

Tracing the Roots of American Cinematic Vilification of Arabs and Muslims

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Abstract

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

Keywords: Muslims and Arabs, American cinema, stereotypical representation.

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Résumé

Le cinéma Américain est imprégné de représentations stéréotypées de divers groupes ethniques et raciaux, mais les nombreux stéréotypes et fausses représentations qui empoisonnent Hollywood sont ceux du monde musulman et de ses habitants ont ostensiblement été les plus dommageables et les plus résistants. Depuis le début de Hollywood entreprise, Le cinéma Américain fait paraître les Arabes et les Musulmans en tant exotiques. L'Arabe apparaît comme un personnage terroriste grossier, barbare et violent dans plus d'un millier de films. Cet article analyse ce qui promeut l'image négative omniprésente des Arabes et des Musulmans, d'où elle vient, et pourquoi elle persiste et continue toujours a apparaître dans l'industrie cinématographique Américaine.

Mots clés: les Musulmans et les Arabes, le cinéma Américain, la représentation stéréotypée.

ملخص

تعد السينما الأمريكية مليئة بالصور النمطية لمختلف المجموعات الدينية والعرقية. من بين كل الصور والتحريفات التي تملئ هوليوود تعد تلك الخاصة بالعالم الإسلامي و سكانه الأكثر ضرراً. منذ أن بدأ التصوير و الإنتاج السينماتوغرافي في الظهور، أظهرت هوليوود العربي على أنه شخصية إرهابية وبربرية وعنيفة في معظم الأفلام. تنطرق هذه المقالة إلى ما يروج هذه الصور السلبية عن العرب و المسلمين، من أين تأتي، و لماذا تستمر في الظهور في السينما الأمريكية. حيث تحاول إظهار كيف أن الخوف من الآخر أدى إلى خلق شخصية العربي الخطير في السينما الأمريكية .

الكلمات المفتاحية: المسلمون والعرب ، السينما الأمريكية ، التمثيل النمطي.

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I. Introduction

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

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

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

Stereotypes are so powerful, so hard to eliminate, and self-perpetuating. They are nurtured by the popular culture through television programs, jokes, songs, comic strips, cartoons, movies and the like. Cynical stereotypes of racial and ethnic groups accompany Americans from childhood morning cartoons to adulthood. Image-makers grew up watching hundreds of wicked Arabs and Muslims in cartoons, comic strips, and video games. Some of them might naturally accept and repeat the stereotypes without realizing. The image that they produce about this distinctive social group is simply how they had seen them depicted again and again. Arab/Muslim Stereotypes are generalizations gone rotten that single out Arabs as backward, inferior, vagabond, devilish, and subhuman through popular culture.

American motion picture industry is considered to be well-established and has a wide scope throughout the globe. It is the world's greatest entertainer and most effective teacher of youngsters, as it reaches into every aspect of individuals' lives and influences the way they think and act in real life. The ability to stereotype racial and ethnic groups is both dangerous and damaging. The consistent portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in a negative light in movies affects the way the Hollywoodian audience perceives this distinctive social group in real life. Although the negative roles attributed to Arab characters in movies are part of the fictitious stories for TV shows and movies, the general audience becomes accustomed to seeing them in such negative roles. And

even if stereotypes are so deeply ingrained in American cinema and are a profitable tool for movie producers and scenario writers, the enduring denigration of Arabs and Muslims in antagonistic roles may undoubtedly encourage the public to form biased views about Arabs and Muslims. The real issue here is what motivates this dangerously unswerving pattern of hateful Arab/Muslim stereotypes in Hollywood.

II. The Roots of Misconception

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

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

The representation of the Islamic Orient as a place that should be feared, controlled, and domesticated that emerged during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries smoothly found its way onto the silver screen. Moviemakers continue to associate the Muslim world, Arabs, and Muslims with threat, violence, and terrorism not only to the West but also to the Muslim world. Besides, The West is not only represented as superior and opposed to what the Muslim world is, but also as its protector. The frequent portrayal of Arabs and Muslims as terrorists and violent is accompanied by the projection of an American hero, who at the end of the movie defeats and domesticates the Muslim rage. *Three Kings* and *The Army Now* released respectively in 1999 and 1994, in which the American army presence in the Gulf is projected as a rescue mission, clearly represent this idea. Such an attitude of representation aims to justify the American gigantic role as a protector and a peacekeeper in the Muslim world.

This narration of America's superiority and exceptionalism persisted and continue to manifest itself in new and dynamic forms through time. Obviously, there is power in what we watch and how we view it; the essential theme of American exceptionalism has been proliferated through the American movie industry for centuries. Various movies have bombarded the audience, whether American or non-American, with putrid images of a superior, hegemonic, and God-favored America. The majority of Hollywood movies promoted the United States as a benevolent force in world affairs, supported the American foreign policy, and almost never criticized American exceptionalism at any serious level.

A key facet of Orientalism is the masse generalization of the Orient. The tendency to generalize the Orient creating a monolithic entity called the 'Other' or the 'Rest' is prevalent in Hollywood movies. 'Arabs' are equated to 'Muslims' even though Arabs make slightly more than 12 percent of the whole Muslim world population and that not all Arabs are Muslim, nor are all Muslims Arab. Due to this popular conflation of the two, many of the stereotypes which Hollywood applies to Arabs are also applied to other Middle Easterners and Islamic groups. This tendency to

monolithically depict the Muslim world appeared in movies such as *The Sheik* (1920), *True Lies* (1994), and *Commando* (1968) in which All Arabs are grouped as fanatic and violent.

Although a relatively new form of media, the American cinema emerged as an effective tool of entertainment. Movies became part of the human's everyday life; they repeatedly transmit certain selected representations to people around the world and contributed to the re/shaping of beliefs and values. Various academic scrutinies of the movie industry have unveiled that the movie-making is political, and brought to the full light of day the intimate relation that ties Hollywood and Washington.

Politics and the motion picture industry are inextricably interconnected through mutual benefits. Whereby, in return for promoting the American ideas and values and enhancing the notion of American superiority and heroism, moviemakers receive financial and material support, equipment, personnel, technical assistance, and mainly the sponsorship of political officials in movies that promoted government actions. This unique relation that ties Hollywood and Washington allows the American government to impact the way friend and foe nations should be portrayed through the moving pictures.

American policymakers have recognized that the moving pictures could be used to advance a particular sanitized view, and to manipulate the audience into endorsing the government policy actions in different parts of the world. For such reason, a Liaison office was created during the late 1920s by the United States War Department to act as a bridge between the movie industry and the Armed Forces. This so-called visual screen politics impact cultural values and shape political priorities by placing influential stereotypes into the minds of viewers.

With that being said, Hollywood can be seen as a Pentagon device used to provide ideological backup and manipulate the American public consciousness in support of the nation's foreign policy and imperial objectives (Robb 15). Undeniably, viewed through Hollywood lens, the United States is always engaged in a good war. The American great arsenal is only used to secure the world's stability and order from radical actors. *The Jerusalem File* (1973), *Operation Thunderbolt* (1977), *The Kingdom* (2007), *Lone Survivor* (2013) are among a variety of other movies that clearly projected the American 'white man's burden' role of a protector against the increasing threat of the Middle East radicalism.

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

In fact, Arabs and Muslims make a newsworthy issue only during the political crisis. This political context tells much about their portrayal in war and action movies. One of the perfect examples which reveals the coalition between Hollywood and Washington is the fact that every American administration, from 1948 to the present day, has sided with the forcibly established Jewish settlement in Palestine. This very reason has prevented Americans from sympathizing with millions of tyrannized Palestinians who were so equally unjustly represented in Hollywood movies such as; *Death Before Dishonor* (1987) and *Black Sunday* (1977) (Shaheen 4:07-5:16).

Since the 1940s, Image-makers helped to make the Middle East region meaningful to most Americans. It forged the connection that allowed them to see

themselves as closely involved, religiously and historically, in the Middle East in order to legitimate the nation's cultural, political, and economic interest in the region. Hollywood's production was used to help mobilize American public opinion in favor of Israel and American involvement in the Middle East. The release of *Exodus* in 1960 based on Leon Uris's novel, informed Americans about the newly formed Israel and made the Zionist story of Israel an American tale. Indeed, Israel was regarded as an America-like refuge that had been fought for and won by Jews (McAlister 163). The movie deliberately dehumanized Arabs and was heavily prejudiced in favor of Israel.

Up to this point, news media headlines and printed media Orientalist articles have had a powerful role in the creation and the perpetuation of derogatory stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims. Newspaper headlines, editorial cartoons and articles in magazines inspire moviemakers' storylines. Undeniably, film producers' opinions and perceptions are formed on the basis of what they read, hear, and see on the news media. Besides, most of the images that Americans hold in their heads about social groups and foreign nations are the result of news media reporting.

Because movies are reflections of the real life, the choice of villain in American movies is dictated by headlines and events that magnetize the public attention. This certainly explains why Arabs and Muslims are the villains of choice since the late part of the twentieth century. They are the latest ethnic group that is cast in stereotypical bad-guy roles in American cinema since the fall of Soviet Communism (Shaheen, "The Hollywood Arab: 1984-1986" 148). Essentially, the enduring news media visual representation of Arabs and Muslims as villains in nightly news footage, magazines, showed pictures of militant Muslims, and printed informative articles acts as both a source and a ploy for the permanent moviemakers tarnishing of Arabs/Muslims' image in movies. The continuous flow of seen one, seen them all headlines and misrepresentations in Orientalist articles have in a kind filtered down to moviemakers and network producers. Moviemakers would often point to the news to justify their portrayals, objecting that they are not stereotyping Arabs and Muslims (Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs* 29).

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

American media and Hollywood disdain from presenting Arabs and Muslims positively. Arab accomplishments and contributions to civilizations in various fields are never referred to (Shaheen, "The Arab Stereotypes on Television" 1). Within the American cinema, one can only see Arabs as enemies, villains, anti-Jewish, anti-American, or anti-Christian terrorists bent on ruining Western civilization. It is almost no single entertainment program or cinematic production has projected Arabs and Muslims in positive light as ordinary citizens living an ordinary life.

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

Such ill-equipment in terms of education and experience drove American news reporters, moviemakers, and TV executives to turn to Orientalism for alimentation

picking up thereby, old prejudices that went back centuries. This enormous lack of knowledge and interest in the Muslim world has always had a serious impact on the American perception of Arabs and Muslims, for it oversimplifies Islam to simple ideas related to oil, terror, underdevelopment, and antagonism toward the Western values and democracy. Some scholars, however, would quarrel that ignorance and apathy are not the only source of the Arabs and Muslims' distorted visions in movies, and would rather point to the specific kind of knowledge established on religious and racial animosity toward this distinctive social group (Hamada 8). Western cultural hostility and racism that was developed since the very early encounter between the West and Islam dictated, in a way or another, the visual characterization of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood production for centuries.

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

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

Jews recognized the value of using the power of the moving images in American motion picture industry to constantly portray some of their long-suffering arch enemies negatively (Cones 26). Their grip on the American cinema promotes bias against Arabs and Muslims. Since the Jewish settlement in Palestine in 1948, a new cinema genre of 'good versus bad' around the Arab-Israeli conflict was developed, through which Hollywood manifested support for Israel and crafted a sinister image of Arabs as savage and barbaric. Jews were able to brainwash the American and the world's audience with a powerful form of propaganda, which is Hollywood. Despite the raising argument that the Jewish control over the movie business declined by the end of the twentieth century, yet the Jewish control, dominance, and influence over the entertainment and motion picture industry is still higher than any other identifiable racial, ethnic, or cultural group. Certainly, in dealing with the roots of misrepresentation in Hollywood one cannot ignore the role of Zionism in distorting facts and manipulating truth. Arabs and Muslims' representation in American movies is one-sided, with little effort being made by moviemakers to balance such portrayal, due to the absence of the Arab voice.

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

American society since antiquity, constituting an integral part of America's European folk heritage.

From the early years of the American campaign against Native Americans to the Japanese during World War Two, Russians during the Cold War, and lately Arabs since the Iranian Hostage Crisis 1980 and the Gulf War 1991, the 'Other' has been represented as a barbaric menace. Hollywood tended to portray the enemy as sub-human and malevolent. Portraying enemies negatively in movies during times of war has been very frequent in Hollywood (Alsultany 162). Thus, it is important to point to the link between the end of the Cold War and the shift in the enemy role in Hollywood movies. The pejorative representation of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood movies can also be attributed to the long-lasting fear of the cultural 'Other', and the Arab replacement of the Soviet Communism as the new villain, which became a widespread entertainment theme in American cinematic representation of Arabs and Muslims since the 1980s.

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

While some scholars, to name Tim Semmerling among others, agree with this assumption, others such as Jamie C. Fries strongly rejected it and believed that the exotic element was already used in the depiction of Arabs and Muslims before the collapse of Soviet Communism. That is true, yet, it would be conventional to argue that there is a relation between the representation of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood and American foreign policy objectives in the Muslim world. Several political events in the past century left a touch on Hollywood's production. The increased American engagement with the Muslim world has led to a proliferation of movies that focused on the Middle East, its people, their relationship with the West, and the ongoing battle between 'good' and 'evil', or freedom and repression. Hollywood's despising and slanderous representation of Arabs and Muslims aimed to further reinforce the concept of "exoticism" and continuously detach Arabs and Muslims as primitive and backward in need of Western and mainly American guidance.

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

Nevertheless, Orientalist essays helped engender a common and solid belief that Muslims and Arabs are the West's number one enemy. Arabs and Muslims' image in Western media has been highly disfigured by anti-Muslim Orientalists such as, Daniel Pipes, Khalid Duran, Judith Miller, Martin Peretz, Bernard Lewis, and others. Their numerous articles and essays have been obsessed with Muslim/Arab hatred and helped broadly disseminate images of devilish Islam, Arabs, and Muslims in the West. Plenty of Orientalist articles and images that openly endorse the perception that Islam is a violent religion and its adherents are innately dangerous and threatening educated most Americans about Arabs and Muslims. Academic John Esposito believed that

American Orientalists intellectuals, policymaker officials, and the mainstream media had identified the 'Islamic fundamentalism' as a new global ideology menace to fill a 'threat vacuum' engendered by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War (3-5). As the twenty-first century embarked on, the emergence of a new genre of Orientalism known as neo-Orientalism, which has renewed, extended and exaggerated the old one, contributed to paint the whole Muslim world with the same sinister brush (Edwards, *After the American Century* 206).

When terrorism became a salient issue following the 9/11 attacks, Islamophobia came to replace the antecedent Orientalism, which was crafted before the attacks. It saw a rapid evolution, and precisely, after the beginning of the war on terror campaign. During this period, Hollywood contributed with the sponsor of the Pentagon to reawaking and spreading pre-existing toxic Islamophobic sentiments worldwide. Nowadays, Arabs and Muslims are shown to threaten the very freedom of the United States. Such representation is so unyielding and insidious and perpetuated because it is politically motivated. The West has always had a latent hostility toward Arabs and Muslims thereby the negative images are often assimilated unconsciously. Entertainment makers continue to exploit stereotypes for benefits.

III. Conclusion

Constructing images about individuals and events is a complex process of deliberate selection and expression subject to historical, ethnic, and political standards. When it comes to the image of Arabs and Muslims in popular culture, it is formed on the basis of historical and ethnic animosity toward Islam that emerged during the seventh century and still enflames the modern-day Islam-West relationship.

The manner in which Arabs and Muslims have been visualized in Hollywood movies is highly unfavorable and demeaning. Since the dawn of cinema, Arabs and Muslims have been portrayed as barbaric, uncivilized, savages, sex maniacs, and fanatic killers. Such images have always been based on Orientalist accounts and are usually determined by anti-Muslim sentiments, Islamophobia, and other historical and political factors. For over a century and since the beginning of Hollywood enterprise, no single entertainment program had featured Arabs and Muslims in a positive light away from barbarism, violence, and terrorism. No other social group was downgraded and negatively presented as Arabs and Muslims. These latter are hardly ever seen as ordinary people.

Over the years, Hollywood has extended its malignant wingspan. The portrayal of Arabs and Muslims became more and more sinister and dangerous than it has ever been before. The portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in the American motion picture industry fluctuates in accordance with the evolution of world politics. No question the malignant stereotypes perpetuated in the West have been used as a means to achieve political and strategic goals, including the exploitation of the Arab oil wells. Simply put, the American media and motion picture industry marginalizes the Muslim world as having a rejected culture, different, and threatening so as to breed that feeling of the American duty to overtly dominate, or rather offense, the Muslim world.

Virtually, since the Jewish settlement in Palestine back in 1948, Arabs and Muslims are more often than not, associated with extremism, irrationality, and terrorism. The portrayal of Arabs and Muslims as villains in movies, TV shows, comic strips, or school-text books provide pictures that cultivate a certain world view and stimulate bias within the American society. These pictures continue to dictate the future representation of Arabs and Muslims in popular culture. Besides, future events would likely engender another plethora of movies with a demeaning and Islamophobic image of Arabs and Muslims. With the rise of the war on terror campaign, it is even more liable for the neo-Orientalist and Islamophobic discourse to become widely prominent in the Western cinema.

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