



2018

From Antagonists to Protagonists: Muslims on the Hollywood Screen

Brooke K. Gentry
Colby College

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From Antagonists to Protagonists: Muslims on the Hollywood Screen

by

Brooke Gentry

Honors Thesis
Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies
Colby College

2018

Faculty Advisor: Nikky-Guninder K. Singh, Professor of Religion
Reader: David J. Strohl, Professor of Anthropology

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Acknowledgements

Thank you to my academic advisor Nikky Singh and my reader David Strohl. I would never have been able to take on this project without their assistance and expertise. Nikky, you have always pushed me to think deeply and critically, pushing below the surface of my research. Your assistance brought me to conclusions that I believe expand the importance of this thesis beyond the purely academic. I am beyond grateful for your support – Thank you both.

Introduction

The idea for this scholarly investigation arose after a conversation I had with my grandfather. I was excitedly telling him about my classes, in particular my Foundations of Islam course. I spent a few minutes talking about our current topic, which focused on the history of Islam in America. At one point, I used the term “American Muslim” to describe someone. Upon hearing this, he stopped me and asked, “What is an American Muslim?” I was puzzled, as I felt that this was self-explanatory. I replied that it was an American who practiced Islam and self-identified as Muslim. In response, he stated that if they were Muslim they were Arab and not American. I love my grandpa, and recognize the generational gap in our thinking. But this brief conversation brought to mind questions I’d been unconsciously wrestling with since I first began studying religion. I feared that his view of Muslims as all Arab or not American was not an isolated opinion. I wondered why these assumptions seemed so pervasive among the American public.

As a student of religion, I had been grappling with issues of religious identity in various contexts since my freshman year. My thesis advisor for this project, Nikky Singh, taught the very first Religious Studies course I encountered at Colby, entitled *A Passage to India*. This course addressed Western attitudes towards India and India’s encounter with Western culture. In the course, we closely analyzed texts as narratives on colonialism, racism, and orientalism. *A Passage to India* also introduced me to Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, a book that would have a significant impact on this thesis and my own perception of colonial history. That January term, I would take American Independents, a course designed to train students with no background in cinema how to analyze and review past Sundance Film Festival films. This course was

instrumental in teaching me how to critically assess films beyond their surface plots. I was first introduced to the intersection of religion and film in January of 2016, when I took Hollywood and the Catholic Church in the Religious Studies department. Throughout the course, we explored the various ways the histories of the Catholic Church and Hollywood intersected, from the works of God-obsessed directors, to Hollywood's treatment of Catholic teachings, to the Catholic hierarchy's attempt to act as a sensor upon Hollywood. Finally, my understanding of exchange between religion and film would culminate with Nikky Singh's seminar Bollywood and Beyond. In a small, discussion-based setting, we looked at South Asian religions through the lens of Bollywood and world art cinema, covering topics such as religious diversity, partition, gender, sexuality, diaspora, and transnationalism. These courses, in tandem with preliminary research, led me to the realization that these stereotypes and misrepresentations of Muslims are inextricably linked to the popular media. Hollywood, a symbol of America, was responsible for the problematic images of Muslims in American minds.

I intend to investigate the depictions of Muslims in Hollywood film. Have the Muslim protagonists been reduced to antagonists? Are the depictions historically and culturally relevant? How can films psychologically impact viewers? What kinds of stereotypes pervade even the most innocuous of films? What context to these stereotypes rise out of? What impact do Hollywood images of Muslims have on the ideas, actions, and politics of the American public? How do non-Hollywood films portray Muslims, and what impact do these films have on viewers?

I begin this project by briefly outlining the historical experience of Muslims in America to provide background information and context to readers. The bulk of my essay critically

assesses the cinematic representations of Muslims over the decades, and how these portrayals have been largely misrepresentative. I am particularly drawn to the works of Jack Shaheen, whose popular volume *Reel Bad Arabs* was crucial to my film selection. Additionally, Laura Mulvey's work on visual cultures gives me a lens with which to understand the impact these films have on the thinking of the American public. The essay "A Window on Reality: Perceiving Edited Moving Images," written by a team of leading doctors in the psychology field was instrumental to helping me understand the ability of film viewers to separate on screen images from reality. The ideas presented by Edward Said in his theory of Neo-Orientalism gives me further tools to analyze the often violent visual representations of Muslims on the Hollywood screen. Nancy Yuen's volume, *Reel Inequality: Hollywood Actors and Racism*, helps me understand how film and television can also cultivate existent fears of foreign threat. In addition to my own analyses, these sources have helped me better understand the impact of visual on the thinking of the American public.

I believe this work is important because it attempts to explain the widespread islamophobia rife in America right now. By identifying misrepresentations and stereotypes of Muslims in film, we can work towards eliminating them. If Hollywood can hurt Muslims with these portrayals, then the reverse must also be possible. The power of film and other media to impact public perception of certain groups must be harnessed for good. What once spread islamophobia, xenophobia, and racism, can also exude acceptance, tolerance, and pluralism. It is only by identifying and addressing these preconceptions that they can be overturned. I so hope to begin the transition of Muslims from antagonists to protagonists both on the Hollywood screen and in the view of the American public.

Background

Disclaimer: This section intends to trace the history of Muslim presence in America as a brief overview and background for readers. I attempt to use the history of American Muslims as a counter for their misrepresentations on the Hollywood screen. However, this is not to say that a particular religious group or race of people must prove their national belonging through a shared history with that nation. I seek to understand the complex position of Muslims in American history. Their long historical presence may aid my argument in the sense that their portrayals in Hollywood seem particularly bad because they have lived in this country for so long. But if a rich history of American Muslims did not exist, these Hollywood representations would still be negative, detrimental, and wrong. As a white person, I do not feel as though an entire industry has depicted me poorly in the majority of its films. If it did, would I be required to trace my historic presence in this country to defend myself? Much of my historical information comes from Harvard University's pluralism project, a prolific research project aimed at studying religious diversity in the United States. The project's research was very helpful to the content of this section. But I remain critical of the project because its goals are not entirely clear to me. I do not believe certain religious traditions must justify their presence and practice in the United States by finding commonalities and shared histories between them and their more dominant counterparts, or Christianity.

Muslims have been part of the American landscape for a long time. Muslims were navigating their own complex historical narrative even before the first motion picture camera was invented. From the Age of Exploration in the 15th century, to the contemporary era, Muslims have made major contributions to American society. They have been explorers, slaves,

soldiers, political activists, and black nationalists. Like so many other populations, Muslims immigrated to the U.S.A., they have been born here, and some may have converted to Islam. Muslims come to the United States from across the globe, from regions such as North Africa, Syria-Lebanon, Europe, and South Asia. Unfortunately, history reveals that even these Muslims, like the Muslim actors and actresses today, were also treated unfairly. Muslims have been enslaved, disrespected, and neglected by their fellow countrymen. Biased depictions of Muslims in film do not exist in a historical vacuum. American history reveals a pattern of systematic oppression.

As explorers during the European Exploration of the 16th century, Muslims were among the first non-Native Americans to step foot on American soil. We find several documented cases of Muslim men acting as mapmakers and guides in European expeditions to the Americas.¹ The first chronicled Muslim in America was Moroccan guide Estevanico of Azamor, who landed in Florida in 1528.² Estevanico, also known as Esteban the Moor, or Mustafa Zemmouri, was raised Muslim but may have converted to Roman Catholicism. The Spanish typically did not allow non-Catholics to travel to the New World. So it is likely that Estevanico privately kept his faith in Islam.³



Figure 1 - Painting, Estavanico by Granger

Estevanico was captured by the Portuguese around 1520, and sold as a personal servant

¹ Diana L. Eck, The Pluralism Project, accessed October 09, 2017, <http://pluralism.org/religions/islam/islam-in-america/the-first-american-muslims/>.

² Diana L. Eck, The Pluralism Project.

³ Tony Horwitz, *A Voyage Long and Strange: Rediscovering the New World* (London: John Murray, 2009), 130.

to a prominent Spanish nobleman.⁴ He became close friends with his master, Andrés Dorantes de Carranza. Estevanico accompanied de Carranza on an expedition to Florida 1527. Later, he served as the primary guide for another expedition Southwest. He is believed to have been killed by Zuni pueblo indigenous people in Mexico in 1539. Estevanico has been described as interpreter and scout who moved easily between the worlds of Spaniards and Indians.⁵ Estevanico's skills made him crucial to what were often very dangerous expeditions in the New World. By the late 18th century, historical records show evidence of Muslims living in South Carolina. It is likely that these "Moors," were displaced from their homelands through an edict by the Spanish crown.⁶ Explorers like Estevanico made gains in the discovery of the New World as mapmakers and guides for Europeans.

The Pluralism Project, a Harvard University project spearheaded by Diana Eck to study and document the growing religious diversity of the United States was a great resource in informing this history. According to the Project, the first large groups of Muslims to arrive in America were black African slaves, mainly hailing North Africa. African Muslim slaves contributed to American history and culture as agriculturalists, soldiers, and writers. Most Muslim slaves were not able to spend their days freely exploring the Americas, and like Estevanico, they were forced to convert to Christianity.⁷ Plantation owners in Louisiana made a point to add enslaved Muslims to their labor force to benefit from their experience with the cultivation of indigo and rice.⁸ This is evidenced by the presence of Islamic religious titles and

⁴ "History of Estevanico," History of Estevanico - The Estevanico Society, accessed October 09, 2017, <http://www.humanities.uci.edu/mclark/HumCore2001/Spring%20Quarter/Estevanico.htm>.

⁵ Tony Horwitz, *A Voyage Long and Strange*, 130.

⁶ Diana L. Eck, The Pluralism Project.

⁷ John L. Esposito, ed., "Islam in America," *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, accessed October 2, 2017, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e144>.; Diana L. Eck, The Pluralism Project.

⁸ Peter Manseau, "The Muslims of Early America," *The New York Times*, February 9, 2015, accessed October 2, 2017, www.nytimes.com/2015/02/09/opinion/the-founding-muslims.html.

Muslims names, such as Omar and Biram, in the colony of Louisiana's slave inventories and death records.⁹ Though the actual percentage is unknown, historians estimate that between ten and fifty percent of the ten million African slaves brought to America identified as Muslim.¹⁰ The sheer range of such estimates suggests that slave owners usually made little to no effort to learn about their captives' way of life. Their enslavers denied these forefathers of America their most basic humanity and culture. Families were dissolved and religious practices suppressed.¹¹ Without these Muslim agricultural laborers, crops such as indigo and rice may not have been successful on U.S. soil.

Despite suppression by their enslavers, Eck notes that many Muslim slaves strove to preserve their religious and cultural heritage textually even after conversion.¹² For example, Bilalia Fula, a Muslim slave from the Sea Islands of Georgia, demonstrated immense bravery as a soldier during the War of 1812. A multilingual Muslim, Bilalia was buried with his prayer rug and Qur'an.¹³ Omar ibn Said, another American Muslim slave, was born in 1770 in what is now Senegal's northern border with Mauritania.¹⁴ Said was educated in Africa for twenty-five years before his enslavement and transport to Charleston, South Carolina. Soon after his sale to a local planter, Said escaped and made his way to Fayetteville, North Carolina. There he was imprisoned and subsequently sold to General James Owen. Owen recognized that Said was an educated man and treated him as such. He lived out the rest of his life with the Owen family.¹⁵

⁹ Peter Manseau, "The Muslims of Early America."

¹⁰ Diana L. Eck, The Pluralism Project.

¹¹ Diana L. Eck, The Pluralism Project.

¹² Diana L. Eck, The Pluralism Project.

¹³ Diana L. Eck, The Pluralism Project.

¹⁴ Omar ibn Said, "Autobiography of Omar ibn Said, Slave in North Carolina, 1831," ed. John Franklin Jameson, *The American Historical Review* 30, no. 4 (July 1925): , doi:10.1086/ahr/30.4.787.

¹⁵ Omar ibn Said, "Autobiography of Omar ibn Said."

In 1925, a copy of Said's autobiography, translated from Arabic, was published in the *American Historical Review*.¹⁶ Later, in 1995, Said's original handwritten manuscript detailing his life in fifteen pages of Arabic was discovered in an old trunk in Virginia.¹⁷ Written with intermittent Qur'anic verses and Christian gospels, Omar ibn Said's autobiography is an essential resource to the study of the melding of Islam and Christianity in early American history. Many slaves strove to preserve their beliefs in Islam after capture, but this was difficult given the growing pressure to convert to Christianity by their slave owners. Therefore, many later generations of slaves born in the Americas practiced a hybridized Islam and Christianity. Furthermore, Said's account represents one of few primary sources detailing the capture, transport, and enslavement of African Muslims.



Figure 2 – Omar ibn Said, Davidson College Archives



Figure 3 – Salem Poor Commemorative Stamp

Early American Muslims were also soldiers during the American Revolutionary War. Records suggest that several African Muslims fought on the American side. Peter Salem, for example, shot and killed

¹⁶ Omar ibn Said, "Autobiography of Omar ibn Said, Slave in North Carolina, 1831."

¹⁷ Patrick Horn, "Summary of Autobiography of Omar ibn Said, Slave in North Carolina, 1831. Ed. John Franklin Jameson. From *The American Historical Review*, 30, No. 4. (July 1925), 787-795," Documenting the American South, October 2007, accessed October 09, 2017, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/omarsaid/summary.html>.

British major John Pitcairn in the Battle of Bunker Hill in 1775 and also served at Lexington.¹⁸

Besides Peter Salem, another African Muslim soldier, Salem Poor, is cited for bravery during the Battle of Bunker Hill. Both Peter Salem and Salem Poor were interestingly printed on U.S. Postal Service commemorative stamps for their heroism.¹⁹ As soldiers, Muslims bravely fought for America's independence.

In the late 19th century, the first wave of Muslim immigrants moved to the United States. Initially, these Muslims came to the U.S. as part of a majority-Christian group of immigrants from the greater Syria area.²⁰ These immigrants were mostly poor, working class men who hoped to return home to their families with financial success.²¹ Instead, a number of them settled permanently in America. They were later joined by European Muslims and began to establish communities in rural and urban areas. These immigrants from the greater Syria area, or what is today Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria, often worked as street peddlers selling food and drink in the mid-west. Industrial areas such as Fall River, Massachusetts, Chicago, Illinois, Toledo, Ohio, and Dearborn, Michigan were home to the first Muslim communities in the United States.²²

South Asian Muslim immigrants began immigrating to America as early as 1900 by ship from India and what is today Pakistan. They often entered through the port of Vancouver, Canada, and then migrated south to California for the farming opportunities.²³ A significant incident occurred in 1914, when the *Komagata Maru*, a Japanese steamship carrying passengers

¹⁸ Samory Rashid, *Black Muslims in the US: History, Politics, and the Struggle of a Community* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 78.

¹⁹ Samory Rashid, *Black Muslims in the US*, 78.

²⁰ John L. Esposito, ed., "Islam in America."

²¹ John L. Esposito, ed., "Islam in America."

²² Diana L. Eck, The Pluralism Project.

²³ Diana L. Eck, The Pluralism Project.

from the Punjab, was denied entry into Vancouver's Coal Harbor.²⁴ Of the 376 passengers, the majority was Sikh, but there were also 24 Muslims and 12 Hindus. The passengers were forced to return to India, and were not even allowed to disembark in Hong Kong. The *Komagata Maru* incident is still remembered today as a "revolutionary episode" because of the way the passengers were treated. It gave momentum to several the Indian revolutionary movements.²⁵ Despite such racist exclusionary rules, by the 1920s, American Muslims had settled in small communities throughout the United States, and included South Asians, Albanians, Turks, Bosnians, as well as people from Syria-Lebanon.²⁶ These budding communities strove to retain their culture and practice Islam at a time when most of America was ignorant of the religion.

Muslim immigrants had a political streak. Because of the rise of Indian nationalism at the end of the 19th century, South Asian immigrants were particularly politically active. In 1913, the Ghadar Movement began in San Francisco as a federation of expatriate Punjabis committed to raising funds and support for the overthrow of British rule in India.²⁷ Ghadar Party members were Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims. The insignia of its publication bore the names "Ram, Allah, and Nanak."²⁸ By placing Allah alongside the Hindu deity Ram and Sikh Guru Nanak, the Ghadar Party established its identity as a pan-Indian nationalist movement that included Indians of all religious affiliations. The Ghadar Party printed educational pro-nationalist pamphlets and arranged to send arms and volunteers on revolutionary missions to India. Though these revolutionary missions were unsuccessful, the Ghadar Party remained a focal point for pan-

²⁴ A.C. BOSE, "THE 'KOMAGATAMARU' EPISODE," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 29 (1967), 74. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44137996>.

²⁵ BOSE, A. C. "THE 'KOMAGATAMARU' EPISODE."

²⁶ Diana L. Eck, The Pluralism Project.

²⁷ Diana L. Eck, The Pluralism Project.

²⁸ Diana L. Eck, The Pluralism Project.

Indian Punjabi Sikh, Muslim, and Hindu identity until Indian independence in 1947.²⁹ The Ghadar Party and movement demonstrate an example of Muslim political action in the early 20th century America.

As interest in Islam grew, a number of Americans decided to convert to the religion. In 1893, US Diplomat and Muslim convert Muhammad Alexander Russell Webb became the first

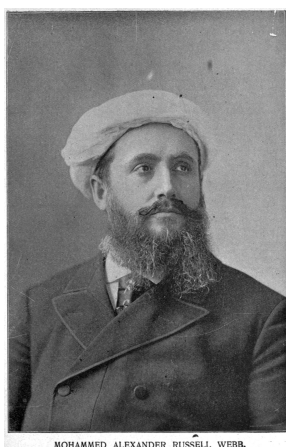


Figure 4 – Muhammad Alexander Russell Webb, the first American Muslim Convert

and only Muslim speaker at the first Parliament for the World's Religions. Historians consider Webb to be the earliest prominent white American to convert to Islam in the USA.³⁰ Webb accepted Islam as an American Consul General in the Philippines, probably as a result of his contacts with some Muslims in Bombay, India.³¹ Webb devoted the

rest of his life to spreading the teachings of Islam; ultimately founding the American Muslim Propagation Movement

entitled *Moslem World*, a publication oriented towards education on Islam.³²

The earliest Muslim immigrant communities did not have the funds or the numbers to establish formal mosques, and instead met in private homes.³³ The first documented mosque in the United States was built in 1929 in Ross, North Dakota by pioneers from the Syria-Lebanon area.³⁴ The Ross Mosque is described as “a modest square of cinder blocks, perhaps 15 feet on

²⁹ Diana L. Eck, The Pluralism Project.

³⁰ M. Ali Kettani and Amadou Mahtar M'Bow, *Islam and Muslims in the American Continent*, 1st ed. (Beirut, LB: Center Of Historical, Economical and Social Studies, 2001), 134.

³¹ M. Ali Kettani and Amadou Mahtar M'Bow, *Islam and Muslims in the American Continent*, 175.

³² Diana L. Eck, The Pluralism Project.

³³ Diana L. Eck, The Pluralism Project.

³⁴ Samuel G. Freedman, "North Dakota Mosque a Symbol of Muslims' Long Ties in America," *The New York Times*, May 28, 2016, On Religion sec., May 27, 2016, accessed October 18, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/28/us/north-dakota-mosque-a-symbol-of-muslims-deep-ties-in-america.html>.

each side, topped with an aluminum dome and minarets.”³⁵ The mosque fell into disrepair, but was restored in 2005 by the descendants of its founders and the Christian friends they had made over the generations.³⁶ The Ross Mosque looks somewhat out of place on the sprawling North Dakota prairie. But local residents see the mosque as just another house of worship, perhaps significant in that it is almost a century old.

Another noteworthy early mosque was the Pepperell Counting House in Biddeford, Maine.³⁷ In 2010, Charlie Butler, a historian researching Biddeford’s early Muslim community, discovered that a section of the Woodlawn Cemetery in Biddeford has every gravestone facing Mecca. As a result, Woodlawn may be the oldest Muslim cemetery in America. Records suggest the cemetery was founded by the York County Albania Society in 1918, a society of Turkish and



Figure 5 – “Mother Mosque” in Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Albanian men recruited to work in the mills in Maine.

“Butler is fairly certain that Muslim men would gather for prayers in 1915, most likely on the second floor of what used to be called the Pepperell Counting House, which was part of the mill complex and where different religious groups would start off over the years.”³⁸ The

Counting House cannot be labeled as an official mosque, but its presence suggests there were a substantial number of Muslims in Biddeford to meet in a private home.

With the onset of WWI, the limiting Immigration Act of 1924, and the Great Depression,

³⁵ Samuel G. Freedman, "North Dakota Mosque a Symbol of Muslims' Long Ties in America."

³⁶ Samuel G. Freedman, "North Dakota Mosque a Symbol of Muslims' Long Ties in America."

³⁷ Maine Public Broadcasting Network, "Being Muslim in Maine," public broadcast, Maine Watch With Jennifer Rooks, July 8, 2010, accessed October 18, 2017, <http://video.mainepublic.org/video/1540819504/>.

³⁸ Maine Public Broadcasting Network, "Being Muslim in Maine."

Muslim emigration slowed.³⁹ However, in 1934, the Cedar Rapids Syrian-Lebanese community built the Mother Mosque of America in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Widespread fundraising is responsible for the continued existence of this mosque, which claims the title of “the oldest purpose-built mosque that is still in use today.”⁴⁰ Early American Muslims may not have needed mosques to practice their faith, but mosque building still remains an important indicator for an expanding Muslim community. Furthermore, efforts towards the continued upkeep of these mosques suggest residents view them as linked to the community’s history.

A significant number of African Americans assumed an Islamic identity in the mid-20th century through the Nation of Islam (NOI). Made popular in the 1950s by African-American Muslim Minister and human rights activist Malcolm X, the NOI used Islam as a way for black Americans to reclaim their identity, and sometimes went as far as justifying black superiority.⁴¹ Though most of these NOI members (including Malcolm X) converted from the



© EVE ARNOLD/MAGNUM PHOTOS

Figure 6 – Malcolm X Delivers Speech at NOI meeting, 1961, Washington

sectarian Islam practiced by the NOI to Sunni Islam after 1975, the organization still exists today with a small membership base. Demographically, African Americans and other converts to Islam make up almost half of America’s Muslim population. One fifth of the American Muslim populace identifies as Shia, while the rest are classified as Sunni or members of minority sects, such as Sufis, Ahmadis, and Druze.⁴²

There is a long history of Muslim presence in the America. In some cases, Muslims have

³⁹ Diana L. Eck, The Pluralism Project.

⁴⁰ Diana L. Eck, The Pluralism Project.

⁴¹ Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Grove Press, 1965).

⁴² John L. Esposito, ed., "Islam in America."

lived in this country much longer than their white European immigrant counterparts.

Additionally, these early Muslims were not insignificant or simply uneducated workers, as some may believe. Instead, they were explorers like Estevanico of Azamor, slaves with twenty-five years of education, as in the case of Omar ibn Said, American soldiers and patriots, like Salem Poor, political activists, like the members of the Ghadar Party, government diplomats, such as Muhammad Alexander Russell Webb, and civil rights leaders, like Malcolm X. American Muslims are clearly three-dimensional protagonists who made significant contributions to U.S. history. So why have Muslims been portrayed so negatively in Hollywood? Especially before they were associated in the United States with extremism and acts of terror? Muslims today face the same disrespect, oppression, and disregard for their education or talent carried on screen as their historical predecessors. Though hundreds of years apart, the enslavement of the educated Muslim Omar ibn Said is inextricably linked to the misrepresentation of Muslim actors and actresses in the 21st century. The narrative of Muslim Americans confirms that the abhorrent media portrayals of Muslims are not a new phenomenon. A long tradition of marginalization demonstrates both American systematic racism and ignorance of the substantial and significant contribution of Muslims to American history.

Whitewashing & Race in Hollywood

Over a century ago, shortly after Thomas Edison founded the first film studio, his initial film screened was *The Dance of the Seven Veils*. Since then, thousands of feature films with Muslim characters have been produced, with representations ranging from the international terrorist to the desert sheik.⁴³ Jack Shaheen suggests that this misrepresentation of Muslims is not benign. Instead, it is a deliberate use of “repetition as a teaching tool, tutoring movie audiences by repeating over and over, in film after film, insidious images of Arab people.”⁴⁴ Ironically, many of the early Hollywood films depicting Muslim characters never consulted with or cast any actual Muslim men and women. This concept, called ‘whitewashing,’ refers to a casting process in the United States where white actors are given historically non-white character roles. Hollywood’s whitewashing engages in erasure, where Muslims are erased completely from the screen, and inaccuracy, where Muslims are represented inaccurately, which can lead to invented stereotypes and fabricated history and identities. By casting white actors in these roles, Hollywood never gives Muslims a chance to defend themselves or call for more historically accurate representations.

Instead of selecting Muslim actors for the roles of Muslim characters, Hollywood whitewashes these characters, even going as far as showing white men in brown face to make them appear more ‘ethnic.’ Even as late as 2016, Hollywood’s homogeny and blatant racism has kept them from using actors of color in historically non-white roles. If given the chance, based on the stereotypes and misrepresentations most Muslim characters embodied, would real

⁴³ Nawar Shora, *The Arab-American Handbook: A Guide to the Arab, Arab-American & Muslim worlds*, 1st ed. (Seattle, Washington: Cune Press, 2009), 266.

⁴⁴ Jack G. Shaheen, "Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People," *Sage Publications, Inc. in association with the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *Islam: Enduring Myths and Changing Realities*, 588 (July 2003): 172, accessed October 20, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1049860>.

Muslims even take on such roles? Currently, in America, why do we perceive this ‘brown face,’ or whitewashing of Muslim characters, as less problematic than ‘black face’? How does our geopolitical history play a role in this?

Whitewashing was initially deemed necessary because mixed race relationships were viewed as unacceptable. In the 1921 silent film *The Sheik*, Italian heartthrob Rudolph Valentino plays Sheik Ahmed, an Arab protagonist who falls in love with white English heroine Lady Diana. However, since the current Motion Pictures Production Code forbade “miscegenation,” or sex relations between white and black races, the film ends with Sheik Ahmed’s true identity



Figure 7 - Rudolph Valentino and Agnes Ayres embrace in *The Sheik* (1921)

being revealed as a white Spaniard who was orphaned in the desert and raised by Arabs.⁴⁵ “As

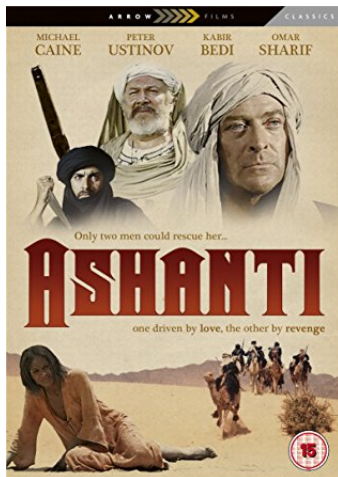
some Code executives believed Arabs to be nonwhite persons, it became unthinkable for producers to show a white Western woman loving a dusky-skinned, swarthy Arab. Like brown Indians and black Africans, dark Arabs, too, could not be bonded with “white” heroines.”⁴⁶ Since Sheik Ahmed is later revealed to not be ethnically Arab, this is actually not a case of ‘brown face.’ However, this film is still significant as it highlights the unacceptability of mixed race relations of any kind at the time. In this case, mixed race relations were so unacceptable that plots of films, like that of *The Sheik*, were designed to show only racially homogenous relations.

Whitewashing cannot be suppressed from the annals of American history, as even box office hits contain whitewashing. Another, perhaps more famous film, also casts prominent white

⁴⁵ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001), 423.

⁴⁶ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 423.

actors as Arab characters. Released in 1962, the historical epic *Lawrence of Arabia* was heralded by the American Film Institute as the “Fifth Greatest Movie of All Time.”⁴⁷ *Lawrence* stars Peter O’Toole as T.E. Lawrence, Omar Sharif as Sherif Ali, Alec Guinness as Prince Faisal, and Anthony Quinn as Auda Abu Tayi.⁴⁸ Both Alec Guinness and Anthony Quinn donned



“brownface” for their roles. Egyptian actor Omar Sharif actually did not identify as Muslim until later in life, and was born into a family of Melkite Catholic descent. However, in 1955, Sharif changed his name and converted to Islam in order to marry Egyptian Muslim actress Faten Hamama.⁴⁹ In an interview with Sharif in 1989, almost thirty years after his portrayal of Sherif Ali in *Lawrence*, he expresses some regrets about the depiction.

Figure 8 – Film jacket for *Ashanti* (1979) Because of the box office success of *Lawrence*, Sharif was cast in alongside Michael Caine in a much more controversial film. In this case, Sharif had to make the difficult decision of whether or not to take a role that poorly represented his fellow Arabs, but that would pay well.

Though many people hope to never have to sacrifice their personal beliefs for their careers, Sharif had a wife and young son to support. In *Ashanti* (1979), Sharif plays an evil oil sheik that, according to Jack Shaheen, is one of the worst portrayals of Arabs by Hollywood in history. Sharif’s portrayal of Prince Hassan was particularly negative because of Hassan’s

⁴⁷ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 288.

⁴⁸ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 288.

⁴⁹ Omar Sharif and Miriam Rosen, "The Making of Omar Sharif: An Interview," *Cinéaste* 17, no. 1 (1989): 19, accessed October 31, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23803061>.

straddling of both what viewers perceived as stereotypically “Western” and “Eastern” culture.⁵⁰ Throughout the film, Prince Hassan is only seen dressed in a stylish Western-style black suit paired with a black tie and suave aviator glasses. He speaks perfect English, and enjoys a wealthy lifestyle. His characterization is not unlike depictions of Italian mafia bosses in American gangster films. He also seems well traveled and well versed in the “Western” world. However, despite his Westernized character, he still retains the “backwards” practices of region, or buying and selling women as sex slaves.⁵¹ Prince Hassan’s European dress and wealth suggest he has spent time abroad, where it is assumed women are better treated than in *Ashanti*’s fictional West African setting (whether or not women are actually treated better in the West is complex and up for interpretation). But Hassan did not abandon his slave-trading ways, choosing Western style and wealth—not its treatment of women. *Ashanti* and Omar Sharif’s depiction of Prince Hassan imply that no amount of exposure to “Western ways” will cure Arabs of their evil inclinations, especially in regards to the enslavement and maltreatment of women.⁵² “In the wake of *Ashanti*, Sharif wound up on the Arab boycott list, and nearly ten years later, the film, deservedly, continues to raise hackles in the Arab world.”⁵³ Sharif pointedly ignores his role in *Ashanti*, choosing not to mention it in any recent interviews.



Figure 9 – Alec Guinness dons “brownface” in *Lawrence of Arabia* as Prince Faisal

⁵⁰ *Ashanti*, dir. Richard Fleischer, screenplay by Stephen Geller, by Alberto Vazquez Figueroa, perf. Michael Caine, Peter Ustinov, Kabir Bedi, and Omar Sharif (United States: Warner Bros. Pictures, 1979), DVD.

⁵¹ *Ashanti*, dir. Richard Fleischer.

⁵² *Ashanti*, dir. Richard Fleischer.

⁵³ Omar Sharif and Miriam Rosen, "The Making of Omar Sharif: An Interview," 18.

Some films are “better” than others in their portrayal of Muslims. But these films must still be criticized for their racist whitewashing of on-screen Muslim characters, bereaving those characters of the chance to be represented by actors and actresses that share their religious faith. *Lawrence of Arabia* presents an interesting dichotomy. On one hand, it is somewhat historically truthful, and paints Arabs in a much more positive light than its counterparts. *Lawrence of Arabia* is important because it does show Western powers, namely France and England, reneging on their promises for Arab independence.⁵⁴ Additionally, most scenes do display Arabs behaving as decent, real human beings. In a scene inside Prince Faisal’s (Alec Guinness) tent, viewers do not see the stereotypical gratuitous harem maidens or bellydancers. “Instead, an imam reads from the Holy Koran; and Faisal reflects on Arab contributions to society.”⁵⁵ Unlike later films, which equate Islamic religious practices like reading the Qur’an with acts of terror, *Lawrence* presents them as benign and disconnected from violence. However, *Lawrence* still fails to escape the cultural domination on the part of the West that runs rampant in such films. The hero of the movie is Lawrence—the brave Englishman—not the valiant Arab. He is the desert savior, and without him, the Turks never would have been defeated. This in itself is historically inaccurate, because although Lawrence was crucial as an intermediary between the British and Arabs, he did not lead the revolt.⁵⁶ Finally, the whitewashing of Prince Faisal by Alec Guinness and Auda Abu Tayi by Anthony Quinn permanently places this film in the realm of misrepresentations of Muslim characters.

Though the Western film industry was still engaging in “brownface” well into the modern era, many viewers would assume that blackface was deemed unacceptable many years

⁵⁴ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 291.

⁵⁵ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 289.

⁵⁶ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 291.

ago. This is not the case for the 1965 British theatre staged film of William Shakespeare's *Othello*. Read in high schools across the world, the Shakespearean tragedy tells the story of Othello, a Moorish general in the Venetian army, who falls in love with and elopes with Desdemona, a white woman. *Othello* has been reproduced many times since its inception, both on the stage and the screen. In the 1965 film production, white English actor Lawrence Olivier engages in blackface while playing the role of Othello.⁵⁷ Producers of the film, as well as Olivier himself, claimed that blackface was necessary in order to stay true to the traditional minstrel historical productions of the play.

The implications of Olivier donning blackface were not lost on critics of the film. "Just as actors of nineteenth-century minstrel versions of *Othello* jumped Jim Crow between scenes, even those modern approaches to *Othello* that sought to celebrate diversity or Otherness tend to participate in the dynamics of spirit-murder implicit in the blackface tradition."⁵⁸ If anything, the character of Othello should be empowering to people of color. Othello is a



Figure 10 – Lawrence Olivier in blackface as Othello in the 1965 film *Othello*

courageous, brave, and competent, general with a Moorish (Muslim) background. Despite the color of his skin, he has managed to rise to high ranks in the Venetian military during the sixteenth century. By preventing people of color, let alone Muslims, from taking on Othello's role as late as 1965, the film industry is robbing the play of any of its original empowerment. Regarding the role,

⁵⁷ Susan Gubar, *Racechanges: White Skin, Black Face in American Culture* (New York, NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), 93.

⁵⁸ Susan Gubar, *Racechanges: White Skin, Black Face in American Culture*, 93.

Olivier states the following.⁵⁹

Black all over my body, Max Factor 2880, then a lighter brown, then Negro No. 2, a stronger brown. Brown on black to give a rich mahogany. Then the great trick: that glorious half-yard of chiffon with which I polished myself all over until I shone....I am, I...I am Othello...but Olivier is in charge. The actor is in control. The actor breathes into the nostrils of the character and the character comes to life. For this moment in my time, Othello is my character—he's mine. He belongs to no one else; he belongs to me. When I sigh, he sighs. When I laugh, he laughs. When I cry, he cries. (158-59)

When Lawrence Olivier states that Othello is his—that Othello belongs to him, he is only continuing the tradition of white ownership over people of color. Furthermore, though Othello is described as “the Moor,” his Muslim identity is never addressed. It is not until 1995 that an African American is given the role in a full-length feature film version of *Othello*.

When government leaders condemn Muslims and Arabs as villains in Hollywood film, they suggest these individuals committed crimes because of their ethnic and religious identity. 1975 marked the release of the popular *The Wind and the Lion*, a film very loosely based on a



true incident that occurred in Tangier, Morocco in 1904. In the film, white Scottish actor Sean Connery plays the Raisuli, a suntanned, black turban wearing, curled mustache touting Moroccan kidnapper. After breaking into a European estate, Raisuli and his followers slash art works, kill Westerners and their Moroccan servants, and kidnap the wealthy American

Figure 11 – Sean Connery playing Moroccan Raisuli in *The Wind and the Lion*

family living there.⁶⁰ This prompts the response of U.S. President Roosevelt, who states, “[This Raisuli has no]

respect for human lives; he is an Arabian thief [who is] holding me up like a common desperado.

⁵⁹ Susan Gubar, *Racechanges: White Skin, Black Face in American Culture*, 93-94.

⁶⁰ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 527.

[I am] not a man to stand by and condone barbaric acts.”⁶¹ By having President Roosevelt name Raisuli an “Arabian thief,” instead of just a thief, the filmmakers are racializing his crime, suggesting that he committed such acts because of his Arab identity. Furthermore, calling Raisuli’s acts “barbaric” hearkens back to the perceived superiority of the historic West over the savage East. In another scene, an American diplomat discusses the kidnapping with the Sultan, inquiring about what he could give the Sultan in exchange for the safe return of the American family. The Sultan requests that lions be delivered to him via camel. Shaheen comments on this, stating, “Camels, not trucks, are used to transport the lions. Why? Because the dense sultan refuses to build roads.”⁶² Again, this insinuates that Morocco is very backward—especially compared to America.

The film ends with Raisuli, originally the villain, being praised for the mercy and concern he showed the American family when he saved them from abuse by yet another group of Moroccan scoundrels. Despite this more positive depiction of Raisuli at the end of the film, *The Wind and the Lion* remains problematic for its whitewashing, racist depictions of Arabs, and historical inaccuracy. In addition to casting Sean Connery as real life Moroccan Muslim Raisuli, the film also depicts the 1904 incident in Tangier incorrectly. Raisuli never kidnapped any women and children, instead taking a wealthy Greek-American businessman and his male companion. No one was shot or killed at the villa, and the captives were treated well and eventually released. In the end, Raisuli became the Caid, or official, of Morocco and kept the ransom of seventy thousand U.S. dollars he had received for the safe return of the two men.⁶³ As a result, *The Wind and the Lion* not only serves as an example of Hollywood whitewashing, but

⁶¹ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 527.

⁶² Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 528.

⁶³ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 529.

also incorrectly presents a significant historical event.

Occasionally, whitewashing can take another form in which the Middle Eastern landscape only serves as an exotic setting for European plots. A classic example of this is the extremely popular 1942 film *Casablanca*. “[*Casablanca*] is peopled by Americans, French, Germans, and even Czechs, but where are the Arabs?”⁶⁴ In this example, American directors erase Moroccans from their native land to populate it with white people. They are hijacking the colorful, bustling streets of Casablanca, Morocco to further the plotlines of non-Muslim non-Moroccan white characters. The Moroccan extras that people Casablanca’s picturesque streets in the film are not even given an individual purpose or distinction—they only serve as relevant props to the foreign exotic setting sought after by the director.

Whitewashing is a concept where white actors and actresses play roles traditionally played by non-whites. The American film industry has been whitewashing Muslim characters since the dawn of film. Whitewashing not only prevents Muslims from engaging in the film industry, but also takes away the authenticity and experience they might have brought to the role. Furthermore, giving white actors such roles creates a culture that suggests white people are the experts on Islam and Muslim culture. Though categorizing whitewashing as a racist or bigoted practice seems obvious, the fact that whitewashed roles have persisted into the 21st century is indicative of its prevalence. Whitewashing may only make up a single piece in the misrepresentation of Muslims in Western film, but is essential to understanding the empty identity of Muslim roles that are played by white characters.

⁶⁴ Laurence Michalek, "The Arab in American Cinema: A Century of Otherness," 4.

Othering Through An Orientalist Lens

Many American films portray Muslims as the *other*—the colorful Eastern character out of touch with the “modern” life led by his surrounding white characters. *Othering* in this sense is to view or treat a person or a group of people as intrinsically different from and alien to oneself or one’s own group. Such depictions are characteristic of the prevailing Orientalist discourse in Hollywood film. Though Edward Said’s revolutionary 1978 book *Orientalism* spoke mainly to colonialist rhetoric from the 19th century, his theory of Orientalism, specifically Neo-Orientalism, is most relevant to the current American film industry.⁶⁵ Said’s definition of Neo-Orientalism is very applicable to the forms of Muslim *othering* in Hollywood film. The American film industry depicts the Muslims as unchanging, stagnant, and inferior, just as colonial Britain and France portrayed the East.

Orientalism and Neo-Orientalism are distinct, yet related concepts. Said describes Orientalism as, “a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience.”⁶⁶ Said means that Western Europe has constructed a specific and arguably artificial way for viewing “the Orient.” He explains that Orientalism as, “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and “the Occident.””⁶⁷ By making the Orient out as the *other*, the Occident, or Western world, has distanced itself and created an inherent mode of viewing the Eastern world as alternative and strange. As a result, the *other* is culturally inferior and open to colonialist rule. Said illustrates this construction of superior and inferior culture well when he states, “Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the

⁶⁵ E. W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York City, NY: Pantheon Books, 1978).

⁶⁶ E. W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1.

⁶⁷ E. W. Said, *Orientalism*, 2.

Orient.”⁶⁸ In the American film industry, this domination is played out by placing Muslims in the role of antagonist rather than protagonist. Arabs and Muslims are often placed in culturally distinct roles from their white counterparts, even when not playing the villain.

Neo-Orientalism retains the same tenants as Said’s original Orientalism, but is more updated for the 20th century onward. In his chapter “Orientalism Now,” he describes the neo-Orientalism practiced by America in varying disciplines of the 20th century.⁶⁹ According to Said, since World War II, and more noticeably after each of the Arab-Israeli wars, the Arab Muslim has become a figure in American popular culture.⁷⁰ These depictions were initially offensive, but not malicious. However, after the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, “the Arab appeared everywhere as something more menacing.”⁷¹ Said cites cartoons appearing that showed Arab sheiks posing behind a gasoline pump with sharp, hooked noses and malevolent mustache-covered smirks on their faces. Soon after, the assumption arose that the Arab was the enemy of Israel and the West, and Arabs began to be depicted negatively and stereotypically, as evil Sheiks and violent terrorists, in American film. “In the films and television the Arab is associated either with lechery or bloodthirsty dishonesty. He appears as an oversexed degenerate, capable, it is true, of cleverly devious intrigues, but essentially sadistic, treacherous, low.”⁷² Said believes the neo-orientalist themes present in Hollywood is a “specifically American” addition to the history of Orientalism.⁷³

⁶⁸ E. W. Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

⁶⁹ E. W. Said, *Orientalism*, 284.

⁷⁰ E. W. Said, *Orientalism*, 284.

⁷¹ E. W. Said, *Orientalism*, 285.

⁷² E. W. Said, *Orientalism*, 287.

⁷³ E. W. Said, *Orientalism*, 290.

American film *others* Muslims by exotifying them, fetishizing them, and muddling their cultures together. These methods of *othering* fall under the umbrella definition of Orientalism, including Said's more recent Neo-Orientalism.

Exotification occurs when the broadly identified "West" makes the "East" appear more exotic – or strange, mysterious, alluring, colorful, and outlandish. Of the films that exotify Muslims, the most popular were those that depicted, "the exotic adventure melodrama set in the desert."⁷⁴ The 1921 film *The Sheik*, a desert melodrama,



Figure 12 - Rudolph Valentino as the Sheik

acts as the first concrete example of exotification in the history of Hollywood film. In the original *Sheik* as well as its sequels, Italian actor Rudolph Valentino is dressed in full "Arab" costume. As seen in figure 12, he appears to be wearing a poorly fashioned keffiyeh, or type of Middle Eastern headscarf used to protect the wearer from sunburn, and long multicolored robes, while gazing at something or someone with smoldering, dark eyes. While Valentino's robes are dark colored, traditional Middle Eastern or Arab robes for men were usually white, so to keep the wearer cooler in the arid climate. The clash of colors, patterns, and hanging tassels in Valentino's costume is excessive and fabricated. For Westernized audiences, the more exotic Valentino appears, the more entertaining. This, in turn, gives the impression that life in the Western world is normal, while the cultural practices and norms in the Eastern world are something to be fascinated by. In reality though, not how life should be lived by the perceivably more civilized and culturally superior West.

⁷⁴ Laurence Michalek, "The Arab in American Cinema: A Century of Otherness," 3.

Exotification in Hollywood films can apply to people, places, and objects. The *Kismet* series, or a set of four films all based off of Edward Knaublach's 1912 play, exemplifies



Figure 13 - Stills from *Kismet* (1955)

exotification of place. The word “kismet,” deriving from both Arabic and Turkish, roughly means “fate” or “destiny.” In this case, the fate of the series’ characters is highly romanticized and improbable. These films diverge from the

stereotypical desert melodrama in that they do not partake in the Muslim antagonist versus white protagonist storyline. Instead, the *Kismet* films portray Arab versus Arab violence, with both the protagonists and antagonists identifying as Muslim. Jack Shaheen states, “Prominent performers appear as admirable Arabs.”⁷⁵ However, the films remain problematic for their exotified gaze of Bagdad, as illustrated by the ostentatious costumes in figure 13.

Hollywood film portrays Islam and the Middle East as passive and immutable. In the first installment of *Kismet*, released in 1920, the settings are peaceful, romantic, and fantastic. “Beautiful Bagdad” appears as “a fabulous old city, the jewel of the Orient.”⁷⁶ The way of life depicted in *Kismet*, supposedly set in the *Arabian Nights* time period, or as early as 800 C.E., is extravagant and unrealistic, with commoners befriending and marrying royalty, as well as fathers sacrificing all they have to secure the happiness of their daughters.⁷⁷ If the film were based in fact, those in the upper echelons of Islamic society would not be marrying outside of their social

⁷⁵ Jack G. Shaheen, “Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People,” *Sage Publications, Inc. in association with the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *Islam: Enduring Myths and Changing Realities*, 588 (July 2003): 281, accessed October 20, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1049860>.

⁷⁶ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 281.

⁷⁷ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 282.

class. Furthermore, the emphasis on female honor would keep most women from encountering a love-match situation that required a father's sacrifice. The mythical fictitious narrative of the *Kismet* series is dangerous because it promotes untrue stereotypes and presents a landscape and city without historical accuracy. Furthermore, the romanticization of life for the characters in *Kismet* ignores the harsh reality of life for women in Bagdad at that time, whose bodies were strictly controlled by male relatives. In placing fantasy over truth, the *Kismet* series misleads viewers into the false perception that the mysterious Bagdad, and by extension, the Middle East, is eternal and unchanging, and therefore not worth addressing when talking about the position of women and other social concerns.

Muddling in film takes exotification a step further to make all that is deemed exotic indistinguishable from each other. In Professor Diya Abdo's article on Orientalism and Arab women, she notes this muddling of identity in several films. "Kamal-Eldin explores the organization of gender, race, sexuality in Hollywood's portrayal of the exotic East, an indiscriminate fusion of things Arab, Persian, Chinese and Indian."⁷⁸ Through the exotification process, the Western film industry deliberately forfeits any chance of discernment between the *others* lumped together. Their distinct identities are erased by Hollywood. This muddling of culture is made more apparent by Marsha Meskimmon's description. "The exotic was shorthand for anything transgressing the borders of an ostensibly 'christian, civilised, rational Europe.'"⁷⁹ To American filmmakers, anything outside the norm of accepted Western culture was considered exotic and therefore only distinguishable in the sense that it was different from the West. It did not matter that these regions had rich, diverse, complex, and divergent histories and culture.

⁷⁸ Diya Abdo, "Uncovering the Harem in the Classroom: Tania Kamal-Eldin's "Covered: The Hejab in Cairo, Egypt" and "Hollywood Harems" within the Context of a Course on Arab Women Writers," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 30, no. 1/2 (Summer 2002): 234, accessed November 1, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40004649>.

⁷⁹ Marsha Meskimmon, *Women Making Art: History, Subjectivity, Aesthetics* (London: Routledge, 2003), 136,

They were not American or Western European, and therefore their cultural intricacies were not worth investigating.

Fetishism takes exotification a step further by explicitly sexualizing the object or person exotified by Hollywood. Laura Mulvey describes fetishism as “the attribution of self-sufficiency and autonomous powers to a manifestly “man” derived object. It is therefore dependent on the ability to disavow what is known and replace it with belief and the suspension of disbelief.”⁸⁰ Mulvey means that in fetishizing a person, object, or culture, male-dominated Hollywood is able to change what is known to be true about that person, object, or culture by giving it sexual power. However, any power given to, for example, fetishized Muslim women, is still in the hands of those who fetishized them initially. “The fetish, however, is always haunted by the fragility of the mechanisms that sustain it.”⁸¹ These mechanisms are the changeable desires of Hollywood directors and viewers. The Muslim harem maiden once heralded as an object of seduction and sexual prowess can easily be transformed into an ugly villain. Racial fetishism, at its core, involves the desire for another person from another culture solely because they are different and exotic.

Though both men and women can be fetishized, more often than not, fetishization in this case is directly connected to the sexualization of Muslim women. “This world, and its women, are “hot,” “exotic,” “lavish,” a “feast,” and “wild” and are filled with “intrigue,” “treachery,” “beauty,” and “glamour” as the 1942 trailer for *Arabian Nights* tells us.”⁸² Muslim women rarely take on the roles of main characters in these films—most often not speaking at all. Mulvey describes this notion of silenced women as scopophilia, or the deriving of pleasure from looking

⁸⁰ Laura Mulvey, “Some Thoughts on Theories of Fetishism in the Context of Contemporary Culture,” *The MIT Press*, October, 65 (Summer 1993): 7, accessed January 14, 2018, doi:10.2307/778760.

⁸¹ Laura Mulvey, “Some Thoughts on Theories of Fetishism in the Context of Contemporary Culture,” 7.

⁸² Diya Abdo, “Uncovering the Harem in the Classroom,” 234.

people or objects.⁸³ Mute Muslim women act as sexual objects to be gazed voyeuristically upon by film viewers. Harem maidens are objects to be owned by Muslim men and sold or given to white men. Furthermore, if they do play the role of main characters, they are frequently depicted as lustful villains, intent on bedding Western men in any way possible.

On screen Muslim women are sometimes characterized as racist towards Muslim men, in a deliberate maneuver to emphasize the superiority of white men. *Beau Ideal* is an early Hollywood film featuring this fetishized and poorly depicted maiden stereotype.⁸⁴ Released in 1931, *Beau Ideal* tells the story of a half-Arab, half-French dancer who betrays her Arab masters in order to bed the Western protagonist. Zuleika, the dancer in question, at first appears devoted to the unnamed Emir, played by Greek American actor George Regas.⁸⁵

Zuleika: There has been another religious outbreak.

Emir: The Muhammadans against the Christians.

Zuleika: Every guard and convict in the [Legion] camp has been massacred.

Emir: Allah is good to help us in our holy mission. (91)

The Emir invokes the name of God to assist them in their mission of murdering all Christians, suggesting that it is acceptable or common practice in Islam to condemn Christians, when in reality the Qur'an respects Christians as fellow people of the book over polytheists. In this instance, "Islam equals violence; Muslim bedouin hate Christians."⁸⁶



Figure 14 – Leni Stengel as Zuleika in *Beau Ideal*

⁸³ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Visual and Other Pleasures*, 1989, doi:10.1007/978-1-349-19798-9_3.

⁸⁴ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 91.

⁸⁵ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 91.

⁸⁶ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 91.

However, Zuleika soon betrays the Emir, enamored by the white skin of the legionnaires.

“Zuleika dances seductively for Otis. She drops into the legionnaire’s lap and puckers up. Otis recoils. Zuleika spits in his face, shouting “You Christian dog!””⁸⁷ Despite rejection by Otis, the object of Zuleika’s desire, she still betrays her Muslim master for the white Christian foreigners. As a result of Zuleika’s betrayal, Muslims are all machine-gunned down by French cavalry troops.⁸⁸ This too evidences Western superiority and legitimizes their control of the situation. Furthermore, at the end of the film, Zuleika requests that Otis take her to Paris, as she hates “these brown-skinned!”⁸⁹

Not only is Western religious superiority implied through Zuleika’s betrayal of the Emir, but Zuleika’s actions also suggest the apparent sexual superiority of white Western men. This is evident through Zuleika’s attraction to Otis as she attempts to seduce him. Though Zuleika is conventionally beautiful (see figure 14), her identity as a “half-Arab” makes her repulsive to Otis, evidenced by his balking at her advances. Zuleika perfectly embodies the stereotypical harem girl as described by Diya Abdo: “The women of this world are sexual, sensual, erotic, and sometimes violent.”⁹⁰ Zuleika is so driven by her sexual desire for a white man, that she condemns her fellow Arabs to violent deaths by machine gun.

When not taking on the role of antagonists, Muslim women are strangely silent on screen. Another film, the 1952 *Sons of Ali Baba*, features maidens with less power than Zuleika.⁹¹ “Giggling mute harem maidens fawn over the handsome Persian protagonist, Kashma. And, an

⁸⁷ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 91.

⁸⁸ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 92.

⁸⁹ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 92.

⁹⁰ Diya Abdo, “Uncovering the Harem in the Classroom,” 234.

⁹¹ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 445.

“Egyptian” bellydancer provides entertainment.”⁹² These heavily fetishized women exist only as sexual objects, tittering coquettishly, but otherwise silent. The sounds they make are not words and have no meaning. They only make these girlish noises to make them more attractive and show their eagerness to please. This scene illustrates “the power of the gaze—Western, male, and voyeuristic.”⁹³ A fantasy film, *Sons of Ali Baba* tells the story of Persians triumphing over an evil caliph and his Arab forces. In addition to its depiction of harem girls, the film is devastatingly historically inaccurate, presenting Baghdad as a Persian city (it is Arab), and describing “Arabia’s 40 thieves” as Persian.⁹⁴

Arab women are humiliated, demonized, and eroticized in more than 50 feature films.⁹⁵

In his 1961 *Esquire* feature, “In Search of Lawrence of Arabia,” American writer William Zinsser describes a setting characterized by stereotypical sketches of Muslim maidens.⁹⁶

It is a place where young slave girls lie about on soft couches, stretching their slender legs, ready to do a good turn for any handsome stranger who stumbles into the room. Amid all this décolletage sits the jolly old Caliph, miraculously cool to the wondrous sites around him, puffing his water pipe... This is history at its best. (72)

The image of a nubile young girl held against her will yet lying on a “soft couch” allows for the socially unacceptable fetishization of youth and lack of consent to be presented and consumed by a mainly male audience. Because these girls are both non-white and in the fantasy realm of film, it is easier to write off their portrayals without considering the ramifications of such depictions.

“Despite being enslaved, these girls seem enthusiastic to serve whatever white man wanders into this mythical desert mirage. In describing possible ‘Johns,’ Zinsser uses the physical descriptor,

⁹² Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 445.

⁹³ Diya Abdo, “Uncovering the Harem in the Classroom,” 234.

⁹⁴ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 445.

⁹⁵ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 22.

⁹⁶ William Zinsser, “In Search of Lawrence of Arabia,” *Esquire*, June 1961, 72, 2015, accessed November 1, 2017, <http://archive.esquire.com/issue/19610601>.

“handsome,” as if the enslaved women somehow enjoy the non-consensual trysts they are forced into by the “jolly old Caliph.” Furthermore, why should this mythical Caliph be in awe of the “wondrous sites” surrounding him, if it is his natural environment?

Though most often characterized as maiden harems, Muslim women are also orientalized and subsequently *othered* in additional ways in the American film industry. These reproductions range from “Beasts of Burden, carrying jugs on their heads” in the background of wide angle camera shots of desert landscapes to “shapeless Bundles of Black, a homogenous sea of covered women trekking silently behind their unshaven mates.”⁹⁷ In the 1990 film *The Sheltering Sky*, these “Bundles of Black” describe “foul” Arab women lurking in the shadows, insidious villains themselves. They are “mute whores,” appearing as “objects in black.”⁹⁸ When not sexualized, Arab women are dehumanized, acting as accessories to their villainous male counterparts. Even though their husbands are more likely to be antagonists, these men still command more respect than their wives. It is as though these Muslim women must be extra evil to commit the same acts as men.

Villainous and oversexed Muslim women are a popular trope aimed at a Western, male audience obsessed with the “bad girl” image. In *The Sheltering Sky*, Port, the American protagonist played by John Malkovich, is escorted by a pimp to a bed with a “seemingly naïve [Muslim] whore.”⁹⁹ After disrobing, the



Figure 15 – Desert scene from *The Sheltering Sky*

⁹⁷ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 22.

⁹⁸ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 426.

⁹⁹ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 427.

Arab woman lunges suddenly for Port's wallet. When he tries to escape, the woman abuses him, and he eventually dies. The other protagonist, Port's wife, Kit, is raped by a Bedouin and eventually "gives herself over to a mad sexual adventure and escape into a harem."¹⁰⁰ New York Times columnist Caryn James comments: "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*, it is a cliché."¹⁰¹ Negative and static images of Muslim women in American film are thus not limited to the harem maiden. These voiceless archetypes can also be villainous—but still retain their orientalist nature, as strange, foreign, covered women following a backwards system.

When fetishization of Muslim men does occur, the men involved are often neither Muslim nor Arab. Italian actor Rudolph Valentino as *The Sheik* acts as a prime example of this. NPR's Neda Ulaby describes Valentino's sheik as bearing "little resemblance to the venerated Arab leaders commonly known as sheiks."¹⁰² Like most desert melodramas, *The Sheik*'s goal was not to promote authenticity. Instead, the film was concerned with "perpetuating a fantasy of sexual extremes."¹⁰³ In fact, after the film was released, newspapers actually reported that American women were "running off to the Middle East" so as to be abducted by sensual, handsome, and exotic Arabs.¹⁰⁴ Because of this fetishization, *The Sheik* only succeeded in perpetuating Orientalist stereotypes that Middle Eastern culture was at once decadent and primitive.

¹⁰⁰ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 427.

¹⁰¹ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 428.

¹⁰² Neda Ulaby, "Valentino's Sheik: An 'Other' Made to Swoon Over," NPR, February 04, 2008, , accessed November 1, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=18602260>.

¹⁰³ Neda Ulaby, "Valentino's Sheik: An 'Other' Made to Swoon Over."

¹⁰⁴ Neda Ulaby, "Valentino's Sheik: An 'Other' Made to Swoon Over."

The fetishization of brown men extends to South Asians who look like Muslims. This is evident in the popular 1996 war drama *The English Patient*.¹⁰⁵ Kip Singh, a Sikh sapper in the British army, wears a turban, typical of the exoticized Muslim (a common slur for Muslims present in



Figure 16 – Naveen Andrews as Kip Singh in *The English Patient*

several films is “Raghead”).¹⁰⁶ Singh has a passionate love affair with Hana, the white French-Canadian nurse looking after a burned patient. Though Kip is portrayed in a positive light, his Indian identity and appearance is sexually fetishized and put on display for white, arguably female film viewers. In one scene, Hana walks upon Kip washing his long hair that is usually covered by a turban. Kip is shirtless, the soft light of the camera highlighting the curves of his body. Hana is taken with this image of Kip that is different and exotic from the men she usually encounters. Water drops glisten on his brown skin, like that of Arabs, as he accepts a cup of oil from her for his long, flowing, curls.¹⁰⁷ Kip’s appearance and sensitive character feminize him to viewers. His and Hana’s sweet fling presents a stark contrast to the more dominant and overpowering love affair of Katharine and Almásy. Kip is an exotic fantasy for Hana – not anything more. This is emphasized by their parting ways after Hana finishes caring for the Patient.¹⁰⁸ Kip is Sikh and not Muslim, yet the impact of his representation in *The English Patient* is the same as if he had been cast as a Muslim character. His “exoticness” as portrayed

¹⁰⁵ *The English Patient*, dir. Anthony Minghella, by Michael Ondaatje, screenplay by Anthony Minghella, perf. Ralph Fiennes, Juliette Binoche, Willem Dafoe and Naveen Andrews (United States: Miramax Home Entertainment, 1997), DVD.

¹⁰⁶ *Navy SEALs*, dir. Lewis Teague, screenplay by Chuck Pfarrer and Gary Goldman, perf. Charlie Sheen, Michael Biehn, Bill Paxton and Joanne Whalley-Kilmer (United States: Orion Pictures, 1990), DVD.

¹⁰⁷ *The English Patient*, dir. Anthony Minghella.

¹⁰⁸ *The English Patient*, dir. Anthony Minghella.

through his glistening brown skin, dark curls, and dark eyes, which are accentuated for no grand cinematic reason other than satisfying the unprofound sexual appetite of viewers.

Hollywood film can subjugate Muslim majority nations as well individuals. In the 1930s, a new genre of Arab exploitation film was introduced with the release of Boris Karloff's *The*



Figure 17 - Boris Karloff as the Mummy

Mummy.¹⁰⁹ The mummy, a long-dead Egyptian pharaoh, comes to life and chases after a terrified European woman that he believes to be a reincarnation of his beloved. According to Michalek, the Middle East presented in *The Mummy* franchise “represents despotism, old age, decay, death, and superstition,” while the “Western archaeologists who dominate the Mummy represent democracy, youth, vigor, life, and science.”¹¹⁰ Egypt, a global political power and nation characterized by a long history

of advanced civilization, technology, and medicine, is being reduced to a mythological fantasyland with nonsensical narrow-minded beliefs.

Laurence Michalek believes *The Mummy* films epitomize the notion of “penetration” described by Edward Said in *Orientalism*. “On a collective level, the Europeans penetrated the Middle East, even into forbidden places, such as temples, tombs, and harems.”¹¹¹ By penetrating these sacred spaces, the American film industry is exercising its power, control, and superiority over them. Europeans also managed to penetrate the predominantly Muslim Middle East on the individual level. “...the threatening Arab, wielding knives and proffering sexuality, is denied penetration and instead is penetrated: the Arab man is shot, stabbed, or skewered on a sword, the

¹⁰⁹ Laurence Michalek, "The Arab in American Cinema: A Century of Otherness," 4.

¹¹⁰ Laurence Michalek, "The Arab in American Cinema: A Century of Otherness," 4.

¹¹¹ Laurence Michalek, "The Arab in American Cinema: A Century of Otherness," 4.

Arab woman is seduced.”¹¹² Just as Rudolph Valentino in *The Sheik* turned out to be a European, as consensual relationships between white women and brown men were unacceptable, so to does *The Mummy* portray the sexual domination of white American men over the *other* by seducing Muslim women and denying Muslim men acts of penetration through violence.

By the 1960s, in light of changes undergone in the first half of the 20th century by the Arab and Muslim world, depictions of Muslim culture and society as stagnant and unchanging were even more inappropriate and counterfactual. “Royalty, deserts, sheiks, and harems were the mainstays of the Arab image in the 1920s.”¹¹³ However, in the second half of the 20th century, “there were few Arab monarchies, and nomads made up a tiny and dwindling fraction of the Arab population.”¹¹⁴ Furthermore, “polygamy had been abolished in many Arab countries, and ‘harems’—which had always been rare—were generally a thing of the past.”¹¹⁵ Continuing to portray the Middle East as regressive and traditional in American film not only perpetuates stereotypes, but also suggests to viewers that certain archaic practices still pervade most of Muslim life. This inaccurate representation of the apparent backwardness of the *other* increased feelings of superiority by American movie-goers.

Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism was specifically in reference to the academic study of the Orient during the colonial era of the 19th century. However, Said’s description of how Western powers use Orientalist discourse to assert their superiority over the unchanging, exotic, strange, and inferior “Orient” remains highly relevant to the American film industry today.

Understanding Said’s theory can help explain why Muslims are depicted incorrectly in

Hollywood films. Furthermore, applying Said’s notions of exotification and fetishization of the

¹¹² Laurence Michalek, "The Arab in American Cinema: A Century of Otherness," 4.

¹¹³ Laurence Michalek, "The Arab in American Cinema: A Century of Otherness," 6.

¹¹⁴ Laurence Michalek, "The Arab in American Cinema: A Century of Otherness," 6.

¹¹⁵ Laurence Michalek, "The Arab in American Cinema: A Century of Otherness," 6.

East to these films aids in the identification of common patterns and stereotypes such as the evil Sheik, the harem maiden, the sinister “covered” woman, and the terrorist. As evidenced by the film analyses, the American film industry is still “Orientalizing” Muslims in the current era. These depictions are deliberate and premeditated, affirming the position and superiority of white Americans in film over their Muslim counterparts, propagating dangerous misconceptions about Islam among the film-going masses.

The Terrorist Image In Film

The groups or people chosen to be Hollywood villains are inseparable from the American geopolitical climate of the time. With the onset of the Gulf War in 1991, images of Muslims as villains in film became increasingly focused on the terrorist. These stereotypical images of machine gun toting bearded turban wearing religious zealots was a new form of *othering*. Unlike the past *othering* of sheiks and harem maidens through exotification, portraying Muslims as violent terrorists *others* them by taking away their humanity through extreme violence. Still physically *othered* by their strange garb and dark skin, they now are *othered* by their supposedly extremist beliefs in radical Islam. Though extremists make up a very small group of the almost two billion Muslims in the world, Hollywood's emphasis on the terrorist as the main representation of Muslims in film is extremely detrimental to American public perception of Islam. Hollywood's terrorist flicks in combination with the racist media are partially responsible for widespread Islamophobia in the United States. In several instances, acts of hate committed against American Muslims have directly correlated with the release of Muslim-as-terrorist films.

Though he never uses the word "terrorist," Edward Said predicts, to an extent, the increasing association of Islam with violence, resistance to authority, and uprising. In the chapter "Orientalism Now," of *Orientalism*, Said writes, "After the 1973 [Arab-Israeli] war the Arab appeared everywhere as something more menacing."¹¹⁶ This partially was due to misunderstandings around the concept of jihad. "Lurking behind all these images is the menace of *jihad*. Consequence: a fear that the Muslims (or Arabs) will take over the world."¹¹⁷ Jihad, which means striving or struggling in Arabic, is mentioned in the Qur'an in both a military and

¹¹⁶ E. W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York City, NY: Pantheon Books, 1978), 285.

¹¹⁷ E. W. Said, *Orientalism*, 287.

non-military sense. However, the term has gained attention in the past few decades for its association with Islamic terrorist groups, and the suspicion that the Muslim world is trying to rise up against the generally defined “West.” Films with Muslim terrorist antagonists perpetuate violent conceptions of jihad and Islam that suggest jihad always means violence against non-Muslims, and that this antagonistic jihad is central to Islam.

When terrorists attack small towns, it is perceived as an attack on the American Dream. The film *Terror Squad* portrays Libyan terrorists holding high school students in the small town of Kokomo, Indiana hostage. The most concerning scene is actually unrelated to the actions of the terrorists. In a scene outside an Arab university, screaming university students protest with



Figure 18 – Cover art for *Terror Squad* (1987)

slogans such as “Death to America” and “Death to the American Dogs.” Furthermore, “The students ignite the American flag. Then, they shout “die, die,” as they burn Uncle Sam in effigy.”¹¹⁸ Here, university students, associated with liberal, open-minded thinking in most societies, are professing anti-American sentiments. This insinuates that it is not simply “radical” Muslims that are enemies of or threatening to America—it is all Muslims. Additionally, it advances the idea that a college

education cannot dispel the radical ideas engrained in the youth by Islam. Or worse, Muslim institutions of higher education propagate jihad. The film goes on to portray a battle between the high school students and terrorists.¹¹⁹ All the while, the high school students call the Arabs

¹¹⁸ Jack G. Shaheen, “Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People,” *Sage Publications, Inc. in association with the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *Islam: Enduring Myths and Changing Realities*, 588 (July 2003): 476, accessed October 20, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1049860>.

¹¹⁹ *Terror Squad*, dir. Peter Maris, screenplay by Chuck Rose, perf. Chuck Connors, Brodie Greer, Bill Calvert, and Kerry Brennan (United States: Forum Home Video, 1987), DVD.

various slurs, such as “camel-jockeys.”¹²⁰ Persistent use of racist slurs can normalize them to viewers, and make them more likely to repeat similar insults outside the movie theater. Finally, at the film’s conclusion, the town Police Chief states, “Those god-damn terrorists nearly destroyed my town, and killed a lot of innocent people.”¹²¹ *Terror Squad* is unique in that its protagonists are high school students in a small town, rather than law enforcement or counterterrorism agencies in the big city. By placing Libyan terrorists in rural Indiana, director Peter Maris is suggesting, whether it be accidental or deliberate, that what much of the world perceives as “ordinary” Americans, or white Christians (as in the case of *Terror Squad*), are at risk for terrorist attacks by Muslims. For a number of Americans, a calm life in a small town represents a nostalgic vision of the American Dream. When Muslims terrorists attack this town, they are attacking that dream—however artificially constructed it may be.

By depicting Muslim terrorists in film as subhuman, they are easier to villainize and kill. James Cameron’s remake of a French spy film, *True Lies*, released in 1994, perpetuates images of Arabs, in this case Palestinians, as “dirty, demonic, and despicable peoples.”¹²² *True Lies* is significant as the first film to depict Muslim terrorists actually exploding a nuclear bomb inside the United States. Scenes showing frightening terrorists enacting villainous plots in locations



Figure 19 – Actor Art Malik as Salim Abu Aziz, leader of the Crimson Jihad terrorist group in *True Lies*

such as the Florida Keys and Washington, D.C. leave viewers fearful that the enemy is inside America and that Muslim faces must not exist in America without being ‘up to something.’ The

¹²⁰ *Terror Squad*, dir. Peter Maris.

¹²¹ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 476.

¹²² Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 500.

Palestinians in *True Lies* also abuse women, slapping a female villain and taking a woman in an elevator hostage.¹²³ Unsurprisingly, the blatantly racist attitude of *True Lies* towards Arabs, coupled with its star-studded cast, including Arnold Schwarzenegger and Jamie Lee Curtis, drew criticism. Columnist Russell Baker, writes, “Schwarzenegger...slaughters multitudes for a laugh...the murdered villains are Arabs, apparently the last people except Episcopalians whom Hollywood feels free to offend en masse.”¹²⁴ Eventually, protest groups marched outside a Washington, D.C. movie theater, shouting slogans such as “Reel Arabs are not Real Arabs” and “Open Your Eyes and Terminate the Lies.”¹²⁵ In an attempt to cover all their bases, the studio added the disclaimer “This film is a work of fiction and does not represent the actions or beliefs of a particular culture or religion.”¹²⁶ The disclaimer proved deliberately ineffectual though, as it was only shown in theaters after the very last of the credits rolled, and most moviegoers had left. Finally, before the disclaimer, movie credits thank the Mayor of Washington, D.C. and the Department of Defense for their cooperation on the film, suggesting that it is somehow a true depiction of military combat with Muslim enemies.¹²⁷ Here, sources of authority are used to lend legitimacy to a racist film, but mentioning these authorities only succeeds in alienating American Muslims.

Some films become intense propaganda, leading to the real-life abuse of Muslims. Professor of Sociology Nancy Yuen claims, “film and television can also cultivate existent fears of foreign threat.”¹²⁸ Yuen uses popular television series *Homeland* as an example, which perpetuates stereotypes of Muslims and Arabs to “justify actions in the real world—U.S. wars,

¹²³ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 501.

¹²⁴ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 503.

¹²⁵ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 503.

¹²⁶ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 503.

¹²⁷ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 504.

¹²⁸ Nancy Wang Yuen, *Reel Inequality: Hollywood Actors and Racism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017), 8.

covert operations and drone strikes; CIA detention and torture; racist policing, domestic surveillance and militarized borders.”¹²⁹ As Yuen suggests, Hollywood’s portrayal of certain groups is directly linked to the American political climate of the time. The 1998 film *The Siege* is known for its disturbing extreme violence and transparent Islamophobic message.¹³⁰ The film introduces the concept of “homegrown terrorism,” or terrorism that stems from individuals or groups that are citizens of or already living in the target country. Homegrown terrorists in *The Siege* include Arab American auto mechanics, university students, and a college professor working in tandem with Arab immigrants to terrorize and kill more than 700 people in New York.¹³¹ The extremists destroy the city’s FBI building, killing many government agents. They blow up theater-goers, set off a bomb in a crowded bus, and attempt to murder school children.¹³² *The Siege*’s directors equate Islamic practices in the film, such as the call to prayer and ritual washing before prayer, with terrorist activities. Additionally, the “word ‘terrorist’ is used eight times to describe the Muslims in the movie.”¹³³ Ingrained, however subconsciously on the minds of viewers, is the idea of ‘Terrorist’ as synonymous with ‘Muslim.’

After the film’s release, many Muslim organizations nationwide were concerned that viewers of *The Siege* might interpret it as fact. Hala Maksoud, President of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, complained that *The Siege* was “insidious, dangerous, and incendiary” and that it was “bound to have a negative impact on the millions of Arab Americans

¹²⁹ Nancy Wang Yuen, *Reel Inequality*, 9.

¹³⁰ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 430.

¹³¹ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 430.

¹³² Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 430.

¹³³ Anton Karl Kozlovic, "Islam, Muslims and Arabs in the popular Hollywood cinema," *Comparative Islamic Studies* 3, no. 2, 213-246, *ATLA Religion Database*, EBSCOhost (2007): 223, accessed January 28, 2018, <http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=4&sid=6c726365-34fb-4fbc-94ed-895edbd9ecde%40sessionmgr102#>.

and Muslims in this country.”¹³⁴ Several mosques and other American Islamic organizations opened their doors in an effort to educate those with questions about Islam in light of the hate promoted by *The Siege*. However, the Islamophobia presented in the film had already been detrimental to viewers. According to Jack Shaheen, some moviegoers responded to these educational efforts with “foul language, or even more.”¹³⁵ Apparently, outside one theater, someone observed a passerby spit on a young Muslim woman handing out leaflets about Islam.¹³⁶ In light of this incident, a direct correlation can be established between viewing these films and exacting acts of hate on innocent Muslims.

Destruction of stereotypically American values by Muslim terrorists did not begin in the 1980s. *Black Sunday*, released in 1977, also depicted terrorists threatening something Americans



Figure 20 – A *Black Sunday* (1977) promotional poster showing Americans running in terror from a Super Bowl blimp attack

held dear.¹³⁷ In this case, a fictitious Palestinian radical group, Black September, attempts to hijack a Goodyear Blimp and crash it into the Miami Super Bowl, killing the U.S. president and 80,000 football spectators.¹³⁸

Antagonist and leader of Black September, Palestinian

woman Dahlia, actually states that she and her followers intend to strike Americans, “where it hurts,

where they feel most safe.”¹³⁹ In this case, *Black Sunday*’s director deliberately made the target

¹³⁴ Anton Karl Kozlovic, "Islam, Muslims and Arabs in the popular Hollywood cinema," 223.

¹³⁵ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 433.

¹³⁶ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 433.

¹³⁷ *Black Sunday*, dir. John Frankenheimer, screenplay by Ernest Lehman, perf. Robert Shaw, Bruce Dern and Marthe Keller (United States: Paramount Pictures, 1977), DVD.

¹³⁸ Anton Karl Kozlovic, "Islam, Muslims and Arabs in the popular Hollywood cinema," 219.

¹³⁹ *Black Sunday*, dir. John Frankenheimer.

of Black September the Super Bowl, an inherently American tradition and sport. Hollywood is again depicting Muslim terrorists as a threat to the American dream. “During the film’s climax, stock footage of an actual football game appears on the screen, showing the Pittsburgh Steelers playing the Dallas Cowboys.”¹⁴⁰ In the same tone as *True Lies* when filmmakers thanked the Department of Defense in the film’s credits, using actual footage of a football game between two popular teams amplifies the feelings of the American public that Muslims as terrorists present a real-life threat to everything they hold dear.

Furthermore, the protagonist of the film is Israeli Major Kabakov, who saves the day in tandem with U.S. FBI officials. This, along with Dahlia’s identity as Arab-German, reflects a pro-Israel political stance by America in the Israeli Palestinian Conflict after the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. Finally, when *Black Sunday* was released, several critics imitated its anti-Palestinian message, with a New York Times reviewer writing, “Miss Keller has some difficulty portraying a Palestinian terrorist, looking, as she does, as beautiful and healthy and uncomplicated as a California surfer.”¹⁴¹ New York Times writer Vincent Canby is blatantly insinuating that Palestinians appear the opposite of beautiful, healthy, and uncomplicated.

Hollywood terrorist flicks teach viewers that Islam as a religion and terrorism are inextricably linked. Yet the on-screen terrorists, “perform their deadly missions devoid of human decency, compassion or God’s merciful morality.”¹⁴² *Executive Decision*, released by Warner Brothers in 1996, equates Muslim religious practices with extremism.¹⁴³ Much like *The Siege*, *Executive Decision*’s leading jihadi, Nagi Hassan, “carries the Quran, quotes it, murders to the

¹⁴⁰ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 104.

¹⁴¹ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 105.

¹⁴² Anton Karl Kozlovic, “Islam, Muslims and Arabs in the popular Hollywood cinema,” 219.

¹⁴³ *Executive Decision*, dir. Stuart Baird, screenplay by Jim Thomas and John Thomas, perf. Kurt Russell, Steven Seagal, Halle Berry, Oliver Platt, David Suchet and John Leguizamo (United States: Warner Bros. Pictures, 1996), DVD.

cry of “Allah Akbar” and is very thankful for being a true soldier of Islam who has been granted the sword of God.”¹⁴⁴ “Allahu Akbar,” which simply means “God is the greatest,” is said in the call to prayer for all Muslims. By having Nagi Hassan cry out the phrase while committing murder, *Executive Decision* director Stuart Baird is perverting a common and cherished phrase in Islam, and causing film viewers to equate Islam with terrorism whenever they hear the call to prayer sounding from their local mosque.

Character development is of no concern for the terrorist villain. In fact, the terrorists that accompany Nagi Hassan in his plot to hijack a Boeing 747 and crash it in Washington, D.C. are not even accredited in the film’s credits—they are billed only as “Terrorists.”¹⁴⁵ Two of these accomplices are played by American Muslim actors Sayed Badreya and Majed Ibrahim. Both Badreya and Ibrahim state that they persuaded Baird to remove several scenes before the films release, which they believed presented Islam in a negative light. “Not only did the original script contain a rape scene, said Ibrahim, but Jews were targeted as the primary hijacking victims.”¹⁴⁶ Despite the scene removals, *Executive Decision* irreparably damages American perceptions of Muslims by equating the call to prayer with a terrorist attack. The terrorists are Palestinians and an Israeli agent is present in the film, suggesting that like *Black Sunday*, *Executive Decision* presents a pro-Israel anti-Palestine political perspective.

Many terrorist films claim to be inspired by actual military events, even when the military refutes these assertions. If viewers take the on-screen depictions as real historical fact, it is no surprise they develop bigoted opinions of Muslims. The film *Navy SEALs*, released in 1990,

¹⁴⁴ Anton Karl Kozlovic, “Islam, Muslims and Arabs in the popular Hollywood cinema,” 220.

¹⁴⁵ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 188.

¹⁴⁶ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 188.

extends thanks in its credits to both the U.S. Navy and Department of Defense.¹⁴⁷ However, the Navy released the following statement when asked whether or not they collaborated with the film's producers.¹⁴⁸

The Navy did not formally cooperate with Orion Pictures... Quite recently the Navy denied support to another SEAL movie... not only because of the inaccurate portrayal of the Navy SEAL community but also because of the negative portrayal of Arabs in the Middle East. The Navy remains sensitive to stereotypical portrayals in productions requiring formal cooperation. (347)

The thanks given to the Navy and Department of Defense was not removed from the film's credits, and ads for the film stated, "GET AN OFFICIAL 'NAVY SEALS' HAT BY MAIL. Only \$5.00 with Pepsi purchase. Details at participating 7-Eleven stores."¹⁴⁹ Using the word "official" exaggerates the apparent approval by the U.S. government of *Navy SEALs* as fact.

Additionally, advertising the film in association with popular soda brand Pepsi and nationwide chain



Figure 21 – Shot from *Navy SEALs* (1990) showing the protagonists in official Navy Seal uniform

7-Eleven further normalizes the film's misrepresentations of Muslims. In one scene,

protagonist Navy Seal Hawkins takes Claire, a "half-Lebanese woman reporter," to dinner.¹⁵⁰

While there, Hawkins describes Beirut as a "shithole filled with ragheads" and then says to Claire, "I was mocking your heritage and now we're having dinner."¹⁵¹ Claire fails to protest Hawkins's racist remarks, and then refuses to tell him where a terrorist group is based. As a

¹⁴⁷ *Navy SEALs*, dir. Lewis Teague.

¹⁴⁸ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 347.

¹⁴⁹ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 347.

¹⁵⁰ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 346.

¹⁵¹ *Navy SEALs*, dir. Lewis Teague.

result, the scene suggests that Claire is sympathetic or lenient towards terrorists because of her heritage—even though she is Lebanese and the terrorists are Palestinians.¹⁵² This implies that even if they are not terrorists themselves, Muslims feel sympathy for terrorist groups.

Scholars have observed that the Muslim-as-terrorist film has become a “legitimate genre (or subgenre) in its own right.”¹⁵³ Like the static, flat, and indistinguishable images of terrorists in films like *Terror Squad*, *True Lies*, and *The Siege*, the Muslim-as-terrorist film genre is formed by “numerous examples of raving Islamic madmen with maniacal eyes and bushy beards who seethe with hate as they merge Muslim extremism with terrorism.”¹⁵⁴ Cinematically, the villain of the terrorist is nothing special. “In film, our terrorists are as interchangeable as paper dolls. Dress them up with robes, guns and prayer rugs and presto, a villain is among us.”¹⁵⁵ This dull, monotonous, and uni-dimensional character type is harmful to perceptions of Muslims in itself. By making terrorists so uniform in character, they are all automatically placed in the same villainous category. Their motivations are not so complex to be connected with specific polities or even countries. In this way, they encapsulate American xenophobia towards Arabs and Muslims in general, and our insensitive inability to distinguish groups further. Once a group or person is designated as the *other*, their unique motivations become irrelevant. This makes them the perfect movie villain, as they can be placed in almost any situation without necessitating context for their extremist beliefs. Audiences do not need an explanation for *why* the terrorists are evil – they simply are. Or worse, they are evil because they are Muslim.

¹⁵² *Navy SEALs*, dir. Lewis Teague.

¹⁵³ Anton Karl Kozlovic, "Islam, Muslims and Arabs in the popular Hollywood cinema," 219.

¹⁵⁴ Anton Karl Kozlovic, "Islam, Muslims and Arabs in the popular Hollywood cinema," 219.

¹⁵⁵ Anton Karl Kozlovic, "Islam, Muslims and Arabs in the popular Hollywood cinema," 223.

After 9/11, Muslim-as-terrorist films became even more increasingly focused on placing Islam as the root cause of extremist behavior. This is evident in the Muslim religious rhetoric present in the 2006 biographical thriller drama, *United 93*.¹⁵⁶ The film chronicles the events aboard United Airlines Flight 93, one of the four passenger flights hijacked by Al-Qaeda terrorists during the September 11th attacks.¹⁵⁷ Attempting to account the events of the hijacking with as much truth as possible, the film also claims to have been made with the cooperation of all the passenger's families.¹⁵⁸ *United 93* achieved critical acclaim, earning a score of 90% certified fresh on Rotten Tomatoes, a review website known for its often harsh ratings of films and television shows.¹⁵⁹ The film then went on to receive two Academy Award nominations, including Best Director for Paul Greengrass.¹⁶⁰ Given its sometimes imaginative, but consistently accurate portrayal of events, box office success, and widespread viewership, *United 93* serves as an important reflection of the American public's perception of 9/11. Though *United 93* is considered 'biographical' in nature, it is not free from bias. In fact, because it attempts to recount the events of what is considered by most Americans alive today as the worst tragedy in our country's history, *United 93* is more immune to criticism, as calling its portrayal into question could seem unpatriotic or un-American to some. But it is no mistake that the film

¹⁵⁶ Anton Karl Kozlovic, "Islam, Muslims and Arabs in the popular Hollywood cinema," 221.

¹⁵⁷ *United 93*, dir. Paul Greengrass, prod. Paul Greengrass, screenplay by Paul Greengrass, perf. Christian Clemenson, Cheyenne Jackson, and David Alan Basche (United States: Universal Pictures, 2006), DVD.

¹⁵⁸ *United 93*, dir. Paul Greengrass.

¹⁵⁹ "United 93," Rotten Tomatoes, 2006, , accessed March 4, 2018, https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/united_93/.

¹⁶⁰ *United 93*, dir. Paul Greengrass.

begins in darkness with the “soft muttering prayers” of hijackers reciting the Quran before the attack, and ends with “invocations to God as the plane dived into the ground” by American passengers.¹⁶¹ By framing *United 93* with Qur’anic rhetoric, Paul Greengrass is stressing the religious (Muslim versus Christian) nature of the attack, and suggesting an inherent conflict between ‘good’ Christianity and ‘bad’ Islam is at play, rather than a multitude of complex ideological, historical, social, and political motivations.

Another way Hollywood films directly implicate Islam with acts of terror is by characterizing it as the antithesis of the ‘true’ American religion, Christianity. In *Flight 93*, the 2006 TV equivalent of *United 93*, Christianity is more blatantly pitted against Islam.¹⁶² This is



Figure 22 – Passengers revolting against hijackers in *United 93* (2006)

enacted through “religious oneupmanship via prayer.”¹⁶³ In the terrifying final scenes of *Flight 93* before the crash, passenger protagonists recite the Lord’s Prayer. According to Australian professor Anton Kozlovic, “the solemn Christian prayer functioned overtly as emotion-cum-spiritual consolation and covertly as a counter-balancing of the terrorist’s Islamic prayers and triumphant ranting

invoking Allah delivered enthusiastically throughout the film.”¹⁶⁴ As Kozlovic notes, the cinematic juxtaposition of the Lord’s Prayer with the plane spiraling out of control

¹⁶¹ Anton Karl Kozlovic, "Islam, Muslims and Arabs in the popular Hollywood cinema," 220.

¹⁶² *Flight 93*, dir. Peter Markle, prod. Clara George, by Nevin Schreiner, perf. Jeffrey Nordling, Colin Glazer, and Brennan Elliott (United States: A&E Network, 2006), DVD.

¹⁶³ Anton Karl Kozlovic, "Islam, Muslims and Arabs in the popular Hollywood cinema," 221.

¹⁶⁴ Anton Karl Kozlovic, "Islam, Muslims and Arabs in the popular Hollywood cinema," 222.

simultaneously imparts upon audiences that Flight 93 avoided its true target with the help of the Christian God, and, as a result, the Christian God must be diametrically opposed to the Muslim GodA.

Hollywood attempts to prove the impartiality of their depictions of Muslims by inserting a ‘good’ Muslim in the terrorist flick. Don Cheadle fulfills this role as Samir Horn in *Traitor*,



Figure 23 – Don Cheadle undercover as a terrorist in *Traitor* (2008)

released in 2008.¹⁶⁵ Samir Horn is a Sudanese-American former U.S. soldier and veteran, as well as a devout Muslim. Horn goes into deep cover for a U.S. intelligence contractor in an attempt to infiltrate

the terrorist organization al-Nathir.¹⁶⁶ He is successful in his mission, and prevents the

sleeper bombing attack of fifty U.S. busses. Samir Horn’s character is an unabashedly ‘good’ Muslim, as evidenced by his conversation with U.S. intelligence Agent Clayton at the end of the film. Horn tells Clayton he feels guilty that despite his best efforts, some innocent lives were lost, and that the Qur’an states that to kill an innocent person is to kill all mankind. To this, Clayton responds that the Qur’an also says that by saving one innocent person, all of mankind is saved.¹⁶⁷

The use of the ‘good’ Muslim is a façade by Hollywood for xenophobia and racism. Despite the positive use of Qur’anic text and Cheadle’s status as an American-Muslim hero, *Traitor* remains problematic in its stereotypical depictions of jihad. These depictions show jihad

¹⁶⁵ *Traitor*, dir. Jeffrey Nachmanoff, prod. Don Cheadle, screenplay by Jeffrey Nachmanoff, perf. Don Cheadle and Guy Pierce (United States: Overture Films, 2008), DVD.

¹⁶⁶ *Traitor*, dir. Jeffrey Nachmanoff.

¹⁶⁷ *Traitor*, dir. Jeffrey Nachmanoff.

as epitomizing ruthless anti-American, anti-Western, and anti-Christian sentiments. A critic writes, “despite its good intentions and array of terrorist stereotypes, however, ‘for those in American ignorant about Islam and Muslims, it reinforces paranoia and mistrust, making it seem like your harmless Muslim neighbors, teachers, friends and lovers are all cue drum roll and melodramatic music terrorists!’”¹⁶⁸ The film has a Muslim protagonist, but still manages to successfully *other* Islam by making Cheadle himself question its supposedly extreme tenants and practices. In this way, the guise of the “good Muslim” provides an effective cover for what is an overall xenophobic message.

Hollywood terrorist films perpetuate images of Muslims as not only the *other*, but also the enemies of freedom, Christian values, and America. Edward Said rightly predicted the misunderstood nature of jihad because Americans have come to equate Islam with radicalism and extremism. Even though the vast majority of Muslims do not participate in terrorist activities or espouse extreme interpretations of Islam, Hollywood’s obsession with the terrorist flick perpetuates these harmful associations. By using Muslim terrorists to attack the artificial notion of the “American Dream,” depicting Muslims as subhuman, propagandizing certain anti-Muslim political viewpoints, having Muslim terrorists attack stereotypically American things, such as the football stadium during the Super Bowl, showing on-screen terrorists reading the Qur’an and speaking Arabic, and claiming the U.S. military affirms their depictions of terrorists. Popular Hollywood films spread negative, racist, bigoted, misrepresentative, and dangerous views of Muslims and Arabs. Characterizations of Muslim terrorists are different pre and post 9/11, and reflect the political leanings of the United States government at the time. Unlike some of the

¹⁶⁸ Anton Karl Kozlovic, "Islam, Muslims and Arabs in the popular Hollywood cinema," 221.

Orientalist stereotypes of Muslims in earlier Hollywood film—such as exotification and fetishization—these depictions identify Muslims as violent, cruel, and savage murderers. These films do not exist in a vacuum. The extreme brutality of such films has not only aided in the creation of widespread Islamophobia across the U.S., but has also led to actual hate crimes being committed against American Muslims. Hollywood's terrorist flicks are the most dangerous and damaging of all misrepresentations of Muslims in film because they lead to real life violence.

Alternative Titles or Positive Representations of Muslims in Film

The overwhelming majority of films with Muslim characters cast them as antagonists. But there is an alternative cinematic landscape that represents Muslims much more complexly. Comparatively, the number of films featuring “positive” depictions of Muslims remains scarce. In Jack Shaheen’s prolific analysis of over 900 Hollywood films displaying Arab characters, only twelve portrayed Muslims in a positive light.¹⁶⁹ But several directors have worked towards creating “alternative titles.” These are non-Hollywood films dedicated to presenting Muslims as three-dimensional protagonists. The Muslim protagonists in alternate films grapple with the challenges of interracial, interreligious, and intercultural relationships. These films include foreign titles, or those produced outside the U.S., and independently produced, or “indie” films. Because indie films are not subject to the same mainstream consciousness as, for example, big budget action flicks, they are more concerned with reality and accuracy rather than box office success. Furthermore, indie film directors often consciously produce pictures with aimed at dispelling the stereotypes propagated by the mainstream film industry. The power of mass media is demonstrated by the impact of negative representations of the Islamic world in Hollywood film on the thinking of the American public. By exploring themes such as racism and visibility, homegrown Islamic fundamentalism, and the conflict between institutional and everyday Islam, these “alternate” films have had an inverse effect on the American public. They promote better cultural understanding of Muslims and their families, and thus dispel the stereotypes reinforced by Hollywood.

The film industries in countries outside the United States contain their own rich, layered, and geopolitically influenced histories. In today’s technological era of numerous online

¹⁶⁹ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 550.

streaming services, “foreign” films are much more accessible than they were in the past. A prime example of a foreign “alternative title” is the 1974 German romantic drama *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*, which addresses German prejudices against Arabs and Muslims, as well as bigotry directed towards mixed race couples.¹⁷⁰ In *Ali*, “a handsome Moroccan mechanic and his German mate experience prejudice in post-war Munich.”¹⁷¹ Ali and Emmy, his future wife, meet when Emmy enters a bar in Munich to escape the rain. The pair end up dancing and getting to know each other, and Emmy invites Ali back to her flat at the end of the night. As the two begin a relationship, Ali struggles with his independence.¹⁷²

There is almost a twenty-year age difference between Emmy and Ali, and Ali does not want to be perceived as a “kept man.”¹⁷³ However, despite their differences and much to their own surprise, love blossoms between them. Ali sees Emmy as his confidant, extolling upon the hardships of being a Moroccan Muslim man in Germany. “German master—Arab dog.” “Arab nichts [not] human in Germany.”¹⁷⁴ This much is clear when Emmy and Ali are seen together in public, as the couple is continually harassed throughout the film. Jack Shaheen notes, “German ladies whisper they would ‘die of shame’ if anyone saw them with a



Figure 24 - Emmy and Ali in *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (1974)

¹⁷⁰ *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*. Directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Screenplay by Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Performed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Brigitte Mira, and El Hedi ben Salem. Germany: Tango Films, 1974. DVD.

¹⁷¹ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 59.

¹⁷² *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*. Directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder.

¹⁷³ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 59.

¹⁷⁴ *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*. Directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder.

‘foreigner.’”¹⁷⁵ Several shopkeepers refuse service to Ali, and when on a date, the couple is placed at a table well out of view from fellow restaurant patrons. The same thing occurs in indie film *My Son the Fanatic* when characters are seated in a room separate from the main restaurant. German perceptions of Muslims are evident when Emmy’s cleaning woman states, “He’s good looking, you know and so clean,” insinuating she perceived Arabs or Muslims as dirty and unclean.¹⁷⁶ By poignantly displaying the racism Emmy and Ali encounter for their relationship, the film creates empathy in white viewers that have never experienced prejudice themselves. After Emmy and Ali marry, Emmy experiences the ultimate betrayal when her own adult children inform her, “You can forget you have children.”¹⁷⁷ Despite the tragedy of her children’s rejection and the couple’s continued harassment, *Ali* ends on a positive note. Several Germans accept the couple, and the film concludes with them happily continuing their life together. *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* was far ahead of its time.

Director Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s message is evident even in the title, when he suggests fear and subsequent bigotry towards Muslims—or any group—eats the soul.¹⁷⁸ The film may be specifically exploring attitudes towards Arabs in Germany, but its message of love, acceptance, and the complexity of belonging is beneficial to all viewers. Fassbinder is unique in that almost all his films were written or adapted for the screen by himself.¹⁷⁹ Fassbinder’s films are described as being compassionate looks at outsiders unwanted by society for reasons out of their control. His poignant depictions of outsiders are so successful because of the director’s own feelings of alienation from mainstream society as a result of his sexuality, politics, and lifelong

¹⁷⁵ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 59.

¹⁷⁶ *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*. Directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder.

¹⁷⁷ *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*. Directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder.

¹⁷⁸ *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*. Directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder.

¹⁷⁹ Joe Ruffell, "Rainer Werner Fassbinder," *Senses of Cinema*, July 21, 2016, , accessed April 10, 2018, <http://sensesofcinema.com/2002/great-directors/fassbinder/>.

struggles with addiction.¹⁸⁰ Ali, a Muslim Moroccan immigrant in post-war Germany, is subjected to racism and prejudice because of his outsider status. Fassbinder was also known for his melodramas that used working class protagonists to, “Explore how deep-rooted prejudices about race, sex, sexual orientation, politics, and class are inherent in society.”¹⁸¹ Fassbinder was much more concerned with creating intelligent and truthfully socially conscious works over material success. He would often cast his own friends and lovers in his films over professional German actors. El Hedi ben Salem, the Moroccan protagonist who played Ali, began a relationship with Fassbinder after meeting him in Paris.¹⁸² This relationship gave Fassbinder an intimate look into the post-WWII immigrant experience in Germany. Ultimately, Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s personal identity as an outsider because of his bisexuality, left-wing politics, and drug addiction coupled with his desire to create truthful, but often depressing pictures of German post-WWII society enabled him to positively depict the Muslim immigrant experience.

Hollywood flicks rarely, if ever, contain Muslim role models and mentors. The 2003 French drama, *Monsieur Ibrahim*, counters this lack of role models with Omar Sharif as a strong Muslim male lead teaching a message of love to a young Jewish boy.¹⁸³ French director François Dupeyron adapted *Monsieur Ibrahim* from a novel by Franco-Belgian playwright and novelist Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt. The film, set in a lower class Paris neighborhood in the 1960s, tells the story of the relationship between Momo, a young Jewish boy, and Ibrahim, an elderly Turkish man known as the neighborhood’s “Arab” (though he is Turkish and not Arab). Momo has a

¹⁸⁰ Joe Ruffell, "Rainer Werner Fassbinder," *Senses of Cinema*.

¹⁸¹ Joe Ruffell, "Rainer Werner Fassbinder," *Senses of Cinema*.

¹⁸² Dennis Harvey, "My Name Is Not Ali," *Variety*, September 03, 2012, , accessed April 10, 2018, <http://variety.com/2012/film/reviews/my-name-is-not-ali-1117948182/>.

¹⁸³ *Monsieur Ibrahim*, dir. François Dupeyron, by Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt, perf. Omar Sharif, Pierre Boulanger, and Gilbert Melki (France: ARP Sélection, 2003), DVD.

difficult family life. His mother is not in the picture, and his father is stricken with debilitating depression. At just eleven, Momo spends his days stealing from Monsieur Ibrahim's grocery store so he can save his cash to pay for sex with a local sex worker. Though Momo steals from Monsieur Ibrahim's store, the man takes a liking to him and becomes the paternal figure he desperately needs. The bond between Muslim Monsieur Ibrahim and Jewish Momo stands in stark contrast to Hollywood films that pit Jewish Israelis against Muslim Palestinians, like in the films *Black Sunday* and *Executive Decision*. Viewers cannot help but sympathize with the displaced youth, and admire Monsieur Ibrahim for his peaceful, giving, and fatherly nature.

Monsieur Ibrahim is a Sufi, and interweaves Sufi philosophy and lessons into his talks with Momo. Sufism is more focused on experiencing the divine through love than strictly adhering to institutional Islam. Monsieur Ibrahim also relies heavily on the Qur'an, frequently



Figure 25 – Momo and Monsieur Ibrahim in *Monsieur Ibrahim* (2003)

stating, “I know what’s in my Qur’an.”¹⁸⁴ But he does not push Islam on Momo, who comes to read the Qur’an of his own volition. After Momo’s father abandons him and commits suicide, Monsieur Ibrahim

adopts him. They go on a trip to Normandy, and

Momo is struck by the beauty of the landscape, saying,

“It’s too beautiful here for me.”¹⁸⁵ Monsieur Ibrahim replies, “You can find beauty wherever you look. That’s what my Qur’an says.”¹⁸⁶ Momo responds to this by asking if he should read the Qur’an, to which Monsieur Ibrahim replies, “If God wants to reveal life to you, he won’t need a

¹⁸⁴ *Monsieur Ibrahim*, dir. François Dupeyron, by Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt.

¹⁸⁵ *Monsieur Ibrahim*, dir. François Dupeyron, by Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt.

¹⁸⁶ *Monsieur Ibrahim*, dir. François Dupeyron, by Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt.

book.”¹⁸⁷ Monsieur Ibrahim’s words ring true, as God seems to be revealing life to Momo through Ibrahim’s own paternal tutelage. This statement counters Hollywood’s insistence on always portraying a fanatical institutional Islam, where the Qur’an is of the utmost importance. Not insisting Momo study the Qur’an is indicative of Monsieur Ibrahim’s Sufi nature. Sufi poet Bullhe Shah wrote, “Why must I turn towards the Ka’ba, / When my heart longs for Takht Hazara.”¹⁸⁸ Bullhe Shah is trying to explain that his lover in Takht Hazara brings him closer to Allah than prayer. Similarly, why must Momo study the Qur’an when life is revealed to him through Monsieur Ibrahim’s love? Monsieur Ibrahim is patient, kind, and meditative—an exact contrast to Momo’s absent and neglectful father. Tragically, shortly after Monsieur Ibrahim adopts Momo, he is killed in a car accident. However, he leaves his grocery store and all his possessions to Momo, whom he describes as the son who “chose” him as his father.¹⁸⁹ Momo takes over running the grocery store, and is now known as the “corner Arab, open from a.m. to midnight...even on Sundays, in the grocery trade.”¹⁹⁰

Monsieur Ibrahim is an important alternate foreign film because Omar Sharif’s character is the antithesis to typical Hollywood depictions of Muslim men. He is caring and generous, trying to change the life of a trouble teenage boy while remaining simultaneously remaining humble and down to earth. He gets joy from the simple things in life, frequently encouraging Momo to smile and be grateful for what he has. Films like *Monsieur Ibrahim* that present Muslims living ordinary, day-to-day lives filled with happiness, healing, humor, and melancholy are rare. *Monsieur Ibrahim* is sweet and moving in its success, reminding viewers of the small

¹⁸⁷ *Monsieur Ibrahim*, dir. François Dupeyron, by Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt.

¹⁸⁸ Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, *Of Sacred and Secular Desire: An Anthology of Lyrical Writings from the Punjab* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 92.

¹⁸⁹ *Monsieur Ibrahim*, dir. François Dupeyron, by Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt.

¹⁹⁰ *Monsieur Ibrahim*, dir. François Dupeyron, by Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt.

joys and beauty in the world without being heavy handed in its underlying Sufi themes and philosophy. Omar Sharif's faith in the film creates an Islam for audience members that is peaceful, tolerant, and contemplative, dispelling any stereotypes they may have had about the religion.¹⁹¹

Contemporary independent films are more likely than their predecessors to deliberately use their media platform to make social commentaries on pervasive islamophobia. This is evident in several independent films, including *My Son the Fanatic*, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and *The Big Sick*. These movies are a product of the increasingly socially conscious popular media. In the past, white males have dominated the film industry – especially the position of director. As the demographics of film directors change, hopefully more positive representations of Muslims will emerge and lead to a better American social consciousness around Muslims and Islam. Furthermore, they cast Muslims as complex and layered protagonists with varied desires and motivations. Muslims can finally be shown as dynamic human beings, rather than one-dimensional villains.

Automatically labeling a Muslim as a terrorist or extremist leaves no room for understanding. These identifiers cause many Americans to shut down and equate that particular person—or religion—with evil. Only very infrequently, and perhaps among more academic circles, does anyone take the time to determine how the beliefs of an ordinary citizen (especially in the case of “homegrown” terrorism) become “extreme.” For many Americans, after 9/11, that kind of understanding aimed towards the perpetrators of such an awful tragedy is too much to ask. Fortunately, several directors have attempted to give insight into homegrown terrorism through their films.

¹⁹¹ *Monsieur Ibrahim*, dir. François Dupeyron, by Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt.

A trend of alternative titles is to address Islamic extremism and its causes through an empathetic lens. In *My Son the Fanatic*, Udayan Prasad and Hanif Kureishi work to tell the story of how young Farid went from an ordinary unreligious British college student to a member of an radical Islamic fundamentalist group in the town, committed to ridding the community of its excesses in all forms—in particular prostitution.¹⁹² Farid's evolution towards radical Islam is told through the eyes of his alcoholic taxi driver father, Parvez. Prasad brings Kureishi's short story to life through the medium of film, successfully investigating the series of events leading up to Farid's radicalization, and consequently making audiences understand exactly why Farid decided to take on extremist beliefs. In this way, the film acts as a prediction of 9/11.

Farid's disillusion with Western culture begins when he introduces his family to his girlfriend's family. In an unforgettably humiliating scene, the two families meet.¹⁹³ Parvez views Madeline's father, Chief Inspector Fingerhut, as representative of a higher, more socially superior society. As a result, he behaves in a submissive and groveling manner, doing all he can to please Mr. Fingerhut. However, despite Parvez's best efforts, Mr. Fingerhut has nothing but contempt for the Pakistani family. His grimace, stature, and judgmental gaze all indicate that he finds the idea of his daughter's engagement to Farid extremely repulsive. The Fingerhuts embody Western racism and prejudice against immigrant families. After the engagement ends and Parvez questions Farid about it, Farid responds incredulously, shocked that his father was unaware of Mr. Fingerhut's feelings towards their family before. "Couldn't you see how much he hated his daughter bein' with me? And how... repellent he found you?"¹⁹⁴ The kind of submissive imbecilic persona Parvez takes on around those he perceives to be white men of

¹⁹² *My Son the Fanatic*, dir. Udayan Prasad, by Hanif Kureishi.

¹⁹³ *My Son the Fanatic*, dir. Udayan Prasad, by Hanif Kureishi.

¹⁹⁴ *My Son the Fanatic*, dir. Udayan Prasad, by Hanif Kureishi (United Kingdom: Feature Film, 1997), unpublished script, 1997, accessed April 2, 2018, http://www.script-o-rama.com/movie_scripts/m/my-son-the-fantatic-script.html.

importance disgusts Farid. In Farid's view, "his father 'grovels' before the 'whites' who think that they represent the best civilization in the world."¹⁹⁵ Audience members can relate to Farid's frustration. He simultaneously wants his father to be treated with respect, but also cannot prevent his father's victimization from such racist attitudes.

Parvez's behavior and actions push his son further into the arms of visiting radical Pakistani religious leaders, who Parvez despises because of his own negative childhood experience with religious authority. Like Monsieur Ibrahim, Parvez



Figure 26 – Parvez gazing with frustration at the Pakistani Mullah that has infiltrated their home in *My Son the Fanatic* (1997)

places little faith in institutionalized Islam, as represented by the visiting

Mullah. Farid already views his father as a coward who has silently accepted the racism inflicted upon him his entire British life. But now he can personally see the impact Western excess can have on a family. His father is an alcoholic, cheated on his mother with a prostitute, and hangs around morally despicable characters like German businessman Mr. Schitz.¹⁹⁶ In the most climactic scene of the film, this generational and ideological gap between Farid and Parvez is examined. Farid accuses his father of being a pimp and sleeping with Bettina, a prostitute. This causes Parvez to lash out in anger, beating his son to both defend Bettina's honor and to deny the gossip that he is a pimp and sleeping with Bettina.¹⁹⁷ The fight is emotionally charged, raw, and brutal in nature. In the end, Farid gazes up at his father with blood dripping down his face,

¹⁹⁵ Sander L. Gilman, "The Fanatic: Philip Roth and Hanif Kureishi Confront Success," *Comparative Literature* 58, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 165, accessed April 2, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4125416>.

¹⁹⁶ *My Son the Fanatic*, dir. Udayan Prasad, by Hanif Kureishi.

¹⁹⁷ *My Son the Fanatic*, dir. Udayan Prasad, by Hanif Kureishi.

stating, “You call me a fanatic, dirty man. Who’s the fanatic now?”¹⁹⁸ In this, the film convinces viewers that Farid’s extremism does not stem from something inherently Islamic in nature. Instead, he is a displaced young man looking for someone or something to blame for his family’s suffering.

Hanif Kureishi, author of *My Son the Fanatic*, is able to so richly portray the conflicts encountered by the characters because of his own experience. Kureishi was born in South London in 1954 to an English mother and a Pakistani father.¹⁹⁹ He began his career in the 1970s as a pornography writer. In 1985, he first achieved success with his screenplay for *My Beautiful Laundrette*, which told the story of a gay Pakistani-British boy growing up in 1980s London.²⁰⁰ The racial discrimination present in the screenplay contained elements from Kureishi’s own experience as the sole Pakistani student at his school. Kureishi also wrote the screenplay for the 1987 hit film *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*. His 1990 book *Buddha of Suburbia* won several awards and was made into a British television series with a soundtrack by David Bowie.²⁰¹ Kureishi’s writing often focuses on themes of race, family, religion, and sexuality. It is conceivable that his experience as a second-generation South Asian immigrant in the U.K. is reflected in *My Son the Fanatic*. He can identify with both Parvez and Farid. Parvez is grateful for the opportunities afforded to him by life in the U.K. and is subsequently submissive to the white men around him, while Farid is disillusioned with British or Western culture, and therefore rejects it. Hanif Kureishi’s own experience has helped him more accurately portray the

¹⁹⁸ *My Son the Fanatic*, dir. Udayan Prasad, by Hanif Kureishi (United Kingdom: Feature Film, 1997), unpublished script.

¹⁹⁹ Emily Ballou, "Whims of the Father," *The Weekend Australian*, November 15, 2008, accessed May 18, 2018, <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/life/weekend-australian-magazine/whims-of-the-father/news-story/e00fc806351a95a50b0d332ac9b90c07>.

²⁰⁰ Emily Ballou, "Whims of the Father."

²⁰¹ Emily Ballou, "Whims of the Father."

generational complexities of the South Asian immigrant experience better than any white director could.

Films that address the impact the 9/11 terror attacks had on Muslims living in the United States remain sparse. These particular alternate titles are extremely valuable though, as they invoke the same kind of empathy in American viewers that films like *My Son the Fanatic* achieve. One film, adapted from Mohsin Hamid's novel of the same name, is Mira Nair's *The*



Figure 27 – Changez telling his life story to the CIA operative in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2012)

Reluctant Fundamentalist, released independently by IFC Films in 2012.²⁰² *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* depicts a Pakistani man's gradual awareness of his own position in the eyes of white America. Changez,

the protagonist, describes this disillusionment with the United States while telling his life story to a CIA

informant in a café in Pakistan. Initially, Changez valued America as the land of opportunity—despite his family's poverty, he excels, receiving a scholarship from Princeton and accepting a job at a top Wall Street firm.²⁰³ But after the World Trade Center attacks and his subsequent treatment, he, like Farid in *My Son the Fanatic*, begins to see his previous attitude towards the U.S. as naïve and uninformed.

Changez's cognizance of the impact imperialism and colonialism has had on the Philippines and South Asia is heightened post 9/11. When Changez returns to the U.S. from a business trip in Manila, he is strip searched at the New York airport and harassed by federal

²⁰² *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, dir. Mira Nair, screenplay by William Wheeler, by Mohsin Hamid, perf. Riz Ahmed, Kate Hudson, Liev Schreiber, Meesha Shafi, and Kiefer Sutherland (United States: IFC Films, 2012), DVD.

²⁰³ *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, dir. Mira Nair, screenplay by William Wheeler, by Mohsin Hamid.

agents. He decides to grow a beard in solidarity with his fellow Muslims against the Patriot Act, but this backfires for him professionally. “Changez’s beard provokes unease among his colleagues at Underwood Samson, who see it not as a ‘form of protest’ but as an incendiary gesture.”²⁰⁴ Eventually, Changez resigns from his position at the Wall Street firm and returns to Lahore to work as a professor. He is recruited by a terrorist cell and chooses not to join, yet states, “I had seen firsthand the arrogant America he described, the blindness, the hypocrisy, the xenophobia.”²⁰⁵ Ultimately, Changez remains true in his strong critique of America, but chooses not to engage in violence. He compares the actions of Islamic fundamentalists with that of his ruthless fellow businessmen at the Wall Street firm—they are both “deciding from a distant perch the fate of people I [they] do not know.”²⁰⁶ *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is powerful because in addition to exposing the hypocrisies of American society, it also informs audiences that being anti-American is not synonymous with terrorism, and that we must remember we live in a country where critiques such as Changez’s are supposedly the backbone of democratic society.

Mira Nair, director of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, grew up in India before moving to the United States to attend Harvard in 1976.²⁰⁷ It was there that Nair developed an interest in documentary filmmaking. For her thesis in sociology, Nair produced her first documentary, a record of a traditional Muslim community. Following this, Nair created a string of “gritty and realistic” documentaries that critically examined Indian patriarchal society and its impact on

²⁰⁴ Joseph Darda, "Precarious World: Rethinking Global Fiction in Mohsin Hamid's 'The Reluctant Fundamentalist'," *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 47, no. 3 (September 2014): , accessed April 2, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44029864>.

²⁰⁵ *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, dir. Mira Nair, screenplay by William Wheeler, by Mohsin Hamid.

²⁰⁶ *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, dir. Mira Nair, screenplay by William Wheeler, by Mohsin Hamid.

²⁰⁷ The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, "Mira Nair," Encyclopædia Britannica, January 06, 2017, , accessed April 19, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mira-Nair>.

unborn female babies.²⁰⁸ In the late 1980s, Nair moved into the realm of feature films with her acclaimed hit *Salaam Bombay!*. *Salaam Bombay!* was unique as it employed documentary film techniques and cast ordinary people on the street instead of professional actors. Nair does not shy away from controversial topics, and is highly concerned with authentically portraying the experiences of her subjects, like that of the street kids in *Salaam Bombay!*.²⁰⁹

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Nair employed similar techniques in an attempt to authentically render Changez's identity crisis and subsequent animosity towards America following 9/11. In an interview with the New York Times regarding the film, Nair describes herself as "an Indian director making a Pakistani film in America."²¹⁰ Nair's awareness of her position as a non-Pakistani non-Muslim director creating a film in America about the experience of a Pakistani Muslim man is significant. She recognizes that she can simultaneously relate with Changez's experience, but also feel disconnected from it because of her gender. Nair's films are popular in both Pakistan and India. After visiting Lahore in 2004, Nair stated, "The trip had a big impact on me. There was this incredible feeling of familiarity – the hospitality the music, the artistic expression."²¹¹ Though Nair is neither male nor Muslim, she still experienced the fear and harassment as a South Asian person of color living in New York immediately following 9/11. Nair ends the interview by stating, "The beauty of living in two or three places is your worldview is forced to expand. When you live only here [America], it's a one-sided conversation

²⁰⁸ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Mira Nair."

²⁰⁹ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Mira Nair."

²¹⁰ Fred Kaplan, "Mira Nair on 'The Reluctant Fundamentalist'," The New York Times, April 19, 2013, , accessed April 19, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/21/movies/mira-nair-on-the-reluctant-fundamentalist.html>.

²¹¹ Fred Kaplan, "Mira Nair on 'The Reluctant Fundamentalist'.

with the rest of the world.”²¹² Nair’s own identity, as well as her tenacity and talent as a director, give her the tools necessary to make *Changez*, a possible terrorist, into a sympathetic character.

Comedy has the unique ability to made serious and controversial issues easily digestible. The past decade has seen an increase in the number of American Muslim comedians. These comedians use humor, usually through the form of stand-up performances, to bring awareness to issues faced by Muslims in the United States. Well-known comedian Kumail Nanjiani recently starred in and wrote the screenplay for the acclaimed romantic comedy, *The Big Sick*, released in 2017.²¹³ *The Big Sick* is roughly based on Nanjiani’s courtship with his current wife, Emily Gordon. The film addresses themes such as the cultural clashes that can arise in interracial relationships, immigration, assimilation, heritage, and xenophobia.²¹⁴ In the film, Kumail struggles to make it as a standup comedian in what can be an extremely xenophobic industry. Though his stand-up comedy is more refined than most, he is perceived as inferior in his comedy group. When an important figure from the industry comes to the show and Kumail asks to extend his set to ten minutes in hopes of impressing him, his boss only allows him to perform for five minutes. It is clear another comedian, CJ, is receiving preferential treatment.

Kumail’s Pakistani parents did not want him to become a comedian. They immigrated to the United States in search of a better life, but do not wish for children to completely assimilate to American culture and lose their Pakistani roots. They want to arrange a marriage for Kumail, who unfortunately has no interest in marrying a Pakistani Muslim woman. But he also does not want to be disowned by his parents, who have a history of acting in such a way. “My cousin Rehan married an Irish woman and he was kicked out of the family! And nobody is allowed to

²¹² Fred Kaplan, "Mira Nair on 'The Reluctant Fundamentalist'.

²¹³ *The Big Sick*, dir. Michael Showalter, perf. Kumail Nanjiani, Zoe Kazan, and Holly Hunter (United States: Amazon Studios, Lionsgate, 2017), DVD.

²¹⁴ *The Big Sick*, dir. Michael Showalter.

talk to him.”²¹⁵ Though Kumail’s parents eventually come around to his relationship with Emily, it is an arduous process, and for a short time they disown him. When people feel their cultures threatened, they sometimes become more insular and emphatic in their beliefs. In light of the pressures to assimilate, perhaps Kumail’s parents are acting more strictly or traditionally than they would otherwise.

Kumail deals with potential Islamophobia through comedy. After informing his brother, Naveed, that he is dating a white woman, Naveed responds, “I thought you were going to say you were involved in a hit and run or you got caught forging some checks. But a white girl? Such a cliché.”²¹⁶ A white family overhears this and stares in Kumail and Naveed’s direction. hilariously, Kumail shouts at them, “It’s okay! We hate terrorists!”²¹⁷ In another scene, Kumail eats lunch in the hospital cafeteria with Emily’s parents, Terry and Beth. There is an awkward silence, and then Terry, addressing Kumail, says, “So, uh, 9/11? No, I mean, I’ve always wanted to have a conversation about it with...[Muslim] people.”²¹⁸ In light of this uncalled for, inappropriate, and awkward topic of conversation, Kumail responds with humor. “What’s my stance on 9/11? Oh, ummmm... Anti. It was a tragedy. I mean we lost 19 of our best guys.”²¹⁹ By referring to the Al-Qaeda terrorists who perpetrated 9/11 as “our best guys,” Kumail succeeds in cheekily responding to Terry’s imprudent question. Obviously, Kumail quickly tells Emily’s parents that he was only joking, and then apologizing for joking about something as sensitive as the 9/11 attacks. These jokes are significant because they act as a defense mechanism for Kumail and other Muslims against similarly ignorant questions. The *Big Sick* represents the future of

²¹⁵ *The Big Sick*, dir. Michael Showalter.

²¹⁶ *The Big Sick*, dir. Michael Showalter.

²¹⁷ *The Big Sick*, dir. Michael Showalter.

²¹⁸ *The Big Sick*, dir. Michael Showalter.

²¹⁹ *The Big Sick*, dir. Michael Showalter.

alternate films because of its use of contemporary humor to address issues that people are otherwise too uncomfortable to talk about.

Alternate titles, or films depicting Muslims in a positive light, are an exception to the majority of mainstream Hollywood representations of Islam. These films are often produced outside the U.S. or independently, and are usually not huge box office successes. Films directed by women, people of color, or both are more deliberate in their message, and use their film as a platform to advocate for a particular position. Hanif Kureishi's *My Son the Fanatic* and Mira Nair's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* shed light on Islamic fundamentalism in an empathetic and relatable manner to American audiences, dispelling preconceptions of an inextricable link between Islam and terrorism. Contemporary comedies like *The Big Sick* use humor to address complex cultural clashes and xenophobia in the United States in an engaging and empathetic manner. Alternate titles are an invaluable resource for the fate and perceptions of Muslim Americans. By showing the strife suffered by Muslim protagonists because of racism, Alternate films create empathy and sympathy in white audiences. If the mainstream media can spread Islamophobia and misconceptions through its box office hits, then it is also possible for these alternate titles to counteract that message.

Conclusion

Hollywood's negative portrayal of Muslims is not an accident. It reflects the geopolitical atmosphere of the nation at the time. It is no coincidence that terrorist-as-villain films became increasingly violent after 9/11. Hollywood films are deliberate in their perpetuation of a system that privileges non-Muslim Americans over Muslim Americans. These repeated images of Muslims as evil, backwards, dirty, and more flash before viewers' eyes over and over again until we no longer realize that we are being trained to hate. I feel that in the era of the Muslim ban, it is important now more than ever that we critically reflect on the images being presented to us. Additionally, we must encourage the production and viewing of films that work to positively depict Muslims and dispel negative stereotypes. Based on my research, this can be achieved most successfully by giving women, people of color, and Muslims themselves the opportunity to direct such films.

As I reflect on this project, I hope that through my writing, I have made a small difference in the lives of Muslims across the globe. Even if no one reads this work, it was still instrumental in educating me about Hollywood's racist misrepresentations of Muslims. If the situation arises, I feel prepared to speak confidently about these issues and share my knowledge with others. When I studied abroad in Haifa, Israel in 2017, I directly encountered racism against Muslims in connection to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This project has made me more empathetic towards the challenges faced by my Muslim friends, and a better educator to my non-Muslim friends. As I move forward in the world, I will continue to be an advocate for the fair representation of all races and religions in the media.

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