

ARABS IN HOLLYWOOD:ORIENTALISM IN FILM  
by

NAJAT Z. J. DAJANI

B.A., The American College of Switzerland, 1986  
M.A., The University of Bath, 1988

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Department of Theatre, Film & Creative Writing | Film Programme

The University of British Columbia  
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## Abstract

Early representations of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood productions were largely drawn from the literary works of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They, in turn, were inspired by depictions found in Elizabethan manuscripts, which took their cue from the Middle Ages. Films like *The Sheik* (George Melford, 1921) and *The Son of the Sheik* (George Fitzmaurice, 1926) present the Arab as a barbaric savage, not yet cultured by civilization. These 'desert romances' started a filmic tradition, which lasted for a number of decades. Portrayals of the desert Arabs in *The Sheik* also left their mark on 'historically based' films, like *Lawrence of Arabia* (David Lean, 1962) and *Khartoum* (Basil Dearden, 1966). By the late sixties, however, representations of Arabs and Muslims had changed in a drastic manner. No longer seen as romantic and erotic, Arab/Muslim portrayals in Hollywood films were influenced by the politics of the day. Islam not only posed an ideological threat to Christianity, but was also staking territorial and nationalistic claims, in the form of the Palestinians fighting for self-determination. Depictions from Hollywood followed suit, with films like *Black Sunday* (John Frankenheimer, 1977), opting to take Israel's side, in its fight against the Arabs. Today's world, which calls for a peaceful resolution to conflict has once again, brought upon a change in Arab/Muslim representations found in Hollywood productions. A nostalgic search for the exotic foreigner can once again be seen in films like *The 13<sup>th</sup> Warrior* (John McTiernan, 1999). Just as they did after the Vietnam War, American filmmakers are now reflecting upon past actions in the Gulf, through such films as *Three Kings* (David O. Russell, 1999).

Much as Professor Edward W. Said and other post-colonialists have done, I will concentrate on singling out the negative aspects of Orientalism, with regard to the chosen films. I will trace the origins of Arab/Muslim images in Hollywood since the early days of film to the present day. Films are also analyzed and viewed through historical, political and cultural contexts to show why these images prevail, and what changes, if any, have been presented on the screen.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	ii
Acknowledgements .....	iv
Introduction .....	1
Chapter I. "The Oasis of Wild Imaginings" .....	9
i. How The East Was Won .....	10
ii. The Exotic .....	17
iii. And The Barbaric .....	23
Chapter II. "Arabs with guns – help us!" .....	27
i. Taking Sides .....	27
ii. Shifting the Balance .....	30
iii. Levelling the Scales .....	38
Chapter III. 'The Good, the Bad and The Slightly Better' .....	50
i. The Empire Strikes Back .....	51
ii. False Truths .....	60
iii. Changing Images? .....	67
Conclusion .....	74
Filmography .....	76
Bibliography .....	78

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## Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to identify the manner in which Arabs and Muslims have been visualized in Hollywood films since the early days of production at the beginning of the twentieth century to the present day.<sup>1</sup> As it is not feasible to include every single Arab/Muslim depiction that has appeared in film, I have chosen those which provide the best representations of the time in which they were made. Additional film portrayals will also be dealt with in lesser detail. I argue that such portrayals have for the most part tended to be unfavourable and demeaning; that the basis for such representations tended to be anti-Islamic in nature, usually determined by historical and political factors; that from the twenties, portrayals were influenced by earlier anti-Islamic writings and other Western literary works; and that by the late sixties, the depiction of Arabs/Muslims took on a more ominous and threatening demeanour, brought about by the escalation of activities attributed to the Arab/Israeli conflict. It also argues that such portrayals did not diminish after the signing of the Camp David Peace Agreement, the first Arab/Israeli peace treaty in 1979; that, mainly due to the Islamic revolution in Iran and the American Hostage crisis, as well as the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait followed by the Gulf War, Arab/Muslim portrayals took over the 'evil' roles formerly reserved for communists. This thesis also aims to prove that despite the laying down of the foundation for the road to peace in the Middle East, which is now perceived as no longer posing the grave danger it used to, negative Arab/Muslim portrayals, although less prevalent, have not disappeared; that a distinction between Arab and Muslim is now slowly emerging and is becoming evident in films dealing with this subject matter; that plotlines have become more complex and are executed with increased maturity; and that there is also a tendency to return to the 'romanticized' portrayals of early Hollywood productions.

Although, within the context of this study, the depictions of 'Arab' and 'Muslim' may appear to be interchangeable in places, that should not, in any way, be understood as an implication that all Arabs are Muslim or that all Muslims are Arabs. The 'Muslim' group

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<sup>1</sup> Although emphasis is placed on Hollywood films, co-productions such as *Lawrence of Arabia* (David Lean, 1962) and *Khartoum* (Basil Dearden, 1966), as well as non-Hollywood productions, such as *Hanna K.* (Costa-Gavras, 1983) will also be included in the discussion.

comprises a varied ethnic diversity to include non-Arabs such as Persians (Iranians), Turks, South Asians (Pakistanis, Afghanistans and Bangladeshis) and Europeans (Bosnians and Albanians), as well as the Muslim states of the former USSR: Chechnya, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

In fact, some groups within the Arab countries do not consider themselves Arabs. The Maronites of Lebanon and Copts of Egypt are two Christian groups that associate themselves with earlier civilizations that existed in the area, namely the Phoenician and Pharaonic respectively.<sup>2</sup> For the most part, however, this thesis will limit its research to Arab/Muslim depictions, as the inclusion of all Muslim groups would be beyond the scope of such a study.

The shared geographical and cultural aspects of such broad groups as 'Muslim' and 'Arab' not only act as cohesive elements binding the peoples within them, but are also the cause of much confusion and inaccuracies for the rest of the world.<sup>3</sup> For example, Iranians are Middle Eastern and predominantly Muslim, belonging to the Shiite sect, yet they are not Arabs. While the majority of Iranians are Muslim, some belong to the Zoroastrian, Baha'i and Jewish faiths. The same applies to Turks, who are often associated with Europeans, due to the geographical boundaries of their country. The majority of Turks are Muslim (with Christians being the minority), yet they are also not Arabs. Neither are Kurds, Pakistanis, Afghanistans and the people of Bangladesh, and the list continues. In the same vein, one cannot list all Lebanese under the category of Muslims. In most of the other Arab countries where a Christian minority exists, it does not usually exceed 10% of the population, whereas the split between Muslims and Christians in Lebanon is almost equal. In Yemen and the North African states of Tunisia and Morocco, although most of them have immigrated to Israel, small Jewish populations still exist.

This calls for a definition of the term Arab. Originally used to describe tribes living in the Arabian Peninsula and in areas corresponding to modern day Yemen, today an Arab may be defined through linguistic and/or geographic contexts. Through a process of what George Antonius calls arabisation, Arab evolved into a social and cultural term with much broader

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<sup>2</sup> In the notes to her essay, "The impact of the Islamic Revolution in Iran on the Syrian Muslims of Montreal," Yvonne Haddad also mentions this (181).

<sup>3</sup> Evidently this is still the case; in a review of the film *Not Without My Daughter* for the Village Voice, the writer, Mim Udovitch, repeatedly refers to Iranians as Arabs.

definitions.<sup>4</sup> An Arab “gradually came to mean a citizen of that extensive Arab world – not any inhabitant of it, but that great majority whose racial descent, even when it was not of pure Arab lineage, had become submerged in the tide of arabisation; whose manners and traditions had been shaped in an Arab mould; and, most decisive of all, whose mother tongue is Arabic. The term applies to Christians as well as Moslems and to the off-shoots of each of those creeds, the criterion being not islamisation but the degree of arabisation.” (18).

Needless to add, however, the modern Arab world is one that combines a variety of cultures and dialects. Being a diglossic language, Arabic exists in many different national and regional dialects, often forcing its speakers to resort to the higher classical form of the language in order to be clearly understood.<sup>5</sup> The different histories and geographies of the region have all contributed to the diversity of the cultures within the Arab world. More often than not, it is these differences that confuse the rest of the world; therefore, it is quite difficult to ‘lump together’ the whole region. However, such mix-ups are prevalent when presenting Muslim depictions on the screen, and are frequently the cause of much inaccuracy. For example, in Michael Mann’s 1999 film *The Insider*, a television journalist tries to secure an interview with one of the members of a militant group based in Lebanon, namely Hizbollah. The speaker for that group or the ‘man in charge’ of handling the arrangement speaks with an Egyptian dialect, which sounds out of place in the middle of Lebanon. This, however, is a vast improvement on the incomprehensible gibberish that was passed as Arabic in earlier Hollywood productions.

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<sup>4</sup> Antonius explains that barely one hundred years after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, an Arab empire had been founded through expansion and the preaching of Islam. The Arabs also set in motion a cultural evolution reliant on two processes: islamisation and arabisation. The first process involved the preaching of the Muslim faith, whereas the second “had two aspects: linguistic arabisation, that is to say the process by which populations of the conquered countries gradually acquired Arabic as their mother tongue; and racial arabisation, caused by the entry into those countries of masses of immigrants of pure Arab stock, whose absorption by fusion and inter-marriage gave the conquered races a certain, in some cases a predominant, admixture of Arab blood” (15). Although they worked together the two processes differed, especially in results. In broad terms, most countries which became arabised were also islamised, but not vice-versa, hence the situations in Iran, Afghanistan, etc.

<sup>5</sup> From the Greek meaning two tongues or two languages, diglossia is a sociolinguistic situation in which a language exists in two forms, one that is formal/classical and another that is common/colloquial. Classical Arabic is the written form of the language and is employed by all educated Arabs. The spoken colloquial form differs from one Arab State to the other with each dialect influenced by regional and cultural as well as historical and political factors. This renders some dialects incomprehensible to speakers from different Arab regions. On occasion the only way in which two Arabs with such different colloquial dialects can converse is by resorting to the less used higher form or using an alternative language such as English or French.

Continuing with a tradition that began in literary works and travel journals, the earliest Arab/Muslim portrayals adhered to the romanticized notions of the desert and the Bedouin ruler. Such portrayals in early Western film encouraged the stereotyped notions of the Arab, already adhered to in literature; in depicting them on the screen, they brought further validity to the 'imagined', which in turn provided such portrayals with a false sense of reality. Best remembered as the film that started a 'Valentino craze' in the twenties, *The Sheik* (George Melford, 1921) also laid down the foundations for Eastern representation in film. *The Sheik* influenced the fashion ideas of the day, which quickly incorporated all that was considered Eastern. Although similar depictions appeared in the sixties and eighties with films like *Harum Scarum* (Gene Nelson, 1965) and *Ishtar* (Elaine May, 1987) respectively, the love affair with the desert Arab was soon ended. The political climate called for a change in roles. It is in association with current affairs and politics that such portrayals have been created. In the various chapters of this thesis, I will undertake to present (to the best of my ability) a historic facsimile of the political climate of the day leading to the emergence of such portrayals in film, television and video.<sup>6</sup> The need to place the Arab within a certain context, be it that of romantic hero or evil enemy led to such creations. Just as *The Sheik* had provided its audience with a visual representation of the exotic foreigner they had read about in books, Arab/Muslim portrayals in *Lawrence of Arabia* (David Lean, 1962) and *Khartoum* (Basil Dearden, 1966) paved the way for the 'terrorist' in *True Lies* (James Cameron, 1994). In representing the Arabs as a people who need to be governed, such films lamented the loss of Arab protectorates and urged the people to stand up to those who called for an end to imperialism and colonialism. Basically, a good Arab was one who acquiesced to his/her Western masters and accepted their ways, rejecting his/her own culture and heritage.

In films like *Black Sunday* (John Frankenheimer, 1977), America, the home of Hollywood, took Israel's side in its fight against the Arabs. During the seventies and the eighties, the Arab/Muslim was not only portrayed as the dreaded foe of Judaism and Christianity but also as the enemy of humanity, ready and willing to kill and murder innocent people. At a time when the Western world stood up to Apartheid in South Africa, it turned a

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<sup>6</sup> Although I have relied mainly on feature films made for cinematic release, I have also provided some examples from films and mini-series produced for television and video.

blind eye to the injustices in the Middle East and those who, in a different time and place may have been addressed as 'freedom fighters,' were labelled 'terrorists'.

Today's world, which calls for political correctness and a peaceful resolution to conflict, has once again, brought upon a change in Arab/Muslim representations found in Western film. A nostalgic search for the exotic foreigner can once again be seen in films like John McTiernan's *The 13<sup>th</sup> Warrior* (1999) and *Hideous Kinky* (Gillies McKinnon, 1998). Just as they did after the Vietnam War, American filmmakers are now reflecting upon past actions in the Gulf, through such films as *Three Kings* (David O. Russell, 1999). However, this is also a world where most areas of conflict revolve around issues dealing with Islam. As can be seen from the wars in Bosnia, Chechnya and Albania, no longer is this solely an Arab issue. And with Arab Muslims fighting their own battles against Islamic fundamentalists, for the first time, the West is attempting to draw a line between Arabs and Muslims in films like *Shot Through the Heart* (David Attwood, 1998). In addition to these newly emerging portrayals, this study will also shed light upon some of the films made by Arab and Muslim directors, in their attempts to respond to the West.

Much as Professor Edward W. Said has done in his various books, this thesis will concentrate on singling out the negative aspects of Orientalism, with regard to the chosen films. My methodology thus follows that favoured by Edward Said and other post-colonial critics. Whereas Said and Rana Kabbani concentrate on literary and journalistic aspects, this thesis will delve into the world of the moving image. Films will be analyzed and viewed through historical, political and cultural contexts to show why these images prevail, and what changes, if any have been presented on the screen.

Chapter One is dedicated to defining the foundations for such inaccuracies and misconceptions about Arab/Muslim portrayals in film. It traces these prejudicial representations to the first generations after the birth of Islam, which was seen as a direct threat to Christianity. Concentrating on the time-period between 1900 – 1967, it sheds light on early stereotypical depictions of Arabs/Muslims. The birth of the cinematic image did not bring with it new portrayals, but breathed life into those already existing in books, novels and paintings. Such creations were inspired by early travellers and visitors venturing into lands east of their own, and attributed to the writings and translations of these so called 'orientalists', in their attempts to gain control over the East. In 'The Oasis of Wild

Imaginations' I examine the origins of these writings and discuss a number of films to show how literary depictions of the 'exotic and barbaric' progressed onto the big screen.

By the early seventies, Arab/Muslim representations in film were no longer associated with eroticism and sex, but with terror and violence. In 1948, the State of Israel was established in the middle of Arab territories. After the Israeli victory in 1967, a number of 'terrorist' activities, such as bombings and plane hijacks, were attributed to Arabs. Films dealing with this subject matter portrayed the Israelis' rightful ownership of the land of Palestine and the illegitimacy of Arab claims. Cinematic productions coming out of Israel in the fifties and sixties did not feel the need to provide reasoning for the existence of the Palestinian people, who for the most part were ignored and not permitted to answer accusations and provide their own defense. When Arabs were featured, in most cases it was in the old tradition of 'good Israeli versus bad Arab'. Films coming out of Hollywood followed suit; Otto Preminger's 1960 film *Exodus* is an early example. Chapter Two shows how Western film portrayals of the Arab/Israeli conflict were biased towards Israel and did not allow the Palestinians freedom of expression. 'Arabs with guns – help us' refers to the association between Palestinians and terrorism, frequently highlighted in such films. It sets out to prove how prejudicial these Hollywood films are and shows that only films, like Israeli director Uri Barabash's *Beyond the Walls* (1984), succeeded in presenting a balanced portrayal of the conflict. This chapter also spends time on Palestinian director Michel Khleifi's film *Wedding in Galilee* (1987), in an effort to demonstrate how the Palestinian voice was finally allowed to soar.

By the fifties and sixties national cinemas were slowly emerging in the newly independent Arab states. While Hollywood was preoccupied with the exotic and romantic depictions of this part of the world, Arab and Muslim cinemas were slowly emerging, with their own mirror-image of society. Chapter Three is split into three sections designed to highlight some of the films that responded to these Western creations, the ongoing negative depictions emerging from Hollywood and the improved representations from the late nineties--hence the title 'The Good the Bad and the Slightly Better.' The first section 'The Empire Strikes Back' commences with a look at a number of films made by Arab directors. In *Saladin the Victorious (Al Nasser Salaheddin)* (1963) and *Destiny (Al Massir)* (1997), Egyptian director Youssef Chahine used historical dramas as allegories for the present,

voicing his opinion of Arab and Islamic politics. In a direct response to the images of Islam and Muslims that were created by the West, Syrian director Moustapha Akkad realised his long-lived dream of bringing to the screen the story of Islam. His film *The Message: Mohammad Messenger of God (Al Risala)* (1976) took almost ten years to be completed. Akkad followed it with another epic, this time on the life of the Bedouin guerrilla-fighter Omar Mukhtar, who led his country's rebellion against the Italian colonisation of Libya. *Lion of the Desert* (1981), like its predecessor, was also an Arab funded film, created with an international cast and crew. Although the rest of the North African countries did not create films in the numbers that Egypt did, much of their work received critical acclaim and support. In his film *A Summer in La Goulette (Halq-el-wad)* (1995), Tunisian director Ferid Boughedir presented his ideal view of life by taking us back to pre-1967 Tunis.

However, the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the subsequent American Hostage Crisis continued to provide Hollywood with sufficient ammunition to warrant the usual fare. With the collapse of the communist threat, gun-toting Muslim terrorists became the order of the day, especially in action movies like James Cameron's *True Lies* (1994). Just like they once substituted for the image of the ugly, dirty and evil Jew, Arabs/Muslims now took over the Soviet Communist's former role of 'the enemy of America.'<sup>7</sup> The second section 'False Truths' takes a look at the animated film *Aladdin* (Ron Clements & John Musker, 1992), which, despite the new format and the younger target audience, reproduced an old and oft-used vision of the East. Brian Gilbert's portrayal of post-revolution Iran in *Not without My Daughter* (1991) is also discussed.

By the end of 1994, the world had witnessed two major events in the Arab/Israeli Conflict: the Oslo Declaration of Principles, initialed on September 13, 1993, which signified the official commencement of peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, and the Jordan-Israel Peace Treaty of 1994 ended over four decades of hostilities between the two countries. With the other Arab parties, Lebanon and Syria, also in the middle of peace negotiations with Israel, the Middle East no longer posed the threat it used to. Nevertheless,

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<sup>7</sup> It is not at all far fetched to claim that the features once attributed to Jews in Medieval literature were transplanted to Arabs and Muslims, when it was no longer deemed politically correct to portray the Jew in such a demeaning fashion. The old images of Shylock in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and *Oliver Twist*'s Fagin are identical to those now associated with Arabs, hooked nose, sinister eyes and all, the only difference being the headdress. In his book, John Gross traces the mythical image of Shylock to medieval literature and

with Islam's involvement in various areas of strife around the world, in Chechnya, Albania, former Yugoslavia, and the Philippines, the Muslim has not been disassociated from conflict and terrorism. Section three, 'Changing Images?' takes a look at some of the improved representations of the Middle East coming out of Hollywood. A tendency for reflection on previous actions and even self-analysis are exhibited in American films like *Three Kings* and *The Siege* (Edward Zwick, 1998), resulting in better-developed plot-lines and stories. Film portrayals of Arabs/Muslims also hint at a return to the 'romanticized' representations of early Hollywood, evident in films like *Hideous Kinky*. Surprisingly, however, as is evident from the portrayals in John McTiernan's *The 13<sup>th</sup> Warrior* (1999), some are not all that bad! Western filmmakers have also attempted to make a distinction between Arab and Muslim through films like *Shot through the Heart* (David Attwood, 1998), while trying to move away from the good versus bad formula.

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also talks about the changes in his appearance, into a "handsome, dignified and heroic" character, since 1945 (300).

## I. “The Oasis of Wild Imaginings”\*

Early representations of Arabs and Muslims, in film were largely drawn from the literary works of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They, in turn, were inspired by depictions found in Elizabethan manuscripts, which took their cue from the Middle Ages. In fact, such representations originated with the birth of Islam, which was seen as a direct threat to the spread of Christianity. To deter others from coming in contact with Muslims, early Christian writers presented the world with a distorted image of Islam and its teachings, one that associates it with sexual deviancy and violence. It is not surprising, therefore, that films like *The Sheik* (George Melford, 1921) and *The Son of the Sheik* (George Fitzmaurice, 1926) present the Arab as a barbaric savage, not yet cultured by civilization, a naïve being, requiring the assistance of the ‘modern Westerner’ to bring him/her to his/her senses. These ‘desert romances’ started a filmic tradition, which lasted for a number of decades. Regarded as ‘ethnographic’ in style, the two films were the prototype for such works as *Kismet* (Vincent Minnelli, 1955), one of many versions of the ‘Cinderella meets the Arabian Nights’ musical; *Road to Morocco* (David Butler, 1942), the last of seven ‘road’ movies involving Bing Crosby and Bob Hope having to make a quick getaway when they find themselves in trouble, in a ‘strange’ land; and, *Harum Scarum* (Gene Nelson, 1965), an Elvis Presley vehicle designed to place him together with scantily-clad women, in an exotic place. Portrayals of the desert Arabs in *The Sheik* also left their mark on ‘historically based’ films, like *Lawrence of Arabia* (David Lean, 1962) and *Khartoum* (Basil Dearden, 1966).

This chapter is concerned with the predominant representation of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood film, from early silent screen portrayals to the late sixties.<sup>1</sup> Due to the varied ethnic diversity of the ‘Muslim’ group, and the shared historical and geographical boundaries of countries within the Middle East, at times it may be necessary to broaden the scope and include Persians and Turks. The intention here is to highlight the influences of early anti-Islam writings and other literary works on the above-listed films.

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\* From *Kismet*, the name given to the place where the Wazir’s wife and her conspirators are exiled to.

<sup>1</sup> 1967 seems to be the cut-off year, after which Arab and Muslim representations became more violent, probably as a direct result of the Arab/Israeli war which took place that year.

The discovery of film brought to the forefront a new form of art, originally designed for entertainment purposes. With its ability to 'record' an event, it quickly became clear that film was an ideal method to capture exotic images, which could be shown around the world. Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922), dealing with the Inuit people, presented new civilizations and cultures and made heroes of 'non-whites.' The use of film for propaganda purposes was also evident from the beginning. By presenting a character, or dealing with a subject in a certain manner, scriptwriters and directors could influence the opinions of the masses. This was made all the more clear with films like D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), where a "glowing portrait" of the Ku Klux Klan actually revived the white supremacist group and helped expand its membership (Cook 85). The popularity of this new medium quickly rivaled that of books, since films did not require literacy as a prerequisite. Many of the earlier films, however, were based on written stories; therefore, film owed much of its earlier inspirations to literary novels. Other works also included accounts and descriptions of 'foreign' places, with people often presented to the reader as exciting and exotic. At the same time, such societies were also made to appear inferior, when compared with his/her own culture.

i. **'How the East was won'**

Orientalism, in its many forms, has existed since the first confrontation between 'Western' and 'Eastern' forces. Having long thought of themselves as the 'centre' of the universe, travellers from Europe were surprised to discover new civilizations to their east. Labelling these peoples 'Eastern,' in adherence with their geographical situation, from the point of view of the discoverers, probably created the first instance of contrast. By setting these peoples up as their opposites, not only did they establish themselves as the 'measuring stick' for the norm; they also started a tradition that would go beyond geographical boundaries. With further discoveries, the East was divided into Near, Middle and Far, for distinguishing purposes; yet, by the eighteenth century, and despite the different ethnic groups, cultures and languages, the name most frequently associated with that part of the world was 'the Orient'. Orientalists made it their life's work to study the beliefs and habits of people from that part of the world, reaching a point where they felt they knew them better

than the 'Orientals' knew themselves. In fact, it became a habit to speak for them in books and manuscripts, in the literary and political arenas, believing the natives to be incapable of comprehending such matters, even with regard to their own lives.

According to Edward W. Said, Orientalism is not only "an academic institution," nor is it a "mere political subject matter;" it is a combination of that and more (Orientalism, 2,11). Orientalism encompasses the spreading of ideas and beliefs about the part of the world generally regarded as the Orient, through any form or medium. These ideas usually present the Orient as a contained space (the areas not considered part of the West), which includes all that is different from the 'normal' Occident, thereby presenting it as mysterious and odd, and ultimately deeming it inferior and lacking. These 'creations' came forth as a means to deal with the emerging Islamic empire, which the Christian world saw as a direct threat. As Said explains, in his similarly titled book, "Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient-dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (3). With such ideas, the Western world created an 'imaginary' Orient, representing it as that, which it is not, or as the 'other,' and through it, boldly defined itself as the norm. This is also evident in early Hollywood film depictions of the East, which was either perceived as exotic and sensual, yet corrupt and backward, through films like *The Sheik* and *Kismet*, or riddled with political turmoil as was made evident in *Khartoum*. For the sake of fairness, Said felt it necessary to add that as well as "the exaggerations, racism and hostility of much of the Orientalist writings," these works did result in "numerous scholarly and humanistic achievements" (Orientalism, 341). This chapter, however, will concentrate on singling out the negative aspects of Orientalism, with regards to the chosen films, in a similar mode to Said's.

In his book The Nature of Prejudice, Gordon W. Allport starts by offering the definition of the word "prejudice" as found in the New English Dictionary: "A feeling, favourable or unfavourable, toward a person or thing, prior to, or not based on actual experience" (6). Although the word has both positive and negative connotations, unfortunately it is mostly associated with the latter. Allport's book presents a study of the causes and reasons why certain groups of people, regarded as the 'in-groups' in that society,

usually due to their majority,<sup>2</sup> feel threatened by the ethnic differences of other smaller groups. These feelings are usually manifested through hostile behaviour such as antilocution, avoidance, discrimination and physical attack. Extreme incidents of hostility may even result in the attempted extermination of such 'out-groups.' In most cases, such attitudes towards the minority groups are assembled through misconceptions, falsely regarded as generalizations about all people, who belong to said groups. A number of elements contribute to the formation of misconceptions, the most obvious of which is visible difference. As young students, children are taught that if something looks different, and smells different, it usually implies that the object is not familiar to them; visible difference therefore implies strangeness. In the case of people, these differences may be in "skin colour, cast of features, gestures, prevalent facial expression, speech or accent, dress, mannerisms, religious practices, food habits, names, places of residence, and insignia (e.g., uniforms or buttons in lapels signifying memberships)" (131-32). Ignorance of other cultures also leads to further negative judgements, allowing for the creation of stereotypes about the varied ethnic minorities. And, with the need to justify the reasons for the occurrence of 'trouble' in the world, it is most likely that 'in-groups' will hold these 'different' groups responsible.

In his book, Allport cites examples from American society, where the African-Americans were targeted as an 'out-group,' and Germany in the thirties, where the ruling Nationalist Party regarded the Jews as 'an inferior race.' However, ethnic prejudice also existed during the age of new territorial discoveries, when "the forging of racial stereotypes and the confirmation of notions of savagery were vital to the colonialist world view" (Kabbani 4). Due to their non-conformity to what was regarded as the norm, and their visible differences, Spanish discoverers looked upon the natives of America as savages, and Jesuit priests believed the people of Japan were barbaric. Fear of losing power and the spread of new cultures and religions led to the forceful domination of newly discovered societies. Natives were taught the language and religion of their occupier, and encouraged to convert. In cases where the balance of power was threatened, wars, in the name of religion, were fought for decades.

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<sup>2</sup> Some exceptions exist, as in the case of South Africa during Apartheid, where a white minority was the in-group. And in India where there was no ethnic differences between the in-group and out-groups due to the caste system.

Sometimes further stereotyping occurs as a result of confusing ethnic and religious diversity. Allport uses the case of the Jews as example. He explains that “it is certainly wrong to think of Jews as a ‘race’” but the afore-mentioned negative stereotype proves that Hitler and his supporters saw them as one (120). Up until the establishment of the State of Israel, it was also clearly difficult to define them as a national group.<sup>3</sup> Despite all this, historically, Jews have been regarded as more of a social group, rather than a religious one.<sup>4</sup> Even the simple definitions provided by The Oxford Dictionary indicate the ‘social’ difference in the meanings of Jew, Christian and Muslim. A Christian is identified as a person who believes in or follows the religion of Jesus Christ, and a Muslim is a follower of the Islamic religion; whereas, a Jew is defined as a person of Hebrew descent or whose religion is Judaism. With such a precedent, it is not surprising that early European merchants travelling to the East would confuse their ‘Arab’ and ‘Muslim’ traders. The confusion and inaccuracies arose from the historical and cultural aspects shared by these two groups, and the overlapping of geographical boundaries. Adding to this confusion could be the major bond among all Muslims, created by their shared knowledge of the Arabic language, through the Qur’an. Despite the various languages spoken in the Muslim world, Arabic is still used during prayer, and when reciting verses from the Qur’an. In fact, Jews and Christians in the region also adopted Arabic as their spoken language with Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic, Syriac and Coptic only used for liturgical purposes (Hourani 97). This has led to further misguided generalizations about all Arabs being Muslim.

Resentment towards and prejudice against Muslims has existed since the first generations after the rise of Islam. “People seem to take it for granted that an alien society is dangerous, if not hostile, and the sporadic outbreak of warfare between Islam and Christendom throughout history has been one manifestation of this” (Daniel 12). The Christians in Syria, who succumbed to Muslim rule when their land was occupied looked upon it as a religion that would not last for long; they believed, that sooner or later, the Arabs would revert to their pagan worshipping. However, when it appeared that Islam was there to stay, it became an even bigger threat in their eyes. In his book Islam and the West, Norman

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<sup>3</sup> Many might argue that it is still inaccurate to do so, as simple logic dictates that not all Israelis are Jews.

<sup>4</sup> Allport cites the definition of a Jew provided by G. Ichheiser in his essays on the diagnosis of anti-Semitism, which he says “leans heavily toward the social conception of Jewishness” (119).

Daniel discusses the relationship between Islam and Christianity, and the reasons why early Christian writers felt the need to falsify facts about Muhammad and his followers, thereby creating a distorted image, that has been adhered to by the West.

Daniel explains that to undermine the new religion, which challenged Christian doctrines and beliefs, early writers cast doubt upon Muhammad's Prophecy. St John of Damascus ridiculed Islamic belief and "began the long tradition of attacking Muhammad for 'bringing in God' in order to justify sexual indulgence" (14).<sup>5</sup> This trend in thought later expanded to include all Muslims, "dismissing Islam as religious fraud devised from the beginning to facilitate aggression and lust," and emerged as a recurring theme in many films, as is apparent from Laurence Olivier's portrayal of the Mahdi in *Khartoum* (17). It was regarded highly unlikely that God would choose someone as Muhammad for prophethood. The fact that he was not from the most important tribe in Arabia was cited as a lack in credentials. God did not choose to bestow upon Muhammad the ability to perform miracles, like Christ. And yet, this illiterate man was prophesying that he had been chosen as God's messenger on earth. Latin and Oriental Christians generated the idea that Muhammad was a dissembler and a weak man, prone to epileptic fits, who came up with the revelation to hide the truth from his wife. Other versions claimed that "Muhammad had already convinced Khadijah of his 'latent divinity' through magic arts" (47). For many Christians, Muhammad's death was enough to convince them that he was no true prophet, comparing this with Christ's ascension to heaven.

The part of the Prophet's life which proved to be fascinating to most of these writers was his marriages. Not only did it provide enough cause for the spreading of twisted stories about why he married the women, but also, as Daniel mentions, "their number alone gave sufficient scandal" (124). Overlooked was the fact that apart from his wife Khadijah, for each of the other wives there was a reason behind their marriage to the Prophet. It was God's way of showing Muslims what was acceptable for them, within Islam, by using the Prophet as

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<sup>5</sup> Born fifty years after the Prophet's migration to Madina, St. John is cited by Daniel as the person who initiated prejudiced ideas about Islam (13).

example.<sup>6</sup> Christians delighted in pointing out that while Islam preached abstinence, Muhammad was exempt, highlighting this as one of the hypocritical sides of the religion. In fact, another early anti-Islam writer, Riccoldo da Monte di Croce “insisted that Muhammad’s pretence to revelation, in order to justify himself, added blasphemy, the worst crime of all, to his other crimes” (Daniel 123).

Rana Kabbani takes up this ‘created’ association between Islam and sexual indulgence in her book Europe’s Myths of Orient, where she states that such connections were devised by the West as a means of ruling the East. Kabbani traces these distorted images back to medieval literature in which Saracens were thought of as lucifers and anti-Christians who should be eliminated. Romances called for the conversion of Muslim princesses to ‘good women’ through marriage to Christian knights, just like Princess Shalimar in *Road to Morocco*, who leaves her old life behind, choosing to go off with the Western man. The Qur’anic image of Paradise was exaggerated, with emphasis placed on “its carnal delights,” setting it up in opposition to the “angelic society” of the Christian Paradise (16). Travellers to the Orient delighted in making up stories about the Sultan’s harem, which reinforced the sexual image already associated with Muslims, and which was brought to life on the screen, though films like *Kismet*. Elizabethan dramas also incorporated the Saracen, the Turk and the Moor as villains of the day. Kabbani cites Shakespeare’s play Othello as an example, where the Moor is cast in a rather favourable light because he was a Christian fighter who killed Turks; however, as she also points out, the story was bound to end tragically, so as to continue with the tradition of condemnation of inter-racial love/sex (20).

Kabbani also pinpoints the translation of a number of folkloric stories from Eastern countries, like India, Persia, Iraq, Syria and Egypt, as one of the most important influences on Western literature. These translations were first put together by Antoine Galland in 1704, appearing under the title of Arabian Nights or Les Mille et Une Nuits. According to her, these stories never actually existed in a textual form, in the Arab/Muslim world; they were, in fact stories told and re-told by raconteurs (23). In his attempt to document these tales, Galland also felt free to improvise, adding what he thought would appear more interesting to his readers. Thus, according to Kabbani, a Westerner had, in effect, mostly created these

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<sup>6</sup> The Prophet’s way of life and sayings were included within his “Sunna” (teachings) to be adhered to by Muslims.

tales, of which no major documentation appeared in the Arab/Muslim part of the world, but nevertheless they have been used as a guideline for it.<sup>7</sup> Despite its shocking stories about the East, Galland managed to adhere to a reserved and repressed tone with regards to sexual depictions. This became the guide for writings about the East, for over a century, and influenced the works of 'Romantic' poets like Coleridge and Lord Byron. And in turn, it was adapted onto film through depictions like *The Thief of Baghdad* (Raoul Walsh, 1924) and *Kismet*.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the Arabian Nights was given another interpretation at the hands of Sir Richard F. Burton. In 1841, a new edition by E.W. Lane had rendered the book into an account about the people of the East. While living in India, Burton became fascinated with the East, and started a new translation of the book adding a number of footnotes, which he claimed were based on first hand observations. Kabbani sheds light on Burton and his circle of friends, whom she presents as men with rather outrageous and deviant sexual tastes (55-62). Burton and others would disguise themselves as natives, giving themselves Arabic or Persian names, in order to infiltrate places they would not have had access to as foreigners. This new issue of the Arabian Nights presented the people of the East as sexual beings, who also indulged in lesbianism and homosexuality. Harem stories included detailed sexual descriptions of liaisons between the women and their female lovers; while at the same time, Burton claimed that houses of male prostitution were very common in Persia (58). As lesbianism and homosexuality were considered sinful crimes that did not officially exist in Victorian England, this was further evidence of the degeneration of the East. However, these stories did have an influence on the artists of the day, and works, such as Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres' Le Bain Turc, (1862) clearly hinted at sexual intimacies between women.

Kabbani argues that the creation of such images was "an intrinsic part of the imperial world-view" (59). In order to provide further validity for colonization, the East was rendered into a "sexual domain" and most often regarded as female. She also argues that this highlighted misogynistic tendencies, especially since most of the deviant sexual images were

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<sup>7</sup> Although Kabbani may be right in claiming that modern versions of the Arabian Nights have been influenced directly or indirectly by Galland's translations, in his extensive study on the origin of The Thousand And One Nights, Muhsin Mahdi shows that they did exist in written form since the late thirteenth or early fourteenth centuries.

associated with Eastern women, often portrayed as nymphomaniacs. Apparently, this was a result of the repressive measures society applied to the Victorian woman. Unable to fulfill his sexual fantasies with his wife, the Victorian man dreamt of conquering the 'erotic Eastern woman.'

ii. The Exotic...

Ella Shohat has written extensively on East/West depictions in film, arriving at a number of 'tropes' that have appeared as common themes in plot-lines: "Rape and Rescue Fantasy", "The Imaginary of the Harem" and "The Desert Odyssey". The films chosen for discussion also include a number of other created representations, which are based on the visions of the East depicted in earlier literature. The most obvious is the association of Islam and Muslims with women and sex, presenting the harem as a sort of Muslim Paradise. In doing that, the films limited the role of women by making them 'slaves' to their 'master,' any powerful women were deemed 'evil,' and in need of discipline. Women also provided entertainment with their knowledge of exotic dances, which, on screen, somehow appeared to be a melange of Indian, Chinese and acrobatic movements. The Arabs were viewed as a people who were governed by fatalism, superstition and mysticism. They were prone to laziness and idleness, choosing to beg for money rather than work for it, insisting that God will provide for them. If all else fails, they resorted to stealing. At the same time they were pictured as a brutal and murderous race that delighted in killing for fun. They were not enlightened, still choosing to own their Nubian slaves, unlike the West.

Continuing with the trends set by literature and art in presenting the East, *The Sheik* and its sequel *The Son of the Sheik* brought further validity to the 'imagined' by depicting it on the screen, and giving it a false sense of reality. Best remembered as the film which started a 'Valentino craze' in the twenties, *The Sheik* also laid down the foundations for Eastern representations in film. Originally thought of as far too racy for censorship approval, the film influenced the fashion ideas of the day, which quickly incorporated all that was considered Eastern. Rudolph Valentino's portrayal of the sheik associated romance and eroticism with the previous notions of the desert Arab. With all the hype surrounding *The Sheik*, again it was easy to overlook the negative stereotypes being created. The first image

seen in the film is that of the muezzin calling for prayer, with an inter-title that reads “Mohammad’s land-where saint and sinner chant as one Their praise to Allah-bowing low Beneath a desert sun-Holmers, [sic]” inter-cut by a scene showing men praying in the desert. This is quickly followed with another where the same men are now bidding for women at a slave market, thus, once again associating Islam with promiscuity and lust.

It also presents the desert as the Arab domain, where no foreigner is allowed access, unless given permission to do so by the Arabs themselves. This reinforces the segregation policies adhered to by the colonizing powers. When the sheik and his men decide to spend the evening at the casino, the young “madcap” Diana Mayo (Agnes Ayres) has to disguise herself by borrowing a costume from the belly dancer, in order to follow them. Only by ‘going native’ can she possibly enter this predominantly male and Arab domain. However, because she is uninvited it is inevitable that she would be caught; after all, as a woman, it is not her place to make decisions for herself! The following day, while on her desert trek, Diana is abducted by the sheik, who intends to force her to submit to his will. Adhering to a motto of “when an Arab sees a woman he wants, he takes her” the sheik is stopped short of raping Diana when he sees her praying.

The viewer has been informed that the sheik was educated in Paris; therefore, he is not as barbaric as the other Arabs are. His ‘foreign’ schooling and his friendship with a French writer allows him to become more acceptable to the audience, especially when he decides not to force his attentions on Diana, but to allow her to grow to love him. While the sheik is away from the camp, Diana attempts to escape, but is not successful. Not only is she found by the sheik, who is making his way home, but she also catches the eye of Omair the bandit (Walter Long), who, like the ‘true’ Arab he is decides to have her for himself. Seeing her misery, the writer Raoul de St. Hubert (Adolphe Menjou) convinces his friend to release Diana and allow her to return to the city with him. Unfortunately, however, Diana is abducted by Omair, necessitating her rescue by the sheik.

By permitting the sheik to rescue her, literally from the hands of this barbarian, he manages to redeem himself for his past sins. By now, it has become clear to Diana that she loves him and that provides further justification for a happy ending; however, there is the little issue of how to deal with an inter-racial romance. As the sheik lies recovering from the wound he sustained during the rescue, Diana comments to his friend about how ‘un-Arab’

looking the sheik's hands are. Raoul looks a little uncomfortable as he responds: "He is not an Arab. His father was an Englishman, his mother a Spaniard." Apparently, the sheik was adopted by the previous tribal leader who brought him up in the desert, but sent him to Europe for his education so he could return to lead his people. The sheik is therefore not a 'real' Arab, which accounts for his 'humanistic' nature. By making him of European origin, the issue of inter-racial love/sex has been avoided. Having lived with the Arabs, the sheik is excused for having adopted some of their barbaric beliefs but he is quickly brought to his senses. This also reinforces the imperialistic belief that the Arabs are incapable of taking care of themselves. Left alone they would be governed by the likes of Omair the bandit, which is why the Europeans have to be in control.

The film also reinstates the idea that women should not aspire to become decision-makers. Every decision that Diana makes on her own causes problems that are eventually corrected by the sheik. Whereas Diana has a name, Omair's wife has the unfortunate luck of being both a woman and an Arab, and she is simply referred to as "the Jealous One". Highlighting the rivalry between the women of the harem, when Omair brings Diana to his camp, his wife becomes jealous and attempts to kill him, thus not only reinforcing the image of lustful Arabs but also their uncivilized lives. Such misogynistic elements are also evident in the sequel to *The Sheik*, where women are looked upon as the evil that causes men to lose all reason and are objectified, with such references as "today's peach is tomorrow's prune!"

*The Son of the Sheik* simply recounts the previous story, this time making the son of the sheik, Ahmed (Valentino), the hero. Since the viewers are aware that Ahmed is not a 'real' Arab, they are spared any anxiety over an inter-racial romance, especially since the young woman Ahmed loves is French. The film begins with an inter-title that defines the locale: "Not East of Suez but South of Algiers;" the area where the story takes place is defined from the perspective of two European colonies, in the same manner that Biskra (the setting for *The Sheik*) was referred to as "The Monte Carlo of the Sahara." However, since these directions lead to an area that is outside the drawn boundaries of European control, the viewer assumes that the locale is 'foreign' and therefore more than likely to be 'different'.

Like his father before him, the young Ahmed has abducted a woman, but his motive is revenge because he believes she had conspired with "the Moor, whose crimes outnumber the sand". By making him think she was in love with him and arranging to meet him, she had

facilitated his capture, humiliation and torture. Once again, the young man of European origin has allowed the barbaric laws of the Arabs to influence his judgement. He justifies his actions with the words “an eye for an eye and a hate for a hate, it is the law of my father;” yet, this time, it is his European father, the sheik, who reminds him of his duty to return Yasmin (Vilma Banky).<sup>8</sup> When Ahmed discovers that Yasmin is innocent and she herself is in danger, he feels duty bound to rescue her from the Moor, who is the ‘true’ savage. Once again the film limits the representation of the Arab to two categories: as evil which should be eliminated and as naiveness, as depicted in the character of Ramadan, the manservant, who needs to be ‘ruled’.

Unlike *The Sheik* and *The Son of the Sheik*, which present a ‘European’ romance in the desert, *Kismet* has no ‘Western’ components. The film is highly influenced by the stories and images from Arabian Nights; however its plot-line is quite simple. The young Caliph (Vic Damone) falls in love with a beautiful maiden (Ann Blyth), but she disappears before he has a chance to get her name. When he sees her again, he is saddened to find out that she had tricked him, for she is married to his Wazir (Monty Woolly). However, he has been misled by his Wazir, who has been arranging a marriage of alliance for him, with the three daughters of a nearby emperor, in exchange for gold. He is aided in this by the ‘rhyme-seller’ (Howard Keel), pretending to be Hajj the beggar, whose curses and blessings have a ‘miraculous’ way of coming to life! He is none other than the maiden’s father, who upon realizing the truth reveals all to the Caliph.

Packaged as a fairy-tale, the film brings together every negative portrayal that has been associated with Arabs and Muslims. The rhyme-seller is a man who lives his life according to what he believes is fate; if things work out in life, that is good, but if they do not then it is Kismet (fate). He encourages his daughter to steal food from the bazaar, since it is permissible, as long as she is not caught. He himself resorts to begging from the wealthy, when he discovers what a lucrative career that could be. Apparently, the threat of a curse to make his taxes increase will make a wealthy merchant give up a good sum of money for charitable purposes. The Wazir is the epitome of greed and idleness; his time is spent in the gathering of money and women for his harem. According to the film, in his capacity as

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<sup>8</sup> The association between Islam and violence as opposed to the Christian ideology of turning the other cheek has often been cited to highlight differences between the two religions.

judge, he can even marry himself to other women, by simply saying a few lines. As he puts it, he has more than enough wives that he does not know what to do with them. Yet, he appears to be impotent, only deriving voyeuristic pleasure from observing his women through a one way glass window. His wife helps him to plot against the Caliph, portraying the role of the madam who procures young maidens. However, like any fairy-tale, love will eventually conquer all and the story comes to a happy ending. The plot is discovered and the Wazir is ultimately sentenced to death. After confessing and repenting their sins, the other conspirators are exiled to the "oasis of wild imaginings," which would not have been such an inappropriate title for a film presenting the East, from a Western point of view!

*The Road to Morocco* and *Harum Scarum* add a new element to the romance, when a Western traveller falls in love with an Eastern princess. Western audience fears are put to rest, however, for by the time the words "The End" appear on the screen, the princess has 'converted' and gone off with her hero. 'Trouble' in her own land necessitates the aid of the Western man who will rescue the princess and take her with him to his own world, in this case America. Both films are also somewhat self-reflexive. In *The Road to Morocco*, Bing Crosby and Bob Hope repeatedly address the audience out of character, and refer to the film as a movie. As this is the seventh in a series of "road" films, the viewer is aware that Crosby and Hope will no doubt find themselves in a "strange" land with "strange" habits. They will meet beautiful woman and come across angry men, from whom they will run away, taking the women with them. *Harum Scarum* commences with a sequence involving Elvis Presley dressed up as an Arab, in the process of fighting a leopard in order to rescue a fair maiden. When the camera moves back, the viewer realizes that what he/she has just witnessed is the ending of another film being presented to the audience on the screen. It is possible that the filmmakers were aware of the limitations of the film and its role in providing a spectacle that should not be taken seriously. In a sense, what the viewers see on the screen is not always what it appears to be. Both films are also intended as lighter viewing fare, mainly designed as vehicles, through which the singing stars can churn out a number of hit songs. However, the jokes are usually at the expense of the natives. Apart from the inclination towards an inter-racial romance, both films still present the East within the frame of a fairy-tale, borrowing from former films as well as earlier written works.

In *Road to Morocco*, the viewer is presented with further examples of the Arabs as a people who believe in magic and astrology. Princess Shalimar (Dorothy Lamour) is misinformed by her astrologer that her first husband will only live a week. To ensure that her beloved Mullay Qasem (Anthony Quinn) will live a long life, she chooses an American named Orville Jackson (Bob Hope) for her first husband. By the time her astrologer discovers the errors of his calculations, the princess is in love with Orville's friend Jeffrey (Bing Crosby). But before they can live happily ever after, Orville and Jeffrey have to rescue the princess, who has been abducted by Mullay Qasem. In order to do so, they resort to the age-old imperial method of divide and conquer, setting up two rival Arab tribes against each other and making their getaway after the fighting has erupted.

*Harum Scarum* makes a blatant 'dig' at American interests in the Arabian Gulf. The actor Johnny Tyronne (Elvis Presley) is abducted and forced to assassinate the king of a little oil-rich country. The old king is opposed to the ways of the modern world and does not permit any form of Western civilization through his gates, but his brother plans for reforms. Prince Dragna (Michael Ansara) enlists the help of Sinan, lord of the assassins (Theo Marcuse) and the beautiful, but evil Lady Aisheh (Fran Jeffries) to kidnap the actor, who is regarded as a man of many talents (strangely enough this is an assumption based on the actor's screen portrayals!) Once in power, he would allow Western oil companies to speculate for oil in his kingdom. As the film proceeds, Tyronne manages to escape imprisonment not once, but twice, and in the process, he meets and falls in love with Princess Shalimar (Mary Ann Mobley). He also foils Prince Dragna's plot and rescues a group of people in addition to the king and the princess, taking them all back to America.

The film presents the East as a spectacle that fits perfectly within the casino-life of Las Vegas. The three fair maidens rescued by Tyronne become part of the spectacle when they are presented as "the Harem of Dancing Jewels from the Near East," performing on the stage, while the slot machines of Las Vegas appease the Arab hunger for money. The East is portrayed as a dream world, with its maiden-filled gardens of Paradise. It is a world worth visiting for it awaits Western exploitation and the film makes clear its message, with Elvis' song, "Go East Young Man."

### iii. ...and the Barbaric

*Lawrence of Arabia* and *Khartoum* stand slightly apart from the previous films; they not only portray Arabian images, but also attempt to document facts, based on true historical events. Much has been written about the ‘inaccuracies’ of both films, with regards to actual history; however, of concern here is the representation of Arabs and Muslims that eventually makes its way to the screen.<sup>9</sup> Both films were made within ten years of the Suez Crisis, when ideas of Arab Nationalism were still in the teething stages, and from the imperialistic viewpoint, needed nipping in the bud. Both Lawrence (Peter O’Toole) and Gordon (Charlton Heston) are seen as expendable men, who are regarded as ‘different’ from their peers, men who could be sent to the “burning fiery furnace” of the desert, where they appear to feel more at home. They are capable of assuming the characteristics of the desert Arab, and are therefore accepted by the natives. Both men acquire names that identify them with the colonized power: ‘Chinese’ Gordon and the Arabacized ‘El Aurens’ for Lawrence. Due to the absence of women in both films, the romance is between the protagonist and the East. This love affair is also emphasized through the homoerotic elements which appear in both films.

*Lawrence of Arabia* is set during World War One, when stirrings of Arab independence were encouraged by the British, in hope of an Arab revolt against their Ottoman rulers, Germany’s ally in the war. Lieutenant Lawrence, who had been serving his country in Cairo is sent to Arabia to assess the situation and report back to His Majesty’s Army. Lawrence is a scholar and archaeologist who has spent much time reading up on the East, and is soon able to prove himself, as good as any Arab in the desert, making his guide question his English origins. His aim is to unify the Arab tribes in the hope of making them put aside their petty differences, stand up to the Turks, and successfully achieve independence. Lawrence quickly gains the respect of the Arabs because of his refusal to accept what they look upon as fate; in their eyes, he has tempted God and survived. Once again, the Arabs are portrayed as passive, waiting for a leader who will show them how to take action. He convinces them to cross the desert to Aqaba, a feat that no Bedouin had ever

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<sup>9</sup> See Andrew Sarris’s review of *Lawrence of Arabia* in the Village Voice entitled “Sand Gets in Your Eyes, Or The Sheik of Araby.”

managed. Not only does he lead them through it, but he also succeeds in crossing the Sinai desert to return to Cairo. Such achievements would delude any mere mortal into believing he was the 'prophet,' who would lead the Arabs to salvation.

However, Lawrence makes the mistake of becoming a little too 'Arab' like. He finds pleasure in killing, probably after having spent so much time living with 'murderers'. He calls for leaving no prisoners after battles, preferring that the wounded be killed at the hands of their own people, than fall into the enemies'. However, since they are regarded as 'allies', the Arab portrayal in the film is limited to naiveness, a depiction of a people who need to be guided by a Western power. The imagery of evil is associated with the Turks who torture Lawrence, when he is caught in Dera'a. The Turkish commander is also presented as a man with homosexual tendencies, who enjoys seeing and touching Lawrence's 'white skin' and derives sadistic pleasure from watching him being tortured, thus conforming to the old images associated with the East. Applying the formula of 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend,' the film portrays the Arabs as an unfortunate people, whose only fault is the lack of civilization, brought upon by years of Turkish rule. With the British in control of their affairs they would be set on the right path.

The film also warns of false hope regarding Arab independence. Lawrence is misguided when he thinks that the Arabs should be allowed to govern themselves. This is evident in the depiction of the events, following the seizure of Damascus. The newly formed Arab National Council is presented in a manner that brings to mind the scene from *The Birth of a Nation*, when the Black Congressional session comes together for a meeting. Chaos reigns across the room with the various members arguing and shouting at each other. According to the European politicians, the Arabs are incapable of making important decisions on their own, and a good Arab is one who recognizes that fact. Prince Feisal understands the necessity of having the British presence in Arabia. In making such references, the film clearly hints at the then somewhat recent confrontation between Egyptian troops and British, French and Israeli troops in the Suez Canal. Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser had sought help from the USSR to build the Aswan Dam, and taking Nikita Khrushchev's advice, he had started plans for the nationalization of the Canal. With such a threat to its interests in the Middle East, Britain joined forces with its former colonial ally, and enlisted the help of Egypt's enemy Israel. *Lawrence of Arabia* clearly points to Egypt's

foolishness of abandoning the British as a colonial power, opting to become a Soviet satellite instead.

*Khartoum* deals with the rise of a religious movement in the Sudan led by a man called Muhammad Ahmad, known as the Mahdi (the expected one). In 1884 he brought Egyptian rule in the Sudan to an end, and applied Islamic justice. The British were fearful of the influence this might have on neighbouring countries. As the film explains, not wanting to involve their troops directly, the British government sends General Gordon who had previously served in the area and was regarded as the hero who brought an end to slavery in that part of the world. The film is therefore, predominantly anti-Islamic in nature, with Laurence Olivier's portrayal of the Mahdi, as a power-crazy, bloodthirsty madman. The use of bright red make-up around his lips is designed to imply his thirst for blood, and possibly hint at his homosexual tendencies, bringing to mind Norman Daniel's words about Western portrayals of the Prophet, who was presented as a man, who "coloured his lips and eyes" (*Islam and the West*, 124). The Mahdi is also prone to using very flowery language, and refers to his men as his "beloveds". The theme of homosexuality is also present at the end of the film, when Gordon's head is presented to the Mahdi, at the top of a wooden stick. The association with Salome, who was punished for having Jokanaan's head cut off is brought further home with an epilogue that states the Mahdi died "within months after Gordon," but no one knows what caused his death. Despite his claims that he forbade his men to remove Gordon's head from his body after killing him, (the film repeatedly refers to this as a Muslim practice in war), it is made evident that the Mahdi had wished to 'possess' Gordon.

Applying the same old methods used to undermine Islam, the film highlights the savage nature of the Muslims, who will stop at nothing to get their own way, even if it means blowing up the minaret of a mosque, or slaughtering thousands of Muslims who oppose them. Whereas the Mahdi is only interested in gaining power, Gordon truly cares for the people. The Mahdi claims that he has visions in his sleep of the Prophet who instructs him and guides him, (hinting at the accusations of false prophesy thrown at Muhammad), whereas the film sets up Gordon as the 'real' prophet, awaited for by the people of the Sudan to deliver them from this evil.

Like *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Khartoum* addresses the events of the day. By portraying the Mahdi and his followers as the representation of evil, the film hints at the harm that could

befall the Middle East, if the Arabs persisted in their call for nationalism. Once again, the majority of the natives are presented in a rather favourable light, an innocent people who need to be led by the hand for their own good. The message in the film is clear: Arabs should stand up to those who call for an end to British imperialism and colonialism, for that would not be in the interest of the people. Arab nationalism would only lead to disaster. The yearning for the 'olden days' is made evident by the short prologue at the beginning of the film, with the images and the voice-over narration glorifying the Nile's 'Pharaonic' past.

Despite the advancement in technology which facilitated travel to various parts of the world, depictions of Eastern peoples still indicate remnants of the ideas and beliefs created by the early Christian writers, who wished to see an end to Islam and the Arabs. Film portrayals define them as a savage race in need of guidance by a greater Western power. They are presented as lazy men who are far too occupied with women and killing, and incapable of managing their own affairs, and running their own countries.

Psychological studies have shown that human beings are susceptible to persuasion through the mediums of film and television. In a study carried out at Florida State University by Russell Middleton, it was shown that "experimental subjects who saw the motion picture *Gentleman's Agreement* [Elia Kazan, 1947] were more likely to show reductions in the expression of anti-Semitic sentiments than control subjects who did not see the film" (679). The study also showed that the same people were likely to regard all ethnic minority groups in a more favourable light, unlike those in the control group. The Western world, however, has chosen to continue to apply its imperialistic views of the East, in various demeaning manners. America, the home of Hollywood and film production, has replaced Britain and France as the super-power of imperialism. By the early seventies, the Muslim and Arab representations in film were no longer associated with eroticism and sex, but terror and violence. With the escalation of the Arab/Israeli conflict, and the elimination of the Soviet fear, the Islamic revolution in Iran and the Gulf War helped the West in pinpointing the Muslim/Arab as an even bigger threat to Western ideology.

## II. “Arabs with guns – help us!”\*

By the late sixties, representations of Arabs and Muslims had changed in a drastic manner. No longer seen as romantic and erotic, Arab/Muslim portrayals in Hollywood film were influenced by the politics of the day. Islam not only posed an ideological threat to Christianity, but was also staking territorial and nationalistic claims, in the form of the Palestinians fighting for self-determination. Depictions from Hollywood followed suit. In 1967, the Arab/Israeli skirmishes over Palestine/Israel developed into full-fledged war that ended in further land gains for the latter. Though not actively taking Israel's side in the war, America nevertheless was providing backing and support to its Middle Eastern ally.<sup>1</sup> Incapable of facing its military might, Palestinian Arabs initiated guerrilla warfare tactics against Israeli targets, by setting off bombs and hijacking planes, in order to draw attention to their cause. These political events had a great influence on Arab screen depictions. Hollywood's policies mirrored those of the American government; the aim was to highlight the plight of the Israelis fighting for a Jewish homeland, and their struggle in dealing with barbaric elements, in the form of Arab terrorists killing innocent women and children.

### i. 'Taking Sides'

Films depicting conflict tend to show bias, favouring one side over another, and a filmmaker covering the Israeli/Palestinian conflict will inevitably end up taking sides. In an article, entitled 'Master Narrative/Counter Readings: The Politics of Israeli Cinema,' Ella Shohat writes about the "inescapability of 'taking sides,' which, as she so rightly adds, has "a linguistic dimension, for the very terms we use-'Israel,' 'Eretz Israel' (the land of Israel), 'Palestine,' 'Occupied Palestine'- already implicate us in questions of point of view and political perspective" (Sklar 251). In dealing with issues of representation within such conflicts, it becomes necessary to identify one's self by what you are not. Unfortunately,

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\*from the film *24 hours at Munich*, said by an Israeli when he sees a man holding a gun, pushing at the door, to enter the room.

<sup>1</sup> Political analyst Noam Chomsky dedicates a whole book, Fateful Triangle to the special relationship between the United States and Israel, highlighting the hypocritical stand that America takes with regards to the Arab/Israeli conflict.

when adapting this to film, the common practice is to portray one party in a 'bad' light, while highlighting the other's 'good' qualities. In the history of American film, the accolades have always been bestowed upon the Israeli side and as Noam Chomsky says such references were "so commonplace as to pass without notice quite across the board in American journalism and scholarship with rare exceptions" (5). In his book, *Fateful Triangle*, explaining the involvement of the United States in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, he goes on to say that in contrast to the glowing terms with which the Israelis and their actions have been described, the Palestinians "have been portrayed in terms of violence, terrorism, irrationality, and uncompromising refusal to come to terms with the existence of Israel or to accept the norms of decent behavior" (5). He adds that it would be unimaginable for an American dramatic production to include such negative portrayals of Israelis or Jews as the ones that have been associated with the Arab villain, despite there being enough evidence of Israeli terrorism over the years to justify such a depiction.

In essence, the decision-makers of Hollywood had taken up the fight for the Israeli cause, thus creating a major shift in their ideology. The films made in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had glorified the American Dream and sanctioned the assimilation of the masses, preferring not to dwell on 'minority' issues.<sup>2</sup> Now film depictions of the 'troubles' in the Middle East were reduced to the binary codes of good vs. evil, in most cases with the Arab as the latter. Since the American government had voiced its support for the Israeli state, Hollywood was no longer worried about coming out of the Jewish closet with films like *Exodus* (Otto Preminger, 1960) which presents the Zionist struggle against the British caretakers and the Arabs, culminating in the establishment of the State of Israel. In *Black Sunday* (John Frankenheimer, 1977), a Vietnam veteran is recruited to carry out a suicide mission that will involve the killing of thousands of civilians in order to alert the world to the demands of the Palestinian 'terrorists'. *24 hours at Munich* (Serge Groussard, 1972) and *Victory at Entebbe* (Marvin J. Chomsky, 1976) are two television films dramatizing events that took place, namely an attack by a Palestinian movement during the 1972 Munich Olympic Games and the hijacking of an Air France jetliner. George Roy Hill's 1984 film *The*

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<sup>2</sup> According to Neal Gabler, the creators of Hollywood, the 'Movie Moguls', most of whom came from East European Jewish backgrounds refused to highlight such issues in their films. Their films created a wholesome WASPY image of America which was identified with and emulated by the audiences.

*Little Drummer Girl* revolves around the involvement of an American actress in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.<sup>3</sup> Even Costa-Gavras' *Hanna K.* (1983), which was seen by many as the first film to allow the other side's point of view does not push the boundaries far enough. In a similar vein, early works from the Israeli cinema tended to ignore Palestinians or regarded them as part of a larger Arab threat. It was not until the 1980s when a new breed of filmmakers, with Israeli director Uri Barabash at the forefront, decided to give the Palestinian a chance to voice his/her own dilemma. At the same time, Palestinian directors emerged with their own portrayals. In *Beyond the Walls (MeAkhorei haSoragim)* (Uri Barabash, 1984), the prison becomes a microcosm of the society and situation in Israel, where Palestinians and Israelis realize the need for dialogue in order to achieve a better quality of life. And with Michel Khleifi's *Wedding in Galilee (Ursul Jalil)* (1987), the Palestinian is finally allowed free reign to explain his side of the story.

In the write-up to his research on ethnic prejudice and susceptibility to persuasion, Russell Middleton cites several studies, which have confirmed the possible influence of films on ethnic intolerance, favourable and otherwise. His interest lies in the positive feedback his study showed on experimental subjects who saw Elia Kazan's 1947 film *Gentleman's Agreement*. He also points out several criticisms made by skeptics "regarding the effectiveness of the mass media in bringing about changes in attitudes – especially ethnic prejudice" (679). One such criticism stated that the exposure of the public to a particular motion picture was limited and only those who would have agreed with the film's theme would go to watch it. Other criticisms suggested that viewers did not give much credibility to commercial films, as they were only meant to entertain and not inform; that the viewers did not abide by the propaganda the film was preaching; or, they may even fail to understand the underlying message of the film. It was also said that ethnic prejudice was deeply ingrained and therefore "brief exposure through the mass media to a message of tolerance" was not sufficient to change such beliefs; in fact, many thought such exposures may trigger what is

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<sup>3</sup> Although Charlie's character in the book by John Le Carré is younger and less accomplished it would be hard not to draw similarities between it and British actress Vanessa Redgrave, who in 1977 helped make a documentary film called *The Palestinian*. Her outspoken involvement for the Palestinian cause annoyed many of the Hollywood elite. Redgrave spends a considerable amount of time in her autobiography explaining how she became involved and the reactions she received from Hollywood as a result.

known as a “boomerang effect” where prejudices would become stronger when threatened by an attack (680).

In responding to such comments, one needs to take into consideration the time this study was made. In 1960 television was still coming into its own. News coverage was nowhere near as detailed and immediate as it is today. To make comments today about limitations of exposure to film would also be naïve; as in most situations, the publicity campaigns that are designed to promote film releases tend to be as costly as the films themselves, if not more, with promotional merchandise that includes soundtracks, video games, posters and dolls. Although Middleton’s study succeeded in showing that positive portrayals of ethnic minorities in film and television can help eliminate stereotyping and prejudices, the point being made here is that the opposite is not only true but most likely easier to accomplish. It is ironic, however, that two decades after *Gentleman’s Agreement* was produced, one could say that Hollywood was still making ‘anti-Semitic’ films.<sup>4</sup>

## ii. ‘Shifting the Balance’

In its dramatization and representation of events and characters, *Exodus* may be regarded as the film that lays down the foundation for other portrayals of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Adapted from Leon Uris’s best-selling novel, which in turn was based on actual events, the film sets a precedent for ignoring or misrepresenting the Palestinian point of view. What makes *Exodus* somewhat unique is the absence of the Palestinian Arab; never once is Taha (John Derek), the only Arab character of any importance in the film, referred to as a Palestinian. Instead it is the Jews who have appropriated that nationality, thus attempting to erase the Arab ties with the land. Set around the time when the UN was holding its debate on the partitioning of Palestine, the film manages to exclude the then Arab majority of the country’s inhabitants. Instead, it highlights the struggle between the Zionists and the British. The first half of the film is dedicated to the plight of more than 500 hundred Jews interned in Cyprus, and denied passage to Palestine because as the film explains “the Arabs don’t want them in Palestine and the British don’t

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<sup>4</sup> It is a common mistake to assume that Semitism is restricted to Judaism, when Arabs are also Semites and their language is a Semitic one.

want them here [Cyprus] either.” The solution in British eyes is to send them back to the European countries they came from. The film goes on at length to show enough proof to justify the existence of a Jewish national homeland, but does not deem it important to present both sides of the situation. The conflict at hand is one with the British, who had been made caretakers of Palestine at the end of The Great War.

During the First World War, the British had made promises to both the Arabs, who fought with them against their Ottoman rulers, and to the Zionists. One such promise saw the light of day when British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour declared the “establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people” in November 1917 (Cattan, The Palestine Question 10). This of course angered the Arab population of the area since it reneged on promises made by the British to help them secure independent Arab states. Due to the vague wording of the declaration it was never made clear what was meant by the establishment of a national home. The British insisted that from their point of view this did not justify the establishment of a Jewish state, and they repeatedly made reference to the fact that the Balfour declaration had also stipulated “that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine” (10). Of interest here is the omission of the word Arab since that was the predominant non-Jewish population in Palestine. Despite arguments citing the validity of a declaration made by one nation to another concerning a territory that neither have any claim over and without the approval of the inhabitants and the legal sovereigns of the land, the Balfour Declaration remained in effect. Although they promised to closely monitor and limit the immigration of Jews to Palestine, the British were unable to stop the huge influx.<sup>5</sup> Zionist Jews fought all attempts by the British to limit immigration numbers and after 1939 the fight was also against plans to provide Palestine with its long overdue independence.<sup>6</sup> What they wanted was a partition of Palestine into Arab and Jewish states and this matter was put into the hands

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<sup>5</sup> “During the mandate, the Jewish population increased more than tenfold: from 56,000 in 1918 the number of Jews in Palestine increased to 83,794 according to the census of 1922, to 174,610 according to the census of 1931 and to 608,230 in 1946 out of a population of 1,972,560” (Cattan, The Palestine Question 28).

<sup>6</sup> In what became known as the White Paper of 1939, the British announced their “intention to limit Jewish immigration to Palestine to 75,000 during the following five years and to grant Palestine its independence within ten years” (Cattan 30).

of the United Nations, in April 1947, after the British found themselves unable to diffuse the situation.

Much as *Gentleman's Agreement* did in presenting prejudicial views about the Jews, *Exodus* spends a considerable amount of time highlighting similar injustices, with bigoted remarks made by the British Major Caldwell (Peter Lawford). American Kitty Fremont (Eva Marie-Saint) assumes that it was Karen's mother who was Jewish because her surname [Hansen] does not fit the stereotypical Jewish name, nor does she with her blond hair look like one. It is probably their similarities in physical appearance that brings out the maternal instincts in Kitty wanting to adopt Karen and "save a Jewish child" by taking her to America. Karen would replace the unborn child she had lost in a Jerusalem hospital after hearing of her husband's death. In that, she is initially misguided; Kitty's adoption of Karen need not require the latter's migration to America. Kitty Fremont's relationship with the Jewish characters in the film mirrors that of the United States with Israel. Initially, feelings of human compassion drive her to provide physical aid and moral support, but by the end of the film, Kitty, by falling in love with Ari Ben Canaan (Paul Newman) has 'converted' and joined the Zionist cause in the fight for a Jewish homeland; she wears an army uniform and carries an armed weapon as she heads off to fight the Arabs.

*Exodus* presents the Arab Bedouin in a secondary role in relationship to the land, a pacifist who willingly gave up the territory to the Jews. By allowing the Jewish characters to recount Hebraic stories and legends, the film also goes to great lengths to imply previous ownership of the land to the Jews and thereby right of possession by them. It does not extend such rights to the Arabs. Instead, Taha's character is that of a conflicted man, albeit noble. He is torn between his duty to his kinsmen and his love for his childhood friend. In hiding Ari from the Arabs, he feels he has repaid his debt to Ari's father who had saved him as a child, after the killing of his own father. However, after the partition vote is passed, Taha realizes he must choose sides; he also feels obliged to do his duty by his people and bids his friend farewell, after warning him of the imminent danger to the Kibbutz. *Exodus* recreates the old depictions initially deployed by Hollywood filmmakers. The film presents the Arabs as unable to decide for themselves, requiring guiding and leadership from their Israeli

masters (who now play the role of a Western colonial power). Without them, they would continue to fight amongst themselves or be influenced by Nazi beliefs. Taha is a 'good' Arab who understands the need for such leadership, whereas the others need to be taught that lesson. In eulogizing both Karen and Taha, who have been buried side by side, Ari looks forward to a time when both Arab and Jew will share in a peaceful life. By this he means that each will understand and accept their rightful place in relationship to the land, a country where Zionists would become masters and rightful owners and Arabs relegated to the status of secondary citizens. It is quite ironic therefore that the last word in the film is Shalom (peace) when the last visual presents the youth of the newly created state of Israel setting off to fight the Arabs.

Television films like *24 hours at Munich* and *Victory at Entebbe* present the Palestinians as militant activists willing to destroy and kill innocent people for their cause. Both films "recreate" events that had happened involving the taking of Israeli hostages by Palestinians.<sup>7</sup> These depictions also bring up traits that are later commonly associated with

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<sup>7</sup> The Palestine Liberation Organization became the representative of the Palestinian people in 1964; however, not all Palestinians ascribed to Yasser Arafat's view of their future. It was the brainchild of Egypt's President Gamal Abdul Nasser, and founded in 1964 by the Arab League under his auspices (Becker 35). Still smarting from the 1948 defeat by the Israelis (which led to the creation of the State of Israel) and the involvement of Israeli paratroops in the 1956 Suez Crisis, Nasser had been seeking a cause that would unify the Arab states under his leadership. From its inception the PLO faced opposition from other Palestinian factions, namely Fatah, a fedayeen (guerrilla freedom fighters) group headed by Yasser Arafat. Arafat succeeded in undermining the leadership of the PLO and took over the position of chairman in 1969.

After the 1967 war with Israel, a number of other Palestinian organizations emerged all with their own ideologies. "The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) established itself from the beginning as one of the most violent Palestinian groups with strong ties to other Marxist revolutionary organizations" (Victor 294). Another Marxist-Leninist, pro-Soviet group was founded in 1969 and called the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. After the Arab defeat in 1967, the Palestinian fedayeen retreated to hideouts in the Jordanian side of the border, with skirmishes between the two sides constantly erupting. The Israelis held the Jordanian government accountable for allowing the Palestinians to carry out attacks from their country. Initially backing the Palestinians, King Hussein of Jordan soon realized that the skirmishes were providing trouble for his country, especially since the fedayeen were soon operating on their own without consulting their Jordanian hosts. This threat increased when it became apparent that the United States felt that the king was no longer able to control the situation in Jordan. Attempts were also made on the king's life, for the PFLP and the DFLP had formally called for the overthrow of the royal regime. To further this cause, the PFLP led by Dr. George Habash hijacked four Western Airliners on September 9, 1970 and forced them to land in Amman. Outraged that the Palestinians had caused him international embarrassment, the king decided to regain his country. The gradual expulsion of the Palestinians from Jordan took almost a year to accomplish.

On July 17 [1971], the fedayeen were completely evicted from their last stronghold in Jordan. Some 2,300 fedayeen surrendered, seventy sought and were granted refuge in Israel, and the rest were killed or injured. Those who surrendered were given the choice of retiring to civilian life or being evacuated to Syria. The majority went to Syria, from where they moved on to Lebanon. (Abu Odeh 187)

An outcome of the expulsion was a number of 'terrorist' activities attributed to a group that called themselves Black September. In September 1972 members of this revolutionary group stormed the Israeli

Palestinian portrayals. The connotation of an Arab alliance with Nazi Germany in *Exodus* is made clearer in *Victory at Entebbe*, since the hijackers consist of Arabs and Germans, thus linking Palestinian ideology to that of Nazism and thereby reaffirming the threat they constitute to Jews. Such portrayals repeatedly accentuated coalitions between Palestinians and other nationalities, historically perceived as “enemies” of the Western world. In *Black Sunday* Dahlia Iyad (Marthe Keller), the Palestinian activist who masterminds the blowing up of the Blimp is said to have a German/Arab background, while the ship carrying the explosives is Japanese and in *Victory at Entebbe*, the hijackers are in cahoots with Idi Amin, who reportedly was a great admirer of Adolph Hitler. The films bring up the Holocaust as a reminder of the atrocities that had befallen the Jews, also eliciting the sympathies of the audience. In *24 hours at Munich*, the discomfort of the Germans that such an incident was happening in their country is made quite clear. The West German government wants to exonerate itself in the eyes of the world and works towards improving its post-WW2 image; therefore, it resents that such an attack had taken place in Munich. The motif of a Jew dying at German hands is also brought up in *Victory at Entebbe* when one of the hostages asks a hijacker “a German with a gun killing a Jew, what is the difference between you and your father?” and in *Black Sunday* it is implied that Israeli agent David Kabakov’s (Robert Shaw) family were Holocaust victims. The three films are linked through the theme of ‘terrorism’ aimed at civilians; however, *Black Sunday* stands slightly apart, not only because the story is purely fictitious (although it attempts to create authenticity through the use of location shoots in Arab cities and dating the scenes) but mainly in that it brings this act of destruction to the United States.

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compound in Munich, the venue for the 20<sup>th</sup> Olympic Games. Two Israelis were immediately shot and nine were taken hostage. The standoff continued for 18 hours, when the West German government agreed to the demands of the eight Palestinians to provide them with a plane to Cairo. At Furstenfeldbruck Airport, German sharpshooters opened fire and the captors retaliated. As a result all the hostages were killed and only three Palestinians were captured alive. In October of the same year, the three Palestinians were exchanged for the release of hostages, after a Lufthansa jetliner was hijacked by two men over Turkey. It was later revealed that the Israeli Intelligence hunted down the perpetrators of the Munich attack and assassinated them.

On July 4 1976, a weeklong hijack of an Air France jetliner was brought to an end, after Israeli commandos raided the compound where the hostages were being held, at Entebbe Airport, in Uganda. Flying out of Athens, the plane was diverted to Uganda where the captors released about 150 passengers. The crew and the Israeli passengers were to be held hostage until all demands were met. The Israeli army decided to storm the airport and release the hostages, resulting in the release of 105. Three passengers, one Israeli commando and the perpetrators died.

By taking this terrorist act to America, Dahlia claims that the Palestinians are striking the Americans where “it hurts, where they feel most safe,” which, in the case of *Black Sunday* happens to be the Orange Bowl in Miami. She is presented as a fanatic revolutionary, a sexual being who has used her charms to trap and manipulate a confused and psychotic Vietnam veteran, Michael Lander (Bruce Dern). Lander, who resents the way his family and country had treated him after his return from the war, is out to prove himself and to show everyone their error in underestimating him. The film, however, sets out to prove that America will not stand for such acts to be brought onto its territory. Enlisting the help of the Israeli agents who had initially brought their attention to the plot, the United States plans to get rid of these terrorists. The conflict at hand, however, is predominantly an Arab/Israeli one, with America providing the locale and the support to the latter. Frankenheimer, the film’s director, has denied that he had any intention either of making a political film or of taking sides in the conflict. He refused to acknowledge that the film has anything to do with the Middle East crisis. Even if his intention was not to make a film about the conflict in the Middle East, nevertheless it would be hard not to make similarities and pinpoint biases. The plot to kill 80,000 Americans is being hatched by a faction that calls themselves Black September ( a well-known revolutionary group at the time the film was made) and carried out by a crazed femme fatale, all in the name of the Palestinian cause. The main protagonist is a middle aged Israeli agent who has had enough of killing and for his final act of duty wants to rid the world of these assassins. As Aljean Harmetz puts it, “the audience must inevitably root for the Jew against the Arab;” Kabakov will eventually succeed in averting a huge tragedy and tracking down the perpetrators, even if it means pushing them into the sea.(21)<sup>8</sup>

Once again a director claims that the film he has made is not political. This time the director is George Roy Hill and the film is *The Little Drummer Girl*. However, he does admit wanting to remain true to John le Carré’s work and present an even-handed portrayal of both sides, for “the book shows the Palestinians for the first time in a human light. Up until then they were seen as bloodthirsty monsters” (Darnton 1). Both factions kill and torture and the viewers do get to hear little bits and pieces of a Palestinian point of view provided by the

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<sup>8</sup> Faisal, a member of the revolutionary group is literally driven into the sea before Kabakov manages to shoot him. Israelis have often quoted the Palestinians as repeatedly saying that given the chance they would throw all the Israelis into the sea. This reference is also brought up in *The Little Drummer Girl*.

likes of the notorious terrorist Khalil (Sami Frey), the invisible mastermind behind the operations and Captain Tayeh (Michael Cristofer), who trains young men at a Palestinian military camp in Lebanon. However, the audience is only permitted to view the Palestinian as a terrorist, which is exactly how Israel wants him/her to be seen.

Charlie (Diane Keaton) is an American actress living in London, who has never really made a huge success of her career. She is, however, involved in politics and is a staunch supporter of the Palestinian cause. This makes her an ideal candidate for recruitment by the Mossad who are trying to locate the elusive Khalil. In the process, Charlie is deceived into believing that she is working on a commercial shoot in Greece and the man she had just met is a Palestinian revolutionary leader; it turns out they are all members of the Israeli secret service and she is brainwashed and initiated into the plan. *Little Drummer Girl* does not even attempt to come up with new characteristics for Palestinians and Arabs, relying on the oft-used stereotypes of greed, violence and sex. When she has misgivings about her actions, Charlie is reminded that these men use their many girlfriends to deliver their bombs. No mention is made of the fact that Charlie is being used in the same manner by the Israelis.

Charlie lives in a world of make believe. She is convinced that the man she has named Joseph (Yorgo Voyagis) is in fact Michel, the Palestinian leader. In her mind, she understands the necessity for hidden identities, especially in this world of espionage. No different from the romanticized notions of the desert and the sheiks of earlier films, in *The Little Drummer Girl* Charlie eroticizes revolutionary struggle and war, maybe even terrorism! After her recruitment, she is thrown into yet another theatrical production, this one directed by the Mossad. By the end of her mission (and the film), Charlie is no longer able to come to terms with who she is nor understand what she has become. In her mind, she has simply turned into an empty vessel for the characters that she portrays. The film may be somewhat successful in showing the futility of war, but in no way does it manage to provide an understanding of the actions carried out. As for the weary Israeli agent who no longer knows what is right and what is wrong, it is easy to retire after a successful mission that involved killing all the targets and destroying the enemy military camp.

Costa-Gavras's 1983 film *Hanna K.* actually provides a more sympathetic view of

Palestinians than *The Little Drummer Girl* and was made one year earlier. This is probably the first western film to humanize the Palestinian conflict. Hanna Kaufman (Jill Clayburgh) is an American-Jewish lawyer now living in Israel. She is assigned to defend a Palestinian, Selim Bakri (Muhamad Bakri), who is accused of infiltration and terrorist activities. He claims that he is trying to regain his family home, which was taken from him by the Israeli authorities. With its characters and plot, *Hanna K.* analogizes the Palestinian dilemma, making the film rather didactic; of need in this instance, as previous depictions of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict have tended to be inaccurate and favour the former. Costa-Gavras makes it a point of including the humiliations suffered by the Palestinians at the hands of the Israelis. In the opening scenes, the viewers are witness to the eviction and destruction of a Palestinian home by the Israeli authorities. When they find Selim hiding in a well, one soldier says "He's probably pissed in it." Another replies, "they're probably used to it." New Israeli villages are built upon the ruins of Palestinian ones and, ironically, Israeli troops monitoring the area have no idea where Kufr Rumaneh is but they do know of Kfar Rimon. The film is laced with more satiric moments: when Hanna's husband Victor (Jean Yanne) says "Shalom" to an Israeli soldier who is worried about terrorist activities and when he meets with another man looking for a courtroom. Apologizing for being unable to read the Hebrew sign on the door, he introduces himself as "French/Catholic." The other man replies, "I'm Protestant/German."

In light of the previous depictions, it is undeniable that *Hanna K.* paints a more favourable picture for the Palestinian side; however, the film still denies the Palestinians the right to voice their own issues. Just as Charlie felt the need to yell at the Israeli agents to "leave the poor fucking Arabs alone!" in *Drummer Girl*, Hanna takes it upon herself to speak for Selim and to make judgements about him. She assumes he does not speak Hebrew and therefore requires a translator, and she defends his actions not only in court but also to her former lover, District Attorney Joshua Herzog (Gabriel Byrne). She also dares to voice what Israelis look forward to, namely an eradication of the Palestinian issue. In court, Hanna proclaims that since the D.A stipulates that Selim has no identification papers and they do not recognise his claim as legitimate "maybe he doesn't exist at all." *Hanna K.*, however, does

not present a positive outcome to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Selim is never recognized as the rightful owner of the house in KufR Rumaneh, nor is he really permitted to stay in the country. Discussions on how to solve the issue possibly include securing a citizenship from another country, such as South Africa (another ironic moment in the film associating Israeli measures with Apartheid). This would permit Selim to stay in Israel, since providing him with an Israeli nationality does not appear to be a possibility! When a bomb goes off in Kfar Rimon, Herzog is quick to assume that Selim is involved, forcing the latter to flee the scene; Selim is once again driven out by the threat of Israeli aggression.

### iii. 'Levelling the Scales'

In their earlier works, Israeli filmmakers also opted to exclude the Palestinians. Although films did cover the Arab/Israeli conflict, filmmakers did not allow the Palestinian national identity to come into focus, choosing to refer to the Palestinians as Arabs and, thereby, including them as part of a bigger threat. At the same time, this permitted them to provide legitimacy to the words of "the late Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir who justified the creation of a Jewish state by proclaiming, "A land without people for a people without land" (Victor 8). In the eighties, however, Israeli directors like Uri Barabash broke away from that approach. Films no longer revolved around the 'good Israeli versus bad Arab' plot line. Instead, stories attempted to portray conflict within the Israeli community, with regards to the question of Palestinian national identity, opting to move away from the battlefield as the meeting place for the two sides. The Arab depiction changes from that of "an anonymous enemy" to "a Palestinian (often noble) fighting for his/her national rights" (Shohat, Israeli Cinema 245). In the prison drama, *Beyond the Walls (MeAkhorei haSoragim)*, the inmates, both Israeli criminals and Palestinian activists, join forces in their fight against the prison authorities. Initially antagonistic towards each other, the Israelis and Palestinians realize they must put away their differences if they want better treatment. Palestinian directors have added their own voice through films like *Wedding in Galilee (Ursul Jalil)*, not only asserting the right to partake in a dialogue about their future, but also demonstrating the richness of a

past that was previously denied.

Although many similarities exist between the different areas of conflict in the world, each situation has its own little details that make it unique. According to Ella Shohat, the uniqueness of the Israeli/Palestinian situation lies in the fact that the creation of a Zionist state of Israel came out of a dream by European Jews to settle in the East, “only to found a state whose ideological and geopolitical orientation has almost been exclusively turned to the West” (Sklar 253). She also adds that both Jews and Arabs have historically been victims of Orientalism; however, as a state Israel has now become “the perpetrator of Orientalist attitudes and actions” (254). When Zionism was created it was to be a liberation movement for all Jews; however, it was primarily aimed at European Ashkenazi Jews. After the creation of the State of Israel, Oriental Sephardic Jews were encouraged to leave their homes in Muslim and Arab countries, like Syria, Iraq, Turkey and Morocco, and immigrate to Israel, in order to shift the balance of Jews and Arabs. Although a minority, the Ashkenazim were in control and “The Sephardim, not unlike the Palestinians, have been largely the objects rather than the subjects of the Zionist master-narrative” (255). The Sephardim not only resent the Ashkenazi Jews for their wealth and control but also look upon the Palestinians as the main competition in acquiring jobs, since they would be willing to accept lower wages.

In the fifties and early sixties, Israeli cinema was dominated by the Heroic-Nationalist Genre. Films portrayed the Israelis’ rightful ownership of the land of Palestine. No explanation was given for the existence for Palestinian characters appearing in the films. Some of these films feature “virtually no Arab characters, although Arabs do appear en masse as incarnations of violence” (Shohat, *Israeli Cinema* 76). In her book, Shohat also goes to great length to explain that the Arab images represented in Israeli Cinema, at the time, were more complex than those portrayed by Hollywood. In addition to the image of the evil Arab, some films presented a more “positive” Arab character (81). After the Israeli victory over the Arabs in the 1967 war, such Arab portrayals took on a more violent nature, with films like *The Great Escape* (Menahem Golan, 1971) showing sequences of Israeli soldiers suffering in Syrian jails during the war (104). Despite their appearance in some of these films, Palestinians, however, were denied the chance to validate their existence.

After the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, leftist Israeli filmmakers, many of whom were active in the Peace Now Movement (which called for a peaceful resolution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict) attempted to recreate the Arab representation.<sup>9</sup> No longer were Arabs represented en masse; the Palestinian was permitted to emerge and given a chance to voice his anger. In what has become known as the 'Palestinian Wave' films, "we find not only recognition of a Palestinian entity but also a refusal of the tiny-Israel/mighty-Arab trope, of the Manichean imagery of Arab encirclement of a besieged Israel" (Shohat, Wide Angle 36).

*Beyond the Walls* is all about taking sides; however, the parties involved change dramatically from the beginning of the film to its ending.<sup>10</sup> *Beyond the Walls* brings together Oriental Jews, a leftist Sabra (a Jew born in Israel) and Palestinians all under the control of Ashkenazi Prison authorities.<sup>11</sup> Uri Mizrachi (Arnon Zadok) is serving a twelve-year sentence for armed robbery and Issam Jabarin (Muhamad Bakri) is in for life, convicted of terrorist activities in service of the PLO. In the film, the prison authorities make use of the animosity between the two groups by applying a 'divide and conquer' methodology. When a new prisoner is brought in, the chief guard decides to place him in cell 16 with the other

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<sup>9</sup> In the Israeli Knesset, the leftist Labour party, has a more tolerant attitude towards peace than the hard-line Likud party.

<sup>10</sup> The film won the critics' prize at the 1984 Venice Film Festival, seven Israeli Oscars and a nomination as the best foreign language film for the 1985 Academy Awards. "Beyond its critical success the film has become what director Uri Barabash calls a 'cultural and political event' in Israel. It has been seen by over 600,000 Jews and Arabs in Israel-some sixty percent of the country's movie going population. It has broken box-office records with commercial runs in major cities like Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, and the filmmakers themselves have brought it to high schools, universities, youth centres and private discussion groups. It has been screened in border settlements largely populated by Oriental Jews and in Palestinian towns in the Galilee. It was the first Israeli film to be shown at al-Hakawati Theatre, the Palestinian cultural centre in East Jerusalem, and also the first to receive a special screening at the Knesset (followed by a heated discussion with the deputies). Rabbi Meir Kahane and his ultra-conservative entourage have repeatedly demonstrated against the film-according to Barabash, they were also responsible for three attempted theatre bombings-but they have been met by counter-demonstrations, including one group of three thousand in Jerusalem who drove them away with chants and tomatoes. The filmmakers have received hundreds of letters of praise and support, along with a handwritten note from the Israeli censor who said that Beyond the Walls was the most powerful film he'd ever seen" (Rosen, Cineaste 47).

<sup>11</sup> "More than eighty percent of the prisoners in Israeli jails are Sephardic (Oriental) Jews. Nobody puts them there deliberately, but it is not a coincidence. It is the outcome of the economic, political and racial situation. They are actually mostly criminals, but at the same time they are political prisoners. All the rest of the prisoners are Arabs, mostly political. These are the two groups of people in Israeli prisons, and they are the two main underdogs of Israeli society" - Uri Barabash (Margulies 49).

Israelis, knowing this would cause antagonism, since, Assaf Furman (Assi Dayan) is serving five years for having contacts with PLO agents.

The Palestinians and Israelis manage to co-exist within the prison walls by avoiding each other and protecting their own turf. Assaf is initially rejected by both groups; however, Issam makes it clear to Uri, if Assaf is harmed, they would have to answer to them. Barabash also manages to convey the divisions within each group. The Palestinians differ in their standpoints about violence but are won over by Issam's moderate views. The Israelis regard Assaf as someone who is "worse than an Arab, a traitor to his own people" and does not have any rights; he is not really accepted until he refuses to be taken out during the hunger strike. Assaf is continuously taunted by his cellmates and only Musa comes to his aid. Musa, who also lives in cell 16, is an Arab who wants to convert to Judaism to marry a Jewish girl; his defense of Assaf initially aggravates the situation.<sup>12</sup> Doran, an Israeli, who has been subjected to homosexual rape by fellow inmates, is taken to the Arab cell for his own protection. On both sides, there are informers/collaborators working with the authorities. Hoffman provides the inmates with drugs given to him by the chief guard, in exchange for information, and the Palestinian deaf-mute carries out 'janitorial services' for him.

The prison authorities had permitted one of the inmates to participate in a song contest, to be televised from the prison. After the telecast, the prisoners listen to a TV news item about a terrorist attack that took the lives of six people. As they are being led out, Hoffman attacks one of the Arab prisoners, and receives a death threat in response.

In his film, Uri Barabash interprets what he believes is the cause of conflict between Palestinians and Israelis. In an interview with Ronnie Margulies, Barabash rejects the idea that the prison authorities in the film represent the Zionist establishment. "The authorities do not represent Zionism: they may represent Rabbi Kahane or Ariel Sharon or the most right wing way of thinking. They represent power and manipulation, they do not believe in friendship, solidarity and choice. They are mutations of Zionism" (49). By having Hoffman killed, the chief guard hopes to instigate more trouble between the two sides and then make separate alliances with each of the parties. The Israelis would believe that the Palestinians

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<sup>12</sup> It is not made clear why Musa is placed in the Jewish cell. It may be for his own protection; as someone who has declared that he plans to convert from Islam to Judaism, he could be targeted by other Muslims. The other possibility is that he is not a political activist. Interestingly though the character is given the Arabic name for Moses!

had acted upon their threat and carried out the murder. Unwilling to accept that Issam's group did not kill Hoffman, the Israelis retaliate by starting a fire in cell 9 (the Palestinian's cell).<sup>13</sup> In response, the prison authorities instigate harsher sanctions against the prisoners, and reduce visiting hours.

All is going according to plan in the chief guard's eyes, but he does not count on these sanctions actually bringing the two enemies together. While both men are serving time in solitary confinement, Issam makes the first contact: "These games of ours are becoming too costly, I mean for you and for us too." Uri initially responds by saying that he could never be on the same team as Issam.

Uri: Every single time it's the same, you always leave after you have done your dirty work without looking back at the pain and the sorrow you have created, as long as you kill.

Issam: You kill the enemy.

Uri: Passengers on a bus are your enemy?

Issam: And the refugees in a camp you bomb are your enemy? That's like a thousand buses.

When Doran's body is found after he had hung himself, and a note is discovered explaining how the chief guard had tried to blackmail him into saying that Issam's group had killed Hoffman, the prisoners unite and go on a hunger strike.

*Beyond the Walls* is about taking sides with the party that will grant the freedom of choice. To be able to reach out your hand in peace and not be called traitor, to be able to go off the strike and not be called a coward and to choose to stay on the strike even if it means your death. The film provides an allegory of Israeli society. In one scene, the Palestinian Muslims are standing together in prayer and the camera pans to reveal Jews coming out of a synagogue, a few feet away. This brings to mind the Al Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, (the site of a number of confrontations between both sides) which is closely located to the Wailing Wall, a place of worship for Jews. Barabash looks forward to a time when both peoples can co-exist in peace.

In *Beyond the Walls*, Uri Barabash not only permits the Palestinian voice to be heard within the world of the film but also allows "a radicalization of a crucial point in the film" by

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<sup>13</sup>Hoffman was killed by orders from the chief guard. However, the person carrying out the order is the Palestinian deaf-mute who works for him. He strangles Hoffman with a black and white Koufiah (Palestinian headdress that has become a symbol of national identity).

the Palestinian actor Muhammad Bakri (Issam). (Shohat, Wide Angle 36) In the original script, Issam is supposed to walk off the strike after the chief guard brings in the wife he has not seen in ten years and the child he has never met. Issam is encouraged by the other inmates to walk out and thereby he breaks the strike. Bakri refused this ending, stating that a Palestinian activist would not abandon his cause.<sup>14</sup> The two men reached a compromise, by agreeing that the director would film two takes. "Barabash first shot Bakri's version in which the character Issam steps out only to tell his wife and son to go back home, a scene whose authenticity led Barabash to completely give up his original idea" (37).

In his film, Uri Barabash calls for a peaceful outcome to an age-old conflict. Through the mutual efforts of the two sides, they will be able to overcome hurdles in the peace-making process. By presenting the Assaf character also as an Ashkenazi Jew, Barabash avoids the 'good versus bad' imaging; he presents the two sides as complex groups that need to deal with the problems from within, in order to achieve a peaceful resolution to the external conflict.

Pertinent to this discussion is the fact that a film made by a Palestinian director and largely representative of Palestinian village life is discussed as part of books on Israeli national cinema. Although the Palestinian national identity is located within the Israeli one, it has been given a voice. An argument could be made for the creation of a Palestinian national cinema; however, the fact that the Palestinians are part of a stateless nation weakens it. The film and its maker epitomize the Palestinian Diaspora. *Wedding in Galilee* is a Franco-Belgian-Palestinian co-production made by a Nazareth (considered part of Israel) born Palestinian Christian who has lived in Belgium since 1970, with a cast that includes Palestinians, Israelis, Lebanese and French-Armenian actors and dialogue in both Arabic and Hebrew.<sup>15</sup>

The establishment of a Palestinian Cinema had a direct link to politics. Palestinian films were always intended to be instruments "for the promotion of the Palestinian national

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<sup>14</sup> Bakri's character in the film is loosely based on a the Palestinian activist Issam Sirtawi, who was murdered. Bakri believed that Sirtawi would have never gone off the strike. (Shohat, Wide Angle 37)

<sup>15</sup> Michel Khleifi is an Israeli Palestinian (Palestinians from areas occupied by Israel in 1948 hold Israeli citizenship). Therefore an argument could be made for the inclusion of his work within the context of Israeli Cinema. In the Film Guide Index, the film is cited as a Belgian production, under the French title *Noce en Galilee*.

cause and the registering of revolutionary events related to the Palestinian resistance” (Shohat, Wide Angle 39). Khleifi’s film *Wedding in Galilee* is the first feature by a Palestinian filmmaker who does not attempt to re-tell the Israeli/Palestinian conflict by reducing it to what, at the time, had become a given in Palestinian films: good Palestinians versus evil Israelis. *Wedding in Galilee* is not only a political film; it is a film that portrays the richness of the Palestinian culture, the history of oppression faced by people and the repercussions of violence. Miriam Rosen, in Black Film Review, put it so eloquently when she said “*Wedding in Galilee* is a celebration of culture, of youth and old age, of sensuality, the strength of women, and above all freedom. It is also a film of undeniable cinematic quality” (www.sindibad.co.uk). In a sense, *Wedding in Galilee* is Michel Khleifi’s (and all Palestinians’) response to Golda Meir’s claim that “the Palestinians do not exist” (Victor 8). At the same time, it is a message to all concerned parties about the dangers of a life lived in the past. Learn from the past, says Khleifi, but move on with the times and accept what is required today.

The story of the film revolves around the Mukhtar (village elder/mayor) (Mohamad Ali El Akili) of a Palestinian village in the Galilee, who wants to hold a marriage ceremony for his son. In order to do so, he needs the permission of the military governor, as the village had been placed under curfew a few months earlier and a ban had been placed on group gatherings.<sup>16</sup> The military governor (Makram Khoury) initially declines the Mukhtar’s request to lift the curfew for one day, citing recent bloodshed when Palestinian youths in the village lashed out at Israeli soldiers with stones. He feels it is his duty to teach the villagers a lesson until they become subordinate and succumb to Israeli wishes, especially as he puts it “since that was the gratitude shown to us (the Israelis) after our fair treatment of the villagers.” A younger officer (showing interest in the people living so close by) suggests that they allow the Mukhtar to hold the wedding, on condition that he invites the military governor as his guest of honour. The Mukhtar (Abu Adel) accepts and makes his own condition; they must remain until the end of the wedding ceremony.

The film depicts the military oppression faced by the villagers in a number of other scenes and sequences. On the same day that the military governor gives his permission for

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<sup>16</sup>Israeli military law over the Galilee was actually cancelled in 1966.

the wedding to be held, he decides to implement curfew one hour earlier than usual. In a sequence from the film, Israeli soldiers patrolling the village yell at a group of women who had gathered together to discuss the wedding. The women are stopped in mid-ululation with orders of “go home” from the soldiers. In another scene, while wedding preparations are underway a song can be heard in the background, probably being sung by a woman in one of the nearby houses. Although a love song, it is also nationalistic in tone with the lyrics “I would rather have knives thrust upon me than be subjected to oppression.” Sounds of gunshot followed by a Hebrew accented “shut-up” put an end to the singing.

Abu Adel’s decision to invite the military governor causes divisions in the village. Wanting to fulfil his dream, by holding the biggest and best wedding the village has ever seen, the Mukhtar urges the village elders to respect his wishes and allow the event to take place in peace. His brother Khamis takes what has happened as an insult and walks out saying, “there can be no celebration without dignity.” His own son, Adel, complains to his mother that his father has brought shame upon the family, and that “not even a traitor would get married under such circumstances.” The Mukhtar finds support from the majority of the village men who pledge to do their best to oversee the smooth running of the wedding and make sure that troublemakers like Ziad and his group will not try anything.

Through the characters of the grandparents, Michel Khleifi also succeeds in portraying the richness of a heritage whereby the elders pass on their stories to the younger generations. The grandmother recounts anecdotes from her youth, whereas the grandfather repeats tales about oppressive Turks during the Ottoman rule, and about the English who were even worse during the British Mandate. It feels as though the director is making a statement that tradition and history constitute a major part of the Palestinian culture and heritage, but maybe the time has come to let go of the oppressed mentality and start a dialogue for peace.

*Wedding in Galilee* also manages to capture the strength of women who are not satisfied with their roles as homemakers. Sumaya (Sonia Amar), the Mukhtar’s eldest daughter, voices her discontent at the traditional life expected of her. She repeatedly seeks out Ziad, the man she has chosen to be her partner, and admonishes him for his violent ideas,

telling him that she will not stand by and watch him go back to prison. She knows what he has planned and is willing to speak out to prevent him from causing any damage to himself and others. Sumaya is narcissistic, believing herself to be the most beautiful girl in the village; she spends time staring at herself in a mirror and comparing herself to others. She is far more concerned with her own life than the needs of others and longs for the freedom of the man's world, which is made clear when she tries on the male head-dress. Tomboyish in her attitude, she is not afraid to break out of the female domain drawn by society. When her younger brother asks her if she had seen their father, she flippantly replies that he had just smoked a cigarette with them before going on his way. She flirts openly with the Israeli soldier and tells him that if he wished to partake in the dancing, he would have to take off his uniform first. Sumaya's character mirrors that of the young women who have grown up during the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. No longer is it possible for them to stand by and simply take on the roles expected of them. It is time for them to break free from the patriarchal domain that society has forced upon them. They need to think about themselves and be permitted the freedom to choose how to live. They, too, feel the need for change and are willing to take matters in their own hands. The same applies to the bride Samia, who, on her wedding day, is supposed to look nice and have people attend to her. She is prepared for the wedding ceremony by older women, who bathe her and decorate her body with henna. She is then put on show while the older men come in bearing gifts. Samia is then expected to observe the celebrations going on around her until it is time for her groom to take her to the bedroom, where the marriage is consummated. The wedding celebrations end with the virginal bed-sheet signifying the bride's purity on her marriage bed. Samia has chosen to take this path in her life and is willing to make it work, but that does not make her a passive character. When the groom is incapable of having sex with his wife, she takes her own virginity. Samia has but a few lines in the film, depicting her as the dutiful, docile wife; however, her actions prevent bloodshed when she stops her husband from attempting to kill his father, whom he blames for his impotency. She also restores her husband's honour when he is finally able to present his mother with the bed sheet marked with his wife's virginal blood. The Mukhtar's wife Um Adel (Bushra Karaman) is another positive female character.

She has chosen to remain within the traditional boundaries drawn for her by society, but she also understands the need to allow her daughter the freedom to choose her own way. Her husband complains to her that people are talking about Sumaya's behaviour and how much time she spends around boys. She responds by saying that Sumaya knows exactly what she is doing and what he really ought to be concerned with is the wedding and making sure that all is well. Um Adel may impose certain restrictions upon herself, but she does understand that things will not remain the same.

The only female character who comes across as weak and misplaced is the Israeli female soldier who faints from the excessive heat. The lone female in an army of men, she spends the first part of the wedding celebrations outside with the men. The rich food, the loud music and the hot sun cause her to faint. She is taken indoors where the women are holding their celebrations. Inside, she takes off her soldier's uniform and somehow regains her femininity for a limited time, she is taken back at the end of the wedding ceremony. For a brief time, she crosses over to the other side, no longer seen as the Israeli soldier but as a woman. As an Israeli soldier, Tali is not given the chance to choose her destiny.<sup>17</sup>

Not only a political film, *Wedding in Galilee* strikes out at the traditional patriarchal rules which constitute the foundation of Palestinian society. What worries the Mukhtar most is how he could show his face to the village, without the last ritual of the wedding ceremony having been performed. He is worried about society's approval and how he is seen by the villagers. He feels the need to impress by putting on the best wedding the village has ever seen. Incapable of showing affection to his family, he bestows it freely upon his mare. In fact, he is willing to sacrifice himself for the horse. His actions alienate him from his family and even his youngest son, whom he feels closest to, runs away to be alone.

Khleifi's message is clear. The Palestinians are a nation that have existed and will continue to exist. Theirs is a culture rich with stories, traditions and customs. As a people, they have lived under Turkish, British and Israeli oppression, and they have continued to survive and maintain their beliefs. The time has come for progress, for women and younger generations to break free from the patriarchal ties that bind them and be given the freedom to create their own future, one that does not have to be forged out of violence. Khleifi clearly

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<sup>17</sup> Israeli men and woman must complete military training.

hopes for a peaceful resolution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict mirroring the ending of his own film. The plot to kill the military governor, concocted by Ziad and his mates, is brought to a halt by, none other than Khamis, who had been opposed to the military governor's presence. He is not opposed to getting rid of the man, but feels that the plan is not well thought-out and mindless of the repercussions of such actions. As Ella Shohat writes: "The pastoral epilogue of the film showing the Mukhtar's child running in the fields then lying down embraced by nature, underlies his desire for harmony in land already much stained with blood....The film's peaceful epilogue gains additional reverberations in the context of frequent media images of Palestinian children living a present day situation which is anything but peaceful. The epilogue concerning a child of the occupation follows (in manner reminiscent of other films depicting national struggle such as Roberto Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* [1945]) the evacuation by the soldiers, implying a wish for a future life free of occupation" (Shohat, Wide Angle 41).

Michel Khleifi is also mindful that the lives of Palestinians and Israelis have become entwined through struggle and violence, and his hope is that they will once again come together in peace. Through the depiction of the wedding ceremony, he brings together Palestinian Christian and Muslim traditions, hoping that such divisions would not cause friction and animosity that could lead to more strife. In one sequence in the film, the Mukhtar's mare is trapped in the middle of an area filled with landmines. To get the mare out, the Palestinians seek aid from the Israeli officers. Once again, a director has indicated optimism for a peaceful resolution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict coming about as a result of the co-operation of both sides.

Despite the great strides that *Beyond the Walls* and *Wedding in Galilee* take, they still portray a resonance of anger towards the opposing side. That is to be expected, since a fifty-year conflict cannot be erased easily. In *Wedding in Galilee*, Khleifi does pinpoint the Israelis as military commanders in control of the Palestinians, as unwanted guests that need to be thrown out; however, he clearly shows that when given the chance to lead their lives, Palestinians will be able to better understand themselves and achieve the future they strive for. And, unless the Israelis start to look upon the Palestinians as equal partners in a dialogue

for peace and co-existence, the Israeli/Palestinian conflict might take a more violent turn. Khleifi believes it is possible for the Palestinians to forgive the Israelis, but only if “they take off their uniforms” and “if they cease the military oppression of the Palestinians” (Shohat, *Israeli Cinema* 254). Both films emphasize the need for choice, and highlight the dangers of extremism, opting for a ‘more reasonable’ approach.

Although a peaceful outcome to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict is still out of reach, films like *Beyond the Walls* and *Wedding in Galilee* have succeeded in moving beyond the ‘good versus bad’ formula, most often relied upon in Hollywood depictions. They have also established the Palestinian as a person with his/her own identity and given him/her a voice to be heard. With two sides ready for dialogue a positive outcome may be achieved.

And just as the Israeli and Palestinian cinemas were finding new themes with which to highlight their political issues, Arab national cinemas had been finding a voice of their own, since their independence from Western powers. The medium of film, which had been introduced in the East as a colonizing tool, was now being used against the colonizers. In Egypt, where a strong and successful national cinema quickly emerged, filmmakers like Salah Abou Seif, Tewfik Saleh and Youssef Chahine were depicting Egyptian reality on the screens. By the mid fifties, the rest of the world was getting a chance to see the Middle East from its own point of view and to listen to its concerns. Soon other Arab and Muslim nations would start their own productions to attempt to rectify the harm done by the inaccurate depictions of their culture, religion and way of life, as created by the West. With films like Chahine’s *Saladin the Victorious* (1963) and Akkad’s *The Message*(1976), Western audiences were finally permitted a chance to see the Arab/Muslim world from its own viewpoint.

### III. 'The Good, The Bad and The Slightly Better'

By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while Hollywood continued with its own depictions of the Arab and Muslim world, national cinemas in these countries were slowly emerging. In Iran, Turkey and the Arab states cinema had been introduced at almost the same time as in the West. By the fifties and sixties, the concerns of these newly created nations were starting to taking precedence on the screen, over fictitious works and literary adaptations. While Hollywood was preoccupied with the exotic and romantic depictions of this part of the world, Arab and Muslim cinemas were slowly emerging with their own mirror-image of society. In a number of instances, historical dramas were used as allegories for the present; one such example is Youssef Chahine's *Saladin the Victorious (Al Nasser Salaheddin)* (1963), in which the portrayals of the conquering 12<sup>th</sup> century Muslims reflect the hopes of the contemporary Arabs and present a glowing image of the past. Youssef Chahine would once again use this allegorical representation in *Destiny (Al Massir)* (1997), this time to criticise and condemn the rising wave of Islamic fanaticism. Other Arab cinemas, although not as prolific as Egypt's, also contributed in the form of an epic about the story of Islam, entitled *The Message: Mohammad Messenger of God (Al Risala)* (1976). With funds from Kuwait, Morocco and Libya, Syrian director Moustapha Akkad produced the story of Islam made in two separate versions (Arabic and English) and shot with an international crew and cast. Tunisian director Ferid Boughedir's 1995 film *A Summer in La Goulette (Halq-el-wad)* provided a nostalgic look at life in Tunis prior to the 1967 Arab/Israeli war, a multi-ethnic life where everyone lived in peace and harmony.

Meanwhile, throughout the seventies and eighties, Hollywood persisted with its distorted representations of the Middle East. The American brokered peace treaty between Israel and Egypt in 1979 did not help thaw the coldness of the Arab/Israeli relationship. Matters worsened still after the Islamic revolution in Iran and the American Hostage crisis with Muslim depictions alternating between the caricature-like and the demonic. And with the dismantling of the Soviet Union in the late eighties, Muslim images soon took over the role of enemy, previously held by communists, as presented by films like James Cameron's *True Lies* (1994). Film audiences were also re-introduced to the mythical and magical world of the East through Disney's *Aladdin* (Ron Clements & John Musker, 1992), and the

backward and uncivilised world of Islam through Brian Gilbert's portrayal of post-revolution Iran in *Not Without My Daughter* (1991).

By the mid-nineties, however, it appears that Hollywood may have had a slight change of heart. The signing of the Oslo Declaration of Principles in 1993 signified the official commencement of peace talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and with the Jordanian-Israeli Peace Treaty signed one year later, the Middle East no longer seemed to pose the threat it once did. Films like *Three Kings* (David O. Russell, 1999) and *The Siege* (Edward Zwick, 1998) offered a deeper look at such issues of conflict, addressing them in a more complex manner than the oft used 'good versus bad' formula. The Arab/Muslim has also made an appearance in mainstream America through films like *A Night at the Roxbury* (John Fortenberry, 1998) presenting the Butabi Brothers as second generation Arab-Americans, who have completely adapted and joined the American pop-culture. They are also secondary characters included in film scripts to provide extra comic relief like the TV repairmen in *Mother* (Albert Brooks, 1996). They also continue to provide 'romantic' and 'exotic' notions through films like *The 13<sup>th</sup> Warrior* (John McTiernan, 1999) and *Hideous Kinky* (Gillies Mckinnon, 1998), where a young British woman is in search of spiritual guidance, in 1972 Marrakech, hoping to understand the mystical side of Islamic Sufism.

i. **"The Empire Strikes Back"**

When the film medium was invented in the West, at the end of the nineteenth century, most of the Arab World was already considered as British and French protectorates. It was not until most of those countries had gained independence that a national cinema came into existence. Film was introduced to the Arab world as early as 1896, just months after the Lumière brothers' first screenings in Europe had taken place. In Algerian and Egyptian cities with large populations of foreign residents, screenings were held in the back rooms of cafés. One year later the Cinématographe Lumière in Alexandria, Egypt, was offering regular screenings, and in 1906, the French company Pathé constructed the first cinema in the country. By 1908, this number had increased to five. In general, these early movie theatres were owned by foreigners or immigrant European minorities and apart from Egypt, where cinemas quickly started offering films with Arabic translations during the colonial period,

most of the film viewing public was foreign. Early films made during that period were also made by foreigners; Louis and Auguste Lumière and Thomas Edison, for example, sent out crews to shoot footage in Palestine, Algeria and Egypt. Western audiences quickly acquired interest in 'seeing' the Holy Land and the deserts of the East, even if it was only on screen.

Egypt was the only Arab country to develop a national film industry during the colonial period. This consisted of mainly documentaries and newsreels, although a number of short fiction films were also produced. Italian investors set up a film company in Alexandria as early as 1917 and many short films were made by Europeans in co-operation with Egyptian actors. Unlike many of the other Arab states, Egypt had maintained a dynamic multicultural life, in which native Egyptians always played an important role, and which remained relatively undisturbed by colonial authorities. This, and the quick interest in the film medium and its combination with other well-established arts like popular musical theatre, succeeded in establishing a national industry in Egypt earlier than in other Arab countries. Many theatre directors, actors and actresses started working in film and established themselves as great pioneers of Egyptian films with characters and stories that had long been popular on the stage. This new medium, however, was not restricted to artists and performers, but also drew entrepreneurs such as Talat Harb, who helped found the Misr Bank (Bank of Egypt), which provided the funding for the first national studio, equipped with a laboratory and a sound studio. Although it officially gained independence from Britain in 1952, Egypt was formally independent from the early 20s. This led to an increase in the struggle against foreign domination with laws being passed no longer granting Europeans special legal rights and making written Arabic the obligatory language for use in companies. This was a far cry from the steps taken in the French protectorates; in the North African countries, Syria and Lebanon, such liberties would have been unthinkable, and the hindering of native efforts to produce was part of the general framework of cultural and economic politics. In Algeria, for example, the indigenous culture was excluded by strict measures and regulations. Egyptian filmmakers also managed to find a way around the multi-colloquial dialect problem of the Arabic languages. Initially using a 'softened' classical form which was infused with the Egyptian vernacular, scriptwriters managed to come up with a form of cinema Arabic. With the increase in the popularity of Egyptian songs and radio broadcasts in

the region, the Egyptian dialect soon took over and became the official language of the medium of film in that part of the world.

Egyptian cinema soon became synonymous with Arab cinema and from 1945 onwards Egyptian directors began to make their mark. These include Salah Abou Seif, Tewfik Saleh and the better known Youssef Chahine. More and more emphasis was made on films depicting Egyptian reality; however literary adaptations and historic films also flourished. In 1961 the Egyptian film industry was nationalised. Initially, this provided backing and support for serious-filmmaking in the country; however, it was to prove a financial disaster. Many producers and directors moved abroad to make their films; a large number headed to Lebanon, which is why that country witnessed an increased production at the time. However, this also hampered the emergence of a Lebanese national cinema, which did not start to take shape until the seventies.

Other Arab countries that are producing films today include Syria and the Maghreb states of North Africa -- Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco. In general, the cinema of the Maghreb countries is not a popular cinema on the Egyptian model and Maghrebi films receive more showings at foreign festivals than in local cinemas. Nevertheless, they are evidence of the continuing vitality and variety of Arab cinema.

Chahine's film about Saladin and the Crusades was made in 1963. It presents Saladin (Ahmad Mathhar) as a virtuous and chivalrous leader who unites Arabs under his leadership with no difference between Muslims and Christians, a humble man who considers himself a servant to his people rather than their leader. The character of the Christian Arab soldier Issa Al Awam (Salah Thulfuqar), who serves under Saladin's leadership is almost like a son to the Muslim leader; he does, in fact, entrust his own son to him. Chahine's film is unabashedly an allegory for Nasserite Egypt; the director makes no efforts to hide his aspirations that Nasser will succeed in uniting all the Arabs, like Saladin did, and that his efforts would also regain occupied Arab territory. As Viola Shafiq mentions in her book Arab Cinema: History and Cultural Identity, this is immediately apparent from the title of the film; Chahine chose to include the title Al Nasser as an adjective to Saladin (Al Nasser Salaheddin), rendering the meaning of 'Saladin the Victorious' and evoking comparisons between the Muslim leader and the man who had defied Western powers by nationalizing the

Suez Canal (169). Even the historically authentic set design included some allegories to the present, such as the Egyptian eagle, displayed behind Saladin's throne.<sup>1</sup>

The film commences with an aide to Saladin reminding him of the oath he had made to help free the Arabs in Jerusalem from their occupiers. News from Jerusalem tells of the hardships the residents are facing, forcing Saladin to make good on his promise. News of his plans quickly reach Prince Renaud of Kerak, who informs the King of Jerusalem that he would take command of the armies against Saladin. His first command is an attack on a caravan of Muslims passing through on their way to Mecca. The King of Jerusalem refuses to allow such an attack, which would break the agreement between him and Saladin to permit pilgrims through their territories. Despite the lack of consent, the king's protestations are brushed aside and the pilgrims are slaughtered, with their gold taken to fill the empty coffers of Kerak. Prince Renaud is portrayed as a blood thirsty megalomaniac, an unscrupulous and merciless warrior, who like his wife, the beautiful Virginia (Laila Fawzi), believes there is no place for mercy in a holy war.

Chahine's film may not be completely free of bias; the crusaders are portrayed in a much more unpleasant light; however, he does make attempts to present characters of both good and evil, in each of the camps. The Prince of Acre betrays his Arab comrades by allowing the French and English armies access to the fort, whereas the Arab Christian warrior Issa Al Awam plays a pivotal role in the film as one of Saladin's military commanders. His presence is designed to show that Arab Muslims and Christians are treated equally, possibly a message to the Christian Coptic community of Egypt with regard to Nasser's policies. As Chahine himself is a Christian, he obviously feels that the Egyptian Copts should be included in Arab unity plans. Issa's character also provides the element of romance in the film through his relationship with Louisa (Nadia Lutfi), a crusader knight in charge of the nursing teams. This permits an inter-racial romance but avoids dealing with an inter-faith one. When they first meet, Issa catches Louisa off-guard as he is planning to go for a swim. Doing the gentlemanly thing, he turns around, in order to give her a chance to get dressed before taking her prisoner. Instead he receives an arrow in the back for his troubles, while she escapes. Although he promises to avenge himself for what she has done to him, he

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<sup>1</sup> The Eagle also held prominence on the nation's flag.

finds himself incapable of killing a woman, even if she was an armed soldier fighting on the battlefield. When she discovers that he is Christian, Louisa is surprised that Issa is willingly fighting with the Arabs. His response is that he is also an Arab and that he is fighting with his brothers. He berates the crusaders for saying that they were fighting a holy war. He accuses them of using the cross as a mask to hide behind while invading Arab territory. When she refuses to marry him saying she would rather kill herself than be married to an Arab, Issa allows her to go, but wonders who it was that stipulated they should be enemies. Jerusalem is an Arab city he tells her, and that there is no reason for foreign powers to feel they have to have control of the city in order to protect the Christian Holy Sites, as those sites would receive equal respect and care as those of the Muslims'. He accuses her leaders of peddling religion like a trade and using it to gain what they want. Louisa does repay her debt, however, by helping Issa escape from the Crusader camp, after his capture.

As an allegory for early sixties Egypt, *Saladin* uses the Christian occupation of the Holy Land to represent the Israeli occupation of Palestine. While the film presents the hardships and oppression of the occupying forces, it highlights the fairness and equality of rights shown to the Christian residents under Arab sovereignty. After the Arab victory at Hiteen, Saladin frees all the prisoners of war and welcomes those who wish to remain in the city. He is hailed by his soldiers as the man who had restored Jerusalem to Arab hands. In the pre-1967 political climate, the hope was that Nasser would be able to reunite the Arabs in order to accomplish that feat. The film also portrays the interest of European colonial powers in Jerusalem. Deals are made to guarantee alliances with the promise of territorial gains. The Prince of Acre (Tawfiq Al Diqin) promises to keep Saladin at bay until Princess Virginia returns with Richard of England (Hamdi Geith) and Philippe Auguste of France (Omar Al Harriri), in exchange for the Emirate of Jaffa. Prince John of England promises his courtier Duke Arthur the Kingdom of Jerusalem if he makes sure that his brother Richard never returns to England. Virginia entices Philippe to lend his troops with the promise of treasures and mysteries of the Orient, and he in turn promises the throne of Jerusalem to his aide Conrad de Monferrat (Mahmoud Millighi), if they manage to get Richard out of the way. Whereas most of the Europeans are depicted as greedy, glory seeking characters, Richard the Lion Heart is shown in a more favourable light. Saladin speaks well of him and always assumes that he would be more righteous and objective in his views.

At one point in the film, Chahine employs a split screen to compare two tribunals: a Muslim court charging the Prince of Acre of treason, by helping the crusaders gain access to the fort, thereby aiding them in their victory; and a Christian forum holding Louisa accountable for Issa's escape from the camp. The director uses lighting to guide the viewer's attention to each side of the screen. Both camps are judging members of their entourage who have committed treacherous acts. Saladin accuses the Prince of Acre of betraying his own by helping the crusaders penetrate a fort designed to keep all foreigners out of Arab territory, in exchange for riches and a title, while Prince Conrad questions the loyalty of Louisa. However, it is Conrad himself who becomes the accused once Richard reveals his knowledge of the plot to give him up to the Arabs. As Richard and Saladin berate the charged men and condemn their acts, the action quickly inter-cuts between each scene, with close-ups of both Richard and Saladin, making it appear as though the two leaders are addressing each other. Saladin believes that a victory under dubious circumstances is shameful; he feels obliged to tell Richard of the plot on his life concocted by the French. Later his own courtier, Duke Arthur, also attempts to kill Richard using an Arab arrow, hoping this would violate the cease-fire that was agreed upon by the two sides.

The film also points to the futility of war and negativity of intolerance. After their victory at Acre, the crusaders meet with the Arabs to discuss a possible peace agreement. Saladin makes it clear that the last thing they need to do is to go back into battle, where more men, from both sides, would die. He asks that they withdraw their troops to avoid more bloodshed, stating that the teachings of both Christianity and Islam call for avoiding war unless it is the last resort. The crusaders, on the other hand, overconfident after their victory, feel they should continue in battle, unless Saladin agrees to an unconditional surrender and the return of Jerusalem, as well as all previously European held territory. Saladin frees all Christian prisoners of war, yet as Richard hesitates, Philippe of France, in the hope of restarting the battles, gives the order to kill the Muslim prisoners. However, Saladin chooses to believe Richard's word about it being a mistake and decides to maintain the cease-fire. The film presents Richard as an extremely pious man, whose adherence to his religion makes him intolerant to the faith of others. His vanity in believing that one religion is better than the other temporarily blinds him to the faults of his allies. While the Arabs adhere to a 'to each his own' kind of motto with regards to religion, Richard is not willing to accept any rule

other than a Christian one over Jerusalem. He slowly sees the error of his ways with the help of his queen, Louisa and Saladin himself, who not only nurses him back to health after the attack, but never falters in his conviction that a king as wise and noble as Richard would not be intolerant. *Saladin* ends with the crusaders entering the city of Jerusalem to celebrate Christmas, but only as guests, invited by the Arab leader. They leave the Arab city to its rightful guardians and this time, Louisa chooses to stay behind.

*Saladin* also highlights Arab accomplishments in the field of science, showing how when faced with Crusader attacks using massive towers, they find the means to create explosives that would destroy them. This theme is also emphasised in Chahine's 1997 film *Destiny*, where Arab feats in medicine, literature, art and philosophy are touched upon. After making a number of biographical and political films Chahine returned to historical drama, in the nineties, with his film *Al Muhajer (The Immigrant)*. For its follow-up, he chose to accentuate the rising wave of Islamic fanaticism that was sweeping over parts of the Muslim world, Egypt and Algeria in particular. Incorporating song and dance sequences, this award winning film cautions of the threat that fundamentalist Islamists could have on modern Muslim societies.<sup>2</sup> Chahine warns of the brainwashing process and mind-seduction methods that befall the youths, who fall under the spell of such "merchants of faith" who aspire for absolute power. His film attempts to show how the teachings of Islam and its message of peace and tolerance should not permit such corruption, by presenting a fictional tale about the 12<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Averroes (Nour El Cherif), a free-spirit who is liberal in his views and in his interpretation of the Qur'an. Fundamentalists, jealous of his close relationship with the Caliph Al Mansur (Mahmoud Hameida) in Andalusia, conspire to bring one of the Caliph's sons into their fold, and through him gain control of the Caliphate. But aided by the music which the young man enjoys so much, friends and loved ones, Averroes succeeds in clearing the youth's mind, and removing the feelings of loathing and hate that had been instilled in him.<sup>3</sup>

In 1976 Syrian-born, American-educated director Moustapha Akkad realized a life-long dream of bringing the story of Islam to the screen. Made with funding from Kuwait,

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<sup>2</sup> The film received the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Prize at the 1997 Cannes Film Festival.

<sup>3</sup> Several Algerian musicians and actors had become targets for fundamentalists who claimed that their work was 'not Islamic'

Morocco and Libya, *The Message* succeeded where Hollywood could not, by presenting the story of Islam from a Muslim point of view using a script that had been vetted and approved by Muslim clerics. In adhering to Muslim practice, the film also manages to tell the Prophet's story without representing him in person or image. In order to reach as much of the viewing public as possible and to avoid the awkwardness of dubbing in another language, Akkad decided to make two versions of the film which he shot simultaneously.<sup>4</sup> The films are almost identical shot for shot, the Arabic version slightly longer, to accommodate the language. *The Message* depicts the Arabs as cultured people who appreciate art and poetry, and does not show up Islam at the expense of the other faiths. It in fact states that the teachings of Islam were very similar to those of Christianity and Judaism, highlighting the humanitarian aspects of the religion; Islam put an end to the burial of new-born girls, which was a common practice among the pagans; it also encouraged almsgiving and abolished slavery. The film also retells how a group of early converts, fleeing from Mecca, took refuge in Abyssinia, ruled by a Christian king, "where no man is wronged in his country."

Tunisian director Ferid Boughedir's sophomore feature *A Summer in La Goulette* is a film that combines two stories. It is the story of friends of different religions who live in this Tunisian suburb, fifteen minutes from the centre of the capital. A port, which also doubles as a popular beach, La Goulette is famous for the diversity of its residents and for the constant activity on its streets. The film is also a plea for tolerance and peace as it provides a nostalgic look at life in Tunis prior to the 1967 Arab/Israeli war. Boughedir's work revolves around three families whose patriarchs are Youssef (Moustapha Adouani), a Muslim, Giuseppe (Ivo Salerno), who comes from a Catholic Sicilian background and Jojo (Guy Nataf), a Tunisian Jew. Their daughters Meriem (Sonia Makar), Tina (Ava Cohen-Jonathen) and Gigi (Sarah Pariente) are best friends. However, this friendship not only binds the daughters, but also their families, for they are neighbours living in the same building. The children play together, the girls go to the same dressmaking school, the wives share gossip and cooking recipes and the men argue over politics and go on fishing trips. They are, in fact, an extended family, going in and out of each other's flats with the familiarity of any family member in his own home. And despite the three tables, their meals are shared and enjoyed as though they were

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<sup>4</sup> Although he does use English dubbing in his film, Akkad cites this as one of the reasons behind making two versions of the same film in his *The Making of An Epic (The Message)* (1976).

sitting to eat together; in fact, Jojo makes allowances for Wassila's cooking, which is not Kosher.

After work, the men enjoy a game of cards at the café, while drinking and arguing about life's tribulations. In Youssef's mind, politics is about patriotism and not religion. Giuseppe and Jojo are men he has known for a long time and the fact that they do not share his faith should not stand in the way of their friendship. As he tells those making snide remarks about his friends, Jews fought for Tunisian independence alongside Muslims and not all non-Muslims fled to France in order to guarantee a French citizenship. And in response to someone asking as to why Jojo does not go to Israel, Hamouda, the café owner declares, "what makes you a Tunisian and not Jojo? Your name is Tarabulsi (Tripolitan) which obviously means your family must have originally come from there, maybe you should go back to Tripoli, however do you know which one to go to, the one in Libya or the one in Lebanon?" The families also share their faiths; they respect the Madonna and light candles for her, as well as other Christian Saints. Jojo and his family rely on their neighbours' help during the Sabbath, when they are forbidden to light the stove or turn on the electricity until sunset. All take part in the Virgin Mary parade on August 15<sup>th</sup> with both Youssef and Jojo lending a hand to carry the statue. What the film succeeds in portraying is the similarities between the three religions and despite the poverty and quibbling, the harmonious lives these families enjoy. When Tina tells her mother that the first chance she gets she would leave La Goulette, Lucia responds by asking why her daughter would want to leave the paradise they lived in, even if it did not smell pleasant on occasion. In the spring of 1967, to most of the residents, being Tunisian did not mean that you had to have an Arab or Muslim background, but that you lived there, and considered it your home. No one thought of leaving despite the rising tension in the Middle East and the constant threat of an Arab/Israeli war. The men pay no heed to the village idiot who feels it is his duty to listen to a number of Arab radio stations on his makeshift radio and inform them about the looming danger of aggression. For Tunisians, in 1967, the news that Claudia Cardinale had returned to visit her birthplace was more exciting than the possibility of a war in the Middle East; they were patriotic, but they did not feel that the problems of the Middle East should infringe on the Tunisian way of life. *A Summer in La Goulette* is also the story of youth and bidding adieu to innocence; the story of Tina, Meriem and Gigi, who decide that the time has come for them to lose their virginity

even thought they know this would bring upon their fathers' anger. What the girls are really out for is some fun, and they decide to find it with the young boys of the neighbourhood. However, to make things a little more exciting each girl chooses a suitor of a different faith; Miriam decides on the Christian, Gigi goes for the Muslim while Tina puts her eye on the Jew. When their plans go awry due to the meddling of Hadj Beji (Gamil Ratib), the fathers blame one another for what was about to happen; they ground their daughters and in a sense, themselves, since they stop speaking. They quickly realize the futility of such actions as they cannot really live without one another's company. They feel foolish to have permitted a difference in religion and background to come between their friendship.

The character of Hadj Beji plays a pivotal role in the film. He is presented as a 'grinch' who disrupts the tranquillity of the multi-ethnic life, by having lived in the 'East'.<sup>5</sup> He is ridiculed for sounding more 'eastern' in his speech and putting on airs, possibly a message to the rest of the Arab/Muslim world, that Tunisia would not allow the politics and conflicts of others to interfere in its cosmopolitan way of life.

## ii. False Truths

Despite the varying images presenting Middle Eastern cultures that were now accessible from Third World filmmakers, throughout the eighties and early nineties, Hollywood persisted in its demeaning and prejudiced portrayals. In 1979, America brokered the first peace agreement between an Arab country and the State of Israel. However, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat was much criticized for the Camp David Agreement by other Arab countries, which perceived his steps as a form of condescension to Israel and the West. The situation in the Middle East remained at an impasse and Sadat was eventually assassinated by his own countrymen, who had opposed his policies. What was perceived as a positive step for Middle East peace was quite disregarded by Western filmmakers, whose portrayals of Arabs and Muslims remained inferior. In the same year, the Islamic Revolution in Iran removed the pro-America Pahlavi regime from power, installing Islamic Shari'a (law). If this was not enough to convince the American public of the barbaric nature of the Muslims, in their eyes, the events of November 4, 1979 certainly did. On that day, a group

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<sup>5</sup> Refers to the Arab countries to the East as opposed to the Maghreb (Western) Arab countries of North Africa

of Iranian students seized control of the American embassy in Tehran taking several hostages; the crisis continued until January 20, 1981, when the 52 prisoners who had been held for 444 days were allowed out of Iran.

These and other events lead to what Edward Said describes as equating Fundamentalist Islam with dreaded ideologies as Fascism and Communism. Dedicated to pinpointing the manner in which the American media and the so called Middle East experts determine how the viewers see the rest of the world and in particular the Islamic world, Covering Islam cites many articles and reports on the fanatic Middle East, paying special attention to the coverage of the Hostage Crisis. In his book, Said highlights the prejudiced stance of a news report on events in the Middle East, whether it was an OPEC or conflict related crisis, be it in Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan or Bosnia and mentions the role that film and television has played in accentuating this difference. Images of Arab “baddies” as Jack Shaheen calls them were frequent on American television, making guest appearances in sitcoms and serials. As he puts it, the “four basic myths about Arabs” being fabulously wealthy, barbaric and uncultured, sex maniacs with a penchant for white slavery and reveling in acts of terrorism were oft used, on both the large and small screens (4). Muslims were subjected to such irreverent images as Eddie Murphy having sex with an Arab woman, while mimicking the muezzin’s call for prayers heard in the background, in William Huyck’s comedy *Best Defense* (1984) or presented as lowly subjects kneeling and prostrating themselves to their landowner in the television mini-series *Lace* (William Hale, 1984).<sup>6</sup>

When the words, “based on a true story” are employed at the start of a film, it usually leads to the false assumption that all events henceforth viewed should be regarded as the gospel truth. In this case, it is the story of American Betty Mahmoody, who barely survives, while struggling to escape, with her daughter, from the clutches of a fanatic husband. No one can describe *Not Without My Daughter* as an objective film; however, that was not its

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<sup>6</sup> Other films that perpetuated such negative stereotypical images included: Elaine May’s *Ishtar* (1987) about two lounge musicians who agree to perform at a hotel in a North African country and get caught up in a tribal conflict; *The Wind and the Lion* (John Milius, 1975), and *Sahara* (Andrew V. McLaglen, 1983) updated tales involving foreign women being abducted by Arab tribal leaders; *Iron Eagle* (Sidney J. Furie, 1986) and *Rambo III* (Peter MacDonald, 1988), different variations that involve hostages being caught up in a Muslim nation’s conflict requiring American intervention and rescue; Harold Robbins’ *The Pirate* (Ken Annakin, 1978) the television mini-series based on the author’s novel about the Arab/Israeli conflict and *Death of a Princess* (Anthony Thomas, 1980), the PBS produced docu-drama about the execution of a Saudi Princess and her lover (Both Said and Shaheen spend a considerable amount of time discussing this film in their books).

intention. Appearing on the large screen in the middle of the Gulf War, it brought home the difference between the United States and the Middle East. Although some of those nations were now regarded as American allies, the film's portrayal of Muslims is rampant with cultural clichés and stereotypical characteristics. Despite being on friendly terms with them, the film clearly states that such people were not to be trusted, and no matter how long a Muslim may have lived in North America, he would never change, just as a leopard cannot change his spots.

Moody Mahmoody (Alfred Molina) is that leopard, an Iranian born doctor who resides in Alpena, Michigan. Married to Betty (Sally Field), he has made America his home for the past twenty years; in his mind, he is "as American as apple pie," as he tells his daughter Mahtob (Sheila Rosenthal). It is 1984 and in the wake of the Iranian Revolution and the American Hostage Crisis, however, that does not prevent him from having to deal with prejudice almost on a daily basis. With bigoted remarks from his fellow colleagues, he feels more and more alienated from his adoptive homeland. When his sister complains that they have not seen him in a decade he starts planning a family visit to Tehran. Betty is hesitant about going to a dangerous foreign country but her mind is eased when her husband puts his hand over the Qur'an and swears that nothing will happen to them. And as Caryn James puts it, "when a foreign religion intrudes on apple-pie America it is a clear sign of trouble" to follow. (14)

Arriving in Tehran provides a quick change of scene. The turmoil and backwardness of the country is contrasted with the earlier images of peaceful and fun-filled family picnics beside the lake in Michigan. The primitive character of Iran is highlighted with the image of a sheep being slaughtered to ward off bad luck and to welcome the travelers, while Betty is presented with a chador and asked to cover herself. She quickly discovers how different Iran is from the home she left behind in America; this is a place where men and women are segregated even at mealtimes; wives are not supposed to question their husbands who would beat them when they thought they stepped out of line. In Betty's eyes, women practically have no rights in Khomeini's Iran, a country where a woman's sexuality is so feared that a hair that appears from under a scarf could amount to grave punishment. However, the viewer is expected to believe that within a few days, Moody falls into step with his family. Having voiced his astonishment, on arriving, at how different things were from the last time he

visited, Moody nevertheless quickly readopts the rituals of his faith and is made to appear as though he is participating in some form of cult worship. When Betty complains about something, he quickly takes her to task, asking her to show his family some respect; this man who days previously thought of himself as American was now detaching himself from any such association.

*Not Without My Daughter* brings in the notion of deceit being a Muslim characteristic; Moody is not to be believed in anything he says. The fact that he swore on the Qur'an means nothing, as it is brushed aside by his elders, whom Betty turns to for help, "God will forgive him because what he has done is for an Islamic cause," she is told. He is also heartless enough to consider that Betty would leave to visit her ailing father without her daughter, presenting Moody as someone who would use his own child as collateral to guarantee Betty's return. Moody's family and in particular his older sister Ameh Borzorg (Mony Rey) are depicted as fanatic fundamentalists and presented as caricature-like villains, who are never given the chance to really vocalize their own sentiments and beliefs within the world of the film; no English subtitles are provided for the spoken Persian, rendering the language not worthy enough for translation. Betty hopes to overcome this oppression by praying to her Christian God and resorting to a little deceit of her own, which she should be forgiven for, given the circumstances.

Brian Gilbert's film also indicates that all Muslims are not to be trusted like the Kurdish tribesman who attempts to assault Betty, unless they happen to like America. Hamid, a shopkeeper allows her to use the phone and gets her in touch with Houssein (Roshan Seth), who runs an underground group that smuggles Americans out of the country. Houssein bemoans what has happened to his country and talks fondly of the days of the Shah, when Iran was under the control of an Americanized regime. With Houssein's help Betty and Mahtob finally make their way out of the country and back home. The plot of the film mirrors the melodramatic formula talked about in Shohat and Stam's book Unthinking Eurocentrism, with regard to the Gulf War, both being replays of colonial-western narratives. The villain of the war Saddam Hussein has to be conquered by the superpower America and the hero George Bush, in order to rescue Kuwait, the damsel in distress (128). Kuwait is the good Muslim nation which adheres to Westernized views and American policies and is therefore worthy of rescue.

Released one year after *Not Without My Daughter* and the Gulf War, Disney's *Aladdin* is not a complimentary fairy tale about the Orient, nor is it a film to be brushed aside because it is animated. In an excellent essay highlighting the negative aspects of the film, Leslie Felperin makes the link between animated film and the East, both marginalized, one by a "dominant live action cinema" and the other by the West (141). She also correctly draws the similarities between this production and earlier Hollywood works, all derived from and based upon artistic works and translations from earlier centuries; in their book on the making of the film, Disney filmmakers own up to using Victorian paintings about the East and relying on films like Alexander Korda's *The Thief of Baghdad* (1940) (89). Publicity surrounding the film actually hyped up the notion that the production was created from images of the Middle East, albeit ones that were not constant with those being watched on television at the time. *Aladdin*, therefore, is a fusion of the mythical and mysterious yet dangerous and barbaric images of the East, in other words the product of all that is "manifestly different (or alternative and novel)" from what is perceived to be the West (Said, *Orientalism*, 12). Basically, whether it is news coverage of a war in Iraq or an animated 'children's' film about a young rascal, viewers were still being guided as to what they should watch and learn about the Arab/Muslim world.

Some critics may claim that by containing this story within the world of animation, Disney has created a caricatured form of the previous fables of the East, which should not be taken seriously. Others may see it simply as a way out for the Disney Company who had taken this form of filmmaking that was once regarded as part of the artistic avant-garde and turned it into "cartoon for kiddies."<sup>7</sup> The medium or the form in which these depictions are represented is of no consequence since they are inferior and false, reliant upon what has become a traditional portrayal of the East. The story of the film is set in a city called Agrabah, which as Felperin suggests could be a near acronym for Baghdad but is actually much closer to Aqaba.<sup>8</sup> It commences with strands of Oriental sounding music as the

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<sup>7</sup> In the introduction to her book *A Reader in Animation Studies*, Jayne Pilling talks of a time when animated films were discussed as part of an artistic avant-garde. In the twenties and thirties critical attention was given to this kind of film. Pilling goes on to add: "If animation tends to suggest 'cartoon for kiddies' this is clearly due, in great part to Disney. Following Disney's audacious gamble on the animated feature film, animation became defined by the Disney model – that of the cartoon as child/family entertainment, and as such, a no go area for most film critics and theorists other than for ideological/sociological analysis" (xi).

storyteller/narrator informs us: “Oh I come from a land from a far away place, where the caravan camels roll; where it’s flat and immense, and the heat is intense, it’s barbaric, but hey it’s home; when the wind’s from the East and the sun’s from the West, and the sand in the glass is bright, come on down, stop on by, hop a carpet and fly, to another Arabian night.” It is immediately clear that the basis for this story is derived from the inaccurate writings of Antoine Galland and Sir Robert F. Burton, reputed translators of the Arabian Nights, or to borrow Felperin’s words “*Aladdin* is far less concerned with a representation of any real Middle East than it is with re-presenting older Western representations of the Orient and the story” (139).<sup>9</sup>

So, instead of attempting to present true images of the Middle East, the makers of *Aladdin* borrowed from films like *Kismet* and *Harum Scarum*, creating an imaginary world filled with magic and danger; a world where thieves lived and flourished, relying on their wits, but should they be caught they would have their arms cut off; a world where men fight for power using any available means. It is a world where women are not favoured and seen as burdens that need to be married off, hence the sultan’s interest in finding a husband for his daughter Jasmine. This film produces a created world that includes a melange of all that is Eastern, whether it is an Arab character, an Indian tiger or a Persian rug, and where writing takes on the form of Arabic calligraphy, but has no meaning. A film supposedly about the East, *Aladdin* is nevertheless intended for a Western audience. The humour is laced with catchy words and phrases all from American pop culture, revolving around baseball, game-shows, cheerleading and other Walt Disney characters; “Brush up your Sunday Salaam” says the Genie which would not have had the desired effect if the more culturally-apt Friday had been used. One may wonder at the reasons for re-deploying these old images of the Arab/Muslim world. Maybe it was due to the uncertainty of how to deal with the situation now that America was not only fighting an Arab country, but also had Arab allies to support; just as the title track of the film says, this certainly was “a whole new world.” However, it appears that like the brush strokes or computer programs created by the animator, George Bush’s “new world order” still has control over the East or to quote Felperin once more,

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<sup>8</sup> The Jordanian Red Sea port city.

“Oriental imagery becomes one of the many special effects, something that superior Western technology, like the weaponry in the Gulf War, can create and control” (141).

If *Aladdin* exploits the Orient by turning it into a cartoon image, the live-action film *True Lies* (1994) further ridicules Muslims by presenting them as inept yet immoral terrorists out to gain control of the world. James Cameron’s film does not stray far from the formula used in previous films dealing with a similar subject matter. The hero, who in this case is a cross-between James Bond and Superman, must eventually rid the world of the evil Salim Abu Aziz (Art Malik), leader of the hard-core militant faction Crimson Jihad, a terrorist group out to blackmail the world with stolen nuclear warheads. As times have changed and the Cold War is now a thing of the past, this secret agent has to deal with a new dreaded foe, Islam. Harry Tasker (Arnold Schwarzenegger) works for the Omega Sector – the last line of Defense in the American Intelligence Network; to his wife Helen (Jamie Lee Curtis) and daughter Dana (Eliza Dushku) however, he is a computer salesman. The plot of the film is hampered by Harry’s mistaken assumption that his wife is having an affair. In his attempt to feed her need for excitement, he decides to play a trick on her by making believe she was part of a covert spy operation. This backfires when Aziz kidnaps them both, turning the ‘imaginary’ to ‘real’, hence the title of the film. This, however, creates a situation where the rescue is a more personal one for Harry, since it not only involves the free world, but his wife, and later, his daughter.

*True Lies* borders on the buffoonery in its portrayals of the Muslim terrorists, possibly creating characters with less dimensions than the ones found in Disney’s *Aladdin*, presenting them as dirty, low-life scum who dare presume that they could win a battle with America. By making Faisal (Grant Heslov) part of the Omega sector team, the film plays off the good Muslim, who sides with America versus the bad one, who wishes to destroy it. The film is loaded with clichés such as “that’s the problem with terrorists, they’re really inconsiderate when it comes to people’s schedules” or the comment Harry’s side-kick and partner Gib (Tom Arnold) makes while trying to lift his friends spirits: “ We’re gonna catch some terrorists, we’re gonna beat the crap out of them, and we’re gonna feel a whole lot better.” And that in a nutshell is the real reason behind a film such as *True Lies*, which many like

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<sup>9</sup> One of a number of popular children’s stories like *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* and *Sindbad the Sailor*, Felperin states that Galland was the first to incorporate the story of *Aladdin* into the *Arabian Nights* and there have been suggestions that the story was possibly written by him (139).

Peter Bart think is a “summer popcorn picture, plain and simple” and not worth philosophizing about (6). True enough the film is intended as a summer blockbuster, hoping to reap as much box-office money as possible, and what better subject than America, the superpower, conquering the villainous Arab, just as it did in its recent war against Saddam Hussein. Unlike the humiliation it had suffered in another Third World country war, this was a victory to be replayed again and again.

### iii. Changing Images?

Although the Peace Process had allayed some of the fears about the Middle East, Hollywood did not relinquish its hold on the demonized Arab/Muslim. And despite having Arab allies during the Gulf War, Americans still attributed most acts of terrorism to Arabs and Muslims; such was the case in the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York in February 1993. This was also the immediate assumption after the Oklahoma bombing in April 1995. Edward Zwick’s 1998 film *The Siege* revolves around this theme. The film commences with television reports about bombings of American sites in Arab countries, reminiscent of the bombing of the American compound in Dhahran, inter-cut with news footage quoting President Clinton that such acts of terrorism would not go unpunished. The attacks are attributed to Sheikh Ahmad Bin Talal, “a well-known radical fundamentalist Muslim cleric,” who is taken into custody and the scene cuts from the worry beads held in the hands of the sheik, sitting in his prison cell to the muezzin calling for prayer, at a Mosque in New York, and then to the FBI headquarters. With these first scenes, associating Islam with violence, *The Siege* appears to be another of Hollywood’s creations aimed at undermining Muslims and presenting them as murders and terrorists. In that aspect, *The Siege* certainly does not disappoint; however, unlike its predecessors, it goes one step beyond.

Recalling earlier films like *The Little Drummer Girl*, *The Siege*, ‘romanticizes’ the Palestinian conflict while at the same time categorizing the Palestinian as a terrorist, yet it also warns about the results of such labelling. When New York witnesses a spate of bomb explosions, the army is finally called in to take control of the city. The siege shifts from that of a suicide bomber holding hostages on a bus, to the United States army holding New York

hostage and the target is Arab-Americans, who are all rounded up and placed in a football stadium, reminiscent of internment camps that were filled with Americans of Japanese descent, during World War Two. Suddenly citizens who had pledged their loyalty to the United States and had called themselves Americans for decades are hoarded up as animals, and not even the son of an FBI agent is exempt. With a self-accusing finger, *The Siege* cautions against the outcome of constant “policy shifts.” In effect, what America was reaping was of its own doing. The Muslim cleric, accused of masterminding the bombings was, at one time, an American ally who was going to help them get rid of Saddam. Changing political climates, however, necessitated a shift in policy and all American support was halted, resulting in a massacre of his people. *The Siege* is one of a number of films, produced in the late nineties, which, on the surface appeared to only promote further negative stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims, yet were also self-recriminatory.

John McTiernan’s *The 13<sup>th</sup> Warrior* (1999), on the other hand, is quite an intriguing film. Adapted from Michael Crichton’s novel Eaters of the Dead, which adopts a style similar to that of the epic Beowulf poem, it recounts the story of Ahmad Ibn Fahdlan (sic), emissary of the Caliph of Baghdad to the land of Tossuk Vlad. Crichton gives his fictitious character the name of an Arab writer from the tenth century A.D. who had travelled from Baghdad into areas of what is now Russia. Ibn Fadlan’s manuscript became a primary source for scholars as it provided the earliest first-hand accounts of Viking life and culture.<sup>10</sup> The story is told from Ahmad’s (Antonio Banderas) point of view and recounts the events that lead him to be recruited by a group of Northmen to join them in their hunt for the beast which has been attacking their villages and killing their families. What starts off as a rather weak and overly protesting character on the written page is transformed into a knowledgeable, resourceful and skilled figure on the screen; McTiernan’s film presents Ahmad as a man, not free of fault, but one who willingly learns from his mistakes and is ready to change his perceived misconceptions of others. A Western creation, Ahmad is a far cry from the stereotypical image seen in films like *True Lies*; he is also made eyewitness to events in the tradition of the Iliad and Beowulf, two of the oldest stories of Western civilization. In fact, according to the film, Ahmad’s journal provides the origin of such

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<sup>10</sup> Crichton provides a “factual note” at the end of his novel giving background information (182-186).

stories. *The 13<sup>th</sup> Warrior* turns the tables on those early ‘orientalists’ whose writings of the East were the inspiration behind the false mythical and exotic portrayals of Hollywood films.

In 922 A.D. Ahmad leaves his home in Baghdad “the greatest city in the world” and travels with his trusted companion Melchisidek (Omar Sharif). They come across the Northmen who are awaiting the death of their leader and preparing for the farewell ceremony. Ahmad is horrified at the manner they bid adieu to their dead, offering a young woman, who is cremated with the body, as sacrifice to the gods. The film initially picks up on the differences between people and cultures, highlighting bias and prejudice. Ahmad finds the Northmen dirty, uncivilized and always drunk, seeking pleasure in killing and bloodletting; he scoffs at their beliefs in witchcraft and myths and wonders at their pagan worshipping. They, on the other hand, make fun of his stallion calling it a dog, but then they discover that bigger does not always mean stronger. Aware that he could not understand their tongue, they make snide derogatory remarks about him, yet they are astonished at the speed with which he familiarizes himself with their language. In turn, Ahmad finds he may have been hasty in his judgement of the Northmen; they were serious warriors, who knew when to keep their heads clear. Despite being illiterate, and after only showing him once how it is written, Ahmad is surprised at Buliwyl’s (Vladimir Kulich) ability to reproduce a phrase written in Arabic.

*The 13<sup>th</sup> Warrior* shows that despite outward differences, varying societies share many beliefs and have similar codes of conduct; both Arabs and Northmen put their trust in fate, respect their guests and remember well their dead. The message of the film hints at the possible exchange of information despite the minor differences. By spending time with the Northmen, Ahmad becomes a better warrior, but he also teaches them that in order to outsmart your enemy, one needs to plan ahead and have a strategy in battle; differences aside he is quickly adopted to the fold and is referred to as “little brother”. On his departure, one of his friends informs him they will be praying for his safe journey, when asked who they would be praying to, Herger (Dennis Storhoi) replies: “In your country, it may be enough to have one God, but we need many, so as not to offend you, we will pray to all.” *The 13<sup>th</sup> Warrior* reminds Western viewers that how we see others could be similar to the way they see us and instead of watching with prejudiced eyes and concentrating on differences, if more time is spent on the similarities, less issues of conflict would arise.

One such conflict is the subject of the 1998 film *Shot Through The Heart* (David Attwood). Based on a story about two friends, who end up on opposing sides, in the war, in the former Yugoslavia, for the most part, the film manages to avoid the common pitfalls of choosing sides and good versus bad portrayals. Vlado (Linus Roache) and Slavko (Vincent Perez) have been best friends most of their lives, never allowing their different faiths to intervene. Both men have competed on the Yugoslav National Rifle Team, and were practicing for the Olympics; however, the war puts an end to their dreams. Initially, the two avoid being pigeon-holed into their respective groups of Bosnian Muslim and Serb, but eventually the war catches up with them. Slavko is recruited by the Serbian army to train snipers, but Vlado manages to hold out a little longer. Slavko tries to help his friends by securing tickets out of the country for them, but they refuse to become refugees. Eventually the two men end up fighting on opposing sides and when Vlado realizes that it is his best friend who is killing civilians on the streets of Bosnia, he seeks him out, knowing that he would be forced to kill him. Admittedly *Shot through the Heart* may harbour more resentment for the Serbs; however the film's main message is about the futility and inhumanity of war and what it does to people. As actor Linus Roache aptly put it, the story "is a metaphor for the insanity of the whole war" ([www.detnews.com](http://www.detnews.com)).

David O. Russell's 1999 film *Three Kings* is more of a film about the Gulf War than on the war. And unlike its subject matter, this is not a traditional war film, from which the viewer emerges with a feeling of exhilaration at the outcome of the battles. In news reports, the war itself had thus been portrayed. Brought into the home of every American citizen via the television, the Gulf war was given the Hollywood treatment and "presented as a macro-entertainment, one with a beginning (Desert Shield), a middle (Desert Sword) and an end (Desert Storm), all undergirded by the fictive telos: the "New World Order"(Shohat & Stam 125). The names attached to the stages recalled the 'orientalist's' exotic point of view associated with 19<sup>th</sup> century literature and earlier Western productions, as well as evoking religious imagery linked to the Crusades. The Gulf War became a battle of wills between America's George Bush and Iraq's Saddam Hussein, with the American people rooting for their man as they watched and took part in the conflict. No longer was the enemy regarded as Arabs or Muslims en masse, it was personified in the form of the Iraqi president. America had Arab and Muslim allies, like Egypt and Saudi Arabia and was fighting to regain

another's invaded territory. Media coverage of the war did not have to take on a neutral tone; news reporters and anchors felt comfortable in using condemning rhetoric to describe Iraq, taking the viewers into the battlefields and converting them into armchair soldiers. Yet despite this, it was never really clear to the American layman why his nation had gone to war. And by camouflaging the truth and using "the imperial imaginary," it was once again placating its citizens into believing it was continuing in its fight to make the world 'safe for democracy'. *Three Kings* refutes this.

The film's starting point coincides with the end of the fighting, putting emphasis on the soldiers' feelings of confusion and frustration; some had not seen any action and for them this had been a strange war. Despite having reported the war, journalist Adriana Cruz (Nora Dunn- with a striking resemblance to CNN's Christiane Amanpour), cannot figure out what it was all about. She puts forward a question to one of the soldiers, pondering if this victory for the American nation vindicates the loss of the Vietnam War. The soldier is unable to relate to her question, as he cannot really explain in the name of what they had gone to war and why he was on foreign soil fighting on the side of people he still refers to in derogatory terms like 'rag-heads'. For them it was a game of 'playing war', from which they had been informed they emerged victorious. Quite ironically, however, the soldiers feel obliged to sing of the glory of America and how they love "this land of the USA", standing as they do in the middle of an Arabian desert somewhere between Iraq and Kuwait. In the midst of their celebrations and taking Iraqi Prisoners of War, the men come across a map. Special Forces Officer Archie Gates (George Clooney) realizes this could be the map to the hidden Kuwaiti gold bullion which had been stolen by Saddam's army. He enlists three soldiers, Troy Barlow (Mark Wahlberg), Chief Elgin (Ice Cube) and Conrad Vig (Spike Jonze) to help him capitalize on this fortunate incident, and thus he would at least stand to gain something out of his tour of duty.

Not only taking a stab at Western financial interests in the Gulf, *Three Kings* is laced with moments showing American bigotry and bias. Conrad has a habit of making remarks that highlight his lack of education; he compares their mission to that of Moses and is corrected by Chief who informs him that he has his Middle Eastern countries confused, as that was Egypt. He does not realize that America now has Arab allies and when asked if American soldiers were trained to kill all Arabs, he responds in the affirmative. Troy defends

Conrad by referring to him as a southern redneck who had not finished high-school and should not be faulted for his ignorance. Chief is offended when Conrad refers to the Arabs as sand-coons and dune-niggers, because of their close association with demeaning references used by whites to describe his African-American race; however, towel-heads and camel-jockeys are fine by him. The American army uses picture cards in order to explain to the Iraqi POWs if they surrender they would be fed, as though they are incapable of understanding the spoken language.

The film criticizes the violence of war. Archie makes it clear that the use of weapons is to be avoided, explaining to the trigger happy Conrad, in graphic visual detail, what a bullet does to the insides of a human being. He explains how the army had dropped bombs and buried people alive and that was not the intention of his mission. *Three Kings* also highlights the deceit America had used in portraying all Iraqis as monsters, unwilling to concede that on many occasions the innocent civilians who were dying from American bombs, while taking refuge in shelters, were simply pawns being used by both sides. Upon entering one of the villages, the soldiers are surprised to see the people coming out of their hiding places asking for food, thinking that the American army had come to free them from Saddam's soldiers. As Archie explained, Bush told the people to rise up against Saddam and they did, thinking they would have the support of the West; in the end, they did not get any help.

*Three Kings* presents a different Arab portrayal to the one previously shown to the American viewer. This Arab is educated, and had knowledge of other cultures and languages as depicted by Amir Abdulah (Cliff Curtis), who had studied in the States and then came back home to open some cafés; he was doing fine until the Americans started bombing his establishments. Not all were blood-thirsty terrorists, as previously made out to believe, for some were even oppressed by their own leadership. And not every Iraqi hated America; they just wanted to get on with their lives in peace. Similarities between the American and Iraqi soldiers are emphasized during the interrogation session that takes place between Troy and his Iraqi captor; both admit to having enlisted in order to have money for their families. Captain Said (Said Taghmaoui) questions the morals of a State that differentiates in its treatment between races; he knows America does not really care about the welfare of the Kuwaitis, just as they do not care they are killing women and children; of importance to them

is the oil that Kuwait possesses. America, he explains, only cares about its own interests at any given time, so why then would it send soldiers to kill armed men it had once trained to fight Iran? yesterday's ally had become today's enemy! This is clearly stated by Amir when asking Archie to help them rescue their families: "The big army of democracy beats the ugly dictator to help save the rich Kuwaitis, yet you would go to jail if you help us escape the same dictator?" reminding him of his wife, who was shot by an Iraqi soldier while beseeching the Americans not to leave them behind.

Although progressive in its ideas and portrayals, *Three Kings* is also not completely free of what Shohat and Stam have called the "Imperial Imaginary". In depicting Iraqi civilians and in particular the Kurds as oppressed minorities, the film gives America the right to intervene and rescue them, from the autocratic leadership. Archie and his mates agree to share the gold with the villagers and do help them to free their families. The soldiers finally redeem themselves by handing over their share of the gold to guarantee the safe passage of the villagers to a refugee camp at the Iraqi/Iranian border. In doing so, they managed to accomplish what their own nation did not. The United States, did not reveal its real reasons for going to war in aid of Kuwait, namely to guarantee control of the 'black gold' the Gulf State owns. It also has not provided much relief for the Iraqi people, who are forced to live under sanctions that restrict the amount of food and medicines entering the country. At the end of the film, journalist Adriana Cruz gets her award winning story and with her reporting secures an honourable discharge for the soldiers, who otherwise would have been court-martialed for breaking the cease-fire and killing four Iraqi soldiers. Media coverage saves the moment, although this time it may be warranted, unlike the coverage of the actual war, which guaranteed a victorious outcome, no matter what the truth was. And with the not so great box-office receipts for *Three Kings*, it was obvious that the American public is not quite ready for the truth.

## Conclusion

Arab/Muslim images in film have not varied tremendously over a century of Hollywood productions. Inherited from the fertile imaginations of early travellers writing about their discoveries in the East, these depictions were lifted from the pages of books and oil canvases and brought to life onto the big screen. Initially portrayed as exotic and sexually deviant beings, to accentuate their contrast to Christians, the changing political climate necessitated their graduation into monsters of a different kind. The most notable change came as a result of the Arab/Israeli conflict, with Arabs being relegated to the role of enemy or bad guy. Demented and fanatic mannerisms portrayed by the Mahdi in *Khartoum* progressed or, more appropriately, regressed into murderous terrorist behaviour carried out by Arabs in films like *Black Sunday*. Further political developments like the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the ensuing American Hostage Crisis, as well as bomb attacks attributed to Arabs and Muslims, such as at the World Trade Center, continually fed the Hollywood filmmaker's imagination. The result was further hostile and prejudiced images of Arabs and Muslims. Following the Oslo Peace Accords signed between the Israelis and the Palestinians and the Peace treaty between Jordan and Israel, a slight change in depictions of Arabs/Muslims has appeared on the scene. Films like *Three Kings* and *The Siege* show more maturity in dealing with Middle Eastern issues and Hollywood is permitting a more introspective look at the East/West conflicts.

However, despite the slightly improved images that have appeared in the past few years, it does not appear that Hollywood will soon be changing its view regarding what it obviously views as the enemy. Misguided by the media and news reports, the American viewer is lulled into believing that this animosity towards Middle Eastern cultures differs from other forms of prejudice because it inspires nationalistic and patriotic feelings. Taking into account America's past record on civil rights and racial prejudice, it begs the question, how long will Hollywood continue to pigeon-hole the Arab/Muslim/Middle Easterner as the 'bad guy', and how does this resonate with the viewer? Despite the improving relations between the United States and some Muslim countries, such depictions will probably continue until filmmakers are provided with new cause to come up with an alternative, thus continuing the traditional fixation that America, the superpower, is fighting to save the world from the latest thug. As long as they are under the misguided notion that there is a difference in 'types of prejudice' based on feelings of nationalism and patriotism, the North American viewer will continue to regard Middle Eastern cultures in a demeaning fashion. With their opinions of right and wrong influenced by biased

media coverage and negative screen portrayals, resentment of other cultures will continue to fester. In a 'new world order' where societies are made up of different races, one would think that people learn from past errors of judgement, allowing for more tolerance and acceptance of others, but as Hollywood has repeatedly shown, in films like *The Peacemaker* (Mimi Leder, 1997), America needs its enemies in order to emerge as the do-gooder.

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