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From Navy Seals to The Siege: Getting to Know the Muslim Terrorist, Hollywood Style

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From Navy Seals to The Siege: Getting to Know the Muslim Terrorist, Hollywood Style

Abstract

The commercial film industry creates cultural products that often reflect societal norms. The popularity of these images is based on the fact that they reflect the "anxieties and longings" of their audience: as contemporary cultural "texts," they are capable of expressing "the pressing concerns" of a moment in history. Film is often informed by the news, and reinforces the images portrayed through these media outlets: they are capable of conveying religious ideology and values in contemporary culture. Popular media such as cinema performs religious functions as public sites for the vocalization and discussion of meaning. Therefore films, as a social form of religion, are considered powerful conveyors of ideology and ethics. Although fantasy, these media representations are usually taken for granted to be rooted in reality, while they reinforce stereotypes and manufacture consensus. As viewers, we tend to accept many of the images on screen as somehow truly reflective of the "universal truths" of the world in which we live. This also means that cultural expressions, exhibited through media and film, are shaped by politics.

The commercial film industry creates cultural products that often reflect societal norms. The popularity of these images is based on the fact that they reflect the "anxieties and longings" of their audience:¹ as contemporary cultural "texts," they are capable of expressing "the pressing concerns"² of a moment in history. Film is often informed by the news, and reinforces the images portrayed through these media outlets: they are capable of conveying religious ideology and values in contemporary culture.³ Popular media such as cinema performs religious functions as public sites for the vocalization and discussion of meaning.⁴ Therefore films, as a social form of religion, are considered powerful conveyors of ideology and ethics.⁵ Although fantasy,⁶ these media representations are usually taken for granted to be rooted in reality, while they reinforce stereotypes and manufacture consensus. Joel Martin and Conrad Ostwalt, in their edited volume entitled *Screening the Sacred: Religion, Myth and Ideology in Popular American Film*, argue that movies are permeated with religious values. They have more than the power to entertain:

films, as with other cultural forms, have the potential to reinforce, to challenge, to overturn, or to crystallize religious perspectives, ideological assumptions, and fundamental values. Films bolster and challenge our society's norms, guiding narratives, and accepted truths.⁷

As viewers, we tend to accept many of the images on screen as somehow truly reflective of the "universal truths" of the world in which we live.⁸ This also means that cultural expressions, exhibited through media and film, are shaped by politics.⁹

In the past eighty years, while American cinema "continues with a long tradition in which images have been used to produce emotion, to strengthen attachment, and to encourage imitation,"¹⁰ it has reflected its relationship to the Orient¹¹ in an ever-changing evolution. It has adopted the narrative and visual conventions, as well as the cultural assumptions, on which Orientalism is founded. The Orient is at first seen as mysterious, and the recurring figure of the veiled woman in movies¹² such as *Thief of Damascus* (1952), *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), and *Ishtar* (1987) becomes an allegory for the Western requirement to unveil the mystery of the Orient.¹³ The Arab Muslim is seen as backward and undeveloped, in need of Western knowledge and domination.

The image of the Arab as a dangerous threat in the Western world has been accentuated by the recent historical conflicts between the West and the Islamic Middle East (such as the Gulf War, the Salman Rushdie Affair, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the US war on Afghanistan in retaliation for the bombings of September 11, 2001 and the war on Iraq against terrorism). "Most movies involving terrorism look at the subject from a US perspective. The cultural expression of Muslims and Arabs in the cinema reinforces, and is reinforced by, the structure of power relations between the Middle East and the United States (and the Western world).

The news media and the film industry, thought to give a more-or-less accurate depiction of the world, plays a large part in sustaining stereotypical images as representative of the whole culture of Islam (and this is not done in isolation, but often in concert with governments, military and industrial complexes). From the beginning of American cinema in 1896, the image of the Arab (who is Muslim) has always been stereotypical - "the cultural 'other',"¹⁴ which are often projected along racial and religious themes.

"Today's imagemakers regularly link the Islamic faith with male supremacy, holy war, and acts of terror, depicting Arab Muslims as hostile alien intruders, and as lecherous, oily sheikhs intent on using nuclear weapons."¹⁵ The "Arab" has countlessly been depicted as a murderer, rapist, religious fanatic, oil-rich and ignorant, and abuser of women.

During the early 1900s, films embellished on the images of the Arab caricatures written about by the Europeans. In mythic Arabia, bearded Arabs rode camels in the desert, waved swords, killed each other and coveted Western heroines.¹⁶ Women were kept in harems and belly danced in revealing clothing. These old stereotypes have been replaced with new ones. The sheik and lusty despot have slowly disappeared, leaving hijackers, kidnappers and terrorists. Muslim women have disappeared behind the chador and burka.¹⁷

Select usage of words by the media (a further example of semiotic warfare) in describing Islam plays a large part in the sensationalizing and stereotyping of Islam. In hundreds of movies, Arabs and Muslims have been referred to in very negative ways. Such slurs as devil-worshipers, rag-heads, towel-heads, sand-niggers, son-of-whores and sons-of-she-camels have been hurled at Arab characters in Hollywood movies. "Still, other movies contain the word 'Ayrahb', a vulgar Hollywood epithet for Arab that is comparable to dago, greaser, kike, nigger and gook."¹⁸

More recent successful movies have increased the depiction of Arab Muslims as faceless militant terrorists. For instance, the word "terrorist" is used eight times to describe the Muslims in the movie *The Siege*.¹⁹ Rarely does the media distinguish between religion and politics in Islamic countries. Furthermore, the acts of terrorists are taken to represent the views and beliefs of most Muslims.

Therefore all we encounter in depictions of Islam is a primitive, backward religion, associated with so-called Muslim fundamentalism, that being militant, terrorist, and violent, increasing the fear of this "other" religion. Many Muslims feel that they in fact are not the terrorists but rather are the ones being terrorized. Muslims entering Western societies do so with ambivalent feelings of frustration at the colonial attitudes fostered about them and of the fear of Western retaliation based on these racial suppositions.

In fact, anti-Islamic sentiment escalated into violence in many parts of the world after the tragic events on September 11, 2001, even though no groups had yet claimed responsibility or been officially blamed. For instance, in Chicago, a Molotov cocktail was thrown at an Arab-American community center, a firebomb was thrown at a mosque in Montreal, in Australia a school bus filled with Muslim schoolchildren was attacked and a Lebanese church was covered in swastikas and then almost burnt down. 300 protestors in Illinois marched on a mosque keeping people from worshipping. Mosques and Islamic centers in various American and Canadian cities were placed under constant police protection based on a series of threats and anti-Muslim incidents.²⁰

Not only does the media fail to portray Islam accurately, but it fails to show how Muslim people around the world perceive their own fate and faith in the new world order. The diversity of Islam (the fact that culture and politics shape one's understanding of religion) has been muted: actually, North American people who are rushing to see such films are, at the same time, learning about Islam, or rather unlearning, since these films are based on fantasy and are not truly reflective of all Muslims. Canadian video stores recorded a large surge in rentals of movies featuring violent terrorist attacks on Americans after the tragic incidents occurring in New York and Washington. *The Siege* (1998) was ranked number three on the list of top selling DVDs. *True Lies*,²¹ a 1994 movie starring Arnold

Schwarzenegger as a US agent battling an Islamic terrorist group named the Crimson Jihad, ranked number five. In the movie, murderous Muslim fanatics steal nuclear weapons and threaten to detonate them in the United States. The Arab Muslim characters appear brutish, and incapable. In contrast, Harry (Arnold Schwarzenegger) shows "just and superior Western values."²²

Air Force One,²³ a 1997 movie about an Islamic terrorist hijacking of the American president's plane was renting 10 times higher than before the attacks.

The official spokesperson for Rogers Video, one of the largest video chains in Canada, claimed that people were perhaps trying to gain insight into the events and the minds of the terrorists, looking for similarities and even wondering if the attackers had received their ideas from a Hollywood plot as the media had started speculating on this thought as well.²⁴

The media in many ways has painted a distorted picture that equates terrorism with all Islam, and Hollywood has reinforced this muted stereotype, which is often overwhelmingly negative. Regrettably, it is one of the only images that people can know based on these images.

Islam has continually been depicted as 'other', separate from values of Western democracy and society: now though, Muslims battle against the label of Islamic terrorist.

The Growth of the Islamic Threat

The 1990 movie *Navy Seals*²⁵ was one of the first instances in popular film that Islamic "terrorists" were depicted as a danger to the "civilized world."²⁶ Viewed in hindsight, this movie can be seen as the beginning of the portrayal in American films of the Islamic threat extending into the Westernized world. In the movie, the US flexes its power by stepping in to deal with the threat as it spreads into allied countries (in this instance Spain).

The Navy Seals, a special elite force, was created to deal with acts of terrorism and guerilla wars. They are used in this film to stop an Islamic terrorist group in order to protect defenseless, innocent civilians. The story-line is as follows: An Islamic "anti-American" terrorist, Ben Shaheed, is the leader of a group called Al-Shahoudah, which has stolen stinger missiles and then begins to attack civilian aircraft in Spain. The Navy Seals are sent in to destroy the missiles. Although images of Beirut are shown, Muslim women are nowhere to be seen. In fact, the only "Muslim" woman (she says that she is half-Muslim) in the movie is a reporter, who claims to have access to the Al-Shahoudah. In order to prove her loyalty to America, she is persuaded by a Navy Seal member to break her journalistic code of ethics to reveal the whereabouts of the terrorists.

This movie exemplifies the ominous threat of Islam, and the terror and death they inflict within their own city, Beirut. In the credits, one of the Muslims is listed only as "terrorist", with no recognition to the character portrayed. This movie, in effect, links terrorists to Islam specifically. As the image of "terrorist" Islam develops over time in popular film, Islam is depicted as an encroaching threat aimed at getting closer to US interests (in relation to the actual threat perceived in the US and the Western world): although this threat has proven real, not all Muslims are threatening. The Hollywood film industry can be seen as advancing the fears of American viewers regarding this Islamic conspiracy.

Another kind of threat to American citizens is depicted in the film *Not Without My Daughter*.²⁷ Set in the mid-1980s during the Iran-Iraq war, the movie tells the story of a couple living in America but who go to Iran for a brief visit.

There, the American wife, Betty Mahmoody (Sally Fields), is battered and intimidated, kept under house arrest, while her Iranian husband, Moody, becomes violent and jealous. Moody (Alfred Molina) is "a pure product of his culture, a mysterious, misogynist Easterner."²⁸ He is depicted as a fanatic, who is willing to beat his wife in order to have her follow the tenets of Islam. The wife plots to escape Iran with her daughter back to the West.

The movie began filming in the summer of 1990 and was released in January 1991 while tension was mounting in the Middle East: Saddam Hussein had invaded Kuwait in August 1990. The movie's highest box office ranking was the week the war in the Persian Gulf began. Although movie reviewers denounced it for exploiting the stereotype of the demonic Iranian, it made over 14 million dollars. The few reviews written about the movie concurred that "it consisted of approximately 80 percent racism and 20 percent melodrama."²⁹ Reviewers acknowledged the fact that the movie exploited the stereotype of the demonic Iranian. Despite the negative reviews, in the absence of other film representations of Iran and Islamic culture at the time, it was able to gain control of a broad audience in order to disseminate its particular perspective on Islam and Muslims. The movie was granted authenticity, and was accepted as characteristic of all Islamic, as well as Middle Eastern culture, even though the movie³⁰ was based on the story of only one woman's experience.

In the movie *Not Without My Daughter*, the Islamic threat is now felt directly by an American woman, even though not on American soil. We are not presented with a Muslim woman's point of view, but rather the voice of an American woman, who is depicted as the only one capable of offering a dissenting opinion of the life around her. All other Muslim women shown in this movie play minor roles, either as forces of the oppression (they are chador-covered women who

carry guns in order to enforce the law of veiling), out to further the violence of Islam, or silent voices who cannot help themselves but can only lead this American woman to men who can save her from this "primitive" society. They are seen as victims of the oppressing Islamic government, either mimicking their rules onto other women, or women afraid to speak for fear of reprisals.

Only an American woman appears capable of outwitting her Muslim husband and escaping the clutches of the evil rule of Islamic Iran. Claiming to be a story based on fact,³¹ this film depicted women, especially American women, as victims of the savage, violent Islamic religion in Iran, in need of American protection.

The religion of Islam is equated with ignorance: Moody, in trying to explain his family's behaviour since the revolution, states that they are a very religious people and basically uneducated. And Betty Mahmoody constantly reiterates throughout the film how primitive this Persian and Muslim nation truly is. She flees Iran to assure that her daughter will not be raised as a Muslim in such an oppressive country, where national identity is Islamic. The only likeable Muslims in the film are those who have had exposure to the West or been influenced by it.

Another movie released in 1990 was *The Sheltering Sky*,³² set in post World War II North Africa. It tells the story of a young American couple who journey

across the Sahara desert. Kit (Debra Winger) and her husband Port Moresby (John Malkovich) wander the streets of inhospitable towns where the muezzins are always calling out prayers, filled with Muslim men who are greedy, and Muslim women who are veiled and always in the background.

When Port has a conversation with an elderly female British travel writer who spends her time writing of North Africa, she says of the Arabs, "they search our rooms, they steal our things and they eavesdrop. The Arabs, they are a stinking low race with nothing to do but spy." When Port becomes ill with fever, Kit tries to enter a hotel, but is not allowed entry. At this point in time, a local woman finally speaks in the movie, telling Kit that because of the epidemic, she cannot let them enter. When we do see the people who have been stricken with the Typhoid epidemic, all we are shown are women's heads covered in cloth, and children with flies all over their faces, huddled in a back alley. There are no ill men, just hidden women and children, an invisible part of society.

Reviewers also found this movie to be highly stereotyped, where a foreign culture attempts to devour the grief-stricken American woman, Kit, after her husband dies. "The image of the turbaned tribesman creeping over the sand to attack the American woman is part of the eroticism and danger that imbues *The Sheltering Sky*."³³ The movie is interspersed with scenes of men praying, working and walking

in the streets, and hustling tourists. The Muslim women are all covered and hidden, in a way denying their function in society.

The same dark alleys, filthy towns and inhospitable Arab Muslims can be found in the movie *Naked Lunch*,³⁴ produced only one year later in 1991, again based in Tangier. Based on the William Burroughs novel, the movie is set in 1953, and Bill Lee (Peter Weller), in a drug induced state, finds himself in a bizarre land called Interzone, a strange and surreal place inhabited by "Arabs, mugwumps, half-alien, half-insect creatures, man-sized centipedes, carnivorous typewriters and bizarre humans."³⁵ Hidden amongst all these freakish creatures are women covered in chadors, veiled and silent. This nightmarish hallucination is also filled with muezzins calling out the times for prayer, drug users, gay men and lesbian women.

Amongst the women, there is one who speaks and is unveiled: her name is Fadela (Monique Mercure). When she is seen in the market surrounded by veiled Muslim women, someone points out that they are indeed lesbians - "Fadela's lovers." Fadela is the only female resident who speaks to the Americans. She is referred to as a witch and her female lovers are her coven, because she has power. She is also considered to be on intimate terms with a major drug supplier named Benway (Roy Scheider). It is only when Bill Lee tries to find Benway to free himself of this hellish world, that he realizes Fadela is really Benway in drag: there are in fact no women who really speak or have power in Interzone. The truth of

who Fadela turns out to be apocalyptic. Fadela, who is most likely Muslim as Interzone citizens are Arab Muslims, is killed for having power and for revealing herself. A woman cannot exist with power, and so she is literally split apart, and from her skin emerges Benway.

In 1991, another movie showing the hazards of Westerners [women] spending time in Islamic countries was made in Hong Kong. *Armour of God II*, starring Jackie Chan was re-released in the United States in 1997 as the movie *Operation Condor*.³⁶ I bring up this movie to illustrate how the anxiety of Westerners towards Muslims and Arabs continues to be perpetuated. Jackie (Jackie Chan) is an adventurer, hired by the US embassy in Spain to find a cache of gold hidden in the Sahara desert. The gold was stolen by Germans during World War II from other European countries and the United Nations wishes to give it back to the appropriate countries.

Jackie, along with partners Ada (Carol Cheng), Elsa (Eva Cobo de Garcia) the German granddaughter of one of the men who hid the gold, and a traveler named Momoko (Shoko Ikeda), head out into the desert to find the gold but are constantly being attacked by two bumbling Arab Muslims (recognizable by their checkered kuffiyehs³⁷). When asked which organization they belong to, they reply that they are "soldiers of the faith who will never give up the holy battle."

In the desert, Ada and Elsa are kidnapped by desert bandits and put up for sale at a sex slave auction. At the auction, we see rich sheiks bartering for the women, and they are finally sold for 150 camels. Luckily, Jackie has disguised himself as a sheik to buy the girls and rescue them from the "smelly" Arabs. Throughout the movie, the two Arab Muslim men are depicted as inept, but constantly show up invoking the name of Allah as thanks for finding Jackie again so that they be able to get the gold themselves. Arabs are portrayed as greedy, foul smelling men who constantly threaten Western interests, the gold and the "lovely" women who accompany Jackie.

The curiosity toward Muslims, who have been viewed from a distance by North Americans, then transforms into anxiety when Muslim nations are seen as military adversaries. Religious rhetoric becomes a significant catalyst in the selling of the Gulf War to North Americans. The culmination of the stereotype of Islam as the embodiment of evil, tyranny and oppression, in comparison to the good, righteous, and democratic United States becomes manifest in many of the films made after 1990.

This fear of an encroaching threat can be observed in the movie *Executive Decision* (1996).³⁸ Directed by Stuart Baird, *Executive Decision* is about a US 747 airliner being held hostage by Muslim terrorist Nagi Hassan (David Suchet), who

is intent on destroying the plane and all of Washington, DC in a suicidal mission as a form of revenge for the death of his wife and children.

The movie begins with Colonel Austin Travis (Steven Seagal) and his Special Forces team, who are raiding a Chechen Mafia house in Trieste on May 17, 1995 in order to recover a cache of stolen Russian chemical weapons. The mission is unsuccessful because the chemicals have disappeared. Three months later, the United States captures an Islamic leader in Cyprus. In response to the capture, Nagi Hassan hijacks a plane coming from Athens, and threatens to blow up the plane if the leader is not released.

A US Army Intelligence consultant, David Grant (Kurt Russell) believes that Hassan's real motive is to destroy Washington in a suicidal attack. The United States decides that its only course of action is to destroy the plane before it reaches US airspace. Grant and his team eventually get on the hijacked plane, where they do indeed find the chemical weapons. Although the American President is willing to let Jaffa, the Islamic leader, free to stop Hassan's mission, Hassan does not desist in his kamikaze-style plan to destroy the "heart" of America.

Claiming to be "the true soldier of Islam," Hassan shoots his second-in-command who does not wish to continue the mission, and then takes time out to do his daily prayer. The act of prayer at this point suggests that his actions are

acceptable as a devout Muslim. Another terrorist is shown to wear a ring emblazoned with the word "Allah" on it. And Hassan himself upholds his cause as "Qur'anic." Terrorism is equated with Islamic practice and belief.³⁹

The bomb on the plane is eventually disarmed, but Hassan does not give himself up. He kills the pilot while screaming "Allah Akbar" and then is shot dead by one of the US Special Forces team. The film ends with the Frank Sinatra tune "It's Nice to Go Trav'ling", insinuating that it's okay to travel but there is no place like the good old United States of America. The credits at the end of the film do not even list the names of Hassan's cohorts, but bills them simply as "terrorists."

This movie takes us one step closer to visualizing the "Islamic threat" attempting to invade American space, and therefore heightens our anxiety. "Any non-American with an Arab or Islamic background is a suicidal threat to the United States."⁴⁰

The power of Islam in this movie is displayed as violence and aggression, men who are representations of the "primitive", fundamental and fanatical aspects of Islam, which threatens the innocent, as they continually encroach on US space.⁴¹

Although we as viewers may wish to think that these stereotypical depictions of Islam subsided with the Gulf War, they do in fact continue to persist. *Executive Decision* was made in 1996 and from March 17 to March 26 was the

highest grossing film in the country. Executives at Warner Brothers claimed that the movie was not meant to be stereotypical, but that it was in fact a reflection of "the headlines of the moment."⁴²

The Siege,⁴³ released in 1998, is loosely based on the bombing of the World Trade Centre. This movie continues to perpetuate this primitive, violent and aggressive Islam by finally developing the Islamic threat into a direct attack on the United States: Islamic fundamentalists threaten its greatest icons, the FBI building (One Federal Place) and New York City, in order to gain the release of an imprisoned sheikh. In fact, all Arab and Muslim Americans have become suspects, and are persecuted for information regarding the "homogenous" threat of Islam.

The opening scene of the film shows the bombing of an American military building in Saudi Arabia. Bill Clinton, then president, is shown calling the people responsible for the bombing "terrorists" and "cowards" because they have committed "murderous acts." As the film continues, the background sounds of Muslims praying are underscored by the muezzin's call to prayer echoing through New York City and FBI Headquarters. Then the viewer sees a city bus, and realizes that Arab Muslim terrorists are holding people hostage, including six children. FBI agent Anthony "Hub" Hubbard (Denzel Washington) pleads with the terrorists to let the elderly go, but instead the terrorists blow up the bus at the moment when the elderly begin exiting the bus, and thus litter the streets with their bodies.

This bombing is put into the context of reality, with law enforcement officials stating that this has been the "worst terrorist bombing in the United States since Oklahoma City," leaving 25 people dead.

Authorities search Muslim homes, malls and student organizations searching for, as Hub states, "anyone critical of this country." Arab Muslims are then shown bombing a crowded Broadway theatre, killing the "city's cultural leaders," and then trying to bomb a school and using children as hostages.

When the FBI building, which houses the Counter-Terrorism Taskforce, is destroyed killing 200 people, the US chief of staff asserts that the Arab Muslims are "attacking our way of life." News coverage labels this as "war", and images of angry Americans are shown calling Arab Muslims "towel-heads". The President of the United States enacts the War Powers Act and Martial law (which was the original title of the movie) is declared in New York, allowing the army to enter New York to find the terrorists.

General William Devereaux (Bruce Willis) takes charge of New York and states that they are looking for 20 men, but that they will search the 15,000 Arab and Muslim men living in Brooklyn to find the culprits. 2,000 men between the ages of 14 to 30 are rounded up and put into detention camps behind barbed wire, while the army conducts house to house searches. Even Frank Haddad (Tony

Shalhoub), an Arab-American FBI agent who has been an American citizen for 20 years and served as an agent for 10 years, finds his twenty year old son interned in the camp because they are "Shi'ite" and therefore suspect.

Hub and Frank finally find a man named Samir (Sami Bouajila), who they believe is responsible for getting the bomber, Ali Waziri, into the country. Samir is a teacher at a Brooklyn college who teaches Arab Studies and seems to spend his time with other Arabs in cafés in Brooklyn: he has not truly integrated into American society. We learn that Samir's brother was a suicide bomber in Palestine, and he died because he was told that "to die for Allah is beautiful" and that his brother will live in paradise with 70 virgins. The threat to America has become internal, with the fear that immigrants are now a menace, and the fear that American people will convert to Islam. Hub, by shooting Samir, ends "the siege" on America.

Although American Arabs felt under attack and discriminated against, and went so far as to ask the director to change the plot by substituting 'militiamen' for 'Islamic fundamentalists', it was released in its original form. Producer-Director Edward Zwick, in a HBO special on the making of *The Siege*, stated that the movie was in fact "based on truth, rather than a fiction thriller."⁴⁴ Denzel Washington, who played the lead character, told a CNN reporter that "this is not a stereotypical view of any group of people, by any means...unfortunately, we're imitating life."⁴⁵

Other films that continue this discrimination include *Three Kings*⁴⁶ (1999) and *Rules of Engagement*⁴⁷ (2000). The movie *Three Kings*, set at the end of the Gulf War in March 1991, is about four greedy Army members who are in search of Kuwaiti gold stolen by Saddam Hussein. The movie begins with Troy Barlow (Mark Wahlberg) shooting a "rag-head." Captured Iraqi soldiers are being forced to undress "like all the other towel-heads"⁴⁸ when an American finds a map of the gold stuffed into one of the body parts of an Iraqi.

Archie Gates (George Clooney) is about to retire from the Special Forces in two weeks, and decides that he is deserving of some gold, so enlists three men (who have the map) to find it. As the four Americans enter a town with a bunker where the gold may be, Saddam Hussein's Republican Guards are shown killing Iraqi rebels and civilians who are opposing Saddam. Chador-clad women are holding babies and cowering.

While searching the bunker, the Americans find Amir, the leader of the uprising, and free him from torture by the Republican Guards. The rebels ask the Americans not to leave, but they don't wish to get involved. At this point in time, a Muslim woman speaks out to the Americans, demanding them "don't go, don't go, don't leave." She is the wife of the man being tortured: she is wearing a veil, a skirt and a blouse: not the traditional chadors which the other women are wearing. Her action of speaking out against her country causes the Republican Guard to act out

by shooting her in the head point-blank. The scene is shown in slow motion, graphically displaying the blood flying from her head as she is executed. By actively speaking out, this woman has defied her religiously ordained passive role, enforcing the silence that is imposed upon Muslim women by their men. The cost of her transgression is her destruction. By killing this Muslim woman, the Republican Guard re-establishes male authority, and her body becomes the signifier of the oppression and ultimate destruction by patriarchal Islam.

Some Muslim and Arab American groups found this movie not to be stereotypical because it included positive characters. Hala Maksoud, president of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee stated, "it shows the Arab and the Muslim and their complexity, with feelings and normal aspirations."⁴⁹ The racist language used by Army personnel during the movie were overlooked: terms such as "dune cune", "sand nigger", "towel jockey" and "raghead" were often used to refer to the Arab Muslims. Muslim women were continually invisible in the movie: the one woman to act differently was executed. The positive reading of the film narrative could be derived from "reading against the grain." Although Muslims were still "othered" in this film, they were capable of benefiting from the text.

An audience member from a marginalized group (people of colour, women, the poor, and so on) has an oppositional stance as they participate in mainstream media...Out of habit, as readers of mainstream texts, we have learned to ferret out

the beneficial and put up blinders against the rest. From this wary viewing standpoint, a subversive reading of a text can occur. When things appear strange to the viewer, she/he may then bring other viewpoints to bear on the watching of the film and may see things other than what the film-makers intended. The viewer, that is, will read "against the grain" of the film.⁵⁰

Rules of Engagement,⁵¹ made in 2000, further perpetuated the idea that Muslims are murderous fanatics, including Islamic women. The movie takes place in contemporary Yemen. Colonel Childers (Samuel L. Jackson), in charge of the Twenty-fourth Marine Expeditionary Unit aboard the USS Wake Island in the Indian Ocean, is ordered to take out a team to San'a, Yemen because the US Embassy is under attack. In Yemen, we see men, covered women with only their eyes visible, and children chanting in front of the Embassy. No context is given for the riot and the American ambassador even seems confused as to why the embassy is being attacked. When Childers shows up, they are shot at from two snipers on a rooftop and so he evacuates the Ambassador and his family. Childers gives the order to "engage hostile targets as they appear. Deadly force is authorized." Captain Lee negates the order, stating that there are women and children in his line of fire. Childers tells his Captain that he wants him to fire into the crowd, yelling "yes goddamn it! Waste the motherfuckers!!" At this point, all the marines on top of the embassy rooftop open fire into the crowd below, and we see people thrown

backward from the force of the bullets, blood gushing from mouths, and children falling over. After calling a cease-fire we see a toddler sitting next to the body of his chador-covered mother (no face is shown), and then in the center of the crowd six black chador-clad women stand up amongst the dead people and start wailing. The mission is considered "complete."

Upon his return to the United States, Childers is charged for the murder of 83 Yemeni men, women and children: it is considered an international crisis as no weapons or ammunition were found amongst the dead, therefore considered unarmed. Sokal (Bruce Greenwood), the National Security Advisor, does not want the United States held responsible for the "actions of one man" so proceeds to hide evidence as to what really happened at the embassy. Childers, who has a navy cross and two silver stars for composure in battle, is tried for 83 counts of murder, breach of peace, and conduct unbecoming an officer.

Childers hires Hodges (Tommy Lee Jones) as his lawyer. Hodges goes to Yemen to see if he can find evidence to save his friend. Yemen is filled with scenes of men dancing with knives, chador-covered women in the background, and men praying. Hodges is told that the Marines shot first and the Yemeni were only trying to defend themselves. Muslim men shout at Hodges in the street, yelling "Allah will give us justice" and a young girl on crutches calls him a killer. Upon finding no evidence, Hodges confronts Childers, asking him if he opened fire because they

were "rag-heads, camel-jockeys, or fucking gooks?"⁵² Sokal finally looks at the videotape, and we see two men holding machine guns within the crowd, and then two more with handguns. The scene changes and we see six other men holding machine guns. We become aware that Yemeni Muslim men were armed in the crowd and responsible for the shooting at the embassy, which killed three US soldiers.

As the trial progresses against Colonel Childers, Hodges finds evidence that there was a terrorist plot brewing in Yemen against the Americans. He has found two political propaganda cassette recordings while in Yemen, and asks the Yemeni doctor who is there as a witness against Childers to translate the tape: it is a Declaration of Islamic Jihad Against the United States, and proclaims "we call on every Muslim who believes in God and hopes for reward to obey God's command." God's command is "to kill Americans and plunder his possessions wherever he finds them. To kill Americans and their allies, both civil and military is the duty of every Muslim who is able."

Hodges finds further evidence showing that the State Department reported crimes of terrorism against tourists by "fundamentalists" in Yemen. Almost every Yemeni man (many depicted wearing kuffiyehs) who has been given a speaking part in the movie is proven to be a liar, covering up for a country of killers.

Just when we are beginning to believe Childers is in indeed innocent, he has a flashback: we see a woman fully covered in black, with a red veil covering her face so only her eyes are visible, holding a machine gun and staring at Childers. Then we see the whole crowd armed with weapons, and we are told that only Childers was able to observe the fact that the crowd was armed based on his position.

The flashback differs from the scenes in the video, where the Muslim woman is the first to strike against Childers and the other marines. The video shows only men with guns, and a woman cowering behind them. We are left not fully knowing the truth, but aware that Childers is found innocent by a jury of his peers. The image of the Muslim woman as destructive and violent is rare, but also representative of the fact that she cannot survive. It is her face Childers sees, and because of it, he orders his men to fire upon everyone in the crowd. Her power and destruction leads to the death of everyone in the courtyard.

These stereotypical images have also manufactured themselves into family-oriented animation; popular visual culture intended to fascinate the minds of children. Unfortunately, the message conveyed through this medium continues to strengthen the violent image of Islam as well as the perceived injustice that Muslim women face.⁵³ Based on the book *Arabian Nights*, the opening scene of the movie

*Aladdin*⁵⁴ shows a shady storyteller sitting on a camel singing "Arabian Nights".

The lyrics begin:

Oh I come from a land,
From a faraway place,
Where the caravan camels roam.
Where they cut off your ear,
If they don't like your face,
It's barbaric, but hey, it's home.⁵⁵

Offering a depiction of the "cultural" laws of Islam through Jasmine, a young girl who is forced to follow the rules of her religion against her will, *Aladdin* angered many North American Muslims because they did not feel that they could relate to the characters or the culture portrayed. The story is of Princess Jasmine (Linda Larkin), forced by law and her father, the Sultan, to wed against her wishes in Agrabah.

Jasmine escapes the palace only to find that the "threat" of Islam is greater outside the palace walls. Jasmine is caught for stealing an apple to feed a hungry child, and the penalty is the cutting of her hand by a grotesque Arab street vendor, but *Aladdin* (Scott Weinger) comes to her rescue by calling her his sister who's "a little crazy." In the alleys of Agrabah are women, some dressed provocatively as belly-dancers, while others have veiled faces. *Aladdin* does not know who Jasmine

is, and tells her of his wish to one day live in the palace, so that he can have valets and servants. Jasmine sees the palace as a place where people tell you "where to go and how to dress," alluding to her feelings of imprisonment. The Palace Guards eventually find Aladdin and Jasmine, and she is returned to the palace.

The remainder of the movie is taken up with Jafar (Jonathan Freeman), "a tall, dark and sinister, ugly man" trying to get a magic lamp. Aladdin gets the lamp and the genie inside helps Aladdin win Jasmine's hand in marriage by making him a prince, but Jafar steals the lamp and banishes Aladdin to the ends of the world. Jafar, as royal counsel to the Sultan, tries to marry Jasmine, and when she doesn't respond, he replies, "so you're speechless, a fine quality in a wife." In various other scenes, we see Jafar about to strike Jasmine, and has her chained to serve him. Aladdin eventually returns to save Jasmine, and banishes Jafar. The Sultan, recognizing Aladdin's true kindness, says that he will change the laws so that "from this day forward the princess can marry whomever she feels worthy." Upon telling Aladdin that she chooses him as her suitor for marriage, his banal response is "Hey, just call me Al."

The producers of this film intentionally deviated from the original "*Arabian Nights*" and throughout the film, they disregarded Arab culture and language. Names were mispronounced and the Arabic signs on storefronts were nonsensical. *Aladdin* was Disney's 31st animated feature film, and it won two Academy Awards

(one Oscar was won for the lyrics of the film). It was also Disney's second most successful monetary film ever, earning more than \$216 million.⁵⁶ In the United States, the film ranked number five in rentals during 1992, making more than \$60 million dollars profit as a video.

Within the movie, the Arab Muslims become caricatures, marginalized and conventionalized to accentuate the differences amongst themselves. Speaking of the film, a former spokesman for California's South Bay Islamic Association stated that "all the bad guys have beards and large bulbous noses, sinister eyes and heavy accents, and they're wielding swords constantly. Aladdin doesn't have a big nose; he has a small nose. He doesn't have a beard or a turban. He doesn't have an accent. What makes him nice is they've given him this American character."⁵⁷ By the end of the movie, Aladdin has become entirely Americanized, who says "just call me Al."⁵⁸ The evil Muslims are all big, dark and have beards.

The movie Aladdin continues the Orientalist stereotype where all the evil characters are seen as grotesque, smelly, bearded and dark. The good guys are all small and clean-shaven. Even the women are portrayed as exotic, "wearing the briefest of harem costumes"⁵⁹ or isolated away from the others within the palace, harems or balconies. The perpetual view of Arab Muslims as barbaric, backward, oppressive and cruel continues to be reinforced in almost all North American filmic portrayals. Animation is no exception.

Many of the movies discussed in this paper have repeatedly appeared on various television networks. *Air Force One*, *True Lies*, *The Siege*, and *Not Without My Daughter* have all been replayed on television since 2002, while television shows themselves have begun the inclusion of Arab Muslim plots into their shows. This year alone, *West Wing*, *Law and Order*, and *The Agency* all dealt with Arabs and Muslims who were oppressing their people, killers, bombers or terrorists.

In the last ten years, over twenty-one major movies have been released which depict Arab Muslims as killers.⁶⁰ Since films are considered powerful conveyors of ideology and ethics, within these films, the cinematic representations of Islamic women show how they are situated in the mindset of American culture: they suffer at the hands of Islam, are made invisible by the fact that they are always covered and silenced. The inevitable link between Islam and oppression is reinforced through these films. In the rare instances that Muslim women step outside of their passive roles, they are either threatened or killed. They become, through their chadors and veils, the tragic depictions of bodily suffering and death within patriarchal Islam.

Good Muslims

Within all stereotypes, the opposite must be found. In searching North American films for the image of the Muslim, a few positive images were located.

Out of the 900 films examined by Jack Shaheen, only five percent of all the movies (approximately 50 movies) debunked the barbaric image of Islam. The most famous Arabs to be depicted were characters that tried to help the oppressed: Aladdin, Ali Baba and Sinbad.

The movie *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*⁶¹ takes place in the twelfth century. Robin Hood (Kevin Costner) is a prisoner in an Ottoman jail, where he is tortured by guards speaking Arabic. When a guard threatens to "cut off the infidel's hand", Robin plans his escape, and in the process rescues a Moor, Azeem (Morgan Freeman). Azeem vows to help Robin Hood, stating "you saved my life Christian. I will stay with you until I have saved yours." The two men travel to England where Robin Hood goes to battle with the Sheriff of Nottingham, Azeem by his side. Azeem is shown praying while the men are in Sherwood Forest, and when asked about his faith, he explains that as a Muslim "it is vanity to force other men to our religion."

Although Azeem is called "savage" and "barbarian" at times throughout the movie, Robin Hood tells his men that Azeem is to be treated equally. In the film, Azeem is seen to have many skills: he has a telescope, uses gunfire, and even has medical skills. He also continues to practice his religious beliefs, declining alcohol because "Allah forbids it." When asked about his dark skin, he claims that "Allah loves wondrous variety." In the end, Azeem saves Robin's life from a witch and

returns back to the Middle East. Although the beginning of the movie does portray cruel Ottoman Muslim guards, the character of Azeem remains neutral. He stays loyal to Robin until he has completed his vow. But in a way, he is also considered exceptional, not like other Muslim men. Robin Hood says to Azeem, "you truly are a great one. You're an honour to your country."

*The Thirteenth Warrior*⁶² is based on Michael Crichton's 1976 novel *Eaters of the Dead* and is set in the tenth century. Ahmed Ibn Fahdlan (Antonio Bandaras) is thrown out of Baghdad for desiring another man's woman. The movie begins with Ahmed telling us his story, as three veiled women escorted by a guard walk by. The woman who looks into the camera is the woman he covets, and the credits of the film call her "Shaharazhad (Arabian Beauty)." This is the one and only time we see Muslim women in the movie (with a male voice-over), and the woman who is the cause of Ahmed's eviction from the opulent life of Baghdad.

Ahmed and his courier Melehisidek (Omar Sharif) encounter a landed ship of "Northmen" (Nordic warriors). While spending the evening with them, the Northmen are beckoned to help a northland village which is being attacked by an "ancient evil." Thirteen warriors are needed, and Ahmed is chosen as the thirteenth warrior, although he does not fight (he is an ambassador) and does not even know their language. He travels with them to help them and along the way, he learns their language by listening. When one of the Northmen insults his mother, Ahmed replies

by calling him a "pig-eating son-of-a-whore" and claims that his mother is a pure woman from a noble family.

Ahmed is the only one who can write, and teaches the Northman leader to also write, when he asks Ahmed to "draw speech." Ahmed, saying that he is a Muslim, shows him how to write "there is only one God and Muhammad is his prophet" in Arabic. When they finally arrive at the village, they encounter bodies that have been eaten by their attackers. Ahmed becomes ill and states "I am not a warrior" but a Northman counters by saying "you soon will." Ahmed arms himself with a Nordic sword, which is too big, and proves himself a good metal worker when he shapes it into a scimitar. When the Northmen and Ahmed enter into battle, Ahmed keeps his faith, calling on Allah to be merciful. Throughout the movie, Ahmed is seen praying to Allah, declining to drink alcohol and willingly putting his life on the line to save the Northland villagers and children. Also, the Northmen refer to Ahmed as "little brother", "friend" and "Arab."

By the end of the movie, after defeating the attackers of the Northern people, Ahmed prepares to leave. He dons his original Middle Eastern clothing, and while on the boat, the Northmen call out "Goodbye Arab" and he responds with "Goodbye Northman." The final scene shows Ahmed beginning the tale of his adventures, and his first line written in Arabic is "Praise be to Allah, merciful and compassionate."⁶³ Throughout the film, Ahmed is portrayed as intelligent and helpful, and the

Northmen accept him into their group willingly. Respect and friendship are shown to each other, even for each others' religion. At one point in the attack on the village, the Northmen begin praying to their gods, and Ahmed also joins them in their prayers. The leader of the Northmen, as he lays dying, believes that if someone were to write his story, he will die with glory. Ahmed, showing respect to the leader, does that by telling his tale of travel with the Northmen.

Another Arab Muslim image offered is that of the helpful person, someone who has been educated in a Western country or influenced by Western morals: in the movie *Three Kings*, the one Arab Muslim who is the leader of the rebels, and whose wife is executed for speaking out to Americans for help, helps the American soldiers. We learn in the movie that he was educated at Bowling Green in America. He returned to Iraq to open up some hotels. When he asks for help from the Americans, he states "we're fighting Saddam and dying, and you're stealing gold." In this statement, he differentiates himself from the fanatical Muslims who commit acts of terror and war. But in the same movie, the Republican Guard who tortures one of the American soldiers also claims to have been trained by Americans, but in weaponry.

This same Americanized Muslim is found in the character of Frank Haddad in *The Siege*. We learn that Frank is a Shi'ite Muslim from Lebanon, but he has also been an American citizen for 20 years and a member of the FBI for 10 years. When

his son is interred in the camp, he resigns from his job, throwing his badge at Hub and stating "here, tell them I'm not their sand-nigger anymore." Eventually, when Hub asks Frank for his help to catch the last terrorist, Frank returns to the FBI and continues his job. Edward Zwick, the director of the film, pointed out to people who called the movie stereotypical, that Haddad is "the single rounded character in this movie,"⁶⁴ implying that one good Muslim in the movie was adequate enough to round out the image of the terrorist, fanatical Muslims blowing up New York.

There have also been a handful of movies that depict Muslim women as compassionate and heroic. In general though, the majority of the movies that offered images of Muslim women envisioned them as silent, shapeless bundles under black garb, eroticized, veiled belly dancers, or as enchantresses - "possessed of devils."⁶⁵ The images of women, covered and silenced by their black veils do not take into account the variety of fashion that exists in the Islamic world. Not all women living in Arab countries wear black cloaks and veils, but the images given by Hollywood offer only one homogenous, truncated image, a woman who is alienated from the Western world, silenced and oppressed by the ordinances of her religion.

This stereotype seems to appear not of itself, but as a counterpart to the dark, violent, male terrorist or the barbarian man who are the main protagonists of the

majority of the movies. Even in cinema, the veiled woman exists not for herself but for the definition of the Muslim man.

¹ Margaret Miles, *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), p. x.

² *Ibid.*, p. x.

³ See Darrol M. Bryant, "Cinema, Religion, and Popular Culture," in *Religion in Film*, eds., John R. May and Michael Bird (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), pp. 104-114. Bryant claims that art is the expression and reshaping of the loyalties, anxieties and aspirations of a society. He states that "movies do what we have always asked of popular religion, namely, they provide us with archetypal forms of humanity - heroic figures - and instruct us in the basic values and myths of our society. As we watch the characters and follow the drama on the screen, we are instructed in the values and myths of our culture and given models on which to pattern our lives." p. 106.

⁴ Kelton Cobb, "Reconsidering the Status of Popular Film in Tillich's Theology of Culture," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LXIII, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 53-84.

⁵ Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967).

⁶ See Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 66-84 about the colonial stereotyping of the Other as "fantasy." He states that the stereotype is a substitute as well as a shadow. The colonized Other has become a wild fantasy of the colonizer.

⁷ Joel Martin and Conrad Ostwalt, *Screening the Sacred: Religion, Myth and Ideology in Popular American Film* (Boulder: Westview Press Inc, 1995), p. vii.

⁸ See Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1969) and Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, ed., Michael Banton (London: Tavistock, 1966), pp. 1-46 for an explanation of how secular significances, such as popular film, can effectively define reality in a consumer society.

⁹ Joel Martin and Conrad Ostwalt, *Screening the Sacred: Religion, Myth and Ideology in Popular American Film* (Boulder: Westview Press Inc, 1995), p. 10.

¹⁰ Margaret Miles, *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), p. 3.

¹¹ We must remember that Hollywood's view of the Orient is a product of the colonialist imagination as well as Western male gaze. See Ella Shohat, "Gender in Hollywood's Orient," *Middle East Report* (Number 162) 20, no. 1 (January-February 1990): pp. 40-42.

¹² Bibliographic information about all movies cited in this thesis can be found in the Film Bibliography section.

¹³ See Ella Shohat, "Gender in Hollywood's Orient," *Middle East Report* (Number 162) 20, no. 1 (January-February 1990): pp. 40-42.

¹⁴ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001), p. 2. Jack Shaheen has undertaken a comprehensive review of Arab screen images, discussing virtually every feature that Hollywood has made portraying Arabs, which includes more than 900 films. Out of these 900 films, Shaheen found only 50 feature films which included Arab women, all portrayed as eroticized, demonized or humiliated and silent. In his survey, Shaheen does not focus on the image of the Muslim woman in the films. He reserves only two pages entitled *Maidens* in his introduction to give a brief overview regarding the portrayal of Arab Muslim women in the movies.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Alice Swensen, "Hollywood Harems: A Documentary by Tania Kamal-Eldin," *Café Arabica* (May 2000).

¹⁸ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001), p. 11.

¹⁹ *The Siege*, directed by Edward Zwick (USA, 1998).

²⁰ Staff and Agencies, "Anti-Islamic Violence Breaks Out Around World," *The Guardian* (September 13, 2001).

²¹ *True Lies* , directed by James Cameron (USA, 1994). This movie made over \$146 million at the box office in the United States.

²² Markus Kirchhoff, "Depicting 'Arabs': True Lies," Cinema and the Middle East Conference, Hambourg (December 1999).

²³ *Air Force One*, directed by Wolfgang Peterson (USA, 1997). This movie made over \$172 million.

²⁴ Christopher Read, "Terror Movies Surging In Popularity," *National Post* (September 19, 2001).

²⁵ *Navy SEALs* , directed by Lewis Teague (USA, 1990). This movie made \$24.8 million at the box office.

²⁶ Movies such as *Protocol* (1984), *Jewel of the Nile* (1985) and *Bolero* (1985) offer caricatures of Arab peoples. Movies such as *Delta Force* (1986), *Iron Eagle* (1986) and *Into the Night* (1985) begin to offer images of Arabs and Muslims as terrorists who hate Americans. See Jack G. Shaheen, "The Hollywood Arab," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 14, no. 4 (Winter 1987): pp. 148-157.

²⁷ *Not Without My Daughter*, directed by Brian Gilbert (USA, 1991).

²⁸ Caryn James, as cited in Margaret Miles, *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), p. 71. The article "Embrace the Stereotype: Kiss the Movie Goodbye" by Caryn James appeared in *The New York Times*, January 27, 1991.

²⁹ Margaret Miles, *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), p. 71.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ The original novel by Betty Mahmoody offers a description of how her husband's personality changes over time, from a happy and successful man into a "domestic tyrant." This is one of many divergences from the novel not found in the movie. As cited in Margaret Miles, *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), p. 74.

³² *The Sheltering Sky* , directed by Bernardo Bertolucci ((USA, 1990)

³³ Caryn James, as cited in Jack G Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001), p. 427. The review appeared in the *New York Times* (January 27, 1991) and made stereotypical connections to the movie *Not Without My Daughter*.

³⁴ *Naked Lunch* , directed by David Cronenberg (CAN, 1991).

³⁵ Jack G Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001), p. 345.

³⁶ *Operation Condor*, directed by Frankie and Jackie Chan (USA, 1997). Although this movie was a re-release of an earlier film, was edited and poorly dubbed, it managed to make over \$10 million dollars in the United States.

³⁷ In many American movies, the Arabs are often recognizable by wearing the kuffiyeh, a Palestinian symbol. Interestingly enough, this head covering has become a hot fashion accessory in Japan, with teenagers wearing it around the chin, with camouflage t-shirts and army-style pants. They are sold in army surplus stores. See Brian Whitaker, "An Arab Aesthetic," *The Guardian* (November 13, 2001).

³⁸ *Executive Decision*, directed by Stuart Baird (USA, 1996). This movie earned more than \$56.6 million dollars at the box office in the United States.

³⁹ Jack G Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001).

⁴⁰ Tom Tunney, "Executive Decision," *Sight and Sound* 6, no. 6 (June 1996), p. 38.

⁴¹ The movies *True Lies*, *Executive Decision*, and *Rules of Engagement* have all been assisted by the United States Department of Defense and the US Marine Corps, who provided needed equipment, personnel and technical assistance. More than fourteen feature films which depict Americans killing Arabs have credited the Department of Defense for their assistance in the making of these films. When the Department of Defense was questioned about their involvement in the movie *Rules of Engagement* by the Council on American-Islamic Relations, their responding letter stated: "we would not provide assistance to a production that we believed implicitly or explicitly encouraged audiences to believe that untoward behaviour of ethnic or religious characters on the screen would be generalized to include all members of the group in reality." As cited in Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001), p. 405.

⁴² Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001), p. 189.

⁴³ *The Siege* , directed by Edward Zwick (USA, 1998). This movie earned over \$40 million dollars at the box office.

⁴⁴ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001), p. 432.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 432.

⁴⁶ *Three Kings*, Directed by David O. Russell (USA, 1999). This movie continues the trend that the only helpful Muslims are those who have had exposure to the West. This movie made over \$60 million dollars at the box office.

⁴⁷ *Rules of Engagement*, directed by William Friedkin (USA, 2000). Portrays the demonstrators in Yemen as fanatically anti-American. US marines open fire on the Yemenis violently demonstrating outside the US embassy in Yemen, shooting 83 men, women and children. This movie made over \$61 million dollars.

⁴⁸ Chief Elgin (Ice Cube) takes offense to the phrases "dune-coon" and "sand-nigger" because they are derogatory to African Americans, but the terms "towel-head" and "camel-jockey" are permitted.

⁴⁹ Staff, " Hollywood in Non-Stereotyping Shock," *Guardian Unlimited* (October 1, 1999).

⁵⁰ Jacqueline Bobo, "The Colour Purple: Black Women as Cultural Readers," in *Female Spectators: Looking at Film and Television*, ed. E. Deidre Pribram (New York: Verso, 1988), p. 96. See also Bell Hooks, *Reel to Real: Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies* (New York: Routledge, 1996) for further discussion about spectators and the oppositional gaze.

⁵¹ *Rules of Engagement* made over \$61 million at the box office in the United States.

⁵² The comment of “fucking gooks” refers to the fact that Childers and Hodges fought together in Vietnam. Childers shot a “gook” to get him to stop firing on the location where Hodges was trapped.

⁵³ Caricatures that portray Islamic women as weak and oppressed have become more pervasive in recent years. See Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

⁵⁴ *Aladdin*, directed by John Musker and Ron Clements (USA, 1992).

⁵⁵ From the movie *Aladdin*. In 1993, Disney executives deleted two lines from the opening lyrics for the video version because of public pressure. They removed “Where they cut off your ear” and “If they don’t like your face” but decided to keep the line “It’s barbaric, but hey, it’s home.” As noted in Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001).

⁵⁶ Out of all the movies researched in this investigation, *Aladdin* earned more money at the box office than any other movie. *Air Force One* was second overall, earning \$44 million less than *Aladdin*, bringing in just over \$172 million.

⁵⁷ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001), p. 52.

⁵⁸ Quote taken from the movie *Aladdin*.

⁵⁹ Ziauddin Sardar, *Orientalism* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999), p. 103.

⁶⁰ Parts of the Arab-American community refer to such movies as part of the “Three B Syndrome: Arabs are portrayed as either Bombers, Billionaires or Belly dancers. Mazin B. Qumsiyeh, “100 Years of Anti-Arab and Anti-Muslim Stereotyping,” *The Prism* (Accessed March 26, 2003).

⁶¹ *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*, directed by Kevin Reynolds (USA: 1991).

⁶² *The Thirteenth Warrior*, directed by John McTiernan (USA: 1999).

⁶³ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001), p. 482.

⁶⁴ Laurie Goodstein, “Hollywood Now Plays Cowboys and Arabs,” *The New York Times* (November 1, 1998).

⁶⁵ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001), p. 21.