part of the renaissance in Europe, the demonic religion Islam seemed to never has submitted completely to the West (*Orientalism* 74; *Covering Islam* 5).

Western knowledge of the Islamic Orient was motivated by the deeply held fear of Islam which is, indeed, regarded as the leading motive behind the increased Western interest in the Islamic Orient. This fear of Islam has never been overcome; it remained latent despite the decline of the Muslim worldly power. The British Orientalist Historian Albert Hourani sees that fear and horror were the main reasons behind Western ignorance and prejudice toward Islam and Muslims (22). The stereotypical representation of Islam and Muslims in Western discourses and entertainment production is influenced to a large extent by the so-called ‘early Orientalist discourse’ which is the result of the deeply held anxiety, loathing, and awe of Islam on the part of westerners. The Islamic civilization power and worldly wealth, since the seventh century, has aroused suspicion and engendered series of radical distorted images of Islam and Muslims in Western discourses. Hourani attributes the present day turbulent relationship of both sides toward each other to the historical expansion of both sides on each other, which had generated an atmosphere of suspicion and antagonism (20). The

bellicose relationship between Islam and the West resulted in the proliferation of narratives that painted Islam in a dark color for Westerners. Most of the pejorative visions of the Orient were allegedly influenced, to a large extent, by three main factors, namely, the Middle Ages European long internment, Western lack of contact with the region they labeled the 'Orient', and the absence of knowledge concerning the world outside in general and the Orient in particular (Elgamri 14).

In response to the cultural superiority of Muslims, and the overwhelming, absolute power of the Islamic culture, Muslims were derogated and presented as irrational, vicious, fanatical killers, unjust, and fond of beheading in Western academic, art, and literature writings. Scholar David J. Vitkus found that the denial or the dehumanization of Islam and its adherents is "a long and deeply rooted tradition in the West \_spanning the centuries, from the early Medieval period to the end of the twentieth century" (208). As soon as the West grew superior by the nineteenth century, the escalation of the West's economic, political, as well as cultural interests all over the world allowed for the encounter and contact with the Islamic Orient to expand. The economic, religious, and power rivalries became the driving motives behind Western interest in the Orient. Sardar believes that it was the power and wealth of the Islamic Orient that gave rise to Orientalism, acknowledging that much of the origins and history of Orientalism can be traced in the early encounters of Christendom and its closest neighbor, Islam (2).

The European exploration of the Islamic Orient was accompanied by highly educated experts appointed by European imperial governments for a sole mission of bringing the Orient fully to the West. With such explorations, began to grow the body of Orientalist literature that described the Orient through the eyes of early European colonialist. The Orientalist knowledge of the Orient, however, took the inherited Medieval, classical, religious sources, mythology, and travelers' tales understanding of Islam and Muslims as a foundation (Hall and

Gieben 298; Vitkus 207-226). Basically, the West has developed its vision of the Orient as an exotic and erotic place where mysteries reside and barbaric scenes are viewed upon its very first encounter with Islam. Early encounters and confrontations provided the myths which sustain mutual stereotypes, images, and apprehension that continue to fire fears and biases and perpetuate a vision of Islam against the West and of the West against Islam (Esposito 24). This knowledge was considered true and used as the only source of understanding, or in fact misunderstanding, of the Islamic civilization by early Europeans given the lack of interest and knowledge about Islam and Muslims.

This early knowledge was emphatically encouraged during the movement of colonialism. Geo-political Orientalism facilitated knowing the Orient, its inhabitants, and the Oriental mind and provided the means to ease its domination and control. Although the imperial age did contribute to constructing extensive traditions, perceptions, and renovations to approach Islam and Muslims, it is alleged that the Medieval images of Islam and Muslims as the 'Other', which can be traced in great Orientalist works, such as those of Dante Alighieri, Peter the Venerable, and Guibert of Nogent among others, formed the framework for Western scrutiny of the Orient and Orientals. In fact, Medieval ages' conceptions dominated and never lost a bit of influence on Western thinking and consciousness with regard to Islam and Muslims even following the growth of universal intellectual curiosity in post-Medieval Europe (Elgamri 36). The influence of the Medieval ages prejudice and system of thought is still more visible in the works presented by post-Medieval scholars.

## **1.2. Early and Modern Constructions of the Islamic Orient**

Said was among the very few scholars who dared to criticize Western intellectuals for being Orientalists and was the first to compose a comprehensive scrutiny of Western media construction and portrayal of Islam and Muslims in his works. With his classic *Orientalism*, he provided insights into the power of discourse that defined the Orient in binary opposition



to the Occident while being reduced and downgraded to inferiority, and offered historical insights onto the representations of Islam and Muslims in Western discourses. *Orientalism*, which is considered the most paramount precursor and the most reliable postcolonial scholarly work in the field, revolutionized the study of the Muslim world and facilitated the construct of an entire new field of study namely, the postcolonial theory (Jhally 1:40-1:46).

Though the book was the most authoritative scholarship in the field, since its publication a period of debate and wealth of interest in the subject of Muslims and Islam representation in Western discourses began. The Irish writer Fred Halliday articulated “under the influence of Said’s critique, a range of work has been produced which has viewed academic and other writing on the region as variously, Eurocentric, imperialist, racist, essentialist, and so forth” (199). *Orientalism* has received wide approval and harsh criticism from experts and scholars. A number of scholars, to name Halliday and Turner among other, questioned the survival of Said’s Orientalism theory amidst present day globalization. Nevertheless, what Said captured in his writings became the essence of what we nowadays know as Orientalism. Later, Middle Eastern scholars to name; Homi Bhabha, Zaiuddin Sardar, and Ali Behdad sought respectfully to extend on his book, each in his very different way.

Bhabha considers Said an important figure in colonial discourse analysis and postcolonial theory. In *The Location of Culture*, he sought to extend Said’s analysis in *Orientalism* which he deemed central to colonial discourse analysis. He focused on the way Orientalism became a tool of colonial administrations and imperial will and power over the Orient. Sardar, on his part, in *Orientalism: Concepts in the Social Sciences*, argued that Orientalism was transformed through time and place and was reinvented to cope with the present day circumstances. He agreed with Said that modern day Western thinkers are still influenced by Medieval and Enlightenment style of thought toward Islam and Muslims.

Douglas Little in *American Orientalism; The United States and the Middle East Since 1945*, promoted *Orientalism* and suggested that the American contemporary representation of Islam, Muslims, and Middle East can only be understood within American Orientalism which is related to American interests in the region. While Michael Haldrup, Lasse Koefoed and Kristen Simonsen took up the concept Orientalism and developed it into “*Practical Orientalism*”, the basic assumption refers to the way Western process of ‘Othering’ and the construction of imaginings and stereotypes are folded into practices of hatred, discrimination, disintegration, and profiling of Islam and Muslims in everyday Western discourses and daily experiences.

Said’s main target in *Orientalism* was to show his readers that the West tends to view the whole Muslim world through a lens that distorts the Islamic Orient reality, a lens that he named Orientalism. According to him, Orientalism is a framework that is used by the whole West to provide an understanding of the unfamiliar and strange ‘Other’, and make the people of the Middle East, or Orientals, appear as different and threatening (Jhally 3:09-3:14). His book, not only created a postcolonial theory for the first time in the twentieth century, but also provided a theoretical framework for understanding the production of knowledge about Islam and Muslims, and mainly, the process in which this knowledge or discursive practices constructed the Islamic Orient’s representation in the Western world. In so doing, he set the frame for future works and analysis of Islam and Muslims’ representation in Western discourses and provided an important starting point for questioning Western thinking and portrayal of Islam, Arabs, and Muslims in contemporary American mainstream media discourses. *Orientalism* was critical to the knowledge Western hegemonic nations have accumulated of the Islamic Orient and Orientals in past decades, and to the way this knowledge set a framework of reference for European academic experts that is still evoked whenever the Orient is in question.

As one of the very early scholars to address the Western representation of Islam and Muslims, Said posits that West-East relationship is based on power. Through his study of a multitude of academic texts released from early post-enlightenment Europe to modern day (a point when he finished his work in the 1970's), he observed the way in which Western scholarly works were conducted within an imbalanced relationship of power between the West and the Islamic Orient, and how this power-based relationship was instrumental in ensuring Western construction of ethnocentric discourses of the Islamic Orient. Despite critiques and the claimed limitations posed on Orientalism as a theory in contemporary globalization, Orientalism remained constant when its principal tenets were and are still transformed across time and space. It was capable of reformulating itself into new distinctive ways to cope with modern variants in post-Cold War world order and post-9/11 incident.

### **1.2.1. Early Orientalism: European Imperial Domination of the Islamic Orient**

Once the West established and adopted Orientalism as a system of knowledge about the Muslim societies. The Islamic Orient became stereotyped as an inferior fanatical and socially repressive monolithic entity representing fear and destructive 'Other', with irrational and cruel adherents associated with despotism, backwardness and impoverishment (Kabbani 18). For decades, Orientalists constructed a huge unenthusiastic, detrimental archive of information on the characteristics and traits of the Islamic Orient and Orientals as they were experienced through direct encounter or imagined, understood, interpreted, and presented in accordance with previous Orientalists works. European institutions, experts, writers, novelists, poets, and scholars to name Gustave Flaubert, Gérard de Nerval, Johann Goethe, Richard Burton, and Louis Massignon among others imagined and refined the Orient. Yet, the weighty question that comes to one's mind is the extent to which their knowledge reflects the real Islamic Orient taking into account the long history of animosity and antagonism that characterized the relationship between the West and its neighbor the Muslim world. In

*Formations of Modernity*, Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben argued that the vast archive of knowledge which created the Islamic Orient as a subject of knowledge was collected and arranged together on the basis of an array of values and ideas displayed by European Orientalists to identify and attribute the Orient, its societies, and Orientals with certain characteristics and traits on the basis of stationary divergences between the Occident and the Orient (297).

Western physical domination of the Muslim world spawned binary representations between the West and the Islamic Orient, Muslims and Christians, Arabs and Europeans, and lately Arabs/Muslims and Americans. The American philosopher George Yancy in his book *Colonial Gazing: The Production of the Body as 'Other'* provided an understanding for the proliferation of binary representation in Western contemporary discourses about Islam and Muslims, as he referred to the emergence of this sort of representation between the colonizer and the colonial during the age of colonialism, he wrote:

Colonial invasive powers bring with them their own myths, beliefs, and forms of colonial ordering which create a bifurcated form of hierarchy that is designed to distinguish between the natives and the colonizers, a form of hierarchy where the colonizer (white, good, intelligent, ethical, beautiful, civilized) is superior in all things, while the native (dark, exotic, sexually uncontrollable, bad, stupid, ugly, savage, backward) is inferior. (4)

It would be conventional to say that colonialism brought generalizations and racial separation between Westerners and Orientals that continue to shape contemporary Western views of and attitude toward Arabs and Muslims.

By the same token, Western colonial expansion reasserted the West's superiority and supremacy over the reduced Orient. The main purpose behind the colonizer's discourse is to

define the colonized as non-Western degenerate and extremely different portions of mankind on the basis of racial and ethnic origins to justify the conquest and establish white supremacy. Knowledge and analysis of the Islamic Orient and Orientals during the age of colonialism were carried within a context in which the supremacy of Western civilization was unquestioned, and was closely linked to that firm desire to dominate the Islamic Orient out of fear. Oriental societies, thereby, were reduced to object of colonial discourse of knowledge and power the basis of which is fear and the desire to control the 'Other'.

Understanding the motives behind the rise of stereotypical images of Islam and Muslims in the past and their proliferation in today's Western discourses and mainly American motion picture industry might stand on the answering of two obvious questions: How and why did Orientalism develop? And what is the nature of the Orientalist knowledge? Said states that Orientalism was developed as a systematic discipline to deal with the Orient. He explains without studying Orientalism as a discursive formation one cannot probably arrive to better understand the enormously created discipline used by Western cultures to produce the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively in the post-enlightenment period (5).

*Orientalism* reveals the intimate nexus that ties knowledge and power. Western societies dress themselves in the mantle of knowledge which is linked to power; such knowledge constructed and dominated the Orient and Orientals in the course of knowing them. Said used the French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault's 'theory of discourse', that focuses on the link between discourse, knowledge, and power, as a theoretical framework to best view Orientalism as a manifestation of power and knowledge, which makes the core of his argument in *Orientalism*. The use of Foucault's theory is necessary to provide an understanding of the way knowledge of the Islamic Orient is produced in the West. However, to say that the Islamic Orient was a Western creation blurs the existence of the Islamic

civilization prior to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a period when Orientalists brought the Islamic world fully to the West. Europe has created a world after its own image, whether we like it or not, the European power during the nineteenth century allowed for the West to define the Orient the way it wanted to see it, creating in the process a set of images and knowledge about it that Said labeled Orientalism. Indeed, the power to define the reality of others is a form of domination, which has played a crucial role in the history of colonialism (Miike 113).

The theory of discourse holds that discourse is inextricably associated with power, and those who hold the power, hold the truth, as well as, the ability to speak on the behalf of all others who are powerless and weak. In writing about the French peasantry of 1850s, Karl Marx stated, “they cannot represent themselves; they must be represented” (133), his statement can also be applied here to describe how Orientalists defended their constructed knowledge of the Orient and Orientals. Orientalists believe to have better knowledge and understanding of the Orientals than the latter themselves. This was the very spiritual moral power that motivated the imperialists in the nineteenth century. European hegemony permitted the Western knowledge of the Orient to be naturalized to the point of scientific knowledge, which need not be proved, as it is automatically held as true. This conventional knowledge was not only used to make the Orient known as the West’s cultural ‘Other’ but also to degrade, weaken, discriminate, dominate and control the Orient and Orientals economically, politically, and even culturally. As the nineteenth century colonial era witnessed the enfeeblement of the Islamic world, the latter being silent and defeated, became submitted to being made Oriental. For this reason, Orientalism is best viewed as a power-based system of knowledge which authorized the West to know, understand, and dominate the Orient. The kind of knowledge Orientalism as a discipline produced was often used to justify and further the exertion of Western power over the exhausted Islamic Orient. Said emphasizes

“The Orient could be seen, it could be studied, it could be managed. It need not be remain a distant, marvelous, incomprehensible, and yet very rich place. It could be brought home \_or more simply, Europe could make itself at home there, as it subsequently did” (*Covering Islam* 25).

Orientalism as a discourse has accumulated the authority of academics, institutions and governments. This authority raises the Orientalist discourse to a high level of prestige and importance ensuring its identification with scientific truth. The use of Michel Foucault’s ‘theory of discourse’ demonstrates the extent to which Orientalism is, but a complex system of knowledge which enfolds creating and disseminating multitude of texts though distinct in varying degrees, they converge in producing that image of the Islamic Orient as peculiar and dangerous, ‘the Otherness’. With that being said, Western knowledge of the Islamic Orient is associated with a kind of agenda far broader than mere scholastic tradition. It is a strategic knowledge, accumulated to produce interpretations, stereotypes, and images about the colonized Muslim world with a covert target of allowing the West to manage its colonial relations with that world. In practical terms, Orientalism is the dynamic exchange between Orientalist scholars and the large political concerns of the three great empires, British, French, and American. The academic production and the artistic creations of the nineteenth century are the patronized mechanism (an ideological instrument) that the West used to serve the interests of the Western Empires (Pintak 8; Halliday 200).

*Orientalism* unfolds how the Muslim world was constructed as decadent, alien, inferior, and consistently in need of some sort of foreign guidance and tutelage, and how by virtue of being superior in terms of race, culture, and civilization, the Western world was qualified for such a role. The West has the positive force which would bring the blessings of modern civilization to the Orient. This Western produced systematic discipline, i.e. Orientalism, is not in any way innocent or objective. It set the discursive foundation for the justification of

European imperialism. It is the end-result of a process that reflects certain Western political and economic interests (Jhally 2:42-2:46).

The relationship between knowledge and power was established in *Orientalism* through analyzing the works of early European scholars with regard to Islam and Muslims, including Balfour's speech in defense for the British domination of Egypt against J.M. Roberston. Said explains that to have "such knowledge [Orientalism] of such a thing [the Orient] is to dominate it, to have authority over it. And authority here means for "us" [westerners] to deny autonomy to "it" [the Orient]" (*Orientalism* 32). When Balfour's argument is reduced to its simplest form it becomes clear, accurate, and easy to comprehend. There are Westerners, and there are Orientals, there exist no equivalent to Western knowledge of the Islamic Orient and Orientals in elsewhere but Europe. Said believes that in order to be able to produce an enormous knowledge of the Orient, Europe needs power and physical presence there to see in expert ways things that the Orientals themselves can't see (Jhally 10:24-10:34). Therefore, the West dominates and the Orient must be dominated.

Knowledge linked to power has been the very source of European predominance of the Muslim world. Foucault's 'theory of discourse' is vital to detect the relation that connects power and discourse. This theory helps to explain how the production of knowledge about the Orient permitted the West to construct its self-image as superior and hegemonic. It also contributes to providing an understanding of how historical and actual relations of inequality between the Muslim World and the West are constructed and sustained in American mainstream media and popular culture discourses. Western creation of the 'Other' as diametrically opposed and inferior to the Occident was required to highlight the pre-eminence of Western societies. Through the Orientalist discourse, the Orient has been constantly the negative 'Other' that defines "the edges and boundaries of the civilized world" (Turner, "Orientalism, or the Politics of the Text" 21). It does not actually matter whether knowledge



produced in the West truly reflects the real Orient; what matters most is that this knowledge is strong and consistent enough -at least in the minds of Westerners- to construct the Western identity as the distinctive superior and maintain its authority over the reduced Orient. European officials embraced Orientalism as a self-serving view of Orientals to constantly deal with the Orient as if it was consistently way behind the West.

To put it succinctly, early Western knowledge of the Muslim world was developed within the European imperial paradigm as a means to facilitate European domination and exploitation of the Muslim world. The vast archive of knowledge that was accumulated during the nineteenth century operated as an instrument of policy, which provided the environment for European imperial exploitation of the Islamic Orient to take place, encompassing present sorts of economic and media imperialism. It is Orientalism archive of knowledge which gave the West its power over the Orient which misses all elements and features that make of the West superior. The nineteenth century Orientalism was the expression of the dominant mood of imperialism; or rather a model for the ways in which Europe's strategies for knowing the colonized world became, at the same time, strategies for dominating it. It served as both "the external individual and collective desire to possess the Orient and the internal desire to appropriate [it]" (Sardar 2).

The point is that colonialism was more than just physical, political, or even economic domination of the Islamic Orient, rather it was active in reproducing the Muslim world through knowledge (i.e. texts, reports, records, analysis ...and so forth). This very knowledge codifies Western politics desires into academic disciplines. Thanks to Orientalism the Orient was not and will never be a free subject of thought or action. Orientalism is always involved in whichever occasion when the Orient is in question (Said, *Orientalism* 4).

The Orientalist discourse invigorated the old Medieval visions of Islam and Muslims and the 'Other based relationship' of the age of colonialism to create imaginative but

drastically polarized geography dividing the world into two different and unequal camps ‘*us* and *them*’ or ‘West and the Rest’. This radically crude division is still dominant and continues to affect not only Western discursive formation practices but also the West’s self-image as pitted against the ‘Other’, and its power-based relationship toward the rest of the world and mainly the Muslim world.

Despite the fact that modern scholars in the social science field are afforded with fresh ideas, approaches, and methods which could certainly supplant the old imperial, racial, and ideological stereotypes that thrived during the nineteenth century. Modern Orientalism took a variety of forms refining and accommodating early European Orientalism. No Orientalist managed to fend off the pressure of the old traditional Orientalism. In general terms, Orientalists were duplicating and reproducing the ideas of other early Orientalists and looked unable to rid their perceptions of Islam and Muslims from the deeply inculcated Medieval and confrontational past ideas (Elgamri 36). Within Modern Orientalism the same curtailments that were posed on early European Orientalists confined modern Orientalists. The latter were still being pressured by the outlook of their religious sources and the sense of separation experienced during the age of colonialism which eternally kept on reinforcing and reasserting their feeling of superiority.

What is so important and pervasive within modern Orientalism is the refinement of certain vital ideas about the Islamic Orient into a separate and unchallenged coherence. By the beginning of the twentieth century, it was apparent that Orientalism has set the frame on which future approaches to Islam and Muslims were to be conducted. The strength of Orientalism rests in its potentiality to construct knowledge which encompasses traits, characteristics, and stereotypes that are straightly ascribed to the Islamic Orient and Orientals and used consistently by Orientalists. Such knowledge has gained neutrality, legitimacy, and seemed to have “epistemological status equal to that of historical chronology or geographical

location” (Said, *Orientalism* 205); it is unquestionably a system of interpretations and representations, or mainly “a regime of truth, that is structurally similar to realism” (Bhabha 71).

*Orientalism* provides a wide understanding for the evolution of Orientalism and the changes that it has undertaken to cope with the modern world (the 1970’s a point when said finished his work). Drawing certainly on Gramsci’s ‘hegemony theory’,<sup>3</sup> Said explained how the inner consistency of Orientalism was, by all means, retained through the hegemonic influence of Western culture that created the Orient and “acted dynamically along with brute political, economic, and military rationales” (*Orientalism* 12). What is meant by culture in Said’s main line of argument is the huge body of artistic creations and academic production, which incorporate the intact set of intellectual and literature works that were used by the European hegemonic nations to construct the Orient and provide the means to dominate over it. His main objective was to encourage his readers’ awareness about the huge power of the Western cultural richness linked to large political concerns.

During the nineteenth century the rules of Orientalism as a discipline defined the kind of knowledge that was gained from it. Several Western writers, novelists, poets, experts, and intellectuals have time-honored the essential notion of Western superiority *vis-à-vis* the Orient’s inferiority and the infinite division that alienated the Orient from the Occident. Orientalists will continue to use these notions as a starting point for their works with regard to the Islamic Orient, because just like learning and scholarships move forward and get better, later generations of academic experts improve upon earlier ones and have “very healthy respect for what others have done before it” (*Orientalism* 202).

The unity and the persistence of Orientalism as a school of interpretation and an archive of knowledge are prized for its mutual references which made of it a part of Western culture. Early European Orientalists have laid the foundation of modern Islamic studies on which

future generation of scholars would definitely build. Orientalist intellectuals always have a shared sense of such thing called the 'Other', because over decades Orientalism flourished into a highly fortified institution with a unique system of teaching that enables the passing of the torch from a teacher to a student. This very reason permitted later generation of scholars to absorb the biases and prejudices that went back centuries. For instance, the written material produced in the centuries when Europeans fought long wars against Muslims are embedded in the classic works of Orientalist scholars to name, Dante, Voltaire, and Delacroix among others. No doubt, their continued consumption by post-enlightenment generations maintained a world view of Muslims as essentially aggressive, lustful, and barbaric.

Orientalism, transmitted from one generation to another, survived the world's changes being based on religious, cultural, and distance separation from the 'Other'. Modern-day huge process of globalization and migration probe the extent to which 'classical Orientalism' is bursting itself and being maintained as useful. As the world became more connected than ever during the twentieth century due to recent processes of globalization and migration, it is vital to reassess how the Orientalist discourse may have changed and adapted to the new world. Following the movement of independence that swept the Orient by the second half of the twentieth century, scholars disagreed over the future of Orientalism. Turner argued that the decolonization of the Islamic Orient engendered "a weaker and more hesitant pattern of Orientalist assumptions" ("Orientalism, or the Politics of the Text" 27), while Halliday refuted the argument that Orientalism is limited when it is utilized in the context of contemporary globalization, arguing that Orientalism should not lose its validity just because it was created within a context of imperialism and capitalism as a regime to maintain European authority over its colonies (211). Said, on his part, articulated that the Oriental studies took on a new form as "instruments of national policy toward the newly independent nations of the postcolonial world" in which the Orientalists became not only the guide of a

new generation of scholars but also of policymakers (*Orientalism* 252). Similarly, scholar Masao Miyoshi believes that the intimate connection that characterized the relationship between the colony and its colonizer was and is still marked through a more covert structure of economic, cultural, and intellectual imperialism despite the fact that former physical and political colonialism has been brought to its end (80).

### **1.2.2. American Orientalism: The Middle East in the Mind of America**

The Orientalism, American style grew in importance during the Cold War and post-Cold War era. Expectedly, Americans had a very much similar perception of Islam and Muslims to that held by Europeans. The early American encounter with the Barbary pirates in the Mediterranean Sea spread Orientalist visions that confirmed the old European stereotyped images of Muslims (Vitkus 220; Little 12). However, during the age of increased European cultural hegemony, the American Orientalism was but a mere drop into the wide ocean of European hegemonic knowledge of the Orient. It is by the second half of the twentieth century, in particular, following the end of the Second World War that the United States found itself in a position of dominance and hegemony that was previously held by Britain and France.

Culturally speaking, there was no kind of real interest or a real distinct place for Islam and Islamic studies in the United States before the Second World War. Very few Americans knew about the Muslim world and its history, cultures, people, and languages. Essentially, the United States has had no kind of real interest in the Middle East. The Islamic Orient was completely neglected and continuously downgraded and treated as if it was a dead region, unchanging, and eternal (Lockman 121). With the dismemberment of Empires and the power shift from Europe to America following the Second World War, Orientalism metamorphosed into a new form. Owing to the fact that Orientalism discourse has a continuing actuality that keeps on finding different forms of expression according to its location, the emergence of the

United States as the new leading power allowed for the geographical shift in the source of Orientalism. Thus, something very much like European Orientalism seems subconsciously to have shaped American popular attitudes and foreign policies toward the Muslim world (Little 10).

Actually, Americans' very early interest in the Islamic Orient was made visible in the late 1940s, with the signing of the famous oil-for-protection arrangement with King Abdulaziz Ibn Saud in 1945, the American recognition of the Jewish settlement in Palestine as a state in 1948, and the rising threat of Communism 'the red menace'<sup>4</sup> coupled by the American deepening involvement in the Middle East. The American manifest lack of knowledge and ignorance of the Orient placed the nation in a severe drawback, mainly during the Cold War years, which entailed the American federal government to enlarge its pool of expertise in the region and to beef up its knowledge of the Muslim world. A handful of foundations, associations, and institutions with specialized social scientists, commentators, observers and experts were established in the United States during the Cold War years for the aim of promoting the study of the Middle East. The emergence and development of Middle East studies as an academic field in the United States was closely related to the emergence of the nation as a global superpower and its deepening involvement in the Muslim world. By the 1960s, the newly formed quasi-governmental body of American Middle East institutions were headed and directed by European-born academic experts, who migrated to the United States for the weighty task of informing the American public about the Muslim world, and benefiting the American foreign policymakers and academia from the enormous European expertise on the region.

The American geopolitical ascendancy necessitated the building of a much stronger national identity, and the acquisition of a leading position that would be appropriate for the new rising power, and the best way to do so, was through the portrayal of foreign nations. The

American historian Douglas Little acknowledged that once the British Orientalist attitude made its way into the American government by the late 1940s, the Orientalist worldview of the Middle East invaded the American society and movie screens. Thus from then until fairly recently, most Americans relied on “a well-defined hierarchy of race and culture in dealing with foreigners who looked and prayed differently” (Little 11-41).

The question of American Orientalism is dealt with by Little in his influential book *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945*. Little demonstrated that the American interest in the Islamic Orient was very often linked to a number of factors, namely oil companies and suppliers, the American special relationship with Israel, and the threat of Soviet Communism. As a matter of course, American Orientalism approached the Islamic Orient as an important arena for the Cold War and as an oil wealthy region vital for keeping the wheel of American industry moving. The American officials and academic experts offered the Orient region great interest and importance for the immense economic, political, and military interests. In a similar vein, Said explained the origins of American Orientalism arguing that it flowed from the post-Second World War government’s sudden interest in the non-Western world because by that time the United States was preparing for its new post-Second World War imperial role, and the subsequent ideological conflict the United States fought against Soviet Communism (*Orientalism* 266).

European Orientalism was brought to the United States with the migration of European intellectual scholars to America following the Second World War. Though such scholars, to name Lebanese Philip Hitti, British H. A. R. Gibb, German Joseph Schacht, and Austrian Gustave Von Grunbaum, did not have the same “cultural prestige enjoyed by Jacques Berque in France and Albert Hourani in England” (Said, *Covering Islam* 14) yet, they became leading professors on Oriental studies in American universities such as Harvard, Chicago, Columbia, and Princeton respectively, and had produced solid Orientalist works which made the same

reductive, eliminative, essentialized, and negative generalizations about Islam and Muslims in America (Said, *Orientalism* 297). The associate Professor Matthew F. Jacobs describes these European prominent intellectual immigrant figures as an “informal network” of experts, who “shared professional and policy-oriented interest in the Middle East and sought to convey a sense of the region’s role in broader conception of international politics” (4). Huge efforts were made in the United States by these social scientists, he adds, “to educate American audience about the allegedly inherent character traits of “Arab” and “Moslems”” (10).

Even if that is the case, though the American Orientalism that flourished by the end of the Second World War did not enjoy the same cultural prestige associated with the European version, it was a mere reformulation of the old. By the second half of the twentieth century, a vast interest hooked up evidently all different parts of the old European colonial world with the United States, and allowed for the huge material of knowledge previously collected in Europe to be released in a new form in America. Nonetheless, the fear of Islam continued to fuel Western scrutiny and inspection of the Muslim world. American burst of interest in Oriental studies aimed to protect the national security from the potential threat of the oil rich Orient, especially following certain events such as the Arab-Israeli war, the Oil Embargo crisis, and the Iranian Revolution which were seen as direct challenges to America, and had considerably facilitated the erroneous connection of Islam and Muslims with danger and terrorism. This fear of the Islamic threat became more pervasive by the end of the twentieth century. Western societies saw that Islam had returned in a more militant form, they labeled the ‘revival of fundamentalism’. After the collapse of Communism, Islam emerged as the new global monolithic enemy number one in the Western world (Sardar 81). During that period it was very difficult for most Americans to accumulate knowledge about the Muslim world that might not be infected or influenced by the politics and terror incidence.



In dealing with the Muslim world, the old cultural racial theories which contributed to valuing Europe and raising the European race to rule over non European portions of mankind, such as 'Darwinist theory' find their way into American Orientalism and continue to draw "boundaries between human beings" (Said, *Orientalism* 232-233). Though these boundaries have never been definitive, it allowed no chance for the 'Other' to try and rise above its fate of being from a lower origin. Maintaining such theories in American Orientalism allowed the irreducible distance between the West and the 'Other' to be sustained by means of simple racial prejudice. American Orientalism is based on the same assumption of moral and cultural superiority over the Oriental 'Other' and it further weakened, lowered, and dehumanized the Orient and Orientals, confirming that Islam can only be approached through the crudest thinking of the 'us versus them'. Therefore, Muslims not only continue to appear as uncivilized and exotic but also as terrorists in American intellectual and media discourses.

Although American Orientalism allowed for the use of highly sophisticated-appearing social science techniques and the release of new books and articles on Islam and the Islamic Orient, they offered no real alternative from the old visions and views of the Medieval, Middle Age, and Renaissance eras. Under American Orientalism, the old strain of European Orientalism reappeared in blatantly naked forms. Islam was nothing more than a reasserted vision of the old. The Islamic Orient is projected as frail incapable of appreciating, understanding or, even defining itself. It is something that ought to be feared and must be controlled and brought under Western tutelage either by knowledge, modernization (which comes through westernization), appeasement or domination if it is needed. Such knowledge was needed to maintain the authority of the West and its unchanging ideas about Islam and Muslims.

The European and American cultural industry that was built on the negation of the Muslim world has, for centuries, shaped the Western discourse toward Islam and Muslims.

European Orientalism and its modern variant in America have continuously essentialized, derogated, generalized, and downgraded the Muslim world through producing various malignant images and shaping perceptions that affected the public's images in mind of Islam. Even so, it is important to draw attention to the various nuances that exist between the European and American Orientalism because both of them were decidedly two distinctive Western experiences with the Muslim world. Unlike European Orientalism that was created during the age of colonialism as a system of knowledge based on real contact and direct experiences with the Islamic world for Britain and France had colonies in the Orient, Americans have had a very limited relation with the Muslim world and Muslims before the Second World War. There has never been a full American presence in the Muslim world. Therefore, American Orientalism is allegedly less direct and "much more based on abstractions", media, and political rhetoric. Indeed, it is more politicized due to the presence of 'Israel' the American major ally in the Middle East region (Jhally 11:56-12:16), which is portrayed as an integral part of the West, or mainly, as a self-declared Western country and the only democratic nation amidst the cruel barbaric Muslim world.

Interestingly, Americans for years before to 1960s had very limited knowledge of Islam and Muslims. The overwhelming majority of American population barely knew about Islam and Muslims through school texts which might have referred to this distinctive social group during the Crusades and the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Empire. Besides, Islamic studies, as a field of knowledge in American universities, were not encouraged like in Europe. For better or for worse, Americans used the mass media to accumulate their knowledge about Islam and Muslims. American media, and mainly entertainment media, were the main source of information about religion for young Americans and played a dominant role in informing the general public about the traits and characteristic of Muslims (Douglass and Dunn 87). Hollywood movie industry in the post-Second World War, and mainly following the 1970s,

not only provided stereotypical representations of the Muslim world and Muslims but also revealed the new leading role and responsibilities of the United States. While through the American media, the label Islam is a reference to everything unpleasant, such as terrorism, cruelty, and underdevelopment, the United States appears as a leading power with a benevolent role and responsibilities on the world stage. Hollywood constantly emphasized the demonized figure of Islam by associating it with violence and irrationality.

Another characteristic of American Orientalism is the avoidance of Oriental literature and art. What seemed to matter most for American social scientists was the study of “facts” rather than the Orient’s art, language, or the literature texts. The evasion of the Orient’s literature was aimed to reduce the modern American awareness of the Islamic Orient and Arabs and keep the region theoretically weakened, dehumanized, and reduced to mere “attitudes”, “trends”, and statistics (Said, *Orientalism* 292). American Orientalist experts on Islam have approached the Islamic religion and its cultures and adherents with an ideological framework imbued with passion, defensive prejudice, and abhorrence (Said, *Covering Islam* 8). Thereby, it is more accurate to say that the representation of Islam and Muslims in American media bears to a large extent a chilling resemblance to the nineteenth century British and French hegemonic cultural and knowledge authority over the reduced Islamic Orient. American Orientalism carries within itself the imprint of classical European Orientalism and the same stamp of a problematic attitude toward Islam. The parallel between the European and American knowledge is obvious; the desire to dominate over the Muslim world politically, economically, and culturally.

### **1.2.3. Neo-Orientalism: The Construction of the Muslim Threat**

Orientalism has remained persistent as its common features are transformed across time, space, and history. It became a “self-perpetuating and closed tradition which aggressively resisted all internal and external criticism: an authoritarian system that is flourishing as much

today as it ever did in colonial times” (Sardar 5). Following the 9/11 attacks, things seemed to have shifted considerably in the Western world. No doubt, various features of classical Orientalism continue to inform and influence the narratives of the contemporary Muslim world, but much has changed.

During the first decade of the twenty-first century, a new phenomenon emerged known as ‘neo-Orientalism’. Ali Behdad and Juliet A. Williams had provided insights into the changes that have occurred to classical Orientalism in contemporary world. They argued that they used the term ‘neo-Orientalism’ to describe the contemporary variant of Orientalism instead of ‘new Orientalism’ in order to signal the continuity within the classical Orientalism introduced by Said in his seminal book *Orientalism*. Neo-Orientalism, as presented by Behdad and Williams, claims to mark the shift in the discourse of classical Orientalism through engendering “new tropes of Othering” and entailing “a popular mode of representing, a kind of doxa about Middle East and Muslims which is disseminated, thanks to new technologies of communication, throughout the world” (284). However, neo-Orientalism still contains the same discursive repetitions and conceptual continuities, they wrote “like its classical counterpart, [...], neo-Orientalism is monolithic, totalizing, reliant on binary logic, and based on an assumption of moral and cultural superiority over the Oriental Other” (284). That is to say, neo-Orientalism is the new form of Orientalism.

Neo-Orientalism can also be defined as the raising sensation of anxiety, discomfort, fear, and hatred toward Islam and Muslims and anything that deals with them in the twenty-first century. Scholar Salim Kerboua attributed this raising feeling of apprehension to the rise of ‘Islamic fundamentalism’ and the extremist movements acting in the name of Islam (22). In fact, neo-Orientalism is the result of the misfortunate September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. In the years that followed 9/11 attacks, the United States was engaged in what is known as the war on terror campaign. Indeed, the onset of neo-

Orientalism was made when President Bush described the American war on terrorism as the new crusade on Sept. 16<sup>th</sup>, 2001 (“Remarks by the President upon Arrival”). The war on terror campaign soon turned into what the British historian Bernard Lewis and later the American political scientist Samuel Huntington called the ‘clash of civilizations’. Thus, neo-Orientalism, as a modern variant of classical Orientalism, operates within the ‘clash of civilizations’ thesis. Within which neo-Orientalists, just like classical Orientalists, believe in the difference in culture and civilization between the West and Islam. Huntington highlights these differences arguing:

Islam and China embody great cultural traditions very different from and in their eyes infinitely superior to that of the West. The power and assertiveness of both in relation to the West are increasing, and conflicts between their values and interests and those of the West are multiplying and becoming more intense. Because Islam lacks a core state, its relations with the West vary greatly from country to country. (185)

The term of the ‘clash of civilizations’ was first introduced by Lewis before the collapse of Communism, but was later reintroduced, elaborated and argued for by Huntington, in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Huntington’s controversial article in the *Foreign Affairs* Journal “The Clash of Civilizations?” which was three years later expanded into a book he entitled *The Clash of Civilizations and the Emerging of the World Order* introduced, along prior to the 9/11 events, a theoretical framework on the way the West and its neighbor Islam would ineluctably clash along civilizational lines. His thesis posited that the refusal of a number of non-Western countries to accept Western liberal ideas in the post-Cold War years is due to the profound differences between the world’s cultures and civilizations. That is to say, the difference in culture and religion, beliefs and value systems of what is called the ‘Rest’ are at odds with Western civilization and its liberal social and political ethos.

Moreover, according to the 'clash of civilizations' theory, one of the most important developments engendered by the end of the Cold War was the rise of 'Islamic fundamentalism'. Huntington's thesis applies eloquently that Islam is a religion that stands for violence, instability, underdevelopment, and it is unable to keep up with modernization. In converse for what Islam is, Huntington puts that the West is completely the opposite which further reinforce the 'us versus them' dichotomy. The 'clash of civilizations' tended to cloud the existence of some political, economic, and social-cultural reasons behind the rise of Islamic fundamentalism while emphasizes the longstanding rivalry that characterized the relationship between Islam and the West. Neo-Orientalism looks at Islam and the Islamic resurgence from the perception of the Orientalist tradition which views Islam on the basis of stationary divergence that detach it from the West. Huntington wrote that the end of the Cold War meant a "fundamental division of humanity in terms of ethnicity, religion, and civilizations which spawned new conflicts" (66-67) that pitted the West as an entity against the rest of the world, and mainly against the Muslim world.

Kerboua argues that neo-Orientalism is carried by right-wing circle and neoconservative school of thought, with special relationship to Israel (22). For centuries before the 9/11 attacks, the West perceived Islam as an existential threat to the Western civilization, cultural values, and democratic order. Since the 9/11 attacks this perception has worsened. The attacks proved Huntington's theory to be ipso facto true, as the event signaled that the clash had finally come. Neo-Orientalism dominated early post-9/11 American political and media discourses on Islam and Muslims. Neo-Orientalist production was the only means that generated distorted knowledge to dominate the Muslim world through associating it with tyranny and terror.

Within the neo-Orientalist's imagination, Muslims are presented far from being exotic, peculiar or vicious. The influence of neo-Orientalists extends beyond educating the Western

public about Islam and Muslims into the field of foreign policy strategies and international relations. Just like European Orientalism that once served the policies of European colonial powers, and American Orientalism that served to protect the American interests and justify policies toward the Middle East, neo-Orientalism serves the political hegemony and neo-colonial interests of both of Europe and America due to its wide scoop.

Neo-Orientalism, in this regard, is an ideologically motivated campaign to stereotype Muslims and Islam as a real threat to Western values and interest, and aims mainly to protect the Jewish worldview and interests. It intentionally misrepresents Islam and Muslims through imposing hegemonic and distorted visions and further reinforces the use of ‘us versus them’ thinking. Thereby, neo-Orientalism exacerbates the historical division of the world and fails to afford dispassionate understanding of the Islamic religion and its adherents. The ‘war on terror’ and the ‘clash of civilizations’ paradigm of the twenty-first century Orientalism has replaced the twentieth century ‘Cold War’ model which superseded the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries imperial Orientalism while offering no real change to the old principal dogmas of early European traditional Orientalism. Sardar sees that “The Middle Ages have continued to get a bad press in the annals of modernity” (77). Clearly, the fact that Said has addressed the principal dogmas of Orientalism reinforces the idea that Orientalist fundamental understandings and visions of the Islamic Orient are enduring and consistent through time that they might occur in very recent Western discourses in the forty years that Said has not referred to in his classic *Orientalism*.

#### **1.2.4. Islamophobia: A New Word For an Old Fear of the Other**

The term ‘Islamophobia’ was first used in print in the 1990s. Though there is no overarching definition for the term in place, it is defined in the Runnymede Trust Report <sup>5</sup> as the “unfounded hostility toward Islam, and therefore fear or dislike of all or most Muslims” (4). The term has been coined because anti-Muslim sentiments in the Western world has

grown so rapidly and that a new term is needed so that to describe the recent shift in racist ideas from those based on skin color to others based on the notion of Western superiority and Otherness. A recent definition is offered by the Center for American Progress<sup>6</sup> Fear, Inc. as “an exaggerated fear, hatred, and hostility toward Islam and Muslims that is perpetuated by negative stereotypes resulting in bias, discrimination, and the marginalization and exclusion of Muslims from America’s social, political, and civil life” (9). The term Islamophobia is characterized by the belief that all Muslims are religious fanatics, have deep-seated hatred to the West and non-Muslims, and that they entirely reject equality, tolerance, and democracy (Sajid 1).

Islamophobia is best viewed as a new form of racism based on white supremacy (Love 85) within which Muslims, as a religious group, are constructed as a race. A set of harmful, malevolent presumptions are made about the entire group to damage and deride its members. The manifestation of anti-Muslim animus can be seen to include not only verbal and physical assaults on Muslims and all other perceived to be Muslim in public space, but also discrimination in employment and in the provision of health services. It can be manifest through the widespread of prejudiced and negative stereotypes and detriment remarks in everyday discourse in the media and in political rhetoric both in Europe and America.

The 9/11 attacks and the immediate days that followed produced strong feelings among non-Muslims throughout the Western world. Allegedly, one of the most important factors that contributed to fanning the flames of Islamophobia in the West is the rise of the ‘Islamic militancy’ and the huge media coverage devoted to Muslim terrorism. The political practices of the Western nations have contributed to painting several Muslim countries as the enemy in the eye of westerners. Many non-Muslims make sweeping generalizations and mistakenly assume that all Muslims are religiously fanatic, extremists or Islamists. In the United States, Islamophobia is very often mixed with racism, violence, harassment, and discrimination.



Certain views of Islam as violent, aggressive, committed to terrorism, hostile to the non-Muslim world, and a threat to global peace and security have the effect of justifying such racism. Moreover, negative media representation of Islam as a religion and Muslims as adherents gives support and comfort to racist behaviors in the American society.

Since the dawn of the twenty-first century, Islamophobic incidents and the expression of anti-Muslim ideas and sentiments in the American society, on TV, print media, radio, and in political rhetoric is getting increasingly acceptable. The perpetrators of Islamophobia range from individuals acting on their own to institutionalized anti-Muslim policies. However, it is decisive to remind that most Americans are influenced by what they read in articles hear, and see in the media. They are bombarded by the biased portrayal of Muslims as the new enemy in news stories and by their exposure to right-wing and Islamophobic politicians who fortify prejudice against Muslims and frequently aim for their dismissal from the American society. People from all walks of American cultural and political life share misinformed accounts about Islam and Muslims. The rise of Islamophobia could definitely be attributed to the growing number of Islamophobes and Islamophobic institutions in the American society. Islamophobia is something ingrained, sustained, and prevailing in the United States. Every discussion held, whether in the media or in American civic society, about Islam and Muslims is endorsed by famous or pseudo-Islamophobes, manifests Islamophobia, structured by Islamophobia, and thus is an expression of Islamophobia.

Islamophobia is not just a defined series of actions and presumptions that springs from a general misunderstanding of Islam, and that target Arabs and Muslims and others who look alike. Since the end of the American ideological conflict against the USSR, Islam became identified as the new enemy in the West. Islamophobia is best viewed as a new ideological formation that comes to take full expression in America since the 1990s to promote domestic and foreign political and economic goals. This idea is endorsed by Scholar Stephen Sheehi

who defines Islamophobia as an ideological formation that is created by “a culture that deploys particular tropes, analyses and beliefs, as facts upon which governmental policies and social practices are framed” (4).

Sheehi’s book entitled *Islamophobia: The Ideological Campaign Against Muslims* cracks open the complexities of the ideological formation of the new rising phenomenon of the twenty-first century to help understand how it is constructed and organized, and to critically observe how it is manifested in the American society. It propounds that Islamophobia operates on two levels simultaneously; the level of thought, speech and perception embedded through the circulation of Islamophobic narratives by prominent Islamophobes and echoed in the speeches of officials, and the material level of policies, violence and action which does not only include the daily experiences of harassments, discrimination, hate-speech, and vandalism of properties and places of worship, but also an array of acts institutionalized by the American government ranging from surveillance, profiling, tracking, monitoring, spying, coercing, prosecution of Muslim-Americans to war against Muslim majority countries, torture, extrajudicial kidnapping, and the imprisonment of Muslims. Thus, as a new ideological formation, Islamophobia facilitates American imperialism and legitimizes the deployment of the United States’ political power in the Muslim world.

However, anti-Muslim attitudes dates back thousands of years, and the discrimination of Muslim-Americans existed in America long before the 9/11 attacks. The religion of Islam has been frequently represented as violent and barbaric, and Muslims and Arabs have been very often derided in American mainstream media, popular culture, and political discourse. In fact, since the emergence of Islam as a political power, the general representation of Islam and Muslims in the West has been entirely negative (Abbas 85). Said exposed the vast history of distorted views of the Muslim world through the eye of the West in his works. From his

perspective, the scholarly writings from Europe and American presented inaccurate and misleading stereotypical representations of Muslims, Islam, and the Muslim world and were inherently political and intellectually uncertain. The post-colonial theory that he introduced back in the 1970s postcolonial world provides us with the tool to understand how the new phenomenon 'Islamophobia' serves much similar ends for the twenty-first century American political designs. The rising anti-American sentiments in the Muslim world since the 1980s helped to recode Islam into something more fanatic, threatening, and intimidating. And with the emergence of the United States as the only global superpower after the demise of Communism, the pre-existing forms of Orientalism and anti-Muslim sentiments metamorphosed into a new form of political Islamophobia. That is to say, Orientalism is "the system that preceded and mothered Islamophobia" in the West (Beydoun, *American Islamophobia* 50). Connecting Islamophobia to Orientalism, however, is important to show that Islamophobia is just like Orientalism that was once circulated by the state to achieve certain desired political ends. That is to say, the same old detrimental cycle of stereotypes is the core of modern-day Islamophobia.

A great deal of Islamophobic discrimination against Muslim Americans preceded and outlived the 9/11 attacks. The hateful rhetoric became a prominent feature of American politics since the 9/11 attacks. Despite the fact that President Bush made effort to make Americans distinguish between Muslim friends and foes when he announced: "the enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends; it is not our many Arab friends" ("Address to the Joint Session of the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress"), commenters who blamed Islam for the 9/11 seemed to acquire a massive, receptive audience. Hatred toward Muslim-Americans met the least resistance in American society since the attacks which encouraged most political leaders and government officials to use racialized rhetoric as a tactic throughout American politics and sought to promote Islamophobic ideas in the American political sphere (Love 93). They make

blatant Islamophobic statements as a winning campaign strategy when discussing the issue of Islamic terrorism. In 2014, the South Asian Americans Leading Together organization (SAALT) <sup>7</sup> published a report entitled *Under Suspicion, Under Attack* in which it collected and examined dozens of examples of political leaders using rhetoric that described South Asians, Muslims, Sikhs, and Arab Americans communities as a threat to national security from January 2011 through April 2014. The finding of the report indicated that “xenophobic political rhetoric has become more frequent, more insidious, and more likely to be feature on a national platform” (2).

The anti-Muslim sentiment remained latent in American national politics and discourse until recently, proving that Islamophobia is a sustained campaign. Hate-speech, surveillance, profiling, and the prosecution of Muslim-Americans continue regardless of the change in the presidency. So much of the Bush administration’s laws that brazenly suppressed the liberties of Muslim Americans and adopted military aggression against the majority Muslim countries continued into Obama and Trump’s administrations. Under the supposition that the Muslim identity was presumptive of a terror threat, and through managing, directing, and mediating centuries-old hatred toward and fear of Muslims and Arabs inside the United States, institutionalized Islamophobic policies were expanded under the Bush administration’s successors. Indeed, Islamophobia in America does not only mean fear or hostility toward Muslims, but also the expulsion of Muslims as the case with the Muslim ban endorsed by the Trump administration under the guise of security and self-preservation.

To conclude, the manner in which Islam is understood in modern times in the Western world, and mainly in the United States, is grounded on the imaginings and perceptions that were established by eighteenth and nineteenth centuries European Orientalist scholars. Various studies have demonstrated that the American motion picture industry, and mainly Hollywood’s, attitude toward Islam, Muslims, and Arabs is inherited from the old school of

Orientalism. Contemporary Western discourses on the Muslim world and its inhabitants are still being greatly motivated by the deeply held fear of Islam and Muslims and are influenced by Medieval Age and colonial time prejudicial imaginings and visions. Using Orientalism as a system of knowledge, the Western world has constituted mythical boundaries based on stationary differences related to civilization, cultural identity, development, and power to continuously detach the Muslim world from the West, and help define it through the notion of superiority versus inferiority and the crude thinking of the 'us versus them' as a monolithic, inferior, and essentialized entity to facilitate its domination and exploitation.

Orientalism remained constant as its principal tenets were and are still transformed across time and space. The continuous historical shift and adjustment of Orientalism proved that Orientalism was not replaced, but intensified. This Western archive of knowledge has set the theoretical framework for the modern-day Western approach to Islam and Muslims. In fact, Orientalism dominates the way Westerners see, anticipate, and react to the Muslim world in past, present, and will continue to do so into the future. Orientalists deliberately create and disseminate distorted visions on Islam and Muslims as an existential threat to the Western world and its civilization in order to ensure the Western attitude of domination and exploitation of the Muslim world into the future. Therefore, today if Islam is not equated to violence and terrorism, it invokes images of exotic being and exploitation of women.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Orientalism as a system of knowledge flourished into a highly fortified institution in the West with unique rules that defined the kind of knowledge that stems from it. Intellectual works that deal with the Orient are constrained by the stabilizing influence of early Orientalists. Said mentioned in his book *Orientalism* that “the imaginative writings are never free, but are limited in their imagery, assumptions, and intentions” (*Orientalism* 202), that is later generation of academic experts improve upon earlier ones in the field of Oriental studies.

<sup>2</sup> The Orientalist knowledge of the Orient and Orientals is based on Western perception of the Orient and its inhabitants. Such knowledge was subjective and one-dimensional but gained a status of a scientific truth. The modern personification of the Muslim world and Muslims in Hollywood cinematic production is highly influenced by the Orientalist constructions of this region and its inhabitants. Orientalism as a theory helps uncover the roots of Western misconception and ‘Othering’ of the Muslim world and its inhabitants.

<sup>3</sup> The term ‘cultural hegemony’ has been developed to refer to control outside the relatively simple notion of physical. The theorist who is mostly to thank for this development is the Italian Antonio Gramsci, who was a key figure in the Italian Communism toward the beginning of the twentieth century. Hegemony was a key component of what he described as his philosophy of Praxis alongside ideology and organic intellectuals to describe and analyze how social classes came to dominate society. Gramsci used the cultural hegemony to analyze how the bourgeoisie and the ruling classes come to dominate in a capitalist society. He acknowledged that power and control comes about not only through physical power but also through cultural domination. It is essentially the idea of a dominant group using culture in order to legitimize their dominance. To put it relatively in a contemporary example, in many war movies we find the Western military engagement in various parts of the globe from Africa, South America, to the Middle East is often shown to be justified and necessary to help support the status quo. In this way, cultural hegemony is the idea that power can be exercised and reinforced as much through cultural texts as through physical force (Cole).

<sup>4</sup> Red Menace ‘or Red Scare’ is a term used during the Cold War to describe the threat of Soviet Communism.

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<sup>5</sup> The Runnymede Trust is a British independent race equality think tank that challenges racial inequality. In 1996, it established the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia chaired by Professor Gordon Conway and composed of eighteen members. In 1997, the Commission has produced a famous report entitled *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* which offered a detailed explanation of Islamophobia and its consequence throughout society, and sets recommendations for practical action by government, teachers, lawyers, journalists, and by religious and community leaders. For additional details see Runnymede Trust. *Islamophobia: A challenge for Us All*. 1997

<sup>6</sup> The Center for American Progress is a nonpartisan research and educational institute dedicated to improving the lives of all Americans, through bold and progressive ideas with the aim of changing the country ([www.americanprogress.org/](http://www.americanprogress.org/)).

<sup>7</sup> South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) is a national nonpartisan non-profit organization that elevates the voices and perspectives of South Asian individuals in the United States. The organization main target is advocating for the civil rights of all South Asians and help build a more just and inclusive society in the United States ([saalt.org/about/](http://saalt.org/about/)).

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Orientalism in Hollywood Movies: The Evolution of Cinematic Representation of Arabs and Muslims before 9/11**

American cinema is imbued with stereotypical representations of various ethnic and racial groups, but of the many stereotypes and misrepresentations that plague Hollywood those of the Muslim world and its inhabitants have ostensibly been the most damaging and resilient. Ever since the camera began to crank, Hollywood has propagated Arabs and Muslims in exotic terms. The Arab appears as an unkempt, uncivilized, and violent terrorist character in over thousand movies. This part of the research study analyzes what promotes the ubiquitous negative image of Arabs, where it comes from, and why it persists in American cinema and attempts to show how the American cultural fear of the 'Other' (the Other being that who challenged the United States national ideology) has resulted in the creation of the dangerous 'Arab Other' in American motion picture industry.

#### **2.1. Stereotypes in American Cinema**

Stereotypes are dangerous and the act of stereotyping is a damaging phenomenon particularly as they distort reality and tag a certain group of people, in spite of their diversity, with specific labels denying them their individuality. Besides, the act of creating biased opinions and views about others has negative ramifications in societies because it does not only affect the group targeted but also the individuals who believe and tend to apply them. Stereotypes' main target is to discriminate and make the stereotyped group homogeneous and negative (Schneider 10). Most of the images and beliefs people know or think they know about particular social groups on the national and international levels are accumulated subconsciously either through reasoning and experiences, or hearsays and information and they can be most of the time driven by emotions and prejudices. In *The Nature of Prejudice*,



Gordon Allport asserted that human beings tend to place things and people in categories to which traits, values, expectations, physical features, practices, and beliefs that form the stuff for stereotypes are attributed (17-27). Stereotypes are generalizations about the stereotyped groups that distinguish, stress differences, and determine their segregation along race, ethnic, gender, or class lines. Indeed, individuals lean to classify and view people as in-group and out-group members based on common religion, religious practices, culture, language, beliefs, values, and ideas.

The fact that the American entertainment and news media apply stereotypes when representing certain social groups, whether blacks, Latinos, or Arabs, reinforces stereotypes and urges Americans to see the non-white Americans through the thick haze of stereotypical representation. Although stereotypes might include some truthful aspects about the stereotyped groups, having stereotypical views of others is extremely harmful and damaging, especially when negative allegations about a member of the stereotyped group are considered to be applicable to all individuals within that group, or when one image is taken as a representative of the whole group. In fact, stereotypes mislead and drive people to react in a manner that is both judgmental and biased (El-Ferra 1).

The way people are represented in art, fictitious stories, and entertainment media tells much about how this group of people is treated in real life. Racist characterizations of various social groups flooded the daily lives of most Americans through propaganda and media. Richard Dyer argued “how we are seen determines in part how we are treated; how we treat others is based on how we see them” (12). During the Second World War, for instance, thousands of individuals of Japanese descent living in the United States on the west coast were forced to evacuate their homes and live in government-monitored internment camps under the Executive Order 9066, just because Japanese Americans were featured throughout

the American popular culture and media as non-human and untrustworthy and were seen as possibly working as spies for the Japanese (Davenport 23).

As a part of the exercise of power, holding stereotypes of any ethnic or racial group is functional for it can bolster the esteem and protect the stereotypist's group, which brings us back to Michael Foucault's 'theory of discourse' applied by Said as a theoretical framework for his classic *Orientalism*. The existence of power relation between the West and the Orient allowed for the Orient to appear as the 'Other' inferior, backward, primitive, and desperately in need of Western tutelage. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the European stereotypical representation of the Orient and Orientals determined the way the West treated the Muslim world and its inhabitants.

The American entertainment industry has a long history of prejudicially representing various ethnic and racial groups over time. Stereotypes routinely appear within Hollywood movies. Unfortunately, while some social groups have been depicted in a favorable light, others have been derogated and negatively portrayed by image makers and screenwriters. Hollywood mainstream movies stereotyped Native Americans, Asians, Jews, Hispanics, Germans, Japanese, African Americans, Vietnamese, Italians, Russians, and the latest in a long line of ethnic groups are Arabs and Muslims. However, the Arab/Muslim stereotype in Hollywood is not a recent fabrication, starting from its early days Hollywood vilified Arabs and Muslims in so many ways presenting them as exotic, backward, and lately as fanatic extremists. In fact, American cinema offers the most detailed picture of the American stereotype of Arabs. It is easy to see how ingrained and commonplace the Arab/Muslim stereotype became for many Americans. By the time certain improvements have been made by Hollywood to abolish bigoted portrayals of racial and ethnic groups, Arabs and Muslims remained the most mischaracterized racial group in the American motion picture industry.

Their stereotypical portraits exceeded all negative images of any other racial group, and have increased in number and virulence over the last three decades (Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs* 28).

Viewing through Hollywood production, many racial and ethnic stereotypes that are no longer used or accepted when applied against other racial and ethnic groups like, Native and African Americans are being applied to Arabs. Hollywood's tendency to inaccurately and prejudicially represent ethnic groups is seen as down to one group, and one group only, Arabs and Muslims. The latter are the most oversimplified and negatively represented group in American cinema. They are regularly vilified in motion picture, Sam Keen made a very interesting comment about this point telling us that "you can hit on Arab free; they're free enemies, free villains -- where you couldn't do it to a Jew or you can't do it to a black anymore" (qtd. in Shaheen, "Hollywood's Muslim Arabs" 25). Arabs and Muslims are the latest in a long line of ethnic groups whom Hollywood feels free to offend en masse.

The reason why stereotypes are spread and profoundly held by individuals in societies is the way they are imposed, taught, and enhanced through the enormous support they accumulate within the in-group members; in-group members are people who use stereotypes against minority racial and ethnic groups, the out-group members. Such a support helps to stabilize and preserve stereotypes from any potential challenge. Journalist Walter Lippmann sees that stereotypes are so regularly and authoritatively "transmitted in each generation from parent to child that it seems almost like a biological fact" (93).

Stereotypes are so powerful, so hard to eliminate, and self-perpetuating. They are nurtured by the popular culture through television programs, jokes, songs, comic strips, cartoons, movies and the like. Cynical stereotypes of racial and ethnic groups accompany Americans from childhood morning cartoons to adulthood. Image-makers grew up watching hundreds of wicked Arabs in cartoons, comic strips, and video games. Some of them might naturally accept and repeat the stereotypes without realizing. The image that they produce

about Arabs is simply how they had seen them depicted again and again. Arab Stereotypes are generalizations gone rotten that single out Arabs as backward, inferior, vagabond, devilish, and subhuman through popular culture.

American motion picture industry is considered to be well-established and has a wide scope throughout the globe. It is the world's greatest entertainer and most effective teacher of youngsters, as it reaches into every aspect of individuals' lives and influences the way they think and act in real life. The ability to stereotype racial and ethnic groups is both dangerous and damaging for the consistent portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in a negative light in movies affects the way the Hollywoodian audience perceives this distinctive social group in real life. Although the negative roles attributed to Arab characters in movies are part of the fictitious stories for TV shows and movies, the general audience becomes accustomed to seeing them in such negative roles. And even if stereotypes are so deeply ingrained in American cinema and are a profitable tool for movie producers and scenario writers, the enduring denigration of Arabs and Muslims in antagonistic roles may undoubtedly encourage the public to form biased views of Arabs and Muslims. The real issue here is what motivates this dangerously unswerving pattern of hateful Arab/Muslim stereotypes in Hollywood.

## **2.2. The Origins of Hollywood's Vilification of Arabs and Muslims**

The origins of Hollywood's negative portrayal of Arabs and Muslims and the roots of Western misconception have been profoundly discussed in various scholarly works. Jack Shaheen as one of the most prominent scholars who established an entirely new field of study known as 'Arab-American Media Studies' and his contemporaries' meticulously documented research into the film and motion picture industry have helped to highlight the dehumanizing personification that moviemakers have given to Arabs and Muslims. An abundance of valuable academic works from books and articles to lectures and essays have identified the leading origins of Hollywood's negative personification of Arabs and Muslims.

When tracing the roots of misconception, it is believed that numerous factors have contributed to the creation and perpetuation of the negative portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood movies. While some of these factors could be offset, others are so deeply embedded within the American culture that there exists no possible end to them. One of the most important reasons behind the rise and the dissemination of bigotry representation of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood movies is Orientalism. The Muslim world has for long been portrayed on the basis of some inherited visions from Orientalism accounts.

When film grew as a new means of cultural expression, it began to draw upon the Orientalists preexisting tropes. Images of Arabs and Muslims that existed in early scholarships of prominent European Orientalists are reproduced with remarkable regularity in contemporary popular cultural productions. The creation of a systematic difference that detaches the West as superior and civilized from the Muslim world as inferior, primitive, and backward, the so-called 'superiority versus inferiority' theme, allowed the Western world to be represented in the illusion of the inferior Muslim world. That is whatever the West might be; the Muslim world must be its negative counterpart. This binary relationship can also be seen to exist within the world of moving pictures and can be traced in numerous Hollywood movies since 1896. *The Mummy* released in 1999 offers a living example. The movie features a group of American archeologists as clean, civilized, and superior in contrast to dumb, barbaric, and inferior Egyptian characters.

The representation of the Islamic Orient as a place that should be feared, controlled, and domesticated that emerged during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries smoothly found its way onto the silver screen. Moviemakers continue to associate the Muslim world, Arabs, and Muslims with threat, violence, and terrorism not only to the West but also to the Muslim world. Besides, The West is not only represented as superior and opposed to what the Muslim world is, but also as its protector. The frequent portrayal of Arabs and Muslims as

terrorists and violent is accompanied by the projection of an American hero, who at the end of the movie defeats and domesticates the Muslim rage. *Three Kings* and *The Army Now* released respectively in 1999 and 1994, in which the American army presence in the Gulf is projected as a rescue mission clearly represent this idea. Such an attitude of representation aims to justify the American gigantic role as a protector and a peacekeeper in the Muslim world.

A key facet of Orientalism is the masse generalization of the Orient. The tendency to generalize the Orient creating a monolithic entity called the 'Other' or the 'Rest' is prevalent in Hollywood movies. 'Arabs' are equated to 'Muslims' even though Arabs make slightly more than 12 percent of the whole Muslim world population and that not all Arabs are Muslim, nor are all Muslims Arab. Due to this popular conflation of the two, many of the stereotypes which Hollywood applies to Arabs are also applied to other Middle Easterners and Islamic groups. This tendency to monolithically depict the Muslim world appeared in movies such as *The Sheik* (1920), *True Lies* (1994), and *Commando* (1968) in which All Arabs are grouped as fanatic and violent.

Through his study of cinema texts, Shaheen has found that only little has been written on American media portrayal of Arabs and Muslims. Despite this fact, two of his groundbreaking books *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies People* and *The TV Arab* had laid a framework of reference for the newly constructed field of study. In his book *Reel Bad Arabs*, Shaheen being driven by the huge need to expose the slanderous history of the Arabs' representation in the American motion pictures industry, has conducted a research study in which he scrutinized more than 900 movies released from 1896 to 2001. He unfolded decades of harmful stereotypes that rendered the Muslim world a place to be feared with inhabitants who were "brute murderers, sleazy rapists, religious fanatics, oil-rich dimwits, and abusers of

women” (*Reel Bad Arabs 2*). Such negative portraits of Arabs in countless movies stoked distrust and loathing toward Arabs and Muslims in American society.

The widely alienating visual vilification of Arabs and Muslims has been a predominant part of the Hollywood moviemaking process. The Muslim Arab character appeared and continues to surface as the threatening cultural ‘Other’. Through using the Arabic proverb ‘*Al tikrar biallem il hmar*’, translated in English as ‘by repetition, even the donkey learns’, Shaheen asserts that the motion picture industry, for over a decade, repeatedly reinforced over and over again the same old Orientalist stereotypes that were presented in literature, art, and academic works. Contemporary moviemakers have inherited and further ornamented the European pre-existing Arab stereotypes and misconceptions that existed long before the beginning of Hollywood enterprise.

His very earliest research was on the portrayal of Arabs in American television, which he believed was one of the most predominant sources and main distributor of popular culture in America at that time, the 1980s. In his book *The TV Arab*, he documented more than a hundred of different popular entertainment programs, cartoons, and major documentaries broadcasted on the network, independent, and public channels, totaling nearly two hundred episodes that relate to Arabs. He concluded that American TV is filled with Arab images; he called ‘Arab baddies’, known as the three B’s; billionaires, bombers, and belly dancers. Quoting President John F. Kennedy’s statement that “The Great enemy of the truth is very often not the lie –deliberate, continued and dishonest- but the myth, persistent, persuasive and unrealistic” (“Yale University Commencement Address”), he attempted to convey to the readers that the American TV tends to perpetuate four basic myths about Arabs as they are extremely wealthy, barbaric, sexually promiscuous, and terrorists (*The TV Arab 4*). Although these basic myths may vary from time to time in emphasis, they remain the most resilient Western images of Muslims and continue to inspire screenwriters to create Arab characters.

Politics is also regarded as a crucial reason behind the rise and dissemination of visual bigotry personification of Arabs and Muslims in movies. Since its early inception, Hollywood emerged as an effective tool of entertainment. Movies became part of the human's life as they never die and they live on and on. They repeatedly transmit certain selected representations to people around the world and in so doing they contribute to the shaping and reshaping of beliefs and values. Various academic scrutinies of the movie industry have unveiled that the movie-making is political and brought to the full light of day the intimate relation that ties Hollywood and Washington. Politics and the motion picture industry are inextricably interconnected through mutual benefits. Whereby, in return for promoting the American ideas and values and enhancing the notion of American superiority and heroism, moviemakers receive financial and material support, equipment, personnel, technical assistance, and mainly the sponsorship of political officials in movies that promoted government actions. This unique relation that ties Hollywood and Washington allows the American government to impact the way friend and foe nations should be portrayed through the moving pictures.

The dehumanizing personification of individuals and nations impacts government policies. American policymakers have recognized that the moving pictures could be used to advance a particular sanitized view, and to manipulate the audience into endorsing the government policy actions in different parts of the world. For such reason, a Liaison office was created during the late 1920s by the United States War Department to act as a bridge between the movie industry and the Armed Forces. This so-called visual screen politics impact cultural values and shape political priorities by placing influential stereotypes into the minds of viewers. The president of the motion picture industry Jack Valenti got it right when he openly declared that "Washington and Hollywood spring from the same DNA" (qtd. in Shaheen, *Guilty* xxiii). As a result, cinematic production became as devastating as the use of physical force of weaponry.



With that being said, Hollywood can be seen as a Pentagon device used to provide ideological backup and manipulate the American public consciousness in support of the nation's foreign policy and imperial objectives. Undeniably, viewed through the Hollywood lens, the United States is always engaged in a good war. The American great arsenal is only used to secure the world's stability and order from radical actors. Journalist Joe Trento reminds us that what is propagated through censored war movies is mere government propaganda, "when the Americans use the military for propaganda and the public sees it all the time, the sensitivity to what is real and what is not is lost" he states (Pacull 37:42-37:52).

Over time, Hollywood production became one of the most powerful opinion-making machines by means of which Washington was able to transmit the image of the United States as a superpower. Using the Liaison office, the American military studied national security movie scripts and then decides whether to agree or deny cooperation with movie producers. Since moviemaking is a business that aims at generating profits, movie producers aspire very often to make bigger and better movies while at the same time lower the production costs. For such a reason, movie producers may frequently rely on the Pentagon whenever in need of some kind of special assistance and military access to warships, aircraft, personnel, etc. The idea is that in return for patronage, Hollywood should project the American government, United States military, and foreign policy interests positively such as the case in the movie *Executive Decisions*. The net result of such a process of censorship is the distortion of the truth and the justification of the longstanding myth of 'good' versus 'bad' struggle to advance American foreign policy objectives throughout the world and mainly in the Middle East (Muscati 131- 132). Movies' negative portrayal of Arabs and Muslims as 'bad' formed the background on which American citizens come to judge American superiority and its intervention in the Muslim world.

In fact, Arabs and Muslims make a newsworthy issue only during the political crisis. This political context tells much about their portrayal in war and action movies. In a documentary entitled *Dr. Jack Shaheen: The Use of Cultural Stereotypes to Shape Policy*, Shaheen offers what he regards as a perfect example which reveals the coalition between Hollywood and Washington. He believes that the fact that American administrations have sided with the Jewish settlement in Palestine since the 1948, has prevented Americans from sympathizing with millions of tyrannized Palestinians who were so equally unjustly represented in Hollywood movies such as; *Death Before Dishonor* (1987) and *Black Sunday* (1977) (4:07-5:16).

News media headlines and printed media Orientalist articles have had a powerful role in the creation and the perpetuation of derogatory stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims. Jerome Stanley, NBC's vice president for broadcast standards, declared that "television entertainment producers, like news reporters, sometimes take their information from newspaper headlines, editorial cartoons and articles in magazines rather than generate the information themselves" (qtd. in Shaheen, *The TV Arab* 6). Headlines and articles mislead and influence moviemakers' opinions and beliefs and inspire their movie storylines. Like ordinary Americans, moviemakers' opinions and perceptions are formed on the basis of what they read, hear, and see on the news media. Besides, the images that most Americans hold in their heads about social groups and foreign nations are the result of news media reporting.

Movies are reflections of real life; the choice of villain in American movies is dictated by headlines and events that magnetize the public attention, which explains why Arabs and Muslims are the villains of choice since the late part of the twentieth century. They are the latest ethnic group that is cast in stereotypical bad-guy roles in American cinema since the fall of Soviet Communism (Shaheen, "The Hollywood Arab: 1984-1986" 148). Essentially, the enduring news media visual representation of Arabs and Muslims as villains in nightly news

footage, magazines, showed pictures of militant Muslims, and printed informative articles acts as both a source and a ploy for the permanent moviemakers tarnishing of Arabs/Muslims' image in movies. The continuous flow of seen one, seen them all headlines and misrepresentations in Orientalist articles have in a kind filtered down to moviemakers and network producers. Moviemakers would often point to news to justify their portrayals of Arabs and Muslims, objecting we are not stereotyping. This is how real Arabs look on television (Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs* 29), to deny that they are complicit in producing and reproducing negative portrayals of Arabs and Muslims.

Americans hold faulty and simplistic assumptions about Arabs and Muslims. TV executives, moviemakers, and network producers just like ordinary American citizens have had very limited knowledge of the Muslim world and its diverse cultures, traditions, and languages. News media reporters' lack of knowledge about the Muslim world's culture and language prevents them from knowing and hearing upon the right things happening in the Muslim world. In *The TV Arab*, Shaheen asserted that apathy became self-perpetuating in America. Drawing on Meg Greenfield, an editor in *The Washington Post*, he explained, Arab caricature is the outcome of misunderstanding, early dehumanization of Arabs, and "the absence of feeling for who the Arabs are and where they have been" (7).

American media and Hollywood disdain from presenting Arabs and Muslims positively. Instead, Arab accomplishments and contributions to civilizations in various fields counting physics, mathematics, astronomy, science, agriculture, art, literature, and music among others are never referred to. Americans give lesser interest to Arab accomplishments and ordinary Arab-American citizens (Shaheen, "The Arab Stereotypes on Television" 1). Within the American cinema, one can only view Arabs as enemies, villains, anti-Jewish, anti-American, and anti-Christian terrorists bent on ruining Western civilization. It is almost no

single entertainment program or cinematic production has projected Arabs and Muslims in positive light as ordinary citizens living an ordinary life.

Apathy, animosity, and antagonism toward Arabs and Muslims are another main source for distortion in American media and popular culture. Social scientist Akbar S. Ahmed openly declared that one of the reasons behind the distorted view of Arabs and Muslims in the media is the fact that “anyone who can make a documentary or spends an hour shooting Muslim groups suddenly becomes an authority, [...] a media expert on Islam” (qtd. in Malek and Wiegand 208). Actually, news media reporters, moviemakers, and TV executives are self-proclaimed; they believe that they know quite enough about Islam, Arabs, and Muslims, and can successfully cover and portray this distinctive social group.

Such ill-equipment in terms of education and experience drove American news reporters, moviemakers, and TV executives to turn to Orientalism for alimentation picking up thereby, old prejudices that went back centuries. This enormous lack of knowledge and interest in the Muslim world has always had a serious impact on the American perception of Arabs and Muslims for it oversimplifies Islam to simple ideas related to oil, terror, underdevelopment, barbarism, and antagonism toward the Western values and democracy, which spring from the distorted Orientalist old texts, personal experiences, representations, and interpretations. Some scholars, however, would argue that ignorance and apathy are not the mere source of distorted visions of Arabs and Muslims in movies, and would point to the specific kind of knowledge established on religious and racial antagonism toward Arabs and Muslims that emerged since the very early contact between Islam and the West (Hamada 8). Western cultural hostility and racism and its relation of exploitation with the Muslim world dictated, in a way or another, the visual characterization of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood production for centuries.

Movie portrayals provide further evidence regarding the nature of Hollywood's controlling group. Obviously, those who hold control in Hollywood are not likely to portray their group negatively. Movies mirror the values, interests, cultural perspectives, and prejudices of their makers. Entertainment makers often translate their likes and dislike of certain social groups into entertainment production, affecting in this process, the public's perception of individuals with different skin color, faith, or culture. Thus, it is equally fair to assume that the people who have been consistently portrayed in a negative manner in motion picture industry probably do not control Hollywood. Then, who really controls Hollywood?

It is important to mention that Hollywood was created and controlled by Jews. The early big eight companies Metro-Goldwyn Mayer, Warner Bros, R.K.O, Paramount, and Twentieth Century Fox, Universal Pictures, Columbia Pictures successfully controlled the entire moviemaking process from casting and production to distribution and exhibition. Neal Gabler reminds us that Jews managed to create an empire of their own in a world where, in the words of producer Gilbert Gates, "it's axiomatic. The more power you have, the louder your voice is heard" (qtd. in Shaheen, "Hollywood's Muslim Arabs" 37). Therefore the representation of Arabs and Muslims on the silver screen is seen to be natural given the huge influence exercised by Jews and pro-Zionists over the movie business. Jewish domination of the movie industry profession was high since 1912 and was still remarkable by the end of the twentieth century. John Cones book regarding Hollywood's controlling group, provides cumulative and convincing evidence that American motion picture industry has been, from the very beginning, controlled and dominated by Jewish males of European heritage.

Jews recognized the value of using the power of the moving image in American motion picture to consistently portray some of their long-suffering arch enemies negatively (Cones 26). Their grip on the American cinema promotes bias against Arabs and Muslims. Since the Jewish settlement in Palestine in 1948, a new cinema genre of 'good versus bad' around the

Arab-Israeli conflict was developed, through which Hollywood manifested support for Israel and crafted a sinister image of Arabs as savage and barbaric. Jews were able to brainwash the American and the world's audience with a powerful form of propaganda, which is Hollywood. Despite the raising argument that the Jewish control over the movie business declined by the end of the twentieth century, yet the Jewish control, dominance, and influence over the entertainment and motion picture industry is still higher than any other identifiable racial, ethnic, or cultural group. Certainly, in dealing with the roots of misrepresentation in Hollywood one cannot ignore the role of Zionism in distorting facts and manipulating truth. Arabs and Muslims representation in American movies is one-sided, with little effort being made by moviemakers to balance such portrayal, due to the absence of the Arab voice.

Though some critics would agree that the prominence of Jews in the American movie industry influenced the portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in certain movies, others have disagreed. Scholar Laurence Michalak among others attributed the stereotypical representation of Arabs and Muslims not only to the pro-Israeli attitude, but also, to the Orientalist prejudice, stressing that "it is important not to scapegoat Jews for the scapegoating of Arabs" ("Cruel and Unusual: Negative Images of Arabs in Popular American Culture" 33). The Orientalist pejorative approach to Arabs and Muslims is indeed much older than the Arab-Israeli conflict and the creation of American cinema. It can be traced in European art, literature, and academic works that date back to the post-enlightenment period in Europe, and they are embedded within the American society since antiquity, constituting an integral part of America's European folk heritage.

From the early years of the American campaign against Native Americans to the Japanese during World War Two, Russians during the Cold War, and lately Arabs since the Iranian Hostage Crisis 1980 and the Gulf War 1991, the 'Other' has been represented as a barbaric menace. Hollywood tended to portray the enemy as sub-human and malevolent.

Portraying enemies negatively in movies during times of war has been very frequent in Hollywood (Alsultany, "Arabs and Muslims in the Media After 9/11" 162). Thus, it is important to point to the link between the end of the Cold War and the shift in the enemy role in Hollywood movies. The pejorative representation of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood movies can also be attributed to the long-lasting fear of the cultural 'Other', and the Arab replacement of the Soviet Communism as the new villain, which became a widespread entertainment theme in American cinematic representation of Arabs and Muslims since the 1980s.

The use of Hollywood as a propaganda machine during the Cold War provided for the success of American government rhetoric about foreign threats. During the 1990s in panic and in response to the rise of the militant Islamic Fundamentalism, Arabs and Muslims became represented as the ominous 'Other' that had to be contained through hegemony (Edwards, "Yankee Pashas and Buried Women" 13). Events such as the Iranian Hostage Crisis and the Gulf War helped to categorize this distinctive social group as America's terrifying and fascinating national 'Other'. That is the collapse of Communism meant that a new foe took the place of Soviet Communism in the imagination of many Americans and marked the launching of anti-Arab racism in America.

While some scholars, to name Tim Semmerling among others, agree with this assumption, others such as Jamie C. Fries strongly rejected it and believed that the exotic element was already used in the depiction of Arabs and Muslims before the collapse of Soviet Communism. That is true, yet, it would be conventional to argue that there is a relation between the representation of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood and American foreign policy objectives in the Muslim world. Several political events in the past century left a touch on Hollywood's production. The increased American engagement with the Muslim world has led to a proliferation of movies that focused on the Middle East, its people, their relationship with

the West, and an ongoing battle between ‘good’ and ‘evil’, or freedom and repression. Hollywood’s despising and slanderous representation of Arabs and Muslims aimed to further reinforce the concept of “exoticism” and continuously detach Arabs and Muslims as primitive and backward in need of Western and mainly American guidance.

It is crucial to note that during the period that was marked by the absence of any American diplomatic strategies in the Muslim world, prior to the Second World War, Hollywood’s portrayal of Arabs and Muslims focused on their ethnic difference and exoticism. While by the time American interests in the Muslim world tangled with those of Arabs and Muslims following the emergence of oil as a major economic source and the settlement of the Jewish on Palestinian lands a shift from the exotic to the violent, terrorist ‘Other’ in Hollywood representation of Arabs and Muslims was marked in several movies. With the increasing number of terrorist acts and verbal threats against the Western world by Islamic militant groups, Arabs and Muslims were further cast in a more negative light.

Nevertheless, Orientalist essays helped engender a common and solid belief that Muslims and Arabs are the West’s number one enemy. Arabs and Muslims image in Western media has been highly disfigured by anti-Muslim Orientalists such as, Daniel Pipes, Khalid Duran, Judith Miller, Martin Peretz, Bernard Lewis, and others. Their numerous articles and essays have been obsessed with Muslim/Arab hatred and helped broadly disseminate images of devilish Islam, Arabs, and Muslims in the West. One example of the worst offenders against Islam and Muslims is the retired Princeton Professor, Lewis. In his article in *The Atlantic Monthly* magazine entitled “The Roots of Muslim Rage” published in September 1990; he endorsed the ‘clash of civilization’ theory that was later adopted and expended by Huntington. Lewis suggested that the Islamic world was not only violent, oppressive, and utterly different from the Western world, but it was on the verge of a clash with the West and its values and ideologies. This Orientalist article not only conflates rage with Muslims, but



also suggests that violence is deeply rooted and constitutes an integral part and a natural aspect of the Islamic mind. Published on the front page of the magazine, a pictorial image that accompanied Lewis's article, in which a turbaned, bearded man with his eyes reflecting the American flag sums up the article's content, and suggests that the inborn Muslim rage is straightly intended for the United States.

Lewis's article and its accompanied pictorial image on *The Atlantic Monthly* magazine are but a mere example of plenty of other Orientalist articles and images that openly suggest and endorse the perception that Islam is a violent religion, and its adherents are innately dangerous, violent, and threatening. Academic John Esposito believed that American Orientalists intellectuals, policymaker officials, and the mainstream media had identified the 'Islamic fundamentalism' as a new global ideology menace to fill a 'threat vacuum' engendered by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War (3-5). As the twenty-first century embarked on, the emergence of a new genre of Orientalism known as neo-Orientalism, which has renewed, extended and exaggerated the old one contributed to paint the whole Muslim world with the same sinister brush (Edwards, *After the American Century* 206).

The negative visual representation of Islam and Muslims began as a European phenomenon with the European imperialism to be later taken over by Americans. Such representation is so unyielding and insidious and perpetuated because it is politically motivated. The West has always had a latent hostility toward Arabs and Muslims thereby the negative images are often assimilated unconsciously. Besides, malevolent portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in movies often sells much, and while no significant effort is being made by the Arab population to counter such portrayal, entertainment makers exploit stereotypes for benefits (Shaheen, "Hollywood's Muslim Arabs" 24).

## 2.3. Arabs and Muslims on the Silver Screen before the 9/11 Attacks

### 2.3.1. The Exotic Other

From long before the American interest was teemed over the Middle East and mainly before the Western recognition of the Jewish settlement in Palestine as a state in 1948, American imaginings of Arabs and Muslims were hugely deformed. The Arab image in the West was formed by the early stories of the Islamic Conquest Age, Western crusades against infidel Muslims, and sultans in Arabian Nights fables (Ghareeb ix). Early Orientalism provided the stuff for the representation of the Muslim world a place of wonder, fantasy, mystery, luxury life, lamp genies, with flying carpets and magic lanterns, corrupt, barbaric, wicked viziers, slimy slavers, irreverent magicians and vicious Arabs/Muslims, harem maidens, and oppressed females. These fictional renditions of the brutal ‘Other’ were accepted as valid and adopted by moviemakers to a degree that it became such an indelible part of Hollywood’s representation of Arabs. Moviemakers have constructed a mythical Arab land composed of desolate deserts, oasis, palm trees, slimy souks, flying carpets, and corrupt places, complemented by ‘An Instant Ali Baba Kits’ made of magic lamps and lanterns, seen through pantaloons, veils, jewelry, fake beards and mustaches, exaggerated noses, curved daggers, scimitars, and burnouses (Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs* 8) to successfully formulate the classical representation of the Arabian fantasy in early Hollywood movies.

Many of the narratives and the classical qualities that were embedded in the early Orientalist works about Arabs and Muslims found their way onto the silver screen. Melanie McAlister reminds us that Orientalism is a citational discourse within which authors and artists draw a great deal on the preceding representations of Arabs by earlier Orientalist generation (McAlister 9). Similarly, image-makers promoted the stereotypical view of their predecessors, chiefly novelists. Robert Hichens’ novel *Garden of Allah* offers the best example. It was published in 1904 and made into three different movies, two of them were

silent movies released in 1917 and 1927, while the third was a technicolor sound film released in 1936.

The movie tells the story of a thirty-two-year-old unmarried Englishwoman who sought refuge in North Africa, where she found sexual adventure with an Arabian Sheik (Leach 111). It displayed actions that took place in the Algerian desert and sarcastically characterized the Arab men and women and their lives. *Garden of Allah* (1936) film attendance was immense and it made the event in the American cinema. Upon its release, the Arabian fantasy became a great phenomenon in American cinema. *The Mummy* series (1918- 1923), *Flame of the Desert* (1919), *An Arabian Night* (1920), *Arabia* (1922), *Tents of Allah* (1923), and *Fleetwing* (1928) are other movies which validate the crude Orientalist stereotypical representation of Arabs and Muslims that existed in previous Orientalist artworks.

Hollywood production during this period was characterized by the great urge to cast Arabs and Muslims as the exotic ‘Other’; the ‘Other’ in this case being that which is outside the culture producing the art. They are displayed as primitive in need of the white man’s salvage from their oppressive rulers or rich Sheiks. A number of movie scenes portrayed Arab males as barbarians ruled by their sexual desire, luring behind exotic females, ravaging and kidnapping exotic women and Western blond heroine (Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs* 20). As in one clip taken from *The Sheik* (1921), Sheik Ahmed (Valentino) informs us; “When an Arab sees a woman he wants, he takes her” (44:28). These women are inevitably rescued by the Western man, who takes ‘the white man’s burden’ role of a protector. *The Seventh Voyages of Sinbad*, *The Desert Song*, and *The Mummy* are other movies with a similar theme.

Hollywood’s denigration also focused on Arab women as ‘Harem maidens’. Tania Kamal- Eldin’s documentary *Hollywood Harems* in which she arranged a compact montage of about thirty movies that stereotypically represented Arab women, explained the pejorative representation of Arab females in Hollywood movies. The documentary exposed harem girls

as typically cast in the image of half-clothed of scant costumes dancing girls, behaving in an inappropriate manner of seduction, in bizarre dancing, jerking, leering, and pleading (Swensen). They have been eroticized and represented very often as ever vamps, man trappers, and voracious seducer who lure the men to their foreseeable demise or as enslaved beings attending oppressive Sheikhs. In this case, the movie *Son of Ali Baba* (1952) offered scenes where Arab females are depicted as harem girls pandering to the fancies of a group of young males.

Another prejudicial peculiarity related to this period of early Hollywood production was the demonizing personification of the Arab Sheiks. Hollywood disregarded the accurate meaning of the word ‘Sheik’ in the Arab world as an epithet of an elderly man of wisdom or a religious leader, to signify oppressive, sex maniac males with unruly lust to deflower Western blond maidens. Shaheen traced such demonization in more than a hundred and sixty movie scenarios. *Sheik Hadj Tahar Hadi Cherif* (1894), *Power of the Sultan* (1907), *The Fire and The Sword* (1914), *The Sheiks* (1921), *The Sheik’s Wife* (1922), and *The White Sheik* (1928) are other films where Arab Sheikhs surface as “stooges-in sheets, slovenly, hooked nosed potentates intent on capturing pale-faced blondes for their harems” (*Reel Bad Arabs* 19).

One of the basic strategies used by the moviemakers during this early period was to stress and honor the Western world superiority. Hollywood’s early production not only represented the brutal Arab versus the heroic Western, but also supported the assumption of ‘the white man’s burden’ through representing the Arab world in great need of Western guidance to be brought out from darkness into light. Though negative representations of Arabs and Muslims were basically founded on some profound hatred to Islam and Muslims as the cultural ‘Other’, they had hidden agenda aiming at generating support for the Western imperial operations in the Muslim world. Later this strategy was proved suitable for the preparation of a second period of political, economic, ideological, military, and cultural

expansion undertaken by the United States of America following the end of the Second World War.

### **2.3.2. Post-Second World War Vilification of Arabs and Muslims**

Beginning into the 1940s a new cinematic genre was developed in America that revealed the invisible importance of the Middle East to the American foreign policy. McAlister believed that in the post-Second World War era the American motion picture industry successfully reconfigured the American interest and investment in the Arab world through Biblical and ancient history stories. Her book *Epic Encounters*, published in 2005, is regarded as one of the best references on this period in which she revealed that Hollywood helped to first establish the parameters of American national interest in the region, and then to increase the public support for the Israeli settlement through the release of epic films.

With the decolonization movements and the creation of the Israeli state, the American interests in the Middle East remarkably intensified. The 1940s marked the use of Hollywood and motion picture industry as a propaganda machine in America (Robb 15). Image-makers helped to make the Middle East region meaningful to most Americans and forged the connection that allowed Americans to see themselves as closely involved religiously and historically in the Middle East, in order to legitimate the nation's cultural, political, and economic interest in the region.

Following the Jewish settlement in Palestine and the rise of the East-West ideological confrontation, the Middle East became an area of concern given its geographic position as bordering the Soviet Union and neighboring the newly settled Israel. The Middle East was regarded in need of containment against the rising threat of the red Communism endorsed through the Truman Doctrine of 1947. Film critics and historians regarded the religious content of 1940s Hollywood's Biblical epic movies as entirely superficial, and simple Cold War allegory (McAlister 56; Nadel 421). Indeed, the American commitment toward the

Middle East revolves around three indispensable interests, namely; religious origin, support to Israel, and an appropriate access to the Middle Eastern oil resources.

Given the significance of the Middle East's strategic importance, Hollywood's production was used to help mobilize American public opinion in favor of Israel and American involvement in the Middle East. The release of *Exodus* in 1960 based on Leon Uris's novel, informed Americans about the newly formed Israel and made the Zionist story of Israel an American tale. Israel was regarded as an America-like refuge that had been fought for and won by Jews (McAlister 163). The movie deliberately dehumanized Arabs and negatively represented Palestinians as sleazy and brutal and was heavily prejudiced in favor of Israel and helped to confirm the "America's impression of Israelis as heroes, of Arabs as villains" (Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs* 189).

Following the Second World War, the Arab fantasy, the highly sexualized belly-dancer as a mode of representing the Arab women, and the Arab men's unbridled sexuality image of pre-Second World War started to gradually disappear and be replaced by representing the Middle East in a storyline with a political bent. Though with the emergence of the Arab-Israeli conflict abusive terms changed to fit the historical context, yet the negative aspect of their connotations persisted. Hollywood's representation of Arabs maintained the Orientalist stereotypical image of Arabs as inferior, primitive, backward, and lascivious. At least a dozen movies released during the 1960s celebrated Israel and demonized the Arabs including *The Ten Commandments* (1956), *Journey to Jerusalem* (1968), *Judith* (1966), *Cast a Giant Shadow* (1966), and the documentary *Survival* (1968) (Michalek, "The Arab in American Cinema: A Century of Otherness" 5).

### **2.3.3. The Emergence of the Arab-Israeli Conflict**

Damaging and intense offenses on the Middle East were considerably bolstered by the 1970s. The deterioration of the Arab-Israeli conflict engendered a six months oil crisis. The

OPEC, an organization which consists of 7 major Arab petroleum exporting countries, in declaring support and solidarity with Egypt and Syria following the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, led an oil embargo against Israeli major allies including the United States. This memorable event marked the shift in Hollywood's representation of the Middle East and provided for the change from the Biblical epic context that characterized the 1950s movies.

Following the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, Arabs appeared in a number of Hollywood movies as camel-riding nomads, incompetent, cowardly, and easily defeated, yet by the 1970s, a new dimension was added to the Arab image which is that of bloodthirsty, dishonest, menacing and threatening 'Other', who is bent on destroying the Western civilization and buying up chunks of America (Said, *Orientalism* 287; Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs* 21). Movies such as *Rollover* (1981) projected megawealth in the desolate and backward Arab land (Semmerling 101). Arabs became depicted as greedy oil wealthy Sheiks, who come to dominate the world's oil, blackmail and control the Western world.

During this period a new genre of politically minded movies paved their path into the big screen, representing Arab Muslim men as not only pursuing the Western blond women, but a host of other things ranging from the American real estate and business to government officials (Shaheen, *The TV Arab* 13). The Arab union and solidarity in the face of aggression was featured as a real threat to the Western world, and essentially, to the Israeli existence in the Middle East. This mode of representation was remarkable in the movie *Black Sunday* released in 1976. The movie is based on a true story of a strike force committed by the Palestine Liberation Organization, known also as 'Black September', which hijacked the Olympic Games in Munich, Germany in 1972 and murdered eleven Israeli athletes. Through the release of *Black Sunday* the moviemakers have not only represented the Middle East as a labyrinth that is full of political instability, deadly explosions, and brutal gun fights

(Semmerling 101), but also suggested the pervasion of terrorism from the Middle East to America.

During the 1970s, Hollywood functioned as a propaganda machine, fictionalizing heinous acts and associating the Muslim world with terrorism. In parallel with the portrayal of Arabs as indiscriminate and brutal murderers, Hollywood presented the United States' role in the region as the power of protection in order to justify the American intervention in the Middle East. *The Jerusalem File* (1973), *Embassy* (1973), *The Ambushers* (1976), *Slavers* (1977), and *Operation Thunderbolt* (1977) are among a variety of other movies released during the 1970s that clearly projected the American 'white man's burden' role of a protector against the increasing threat of the Middle East radicalism. These movies, along with dozens of others shot on the Palestinian occupied territories, presented a blatant American prevalent support for the Jewish settlement in Palestine (being an American major ally in the heart of the radical Arab world) and ignorance of Palestinian struggle under the oppressive Israeli settlement.

Moreover, the 1970s uncovered that the Middle Eastern terrorism theme dominated the movie industry. Throughout various movies America allied with Israel to secure the world against the new raising Arab terror. The American- Israeli union was vindicated in *Operation Thunderbolt* (1977) which clearly projected the Arab world as sponsoring terrorism and represented Arab Palestinians as an extension of Nazi German threat. The movie vilifies the Palestinian cause through portraying the Palestinians' use of violence and terror to achieve lined goals.

The 1970s political events mesmerized movie producers to paint the whole Arab community with the same broad, sinister brush. The period marked the highest of Israeli influence on American news and entertainment media as Hollywood was mostly owned by Jewish families. Hollywood was repeating the American government's political line by



showing support toward Israel as a major American ally. The fabricated tales and malignant images of Arabs as the uncivilized and violent who requires Western rationality carried by America served to justify the nation's presence and activity in the Middle East (Hasian 213). Hollywood production, during this period, demonstrated that the negative stereotypes about Arabs are so well ingrained in the American public consciousness that it appeared to be the real thing (Suleiman, "The Effect of American Perception of Arabs on Middle East Issue" 402).

#### **2.3.4. A New Breed of Villain**

By the 1980s, political events in the Middle East troubled the United States as never before. The changes in Iran's relationship with the United States seemed to have determined its portrayal in American mass media. Since the Iranian Revolution in 1979, hardly ever a week elapses without referring to breaking news on the Arab-Muslim world in the American media (Greg 285). Islam became a major theme around which the image of Arabs and Muslims has been constructed in American mainstream media. The overthrow of America's long-time ally 'Shah' by the Islamic revolution under the leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini on January 16<sup>th</sup> and the subsequent Hostage Crisis of the 4<sup>th</sup> of November, 1979 paralyzed the American administration and weakened Americans' power. For four hundred forty four days the United States seemed unable "to stop one dramatic event after another from happening" (Said, *Covering Islam* 5). The tension between the United States and Khomeini supporters reached height when Khomeini and his supporters denounced the United States as the great Satan of Islam, and intended the export of the Iranian revolution throughout the Middle East to destroy Israel. The central stage that Iran came to occupy by the end of the 1979 resulting in a rising feeling of anxiety and passion drove the United States to focus on the Arab-Muslim world as a military and cultural threat similar to Soviet Communism that called for containment (McAlister 2).

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of November 1979, an angry mob of fanatical looking Iranians, mostly students, managed to break into the American embassy in Tehran and held about fifty-two employees as hostages. During the period of the hostage, the religious leader Khomeini and his supporters strengthened their hold over Iran and toppled the Carter's administration, which failed to ensure a secured release of the held hostages (Donovan and Scherer 140- 147). This significant monumental event is regarded as the first battle in America's war with militant Islam which validated the use of the Orientalist discourse in constructing the image of the Muslim world for Americans. In Columbia University, Said offered the most influential analysis of the impact of the Hostage Crisis on the American media and experts' representation of Arabs, Muslims, and the Muslim world to the American society. He believed that the American media firestorm failed to report the Iranian Revolution led by Khomeini as a Shi'ite revolution and equated Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the Shi'ite sect, to Islam (*Covering Islam* 40). Iranian Islamic militants were viewed by journalist within the Orientalist perspectives that have roots in Medieval Europe.

The consistent media portrayal of the angry fanatical looking Iranian mobs gathering outside the American embassy in Tehran chanting anti-American epithets and burning the American flag, in shot after shot the American media successfully delivered the relentless drum beat that Iranians equal Muslims equal Arabs equal godless enemy. This conflation was strategically used by the American government to reduce the inherent variety of the Muslim world and its inhabitants and present the image of the United States as a land of equality and democracy (Alsultany, *Arabs and Muslims in the Media* 8).

Following the Hostage Crisis, the American Media have played an important role in formulating and presenting the image of Islam and Muslims on the basis of cultural hostility, ethnic hatred, apathy, and political interests. The American media reaction to the Iranian Hostage Crisis did not occur in vacuum, media reporting and portrayal of the crisis was

colored by the everlasting hatred to Islam, Arabs, and Muslims. The Iranian Revolution was conceived as a mere victory of dark over light. Reports and stories about the Muslim world were told within a great awareness to the fact that the United States is a superpower with interests to be secured on the international level. The Iranian revolution and the Hostage Crisis stood for the initial signifiers of the Islamic resurgence and its problematization during the 1980s.

The fear of the Islamic threat became more pervasive by the end of the twentieth century. The rising power of the Middle East as an infamous theme following the emergence of oil as a major economic factor exacerbated the geopolitical tensions in the region and had considerably facilitated the erroneous connection of Islam and Muslims to danger and terrorism. With the release of the American held hostages in the America Embassy in 1981, terrorism that was a visible concern of the nation's foreign policy provided the plot for the movie industry. Yet in lieu of Israelis, Americans were brought into the position of victims and fighters of the Islamic terrorism. The discourse of terrorism that was developed since the Iranian Crisis formed an extension for the Orientalist concept of the dangerous 'Other' and helped to reclassify the non-Arab Iran and Islam as the new synecdoche for the Middle East, rather than oil, Arabs, and the Holy Land (McAlister 199- 200). The depictions of Muslims and Arabs as terrorists by the American motion picture industry seemed to bear a striking resemblance to the Orientalist characters produced by European Orientalist scholars thousand years ago.

The fictional negative characters of Arabs and Muslims contradicted the greatness of the American hero. The violent but incompetent Arab character that is easily defeated by the American hero is quiet apparent in *The Delta Force* series (1986- 1991). The series were produced by Golan-Globus film production and were financed and directed by Israelis. They displayed the Arab/Muslim terrorism as motivated by a deep sited hatred for the American

government and values and portrayed Arabs as terrorists, religiously fanatics, cruel, and engaged in committing horrendous crimes, thereby, deserving for annihilation. The 1980s marked the emergence of a new theme of nuclear terrorist activities in Hollywood movies that directly linked terrorist activities to Arabs and Muslims in order to further damage the image of Islam. *Navy Seal* (1990), for instance, features Arab Palestinians stealing US-made stinger missiles and holding hostage an entire American helicopter crew. To rescue the held crew, a group of seven Navy Seals led by Charlie Sheen is set to slaughter collectively with Israelis dozen of Palestinians (Gottschalk and Greenberg 206-207). *Hostage* (1986), *Frantic* (1988), *Wrong is Right* (1982), *Back to the Future* (1985), *Wanted Dead or Alive* (1987), *American Ninja 4: The Annihilation* (1991), and *Ground Zero* (1988) are other movies with similar theme.

In the years that followed the Iranian revolution, it was hard to overlook Washington's intimate connection to Hollywood, and the significant role the latter played to drive and influence the public consciousness in support of government policies in the Middle East. No one can deny the power of the American media agencies to restrict the choice of information and to offer a version of reality that better work the American interests and foreign policy in the Middle East. Hollywood's representation of the Muslim world ebbed and flowed with the American foreign policy realities. The Middle East was represented as a place of chaos and political upheavals. It was described as brutal, aggressive, lacking democracy, anti-American, anti-Christian, and for the most part, as a cultural and an ideological threat that should be contained both culturally and militarily. The American government spread fear of Muslims as the cultural 'Other' through insinuating images of Muslim threat in popular culture. This new emerging terrorist theme genre of movies by the 1980s advanced the concept of the enemy 'Other' and was used to serve the American imperial objectives in the region.

In the next decade following the Hostage Crisis, the Islamic revival as a political and religious phenomenon, along with other anti-American activities facilitated the identification of Arabs and Muslims as American public enemy number one to fill the threat vacuum engendered by the collapse of Communism (Esposito 4). The war on terrorism became the theoretical structure that both of the Reagan and the Bush administrations needed to reassert the American military and political hegemony over the Middle East. As the threat of Islamic fundamentalism replaced the 'Red Menace' in the American consciousness, a new genre of movies emerged on the silver screen introducing the Arab as villain, terrorist enemy, violent, uncivilized, and engaged in heinous acts of mass destruction, thus, suitable for American extermination (Boggs and Pollard, "Hollywood and the Spectacle of Terrorism" 338).

### **2.3.5. The Post-Cold War Exotic Muslim Terrorist**

Movie villain has changed frequently in American cinema. The collapse of the Soviet Communism marked the twentieth-century monumental event that provided for the shift in Hollywood's movie villain. As the traditional Communist enemy began to disappear from movie stories, the negative personification of Arabs and Muslims has been granted more prominence. In Hollywood "each set of villains reflected the headlines and the anxieties of its ear. Each passed into obsolescence as the headlines changed. [...] with Soviet pretensions shattered and aliens from outer space passé, the new cinematic enemy is the Muslim extremist" (Goodstein), Arabs and Muslims are seen to be the latest ethnic group that is cast in stereotypical bad-guy roles.

The Islamic revival movements and the deterioration of the Arab-American relations since the Iranian Hostage Crisis made the Muslim peril a dominant theme in American cinema. As the communist threat ceased, Arabs and Muslims replaced the twentieth century 'red menace' and emerged as America's new rivals. The portrayal of Arabs and Muslims on American media is frequently generated by "national security paranoia" (Mandel). Therefore,

when the Western world attempted to construct a new world order, it came to signal Islam as a resurgent evil empire aiming to destroy not only the newly created world order but also the world's peace and stability, as well as the pro-Western regimes in the Muslim world. The American foreign policymakers were in search of a new enemy against which they could test their mettle and power, and they came to prefer Islam (Esposito 5). The rise of the Islamic revival movements came to construct not only a religious and an ideological challenge to the West, but also a potential danger to Christianity for most Westerners.

From Khomeini Islamic Revolution in 1979 to Saddam Hussein's attempt to annex Kuwait in 1990-1991, American governments and mainstream media projected the rise of militant Islam as a growing threat not only to the Western world but also to the Middle East and Western interests in the region. Thus, in the face of this rising threat, the leaders of the world needed to acquire the ideological support wanted to rebuild and reinforce a strong national identity using the power of the moving pictures in portraying foreign rivalries. Following the American victory in the Gulf War 1991, it became increasingly vital for the American media to keep the image of the American government and military capacities and abilities morally superior in the eye of the American Public (McAlister 250), thus it took every precaution to control every single image that reached the American public. The collaboration between Hollywood moguls and the Pentagon helped to transmit the image of the United States as exceptional, morally superior, and powerful to the world. This collaboration also helped to construct the image of the enemy in terms of political and cultural justifications. From the Soviet villains to the fanatical Islamic terrorists, the 'Other' was defined in terms of a foreign devil to justify the American gigantic military machine operation abroad.

The emergence of the 'Islamic fundamentalist' movements provided the perfect plot for the movie industry that the American government employed to successfully mobilize the

American public support for its imperial objectives in the Muslim world. Since the Gulf War 1991, the American entertainment media have carried out a campaign to disparage and slanderously project Arabs and Muslims. The Desert Storm allowed Hollywood to precede the making of movies that featured the American intervention beyond its borders as requisite. For more than a generation, the Arab-Muslim image on the silver screen has been highly disfigured by anti-Muslim Orientalists articles which drove Hollywood to embody the ‘clash of civilizations’ theory in its post-Cold War production.

*True Lies* (1994), *Executive Decisions* (1996), *Freedom Strike*, *The Siege* (1998), *American Ninja 4: The Annihilation* (1991), and *Rules of Engagement* (2000) among others, projected the clash between the Western values and the brutal Arab terrorism. In 1994, the release of *True Lies* once again projected Arabs as brutal terrorists and shaded light on the intimate relation that ties Hollywood and Washington. The movie was directed by James Cameron and featured Arnold Schwarzenegger in a counterterrorist action movie, with a rare combination of combat, gangster, thriller, and romance (Boggs and Pollard, “Hollywood and the Spectacle of Terrorism” 339). It presents Schwarzenegger as an undercover agent attempting to foil a terrorist cell named ‘Crimson Jihad’ that endeavors to blackmail the American government using stolen nuclear weapons from Kazakhstan, to pull American troops out of the Persian Gulf. *True Lies* mirrors the American concern at being increasingly targeted by Islamic terrorism. It extremely demonizes Arabs (Palestinians) and projects the United States’ Marines annihilating Arab terrorists to enhance the notion of the invincible United States military and bolster the self-esteem. Thus, as in *Delta Force*, *True Lies* satiated the audience’s desire to see the bad guys get it. Vicki Roland commented on the finale scene of the movie, saying “The elite in attendance are Americans, Asians, Africans, French-speaking people, and no Arabs; [emphasis added] no dark, unshaven men wearing Kuffiyehs.

The film's message is clear: When the world is rid of Arabs, we will at last be safe" (qtd. in Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs* 502).

This new counterterrorist-thriller movie genre was increasingly popular following the Cold War and was influenced by the growing incidents of political violence in the Middle East and its repercussions on America and the American interests in the region. Hollywood portrayal of Middle Easterners as terrorists and fundamentalists, during this period, seemed to reflect the deeply held fear and apprehension generated by the frequent projection of violent images on the news media. Despite the protests coming from the Arab-American community on *True Lies* vilification of Arabs and Muslims, the movie industry continued to release Orientalist and anti-Arab clichés that draw a direct link between Islam and the very act of terror and fueled the fire of racism against Arab Muslims in the Western world such as *Executive Decision*, *The Siege*, *The Peacemaker* (1997), and *Rules of Engagement*.

One cannot talk about Hollywood's production in the post-Cold War without referring to one of the most representative movies of this era, the counterterrorist-thriller *The Siege*. It is a high budget movie that gained a great resonance within the American society. The movie was described as "the most bizarre foreshadowing of 9/11", a prophetic image that featured an Islamic terrorist organization led by a spiritual leader, Ahmed Ben Talal resembling the al-Qaeda terrorist group and its leader Osama Bin Laden (Boggs and Pollard, "Hollywood and the Spectacle of Terrorism" 342-343). *The Siege* demonstrated that Arabs, Muslims, and Arab-Americans were the easiest to despise of all groups. The movie mirrors the American concern and anxiety over the rising threat and danger from the newly emerging Islamic militant groups, mainly, following the creation and training of al-Qaeda by the American CIA. Other movies such as *Three Kings*, *Rules of Engagement*, *The Mummy* (2000), and *The Sum of All Fears* allege the pervasion of terrorism from the Middle East to America and persist the process of associating Muslims to terrorism. Undoubtedly, post-Cold War movie



production projected the Muslim world as a vulnerable place that continues to need American intervention and containment, and echoed Hollywood's strategy of using Orientalism elements which enhance the notion of 'Otherness', create a polarized world, and generalize Arabs and Muslims as terrorists having no mercy and perpetrating heinous deeds in the name of Islam.

As this chapter demonstrates, the evolution of political events in the Middle East, since the 1948, has provided the movie industry with different themes and plots that interpreted the Middle East to the American audience. Hollywood's negative personification of Arabs and Muslims, over the last century, from the exotic 'Other' to the terrorist and devil 'Other' did not occur out of the blue, but rather was the outcome of American intertwining political, economic, and cultural interests in the Middle East. In effect, American imperial objectives in the post-Second World War have indirectly motivated Hollywood's portrayal of the Middle East. Hollywood has always had the tendency to project an unrealistic war fought between the power of savagery, being Arabs, Muslims, and Middle Easterners, and the power of freedom and justice, being Americans. This projection reflects the Americans arrogant perception that their nation, by virtue of its power and natural right, has to intervene and dominate corrupt and chaotic parts of the Muslim world. The process of alienating Arabs and Muslims through their consistent portrayal as a worldwide growing threat mirrors the bias of Western reporters and image-makers rather than the realities of Muslim people in the modern world.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **The Impact of Geopolitical and Socio-Cultural Contexts on the Making of *United 93* (2006), *The Kingdom* (2007), *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), and *13 Hours: Secret Soldiers of Benghazi* (2016)**

As an immensely popular form of entertainment, movies are highly effective in enticing the attention of the mass audience. The power of movies rests in the way in which it contributes to creating understandings of particular events, national identities, and the nation's relation to other countries. Understanding a movie through context means knowing the environment that surrounds the moviemaking; it is important to know what has happened before a movie was made and what influenced its content in order to understand fully its implication. In this regard, the geopolitical and socio-cultural context influenced the representation of Arabs and Muslims in *United 93*, *The Kingdom*, *Zero Dark Thirty*, and *13 Hours: Secret Soldiers of Benghazi*. The context helped to draw the image of Arab Muslims as ruthless, violent, and potential terrorists in the four movies. Several Hollywood movies have explicitly dealt with the American varied involvement around the world. Within the war on terror campaign movies such as the action-thrillers *The Kingdom* (2007), *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), and *13 Hours: Secret Soldiers of Benghazi* (2016) and the docu-drama *United 93* (2006) provided the opportunities for people to watch and reflect on contemporary international politics.

#### **3.1. The Geopolitical Context**

The American cinema has, for centuries, served the political agendas and the dominant social tendencies. Ever since the camera began cranking, movies created arguments out of images, responded to the impulses of ideology, and contributed to justifying the nation's imperialistic wants. In the words of Philip J. Davies and Paul Wells "the politics of the most

powerful nation in the world cannot be divorced from the most far-reaching entertainment medium in the world” (5). It is alleged that in the contemporary world, the American leaders disseminate knowledge that champions the American culture and government while dehumanizes the Arab societies’ culture and religion to legitimize the American presence in the Middle East region.

In the four movies chosen for this study, moviemakers featured Arabs and Muslims within the Orientalist discourse not the way they really are, but the way they wanted them to be represented according to the ideology. All movies were released simultaneously during a critical period in American history. The first quarter of the twenty-first century marked the 9/11 assault on the American soil and the launch of Bush’s ‘war on terror’ campaign. Later, the American operations freedom in both of Afghanistan and Iraq and the capture of Osama bin Laden draw different images of Muslims and Americans in Hollywood Movies.

### **3.1.1. American Imperialism and Hollywood**

Imperialism can be best defined as a policy that sought to gain access to precious raw materials and wealth, and mainly a movement that aimed to extend the power of one nation over the other through the acquisition of lands and territories. The decline of the Islamic civilization coexisted within the rise of the European power and the emergence of colonialism movements, which brought the European colonial power into economic and political conflicts with the Muslim world. Undeniably, imperialism is emphatically linked with the notion of superiority which brought racial separation between the East and the West. This notion of superiority conflicted sharply with the teaching of Islam. Muslims refused to acknowledge Western superiority while the West used the notion to continuously denigrate Muslims as a lesser breed, and justify their domination and exploitation. Following the end of the Second World War and the surfacing of oil as a valuable economic source, the United States

established its interest in the oil-rich Muslim world to ensure a stable flow of oil and secure its geopolitical interests in the region (Suleiman, "Islam, Muslims and Arabs in America" 34).

The outbreak of an ideological conflict between the Soviet Communism and the United States, after the Second World War, compelled the American government to adopt policies of detente to prevent the ingress of Communism into the Middle East and secure its geostrategic interests in the region. This period marked the height of the American imperialism movement, the use of the Truman Doctrine that "amounted to an American declaration of the Cold War" allowed for the deployment of American troops in various parts of the Middle East to help install pro-Western and anti-Communist regimes (Brands 17). The United States sought to impose its imperialism using all means whether economic, political, or even cultural without deliberating on the potential ramifications. Defending the American use of hard power, Joseph .S Nye asserted "the United States can act without the world's applause. We are so strong we can do as we wish. We are the world's only superpower, and that fact is bound to engender envy and resentment" (*The Means to Success in World Politics* 128).

With that being said, the American involvement in the Middle East brought about strong antipathy among Arabs and Muslims in the region. With the exception of the First Gulf War (1991); the American invasion of Iran (1956), its dedicated support of anti-Soviet groups in Afghanistan, and its involvement in Lebanon proved that the American use of hard power is counter-productive and a fiasco on so many occasions. The nation's interventionist policy often engendered political, social, and physical clashes in the Muslim world, which strengthened the old polarization of the world 'East versus West'. The continuous American military presence in the region strengthened the political differences between the Arab rulers and their people, destroyed the economy of various nations, and caused deprivation and impoverishment which gave birth to a great bitterness. The latter intensified when criticism

and anti-imperialism sentiments were directed toward America following the collapse of Communism.

In dealing with the Arab world, the American foreign policymakers operated within a strategy of hard and soft power, which Nye defined relatively as “Soft power is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments . . . . Hard power, the ability to coerce, grows out of a country’s military and economic might” (“Soft Power and American Foreign Policy” 256). Actually, soft power is closely linked with cultural imperialism. It is a form of imperialism that honors and extends the authority of the imposing community way of life, values, habits, and behavior over the other population.

One of the main agents used by the United States’ government to exercise cultural hegemony over the Middle East is the media arsenal, mainly Hollywood. As large numbers of people around the world have access to American movies, the American government, very often, used the motion picture industry to legitimize its political purpose in the Middle East within the public consciousness. Using Hollywood, pop music, fashion, education, and education exchange programs allowed the United States to emerge as a major cultural determinant and to exercise cultural hegemony over the whole world. Hubert Vedrine, a French foreign minister, in a dialogue with Dominique Moisi, an international relation expert, acknowledged the power of American popular culture when he argued that the United States of America possess what the French writer/philosopher René Girard has called ‘Mental Power’ which is used “to inspire the dreams and desires of others, thanks to their mastery of global images through film and television” (3). Putting it differently, to be morally powerful and get people to want what you want, then you do not have to force them and that is what the American government does very often, making use of the most powerful form of propaganda, Hollywood.

The history of Hollywood correlates with that of American foreign policy. It is alleged that Hollywood first functioned as an agent of soft power during the First World War under President Woodrow Wilson, during which Hollywood's scores of propagandist movies promoted the nation's national commitments (Fraser 40). Following the Second World War, the United States government formed an alliance with Hollywood to promote a positive image of the American government and its policies. An alliance in a form of collaboration that is more based on mutual benefits. In return for access to military equipment such as aircraft, troops, vehicles for combat movies, and carriers Hollywood promoted a positive image of the Pentagon and heightened public support for the American armed forces foreign involvements (Robb 29- 32). This collaboration helped to establish the image of the enemy within the cinematic production.

Washington's role behind the scenes goes even deeper. From a very early stage, the American administrations recognized the worth of media in promoting the American cultural values and ideas. Hollywood made crucial contributions to the American imperial objectives. *Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes and Censors the Movies* by David Robb, unveils the secret collaboration between the Pentagon and Hollywood, and the manner in which the American government used propagandist images to achieve political ends. Robb believes that Hollywood contributed to the building of the nation's image and the reinforcing of the concept of "Otherness" through the stereotypical portrayal of heroes and villains. Via this process, the United States government handled to convey its image of a superpower virtue, contributed to the entrenching of the nation's interests, and served to achieve the imperial objectives (Sardar and Davies 148).

American officials recognized that the easiest way to inject propaganda into the people's minds was to let it go through the medium of entertainment, in which people might not realize that they are being propagandized. American foreign involvements have coincided

with an increase in government-sponsored movies. That is to say, Hollywood glorified the American military and its missions abroad. In making the movie *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), director Kathryn Bigelow and her screenwriter Mark Boal were granted full access to classified information by the white house and received sensitive information from the Department of Defense. Thus, in collaboration with the CIA, Columbia Pictures Company released a movie that dramatized the ten-year hunt for Osama bin Laden and championed the American intelligence agencies. *Zero Dark Thirty* is regarded as a “Hollywood’s gift to the American power” (Zizek).

Until around twenty years ago, Hollywood’s production was increasingly determined by the ideological favor that reflects the tendency to articulate American imperial interests through government entities, counting the Office of War Information, the War Activities Committee, and the Entertainment Liaison Office. During the height of the Hollywood-Pentagon collaboration, the co-operation of what is often referred to as the American ‘Big Five’ studios; Metro-Goldwyn Mayer, Warner Bros, R.K.O, Paramount, and Twentieth Century Fox affected Hollywood’s production, which came to share the same features technically and ideologically. However, with the 9/11 terrorist attacks Washington’s influence on the American mass media has grown measurably, demonstrated through the increased glorification of the huge American military power both in news and entertainment media (Boggs and Pollard, *The Hollywood War Machine* 51). The attacks proved that the American government experienced a new type of Cold War when its values and ideas came under attack. Accordingly, Hollywood witnessed a new structural change. The rise of the newly independent companies broke Hollywood’s ideological and technical monopoly that characterized the early ‘Big Five’ studios co-operation, particularly in regard to the American war on terror. Nonetheless, when it comes to post-9/11 representation of Arabs and Muslims in America, both American politics and Hollywood project Orientalist discourses and promote

derogatory caricatures. The American motion picture industry tends to project the political situation in the Muslim world from the American perspective, proving that the American political discourse and that of Hollywood operates in tandem. Movies, produced in collaboration with the Pentagon or the CIA, often have a racist and one-dimensional visual representation of non-Westerners. Post-9/11 American cinema showed that even the most extreme and horrible actions carried out by the American government and military in the Muslim world can be justified by the unprovoked 9/11 terrorist attacks, proving that no constraints exist in the global conflict against terrorism.

### **3.1.2. The American Interest in Oil and the War on Terror**

*United 93*, *The Kingdom*, *Zero Dark Thirty*, and *13 Hours Secret Soldiers of Benghazi* are movies released during the American war on terror which is characterized by the clash between the militant Islamic extremists and the American government that sought to restore the world's law and order and protect its overseas interests. This image of the clash is transposed to the movies, in which the American heroes could overcome terrorists in *United 93*, restore peace and destroy the terror organization responsible for the uncivilized acts of destruction and religious intolerance in Saudi Arabia in *The Kingdom*, hunt and capture the man ostensibly responsible for orchestrating the 9/11 terrorist attacks in *Zero Dark Thirty*, and vigorously defend the CIA annex and ensure a safe deportation of the CIA staff in *13 Hours: Secret Soldiers of Benghazi*. Before proceeding to talk about this image, it is important to expand on the relation between this image and the American interest in oil and the war on terror.

Oil has always been a precious resource for the industry. To the United States, oil is more than any other material that is central to the American way of life. The American economy is profoundly dependent on oil as President George Walker Bush once made it clear "America is addicted to oil" ("State of the Union Address to the 109th Congress, Second



Session”). Addicted, principally, in the way Americans depend highly on oil for almost everything from industry to transportation. In point of fact, since the onset of the petroleum age back in 1860, the United States has been the leading consumer of oil and remains today. What is so exceptional and worth mentioning about the American addiction to oil is the fact that it began when the United States was self-sufficient in the production of this precious energy resource. Precisely, during the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, the United States produced virtually all the oil American citizens consumed, and provided a very high percentage of the crude consumed by the Allied armed forces during the Second World War. By that time, the United States was exhausting its domestic oil reserves, then after, its rapidly expanded energy needs drove the nation to become highly dependent on oil imported from elsewhere. This very reason highlighted the crucial link between American national security and oil (Little 51).

Although it is alleged that it was only until the fall of Soviet Communism that the United States strengthened its imperial hold over the oil-rich Middle East, the United States has for long been interested in the pursuit of oil coming from that region. Lockman contends that following the First World War, American oil companies encouraged by the American government sought to force or buy their own way into the Middle East rich and growing oil industry, yet American oil companies remained junior partners to the French and British oil companies, which at that time dominated the oil industry in the region (116).

Throughout human history, people have fought against each other over access and control of valuable resources, such as gold, silver, diamonds, timber, and other materials. However, in the modern world, oil has become more than any other material a source of warfare. Scholar Michael Klare focused his research studies on the ability of resources to trigger armed conflicts around the world. He examined post-Second World War global conflict and came to a conclusion that was entirely different from that of Huntington’s in “Clash of Civilizations?”. Klare found that resources, mainly oil, rather than differences in

civilizations and identities are the roots of most modern world conflicts. Oil seemed to outpace all other resources as more potential to generate armed conflicts in the contemporary world.

Having oil reserves shrinking and production plummeting by the end of the twentieth century, the American leaders, no matter what party affiliation sought to get access to oil fields in other parts of the world. Klare probes the importance of oil and undertook an intensive study of oil, geopolitics, and American foreign policy, which he published in a book entitled *Blood and Oil: The Dangers and Consequences of America's Growing Dependency on Imported Petroleum*. He found that the American foreign policy establishment has been governed by the American commitment to defend and protect the oil fields from any potential threat, and unveiled that the American military policy and energy policy have become intertwined and one of the same in the modern world.

The history of the United States hegemony over the Gulf region's economy and politics is paralleled with the history of oil discovery in that region. Once the American government's dispatched geologist E.I. Golyer to the Middle East appraised the oil-rich Saudi Arabia claiming that "the centre of gravity of world oil production is shifting ... to the Middle East-to the Persian Gulf area, and is likely until it is firmly established in that area" (qtd. in Rutledge 30), the American oil men turned their attention to Saudi Arabia. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his administration were the first to apprehend that the nation was depleting its oil reserves and would one day be in a situation in which the American civilization could entirely collapse. Thus, he set out to find secure access to new foreign sources of oil to make up for the decline in domestic American oil reserves. In 1945, a meeting that most Americans believed joined an advocate of democracy with an absolute monarch, was held between Roosevelt and the Saudi King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud aboard the USS Quincy in the Suez Canal. The meeting produced the unprecedented oil-for-protection

arrangement which came to govern the American ties with Saudi Arabia into the future (Klare xii). This arrangement made Roosevelt the very first American President to establish an American foreign policy based on oil. Since then, every American President, from FDR to Trump, has worked to reaffirm the American-Saudi Arabia alliance so as to secure American shares of oil in Saudi Arabia.

An abundance of cheap oil is highly essential to ensure the economic growth of the United States. The American leaders felt compelled to do anything necessary to ensure a steady flow of cheap oil. During the twentieth century, oil, unlike any other resource, was treated differently and more seriously as a foreign policy issue, the protection of which fell on the American federal government. Americans are “taught to pursue their interests with toughness and in disregard for other societies” (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 20), hence in the pursuit of oil, Americans were left with little, very little, to know about the Middle East. Within the Cold War years, oil turned into a national security matter and it fell on the Department of Defense to safeguard. American leaders and policymakers were really worried about the Soviet’s efforts to dominate the Persian Gulf and the flow of oil from the Middle East. In the first place, the Truman Doctrine sought to contain the Communist threat in Greece and Turkey through providing American aid, economic or military, to support both nations and protect the United States’ vital interests in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf region (Little 122-123).

This same geopolitical concern over Soviet domination of the Persian Gulf region shaped the Eisenhower Doctrine. President Dwight D. Eisenhower declared in 1956 that “the oil of the Arab world has grown increasingly important to all of Europe. The economy of Europe would collapse if those oil supplies were cut off. If the economy of Europe would collapse, the United States would be in a situation of which the difficulty could scarcely be exaggerated” (*The Eisenhower Diaries*). Eisenhower’s administration reasserted the

importance of the Middle East and the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf to American security and well-being. He also cautioned that “If power-hungry Communists should either falsely or correctly estimate that the Middle East is inadequately defended, they might be tempted to use open measures of armed attack. If so, that would start a chain of circumstances which would almost surely involve the United States in great military actions” (“Special Message to the Congress on the Situation in the Middle East”). This was a brazen announcement by President Eisenhower that revealed his administrations’ readiness to use hard power in defense of the American shares of oil in the Middle East.

The American policymakers played the guardian role in the Middle East. They allegedly defended the region’s economy while, in real, they aimed to protect their nation’s share of oil. In the Persian Gulf, for instance, the United States’ government embraced the Shah as a pro-American regime to protect its interests in the region and in the process the Iranian monarchy became the Persian Gulf region policeman, whose mission was to maintain the flow of cheap oil to the United States. Because the Shah makes available a regular amount of oil which kept America appearing strong, the overthrow of the Shah by the Islamic revolution in 1979 and Khomeini’s anti-American stance troubled the Carter administration. The revolution engendered a tremendous panic in Washington forcing, in the process, the Carter’s administration to take the initiative and act as the world’s policeman and protect its geostrategic interests all over the world. President Jimmy Carter asserted on January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1980 “let our opposition be absolutely clear: an attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary including military force” (“A State of the Union Address to a Joint Session of Congress”).

President Carter took a radical step when for the first time declared that the protection of the flow of oil from the Middle East was an American vital national security interest. He

founded the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force for the aim of protecting the American interests in the Middle East. When Ronald Reagan stepped into the White House, he took the initiatives of Carter's administration and beefed them up even further. He converted the Carter's Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force<sup>1</sup> into the Central Command in 1983, which was at that time a very recent addition to the American unified commands<sup>2</sup>. Reagan's Central Command mission was to increase the Middle East regional stability and once more to secure the American interest and the flow of oil.

During the Cold War years, the United States had come to identify roughly any threat to the political and economic status quo in the Middle East region as a threat to its interests, putting, thereby, stability and control a head of all any other considerations. With that being said, when Iran attacked the Kuwaiti tankers during the 'Tankers War' phase of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1987), Washington regarded the action as a threat to the American access to oil. This very reason, drove President Reagan to order the reflagging of the Kuwait tankers and assigned the United States Navy ships to escort the tankers in and out of the Persian Gulf under the Operation Earnest Will (July 23<sup>rd</sup> 1987). Similarly, during the First Gulf War (1990-1991), when the Iraqi troops invaded Kuwait, President George Herbert Walker Bush gave the Carter doctrine the most extreme implementation. Washington feared that Saddam Hussein was within striking a range of Saudi Arabian oil fields and concluded that the nation had to act military. President George Bush declared:

We are also talking about maintaining access to energy resources that are key, not just to the functioning of this country but to the entire world. Our jobs, our way of life, our own freedom and the freedom of the friendly countries around the world would all suffer if control of the world's great oil reserves fell into the hands of that one man. Saddam Hussein ("Remarks to Department of Defense Employees").

During the Gulf War, the United States wanted a physical presence in the Gulf Region to protect its vital interests in the region. Said described Operation Desert Storm as “an imperial war against the Iraqi people, an effort to break and kill them as part of an effort to break and kill Saddam Hussein” (*Culture and Imperialism* 301). This bloody aspect was largely kept away from the American media to maintain the Americans’ image as virtuous and clean warriors. This very image appeared in the remarks of President George Bush to the military Airlift in Command Dhahran, Saudi Arabia on November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1990, claiming, “we’re here, making a stand in defense of peace and freedom. And we’re here to protect freedom, here to protect our future, and here to protect innocent lives” (“Remarks to the Military Airlift in Command Dhahran”).

Following the victory over Iraq, Saudi Arabia faced a permanent presence of American troops on the Holy Land. American policymakers saw that it was necessary for the American deterrents to urgently stay in Saudi Arabia in order to reinforce the containment strategy against Saddam Hussein, and in the way ensure the safety of Saudi oil from any possible attack. Three years after ‘Operation Desert Storm’, 5.000 American troops remained in Saudi Arabia, with 3.000 more in Kuwait. The American intervention in the Middle East brought about fierce resentment from Osama bin Laden, the leader of the al-Qaeda terrorist group who, by 1996, declared war on the United States (Corbin 44).

In the aftermath of the first Gulf War (1990-1991), Osama bin Laden turned to a sworn enemy. His terrorist group took responsibility for various terrorist attacks on the American interests around the world, including the most tragic one, the 9/11 attacks. Although the attacks have many causes, oil may lay in the roots of bin Laden’s hatred for America. In his book *Messages to the World the Statements of Osama bin Laden*, he furiously believes that oil is the biggest reason behind foreign involvement in the Muslim world and that oil had to be protected (272).

Being at the mercy of foreign oil producers from unstable parts of the world became a source of weakness for the American government and made the nation vulnerable to foreign aggression. When George Walker Bush took office in 2001, he planned for maximum extraction of oil from the Middle East. The United States has had friendly regimes in the Middle East region which operated as surrogates to ensure a stable flow of oil including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar, yet Iraq and Iran in the Persian Gulf were regarded as spoiler countries that stood in the face of his maximum extraction strategy. The United Nations' economic sanctions imposed on Iraq following the first Gulf War were considered as a failure, instead of weakening Saddam Hussein; made him a national hero. Moreover, the major energy supply crisis that swept many parts of the nation drove the American government to do the necessary to allow for the double of oil output from the Middle East to occur (Klare 83; Schwartz 23).

This American interest in oil coming from the Middle East is highlighted in *The Kingdom* (2007). The movie opens with a montage constructed of borrowed archival footage and narration that aims to reveal the history of the United States-Saudi Arabia relations. From the 1930s and early oil discovery in Saudi Arabia to how the United States became involved in geopolitical events in the Middle East, including the Gulf War and the 9/11 attacks. The montage recaps the attacks in terms of Bin Laden's hatred of the Saudi Royal family and the fact that 15 out of the 19 World Trade Center murderers were Saudi nationals. It also evokes two of the catastrophic events the September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 attack on an American compound in Riyadh and the 1996 bombing of the Khobar Towers in Dhahran. This introduction functions as a stage that lays down the foundation of a backward and primitive image of Saudi Arabia standing for Islam and Muslims as pitted against the modern and advanced image of America symbolizing the West. Using this introduction, Director Peter Berg cleverly plays on the

audience's emotions and drives them to believe that what is happening in the movie's fictional scenes is what actually happened in Saudi Arabia in 2003.

Following the 9/11 attacks, Saddam Hussein turned to a dictator, a villain, or once more "the butcher of Baghdad" (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 295) for the American government, who was jeopardizing the Middle East stability by developing weapons of mass destruction and had to be decisively contained through war. On the surface, the Bush administration showed Americans and the world its deep worries about the enduring buildup of the Iraqi military capabilities and the threat it posed on the regional stability, but what lies below the surface is the fact that the safety of the Persian Gulf oil supplies and the prospects for increased output were the major reasons behind the American-led war on terror in Iraq. By all means, the ability to boost the Iraqi petroleum production was the irresistible lure that drove Bush's administration into war in Iraq and not the 9/11 attacks (Yergin).

President George W. Bush and his administration made America and the whole world believe that the invasion of Iraq was to make things in the right order for the sake of peace. America is uniquely positioned to lead the world, and it is part of its duty to adhere to a New World Order and rid the world from evil dictators like Saddam Hussein. Richard J. Barnet made it clear in *The Roots of War*, writing:

The goal of U.S foreign policy is to bring about a world increasingly subject to the rule of law. But it is the United States which must "organize the peace" [...] The United States, uniquely blessed with surpassing riches and an exceptional history, stands above the international system, not within it. Supreme among nations, she stands ready to be the bearer of the law (21).

The Bush administration made use of a special discourse to defend the American plans to invade Iraq claiming that it was not about oil but rather about furthering the cause of peace and stability. In the pursuit of power and energy, the United States has been playing the



dominant role of the guardian of the Western civilization who has the power to right the wrongs around the world. In fact, because the United States has emerged as a global superpower after the Second World War, it wanted to maintain its rule over the world by dominating major oil supplies. The American foreign and military policies establishments have been governed, for years, by that one commitment of defending the Middle eastern oil states like; Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Emirates with its vast military establishment. In such a stance, the United States is more likely to exchange blood for oil.

### **3.1.3. The 9/11 Attacks and the Rise of American War on Terrorism**

9/11 was a professional design and execution of terrorist strikes on strategic targets on the American soil. It aimed to terrorize the Americans by selecting the World Trade Center which is a symbol of global capitalism, and the American Pentagon, the icon of American military power. The attack involved extensive and sophisticated long-term planning by al-Qaeda and was the most deadly foreign assault on the continental America ever since the war of 1812. The attack caused the death of more than 3,000 and the injury to countless others. 9/11 attacks were highly condemned worldwide. President Bush declared “these acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. But they have failed; our country is strong” (“Address to the Nation on the September 11 Attacks”). On September 18<sup>th</sup> the Congress passed a legislation authorizing the president to use all means necessary, including the use of force, against the responsible for the attacks. In this context, President Bush declared the American war on terrorism and told a joint session of Congress on September 20<sup>th</sup> that it “will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated” (“Address to the Joint Session of the 107<sup>TH</sup> Congress”).

The American-led global war on terrorism is a campaign that embodies an American declaration of war on terrorism around the globe in retaliation for the 9/11 terrorist attacks. It is believed that the American War on Terror is the equivalent of the twentieth-century Cold

War in its scope, cost, and ramifications on international relations. The war on terror ushered to a new stage in the global political relations and can be defined as the multi-dimensional efforts by the United States to fight terrorism all over the globe. On the domestic level, the war necessitated new security measures. Maintaining the safety of American citizens became the primary goal of the Bush administration. For that purpose, new priorities were put in place enabling the American federal government to form new security institutions such as; the Department of Homeland Security, and endorse new Counter-terrorism legislations such as; the USA Patriot Act, which gave American police expanded power to investigate suspicious people and preventively detain thousands of suspects (Barr 38- 39).

In the eyes of the American leaders, the United States was no longer secured by vast oceans. The perception that Americans for long had, as being separated from tyranny in the Middle East and protected by oceans was reevaluated. Thereby, guarding the American borders was vitally important to prevent terrorists from sneaking into the nation, after all, the terrorists responsible for the 9/11 attacks were living among Americans while plotting to kill them. Security was strengthened in airports, skyscrapers, train stations, government buildings, public events, and at places where dangerous chemicals were present.

The American federal government learned from the Clinton administration's weakness at the intelligence level and allowed for the reorganization of the nation's intelligence institutions and expanded their funding. It also extended the nation's cooperation with foreign intelligence agencies to help untie terror cells, track, and intercept terror financing around the world. President Bush declared on the 17<sup>th</sup> of September, 2002 "We will cooperate with other nations to deny, contain, and curtail our enemies' efforts to acquire dangerous technologies. And, as a matter of common sense and self-defense, America will act against such emerging threats before they are fully formed [...] In the new world we have entered, the only path to

safety is the path of action” (“The National Security Strategy of the United States of America”).

*Zero Dark Thirty* (2012) gives a pervasive sense of America as being insecure. In the opening of the movie director Bigelow makes the American audience believe that their country is no longer safe, and lets them hear real 911 phone calls recording of innocent people from 9/11 on a black screen. The movie reinforces the idea of insecurity through featuring several terror attacks around the globe confirming that not only the American people but the entire world live under the threat of Islamic terrorism. It recreates an event in American history and portrays the American struggle to achieve security. On so many occasions, the character George Wright, the director of the CIA, raises the fact that American national security had been attacked so many times by land, sea, and air and reminds the CIA agents that it is their responsibility to keep America safe and protected. To further the sense of insecurity in the movie, CIA officials construct the character of Bin Laden as an enormous threat to the American national security, a mythical boogeyman, whose hunt requires the use of extraordinary measures including torture. For most Americans, the only way to be secured is to capture Bin Laden. The movie provides an interesting perspective on the war on terror, and justifies the use of any enhanced interrogation technique that works to eliminate the new enemy, proving that the only response to terror is more terror.

At the diplomatic level, Bush’s administration strived to construct and maintain a global coalition of associate states and organizations to successfully campaign against terrorism and anti-Americanism in the Middle East. President Bush warned the rest of the world in a joint session of Congress on September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2001 “either you are with us, or you are with terrorists, from this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime” (“Address to the Joint Session of the 107<sup>TH</sup> Congress”). Despite the fact that securing international community approval for

American measures in the war on terror was of vital importance since without allies a war against terror will fail, yet Bush avowed that within his war on terrorism, his administration would not hesitate to act unilaterally particularly when the United States national security is vulnerable to foreign threats. He declared “while the United States will constantly strive to enlist the support of the international community, we will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defense by acting preemptively against such terrorists, to prevent them from doing harm against our people and our country” (“Strength Alliances to Defeat Global Terrorism and Work to Prevent Attacks Against Us and Our Friends” 6).

Specifically, the main target of the war on terror was Osama bin Laden and his terror organization ‘ al-Qaeda’ sheltered by the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. President Bush demanded that the Taliban hand over Bin Laden and destroy the terror training camps in Afghanistan or face war with the United States. When the Taliban refused to meet the American demands, Bush formed a coalition supported by dozens of nations and aided by anti-Taliban Afghans, who are also known as the Northern Alliance, and launched ‘Operation Enduring Freedom’ in Afghanistan. On October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2001 the American and British aircrafts initiated the war and began bombing the Taliban Targets. The Afghanistan campaign went very well as the war destroyed most of the Taliban terrorist bases and captured thousands of Taliban fighters and al-Qaeda leaders. Once the ground fighting was completed by November 26<sup>th</sup>, the American-led war on terror successfully removed the Taliban regime from power and installed a temporary pro-Western national government under the leadership of Hamid Karzai. However, the most important target, Osama bin Laden, was not captured yet as he went into concealment in Pakistan (Samuels 14-17; Barr 16-17). The victory over the Taliban regime propped up the morale of Americans and increased the levels of international cooperation in the global fight against terrorism, but will the dismantling of al-Qaeda signify the end of terrorism?

Americans constantly opposed terrorism. The Clinton administration, for instance, has previously bombed al-Qaeda terror camps in Afghanistan and Sudan, yet the bombing did not amount to an American declaration of war on terrorism. Donald Rumsfeld resigned to note that Bush's war on terror "will be a war like none other our nation has faced" ("A New Kind of War"). In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, the United States adopted a national security strategy that focused on preventing any future acts of terrorism to emerge. The main target of the American-led global war on terrorism was "a global network of terrorist organization and their state sponsors, committed to denying free people the opportunity to live as they choose" (Rumsfeld, "A New Kind of War").

As a result, at the military level, the American national security in the twenty-first century required the transformation of the American military, the expansion of the defense budget, and the abandonment of the traditional strategies of containment and deterrence to adopt the new way of war. The latter involved unilateralism and preemptive actions by the American military. Rumsfeld took on the mission of preserving the American hegemony through the transformation of the United States military. In essence, he observed "the United States must work to build up its own areas of advantage, such as our ability to project military power over long distances, our precision-strike weapons, and our space intelligence, and undersea warfare capabilities", and added "defending the United States requires prevention and sometimes preemption [...] Defending against terrorism and other emerging threats requires that we take the war to the enemy. The best-- and, in some cases, the only-- defense is a good offense" ("Transforming the Military").

Once again, Bush made Americans and the whole world believe that the United States is no longer protected by vast oceans; thereby it has to play the role of a policeman to rid the world of uncivilized, barbaric dictatorship regimes around the world. He made it understandable that the only way to do so was by taking "vigorous action abroad and

increased vigilance at home” (“State of the Union Address to the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress”). Defenders of Bush’s doctrine believed that it is the responsibility of the world’s leader to protect democracy around the world. It is a unique responsibility that the United States has inherited from Britain and France. The Bush’s administration saw that it was part of the American self-righteousness to keep the world safe, President Bush declared “we are serving in freedom’s cause- and that is the cause of all mankind” (“Address at the MacDill Air Force Base”).

The Bush Doctrine which is based on preemptive actions, in which the United States will strike enemies before they attack and would act without the international approval was applied for the first time against Iraq. Iraq became the next target of the American war on terror campaign once the coalition overthrew the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. The removal of Saddam Hussein was not the original aim of the campaign but turned to be crucial to its success. President Bush ordered ‘Operation Iraqi Freedom’ on March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2003. But, unlike the first war on terror, this time President Bush waged a preemptive war against Iraq without the UN approval.

The war in Iraq is part of the larger controversy that surrounds the Bush doctrine; it emphasized both unilateral and preemptive military actions. Evidently, little did the American leaders know that the war in Iraq or even in Afghanistan would still be continuing ten years later. *The Kingdom* (2007) is a movie released amidst the amounting skepticism on prospects of the ‘war on terror’ and democracy in the Middle East. Indeed, long before the United States launched its military operations against Iraq in March 2003, Hollywood was already launching its real war against Arabs and Muslims. The pre-9/11 insidious representation of the enemy Arab/Muslim helped fuel prejudice and misrepresentation in America, which would, definitely, help mobilize the American favor for the war on Iraq. The United States has been lately at contentions with most of the world over its foreign policy. The Bush Doctrine was highly criticized at home and abroad. It was believed to have led the United

States into the war on Iraq on mistaken assumptions, 65% of the Republicans believed that the war had been one of the Bush administration's worst decisions (Berlatsky). Even after the invasion of Iraq and the removal of Saddam Hussein, the United States forces did not find any weapons of mass destruction, the very reason d'être behind the war against Iraq. The Bush administration initiated the war on terror in Iraq for the pursuit of a larger American geostrategic agenda that encompassed oil reserves, a regime change, and the expansion of military engagement in the region (Schwartz 24-25; Chomsky & Achcar 55). In Afghanistan, the war successfully scattered al-Qaeda and removed the Taliban regime, yet it did not signal the end of violence, the latter reached record highs years after the invasion. Indeed, sparse terror cells became even harder to counteract.

In years following the involvement in the Middle East, the drawbacks of Bush's war on terrorism were becoming more apparent. The Bush administration war planners had underestimated the difficulties of building functioning governments from scratch. Obstacles were even more perceptible in Iraq, whereby, the nation suffered sectarian tensions unleashed following the removal of Saddam Hussein. Scholar Paul Ruschmann considers Bush's unilateral military action responsible for making the world even more dangerous. He views that a foreign policy that relies on hard power and seeks or pledges regimes change overseas is more likely to leave the world relatively more hazardous (32). Other critics believe that Bush's policy will create more problems than those it is trying to solve in the first place. Richard Falk, Professor of international law at Princeton University, warned that the fight against terror and the preemptive military actions are alleged to create serious problems in the long run. The war on terrorism, he adds, "is a war in which the pursuit of the traditional military goal 'victory' is almost certain to intensify the challenge and spread the violence" (qtd. in Ruschmann 40). In a similar vein, David Rivkin, Jr and Lee A. Casey supposed that

the Bush doctrine will encourage vulnerable nations to speed up their nuclear programs to bar an American invasion in their internal affairs (43).

The war on terror, whether in Afghanistan or Iraq, so far, is proved to increase violence and terrorism. The American involvement in the Middle East had increased anti-American sentiment among the Muslim world. The opposition to the American presence in the Middle East, also called the insurgency, grew and eventually caused more destruction, disruption, and a large number of deaths. Terror groups fed on the people's hostility toward Americans and were enabled to regroup under a common cause. In fact, at that time, it was more likely for the Bush doctrine to fail in building a democratic Middle East, which turned into an exporter of violence and terror since the start of the war on terror campaign.

Hollywood has for years before the 9/11 attacks been a propaganda vehicle for the American government. After the attacks, it seemed keen to help with the war on terror and became a major weapon of the American-led-global war on terrorism (Sardar and Davies 121). The narrative of the 'us vs. them' engendered by the war on terror provided moviemakers with the best setting and with a new chance to build on their favorite storylines. The assumptions underpinning the movie production are the same throughout; that is America is a global force for good, which sometimes forcibly has to act as the world's policeman to ensure that no nation violates the world's law and order. *United 93* (2006) is a movie released amidst the American-led-global war on terror. It provides a blatant example of American heroism and exceptionalism. Although director Paul Greengrass was cautious not to promote his movie as a part of the Bush administration's war on terror campaign, the movie contains scenes that harshly criticize the American government during the 9/11, particularly the scenes where the military operation was unable to obtain the presidential authorization in an endeavor to send two jet fighters to intercept with the hijacked flight. His vision of *United 93* is not essentially to justify the Bush administration's war on terror or even to blame the



American government, but to encourage the American public to band together in their fight against terrorism when it reminds them about the very reason d'être behind the American war on terror, the 9/11 attacks.

In an interview with *New York* magazine, director Berg claimed that *The Kingdom* (2007) conveys a political message through supporting dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims at the expense of religious extremism (Lindgren). However, his movie does not justify any of his claims, as it is a setback for effort to improve relations between the United States and the Muslim world, and it is imbued with crude antagonism, dangerous simplifications, and gross distortions (Shaheen, *Guilty* 26). Berg and his screenwriter Michael Carnahan dealt with the American pre-conceptions of the exotic Arabs. Their movie embellished old Orientalist stereotypes and portrayed the conflict between the Muslim East and the Christian West as interminable due to the Islamic religion's violent nature, validating the 'clash of civilizations' theory.

No doubt, *The Kingdom* as a movie released in 2007 reflects the growing disaffection with the America's war on terror. Berg and Carnahan used the movie to impress their own view regarding the Bush's administration war on terror campaign, suggesting that countering terrorism using power though offers temporary gratification, will definitely sustain the cycle of violence between the militant Islamists and the West (view the closing scenes). *The Kingdom* carefully selected and recycled certain pre-existing Hollywood stereotypical representations of Arabs and Muslims. Excluding the positive characterization of two Saudi officers, it does not allow for the construction of a more diversified characterization of Arabs and Muslims. Moreover, through featuring Saudi Arabia as primitive, uncivilized, and incompetent, it satisfies Western viewers by downgrading the eastern (Islamic) culture in various ways. *The Kingdom* is significantly alarming given the time of its release, the post-9/11 era and the war on terror campaign, its negative representation of Muslims helps to

justify the American war on Islamic extremists and its military measures toward the Muslim world in the twenty-first century.

### **3.2. The Socio-Cultural Context**

American politics is twisted with American society and culture. To successfully advance politics, American leaders involve the American public in political affairs and encourage them to back the government's policies in favor of their nation. After the devastating 9/11 attacks, within the setting of personal loss, paranoia, and political skepticism, the American culture has been profoundly and forever changed. President Bush engaged Americans in the nation's political affairs and instigated them to back him up for the sake of securing the national security and interests. President Bush, literally, sought to manufacture the manner in which Americans all over the country reasoned, discussed, and then responded to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. In this process, he addressed Americans seeking their support and advocacy of the war on terrorism when he said "we'll be deliberate, yet time is not on our side. I will not wait on events, while dangers gather. I will not stand by, as peril draws closer and closer. The United States of America will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons" ("State of the Union Address to the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress"). His discourse in support for the war on terror campaign was imbued with appealing words that stressed the American unity and the preservation of American values in order to secure the public's sympathy for his government. The result was that Bush's administration, along with the American media, contributed to the creation of an evil image of the enemy and reinforced the portrayal of Arab Muslims as the threatening culture 'Other'.

American media is one of the extremely powerful institutions in American society. It exercises influence in a variety of ways profoundly affecting American society. Owing to the fact that the American government and media discourses are interrelated, Bush's 'they hate us for our freedom' rhetoric legitimated his government's racist policies, at home and abroad,

and mobilized the public support for the targeting of Arabs and Muslim-Americans in the post-9/11 events. Clearly, the American policymakers frequently orient the behavior of Americans, affect their opinions, and manufacture their consent through a complex process known as the ‘agenda-setting’. American policymakers hire protagonists in the American media to help enable the public to learn how much importance should be given to certain topics than others and in the way predict their response. In the immediate weeks and months after the 9/11 attacks, the American government has had ongoing efforts to shape the national conversation concerning retaliation for the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

### **3.2.1. The Impact of 9/11 on the American Society and the Rise of Islamophobia**

The 9/11 terrorist attacks promoted biased knowledge about the Arab/Muslim culture and Islam in American society. The association of the Islamic religion with one of the deadliest terrorist attacks on American soil in the United States history intensified the preexisting prejudices and misconceptions against Islam and Muslims. Although very few Americans knew very little about Islam and Muslims prior to the 9/11, the events arouse fear and new hostilities that deeply affected the lives of minority Muslims in America. This very sense of fear and apprehension that many Americans had in common during this period was likely exacerbated by President Bush’s permissive use of the terms ‘Muslim terrorists’ and ‘Arab terrorists’ in his post-9/11 rhetoric in reference to the war on terror. Various surveys have demonstrated a high level of suspicion and mistrust with which Arab/Muslim Americans were frequently viewed mainly as part of the American society.

The attacks made crystal clear for the first time that the United States was vulnerable to foreign threats which could perfectly penetrate deep within the American communities. Predictably, in the days, months, and even years after the 9/11 attacks, the Arab/Muslim community was subjected to a wave of violence and hate crimes. The targeting and vilification of Muslims saw a dramatic increase, both in Europe and in America, after the 9/11

attacks. There was an increase in the frequency and brutality of malignant attitudes toward Muslims within the American society; Muslims were verbally harassed, threatened, and profiled on the basis of their religion. In some instances, verbal confrontations turned into physical altercations that threatened the livelihood of Arab/Muslim Americans. Although it was increasingly difficult to quantify how many Islamophobic hate crimes occurred in the United States, patriotic avengers were responsible for over 2400 violent incidents and more than 481 hate crimes against minority Muslims in the weeks and months that followed the 9/11 attacks (Peek 95). This discrimination of Arab/Muslim Americans was intensified by the profusion of anti-Arab articles and malicious commentary on the American mainstream media. The attacks had had considerable lasting effects on the Arab/Muslim-Americans' integration and assimilation into the American pluralistic society, as a consequence, Arab/Muslim Americans found themselves excluded from the core social institution of the United States.

Unsurprisingly, in response to the actions of very few radical Islamists who were responsible for the huge atrocities the American society witnessed on that 9/11, the federal government unfairly and unjustly targeted Muslims through the implementation of a series of anti-terrorism policies and programs which directly and explicitly targeted and signaled out the whole Arab/Muslim-American community. The most distressing measures adopted by Bush's administration were the USA Patriot Act and the National Security Exit-Entry Registration System. While the NSEERS increased screening of travelers coming from the Muslim countries, the Patriot Act, literally, granted the American President an unlimited power to counter and intercept terrorism by allowing for the conduct of secret searches, surveillance, or monitoring of electronic communications (E-mails and phone calls), and the detention of suspects indefinitely without clear evidence. Even though since the mid-twentieth century several congressional acts and executive regulations made it possible for investigators

to selectively target Arab immigrants for intense questioning and possible deportations (Haddad 154), the Arab-American community viewed the Patriot Act as a violation of the Constitution's Fourth Amendment that guarantees the protection for unreasonable search and seizer and a declaration of war on the Constitutional protections of Arab-Americans civil rights. Although before the 9/11 events, the majority of Americans rejected the practice of racial profiling, which encouraged President Bush to enact the End of Racial Profiling Act<sup>3</sup> months before the 9/11 attacks, only days after the attacks, many Americans favored racial profiling when directed toward Arabs, Muslims, and mainly Arab-Americans. Bush's discourse that racial profiling "is wrong, and we will end it in America" ("Address to the Joint Session of the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress") did not prevent a shocked and fearful nation from expressing profound levels of support for ethnic and religious profiling.

Targeting Muslims as a subject of surveillance, regulation, and violence in American society led to the rise of a new discourse that sought to carefully describe the state and private animus, what has come to be labeled Islamophobia came to replace the antecedent Orientalism, which was crafted before the 9/11 attacks. While Islamophobia may have become more public in recent years, it existed along before the 9/11 attacks and the American declared war on terrorism, it just increased in frequency and notoriety during the past decade. In fact, Islamophobia was relatively manifest in American society by the late of the twentieth century in one of the most blatant biases targeted at Muslims in America during the bombing of Oklahoma City's Murrah Federal building in April 19<sup>th</sup>, 1995. In the wake of the attack, American news organizations, politicians, former officials, and terrorism experts all rushed to put the blame on Arabs and Muslims using absolutely unsubstantiated reports that link men with Oriental Middle Eastern origins to the incident. Stereotypical media reporting of the incident helped to create and disseminate anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiments throughout American society, which spawned harassment and intimidation across the country. As a

result, Muslim-Americans came to suffer retribution for an act that neither involved their community nor implicated any one of its members.

That is to say, Islamophobia in America stems from a deeply ingrained American tradition of labeling Islam as un-American and the positioning of Arabs and Muslims as an existential threat (Beydoun, "Viewpoint: Islamophobia Has a Long History in the US"). When terrorism became a salient issue following the 9/11 attacks, Islamophobia saw a rapid evolution, and precisely, after the launch of the war on terror. However, beyond the American never-ending war on terrorism, the roots of modern Islamophobia run very deep. The history of animosity and hatred toward Arabs and Muslims dates back to early direct contact with the Muslim world and was intensified during the second half of the twentieth century. The newly formed terror organization responsible for the 9/11 attacks launched a series of abrupt and professionally executed attacks on American targets around the world during the 1990s. Al-Qaeda was responsible for the bombing of the American Training and Air Force Facility in Saudi Arabia, two American embassies in East Africa, the assault on the USS Cole in the port of Aden, Yemen, and the first bombing of the World Trade Center. With its active terror cells nearly everywhere around the world, al-Qaeda came to trouble the American administrations and heightened the American concern over the growing threat of militant Islam, allowing for the targeting of Arabs and Muslims for all heinous crimes of mass destruction in American media.

A great deal of what emerged in the West after the 9/11 attacks has been blatantly prejudiced against the Islam and its adherents. As the West witnessed the redeployment of old Orientalist tropes (Choudhury and Beydoun 25), the portrayals of Muslims as irrational and haters of American freedom on television, in movies, and by scholars have become a prevailing received knowledge for most Americans. The fear and suspicion of Muslims on the part of the American government manifested through new laws and policies that were crafted

to punish, persecute, and prosecute members of the Muslim/Arab American community and Arab immigrants to America. The declaration of the war of terror linked terrorism to Islam and assigned the presumption of guilt to all Muslims around the world, and mainly, to the Muslim American community in the United States. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the state actions legitimated the prevailing misconceptions and misrepresentations that were widely held by the public against the Muslims and those perceived to be Muslims. This new system of inculcating fear and prejudice against Muslims rooted in centuries-old tropes and reified by the contemporary war on terror and counter-radicalism policy, and that is perpetuated by negative stereotypes became woven into the fabric of American political and social life and have resulted the discrimination of Muslims and Arabs in the United States.

### **3.2.2. The United States as a “Post-Racial Society”**

The United States was just attempting to remedy racial inequality and emerge as a post-racial society when the 9/11 events proved that racism is deeply rooted within the American society. Although the civil rights movement engendered the institutionalization of anti-racist policies and the shift in the American government approach to race and racism, racial bias toward minority Muslims persisted and accelerated after the 9/11. The United States started to exert a new kind of racism known as exceptional racism, which rearticulated a new more enlightened form of racism that for many Americans has everything to do with the nation’s national security. Defending racial discrimination against Arab-Americans, Arabs, and Muslims, a columnist for *The Washington Post*, wrote:

We have become driveling idiots on matters of race and ethnicity. One hundred percent of the terrorists involved in the 9/11 mass murder were Arabs. Their accomplices, if any, were probably Arabs, too -- or at least Muslims. Ethnicity and religion are the very basis of their movement. It hardly makes sense, therefore, to ignore that fact and, say,

give Swedish au pair girls heading to the United States the same scrutiny as Arab men coming from the Middle East (Cohen).

In the post 9/11, many Americans believed that racism is wrong but necessary given the fact that 9/11 is an exceptional moment of crisis that demands exceptional measures. Those measures discriminate against Arab/Muslim-Americans as American citizens and bare them of their civil rights in exchange for security. Within a few months after 9/11, Arab-Americans, Arabs, and Muslims were being pulled out of screening lines and forced to go through several searches in airports and subjected to additional security checks in other public settings and special events that drew a large number of people (Peek 93). Alsultany explained this American discriminative attitude, arguing that “within the frame of safety, racism is reduced to political correctness and political correctness reduced to useless etiquette” (*Arabs and Muslims in the Media* 52).

For many Americans, it is important to be safe rather than not to discriminate. The 9/11 crisis is too urgent to be mainly concerned with being politically correct. The logic of exception, the fact that the 9/11 tragedy and that the terrorist enemy is unusual, educated, trained, living among Americans as neighbors, that is an enemy within, and willing to sacrifice life allowed Americans to rationalize racism as both wrong but necessary against Arabs and Muslims. Nonetheless, the notion of an exceptional moment of crisis (9/11) along with the public’s approval of racialization enabled the American government to pass racist policies, to initiate mass deportation of Arabs and Muslims, to lead wars on Afghanistan and Iraq, and to justify the hold and torture of detainees without legal resources.

Freedom of religion is the very first protection offered in America’s Bill of Rights, and it is the promise of the American Constitution. The attacks that were supposed to reveal an image of a democratic, multicultural, and enlightened America proved that the nation was more shattered along ethnic and racial lines. A political commentator for *USA Today* wrote;



“when our national security is on the line, ‘racial profiling’ - or more precisely, threat profiling based on race, religion or nationality- is justified. Targeted intelligence- gathering at mosques and in local Muslim communities, for example, makes perfect sense when we are at war with Islamic extremists” (Malkin).

Media and political rhetoric against Islam intensified after the 9/11, which indubitably contributed to the cloud of suspicion hanging over the Muslim American community. Given the enormous influence exercised over the whole public opinion, the more the American motion picture industry misrepresents minorities, the more they will be misunderstood. American cinematic production is the only window into the world that most Americans have. No one can deny the massive impact that entertainment images have on the lives of viewers. Cinematic production not only provides information but also contributes to developing, distorting, and remolding beliefs and values. Movies orient the individuals’ feelings and perceptions and shape their emotional response to various scenes, inculcating the desired ideologies covertly.

The American cinematic production is a cultural form that presses the social and political issues of the moment and has a far-reaching impact on the American society and the whole Western world. Before the term ‘war on terror’ existed in America, Hollywood was seriously creating and disseminating an enthusiastic image of Arabs and Muslims through its production. However, since the 9/11 attacks, this pre-existing toxic Islamophobic sentiments were reawakened and spread through movies. It is quite lucid that the Western mainstream media has and continue to misrepresent Muslims and Arabs through both the news and movies. Various news organizations capitalize on the conflicts in the Muslim world as religiously motivated and make liberal use of terms such as fanatics, extremists, and terrorists to describe individuals from the Middle East. Mass media exclusive focus on fundamentalist Islam spread negative images and fear of Muslims; such images found their way into the

motion picture industry and might be considered as the root cause of Islamophobia in American cinematic production. Associating Islam and Muslims with violence is not only found in America but spread like a virus to other parts of the world via the mass media.

Islamophobia, as a new phenomenon, has been repeatedly reinforced in Hollywood movies. From shady sheiks to Jihadist violent Muslims, Hollywood's misrepresentation of Arabs and Muslims serves as an effective form of propaganda that creates fear and hatred of Islam and Muslims. Islamophobic depiction of Arabs and Muslims as dangerous in American cinema was already prominent by 1960s following the Arab-Israeli war. This racialized misrepresentation was supplemented with another character after the Oil Embargo crisis, which is that of the greedy oil rich Bedouins. But no other event made Arabs and Muslims run through the silver screen as dangerous and fanatic as the Iranian Hostage crisis. The event contributed to shift the oil greedy stereotype that dominated the American cinematic visual representation of Arabs and Muslims since the Oil Embargo to the threatening terrorist stereotype.

In fact, Hollywood can be seen as an Islamophobic industry devoted mainly to make the American and the world's audience believes that Arabs and Muslims are the enemy. After the collapse of Communism, Muslims replaced the traditional enemy 'the Soviets' and emerged as the new villain in Hollywood movies, in which they are shown as threatening the very freedom of the United States. Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, movies, TV shows, TV dramas, and series have operated as sites to discuss and debate the modern-day American global war on terror. Post-9/11 Hollywood production has a clear semblance of the real; moviemakers base their storylines on current events and mediate the war on terror. Viewers are invited to live and witness the war against Islamic extremists in a more real way. As a result, their experiences and perceptions of the war are closely linked to the cinematic production.

It is important to take seriously the power of the motion picture industry in shaping the public perceptions of political issues, because, intentionally or not, the motion picture industry can play a real role in the construction of political realities. Amid the global war on terror, with few exceptions, post-9/11 Hollywood's production often depicted the American military and the government agencies and officials as heroically attempting, by all means necessary, to battle Islamic terrorism to preserve the world's peace and serve the civilized world. The enduring projection of the United States as in perpetual danger caused by Islamic terrorism, in Hollywood movies, not only provides support for banning Muslim entry to the nation and the American use of power in the Muslim world, but also proves that Islamophobia is much alive and well established in the American cinema.

Since both the sense of threat and the rhetoric of danger provide the groundwork for securing the United States as a cultural and social entity, Hollywood frequently contributes, with the sponsor of the Pentagon, to develop and spread Islamophobia worldwide, affecting the individuals' psyche. As a matter of fact, individuals are more likely to respond swiftly to threatening situations, and they are more probable to become aggressive toward a targeted group. Given the fact that Americans know little about Arabs and Muslims, in panic and paranoia engendered by the 9/11 terrorist attacks, fearful and unknowing people validated the war on terrorism launched by the Bush administration. During conflicts and wars, negative stereotypes and historically false portrayals serve to create an image of the Arab/Muslim as someone who would surely be involved in terror activities meet little resistance. Thus, hatred and animus toward Islam, Arabs, and Muslims continue to harm all Muslims in the West.

Greengrass's *United 93* narrates the story of the United States as a nation in crisis. Although most of the events in the movie take place onboard of the airplane, typically, the movie assesses the American anti-Arab racism that dominated American society in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. *United 93*, whether intentionally or not, advanced the logic of exception

that justified the unfair anti-Arab discriminative laws, racial profiling, and targeting of Arabs and Muslims in airports. Once the 19 hijackers of Arab origin turned commercial airplanes into weapons of mass destruction and were responsible for the trauma ensued in America, airports became one of the most common settings in which individuals perceived to be Middle Easterners were targeted. Arab/Muslim Americans were subjected to lengthy security checks and took hours to get from the ground to a plane when attempting to fly. In some instances, once onboard Arab-Americans were deemed untrustworthy and were removed from flights. Dozens of thousands of Arab Americans were barred from flying in the immediate weeks and months after the 9/11. *United 93* can be seen as a movie that justifies the national anxiety of flying with Arabs unleashed by the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Even though Arab-Americans condemned the terrorist attacks and worked jointly with other Americans to counter-terrorism, being tied to the Arab and Muslim world by origins and ethnicity meant for many Americans that Arab/Muslim Americans are guilty by association. Very shortly after the attacks, some Americans suggested that the nation should no longer be open to Arab immigrants. In response, the State Department released information about tightened visa regulations and new restrictions on the manner and process of obtaining visas for all Arab males (Purdy 157). The explicit targeting of Arabs and Muslims by government policies on the basis of identity contradicts claims to considerable racial progress in America.

Negative images of Muslims have been intensified in recent years in large measures by the American media portrayals and the government environment of fear. The continuous motion picture industry repulsive representation of Arabs and Muslims as imminent threat normalized the very logic that supports American imperial projects abroad and promoted racial and religious profiling at home. Albeit much of the cinematic production in post-9/11 is guided by Orientalism, anti-Muslim racism, and Islamophobia as a new form of Othering, and project Arabs and Muslims in a heinous manner, some of it provide sympathetic portrayal

which in a way or another justified the increase in hate crimes, government's discriminative policies, and the targeting of Arabs and Muslims. According to Alsultany, the emergence of sympathetic representations of Arabs, Muslims, Arab Americans, and Muslim Americans "deflects attention from the persistence of racist policies and practices post-9/11" (*Arabs and Muslims in the Media* 12), and offers the impression that the United States has resolved all of its racial problems. This sympathetic representation participates in neutralizing the logic of exception, which is crucial to produce post-race racism.

In the post 9/11, what determines whether an Arab or a Muslim is good or bad is not his or her relationship to Islam but rather to the United States. According to Mahmoud Mamdani, the public debate since the terrorist attacks has involved a discourse about 'good' and 'bad' Muslims. Muslims are assumed to be evil and bad until they prove their allegiance to the United States (15). This very perception is illustrated by Colonel Fares Al-Ghazi and Sergeant Haytham characters in *The Kingdom*, by the character of a CIA official called 'Wolf' in *Zero Dark Thirty*, and by the character of 'Amahl' the Libyan translator in *13 Hours: Secret Soldiers of Benghazi*. This mode of representing the enemy became standard in post-9/11 attacks. The aforementioned positive characterization is, actually, keeping with the popular trope of respectable racism. The use of positive characterization in movies project the United States as a nation founded on justice and equality; while simultaneously perpetuate the image of Islam as a violent religion and of Arabs, and Muslims as threats to the American national security. However, still, the ability to portray Arabs and Muslims as more than just terrorists but rather as fighters of terrorism is regarded as a sign of progress.

### **3.2.3. The Impact of American Exceptionalism and the War on Terror on Post-9/11 American Cinematic Production**

Since the past decades, the United States has acquired a global leadership role not only due to American power and wealth but to its exceptional nature. Although defined in different

ways by different scholars, American exceptionalism generally refers to the ideology which suggests that as a nation, the United States is special and has distinguished characteristics; as being qualitatively different, singular, and unique; as being fundamentally superior, better, and grander by comparison to the rest of the world; and as being a divine selection assigned with special favored status on earth. Since the country's historic beginnings, this notion of an exceptional America has been integrated into the national identity (Weiss and Edwards 1), whether it is proven or not, the United States is exceptional. This perception needs no verification as it is accepted as true in the minds of many Americans.

The American exceptionalism as a concept makes a fundamental part of the United States presidency and has been frequently invoked and used by American presidents to create and maintain a sense of unity within the United States. Essentially, scholars including Andrew Rojecki, Trevor McCrisken, Levy McEvoy, Rico Neumann, and Kevin Coe, have found that, for centuries, American leaders and politicians have been perpetuating the idea of hope, American greatness, and uniqueness for the American public through rhetoric (Neumann and Coe 12-15). Ever since the emergence of the United States as a global superpower, the use of American exceptionalism in political rhetoric and presidential discourses became more frequent. American leaders consistently sought to link their policies with the idea of a unique America assigned with an exceptional mission to provide justifications for their policy choices (Viotti 108).

Serving as the forty-third President of the United States, George W. Bush relied on American exceptionalism to connect his policies with the idea of America's unique destiny and role in the world. In his presidential rhetoric, he repeatedly highlighted America's unique and god favored status in the world. Upon taking office in January 2001, he wasted no time reminding Americans about the American exceptional nature, summing up the unique history of the nation when he stated, in his inaugural address, that the United States emerged from a

“slave holding society” to “became a servant of freedom”, a global superpower “that went into the world to protect but not possess, to defend but not to conquer” (“The First Inaugural Address”). His rhetoric played a considerable role in influencing the private sphere, reinforcing, and shaping how Americans and the rest of the world perceived the image of the United States.

Bush expressed his belief that, as a God-favored nation, the United States is destined to succeed in being a beacon for the rest of the world. It is assigned with a special role in the modern world, which is to use its tremendous power to lead the world toward freedom, peace, and democracy and to advance the American exceptional ideals. In the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Bush addressed the nation from the Oval Office, claiming that the terrorists hate the American values and way of life (“Address to the Nation on the September 11 Attacks”). He strategically sought to revive the American exceptionalism by frequently comforting Americans that their government is mobilized to find those responsible for the attacks and bring them to justice. He called upon the American public to unite and show the terrorists that no one can keep the American light from shining, when he stated that the United States should “celebrate the durable wisdom and recall the deep commitments that unite our country” (“The Second Inaugural Address”).

Leading his war on terrorism, Bush was unyielding in his resolve that “evil is real” and had to be opposed (“The Second Inaugural Address”). He continuously praised the American military and technological capabilities for freeing the country from brutal oppression and sacrificing their lives in the cause of fighting Islamic extremists around the world. He made American exceptional character the guiding light that would lead the world to peace, once he declared that the United States “seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world” (“The Second Inaugural Address”).

The invocation of this concept has culminated during the Obama presidency. President Barack Hussein Obama demonstrated the overwhelming propensity to emphasize American exceptionalism in the war on terrorism. He stressed the fact that “for generations, the United States of America has played a unique role as an anchor of global security and as an advocate for human freedom” (“Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Libya”). On so many occasions, he praised several facets of America’s standing as unique and great, and lionized the American military and the nation’s leadership role in the world. In response to the political upheaval in Libya, he declared, from Brazil in 2011, that America “cannot stand idly when a tyrant tells his people there will be no mercy” (“Remarks by the President on Libya”). He carried as part of a broad coalition a limited military action on Libya. Along with Britain and France, the United States led missile bombardment and airstrikes on Gaddafi’s forces and military targets with no intention to send ground troops. Within a few months, Libya turned into a terror haven country with lethal weapons spread to local black markets.

After the toppling of Gaddafi, the security situation deteriorated allowing for jihadi groups to concentrate in Benghazi. Terrorist activity in Libya rose rapidly and targeted Western interests. On the night of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the morning of September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2012 armed militants stormed the United States diplomatic compound in Benghazi, Libya, and the nearby CIA annex. The attack claimed the lives of four Americans including the American Ambassador, Christopher Stevens. The attack proved that terrorism and anti-American sentiments were on the rising and growing stronger at that time. The reality about the attack was kept secret; the Obama administration linked the attack to inflammatory material posted on the internet (a video that insulted Islam and Prophet Mohammed PBUH) following protests earlier that same day at the American embassy in Cairo, Egypt. *13 Hours* as an American biographical war movie based on a book entitled *13 Hours: The Inside Account of What Really Happened in Benghazi* and directed by Michael Bay describes the attack as a



well planned and executed terrorist attack. The movie as a simple story of courage and valor emphasizes American exceptionalism, honors the American military, and features ex-Navy Seal soldiers as patriotic, brave, and skilled warriors in their fight against extremists in Libya.

The massive emphasis on American exceptionalism in political rhetoric has affected deeply the American public perception of their country. The control of narrative and information is one of the most important factors that contribute to fostering and maintaining public support for the government's domestic and foreign policies. Although a relatively new form of media, the American cinema, also, played an influential role in perpetuating and shaping exceptionalist ideology, affecting the opinions of the American people. Obviously, there is power in what we watch and how we view it; the essential theme of American exceptionalism has been proliferated through the American movie industry for centuries. Various movies have bombarded the audience, whether American or non-American, with putrid images of a superior, hegemonic, and God-favored America. The majority of Hollywood movies promoted the United States as a benevolent force in world affairs, supported the American foreign policy, and almost never criticized American exceptionalism at any serious level.

This narration of America's superiority and exceptionalism persisted and continued to manifest itself in new and dynamic forms through time. The 9/11 events disrupted practically every form of American cultural production and triggered a more pronounced presence of American exceptionalism in movies. In the immediate months after the attacks, Hollywood studios began reorganizing their release schedules, any movies that challenged the American supremacy, did not emphasize American exceptionalism, unity, and heroism were regarded critical and anti-patriotic and were pushed to the margin (Markovitz 201). The philosophy of American exceptionalism had become the backbone of many movies since the attacks. Amid the confusion ensued by the 9/11 attacks, the remarkable increase of patriotic sentiments and

the almost vanishing of political dissent generated a consensus of purpose, which came to shed light on the close relation between Hollywood and Washington, and brought moviemakers and American politicians into close co-operation (McCrisken 204).

The American-led- global war on terror, its intervention in the Middle East, and its use of violence and torture were made within the cinematic production seem necessary evil regrettable, perhaps, but essential for promoting national security. Although the war movie has been a staple of American cinema since its birth, in hundreds of movies released after 9/11, the American special role in global conflict was appreciated. American protagonists are presented as the good guys who do bad things because they are justifiable in the purpose of promoting democracy in failed Muslim states (Dixon 1). Individual courage and valor of the American soldiers were remarkably emphasized, as it is illustrated in Berg's *The Kingdom*, which portrays the American government's technological capabilities and the determination of the FBI team to bring comfort and show the world the exceptional nature of the American fight against the Islamic extremists. The movie, critically, reminds the audience of the unique role the United States and its military forces occupy in the world. It is no wonder that a hugely popular movie like *The Kingdom* was a runaway success, as it thoroughly advocated the ideals of American exceptionalism that consistently prove to win the public favor.

On the other part, *Zero Dark Thirty* released in 2012 serves to celebrate American exceptionalism, promotes patriotism, and bolsters the national security. It offers one of the perfect examples of American heroism, sacrifice, dedication, and massive efforts to fight terrorism. It preserves the American international community role and place, and offers the world audience a glimpse at the courage and sacrifices that CIA officials made in their war on terrorism. Besides, the Maya character as a female hero represents the exceptional classic American virtue of certainty, determination, and perseverance. She stands for all of those who

wanted real American revenge for the evil 9/11 attacks. No doubt, her character reaffirms American exceptionalism.

The notion of America as a divine selection blessed with bravery, power, and desire to be the compassionate defender of the world neatly aligns with the exceptionalist ideology of the war on terror. It is worth to note that the same ideology that dominated the pre-9/11 movies remained constant in post-9/11; appraising the bravery and the meritorious nature of the American soldiers while demonizing their enemies. Accordingly, both pre- and post-9/11 Hollywood movies disseminated consistent narratives of American superiority. In various movies featuring the Germans, Japanese, Russians, or the Islamic extremists as ‘the enemy Other’, the pre-eminence of the American moral ethos and political institutions occupied the central stage. In every case, the theme of exceptionalism remained pure and consistent, serving the propagate ideology and shaping the public thought.

Seen through various movies, American exceptionalism remained a consistent ideological undertone. The notion that America is a beacon of liberty to the world or basically a shining “city upon a hill” will remain in the public’s minds and the American cinema for an indefinite date. Yet, as long as Hollywood reaches nearly everyone on earth, the threat of too much American exceptionalism in movies would continue to influence the audience’s perception of America. Other populations that did not live within the same context as Americans, and have not been raised in events such as the 9/11 attacks, will fear the rest of the world and accept the American actions as genuine, and would in this manner further help the American-led global war on terror.

This chapter demonstrated that the rise of Hollywood-Washington collaboration since the twentieth century promotes a positive image of the United States and heightens support for the American foreign involvements through movies. In the post-9/11 attacks, the enormous American dependency on oil coming from the Middle East and the issue of the

American war on terror added meanings to the American cinematic production. The devastating attacks profoundly impacted American cultural production. American politicians and propagandists used the American media to insinuate pre-existing derogatory Islamophobic images about Arabs and Muslims in order to reinforce Western hatred and provide justification for their policy choices. Seen through various post-9/11 movies, the God-favored United States is assigned with a unique role of ridding the world of evil Arabs and Muslims, protecting the Western civilization, and restoring peace and stability to the world. Americans maintain a high level of devotion to this destiny. Contemporary American cinema constantly reproduces the idea that the United States is engaged in a just war which is inevitable and justified.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> The Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force was officially activated on the 1<sup>st</sup> March, 1980 and based at MacDill Air Force Base under the US Readiness Command. The major purpose of the RDJTF was to deter any possible Soviet invasion of the Middle East region and help maintain the regional stability and the flow of oil. The RDJTF later became a full unified command (Antill).

<sup>2</sup> Today the American Department of Defense has eleven combatant commands, each of which with a geographic or functional mission that provides command and control of military forces in peace and war. During the 1980's there were only three unified commands established; the European Command (USEUCOM) established in Aug. 1952, the Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) established in Jan. 1947, and the Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) established in June 1963, to which the Central Command (CENTCOM) established in Jan. 1983 was a very recent addition at that time. The CENTCOM operates by building cooperation among nations throughout the Middle East in order to respond to crises, deter and defeat any possible threats, and mainly, to increase the regional stability (U.S Dept of Defense).

<sup>3</sup> The End of Racial Profiling Act introduced to the Senate on the 06<sup>th</sup> of June, 2001 prohibits Law enforcement Agents and law enforcement agencies from engaging in racial profiling. The Act requires Federal law enforcement agencies to first, maintain adequate policies and procedures to eliminate racial profiling; and second, to cease existing practices that encourage racial profiling ([www.congress.gov/bill/107th-congress/house-bill/2074/text](http://www.congress.gov/bill/107th-congress/house-bill/2074/text)).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Constructing Islamophobia in Post-9/11 Hollywood Production**

For over a century, Arabs and Muslims have been targeted as the godless enemy in countless movies. Long before the 9/11 attacks, no single entertainment program had featured Arabs in a positive light away from barbarism, violence, and terrorism. No other social group was downgraded and negatively presented as Arabs and Muslims. These latter are hardly ever seen as ordinary people. Nevertheless, since the 9/11 attacks, Hollywood has extended its malignant wingspan. The catastrophic event was nothing like any other event that the contemporary Western world has ever witnessed before. The attacks were so immense and profoundly impacted the American society and culture. Hollywood's portrayal of Arabs and Muslims after the 9/11 became more sinister and dangerous than it has ever been. The link between Islam and terrorism was further reinforced in countless movies released in the post-9/11 era.

#### **4.1. The Impact of 9/11 on Hollywood's Representation of Muslims**

In analyzing the coverage of Muslims and Arabs by the American mass media and popular culture, one cannot disregard the huge influence of the thoughts and the meticulous scholarships of the old European Orientalists and modern-day American social scientists, to name Bernard Lewis, Elie Kedourie, Daniel Pipes, and Panayiotis J. Vatikiotis among others. Their works have constructed a theoretical framework for interpreting, understanding, and presenting the present-day events occurring in the Muslim world in popular culture, including the political and social movements. American social scientists who were once described by Said as "guns-for-hire" ("The Essential Terrorist" 156), scrutinized the Muslim world but were unable to understand and express solidarity with Muslims as subject of their study. Very little of the detail and the passion of the Arab-Muslim life has entered their awareness. In

reality, these social scientists have obstructed all ways of understanding and coexistence. Lewis, as one of the worst offenders, presented Islam as a terrorist religion and Muslims as inherently violent in multitude of his works. He once expressed that “it is appropriate to use Islam as a term of definition and classification in discussing present-day terrorism” (66). The old Orientalist clichés and perceptions of early European Orientalists and modern-day social scientists have built today’s portraits of Arabs and Muslims in American mainstream media and popular culture. As a consequence, it comes as no surprise that Islam is projected as anti-democrat, and anti-human with adherents deemed irrational, barbaric, inferior, and backward in various Hollywood movies such as *Dictator*, *American Sniper*, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* to name but a few.

Constructing images about individuals and events is a complex process of deliberate selection and expression subject to historical, ethnic, and political standards. The image of Arabs and Muslims in popular culture is formed on the basis of historical and ethnic antagonism and animosity toward Islam that emerged since the seventh century and still enflames the modern-day Islam-West relationship. The portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in the American motion picture industry fluctuates in accordance with the evolution of world politics. The malignant stereotypes perpetuated in the West have been used as a means to achieve political and strategic goals, including the exploitation of the Arab oil wells. Simply put, the American media and motion picture industry marginalizes the Muslim world as having a rejected culture, different, and threatening so as to breed that feeling of the American duty to overtly dominate, or rather offense, the Muslim world.

Various diligent studies conducted by some prominent Arab-American scholars including Michael Suleiman, Edmund Ghareeb, and Shaheen, have unveiled the massive bias in the American media in favor of Israel and the downgraded Islamophobic personifications of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood movies. Virtually, since the Jewish Settlement in

Palestine back in 1948, Arabs and Muslims are more often than not, associated with extremism, irrationality, and terrorism. However, the word ‘Terrorist’ as a description of Arabs and Muslims is resulted out of a particular cultural position on the part of the West and does not necessarily represent an abstract objective description. Presenting Muslims and Arabs as ‘terrorists’ or ‘irrational’ in American media and popular culture, rationalizes the American military campaign and hegemony over the Muslim world. Noam Chomsky explained, since Arabs and Muslims are by definition “all terrorists, or mothers of terrorists, or future terrorists [...] whatever was done to them was regarded as legitimate” (224). Certainly, TV shows and movies are not just for entertainment; they are codes transmitted to the public to further consolidate the gap between the Muslim world and the West. The portrayal of Arabs and Muslims as villains in movies, TV shows, comic strips, or school-text books provide pictures that cultivate a certain view of this distinctive social group and stimulate the bias within the American society. Such pictures continue to dictate the future representation of Arabs and Muslims in popular culture. The 9/11 incident would likely engender another plethora of movies with a demeaning and Islamophobic image of Arabs and Muslims. With the rise of the war on terror campaign, it is even more liable for the neo-Orientalist and Islamophobic discourse to become widely prominent in the West.

The crash of the hijacked aircrafts on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon has had a profound impact on the Western perception of Arabs and Muslims, and on the way they were represented on screen. Undertaken by 19 hijackers who happened to be Arab Muslims led by al-Qaeda, the 9/11 shocked the global media. In America, the circulation of the spectacle of terror dominated the public attention and generated fear and panic throughout the American society. The attacks traumatized the United States with fear and validated the twentieth-century portrayal of Arabs and Muslims as bloodthirsty, aggressive, and terrorist. This largest human-made deliberate disaster in



American history caused a drastic effect on Hollywood as no other event in human history. 9/11 helped to shape the first decade of the twenty-first century in American popular culture and politics (Westwall 2). The events strengthened the Islamophobic image of Arabs and Muslims in the United States, which is not surprising given the abundance of unenthusiastic news media coverage that incessantly denigrated this distinctive social group After the attacks.

In the aftermath of the attacks, academics and scholars both from the Muslim and Western realms commenced to scrutinize the ramifications of these events on popular culture future production and the featuring of Muslims. As one of the prominent academics in the media studies field, Shaheen delved into the representation of Arabs and Muslims after the 9/11 and conducted a research study in which he identified over 100 appearances of characters he coded as Arab-Muslims or Arab-Americans in Hollywood. In *Guilty: Hollywood's Verdict on Arabs After 9/11*, he found that nearly every American contributed to reinforce Islamophobic stereotypes in American society, and emphasized that journalists, politicians, TV producers, and moviemakers all helped solidify the fabricated images of Arabs and Muslims (*Guilty* 3-4).

Islamophobic representation of Muslims in Hollywood is not a new theme. The history of misrepresentation lays back to the early time of the foundation of American cinema. The Orientalist characters started to take place in American cinema since 1893. Prior to the collapse of Communism, the confrontation of the United States with the Muslim world and other non-state Muslim actors, such as al-Qaeda, seemed to prepare the way for Islam to become the 'Other', the new enemy in the post-Cold War era. American media and popular culture coverage of various political upheavals, Middle Eastern wars, and anti-American sentiments in the Muslim world frequently tended to attribute blame implicitly and explicitly to Islam, regardless of any other major historical, economic, and political factors. During the

last decade of the twentieth century, Muslims and Islam came under intense focus of Western media and motion picture industry, characterized by stereotypes and extreme animus. Since the collapse of Communism, Islam has been directly identified as the new fascism by Orientalist scholars such as Lewis, Huntington, and Pipes. The polarization of the world under the 'clash of civilizations' theory placed the Muslim world in opposition to the West and created hate and prejudice toward Arabs and Muslims.

The 9/11 attacks have changed American foreign policy in relation to the Muslim world. As a propaganda tool, Hollywood very often worked according to the government's political agenda. The rise of Bush's war on terror campaign that he once described as a war against Islamic fascists intensified the American fear of Islam. Unsurprisingly, the hate campaign unleashed following the 9/11 attacks against Islam and Muslims in American society, politics, media, and American cinema further associated Islam and Muslims with violence and failed to draw a separating line between Islam and terrorism. However, depicting terrorism as blockbuster entertainment and associating Muslims with terrorism is not a new phenomenon. It dates back to the 1990s, particularly, in response to the first act of radical Islamic terrorism on the American soil, the first World Trade Center's bombing. Hollywood swiftly introduced the Jihadist fanatical villain in movies such as *True Lies*, *Executive Decisions*, *The Siege*, and *Rules of Engagement*. The 9/11 events only further heightened the 'Muslim terrorist' imagery in Hollywood.

Post-9/11 Hollywood production proved that Arabs and Muslims remained the most derogated group in the history of Hollywood. Sweeping mischaracterizations and stereotypes equated Arabs and Muslims to evil and terrorism. Arabs and Muslims are still portrayed from the Orientalist perspective and continue to surface as the threatening cultural 'Other' who deserved American prejudicial ire. Years since *Reel Bad Arabs* was published, Shaheen found that no improvement in American cinematic portrayal of Arabs and Muslims has occurred. He

reminds us that pre-9/11 Arab is the post-9/11 Arab. Arabs and Muslims continue to appear as terrorists, devious and ugly sheiks intend on terrorizing, kidnapping, and sexually abusing Western heroines (“Hollywood’s bad Arabs” 86). In fact, post-9/11 Arab-Muslim characters as terrorists in cinematic production were more dangerous and threatening than those of the pre-9/11.

In the immediate years to the attack, any direct examination of 9/11 was a sort of taboo. In the post-9/11 atmosphere, Hollywood showed a great hesitancy to directly address the incident or even to release movies of mass destruction. For the large segment of the American society, the traumatic event, the 9/11 attacks, is still too raw and is regarded as an unsuitable theme for simple entertainment. For such a reason, the 9/11 events “rang down the curtain on Hollywood’s theatre of mass destruction, at least for a while” Stephen Prince noted (70). Some commentators went as far as to proclaim that Hollywood is to be blamed for the terrorist attacks, as 9/11 events proved the fantasy of American mass destruction and disaster movies to be a reality (Maher). Consequently, meetings and high-powered discussions that joined Hollywood executives with the deputy assistant to the United States president, Chris Henick, the associate director of the Public Liaison Office, Adam Goldman, and the Senior White House advisor, Karl Rove were held at the White House to outline the manner in which Hollywood should respond to 9/11 and the subsequent war on terror. Rove called upon moviemakers and TV producers to create a sympathetic cultural context for the specific policy agenda (Westwall 9). Hollywood’s production during this period marked the emergence of a new more complex representation of Arabs and Muslims. In *Guilty*, Shaheen documented the existence of a more complex Arab character; a more decent, sympathetic, and less stereotypical in certain movies and series.

Scholar Ouidyane Elouardaoui came to findings consistent with Shaheen’s study in her article entitled “Arabs in post 9/11 Hollywood Films: A Move Towards a More Realistic

Depiction?” in which she believes that the post-9/11 era marked the release of movies that challenged the preceding Oriental stereotypes. Elouardaoui was not interested in studying movies that strengthened the pre-9/11 stereotypical representation of Arabs and Muslims, but rather she aimed to demonstrate the existence of movies that challenge the dominant line of misrepresentation in the post-9/11 incident. That being the case, she selected and studied three post-9/11 released movies *Babel*, *The Kingdom*, and *Rendition* which, she concluded, offer a more realistic personification of Arabs and Muslims. She found that 9/11 hit so deep in the American society, and induced the American academia and mass media to “approach the Arab-Islamic culture with inquisitive and unbiased mind, precisely, aiming at a better understanding of its main tenants and principles” (11).

Scholar Nowa Alalawi on the other hand agreed that 9/11 has modified the theme of Hollywood movies; however, she rejected both of Shaheen’s and Elouardaoui’s arguments concerning the emergence of a more realistic and decent depiction of Arabs and Muslims. Alalawi selected two post-9/11 released movies *The Kingdom*, and *Rendition* and unlike Elouardaoui, she found that the neo-Orientalist discourse dominated the process of representation. She argued that post-9/11 Hollywood movies stressed the old Orientalist notion of the ‘us versus them’ through which Arabs and Muslims are, more often than not, portrayed as extremists, uncultured, and prone to violence. Alalawi explained that this perception was justified in the West by the fact that Arabs and Muslims “are raised to be this way, and mostly because it is in their religion or what commonly been used as “Jihad” duty” (61).

Scholar Alsultany combines all of the above mentioned scholars’ findings in her book *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation After 9/11*. In which she mentions that the terrorist discourse has been highly visible in Hollywood movies since the 9/11 events, however, she points to Hollywood’s new representation mode, that she believed has become a

standard since the events. This new mode, she elucidates, sought to balance the negative representation of the Arab and Muslim character by a more decent one. Her book delves deeper into the major reasons behind the change in the portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood movies and offers an excellent explanation.

Alsultany saw that there was an improvement in the representation of Arabs and Muslims in movies, but she does clarify that the emergence of what she called ‘a simplified complex representations’ of terrorists and the valiant portrayals of patriotic Muslims, for the aim of solving the problem of stereotyping, allowed for government racist policies and practices to persist under the guise of antiracism. This implies that the diversity of representations and the plethora of sympathetic characters does not necessarily represent the end of racism, or even solve the long-lasting problem of racial stereotyping, rather, the positive representation helps to offer a new kind of racism “one that projects antiracism and multiculturalism on the surface but simultaneously produces the logics and affects necessary to legitimize racist policies and practices”. She argues that the ‘Other’ is no longer explicitly demonized to justify war or injustice rather; it is portrayed sympathetically in order to present the United States as an enlightened country that has entered a post-racial era (*Arabs and Muslims in the Media* 13-16).

Alsultany’s work shows the emergence of a new bipolar image of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood and suggests that moviemakers no longer portray Arabs and Muslims through the classical Oriental discourse, but still depict them as terrorists through the neo-Orientalist discourse. However, it is important to point that despite balancing the Arab/Muslim evil image with a good one, the general audience is used to the evil Arab/Muslim, and that explains much which image sticks the most into the minds of the viewers.

In the early five years after the 9/11 attacks, the American big screen has projected Arabs and Muslims in a more complex, balanced, and even-handed way than it did in the past.

However, the positive representation that characterized Hollywood production during this period further demonized the religion of Islam, through disseminating images of Islam as a demonic religion of blasphemy that preaches violence and terrorism, as it is shown in *United 93*. Post-9/11 Muslim characters framed within the terrorist-theme are presented as innocent Muslim men caught in situations beyond their control and manipulated to commit heinous acts of terrorism by external forces. They are presented as seduced by the religious idea of Jihad and life after death in order to give their lives a purpose. They are tragic figures manipulated by the dark side of the Islamic religion which enables a sympathetic framing to be applied to their characterization (Reid 100). In such a manner, early post-9/11 Hollywood production allowed, intentionally or not, the world's audience to see the American war on terrorism as a war not on Muslim terrorists but, rather, on Islam.

Generally, Hollywood offers precious insight into the social and political realities of its context. In reference to the post-9/11 years, Hollywood mirrored the essence of that period. Terrorism, fear, paranoia, and insecurity became the prime ingredient of Hollywood cinema. Seven years after the 9/11 attacks provided Americans with the opportunity to come to terms with the events. By this time, The American culture was apparently ready for the emergence of movies that addressed the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Kellner124). Paul Greengrass's *United 93*, a movie that recalls the story of the fourth hijacked plane released in 2006 directly dealt with the events. But by 2007, Hollywood gave rise to a whole set of political movies that exploited fear of terrorism and focused on the war on terror and its progress and implications both domestic and international. The Arab/Muslim character, during this period, has undergone a new discursive shift within which the previous positive representation disappeared and a return to pre-9/11 imagery has characterized the American cinema production since then. Within the cinematic production, Muslim villains are portrayed as arch enemies of the American values, one-dimensional, driven by Islamic fundamentalism ideologies, and lacking

a legitimate cause. Very little or no detailed knowledge about their motives is offered. They are simply projected as nothing more than evil Arab-Muslims in hostility with good Americans. While at the same time, regardless of the text, the Arab land is presented as a hometown of violence and terrorism, as it is evidently shown in *The Kingdom*, *Zero Dark Thirty*, and *13 Hours: Secret Soldier of Benghazi*.

Ever since motion picture cameras began cranking, Hollywood movies have continuously been abusing Islam and Muslims. In the aftermath of 9/11 events, Hollywood focused on presenting Muslims as Islamic fundamentalist bearded men and clerics screaming Fatwas (Shaheen, *Guilty* 10). The ‘clash of civilizations’ theory became a conventional wisdom. In various action-thriller and terrorist-themed movies that dealt with the war on terror and defended the American foreign involvement, the Muslim character continued to surface as the godless enemy, while, at the same time, the American government officials and military, FBI and CIA teams, were lionized. Despite the fact that the 9/11 Commission Report informed Americans that Islam is not the enemy and that it does not teach terror (363), moviemakers unceasingly link Islam and the religious practices with heinous crimes and continue to make generalizations and stress the clash of civilizations in their cinematic production.

The American government officials knew that the inefficacy of real-life counterterrorism had to be compensated for in the sphere of entertainment through the projection of light victory over dark in almost every terrorist-themed movie, as it is seen in *The Kingdom*, *Zero Dark Thirty*, and *13 Hours: Secret Soldiers of Benghazi*. Hollywood has perennially played a protagonist role for American imperial objectives particularly in the Middle East region, and it seems keen to help with the twenty-first century war on terror. Movies plot lines, in post-9/11, wrote scholar Thomas Reigler, were relatively pro-interventionist and reflected the Bush administration unlimited war on terror (105). As it has

already been demonstrated, the portrayal of Arabs and Muslims is extensively prompted by political events and American cultural interests in the Muslim world. Incontrovertibly, the twenty-first century political events reopened the old debates on Islam and the West and contributed to further reinforce the 1980's Arab/Muslim 'foreign devil' image.

#### **4.2. Post-9/11 Islamophobic Portraits of Muslims in Hollywood Movies**

Within the scope of this research, it would be impossible to investigate all appearances of Arab-Muslims in post 9/11 Hollywood production. Thereby, in this section *United 93* and *The Kingdom* are selected for a thorough examination since both reproduce well-known terrorist events. Both movies are released five to six years following the 9/11 attacks and form a perfect example of post 9/11 movies that first associated Islam with violence and fascism, and second demonstrated that the clash of civilizations is becoming more manifest in Hollywood production following the terrorist attacks.

The 9/11 attacks had an immediate impact on the world of moving pictures, causing the delaying, editing, or even the canceling of certain movies. *United 93* (2006, dir. Paul Greengrass) was the very first movie released five years after the 9/11 to directly address the attacks. The movie is made by Americans and retells the 9/11 attacks to the American audience. Despite the fact that nobody really knows exactly what happened on board of flight 93 on September 11<sup>th</sup>, yet the director chose to offer tribute to the victims who sacrificed their lives to prevent another disaster from occurring through his movie, and he stressed their bravery and dedication to stand against the Islamic fanatic hijackers. In reality, the movie was released during a period that witnessed the emergence of a kind of sympathetic post-9/11 visualization of Arabs and Muslims in cinematic production. During this period, moviemakers created sympathetic backstories for their antagonists and portrayed Arab/Muslim characters as tragic misguided and blinded figures seduced by the teaching of Islam into committing heinous crimes against non-Muslims. *United 93* offers a telling example of this period.



Beginning in 2007, Hollywood returned to its pre-9/11 dehumanization of the Muslim/Arab character. Muslim villains were introduced as anti-Western and willing participants in terrorism. Therefore, a decision was made to analyze *The Kingdom* (2007, dir. Peter Berg) as one of the best examples on this period. Released within the American global war on terrorism, the movie promotes the American foreign policy in the Middle East. It refers to the 9/11 attacks and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and its impact on the mutual relationship between the Saudi Kingdom and the United States. *The Kingdom* was a runaway success championing the American international effort to fight the Islamic militancy. Even though the movie contains a more complex, even-handed, and balanced representation of Arabs and Muslims, it reveals that Muslims are still being framed within the context of terrorism as fanatic killers.

#### **4.2.1. *United 93* (2006)**

In 2006, the British Working Title Films jointly with Universal Studios released a fiction movie that re-created the actual events of the United Airlines Flight 93, as the last aircraft involved in the terrorist attack on Tuesday, September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. *United 93* is, in the words of Esther Pérez Villalba, “one of the best-known 9/11, big-budget Hollywood films released to date” (51). Released five years after the attacks, the movie was the first to deal with terrorism after 9/11 and helped to establish the cinematic frameworks for dealing with the issue (Nusselder 109). Based on the actual historical events, writer-director Paul Greengrass created a docu-drama movie that was one of the very first Hollywood movies in the post-9/11 that overtly dealt with that dreadful day.

Flying from Newark, New Jersey to San Francisco, Los Angeles, the United Airlines Flight 93 was taken over by four Islamic extremists, who were thought of as aiming for the destruction of the Capitol in Washington, D.C. However, of the four hijacked planes that day, Flight 93 was the only not to hit its initial target. *United 93*, as a fact-based movie, uses a

realistic style which allowed director Greengrass to expose to the audience the central theme of the movie, being the hijacking and the disturbing violence on the airplane. The movie plot alternates rapidly between the events onboard the plane and the situation in the United States military and civilian air traffic control centers. The movie emphasizes the bravery and heroism of the passengers and plane crew before it crashes into an open field near Shanksville in rural Pennsylvania.

In an endeavor to adopt a realistic style, Greengrass made use of no well-known actors (Mendelsohn), he instead relied on the audience's knowledge of the event. Director Greengrass deliberately segregated the actors who played the Arab Islamic hijackers from the rest of the cast until the hijacking scene shooting, in an attempt to allow for a more realistic response to the hijacking, which would permit the actors to deal with the extreme hijacking violence on a more personal level (Corliss). The movie's opening functions to isolate the hijackers' from their victims so as to prepare the audience for what will come as the movie progresses (French). In fact, Greengrass throws us into the plot without any representation of the passengers or the hijackers motives, in order to emphasize that no one is presented as an individual hero.

The use of the realistic style and the avoidance of sensationalism gave the movie a touch of authenticity that clouded the difference between the historical facts and the script. The movie offers no kind of detailed knowledge neither about the motives of the terrorist group blamed for the attack nor about the American federal government's response to the incident. The element of realism in *United 93* restrains the movie "from taking a political stance and depicting the wider context of the events" (Zizek). Greengrass invites the audience to live the event as did the victims onboard the United Airlines Flight 93 on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

A good and a very clear judgment concerning the visual representation of Arabs and Muslims in *United 93* can only be achieved through a detailed study of certain intertwined factors incorporating the movie style, the manner in which stereotypes are approached by the moviemakers, and particularly, the timing of the production in relation to the war on terror campaign and the American foreign policy objectives in the Middle East. *United 93*, as a masterfully balanced and authentic movie, opens with the scene of four Arab men praying and talking in Arabic in a hotel room. With Quranic verses being read as a voice-over, the images of the four men preparing themselves, as it appears for a trip, alternate with images of New York City during the night. As these men leave the hotel room, the image shifts to a large roadside sign (decorated with the American flag) that reads 'God Bless America'.

The Oriental men head toward the Newark international airport, where a normal day begins. The viewers are presented with the images of people checking in, aircrafts leaving and others landing, and a routine situation in the airport flight control room, with a brief reference to the United Airlines Flight 93 as being prepared for a scheduled flight to San Francisco. The four Arab men reappear in the airport as they check-in as passengers of the United Airlines Flight 93. As the movie proceeds, these four men turn out to be terrorists. They hijack Flight 93 and attempt to make a suicide mission. Yet, the bravery of the flight crew and the passengers stands against the terrorists' endeavors. Following a fierce struggle between the terrorists and the passengers, Flight 93 crashes into an open field in Pennsylvania.

Being the first movie to directly deal with the 9/11 attacks, Greengrass recalled the real story of the United Airlines Flight 93, where the passengers and the flight crew confront al-Qaeda terrorists. It is evident throughout the movie story that the Arab/Muslim terrorists are driven by their Islamic religion. Greengrass took quite his time to expand on this particular topic. Through using many religious references, he represented the hijacking as occurring in the name of Allah. The will of the four hijackers to garner the rewards that would come for

fighting infidels is made clear as each one of them hopes to meet Allah soon. It is since the 1980's that Muslims have become projected as terrorists in several Hollywood movies. American cinema naturalized the link between Islam, the religious practices, and terrorism in various movies. For the large majority of Muslims, it is no longer annoying to watch terrorists praying before committing their heinous acts in movies. However, by reciting Quranic verses as justification for the most horrible, irrational acts, or their use as a voice-over the image of New York City suggesting that the Islamic violence is lurking over America, which is a tactic used in several scenes in this movie, *United 93* demonizes Islam as a religion that preaches violence and irrationality and the Holy Quran as a religious book that authorizes and justifies such acts against infidels. Precisely, as it is falsely interpreted in the minds of the terrorists portrayed.

The use of the prayers, the reading of the Quran, and the calling of Allah using divine sentences, such as 'Allahu Akbar', 'Bismillah', 'Ashhadu ana la illaha ila Allah w ana Mohammed rasul Allah', 'Onsurna ya Allah', reinforce the perception that all the terrorists are religious fanatics and thereby, further stress the link between Islam and terrorism. Furthermore, through using the handheld camera to track the sinister actions and the vivid sounds of screaming, Greengrass projects the terrorists' violence as disturbing, increases fear and anxiety, and emphasizes the exotic theme of the Islamic fundamentalist group.

Whether it is intentional or not, the British director neither overtly demonized nor sympathized with the hijackers. However, he failed to draw a separating line between the terrorist actions and the Islamic culture. By the manipulation of Quranic verses and their use in improper situations, and the use of divine sentences and religious practices in support of terrorism and violence, the movie demonstrated that the hijacking can only be understood within the Islamic doctrine. The viewers are presented with scenes in which the Islamic terrorists, in the name of Islam, slash, kill, and abuse the passengers. They are featured as

swearing, threatening, and most strikingly yelling 'Allahu Akbar' while committing evil acts. Among these events, Greengrass presents the only Muslim characters in the movie with great controversy. The terrorists' image is presented within the construction of religious belief. They approach their mission as misguided and blinded individuals, whose response to the religious duty is, above all, a salvation that they aim to achieve. For them, their actions and attitudes are morally justified.

Greengrass exposes the growth of Islamic fundamentalism and its mounting threat to Western societies and liberal ideology. It is unjustifiable for the majority of Muslims to link Islam with irrational and brutal acts; however, *United 93* claims to realistically and neutrally represent the story of the United Airlines Flight 93. The thin line between reality and fiction causes the audience to believe that the concept of pity, religious tolerance, non-violence, and co-existence are unavailable within the entire corpus of Islam; an Orientalist representation of the religion Islam that is ultimately conveyed throughout the movie.

In the final moments before the crash, the movie features the terrorists inside the cockpit, reciting Quranic verses and divine sentences. For Muslim viewers, it is quite easy to realize that the British writer-director is using falsely interpreted sentences. However, it is obvious that he aimed to revive Western fear of the Islamic principles by portraying Muslims as hostile and alien adherents of the false religion of blasphemy. Ostensibly, Greengrass overlooked various Quranic passages in which Allah (The Almighty) encourages the followers of Islam to uphold co-existence with other religions.

Greengrass's use of the realistic style blurs the boundaries between the real event and the movie script, which causes the viewers to adopt fictional images from the movie as real. This way, Americans are more likely to accept the movie's representation of the terrorists as accurate. Indubitably, the movie contains Orientalist elements that emphasize the segregation of the Orientals as different and threatening. Right from the very beginning, the audience is

presented with the Arab/Muslim character as the terrorist and exotic ‘Other’. The movie emphasizes the Islamic religious practices and differences to further isolate Arab/Muslim terrorists along the racial and ethnic lines. Besides, no detailed knowledge is offered about the hijackers’ background or motives. Significantly, their prayers, conversations, and the Quranic verses being read by one of the hijackers at the opening scene are not subtitled. The non-Arab speaking audience is left in the dark as if it is not worth knowing what they are talking about or what the Quranic verses exactly mean.

The strategic alienation of the terrorists in the movie allows for presenting them as belonging to an unfamiliar realm. Although their inconceivable prayers in the opening scenes set the hijackers’ motives as mysterious, they are undeniably religious. Therefore, Greengrass’s movie falls back on the Orientalist projection of Muslims as peculiar and intimidating. By contrasting the good and the bad sides, Greengrass could easily dehumanize the terrorists, while underscoring the American flight passengers and crew.

Apart from representing the Islamic terrorists as ruthless, they are shown as incompetent too. The movie features four hijackers, who are different but reconcile in their outrageous nature. One of them (the one who will eventually be in charge of the mission and flies the aircraft, Ziad Jarrah) is depicted as being reluctant and doubts the whole mission. This characteristic is shown in a scene where his fellow terrorist, seated next to him on-board of the aircraft, questions him “why are we waiting” (in Arabic), to which he replies “it is not the right time” (58:18-58:21). Even if such personification does humanize the Muslim character, it simultaneously projects weakness and incompetency. Later in the movie, Muslim incompetency serves to demonstrate the terrorists’ inability to keep the situation onboard of the plane under control, which allows the passengers to revolt and overpower them in the final scenes.

Greengrass chose to demonstrate the terrorists' hesitancy and weakness to highlight the passengers' bravery, heroism, and determination to counter the terrorists. The humanized personification of the character Jarrah takes place also in a previous scene during the boarding when he makes a phone call to one of his beloved. He is projected saying "Ich liebe dich" subtitled as 'I love you'. In such scenes, the 'Other' is granted human traits, which accords with scholar Jay Reid's finding that the terrorist Muslim characters in the early six years after the attack were presented as tragic figures, driven by Islamic fundamentalism to commit heinous acts that they doubt at some points (100). The movie's main target behind the humanizing of Jarrah's character is to demonstrate that even the most inhuman terrorists are also capable of love, mercy, and human doubt; however, it is their religion, language, and attitude differences that make them brutal and barbaric. Conversely, the scene of the phone call conversation was very brief and lacked deep explanation; it is short-lived and thus forgotten immediately.

Despite the fact that Greengrass's docu-drama attempted to humanize the Islamic hijackers through the avoidance of exaggerated Hollywood typical representation of Arabs and Muslims as bloodthirsty monsters and barbarian murderers with dark long beards and hooked-noses, the Orientalist notion of the 'us' versus 'them' overwhelmed the movie's characterization of the hijackers. Although the movie did not provide any detailed background of either the passengers or the hijackers, it is quite apparent that both groups are treated differently. Greengrass's goal behind featuring the hijacking from the passengers' perspective is to allow the viewers to only identify with the passengers. This goal is also to be achieved by portraying the passengers' phone calls to their families as dramatic and elaborate in contrast to Jarrah's phone call in a previous scene.

Although *United 93* should not be understood as an overt support for Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' theory, the clash between the terrorists and the flight passengers at the

end of the movie along with the moment when the screen goes all black, implies that the long-lasting bellicose relationship between Islam and the West would definitely continue into the future and eventually cause the end of history.

Five years after the tragedy of September 11<sup>th</sup>, the release of *United 93* provided an example of American heroism and demonstrated the American capacity to survive the trauma caused by the incident. A *Time* magazine film critic described *United 93* as a “feel-good movie” (Corliss) that delivered a positive message to the American audience. That is, despite the fact that the 9/11 events were horrendous and caused the death of many innocent people, the presumption that the passengers and the flight crew onboard United Airlines Flight 93 heroically prevented the plane from hitting its target allowed Americans to believe that they did not completely lose control over terrorism.

Indeed, the movie’s message stresses the American readiness and capability to counter terrorism even during hard times. In “Black Screens, Lost Bodies: The Cinematic Apparatus of 9/11 Horror”, Laura Frost views that the 9/11 representation in movies and fiction works emphasizes strongly “the narratives of redemption, bravery, noble sacrifice, dignified human connection, and, above all, heroism”. Taking Greengrass’s *United 93* as an example, she explained that the movie has retreated the 9/11 incident by narrating the event as a story of human courage, community, and dignity (17).

Undeniably, the director’s approach of recalling the crash of United Flight 93 as a heroic tale enabled *United 93* to reinforce the idea that Americans are extraordinary and exceptional. That is, even if Muslim terrorists have been able to destroy the Twin Towers, Americans won’t stand by passively; rather, they will fight back and overcome the terrorists’ power. *United 93* provides a telling example of American exceptionalism and serves as a trauma-healing function. It is satisfying for the American audience and the families of the



victims to see their beloved ones portrayed, through the moving picture, as fighting fearlessly for the cause of preventing another disaster from occurring.

To put it succinctly, watching Islamic fanatics kill innocent people in a docu-drama that retells one of the largest human-made deliberate disasters would surely engender backlash and anti-Muslim and anti-Arab sentiments in the West. In America, the Muslim-American community was the most affected. The emphasis on the contrast between the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ reinforced the old cycle of Orientalist stereotypes and fear of Islam, which justified the discrimination of many Muslims and other perceived to be Muslim in American society.

### **2.2.2. *The Kingdom* (2007)**

Peter Berg’s movie *The Kingdom* is one of post 9/11 Hollywood’s most violent and Anti-Arab movies. It is an action-thriller genre movie that is described as a Rambo-in-Arabia shoot-’em-up movie (Shaheen, *Guilty* 26). This movie requires special attention to its content, the way it promotes American foreign policy in the Middle East, and helps to fuel the climate of fear not only in America but throughout the Western world. Thereby, in order to make a clear judgment about the portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in *The Kingdom*, it is essential to analyze how the movie not only contributed to highlighting the culture of fear but also reinforced the old classical stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims embedded in the Orientalist discourse.

In 2007, Universal Studios released a classic fiction movie, inspired by the actual events of the Riyadh American apartment bombing in September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2003, and the 1996 bombing of Khobar Towers in Dhahran. The movie is directed by Peter Berg and filmed mostly on Arab land, the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, UAE. The plot followed the attack and its aftermaths, starring Jamie Foxx, Chris Cooper, and Jennifer Garner, among others, in a big-budget post 9/11 movie that dealt directly with the Islamic militancy, the Wahhabi extremism. *The Kingdom* tackles one of the most sensitive issues in American foreign policy; being the

American relations with Saudi Arabia and its connection to terrorism at the eve of the twenty-first century (Kellner 171).

The movie tells the story of a terrorist attack on the Al-Rahman compound causing the death of one hundred innocent Americans, including two FBI special agents, and the wounds of a further two hundred. With the death of American citizens on foreign soil being the domain of the FBI, a team of four special agents -Ronald Fleury, Janet Mayes, Adam Leavitt, and Grant Sykes- are sent to Saudi Arabia to investigate the incident and hunt the terrorists. Being confined to five days sojourn and constrained in their movement to ensure their security, the team commences their investigation with extreme caution and vigilance. With the assistance of a Saudi officer 'Colonel Al-Ghazi', who acts as a babysitter for the FBI agents and a translator to the Saudis, Fleury's team begins one of its most dangerous investigations on the Saudi soil despite the impediments of religious and cultural conventions.

The climax of the movie is provided when the militant Islamic terrorists abduct special agent Adam Leavitt. Director Berg increases the tension in the movie when Colonel Al-Ghazi along with Fleury's FBI team track down the kidnapers to the place where they prepare to videotape the beheading of agent Leavitt. Violent shooting occurs between the FBI agents and the Islamic terrorists but, eventually, the FBI team hunts the terrorist cell and executes the mastermind behind the Al-Rahman compound bombing, 'Abu Hamza'. Sadly, after destroying the terrorist cell, Colonel Al-Ghazi is lost to enemy hands. The investigation project is called off and the FBI agents are ordered to return back to America victorious. A film critic wrote for *The New York Times* that "just as Rambo offered the fantasy of do-over on Vietnam, *The Kingdom* can be seen as a wishful revisionist scenario for the American response to Islamic fundamentalist terrorism" (Scott). While, Kellner described *The Kingdom* as "a comic-book fantasy of US revenge against al-Qaeda terrorism" (172)..

Following the opening montage constructed of borrowed archival footage, *The Kingdom* immediately takes the viewers to a compound where American oil workers and their families are housed. This compound is soon to be the target of a terrorist attack led by the Wahhabi extremists. The movie features American men playing with their children in a softball field before it cuts to Washington D.C, USA, where agent Ronald Fleury is in his son's school talking to the kindergarten children about his son's birth and laughing joyfully. The camera, then, takes the audience back to the softball field in the American compound where mass shootings, gunfights, killing, suicide bombing, and explosions are ensued in the name of Islam.

Similar to other movies with Arab-Muslim characters released after the 9/11 attacks, Berg created a simple black-and-white world where it is the United States against the global terrorist threat. Even though 9/11 is not really mentioned but only notable in the background, Berg implicitly applied the neo-Orientalist discourse by demonstrating that the world has changed since the 9/11. He created a new generation of Americans to confront the new form of the enemy 'Other'. The American main protagonists serve as the perfect basis for the comparison between them and the terrorists in many aspects. By contrasting both sides, Berg could easily dehumanize the terrorists while emphasizing American values. One of the main differences between the FBI team and the terrorists is their motivation and their goals. Within the movie's war on terror, Berg projected the American fighting against the ideologically driven Muslim terrorists' war on infidels as courageous, honorable, heroic, and for the most part necessary to ensure the safety of the American citizens in a foreign nation. Their fighting is morally justified (a moral duty) in contrast to the terrorists' use of the Islamic faith to justify the killing of innocents. This was precisely featured in the final 30 minutes of the movie. This power relation is a blatant example of Orientalism, with the United States

featured as righteous in its reasoning, namely believing without doubt that the actions that have been taken are right, justifiable, and without limitations.

During the terrorist attack on the Al-Rahman compound, director Berg made sure to show the viewers the brutality of the terrorists' violence by contrasting the image of Abu Hamza forcing his young grandson to watch, from a top of a building, in cold blood the dreadful suicide bombing he leads and the way Americans are getting killed, with that of special agent Ronald Fleury back in America loving, laughing, hugging, protecting, and talking softly to his son. Such scenes assert that "Arab kids may look innocent but, they, too are "bad people"" (Shaheen, *Guilty* 129) being raised and taught to be tough and evil.

In the course of switching the location between Saudi Arabia and the United States, Berg sets a clear distinction between the Muslim East and the Christian West and stresses the 'us-them' division. His polarization of the world is further emphasized in a conversation between agent Fleury and his son Kevin:

KEVIN. What happened?

FLEAURY. Bad things happened

KEVIN. A lot of bad people out there?

FLEAURY. Yeah. But you are not one of them. (10:43-10:52)

The characterization of Arab-Muslims as the bad guys, having no conscience, lovers of violence, and haters of everything American, reinforces the old Orientalist binary representation of the Muslim world as bad versus the good 'Christian West'.

The extreme violence in the movie's opening scene represents Americans' worst nightmare. Berg on his part offers no background detail on the perpetrators' motives beyond a fundamentalist hatred for the West and an irrational religious radicalism. His movie's villains are simply introduced as anti-American and anti-Western, who possess no human emotion

and intent on causing as much pain and suffering as they can to American citizens on Saudi soil. Hence, it is not difficult for the audience not to have empathy toward them. This is much noticed at the end of the movie when Colonel Al-Ghazi identifies Abu Hamza through his few missing fingers, a teenage boy emerges onto the scene and shot Colonel Al-Ghazi dead. This scene is one of the most dehumanizing scenes in the movie. Though this terrorist is a young boy, he is portrayed as a cold-blooded person who directs his gun once more toward agent Leavitt and attempts to shoot him. Eventually, this teenage boy is shot by agent Mayes in an attempt to protect her teammate. This young boy is portrayed as brainwashed and without innocence, or more properly, as a robot programmed to kill and harm Americans and those who corporate with them. The scene certainly creates the belief that little Muslim children are raised to be terrorists, agent Mayes is totally forgiven for the defensive act she took.

Even though the movie does not deal with the events of 9/11 directly, the latter clearly serves as an undertone for the theme of the movie. Berg offers a clever reminder of the rise of al-Qaeda and its hatred for America and the 9/11 attacks in the opening montage. As if he aims to create a resemblance between the terrorists responsible for the Twin Towers and the Pentagon attacks and the terrorists in *The Kingdom*, and very possibly to relate the terrorists' feelings of hatred toward Americans to Islam. While the terrorist attacks in this movie did not generate the same amount of deaths as the Twin Towers did, on the Al-Rahman compound the terrorists also attacked American citizens this time on foreign soil. With the focus on the men, women, and children who lost their lives wastefully during the attack, the movie recalls the 9/11 trauma. In this sense, the brutal assassination of the terrorists during the last 30 minutes of confrontation serves as a trauma-healing function. It is satisfying for the general viewers to see how the protagonists retaliate for the one hundred Americans killed in the attack.

Berg's movie wastes no time associating Islam with violence, oppression, terror, and anti-Western attitude. Right from the beginning, in the opening montage, for instance, the narrator's voice reinforced by visual and clichéd representation of the Wahhabi warriors as bearded, sword-wielding, and horse riding tribesmen fighting to help establish Ibn Saud Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, tells much about the Muslim rage and hatred for the West. The audience hears the narrator saying: "the Wahhabis were fiercely anti-Western. They want to go back in time to a pure Islam that wasn't threatened by the West" (0:56-1:03).

As the movie progresses, Saudi Arabia is featured as a primitive and violent land that breeds terrorism. The movie presents the audience with the historical and political tension that characterizes the relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia, and mainly, its association with Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein. Saudi Arabia is projected as a land caught in the past and controlled by religion, dwelling in an eternal clash between eastern religious traditionalism and the Western modernity that it currently undergoes. Indeed, right from the beginning, the movie sets the stage for two contrasting cultures. The audience hears the narrator saying that "the strict Islamic laws enforced outside [of the first Western housing compound] do not apply inside" (1:24-1:29), setting the strict and old-fashioned East in opposition to the moderate and modern Christian West.

It is quite evident that the Arab/Muslim terrorists in Berg's movie are driven by their Islamic religion. The terrorist attack is in the name of Allah. It is very obvious from the many religious references. The audience sees the mastermind behind the compound bombing preaching a group of men, including little boys and teenagers telling them "the operation of the Al-Rahman compound was a blessed invasion and a great jihad. This is not the beginning, if Allah is willing, we shall kick out all infidels from all Muslim lands. May Allah bless you my sons. Allah will give us victory. Allah is great. Peace is upon you all. Glory to Allah" (in Arabic) (29:04-29:36).

Berg did not refrain from using stereotypes in general. His movie took the old Orientalist stereotypes to the extreme and did not hesitate to focus on the religious iconography and the prayers. Projecting the terrorists chanting religious prose as they prepared suicide vests and loaded cars with bombs. As a consequence, he actively linked Islam and the Islamic religious practices with violence and irrationality. Various scenes in the movie demonstrate the link between terror and Islam. The movie projected Muslims onscreen as dangerous, untrustworthy, watchful enemies, and posing a real threat as in the old Orientalist discourse. Such association occurred very early in the movie when a terrorist dressed in a good-looking police officer emerged onto the scene hiding grenades in his clothes. He asked Americans to be calm and follow him, and seconds later he suddenly, yelled 'Allahu Akbar', detonating the grenade and blowing himself and everyone nearby into pieces. This characterization shows Arab-Muslims as extreme, inhumane terrorists in comparison to Americans as innocent victims of terrorism. With its extreme violent scenes, the movie sets the stage to construct Islam and Muslims as the West's real enemy and implies that the Islam is closely tied with terrorism.

Notwithstanding, the movie attempted to diminish the implications that all Arabs and Muslims are evil. Berg and his screenwriter, Michael Mathew Carnahan, presented their enemy using the stylistic conventions of realism to focus more on Muslim fundamentalist ideology by pointing out the differences between rational Arabs and those contaminated by sinister ideology. That is, against the background of brutal religious irrationality and violence, the viewers are introduced to Colonel Fares Al-Ghazi and his colleague Sergeant Haytham. Two characters driven by a sense of justice and show no mercy to the terrorists as they desire to bring peace to their homeland. Officer Al-Ghazi and his colleague Haytham are presented as patriotic and are gradually engaged in a friendly partnership with agent Fleury and his FBI team, forming a close bond that chased the terrorist cell responsible for the attack.

Conversely to the characterization of Abu Hamza as a delirious Muslim man, who wants to be another Osama bin Laden by attempting to fight infidels using children as human shields to achieve his lined goals, the camera overlaps to Al-Ghazi home life, showing him as a loving and a devoted father, emphasizing his humanity. His adherence to Islam is shown as moderate and measured. For scholar Robert Cettl, the character of Colonel Al-Ghazi is “the epitome of reason and rationality in contrast to the terrorists, who emerge as madmen and enemies of reason” (168). What stands out is the projection of Colonel Al-Ghazi, who speaks English and is somehow Westernized; he does not feature any of the stereotypical Oriental images of the Arab/Muslim character.

Such a positive portrayal of the two Saudi officers could improve the stereotypical image of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood movies. Berg used positive Arab characters to show that America has entered the post-racial era, where race does not matter, as it is disputed by scholar Alsultany in her book *Arabs and Muslims in the Media*. In which she intelligently discussed the inefficiency of the positive portrayals and the shift from the blatant stereotypes that characterized the pre-9/11 Hollywood portrayal of Arabs in ending the frame of Arabs and Muslims within the context of terrorism. She points that post-9/11 movies, TV shows, and TV dramas tend to dichotomize Muslims into two camps; good and bad Muslims, with the good Muslims being patriotic, supportive of the government, peace-loving, and primarily accept the necessity of the war on terror (*Arabs and Muslims in the Media* 12). As it is, certainly, demonstrated through the characters of Colonel Al-Ghazi and Sergeant Haytham.

Besides, for some film critics, Berg’s 90 seconds scene featuring Al-Ghazi’s and Haytham’s loving, mostly silent, families does not offset the negative representation of Arabs and Muslims in the movie as “their presence is mere tokenism” (Shaheen, *Guilty* 26). Yet, for Berg and Carnahan, the two characters of the good Saudi officers are never meant to be an exception, rather an example of reasonable Muslim Arabs. Berg explained that “there are



rational people on every side who trying to do the right thing but whose efforts are thwarted by those who capitalize on chaos and brutality” (qtd. in Thurkettle). However, through the illusion of the United States living in a post-racial era and the polarization of Muslims into good and bad, *The Kingdom* proves that diplomacy and negotiation are futile in dealing with terrorists and legitimizes the American use of force (Kellner 172). A similar positive representation of Arabs and Muslims in other scenes could quarrel movie critics’ argument that Berg’s movie presents Muslims as terrorists and the Muslim land as a place that breeds terrorism.

The movie also highlights the cultural clash that exists between the West and the Muslim world. Colonel Al-Ghazi’s mission to assist the FBI team during their investigation and his interaction with the team members served to demonstrate a number of cultural clashes. A close examination of the team’s only female member and only major female protagonist, agent Janet Mayes and her contact with Colonel Al-Ghazi exposes the difference in attitude toward women within the Muslim and the Western realms. Agent Mayes’s character represents the superior, advanced, and liberal American culture to which she belongs in juxtaposition to the Muslim women representing the primitive and inferior Eastern Islamic culture.

Although the Saudi Muslim woman appears briefly in the movie, the image of the backside of two Muslim women dressed in black in the opening montage that coincidence with the narrator’s voice saying “this is a nation where tradition and modernity are in violent collision” (3:24-3:29), along with the weak and helpless female figure at the last scene are contrasted to the image of agent Janet Mayes dressed in tight tops and pants that reveal her feminine body features. Even if agent Mayes is not allowed to touch dead Muslim bodies during the Autopsy, denied access to a dinner with the Royal Prince, and her body is covered with a heavy cloak during the presence of the Royal Prince in the crime scene, she is

presented as a woman with scientific knowledge and a job as an investigator. She is strong, independent, and mainly equal to her male colleagues.

Such a visual representation revives the old stereotyped image of Muslim female as harem girls being dominated by the male and highlights the fact that the Muslim woman body symbolizes the body of uncivilized, primitive ‘Other’. According to a movie critic for *The New Yorker* magazine, “Berg’s film is driven not by logic but by simple needling. Like his heroes, he does not particularly want to understand the Saudis, get along with them or play by their arcane rules. He just wants to get in their face” (Lane).

In working with the FBI team, the movie projects Colonel Al-Ghazi struggling to find a middle ground between the Eastern sense of conservatism and the Western sense of liberty. Scholar Michelle Aguayo pointed out that the belief system of agent Fleury’s team is established as being readily irreconcilable with Colonel Al-Ghazi religion, she writes “Islam, which, according to the diegesis of the film, is highly gender-biased and oppressive” (50). It is alleged that the moviemakers intentionally added such scenes to insist on exposing the difference between the Western and the Muslim attitude toward women and prize Western gender equality. According to scholar Douglas Kellner, Mayes’s character “helps demonstrate retrograde Saudi attitudes toward women” (171).

Apart from being presented to the audience as brutal murderers and vicious terrorists, *The Kingdom* represents Arabs and Muslims as primitive and incapable of uncovering the terrorists involved in the attack without the intelligence of the American FBI team. Whether intentional or not, Berg’s movie recycled the old Orientalist stereotype of Arabs as rich and incompetent. This stereotypical representation was first stressed at the opening montage when the narrator referred to the discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia. The audience hears the narrator saying “they [Saudis] want America to be present there in the Kingdom because we are their security ... the Saudi elite became notorious big spenders” (1:34-1:45).

This narrativization suggests that Saudis do not know the value of money, and are in constant need of Americans to help guarantee the pump of oil and ensure their security against other vicious neighboring Arab nations. Nonetheless, in many instances during the investigation, Saudi officers are portrayed as ignorant of their field and in a need of a Western master to show them the work. Throughout the movie, the viewers see the FBI team collecting evidence and conducting their investigation in front of clueless, inefficient Saudi officers. This misrepresentation of Saudi officers as unqualified and inexpert reinforces the old structure of power relationship between the United States and the Muslim world, which enables the modern and advanced Western world hegemony to be sustained over the incompetent, ignorant, and primitive Muslim world. Even though the terrorist groups are portrayed as organized and intelligent which conveys the idea that the Islamic extremist threat is real, the United States is more organized and smarter, as the terrorist cell led by Abu Hamza is outsmarted by the end of the movie.

*The Kingdom* presents the Saudi Land as caught in the distant past. A desert that is similar to planet 'Mars' or a jungle for Muslims with a depraved ideology. It is a land where bullet-proof jackets had to be worn all the time and helicopter gunships frequently hovering overhead and accompanying the armed police. Within the compound walls, American oil workers have to install safe rooms to ensure the security of their families. The movie readily presents the Oriental love of violence in various scenes. Viewers see Arab-Muslim children cheering and enjoying violent video games in an internet café owned by an ex-jihadist, and agent Fleury linking the Saudi Royal charities with the jihadist activities in America when talking to Saudi Ambassador. Imagery such as this, fortifies the Orientalist stereotypes of the Muslim land as a home for religious radicalism and violence.

Director Berg was very good at making the connection between the Muslim normal, daily life, and the terrorist activities. He had been so creative in presenting the good and bad

Muslims in his movie, interrupting scenes that present Muslims as normal people living their life peacefully and practicing their religious rituals with others corrupted by shots that were violent in nature. In opposition to his unenthusiastic portrayal of the Muslim world, he also features the Western world as peaceful, superior, rational, and upholding values of freedom and enlightenment.

The paradigm structure of evil Arab-Muslims versus good Americans, with the possibility of evil victory over good, creates a feeling of fear and insecurity within the audience that legitimizes American violence and targeting of Muslims as a matter of security. The last thirteen minutes of the movie reminds us that *The Kingdom* took the Islamic terrorists as perverted monster figures from the pre-9/11 cinema of terrorism (Cettl 168) and projected Muslims as inherently vicious, who breed violent children. This representation reconfirmed the basic pattern of Hollywood projecting Muslims as terrorists.

In its effort to feature Americans as the champions of human rights and glorify the American global role in ensuring world stability, *The Kingdom* presented Saudi Arabia as a home for religiously fanatic jihadists and radicalism, with little or no anti-terrorism initiatives. Such characterization is regarded as a direct Hollywood slur on the nation. Even though Berg claimed that his movie “presents the most optimistic and moderate portrayal of an Arab character” (Lindgren), his claim was refuted by the film critic, Shaheen, who believed that Berg hardly attempted to avoid Hollywood superficial representation of Arabs (*Guilty* 128). Viewers are surprised by the portrayal of Abu Hamza, the leader of the terrorist cell, as an elderly man who has a loving relationship with his family. However, his character is offered no redeeming qualities, and no justification is presented for what he does. He appears as a man with a depraved ideology who uses his children to commit heinous acts and kill innocent people in the name of his religion.

Remarkably, the movie ends with the most controversial moment, where two scenes overlap. The first, in the FBI department, involves agent Leavitt asking agent Fleury about what he whispered to agent Mayes ear in the briefing before the launching of the mission; the second, in Saudi Arabia, where Abu Hamza's daughter is asking her son about what his grandfather whispered in his ear before he dies. The scene moves back to America, where agent Fleury answers, "I told her, we are going kill them all" (1:43:38) before it overlaps once more to Saudi Arabia, where the little boy is saying, "he told me, do not be afraid my child, we are going to kill them all" (in Arabic) (1:43:39). The movie closes with an extreme camera close-up of the boy's eyes and then fades out to dark. It is important to note that this young boy represents the misguided youths who were Hollywood's Muslim villains in the years immediately after 9/11. This final scene is important in terms of its ability to lead the audience to believe that while radical Muslims fight Westerners on the basis of some depraved ideology, American violence is based on justice, self-defense, and it is morally justified.

This final moment has been highly misunderstood by movie critics, who believed that the movie suggests that hostility and antagonism will continue to influence the East-West relationship and attitude toward each other in the future. Shaheen, as one of them, claims that the final scene provides a moral approval for the death of Muslim children in Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon, and elsewhere as they might be future terrorists. He wrote, "the audience is led to believe that we had better kill the Arabs- even the women and children- quick, before they kill us" (*Guilty*131). The movie shows that Muslims and their children are violence-prone and that Arab-American charity organizations support terrorism. Berg and Carnahan exposed their central argument concerning the war on terror and the use of power to end terrorism, arguing that sometimes within the war on terror no good choices are made. They believed that the use of force alone does not make a proper solution to the conflict of beliefs and values in the

Muslim world. *The Kingdom* suggests that while killing terrorists is undeniably satisfying and a necessary solution to hinder the terrorists, yet it “doesn’t address and may even exacerbate the root problems [...]”. In *The Kingdom*, even justified vengeance is no solution” (Suderman).

*The Kingdom* is an illustration of how popular culture has changed after 9/11 and how this meant that a new version of the ‘Other’ has taken over the old discourse. The way Berg described the Arab-Muslim terrorists in his movie corresponds with the neo-Orientalist discourse. His American and Arab-Muslim characters are completely in contrast to each other. The negative representation of Arabs and Muslims as terrorists continues with increased dedication after the 9/11 attacks. Arab-Muslims are the Islamic extremists who represent a potential threat to the safety of Western civilians. Although Berg tried to give the Arab/Muslim characters some more depth, his movie still depicts Arab-Muslims within the context of terrorism. With the implicit links to the 9/11 attacks, Berg’s screenwriter depicted the United States as the world’s savior and wrote a satisfying ending for Americans, a symbolic punishment for the terrorists, whom he made look evil and threatening.

So far, this chapter has revealed that the 9/11 attacks had shaped the first decade of the twenty-first century in American popular culture and politics. Though the terrorism-themed thrillers served as Hollywood mainstay before the 9/11 attacks, their popularity remarkably increased as movie plots get far darker after the attacks. In the post 9/11 era, the demonized ‘Other’ surfaces as a monolithic culture of radical Muslims committing heinous acts and violence against innocent civilians. More like a military threat that challenged the very foundation of American national security, Western civilization, and global order. Within *United 93* and *The Kingdom*, the everlasting fear of Islamic fundamentalist terrorism makes a common theme. Both movies are regarded as a direct response to the 9/11 attacks and the Bush-Cheney administration discourse and ideology of the war on terror.

*United 93* and *The Kingdom* failed to draw a line between the terrorist actions and Islam. Although post 9/11 era witnessed the emergence of a more complex representation and positive portrayal of Arabs and Muslims, both movies' violence and terror can only be understood within the context of the Islamic doctrine. The Arab-Muslim identity in post-9/11 Hollywood movies is still understood and evaluated in relation to terrorism. The fact remains, post-9/11 Hollywood depiction of Arabs and Muslims is an actual extension of the pre-9/11 Hollywood portrayal.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Ten Years after 9/11: Muslims in Hollywood Movies after the Death of Osama bin**

#### **Laden**

Muslims have been receiving a negative depiction in movies from the very beginning. Hollywood's portrayal of Muslims has been colored by Orientalist myths, but the twentieth century political events contributed to transforming the 1920's Arab image of 'comic villain to the 'foreign devil' image years before the 9/11 attacks. The collapse of Communism meant that the traditional enemy in Hollywood gave way to the Muslim Jihadists as the new enemy. Later, the 9/11 attacks proved that Islamophobia is alive and well established in the American cinema. Several movies further stressed and fortified the link between Islam and terrorism. Truly, Hollywood is to be blamed for spreading negative views and exaggerating fear, hatred, and hostility toward Muslims and Arabs. Having assumed responsibility for the 9/11 terrorist attacks, painted Osama bin Laden and the whole Muslim community with the same sinister brush for over a decade. Would his death following an American Navy Seal raid on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011 signal the end of terrorism and break Hollywood's tradition of associating Islam with terrorism and portraying Muslims as misogynist Jihadist?

#### **5.1. America's Never Ending War on Terror**

The 9/11 attacks have chiefly defined American foreign policy since and affected immensely lives throughout the globe. As it is widely known, in response to the 9/11 attacks, the Bush administration launched the American international war on terrorism. President Bush made it clear that the war was intended to bring those responsible for the loss of innocent lives on the bloody September 11<sup>th</sup>, to justice. Osama bin Laden and his network al-Qaeda, based in Afghanistan, with its terror cells spanning the whole globe were the first major target of the world leader's huge military machine. Following the American invasion of



Afghanistan and the hunt for al-Qaeda leaders, President Bush lauded the progress in the war on terror, announcing in his State of the Union address that Americans “have the terrorists on the run” and that “One by one, the terrorists are learning the meaning of American justice” (“State of the Union Address to the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress, Second Session”). On his part, Attorney General John Ashcroft highlighted this progress claiming, “We are winning the war on terrorism” (“Prepared Remarks about the Patriot Act”). However, no American soldier knew probably that the war on terror was far from over and that the Middle East would remain, for years or perhaps for decades to come, the most fertile ground for anti-American radicalism.

Even after the capture of a number of al-Qaeda top leaderships and the assassination of Osama bin Laden on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011, neither is global terrorism is defeated nor peace is restored. Since the beginning of the war on terror, terrorist attacks were on the raising committed by some radical al-Qaeda members in various parts of the globe. The United States, with the largest military budget ever, was unable to put an end to radical Islamists. Its efforts to fight terrorism have fostered anti-Americanism in the Muslim world, while terror networks fed on the public antagonism toward America and were enabled to regroup and plan mass destruction. Although some critics, Max Abrahms and Jim Walsh among others, would argue that the United States was able to prevent mass attacks from occurring in America or in Europe, others argued that the American strategy had not protected the United States from terrorism but further destabilized the Middle East.

Indeed, pundits have described the American strategy in fighting terrorism in the Middle East as ineffective and counterproductive. The American efforts to fight a group of radical Islamists in one place strengthened another in a different place. The withdrawal of the American troops from Iraq in 2011 provided for the perfect conditions for the rise of Sunni insurgency, which permitted the upsurge of another extremist group from the ashes of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), namely the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). In Afghanistan,

America's longest war continues. The United States "remains stuck in strategic limbo in Afghanistan" (Fuchs). Although the coalition continues to deploy a sizeable number of forces to Afghanistan, no real victory is marked on the battlefields. In 2018, a former Deputy Assistant Security of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs wrote for *The Guardian*, "while the US and its allies continue to send young men and women to fight and die, certain facts remain constant: the Taliban are not going anywhere. Terrorists are not going anywhere -17 years later, the Islamic State has joined al-Qaida as a threat" (Fuchs). The Taliban continues the cycle of violence in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The Critical Threats Projects advisor at the American Enterprise Institute explained for the *Foreign Affairs* that the United States was failing to achieve a mission accomplished in its war on terrorism due to the fact that al-Qaeda and the Islamic State are but a mere fraction of a large global movement, unified under an ideology known as 'Salafi Jihadism', which came to represent the real enemy in the twenty-first century, winning against which alone is a losing battle (Zimmerman). In fact, the failure in the war on terror can be attributed to two main reasons, namely the inflated assessment of the terror threat facing the United States, which led to an expansive counterterrorism campaign that neither ended terrorism nor protected Americans from terrorist attacks and the adoption of an aggressive strategy of military intervention in the already unstable Middle East (Thrall and Goepner).

Terrorism has been a top agenda issue of world politics since the later part of the twentieth century. No surprise, the American war in Iraq and Afghanistan against radical Islamic extremists, the Civil War in Syria that started in 2011, and other terrorist attacks perpetrated by Muslims on Western soil dominate the news and hold a center stage on TV screens. Despite the war on terrorism, the issue has not yet gone away. Today terror cells are still active in parts of the Middle East, namely in Yemen and Syria. There is no question that the terrorist threat is evolving and metastasizing. The American interventionist policy and the

removal of Saddam Hussein created a power vacuum in Iraq that allowed al-Qaeda to evolve into the AQI and then into IS.

In North Africa, the removal of Qaddafi contributed to the instability that fed the Islamic extremists in the region. Newer Salafi-jihadi groups emerged as a threatening power to presidential elections and attempted to impose their agendas and exert pressure by carving out areas of influence in strategic cities and establishing local bases in Benghazi, Derna, and Sirte (Sizer; Estelle and Zimmerman). The Islamic State benefited from the political instability and the large numbers of defectors to rise as a threatening power in Libya by 2015. The vast country offered barely monitored territories to create training camps and establish cells across Libya. The rise of the Islamic State in Libya was intrinsically linked to local conflict dynamics and the national Civil War. The IS managed to exploit the political vacuum ensued by the military fight between the General National Congress and a tribal secularist militia bloc backing the Tobruk-based House of Representatives and allied with other Salafi-jihadi groups, such as Ansar al-Shariah (Wehrey and Badi) to further contribute to the already deteriorated political situation in the nation.

For most Americans, the twenty-first century new enemy is not just a military threat like earlier Nazism or Communism instead it is a real challenge to the American national security and an eminent threat to Western civilization and the new world order. This new enemy consists overwhelmingly of Arabs, Muslims, and chiefly of home-grown Muslim terrorists. Islamophobia, as an irrational fear of Islam, intensified due to the rise of non-state and self-proclaimed terror networks acting in the name of Islam. Terrorism swept various parts of the globe, since the death of Osama bin Laden, under the newly formed ISIS and AQI and further strengthened the link between Islam and terrorism in the contemporary world.

Muslims have been frequently presented by the Western media, and mainly, the American media as irrational and utterly opposed to the West. Amidst the twenty-first century

global developments, Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' theory was given prominence. The war on terror campaign amounted to a struggle solely against Muslims, within which the Muslim identity is increasingly defined in terms of an oppositional dialect that pits Islam and Muslims against the rest of the world (Noor 261). In years after the 9/11 events, the American war on terror campaign made the world even more dangerous, with sparse terror networks that were hard to fight. In America, the debate surrounding Muslims, Arabs, and Islam has been dramatically politicized due to the war in Afghanistan and Iraq and the mounting threat from the newly formed Islamic State on the world's stability and American national security. This debate was enlarged by the manner in which news media presented Arabs, Muslims, and Islam to the American public.

A research study conducted by Sofia Hayati Yusof et.al on the framing of international media on Islam and terrorism in a period of two months after the death of Osama bin Laden demonstrated that Islam, Muslims, and the Middle East made newsworthy issue only in relation to war, terrorism, and political upheavals. The study revealed that the negative issues related to Islam constituted 51.38 percent of the news coverage (Yusof et.al 117). Another analysis of three major networks CBS, FOX, and NBC coverage of the Muslim world, by the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics, and Public Policy, yielded a much similar result. The study revealed that between 2015 and 2017 news about Muslims were generally news about terrorism. 75 percent of the news stories were about terrorist activities, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, and refugees (Stone). Undeniably, this anti-Muslim sentiment in news coverage seeps easily into Hollywood production, so it comes as no surprise that the Muslim world is deemed a ready source of dark fears and threats.

## **5.2. All Terrorists are Muslims in Hollywood Movies**

Movies are an important instrument of (re)constructing realities that are widely accessible. They overtly reflect moviemakers' ideologies and serve to create a common

worldview toward religion by making the audience conscious of inaccessible entities and realities through selecting symbols for representation. When it comes to Islam and Muslims, the term ‘Muslim fundamentalist’, as a symbol for representation, is often used to convey negativity about Islam. Because Hollywood has an enormous sphere of influence, its categorization of Muslims as dangerous, pre-modern, and uncivilized became mediated realities for the entire world and encouraged Westerners to perceive Islam as a religion that promotes intolerance and violence. Shaheen has validated this point in his studies of the celluloid history of Hollywood published before and after the 9/11 attacks. According to him, the Arab character is enormously essentialized and presented in a distorted way by the Western media. There is no doubt that the Arab/Muslim dehumanizing ethnic stereotype is deeply ingrained in the American psyche and cinema precisely, with the rise of the war on terror.

In recent years, the concept of the binary ideology of the “us” vs “them” as linked with Islamophobia is becoming more pervasive in the American mainstream media and popular culture. Contemporary movies are nurturing the idea of the clash of civilizations. The Islamophobic representation of Muslims in Hollywood movies has distanced and alienated them as the threatening cultural ‘Other’, and no one probably knows when such a representation would wear away. Certain ideologies like Islam is a real threat to the West; Islam is old-fashioned and very conservative; all Muslims are irrational, cruel, deviant, and dictatorial; most of the Muslim countries are anti-American, as being disseminated and reinforced through the entertainment industry might lead to a general public acceptance of the current American covert operations in the Muslim world, dropping bombs, torture killings, and oppressive legislations that target the Muslim community in America.

Shaheen critically analyzed American policy to win the war on terror through Hollywood. He believed that the old Orientalist stereotypes in entertainment media allowed

the United States to win the support of other Western countries in its fight against Islamic terrorism (*Guilty*18). Pre-9/11 Hollywood movies were rife with negative and racist stereotypes of Muslims as “they are all fabulously wealthy; they are barbaric and uncultured; they are sex maniacs with a penchant for white slavery; and they revel in acts of terrorism” (Shaheen, *The TV Arab* 4). A post-9/11 review of the American movie industry evinces that the second and the fourth myths, as presented by Shaheen, are unquestionably still being applied to the Muslim character in recent movies. Muslims are frequently portrayed as bad, villains, or terrorists; rather than as ordinary people with families and friends. Such portrayal can be attributed to the fact that since 9/11 the American news media has presented Islam as an ideology of extremism, radicalism, and fundamentalism, and such an Islamophobic representation seeped swiftly to Hollywood thereby, most movies imply that “all Muslims are not terrorists, but all terrorists are Muslims” (Janjua).

Indeed, the 9/11 events did not really usher to a new age of terrorist-themed movies, because many years before the attacks, terrorism had provided the plot for the movie industry particularly, when terrorist actions heightened and were spanning diverse regions as the Muslim world, America, Asia, and Europe. The American popular culture reflected the mounting violence throughout the world and the rise of terrorism to the top agenda of American foreign policy concerns. Terrorism has become the most pivotal source for storylines, myths, and fantasies that have characterized the American entertaining industry since then. The romantic image of Arabs that was featured in movies such as *The Sheik* was replaced by a demonic and dehumanized image that demonstrates “terrorists are typically Middle Easterners” (Fuller 187). Movies with exotic settings, violence, scenes of terror, action, the conflict between good and evil, and counterterrorism have always had a natural cinematic appeal throughout the world, and mainly, in American society. Dozens of movies shows Arabs and Muslims as jihadist terrorists and villains being killed by American heroes

since the 1980's. Unquestionably, the 9/11 terrorist attacks elevated the American public allurements with terrorism, when a new cycle of movies fueled by the increasing paranoia and fear of Islam and Muslims emerged at the eve of the twenty-first century. Nowadays, movies' scenes of terror imitated and dramatized real-life terrorism, President Bush's war on terror campaign served as the perfect backdrop for the new century moviemaking of violent high-tech spectacles (Boggs & Pollard, *The Hollywood War Machine* 189).

Besides providing entertainment, movies allow people to share feelings and thoughts all over the globe. They tend to mirror societies' interests and desires and influence the habits and tastes of individuals. That is to say, the frequently biased projection of the Middle East as a place that breeds terrorism in American cinematic production affected the American public understanding of the region and its inhabitants and also of terrorism. The American mass media coverage of the Arab spring revolutions influences the portrayal of Muslims in Hollywood movies too. The war on terrorism in the Muslim world provides the storyline for Hollywood moviemakers. Therefore, the Muslim land is constantly linked with terrorism, and the Muslim character continues to surface as one-dimensional, without background, and only motivated by fundamentalist Islam; *13 Hours: Secret Soldier of Benghazi* provides a telling example.

It is absolutely normal for the cinematic production to mirror the very current shifts in world politics. The enduring rise of violence in the name of Islam, chaos, and political upheavals in the Muslim world provided for the association of Islam with terrorism. Roughly since 9/11, the whole world watched with disdain scenes of Muslims in various Muslim countries rising and protesting with unbridled fury, whether against their oppressive regimes or the American presence, in the Muslim world. Because the news media influence the story-making in the entertainment industry, it is eminent to acknowledge that the news media by its nature focuses on the most sensational stories of violence and terror, rather than on

resolutions and stories where Muslims are regularly denouncing atrocities that have been committed in the name of Islam. In order to win the hearts and minds, virtually every single piece of mainstream media in America fails to represent Muslims with accuracy. Not much has changed for almost 17 years after 9/11, lurid and insidious depictions of Arabs remain staple fare. The Muslim character is a willing and active participant in terrorist activities motivated most of the time by religion. It is the fearsome enemy to be fought and always defeated by an American hero, as it is featured in *13 Hours: Secret Soldiers of Benghazi*, and *Zero Dark Thirty*.

Perceptibly, Hollywood has protracted and fortified the old narratives of Orientalism to the extent that images of Muslims as violent, fanatics, and murderous thrived in most movies. It became quite obvious that when screenwriters wanted to portray terrorists in their works, they link up Middle Eastern culture with the characters; giving them an accent and making them look like Arabs. This stereotype is quick and easy and used very often since the Middle East is densely populated with Muslims and Arabs who are perceived in negative non-human light by the general Western audience.

For more than a decade since 9/11, Hollywood pejoratively represented Muslims as Jihadists and radical extremists fighting their Holy war against infidels, to convey an epochal clash of civilizations and to justify the expansion of American military operations in the Middle East. The war on terror aimed to give the United States a carte blanche to wage war on any country that is alleged to harbor terrorists. Scholars Carl Boggs and Tom Pollard view that world politics can be recently defined as the clash of democracy versus tyranny, good versus evil, light versus dark, or civilization versus barbarism (*The Hollywood War Machine* 205). Islamophobia, therefore, became the handmaiden of the American effort to fight terrorism. Basically, to justify the war on Afghanistan and Iraq, the Bush administration relied on a number of arguments comprising the old Orientalist clichés that Islam is inherently



violent and oppressive. Truly, since the 9/11 attacks, an overbearing stigma has been attached to Islam and its adherents. The recent surge of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiments in American society is not only the result of the misrepresentations disseminated through the cinema industry that continuously paint the 1.8 billion Muslim around the world with the same broad, sinister brush, but also of government's discriminative policies and right-wing political commentators who benefit from spreading hateful rhetoric.

Islamophobia took a new turn in the United States when Barack H. Obama took office. His administration laid the groundwork for the stoking of fear and paranoia toward Muslims. Although he claimed that America is not at war with Islam, declaring from Turkey "Let me say this as clearly as I can, the United States is not, and never will be, at war with Islam" ("Remarks by President Obama to the Turkish Parliament"), under the second phase of the war on terror, he dramatized the threat of Islamic militants and stoke up fears of terror attacks on American soil to justify the expansion of surveillance over Muslim Americans and the restrictive immigration policies established by the Bush administration and to install the counter-radicalization policing in 2011.

Stereotyping Muslims as terrorists increased essentially when Donald Trump became President. Trump's negative attitude toward Muslims was very apparent throughout his presidential campaign. During 2016 presidential campaign, Islam was at the center of political debates around the American national security. While contending for the presidential office, the Republican presidential candidate made it clear that he supported a complete ban of Muslims entering the nation. His propaganda of labeling Muslims as terrorists is built on preexisting flawed racial ideologies that appeal to American prejudices. Drawing upon centuries of negative stereotypes of Muslims, Trump's propaganda reinforces the association between Muslims and terrorism and makes the stereotype of Muslim terrorists the most readily available image about Muslims in modern America. He drew little distinction between

Islam as a religion of peace and non-state radical Islamic terrorism when he told journalist Anderson Cooper in a CNN interview, “I think Islam hates us” (“Anderson Cooper 360°”). And when asked whether there is a war between the West and radical Islam or between the West and Islam itself, he simply responded that “it’s very hard to define. It’s very hard to separate. Because you don’t know who’s who” (“Anderson Cooper 360°”).

Thus, serving as the forty-fifth President of the United States, he ushered to a new era in American politics with the third phase of the war on terror. The new President promised, in his inaugural address, that his new ‘America First’ foreign policy will, majorly, reinforce the American national security through uniting “the civilized world against Radical Islamic Terrorism” (“Inaugural Address”). Since he took office, Islamophobia has become more visible in the plethora of laws, policies, and programs that were enacted to policy Muslims under the war on terror. Trump’s Islamophobic views have gained traction in the United States. His hateful rhetoric has essentially given every American the permission to express hateful things about Islam, and exposed Muslim Americans to increased prejudice and brutality from private actors. During his term as President of the United States, Islamophobia ran through the American society and culture in myriad ways. He has basically mainstreamed Islamophobia, any hopes that Islamophobia would one day fade away all proved unfounded as statistics revealed that a great deal of racially motivated assaults against Muslim Americans persisted years after 9/11.

Having declared his Holy war against the United States of America in 1996 and assuming responsibility for various terrorist attacks on American targets and interests around the globe brought Osama bin Laden into the American consciousness. Bin Laden represented the true face of evil, a man motivated by a religious ideology dedicated to the destruction of the Western civilization. His death following an American Navy SEAL raid on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011 was seen as a huge blow to his terror network and its sleeping cells all over the globe. Could

his death offer the American cinema a new reason to come up with an alternative and stop associating Muslims with terrorism? American screenwriters and directors have recently provided stronger affirmation for American Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiments through featuring and disseminating before our eyes images of Muslims, Arabs, and Islamic traditions and practices within the context of terrorism years after the death of Osama bin Laden. Simply put, the problem is not about Bin Laden or his so-called terror network; rather it is about Islam and the rising fear of the new ‘Green Menace’. As Huntington once posited, “the underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power” (216).

### **5.3. Vilification and the Creation of the Enemy, Terrorist Image in American Cinema**

Movies act as a means through which moviemakers can influence the general perspectives of individuals. They have an enduring lasting impact on viewers, who are more likely to connect so many occasions with the fictional plots. Movies can be the creator of the worst stereotypes that most people believe in. Shockingly, most American movies happen to depict Islam, Muslims, and Arabs through a largely negative perspective. Such damaging representation affects the peoples’ attitudes and behaviors toward Arabs and Muslims. Most Hollywood movies released after the 9/11 attacks project negative images of Muslims that perpetuate Islamophobia within the American society. It would be slightly unfair to deny that movies have downgraded Muslims as violent, treacherous, threatening, terrorists, and reinforced biased views among the audiences since the 9/11 attacks.

It is morally incorrect to blame the 1.8 billion Muslims around the world for some acts committed by the few. Hollywood has linked Muslims and Arabs with terrorism years before the 9/11 attacks, and such an association is further reinforced after the death of Osama bin Laden. Years have elapsed since the 9/11 attacks, yet stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims

persist, revived time and time again. Islamophobic characterizations continue to spread like a poisonous virus throughout American cinema. One of the first lessons that American children learn from their media about Arabs, and one of the last lessons that the elderly forget, is that Arab equals Muslim equals godless enemy (Shaheen, "Hollywood's Bad Arab" 86). There is a list of movies where Arabs and Muslims from various countries are being projected as terrorists, *Patriots Day*, *The 15:17 to Paris*, *Dictator*, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, *The Green Prince*, *American Sniper*, *London Has Fallen*, *Lone Survivor*, *The Hurt Locker*, and *12 Strong* to name but a few. Painting all Muslims as terrorists would help establish that terrorism is a Muslim phenomenon and promote feelings of hatred and enmity toward Islam.

Thereby, a decision is made to analyze, within this part of the study, two movies released after the death of Osama bin Laden; *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012) and *13 Hours: Secret Soldiers of Benghazi* (2016). While the first features the dedication of the American intelligence service in the search for the mastermind behind the 9/11 attacks, Osama bin Laden, the second recounts the September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2012 attack on the American diplomatic compound and CIA annex in Benghazi, Libya, and stresses the bravery of ex-Navy Seals.

*Zero Dark Thirty* (Dir. Kathryn Bigelow) is regarded as a box office success making more than one-hundred-thirty-two million US dollars on a budget of forty million US dollars. The movie was a big hit at multiple award ceremonies winning an Academy Award for best achievement in sound editing while being nominated for five others. *13 Hours: Secret Soldiers of Benghazi* (Dir. Michael Bay) is not necessarily considered as a box office success, making slightly more than sixty-nine million US dollars on a budget of fifty million US dollars. The movie received no Academy Award but was nominated for the Islamophobe of the Year Award<sup>1</sup> by the UK Islamic Human Rights Commission<sup>2</sup>. *13 Hours: Secret Soldiers of Benghazi* is chosen for it offers the chance to see how Hollywood continues to promote Islamophobia and prejudice after the death of Osama bin Laden.

### 5.3.1. *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012)

*Zero Dark Thirty* is a blockbuster movie written by Mark Boal, directed by an Academy Award-winning Kathryn Bigelow, and released by Columbia (a Sony Pictures Entertainment Company) and Annapurna pictures. The movie is based on firsthand accounts of the actual events and features the story of America's worldwide decade-long manhunt for the world's most dangerous man and the mastermind behind the 9/11 attacks, Osama bin Laden. It is described as "a straight up "hero catches bad guy" movie" (Taibbi). It dramatizes the American effort to track and capture Osama bin Laden, and glorifies the American use of torture against Muslim detainees within the war on terror, and makes the end justifies the means.

*Zero Dark Thirty*, as one of the most Islamophobic movies in the contemporary world begins with an audio recording of the emergency calls made during the 9/11 attacks. The audience is obliged to rely on the sense of hearing and is invited to live the same situation as the people to whom the voices belong. The sound of suffering and dread is aimed to remind the audience about the 9/11 tragedy. The dreadful events create a sense of anger toward the terrorists involved in the attacks and push the audience to unconsciously identify with the CIA officials in their hunt for Osama bin Laden. Therefore, it creates and reinforces dramatically the narrative of the 'us versus them' or 'Self vs Other'.

The movie follows a CIA official Maya, played by Jessica Chastain, in her dedication to capture and kill Osama bin Laden through whatever means necessary. When Maya arrives, two years after the 9/11, at the American embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan, where she is assigned to work with another CIA official called Dan, played by Jason Clarke, to gather the information that will help capture Osama bin Laden, she witnesses extreme torture applied to Muslim detainees. As the movie proceeds, the viewers witness scenes of extreme duress and atrocious torture practices at CIA black sites. The portrayal of the Muslim characters as

potential enemies, who only want to kill Americans with unimportant reasons for fighting, nurtures the idea that applying torture on Muslim men is a necessity, and reinforces the acceptance of violence toward Muslims in favor of American national security. In a scene, for instance, official Maya is attacked by a group of Muslim men as she attempted to leave her safe house, later the audience is informed that her secret CIA identity is not public, which suggests that every American in Pakistan is vulnerable to Muslim brutal rage and uncontrollable hatred.

Through his analysis of Hollywood movies, Shaheen documented positive and negative images of Arabs and Muslims. One of the most prominent images, according to him, is that of the 'Bad Arab'; somebody who is vicious, evil, and who is perennially causing terror, he wrote "the Arab-as-villain in cinema remains a pervasive motif" ("Hollywood's Bad Arabs" 85). *Zero Dark Thirty* uses such a stereotype in various ways. Although the movie grossly focuses on two Muslim countries, Afghanistan and Pakistan, it presents no single dissent Muslim character. In fact, the only good Muslim character is on the American side, a CIA official called 'Wolf' and he appears only for few minutes praying in his office. Other Muslim characters surface in various scenes as backward, violent, untrustworthy, lying, shifty, and holding fanatic Islamic beliefs. The movie conflates Pakistanis with Arabs and Muslims and features the Arabic language as one of the spoken languages in Pakistan, which is not true. For the moviemakers, the distinction is irrelevant, as long as, they know that terrorists are Muslims and Arabs. Simply, the movie did not make any separation between Arabs and Muslims, redeveloping an age-old Orientalist image. Bigelow's movie confirms that the only way to be Muslim and not to be a villain is to be loyal to America, just as in the case of the Arab translator.

The movie misrepresents the Islamic culture by depicting the Muslim world as a monolithic safe-haven for terrorists. The Muslim land 'Pakistan' is presented as a "hell hole"

(Kumar), a region stuck in a primal state of being. In an early scene, official Maya, a new to the region, is asked about her opinion of the country; she replies “it’s kind of [expletive]” (12:10). The coming scenes justify why Pakistan, as a Muslim land, is bad for her. There are checkpoints and wicked Muslims everywhere, she was attacked twice; once while she was leaving her house and the second while she was in a hotel restaurant with a friend, and most importantly Islam is what makes Pakistan unpleasant for her. The movie demonizes Islam by perpetually using the divine sentence ‘Allahu Akbar’, showing mosques and playing the ‘Adhan’ amidst the most violent and intense scenes.

*Zero Dark Thirty* is an American movie, made by an American director, for the American audience. The movie dramatizes the ten-year hunt for Osama bin Laden and champions the American efforts. No surprise, the Orientalist narrative shapes the movie, cultivates hatred, and fuels anti-Muslim sentiment in American society. Right from the beginning, the audience is introduced to an ‘us versus them’ and ‘good versus bad’ mentality, in which ‘them’ are bloodthirsty and irrational, while ‘us’ are peace keeping who aim to ensure the world’s safety. The movie uses derogatory and degrading language when a white American (Dan) tells a brown Arab/Muslim (Ammar) “I own you, Ammar. You belong to me” (2:29-2:33). In another scene, official Dan dehumanizes Ammar by placing a dog collar around his neck and tells him “you’re my dog, I gotta walk you” (20:56-20:57). Such language is rooted in Orientalism and highlights the power relation between the East and West. Even though this scene shows Ammar as being brutally tortured by Dan, the audience is not allowed to sympathize with him, as very soon it is known that Ammar and his other Muslim brethren were plotting to kill all Americans. Thus, justifies the Muslim terrorists’ illegibility for a normal due process and establishes their guilt.

*Zero Dark Thirty* even demonizes the ‘abaya’, ‘burqa’, or ‘niqab’ as an Islamic religious dress that is sometimes worn by Muslim women. In one scene, the CIA officials are shown

dressed in abayas as they disguise to capture a suspected terrorist. While these men in abayas do end up being Americans working for the CIA, they, nevertheless, perpetuate the perception that Muslim women's religious dress is a suspicious hiding place for violence and that Muslim women are suspicious, dangerous, miserable, and oppressed. Such a scene justifies much the discriminative measures taken in the Western world against minority Muslim women with such a type of clothes.

Again the use of the 'Adhan', the call to prayer amidst the most violent scenes, the use of Muslim women's religious dress as a disguise, and the use of the divine sentence 'Allahu Akbar' before the attack on Camp Chapman, Khost Afghanistan in *Zero Dark Thirty*, implies that the Islamic faith is closely tied with terrorism. Ammar's 'Bismillah' before eating and the scene where the American soldiers freak out upon hearing the divine word 'Allahu Akbar' before one of al-Qaeda members detonate his suicide bomb in Camp Chapman is absolutely striking. It yields to the conclusion that all terrorists are religiously motivated or religious fanatics. Hollywood has been using such scenes enduringly even years before the 9/11 attacks, which helped to raise anxiety and fear toward Islamic divine sentences in the West.

Bigelow's movie displayed the Islamic militants as being delighted for murdering Americans for no other reason but the deeply held hatred to the West and its values and way of life. In a scene, the television displays news saying, "there are people around the world that our freedom is threatening" (1:18:24-1:18:29). Although the movie summarizes the ten-year hunt for Bin Laden, it fails to refer to important events including the American war in Afghanistan and Iraq and its drone strikes on the Middle East, which can be responsible for resulting a massive casualty rate and creating new terrorists every day. It only makes reference to further Islamic terror attacks on London and an attempt to detonate a car bomb at Times Square in New York.



Absolutely no attempt is made in *Zero Dark Thirty* to provide the audience with the opportunity to understand the roots of Islamic terrorism, or to place violence against the West within its appropriate context. Bigelow's movie reinforces the faulty reasoning that Islamic terrorism simply exists, independent of any socio-economic or geo-political context (Ballan). Islamic terrorism is presented as a dangerous threat that had to be utterly eliminated from the face of the earth. The CIA operatives are depicted as doing their best to protect the civilized world and preserve life. Official Maya is presented as dedicated to heart and continues, for over a decade, the hunt for Osama bin Laden, being totally convinced that eliminating the leader of al-Qaeda would definitely bring the whole terror network down. The final scenes and the assassination of Bin Laden satisfy the desire for retaliation felt by Americans since the 9/11 attacks.

*Zero Dark Thirty* a terrorist thriller movie released eleven years after the 9/11 attacks, has made over one-hundred- thirty million dollars on a forty million dollars budget. The movie glorifies the American war on terror and celebrates the assassination of the world's most wanted man. No wonder, it pejoratively represented Muslims and Arabs, making little distinction between radical Islamic terrorism and Islam. The movie creates hate and mistrust, develops prejudice, and contributes to the rising of Islamophobia in American society.

### **5.3.2. *13 Hours: Secret Soldiers of Benghazi* (2016)**

*13 Hours: Secret Soldiers of Benghazi* based on a book titled *13 Hours: The Inside Account of What Really Happened in Benghazi* and directed by Michael Bay is an action thriller movie that tells the story of the real-life event of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2012, when the American Ambassador's compound in Benghazi, Libya came under a horrific attack resulting in the death of four Americans including the Ambassador, Christopher Stevens. Bay's movie, released by Paramount, tells only one side of the story and is imbued with stereotypical portrayals of the Muslim land and Muslims, positioning them as backward and undeveloped,

vicious and holding fanatic beliefs. The movie has created a narrative that helped legitimize the already narrow views of Islam and Muslims which many Americans hold.

*13 Hours: Secret Soldier of Benghazi* begins with a graphic video showing that the Libyan people had violently deposed Dictator Muammar Gaddafi and ended his forty-two years of tyrannical rule. The narrators' voice reinforced by visual and clichéd representation of former Libya's President, the allies (US, Britain, and France) airstrikes, and people demonstrating in streets, tells "this marks the end of a long and painful chapter for the people of Libya, who now have the opportunity to determine their own destiny in a new and democratic Libya" (1:29-1:39). Other images of violent scenes of fighting suggest that Libya became a failed country, with another narrator's voice saying, "warring gangs continue to raid Gaddafi's abandoned army, as the battle rages in Libya's two largest cities" (1:44-1:50).

Right from the beginning of the movie, Benghazi is represented as one of the most dangerous places on earth. Scenes of the rising violence resulted from the political instability, images of abandoned tanks and crashed planes as remnants of the revolution, and images of Benghazi Benina airport's walls pierced by bullets shots and occupied by security forces with suspicious eye looks establish the narrative that the Muslim land is a terror haven. Benghazi is an unsafe place for an American to be in, that is why, in a very early scene, Rone, played by James Badge Dale, gives a loaded pistol to Jack Silva, played by John Krasinski, once he lands in Benghazi. Later, when they clash with Islamic radical insurgents, in their road to the CIA annex, Rone is heard telling Jack, "welcome to Benghazi" (07:21), as if radical violence is the rule in Benghazi. Director Bay has presented Benghazi as a city that has fallen to Islamic radical insurgents called Ansar al-Sharia and has become a dangerous home for fanatic worriers with lethal weapons sold in the local open-air market.

Indeed, the movie wastes no time in establishing militant Islam at the root of the problem in Benghazi. It utilizes the Oriental discourse to link Islam with anti-American

violent acts of terror. Instruments of the Islamic faith are prominently shown, with the divine sentence ‘Allahu Akbar’, ‘Adhan’, and prayers associated with terrorism. The audience views how militant Islamists go silent all at once when they hear the call to prayer. Later, these same militant Islamists are viewed in the act of prayer while their guns rest against a wall in front of them inside the mosque, with The Sincerity ‘Surat Al-Ikhlās’ being read as a voice-over the scene. Such scenes are so common in Hollywood movies with Muslim terrorists. No doubt, positioning violence alongside the Islamic faith demonizes the religion of peace and generates a negative perception of Islam as a violent religion established upon a deep-seated hatred for the West and its freedom and liberty. Some other scenes in the movie clearly feature and reinforce the perception that Muslim rage is directed toward America and Americans.

Unlike the private military contractors whom Bay projects as heroes, militant Islamists run through the screen as bloodthirsty savages, gun-toting lunatics bent on killing innocent Americans. The audience is utterly kept away from their geo-political or socio-economic motives and they are not invited to live and experience their situation; there is only a brief reference in the news to protests carried in Egypt concerning an anti-Islamic youtube trailer for a movie that demonizes prophet Mohamed PBUH, called ‘Innocence of Muslims’. Unlike the American characters, Muslim extremists are not given names, families, and feelings except dark-skinned faces with sinister looks. Moreover, while the viewers are presented with the human side of the contractors, and they are invited into their lives and made to sympathize with their pain and loss, militant Muslims are presented as uncivilized and non-human motivated only by a deep-seated hatred to America and its values of freedom and liberty. The movie totally ignored the plight and suffering of Muslim characters except in a brief final scene, where Muslim women are seen looking for their men and sons among dead bodies crying and mourning. However, this final scene is not intended to encourage Westerners to sympathize with the militant Islamists families, rather to stress the fact that they are suffering

not because the Americans fought furiously against their sons and men but because of their depraved ideology and terrorism.

Furthermore, it is clearly observed that *13 Hours: Secret Soldiers of Benghazi* has emphasized the distinction between good and bad Muslims. As the movie progresses, the audience understands that the CIA officials and the GRS team (elite Ex-military operators, known as contracted soldiers) are coordinating with the February 17<sup>th</sup> Martyrs brigade, who are obviously called to help in the fight against Ansar al-Sharia once the Annex is assaulted. Apart from 17 Feb warriors, Amahl, a Libyan translator, plays the good Muslim character who refuses to leave his American friends during the attack. It is pertinent to ponder the words of Mamdani, who wrote:

After an unguarded reference to pursuing a “crusade”, President Bush moved to distinguish between “good Muslims” and “Bad Muslims”. From this point of view, “bad Muslims” were clearly responsible for terrorism. At the same time, the President seemed to assure Americans that “good Muslims” were anxious to clear their names and consciences of this horrible crime and would undoubtedly support “us” in a war against “them” (15).

Evidently, that is exactly what the movie features. Unlike militant Islamists, the movie depicts 17 Feb warriors as courageous, fighting hand in hand with the American GRS team against other radical Muslims. Mamdani adds that the central message of the “good/ bad Muslim” discourse that characterized the post 9/11 entertainment production is “unless proved to be “good”, every Muslim was presumed to be “bad”” (15). In an early scene, the audience hears Rone telling Jack, who has just arrived at Benghazi “well, this place is sucks, Jack. Not only is it hot as balls, but you cannot tell the good guys from the bad guys” (5:42-5:47). In another scene, Tig reinforces the same perception, when he got Jack up to speed on the area in the CIA Annex, he tells him “there is a few we got our eyes on, so always stay

strapped” (13:23-13:25). In another scene, a little conversation between Boon and Tanto highlights Mamdani’s idea:

BOON. Does this look like 17 Feb to you?

TANTO. Dude, how can you [expletive] tell? They’re all bad guys until they’re not.

(1:28:57-1:29:04)

This reminds the audience of the American Ambassador’s words in the movie *Hostage* released in 1986; “I can’t tell one from another- wrapped in those bed sheets they all look the same to me” (19:03-19:07). Although the 17 Feb warriors are believed to be friendly, they are not completely trusted. In a scene, Boon is heard telling two 17 Feb warriors “just don’t shoot us in the back” (58:49). Such imagery reinforces the Orientalist discourse of Muslims as untrustworthy even if they are friendly.

Nonetheless, the movie establishes the dichotomy of primitiveness and advancement between militant Islamists and Americans, using certain visual signs to support the Orientalist fantasy of an Arab city stuck in a primitive state of being unable to modernize and advance. The GRS team is equipped with fancy cars, night-vision goggles, bullet-proof jackets, drones, and an array of advanced military technologies, while the militant Islamists have only Russian rifles ‘AK-47, RPG-7’ and other stolen lethal Russian-made weapons from Gaddafi’s armories. Besides, despite outnumbering the GRS group and being armed to teeth, the militant Islamists are portrayed as incompetent. In a scene, Rone is heard saying “these [Expletive] have no idea what’s coming for them” (55:16).

In another scene, between nightfall and dawn, Tanto compares some militant Islamists sneaking toward the CIA annex through Zombieland to kids, saying, “look at these guys. It’s like kids playing hide and seek” (1:31:49). The movie shows that only within hours of the attack on the CIA annex, the GRS team had successfully gunned down dozens of Islamists losing only two of them. The audience also sees how local militia and Libyan contractors

hired to protect the CIA annex mostly disappear when the attack began, whom Tanto describes as “chickenshit!”. Bay’s movie establishes the militant Islamists as mindless monsters, possessing inferior intelligence but savagely regrouping and planning for new attacks despite their losses.

*13 Hours: Secret Soldiers of Benghazi* contains Orientalist elements that emphasize the difference between Muslims and Americans, and works to present the former as belonging to a different world. The movie uses Muslim terrorists as foil in order to promote model American warriors, and stresses an epical struggle between the civilized West and the Barbaric East. In a scene, for example, Tanto is heard saying “...Could be the start of the holy war” (51:16), which reminds us of President Bush’s description of the war on terror as the new ‘crusade’.

The movie features the Muslim characters as an ignorant menace hell-bent on murdering as many Americans in the service of their exotic and vicious God. However, Islam was not the only religion represented in the movie. Images of Islam as a religion of blasphemy that preaches violence and intolerance were juxtaposed with others of Christianity. In one scene, Tanto is heard saying, “as long as I’m doing the right thing. God will take care of me” (1:52:59-1:53:03), while in another, Oz says that he wants to orders flying few F-16s with low fly-by over the city of Benghazi “to put the fear of God and the United States” (1:39:53) in the hearts of the terrorists. Through such scenes, the movie displays the American fighting against militant Islamists as morally justified, honorable, and necessary. The last violent scenes of fighting between militant Islamists and the GRS team suggest that hostility and antagonism, as linked to the clash of civilizations theory, between Muslims and Westerners will continue enduringly until one of them exterminates the other. Tanto says, “as far as I’m concerned, this is not over till it ends. That’s when they’re all dead or we are” (2:06:11-2:06:17).

Fifteen years since the 9/11 attacks, *13 Hours: Secret Soldiers of Benghazi* disseminates the same vicious cycle of stereotypes that characterized Hollywood production before the death of Osama bin Laden. Although the movie barely covered its production cost in the box office, making slightly more than sixty-nine million on a budget of fifty million dollars, its stereotypical representation of Muslims and Islam makes the core of modern-day Islamophobia.

Ultimately, recent movies demean the image of Muslim men and ladies for cruelty and give the impression that the whole Muslim world is barbaric and savage due to Islam. No doubt, just as there are few Muslims who have committed inexcusable atrocities, which cannot be defended or advocated by nobody, in the name of Islam, Americans have carried out their war on terror on Muslims for God and country. The distinction that Hollywood regularly maintains is that Americans are working for a more prominent good, while the motivation of Muslims is both barbaric and oppressive. Hollywood movies with Muslim characters as terrorists, after the death of Osama bin Laden, have paved the way for a more intense Islamophobia in the West. That means, the death of Bin Laden neither signaled the end of the war on terror nor the break in the portrayal of Muslims as terrorists in Western movies. To put it another way, as long as terror networks continue to surface and act in the name of Islam, Muslims will continue to be vilified and associated with terrorism in Western movies for years to come, which places part of the blame for the negative personification on Muslims themselves. Movies like *Zero Dark Thirty*, and *13 Hours; Secret Soldiers of Benghazi* capitalize on an already tense environment of suspicion and fear. They help place Muslims automatically into the 'Other' category and glorify the American military and efforts to fight the war on terror in the Muslim world. Such movies make people question whether their neighbors and co-workers or even that woman in a religious dress walking down the street might be a threatening cultural 'Other'.

### Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> It is an IHRC's annual fund raising event that offers the chance to mock Islamophobic personalities and institutions while at the same time appreciating the seriousness of the issue.

<sup>2</sup> The Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) based in London is a non-profit, non-governmental organization established in 1997 which works jointly with other organizations to promote justice for all people regardless of their racial, confessional or political background ([www.ihrc.org.uk/](http://www.ihrc.org.uk/)).



## Conclusion

The manner in which Arabs and Muslims have been visualized in Hollywood movies is highly unfavorable and demeaning. Since the dawn of cinema, Arabs and Muslims have been portrayed as barbaric, uncivilized, savages, sex maniacs, and fanatic killers. Such images have always been based on Orientalist accounts and are usually determined by anti-Muslim sentiments, Islamophobia, and other historical and political factors. As it has already been demonstrated, Hollywood's stereotypical representation of Arabs and Muslims had experienced various changes. Whereby, in persistence with a tradition that Said labeled 'Orientalism', which began in literary works and old travels and expeditions narratives, Hollywood's very earliest image of Arabs and Muslims adhered to the romanticized notion of desert and Bedouin ruler. Such images breathed life into and fortified the stereotyped notions of the Arab that was presented in early literature, art, and academic works. Within early American cinema production not only the Arabian fantasy became a great phenomenon, but movies also honored the West's superiority and stressed the assumption of 'the white man's burden' by portraying the persistent struggle between the brutal Arab and the civilized Western heroic to generate support for the Western imperial operations in the Muslim world.

Soon later, this love affair with the Arabian Desert came to its end when the political climate necessitated the change in the Arab/Muslim role in movies. With the establishment of the Jewish settlement in 1948 amidst a predominantly Muslim land, the portrayal of Arabs and Muslims took on a gloomier and ominous demeanor. The political climate and the escalation of activities attributed to the Arab-Israeli conflict allowed for a demeaning portrayal to be created. Suddenly, the visual representation of the erotic foreigner and romantic hero that was read about in books and literature gave way to a new cinematic image of the Arab/Muslim as a dishonest, oppressive, villain, and menacing enemy 'Other'. The early sixties and late seventies American cinematic production demonstrated that America

sided with Israel in its fight against Arabs which allowed for a more sinister image to be given to Arabs and Muslims in most movies.

Such portrayal of Arabs did not diminish; rather it dramatically accelerated and became more intense and detrimental due to the Islamic revolution in Iran, the Iranian Hostage Crisis, and the Gulf war, paving the way, thereby, for the terrorist image that dominated Hollywood production since the 1980s. By the eighties and the nineties, the Arab character emerged as the evil enemy of humanity, who is ready to slaughter innocent people. Images of gun-toting Arabs were the order of the day. Arabs and Muslims took the evil enemy role that was once reserved for the Soviet Communists. Hollywood's portrayal of Arabs and Muslims as villains and terrorists seemed to reflect the deeply held fear and apprehension generated by the frequent projection of Arabs and Muslims in violent images on the news media. Further political developments, including the bombings and hijacks, repeatedly fed Hollywood moviemakers' imagination. The net result was an anti-Arab scenario imbued with hostile and prejudiced images of Arabs and Muslims.

Pre-9/11 Hollywood portrayal of Arabs and Muslims highlighted the intimate relation that ties Hollywood and the Pentagon. Whereby, in return for government patronage Hollywood helped alienate the Muslim world and render it a suitable area for the exercise of the American power. The American imperial objectives in the post-Second World War have indirectly motivated Hollywood's portrayal of the Middle East. This study demonstrates that Hollywood has assaulted the Muslim world in various manners, and proved that its negative personification of Arabs and Muslims over the last century from the erotic 'Other' to the terrorist and devil 'Other' did not occur out of the blue, but was the outcome of the American intertwining political, economic, and cultural interests in the Muslim world.

The crash of the hijacked aircrafts on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 into the World Trade Centers and the Pentagon has had a profound impact on the Western perception of Arabs and

Muslims, and how they were represented on screen. The events have shaped the first decade of the twenty-first-century in American popular culture and politics. The manner in which Arabs and Muslims are represented in America from scholarly textbooks to Hollywood movies since 9/11 proves that the American version of Orientalism had come to implant deep roots into the American popular culture. The incessant dehumanization of Muslims and Arabs provides a vantage point to see Americans' image in the illusion of the evil Arab as the moderate "good guys" fighting for freedom and peace against "bad guys". Hollywood that once served as a propaganda vehicle for the American government during the Cold War seemed keen to help again with the 'war on terror'. The latter provided the American motion picture industry with a new chance to build on its favorite storylines, particularly with the narrative of 'us vs. them'. As a result, post-9/11 Hollywood depiction of Arabs and Muslims served to justify the American war on terror and the exercise of American power and hegemony over the Muslim world.

Although 9/11 events have generated a more complex, balanced, and even-handed depiction of Arabs and Muslims in some movies, due to recent terrorist events such as the Charlie Hebdo massacre in France, the attack on the United States diplomatic compound in Libya, Boston Marathon bombing, and the emergence of a particular kind of terrorism acting on behalf of Islam, it does not appear that Hollywood will soon be changing its perceptions regarding America's new enemy. Muslims and Arabs are, more often than not, portrayed within the context of terrorism. Almost no single movie presented Arab/Muslim families as normal citizens living a normal life.

As the last chapter demonstrates, the death of Osama bin Laden did not prevent Hollywood from continuously blaming the 1.8 billion Muslims around the world for some acts committed by the few. It is apparent that the Western Orientalist writers, Islamophobes, journalists, TV producers, and moviemakers have found in the current situation in the Muslim

world what feeds their Islamophobic representation of Islam, Arabs, and Muslims. Given the constant political upheaval, chaos, violence, and dictatorial government regimes, Western media and popular culture did not actually fabricate events or dramatize stories about Arabs and Muslims as violent, oppressive, threatening, and uncivilized. Moviemakers have found in the real world what they needed to derogate and deride the Muslim world and help fix that negative image of Islam and Muslims in the mind of Westerners. *United 93*, *The Kingdom*, *Zero Dark Thirty*, and *13 Hours: Secret Soldiers of Benghazi* are not the only movies that delineated Arabs and Muslims; there are numbers of others released in the post-9/11 era.

The negative personification of Arabs and Muslims will probably persist until moviemakers and TV producers are offered a new reason to come up with an alternative. Hollywood is more likely to continue projecting an unrealistic war fought between the power of savagery, the enemy 'Other', and the power of freedom and justice, America. As long as neo-Orientalist essays, showed pictures of militant Muslims in nightly news footage and magazines continue to disseminate malignant perceptions about Arabs and Muslims, moviemakers will continue projecting Arabs, Muslims, Islam, and the Muslim world in the most demeaning fashion. Despite improving the relationship between the United States and other Muslim countries and their shared recent initiatives that call for peace, tolerance, and acceptance, Hollywood repeatedly shows that the United States needs enemies so as to emerge as humanitarian and exceptional. The high-tech spectacles genre of movies is increasingly popular in America, Americans love war movies that have heroes and villains and in which the good guys always win. The fact remains; post-9/11 Hollywood depiction of Arabs and Muslims is an actual extension of pre-9/11 Hollywood portrayal. The question that arises from the findings of this study is; how long will Hollywood pursue to paint the whole Arab/Muslim community with the same sinister brush and categorize Arabs and Muslims in 'bad guy' roles? And how will this resonate with the public?

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