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**Continuity and Change in Hollywood Representations of the  
Middle East after September 11<sup>th</sup>**

by

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## Abstract

This thesis inquires into the factors behind Hollywood's depiction of the Middle East. That depiction is not static, but is modified in response to changes in political events and US government foreign policy. Although the events of 9/11 seemed to justify the traditional negative stereotype of Arabs, the image has been partially and rationally re-interpreted. This was due to the rise in prominence of the ideas of a minority of radical and free-thinking members of the Hollywood community who embraced a more intellectual approach, which advocated that the popular Western view of the Arab world was unjustified and based on a fallacious fabrication for Western political advantage.

The research further shows that these activists did not owe allegiance to the Hollywood-US government propaganda machine. They were able to fracture this traditional alliance and provide the opportunity for the appearance of films of a radical nature, which were critical of US Middle Eastern policy and projected the Arab world in a new light. The study analyzes a selection of films that represent the Middle East in terms of their philosophy and cinematic structure, which enables them to act as vectors to raise public awareness of the issues and to promote reconciliation and co-existence between East and West.

Keywords: Hollywood, America, Imperialism, Middle East, Orientalism, Soft Power, Representation, Clash Theory, September 11<sup>th</sup>, Change, Politics, Activism.

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## *Dedication*

*"To my father. May your soul rest in peace, to you I dedicate this work."*

*"To my mother, who never forgets me in her prayers."*

*"To my beloved wife, who never stopped motivating me."*

*"To my kids, Dawood and Ali, whose smiles light my day."*

## Publications

Arti, S., 2007. *The evolution of Hollywood's representation of Arabs before 9/11: the relationship between political events and the notion of 'Otherness'*. A paper on the evolution of American cultural rhetoric to the Journal of the MeCCSA PGN. <http://journalhosting.org/meccsa-pgn/index.php/netknow/search/titles>

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[http://www.meccsa.org.uk/pgn/events/pgnconference2007/conference\\_schedule\\_overview\\_detailed.htm](http://www.meccsa.org.uk/pgn/events/pgnconference2007/conference_schedule_overview_detailed.htm)

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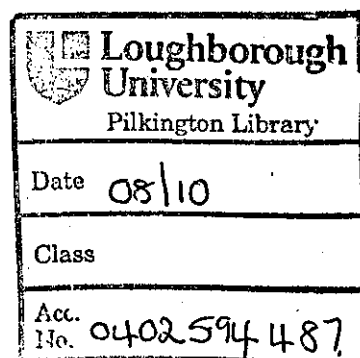
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## 1 INTRODUCTION

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This thesis discusses the marked changes in Hollywood representations of Arabs and Muslims, in a way that reveals American thought and action regarding the Middle East. The research will present a novel and significant evaluation by transcending the historical accounts to provide a critical and analytical approach, mainly illustrated by post-9/11 images. The research will also determine the connection between the stereotypical images of Arabs and Hollywood's changes both in political and commercial terms.

Some American media institutions blamed the Muslim world as a whole for the events of 9/11 (Said, 2003, p. 69). One Arab intellectual made a comment that has stuck in my mind from that time onwards: "Now...you can imagine how Hollywood will represent us." (Al Jazeera, Yuosef, 2001, September 14) His fear was shared by many Muslim thinkers who were concerned that Hollywood would be mobilized against us, especially as we were "the most maligned group in the history of Hollywood" (Shaheen, 2008, p. xi). Because of my cultural background, and my interest in politics and film studies, I decided to explore to what extent this fear of being demonized was well-founded. But since September 11<sup>th</sup>, the big screen has displayed the Arab character in a more complex, balanced and even-handed way than in the past. Joseph Wakim, for example, stated that these films have shifted from black-and-white plots of goodies and baddies to forms that are more intellectual. As he put it, "Finally Hollywood is catching on" (Wakim, 2006, pp. 21-22).

At a time when the wounds of 9/11 remained raw, some Americans were jolted into a new phase of fear and distrust of Islamic culture, particularly the concept of "Jihad". Huntington's argument of a "clash of civilizations" (1993) became increasingly popular, particularly in the American media, where the war on terror seemed to be a struggle solely against Arabs and Muslims, and Huntington's concept was reduced to the form of a "Jihad factory" (Goldberg, 2002, p. 72). This fear had been expressed throughout Hollywood's long history of prejudicial portrayal of the Middle East. As described by Edward Said (1993, p. 120), fear of the Middle East became embedded in American mainstream culture, which labelled Arabs and Muslims as "inferior others". This stereotype was conspicuous in America's media, especially in their films, and scholars have concluded that popular and uninformed American perceptions of the Middle East, rather than their own more considered views, were widely disseminated. The media's representations were unbalanced, negative and did not reflect reality. In fact, they misrepresented the region as much as they presented it (Fries, 2005, p. 13).

Edward Said described this phenomenon as "Orientalism" in his controversial book of the same name (1978). He pointed out that the West has long used the term "The Orient" to define the East as an entity populated by "Others". A systematic difference distinguishes the civilized West from the backward East. This construction, Said argued, helped to justify American imperial activities by portraying the East as an entity that should be feared or controlled (Khatib, 2006, pp. 5-6).

Scholars have shown that the representation of the Middle East by Western films validates Said's argument. Jack Shaheen (2001) for example, made the connection between Said's theory and the stereotypical image of Arabs in American movies as represented in the nine hundred films contained in his huge documentary book *Reel Bad Arabs*. Shaheen documented the slanderous history dating from the cinema's earliest days to the year 2001, and concluded that Hollywood rendered the Middle East in exotic terms that stoked ill feeling, distrust and loathing. Shaheen's work emphasized a number of negative images that plague Arabs due to American representations, which tend "to perpetuate four basic myths about Arabs: they are all fabulously wealthy; they are barbaric and uncultured; they are sex maniacs with a penchant for white slavery; and they revel in acts of terrorism" (Shaheen, 1987, p. 4).

Shaheen categorized his documentary into a descriptive thematic structure, and did not pay attention to the reasons behind the negative depiction of the Middle East. In contrast, Michael Suleiman goes beyond the depiction to assert that US - Israeli relations play a specific role in presenting Arabs and Muslims as the enemy. This is because the US has many more cultural, religious and economic ties with Israel than with the Arab world (Suleiman, 1988, pp. 3-5). This is clearly reflected in American movies where Israel is treated more sympathetically (Khatib, 2005, p. 107).

The consensus of the majority of academics involved in Middle Eastern research is that Hollywood's representation of Arabs and Muslims is highly defamatory. In the process of the construction of "Otherness" they are shown to be untrustworthy (Semmerling, 2006, p. 7), aggressive, viciously warlike and committed to exporting Islam. While some authors refer to a pro-Israeli political culture, others blame the laziness of film makers to find an alternative depiction (Fries, 2005, p. 12). Nevertheless, there are serious attempts to link Hollywood's distorted images with American political activities in the region.

It is significant for our study of the evolution of Hollywood's representation of Arabs to scrutinize chronologically the relationship between political events and the Arab image, before we move on to consider the changes that have occurred since 9/11. By studying some examples of this relationship, the research will attempt to show that the portrayal of Arabs is influenced by American imperial motives.

This research will attempt to reveal that the correlation between Hollywood (its major studios) and the US administration was forged via a "centralization process" designed and monitored by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) and its leaders Jack Valenti and Lew Wasserman over a period that stretched from the beginning of the Cold War to the end of the last century. This was because Hollywood was the linchpin of US ideological hegemony. The cinema was used to project images of super-power virtue, based on a repository of values, attitudes, myths and illusions (Boggs & Pollard, 2007, p. 1). As a result, the idea that Arabs and Muslims represented "Otherness" became a justifiable motivation for US political activities and an exercise of self-definition.

The thesis will explore the above correlation in order to show that the relationship between US political power and Hollywood's rhetoric, into which the Middle East was bundled, had mutual benefits for each party. For example, Hollywood received both financial and material support from the government, while it provided US foreign policy with an idealistic form and promoted America as a super-power in the international arena. Joseph Nye observes that, "Not since Rome has one nation loomed so large above the others" (Nye, 2002, p. 1).

However, over the past 20 years Hollywood has experienced changes in its infrastructure. The hegemony of the major studios has weakened. Independent production companies have appeared, some of them owned by free thinkers, who refuse to be constrained by government diktats or the practices of Hollywood. Because of these changes, a new argument about the implication of American force, especially regarding the Middle East, has arisen. One way to resolve this argument would be to establish a meaningful discourse between different cultures, which would lead to a tolerant respect for each other's point of view. This phenomenon rose to the surface in the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup>, the war on Iraq and the deterioration and increase in the complexity of the on-going Palestinian-Israeli conflict, when Hollywood's rhetoric displayed a distinct lack of desire to cover the US "war on terror" with the ideological legitimacy that was needed.

Between the political events and the industrial contexts, our attention will be directed to the changes in the traditional depiction of Arabs and Muslims. Thus, it is crucial in our study of the evolution of Hollywood's representation of Middle Easterners to demonstrate the structural as well as the political changes in America's film industry, which now provides opportunities for contradicting American foreign policy.

Hollywood's activists are now able to liberate themselves from government influence and refuse to portray the Middle East in terms of threatening "Others". Instead, they express different ideas concerning a whole range of issues regarding Arabs and Muslims. Most post-9/11 movies have replaced a propagandist depiction with a controversial one. For example, displeasure with US foreign policy was clearly reflected in Stephen Gaghan's *Syriana* (2005), where important questions were raised concerning the relationship between terrorism, governments and the oil business. This

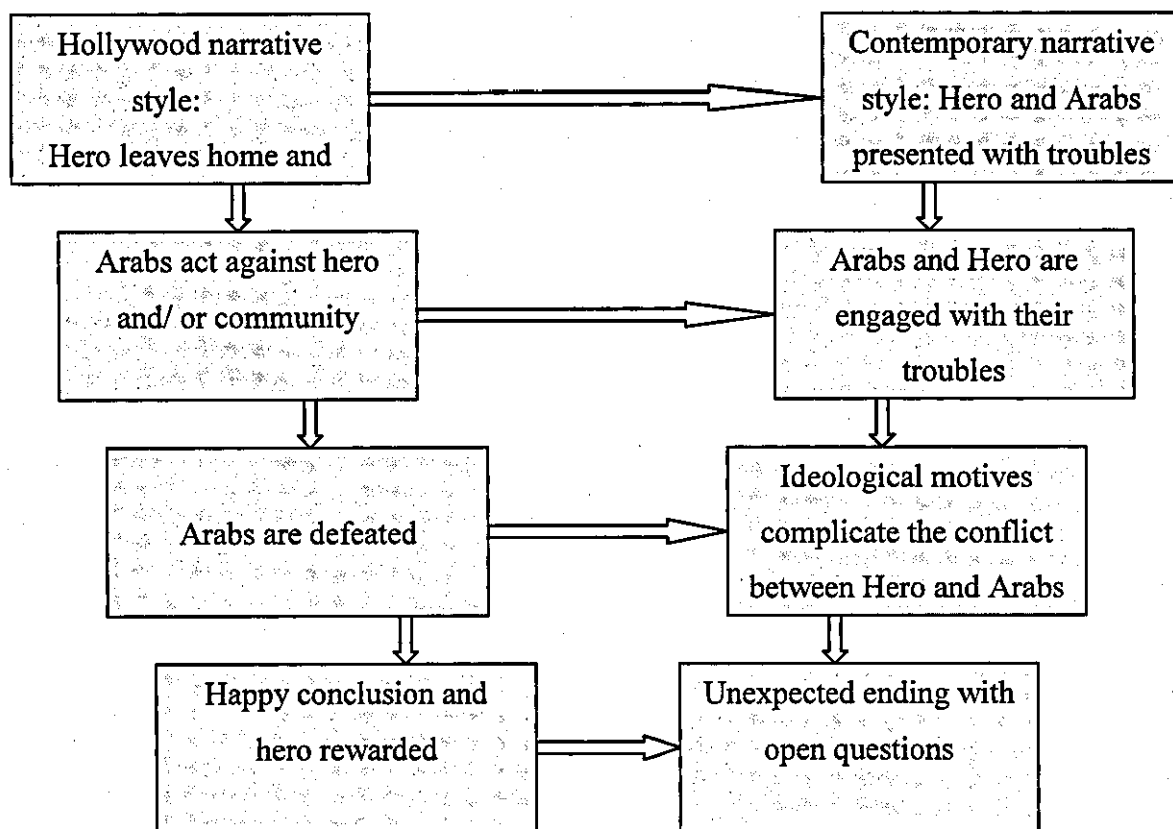
research suggests that these contemporary changes in the representation of Arabs also apply to Steven Spielberg's *Munich* (2005), a film that shows Arabs and Israelis as two sets of people who have historically suffered similar injustices, which now need to be redressed. Both Spielberg and his screenwriter Tony Kushner were referring the on-going Arab-Israeli conflict to the ideological one that exists within each side rather than to traditional Arab terrorism. The film contains many examples of presenting Middle Eastern issues in a way that attempts to understand the Arab perspective.

The thesis will examine the important insight into Arab stereotyping that is presented by Ridley Scott's *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005). Scott and his screenwriter William Monahan provide an intellectual as well as an emotional response to Huntington's "clash theory" by dramatizing the historical events of the Third Crusade. The film tackles the ingrained anxiety of American and Western culture toward the perceived extremism and terrorism of the Middle East by providing an alternative vision that bridges the opposing cultures to embrace peace and break the cycle of violence between them (Wall, 2005, p. 45).

While some Arab intellectuals highly commended the message of *Kingdom of Heaven*, others expressed their scepticism by suggesting that this might be a consequence, directly or indirectly, of changes in US Public Diplomacy, which are designed merely to engage rather than alienate Arab opinion while offering no fundamental change in policy. This criticism has arisen, in some quarters, because of Scott's close affiliation with the Pentagon, which was reflected in his previous film, *Black Hawk Down* (2001). In order to clarify this argument, the research will explore US Public Diplomatic strategy. It will examine intellectual motives to find evidence for Joseph Nye's "Soft Power" theory, which focuses on intangible resources, that is, the ability to persuade and influence other countries by the attractiveness of its society, values, culture, and institutions (Nye, 2004, pp. 5-7).

The research suggests that the new representation of the Middle East is not only characterized by the form of production, but also expressed in their stylistic approach, which distances them from traditional Hollywood. The researcher believes that the new representation must be critically analyzed in order to understand its meaning, which exists in a coded language. It is a revolutionary approach, which breaks with

Hollywood's traditional narrative: The aim is not to demonstrate that the new representation is either good or bad, but to show that the representation of the Middle East has undergone changes, from the traditional Hollywood narrative style (classic style) to one that is more intellectual and progressive, as shown in Figure {1}:



**Figure 1 Changes in Hollywood's Narrative Style**

This table aims to illustrate that the development in Hollywood's representation of the Middle East becomes clear at a certain stage in the movie where these aspects of modern cinema are embraced, which helps to reshape its ideological structure.

### Research questions

- 1- After September 11<sup>th</sup>, do Hollywood representations of the Middle East change and if so, how and why?



- 2- What is the relationship between the role of Hollywood activists and the new representation of Middle East issues?
- 3- How do the changes in Hollywood's production system enable moviemakers to promote a critical debate that rebels against Hollywood's classical conventions in representing Arabs and Muslims?
- 4- How do the post-9/11 representations of the Middle East relate to the broader political debates about the relationship between the USA and the Middle East?

Chapter 2 illustrates the the research methods, which will rely on three main aspects: historical, contextual and textual descriptions. The analysis of each of these aspects depends not only on the formula and the application of the model, but also on the researcher's skills of interpretation and his reading of the literature, supported by evidence.

Chapter 3 highlights Joseph Nye's Soft Power Theory and the way it has been used by the State Department to promote a cultural strategy as part of US Public Diplomacy. The evolution of this policy, from the time of the Creel committee to the current trans-national media empires, is discussed. The chapter will also discuss the confused relationship between US Public Diplomacy and Hollywood. In this regard, it will distinguish between Hollywood's cultural and commercial outlets and the Public Diplomacy process of persuasion that was designed after 9/11 to win the battle for "hearts and minds".

Chapter 4 chronicles the period before September 11<sup>th</sup>, in which Hollywood played a substantial role in cultural defence, especially against Communism (Boggs & Pollard, 2007, p. 1). This chapter has two aims. First, it will familiarize readers with the "centralization process" that was designed by government appointees together with the major studios to justify the policy of perpetuating the myth of the "good" nation fighting the "evil" inferiors or Muslims (Sardar & Davies, 2004, pp. 127-129). Second, it aims to prove that Hollywood's construction of the "Others" was based on American political interest and that over a long period it has rendered the region in an exotic light.

Chapter 5 will explore the changes that have occurred to the industrial structure of Hollywood, especially within its production context. The chapter traces this transformation from a “centralized” to a “decentralized” system that led to the rise of independent production companies, which have weakened the hegemony of the major film studios. The chapter also studies the role of the film industry’s new distribution system, as well as examining the rise of Hollywood activism, which has created a dichotomy inside its community.

Chapter 6 discusses the political motives behind the stereotypical image of the Arab during the period before 9/11. Hollywood has always played a propagandist role for American imperial projects (Said, 1978), especially in the Middle East. The chapter suggests that the evolution of this representation was profoundly influenced by political events, such as the creation of Israel, the Arab Oil Embargo, the Iranian Islamic Revolution and the demise of the Soviet Union. The effect of these events has been to transform the image, over the last century, from “comic villains” to “foreign devils”. It did not occur in a vacuum, but in the context of political and cultural interests in the region.

Chapter 7 will examine the controversial issue of Hollywood’s negative depiction of the Middle East, and how it has dealt with the war on terror and the symptoms of Islam phobia. It also gives clear examples of the divisions inside Hollywood’s mainstream. The chapter will analyze the stylistic techniques used to characterize Arabs post-9/11, to determine whether these changes include traditional conventions.

Chapter 8 provides a critical analysis of Steven Spielberg’s *Munich* (2005) in an attempt to identify the structural as well as ideological changes in post-9/11 movies. Using both textual and contextual analysis, the chapter contrasts *Munich* with *Black Sunday* (1976), showing how the former film’s structure conveys a more balanced image of Middle Eastern people and suggests a reconciliation of opposing ideologies. By this means, the chapter links the changes in Hollywood’s industrial structure with the new depictions of the Middle East.

Chapter 9 uses the same structure and analysis as Chapter 8, but with regard to Stephen Gaghan's *Syriana* (2005) and *Rollover* (1981). This analysis offers another comparison but one that reflects the geopolitical concerns that made the Middle East a region of strategic interest for the United States. Political changes in the Middle East have not favoured American interests, and some of them have raised the concern that the US is at the mercy of foreign oil producers. The chapter will also link the significant role of Hollywood's activism with the new representation of the Middle East.

Chapter 10 provides a textual and contextual analysis for the theoretical basis of the "clash theory" in Ridley Scott's *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005). The chapter demonstrates how the film debates the "clash theory" and attempts to expose Western fears by questioning the basis for the West's traditional stereotype of Arabs. The chapter is supported by third party opinions on how and to what extent the film disputes the traditional stereotype, and to what extent that stereotype is overcome.

## **2 METHODOLOGY**

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In this research, the evolution of Hollywood's representation of Arabs, Muslims and their culture will be subjected to a detailed analysis. Three main techniques will be used: historical, contextual, and textual descriptions. Their use in analysis depends not only on the formula and application of the model, but also on the researcher's skills of interpretation and personal reading (Hansen et al., 1998, p. 131). Thus, the research methodology adopted for this research is qualitative.

The study includes and examines political reactions to cultural differences, theoretical discourses on imperialism, American hegemonic theories, Orientalist theories and the representation of Arabs in Hollywood films.

Theoretical discourses on imperialism and American hegemony are used to research the connection between the stereotypical image of the Middle East and American objectives, set against an "Orientalist" background. The theories of Edward Said and others in relation to debates over imperialism, cultural imperialism and globalization are considered. Historical analysis informs the development of the discussion surrounding the representation of Arab politics and culture. Thus, a close historical analysis is the first methodological technique to be applied in this project.

### **2.1 Contextual Analysis**

Some theories promulgate the idea that the "realm of culture can itself be seen as a text" (Geiger & Rutsky, 2005, p. 27). Films are particular instances of texts that exist within a much larger cultural and historical context.

Between the text and the context, there are many meanings. These range from the specific (the text itself) to the general (important contextual information). They start with the reading of the film's primal background and extend to the institutional, ideological, political and industrial circumstances under which the film is produced. Thus, contextual analysis would be an appropriate method to adopt to achieve a better understanding of the texts of the films reviewed in this research.

Contextual analysis can also provide the research with an analytical framework in terms of technological or cultural forms. The representation of Arabs in post-9/11 movies shows an unprecedented divergence from any chronological correspondence to political events. It is, therefore, difficult to say that these films are neutral or isolated from ideological or political forces (Boggs & Pollard, 2007, p. 177). For example, to understand the conflict in *Munich* is to understand the ideological structural environs of the Arab-Israeli conflict 'as well the staging difficulties' and the backgrounds of the film's makers.

### 2.1.1 Historical analysis

The research will commence with a survey of the mythological view that movies hold about the Middle East. It will look at how ideology and myths inform Hollywood's viewers, and at the preconceptions to which they cling when Arabs or Muslims are projected. The research will follow the work of Melanie McAlister, Elizabeth Poole and Lina Khatid, and then examine how these ideologies and myths serve as defamatory devices in Western cinematic viewing of Middle Easterners. The best way to understand the relationship between the Western preconceptions of Arabs and their stereotype is to base our analysis on Edward Said's seminal book *Orientalism*, because it provides a vantage point for the ideological structure and basis of the inquiry.

First however, it will be appropriate to describe the Middle East and the Theory of Imperialism, demonstrating the importance of cultural domination by giving a brief historical review of the American presence in the region. In order to reach a clear perception of the growing hostility between America and some citizens of the Middle East, the study will explore how scholars and others in the region have focused on

what Edward Said (1978) described as the East/West dichotomy, and how it has become significant in dividing the world. It will also explore the power relationships that have been involved.

Since Said's work is both profound and diverse, the research will narrow down the analysis to the concept of Middle Eastern "Otherness" as a construction of Western thought (Fries, 2005, p. 13), and how it developed into an exercise of Western self-definition. It helps to have a cognitive image of the way Arabs are portrayed in films and why they are projected in terms of "exoticism". The researcher believes that this theme has been described in considerable detail in various "Orientalist" discourses. Said's "Orientalism" also helps to reveal the connection between imperial activities and the Western depiction of Arabs as being irrational, inferior, barbarian and loathsome. This image is authenticated in the Western consciousness by the role that is played by political forces, which are intimately entangled with the military, economic and political strategies of Western countries. The research is based on Said's work because it provides a significant framework for "Orientalism" as practised by the West and particularly the United States.

The research will examine whether the global image of the East is based on observation or a systematic imperial depiction. Said, for example, provided a "textual relation" focusing on the characterization of Arabs and Muslims according to three major dogmas. The first was to create a systematic difference that distinguished the civilized West from the backward East. Said claimed that "Orientalism" tends to generalize the Western perception of the Orient and purposefully ignores the diversities between Middle Eastern countries. Said's "Orientalism" produces the idea that the Orient is a perilous place that should be controlled, an idea presented clearly in Hollywood films, wherein Arab associations continue to be a threat, not just for the West but also for the East itself. A typical example is found in *Three Kings* (1999), in which the American Army protects Iraqi civilians from their oppressive government. In this way, "Orientalism" reduces the "Other" in a systematic process of distortion to justify the American role in the region.

The research considers the theorizing of Edward Said and others in relation to debates over imperialism, cultural imperialism and globalization. The historical analysis

conducted during this research will inform the development of discussion surrounding the representation of Arab politics and culture. Furthermore, the research will add to Said's work by presenting specific classification for the evolution of this negative image in the Western media. Here some examples, particularly from the cinema, have been useful in tracing the evolution of the West's presentation of Arabs.

In order to appreciate the cultural background of the stereotypical image of the Middle East projected by the West it is important to move on from the history and the concept of the "Islamic threat" as the main element in the construction of "Otherness". The research will conduct a theoretical discourse about the religious and political issues that present Muslims as a demonized threat. Using Said's *Covering Islam*, Poole's *Reporting Islam* and Khatib's *Filming the Modern Middle East*, the research will be based on two main assumptions. First, there is an undeniable difference between self-representation of Islam and the representation by unsympathetic others. Second, there is a clear association between political events and the stereotypical image of Muslims, and this is purposeful and politically motivated (Poole, 2002, p. 42).

In Chapter Six, the research will examine the history of the development of the stereotypical image of the Middle East, including its racial and religious forms. The study will utilize Jack Shaheen's huge documentary work *Reel Bad Arabs* (2001), in which he analyzed more than nine hundred films from 1900 to 2001. The analysis in this part of the inquiry does not aim to determine whether the stereotypical image of Arabs is good or bad, but to examine the link between American policy and this stereotype based on the new situation that arose out of the political consequences of the events of 9/11. It is planned, therefore, to examine the differences between the periods before and after September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 by studying Hollywood's representation of the Arab according to the following chronology of political events:

- First, the early stages: from the first productions until World War Two;
- Second, after WW2: during the ideological conflict with Communism;
- Third, the Arab oil embargo and its presentation within the story line;
- Fourth, the post-Iranian revolution period, which coincides with the rise of the Islamic threat;
- Fifth, the period after the first Gulf War and the end of the Cold War, with Arabs represented as "foreign devils".

It is significant to analyze Hollywood's portrayal of the Middle East within its historical framework because the evolution of political events provides different, often contradictory, interpretations of Hollywood's representation of Middle Easterners.

The study attempts to show that the stereotypical image of the Arab was employed to create the unconscious sense of an "evil Arab Other". Thus, in order to avoid ambiguity the study will narrow down its scope of classification to focus on the concept of "Otherness". To do this, the research will seek to base its arguments on a close reading not only of the narrative structure and visual tropes, but also of the political circumstances that outline its general features. In order to assist in this process the evolution of exoticism in Hollywood's productions will be explored in depth and linked to ideological changes, especially those brought about by the demise of the Soviet Union. For example, while Shaheen's discussion of *Rules of Engagement* (2000) takes up only two inches of text, which is "by far too little" (Semmerling, 2006, p. 3), the film could be analyzed as depicting Arabs as a replacement threat for the Soviet Union.

Therefore, the dissertation will expand the analysis of the notion of "Otherness" that has been extended to ever-higher levels by representing the Middle East as a place of corruption in a way that serves American imperial objectives. Said described the American media, especially Hollywood, as constantly repeating the political line that, "They must be foreign devils, otherwise what is our gigantic military machine doing there?" (Said, you tube, 2003)

Before moving onto the second part (comparative theory), the research will conduct a theoretical analysis of the relationship that shows the collaboration between Hollywood and the Pentagon as two potent symbols of American power. Beginning with the "classical" or "studio" era this relationship has witnessed many changes.



### 2.1.2 Comparative Theory

In order to extract the political and ideological motives behind the new representation of the Middle East, this research will conduct a comparative study between two pre- and post-9/11 films that share the same type of case or story. The films will be compared in terms of how their direction, production and cinematography are used to present the Middle East. Examining the style of a film and its relationship to other films with a similar type of story in this way not only provides valuable information about the films and their context, but also helps to determine any cultural and ideological differences between them. Among the different genres, the research will first focus on the structural level of the film's particular style, comprising a set of stylistic rules that formulate a certain type of film (Geiger & Rutsky, 2005, p. 37). For example, the classical Hollywood style is itself a stylistic structure. Unconsciously, the audience responds to the structural rules of the film's style. Indeed, stylistic analysis would enable the research to provide a better understanding of the cultural and ideological differences within the structural levels of the films.

The evolution of Hollywood's representation of Arabs has moved from the classical Hollywood style to one that is contemporary or progressive. Further, particular styles like those employed in *Kingdom of Heaven*, *Syriana*, and *Munich*, have often been associated with different cinematic movements and with directors working outside Hollywood. They range for example, from the polemical style of Ingmar Bergman and Jean-Luc Godard to Ozu Yasujiro's use of low-camera shots. Stylistic structural analysis will examine how the new structure helps the director to convey his ideas.

The actual comparative studies will be *Black Sunday-Munich* and *Rollover-Syriana*. In addition, these studies will allow the researcher to discern the differences in terms of direction, presentation, production and technique. This approach will involve a close reading of the genre, cinematic text and context and it will also help to identify the new changes in political context and ideological framework that Arabs are bundled in .

### 2.1.3 Production context

This is an important but often ignored aspect of contextual analysis. In order to have a clear understanding of every aspect of a film's context it is necessary during analysis to focus on what is most relevant to the researcher's central argument about the film or the questions that are raised by it. The researcher therefore believes that special attention should be given to the constructive role of the production context; that is, to the background against which the film is financed or produced.

The research will identify two means of production. First, it will explore the independent filmmaking that appeared after the evolutionary change due to the disintegration of the classical vertically integrated studio system into a vertically designed production complex of agglomerate proportions (Christopherson and Storper, 1986). The research will attempt to prove that the new "multi-faced" Hollywood makes it easier for the Producer to present films with a political agenda, or to be more critical of American foreign policy, as it provides opportunities for independent thinking and the formation of new ideas.

Independent investors, however, still need a studio for both investment and distribution. The association of independent companies with Hollywood subsidizers and the major studios shows that whatever the production source, they would not be able to find lucrative projects unless they engaged in a partnership with the majors in the distribution sector (Scott, 2001). Hence, Clooney's *Syriana* and Robert Redford's *Lions for Lambs* (2007) are considered Hollywood productions, but the films' production context enables them to deliver a very personal or individualized statement.

The second means of production identified is by conglomerate companies, where American values are magnified to espouse patriotic and nationalistic viewpoints. This style of production used to be the linchpin of imperial and ideological hegemony. Conglomerate companies and their empires live by virtue of the American capitalist system and routinely celebrate the blessing of "free-market" economies. Therefore, they act as proponents of American foreign policy (Boggs & Pollard, 2007, p. 1). In

many ways, these companies play a significant role in shaping political content. As Gianos states,

Films are produced to make money....it is essential to understand that films are a commodity intended to make money to understand their relationship to politics and politics' relationship to film. (Gianos, 1995, p. 1)

The researcher will discuss the significant role of the Producer. The Producer is the first person involved with the film; responsible for hiring the major creative talents, such as the director, screenwriter and cinematographer. In addition he is the main controller of the content or ideological form of the film, and liaises with the American authorities. In the past, most producers avoided hiring directors with a hostile tendency towards American policy or with a dysfunctional political agenda. The researcher believes that with post-9/11 movies the Producer, whether an individual filmmaker or a conglomerate company, plays an influential role in depicting Middle Easterners.

The research will suggest that financial pressures could lead to structural changes in a film's ideological form (Geiger & Rutsky, 2005, p. 904). Since the depiction of the Middle Easterner is profoundly influenced by the affiliation between Washington and Hollywood, especially in military movies (Wheeler, 2006, p. 139), it is significant to explore this relationship in post-9/11 movies, as some of their producers refused to play a "war machine" role. In analyzing the relationship between Washington and Hollywood it is important to lean upon what the film theorist Andre Bazin called the "genius of the system", or Hollywood's capacity to produce films within its own cultural context. Douglas Gomery links this centralization of the film industry to the content of movies when he says,

To those who champion film as an art form, the coming of media conglomerates has meant that corporate chieftains prefer safe, formulaic films to even the most elementary experimentation. To those who look to film to help with ideological struggle, media conglomerates have effectively strangled the market place and kept alternative means of expression marginalized. (Gomery, 1994, pp. 71-74)

## 2.2 Textual Analysis

Textual analysis deals with aesthetical elements, which tend to be coded images. The research deals with film-language as rules that govern the construction of post-9/11 movies. For example, the reverse-angle shot is used in the construction of fighting scenes in *United 93* (2006) to read the action as a disturbing violence rather than entertainment, invoking by this means a different cinematic style and creating a new class of film. The same process occurs in *Syriana*, *Munich*, *The Kingdom* and *Kingdom of Heaven*, as most of the textual elements tends to be at variance with “Hollywood conventions” or its classical style.

In order to identify or decode the language that is contained in films a thorough knowledge of the various techniques used in audio-visual and film construction is required. The signifying elements of this language are divided into two main groups, technical and symbolic, which are combined in cinematic language. Thus, contextual or stylistic analysis will provide the researcher with a means to determine how these signifying systems function within a film’s context to construct scenes and create meaning for the audience (Hansen et al., 1998, p. 133).

### 2.2.1 Technical elements

The central element in the filmmaking process is the Director. He controls the style of the film. The research will analyze the Director’s contribution as the main conveyer of the signifying system from the script to the final artistic impact, especially in films of a political nature. The Director, according to Christensen, is responsible for not only “directing” the actors but also determining many of the visual and aural aspects of a movie, including technical choices such as camera angles (Christensen and Haas, 2005, p. 26).

The role of the Director in Hollywood has increased dramatically in importance since Hollywood's classical era. During that time a group of moviemakers, including a director, made the film. Today the film has become the artistic province of the Director. There are two reasons for this evolution of the role. First, commercialization led to Hollywood films losing their intellectual value. Second, the influence of the French "auteur" film theory of the 1950's (Giannetti, 1996, p. 293) sublimed the Director as the real Author. This research takes into account the considerable role of the Director in the best known American political films, and how the political and humanistic character of these films is maintained through their personal vision.

### 2.2.1.1 Directing

Directors such as Robert Redford, Stephen Gaghan, and Oliver Stone have rebelled against Hollywood's traditional style of presenting political issues. They use a radical style in their presentation of the Middle East. Even directors with a less obvious interest in political implications, for example Steven Spielberg and Peter Berg who are well-known in their commercial style, have interestingly created films with political and aesthetic themes that present the Arabs with a new image. Because this image is combined into the Director's own vision and stylistic analysis of the signifying elements, the researcher has been able to discern the Director's cultural and ideological endeavours within the film.

The research takes into account the Director's background. Peter Biskind notes that there are some points that the Director cleverly tries to dodge when he inserts his image into his movie to present his subject or characters, and claims that this is what happens when liberal directors work with conservative producers or writers and *vice versa* (Biskind, 1995, p. 5). Regardless of the Director's background, the research will examine why Hollywood's representation of the Middle East can be categorized into two major approaches to direction, i.e. realism and formalism, and why the latter is specifically considered to represent dissent from Hollywood's classical or commercial style.

This research believes that the “realism style” seeks to imitate or duplicate reality. This style has been adopted by only a few political movies (Christensen & Haas, 2005, p. 27), including those about the Middle East where the presentation was superficial and artless (Shaheen, 2001, pp. 12-13). It is also noticeable that realism employs signifying elements to duplicate reality, and is often achieved by a minimal amount of film editing or by the use of real locations and events, for example in *Munich*. By contrast, “formalism” tends to examine and connote the political message via aesthetic means and symbols rather than by imitating reality. Since “formalist” films are of a contemporary style, the researcher believes that the characterization of Arabs is staged within unusual set designs of signifying elements.

Because the new presentation of the Middle East has mostly come from political movies, the research will study the nature of the movie as an art form, especially when directors use unusual techniques. This is because the style of the film, realistic or formalistic, could provide the viewer with a kind of political message. For example, in Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* (1979), he dramatizes his political emphasis in a formalistic style, including the signifying elements of editing, lighting and cinematography. Other directors, such as Steven Spielberg in *Saving Private Ryan* or Oliver Stone in *Platoon* (1986), use a more realistic approach to denote a similar message (Christensen & Haas, 2005, p. 27). The researcher believes that this kind of study will help to explore the relationship between the portrayal of the Arab character and the film’s form. In Spielberg’s *Munich* (2005) for example, the director interestingly combines two approaches in his portrayal of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The film’s subject and its representation give the viewer a clue as to the kind of political message that address the people of the Middle East.

#### **2.2.1.2 Editing/Montage**

New and unprecedented styles have been adopted for some recent political movies. For example, Steven Gaghan’s *Syriana* surpasses Hollywood’s traditional mythical image of the Arabs. The research will analyze why Gaghan produced his film with a remarkable level of theatrical authenticity, which approached Bertolt Brecht’s dialectical theatre (Brecht, 1992, pp. 121, 122), and why he used the signifying

elements of an “alienation effect” to discredit worldwide capitalism. The research will examine the extensive use of editing that is usually associated with formalism or the contemporary style of “breaking illusion”. The latter uses an editing sequence that produces a sudden switch between different positions; for example, from close-up to extreme long-shot, or the compilation of rapid shots known as “jump cutting”. It is, therefore, essential to scrutinize the editing techniques, because in many ways they will convey the framework into which the images of Arabs are bundled. Eisenstein and Bazin have carried out research into the implications of the effects of editing techniques. In their theories of montage, they have examined the emotional and intellectual impact of a film as a form of art and the audience as the viewer of this art.

*Mis-en-scene* is a French expression meaning “putting into the scene”. Although the term has a theatrical origin, film scholars have extended the meaning to film directing. *Mis-en-scene* describes the action, lighting, décor and other elements within the shot itself, including those that convey a strong meaning. The term therefore has an overlap with the theatre, both aesthetically and intellectually. *Mis-en-scene* helps the Director to stage the event for the camera and to transmit his messages, in particular the political ones. Christensen, for example, shows that this could happen in many ways, such as controlling the camera angles, the distance of the camera from the scene, the colours and lighting variety, the use of lenses and the concept of distortion (Christensen & Haas, 2005, p. 27).

The research will analyze the reasons behind the manipulative use of montage in Spielberg’s *Munich* and the way that *mis-en-scene* is used to sustain impressionism in many of the scenes describing the impact of the ideological structure of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is significant to examine the ideological reasons for using this theatrical device in Gaghan’s *Syriana* and in addition, to investigate why Gaghan borrowed “instantiation effects” from Bertolt Brecht for his presentation of Middle East issues.

### 2.2.1.3 Camera shots

The research will use textual analysis to explore the technical as well as esthetical elements that work to create film-language through the elements that are described below. They help to reveal the pattern of the movie that the audience is viewing. The camera shots, as David Bordwell describes, can direct our attention to clarify and emphasize the meaning of a film (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p. 111). Therefore, it is important to observe the characterization of Middle East issues as they are developed by the camera's movement.

#### 2.2.1.3.1 The close-up

Some directors tend to frame the picture by using a shot that shows part of a person, for example their face, hand or mouth. Alternatively, the scale of the object is made relatively large compared to the size of the screen. This is to gain a symbolic value or a dramatic effect to direct the audience's attention to a specific meaning. It is a powerful device in film construction (Hansen et al., 1998, p. 133).

#### 2.2.1.3.2 The extreme and medium close-up

The extreme close-up is a frame of a picture that shows part of a person or object on a scale that is not only very large but fills the entire screen and excludes peripheral details. This technique is often used to heighten tension and drama significantly. In European contemporary cinema, extreme close-up is employed to achieve a disturbing for example, of the protagonist's eyes and neck in Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* (1966). The researcher believes that in some of the new Hollywood films involving Arabs this aesthetic technique is intentionally employed.

The medium close-up frames the person or the object in a moderate size. It usually frames the person from the waist upwards (Geiger and Rutsky, 2005, p. 904). To some extent, it has the effect of isolating the person from his or her environment.



### 2.2.1.3.3 The long-shot

The person or the object remains small sized and long-shot uses the cover shot, which allows the scale of the object to be controlled with respect to its environment. Therefore, directors use this shot to relate the person to his environment as well as the extreme long shot, which also reveals much of the landscape.

### 2.2.1.3.4 Camera angle

This is the viewing position of the camera relative to the subject. The research will study the implications of the aesthetic and psychological value created by the angle of framing as well as the impact of the camera angle on the concept or the scene. For example, when the camera looks down on the subject, it is from a high-angle; horizontal, on the same level, is a straight-on angle (which is the camera position used most); and when looking up, it is from a low angle. The choice of camera angle emphasizes a strong meaning for the image projected. For example, in Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941), most of the shots used the low-angle, giving the protagonist a larger-than-life quality and thus emphasizing Kane's character (Gianos, 1995, p. 38). There are two further angles, the oblique angle, in which the camera tilts to the left or right; and the Dutch angle, where the tilt is horizontal or vertical (Hansen et al., 1998, p. 134).

### 2.2.1.4 Lenses

The research proposes that lenses play an instrumental role in emphasizing the meaning of the images that are projected in post-9/11 movies. Lenses contribute by altering the type of image projected on the screen. In this research, films have a political character and so it is essential to analyze the various opportunities that lenses afford. For example, the wide-angle lens is commonly used to exaggerate depth, as shown in *The China Syndrome* (1979) in the short focal length of Jane Fonda's face while inside the nuclear reactor. This technique draws the audience deeply into the

action (Braudy & Cohen, 2004, pp. 186-187). Other cinematic lenses include the fish-eye lens, which is commonly used to gain a greater degree of tension. The telephoto lens has a long focal length and functions as a telescope. It is used to magnify distant objects and make the image seem close to the foreground. Research would improve this technique because in some situations it can cause a distortion, which may result in an "alienation effect". The zoom lens is one of the main devices used to interpret or emphasize the political or aesthetic connotations of the scene. It allows the cameraperson to change the range of the shot from telephoto to close-up without stopping the camera (Hansen et al., 1998, p. 134).

#### **2.2.1.5 Depth of Field**

This significant element has a dramatic influence upon the characters by, for example, directing their eyes and minds to a specific moment. The research will suggest that the intellectual use of this technique in some post-9/11 movies has contributed towards representing Arabs differently. In the case of *Munich*, for example, Spielberg intensively uses close-up and deep-focus shots of Ali and Avner. This is to elicit both emotional and intellectual responses from the audience. The research will demonstrate that contextual analysis places the classic realistic theories of Serge Eisenstein and Siegfried Kracauer with the post-modern realistic theory of Stephen Prince.

#### **2.2.1.6 Camera movement**

Camera movement is of central importance when analyzing moving images because of its ability to characterize by following the moving action or scanning a scene (Hansen et al., 1998, p. 134). It is suggested that some new movies have changed their representation of Arabs from dramatic to ecstatic characterizations by this means. It is vital to examine why Sam Mendes intensified his shots in *Jarhead* (2005) by panning takes in horizontal movements, and how much it helped to avoid the typical or negative depiction of the Iraqi soldier. In the same way, this research will suggest the

need to identify the point of view (POV) shot, which stages the world from the central character's position, and what this could add to revealing his inner conflict.

### 2.2.2 Lighting

Lighting has the potential to emphasize the meaning of a scene. Therefore, different uses of lighting theories lead to different interpretations of the projected image. Some of the Arab characterizations in post-9/11 movies made unprecedented use of lighting techniques for emotional and aesthetic impact; for example, in *Syriana*, *Munich*, and *Lions for Lambs*. This study will base its theoretical analysis on the actual cinematic expertise of persons such as Vittorio Storaro, Nestor Almendros, and Gordon Willis. Their work suggests that the moods of the characters are functionalized via the various effects that lighting tackles bring to bear, such as (High-Key/Low-key) lights or substantiation of (HMI) or (Tungsten) impact.

### 2.2.3 Special effects

These make a substantial contribution to the theme and storytelling in post-modern Arab movies. It is essential, therefore, to study the image of Arabs as influenced by visual effects. The effects are now mainly digital realist aesthetics (Ryu, 2007, p. 6). It is suggested that the gradual transformation from analogue to digital effects provides moviemakers with an alternative realism and liberates them from reliance on the Pentagon for their military footage. For example, in Tom Cruise's recent production, *Lions for Lambs*, he alternated the graphic effects in order to sustain the battlefield. This research will base its analysis on the new digital theories of Monavich, Pierson and Bukatman. In addition, sound, music and optical effects will be taken into account.

### 2.2.4 Sound and Dialogue

These can dramatize the realistic and formalistic style of the film. The research will point to the few examples that show how sound and music have been fictionalized out of their generic context. It is important to examine some directors' attempts to emphasize realistic styles to render their movies with a political bent. Other examples show how the typical use of atabal and fife have been orchestrated and composed to produce music with diegetic sound (the sound that emanates from a scene) to have either fictional or polemical effects. In addition, the study notices that aesthetic features of some Arab films embed the two forms of dialogue, voiceover and scripted scenes. It has been suggested that this could heighten the political and aesthetic emphasis of the message.

### 2.2.5 Narrative and Genre

Such an examination aims first to disclose the latent meaning or the structural forms that exist behind a film. In order to do this it is essential to include not only the structure of the text but also its ideological underpinning. Thus, the researcher will use methodological strategies that uncover the facts and motives behind the new depiction of the Middle East, while taking into account variations from classical and aesthetic styles. The research suggests that when moving from text to context analysis it is important to switch between the two main approaches, the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic.

The syntagmatic approach follows the Proppian model, derived from the formalist work of Vladimir Propp and designed to analyze the sequential development of a narrative plot (Stam et al., 1992, p. 76). In order to analyze the aesthetic form of some movies, the study will follow the paradigmatic approach, which is based on the structuralist analysis of Levi-Strauss in his study of the development of narrative by the pattern of binary opposition between the elements of framing and the structuralist model (Stam et al., 1992, p. 76). In films such as *Babel* (2007), for example, the paradigmatic approach suggests that one should follow the development shot-by-shot

rather than emphasizing the events that comprise the story. It suggests that categorizing opposites could provide a better understanding of the ideological construction within the very structure of the narrative itself.

### 2.2.6 Symbolic elements

Before the process of analysis is concluded, it is important to realize that technical and symbolic devices do not work in isolation; in fact, both are major contributory factors to the opacity of film-language codes. In order to understand the aesthetic meaning of post-9/11 movies it is essential to make clear these hidden conventions and constructions.

### 2.2.7 Hollywood's political conventions

This study will look at some of the cultural implications of the conversion of Hollywood's political conventions, from personalization to collective heroism, as identified by Philip L. Gianos (Gianos, 1995, p. 1). This research seeks to determine to what degree this change makes the Middle East more palatable to the audience and enhances the movie's credibility. For example, in *Syriana*, astonishingly the film's heroism was shared between George Clooney and two Arab actors. In *Lions for Lambs*, Tom Cruise shared the protagonist role with five tyro actors. This research will suggest that the move from "sugar coating" the coverage of the political content in accordance with Hollywood's established style, to one of ambivalence, makes many films present both sides of the conflict without favouritism. This is the case in Spielberg's *Munich*, which presents the Arab-Israeli ideological conflict in a way that favours neither side. As Christensen stated,

Movies are probably more effective when they let us reach our own conclusions. (Christensen & Haas, 2005, p. 27)

### 2.3 The Chosen Films

The films discussed in this thesis were chosen because they met certain criteria. First, these films substantively deliberate Middle East issues in their own right, not as backdrops or minor issues to assist others' heroisms or to contrast other nations and individuals. The films engage deeply in cultural, political and ideological implications and thus provide an enlightened approach, portraying Arabs and Muslims as neither good nor bad, but as responding to their perception and experience of the political realities.

Second, the researcher believes that these films break the traditional representation of Arabs and Muslims. They provide an alternative, more rational image and a serious debate of the cultural and ideological struggle in the Middle East.

Third, since the research discusses the changes in Hollywood's representation of Arabs, these films are, in production or distribution, primarily of Hollywood origin, and available to the public to view. Furthermore, the research focuses on films that enjoyed box office success, including blockbusters such as the films of George Clooney, Jamie Fox, Orlando Bloom, Ridley Scott and Steven Spielberg. It also includes films such as *United 93* (2006), which although they did not include well-known actors, were widely viewed by the American public and will remain in their memory.

Fourth, the films discussed must emanate from the new changes to Hollywood's industrial structure. This is mainly in terms of the production context, where these movies had the opportunity to liberate themselves from the influence of the Establishment. Thus, these films allowed their Directors to engage in a critical debate and refute established practices and negative representations of the Arab World. In addition, the researcher believes that the films are characterized by a stylistic approach that could steer the new image of the Middle East away from Hollywood's traditional one.

Fifth, films were chosen because they comprehensively cover the range of genres that are relevant to this research. For example, *Munich* (2005) provides a serious attempt to discuss the Arab-Israeli conflict aesthetically by approaching a stylistic technique that combines adventure with the world of expressionism. Films such as *Babel* (2007), *Flight Plane* (2005) and *The Interpreter* (2006) also fall into this category. To provide an adequate number of examples of the political and ideological motives behind the new image of the Middle East, and to avoid any restriction of textual and contextual analysis to descriptive reading, the research used *Munich*, *Syriana*, *Kingdom of Heaven*, *United 93* and *The Kingdom* as the main films for analysis.

Finally, these films were chosen with an eye to comparative analysis. *Munich* (2005) is compared with *Black Sunday* (1976) and *Syriana* (2005) with *Rollover* (1980), as exemplars to demonstrate the stylistic difference between post-9/11 and pre-9/11 films.

This research will demonstrate that Arabs and Muslims are bundled together by the elements that are part of the language of cinematography. Therefore, the research will use theories on the articulation of body and space by Ann Doane and David Bordwell.

### 3 COMPETING CONCEPTIONS OF THE USA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE WORLD

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#### 3.1 Introduction: American Imperialism: From Hard Power to Soft Power

The aim of this part of the study is to evidence the relationship between domination and imperialism, which has resulted in some of the greatest atrocities in history, the legacy of which remains with us to this day. As Samson has noted,

Race and Empire provide an invaluable chronological account and analysis of the contentious history of racial science and its connection with imperial expansion. (Samson, 2005, p. 167)

European colonialism was a movement that sought to gain access to valuable raw materials and commodities, to dominate trade and global routes. This brought the colonial power of the West into conflict with Islam, but in political and economic rather than religious terms, as seen for example in the British attempts to control the East by administering Egypt, or the partition of the Ottoman Empire (Kedourie, 1978, pp. 23-24).

During the Second World War, the US had established an economic interest in the oil rich regions, as American economic interests coalesced with its political aspirations (Brands, 1994, xi). After the War, Western colonial domination was replaced by agreements through treaties.

It is undeniable that Western imperialism emphatically allies with the notion of superiority. This notion had its origin in early Church teachings, which promoted the idea of Christian uniqueness and of the inferiority of other cultures. It developed into a



racist theory of European superiority with the Anglo-Saxons at its pinnacle. The ideas of Western religious supremacy and morality, which the Muslims refused to acknowledge, conflicted with the teachings of Islam. The West's view of itself as being superior led it to denigrate Muslim (and other non-Western) societies as primitive and morally inferior (Watt, p. 93, pp. 133-134), living under despotic rule and suffering from all the social and political perversions of a tyrannical government. This notion of superiority provided the Europeans with the justification to practise their colonialism in a provocative way, and that attitude would hallmark the notion of imperialism associated with Middle Eastern culture (Thorn, 2005, p. 48).

The years after the Second World War witnessed further clashes between West and East. The US became engrossed in Arab nationalist movements and the growth of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and used these events to implement its policy in the Middle East. Crucially the US considered it necessary to prevent the ingress of Communism in the region. However, this policy introduced physical, political and social conflict into the region and caused a polarization between East and West.

The US fought to impose its imperialism, whatever the consequences, by military, political, economic and cultural actions. It has a vast global military arsenal and it uses hard force to support and enforce its political decisions, sometimes without deliberating upon the possible consequences. In February 1998, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, defending the use of cruise missiles against Iraq, declared,

If we have to use force, it is because we are America. We are the indispensable nation. We stand tall. We see farther into the future.

(Johnson, 2003, p. 225)

US intervention in the Middle East has brought about resentment among the people living in the region, which has sometimes expressed itself in dissent and acts of counter violence carried out by terrorist Islamic groups. Thus a continuous cycle of conflict exists, which is increasing in intensity as it spreads globally.

The Truman Doctrine was a response to counter Soviet hegemony. It committed the US to use its hard power to come to the aid of any free country threatened by outside

forces. According to Brands, the Truman Doctrine “amounted to an American declaration of the Cold War” (Brands, 1994, p. 17). It was used by the US to engage in a series of military adventures in the region, including intervention in Iran in 1956 to install a pro-Western regime, and supporting fundamentalist anti-Soviet groups during the invasion of Afghanistan (Taylor, 1991, pp. 112-120). Here we see two examples of attempts by the US to employ hard force to resolve issues, attempts which, as on so many occasions, failed and proved to be counter-productive. Ultimately, the Iranian political revolution established an Islamic state that was anti-US, spurring fears in the US of a pan-Islamic revolution across the Middle East (Fries, 2005, pp. 143-245). In Afghanistan, the donated military hardware was actually used against Western and US personnel, as ardent Muslims considered the Afghan war to be against all outside influences.

The Lebanese Civil War of 1975 catalyzed the rise of dissident Islamic groups. As described by S John L Esposito,

This prosperous country, an ally of the West, would be torn apart by a fifteen year civil war. Lebanon became a land of death and unimaginable destruction, a country without a representative government, a fertile ground for the development of militant Shia politics and Iranian influence, a battleground of Muslim and Christian militants, Israeli and Palestinian forces, a land of hijackings, kidnapping and attacks on Western embassies and personnel. (Esposito, 1999, p. 149)

Although some groups, for example Amal, were willing to enter into ‘power sharing’ agreements and to work with the West, it was fundamentalist groups such as Hezbollah that were in the ascendancy. These groups were stridently anti-Western and specifically anti-US. They perpetrated numerous international armed acts.

The US attempted to tackle this situation in different ways. The Republican administration under President Gerard R. Ford used hard power, but this policy failed as the US was forced to withdraw after the bombing of the US embassy and marine barracks in Lebanon. In Libya on the other hand, where the country’s leader

Muammar al-Qaddafi had been for a long time linked to various international terrorist groups (Esposito, 1999, p.159), the use of hard power was more effective, punishing the regime with military air strikes as well as an economic embargo.

United States involvement in the Middle East intensified under the leadership of George H. Bush. In 1991 the country found itself at war in the Middle East, in response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. During this period, the use of hard power by the US reached new heights and the six-week conflict served as a spectacular demonstration of American weapons technology. Indeed, Brands described the Gulf War as “the culmination of a trend toward greater American involvement in the Middle East, a trend that had been under way since 1945” (Brands, 1999, p. 210). This was because Kuwait and the other countries of the Persian Gulf occupied strategically strong geographical positions, and possessed large reserves of crude oil coveted by the West. These factors brought about the formation of an unprecedented military coalition under American leadership (McAlister, 2005, p. 35), unusual in political terms in that it allied a number of Arab states ephemerally with Israel (Fries, 2003, p. 153).

The immediate results of this war seemed to vindicate the use of hard power, but its long term effects turned any advantage into failure. Iraq was destroyed and economically impoverished. Long term economic sanctions caused death and deprivation. American military presence in the region reinforced political differences between Arab nations and their people. Although Saddam Hussein had been defeated, he was still in power and a potential threat. The Saudi government wanted the American troops to remain; but some Muslims took their presence as an affront to Islam. There was a great deal of bitterness directed against the West in general and the United States in particular, and this would ultimately have profound consequences for America (Fries, 2005, p. 41).

The end of the Cold War left US policy in the Middle East more vulnerable to criticism and brought the US less security both regionally and internationally. The USSR no longer existed, so all anti-imperialist sentiment was directed against the US. It was in this context that Al Qaeda launched its attack on the US on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001.

Shaheen (2008, p. 20) is of the opinion that anti-American sentiment will continue to escalate both at home and overseas. Since the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, more than 3,800 American soldiers have perished, and 30,000 have been seriously wounded, together with hundreds of civilians under contract to private agencies. In addition, one million Iraqi families have fled their homes. The number of Iraqi civilian deaths is estimated to be between seventy and six hundred and fifty thousand.

American policy in the Middle East is directed by four interests: the region's strategic position, religious ties, support for Israel and access to oil. Sometimes these work together, but at other times they compete or have more or less relevance. McAlister (2005, p. 34) expresses the view that the multifaceted history of US cultural and political interests in the Middle East, the history of these contending forces, their confluence and their contradictions define the contest over the nature and extent of post-war US power in the region.

The US always found it difficult to justify its policy towards the Arab world. American governments (from the end of the Cold War to today) sought to operate a strategy of hard and soft power. Soft power exercises its influence through its insidious nature and is closely associated with the phenomenon of cultural imperialism. According to Tomlinson, cultural imperialism exalts and spreads values, habits, and patterns of behaviour. It is propelled by economic power and it seems that the process is aided and abetted by importing supportive forms of culture (Tomlinson, 1991, p. 57).

Cultural imperialism contrasts with the political form of colonialism that nations have adopted in the past; nevertheless, it remains imperialistic, because it uses primary economic domination associated with the global reach of capitalism. In practice, many contradictions in its cultural rhetoric became apparent, especially with the growth of independent economic and cultural associations in the Arab world (as we will examine in Chapter 5).

### 3.2 Soft Power in the Global Information Age

The US government has always attempted to legitimize its Middle Eastern policy in the public conscience by using its media arsenal, especially the cinema. A conglomerate of studios monopolized Hollywood during the twentieth century (as described in the next chapter) in terms of its production and distribution. Hollywood portrayed the political situation in the Middle East from the American point of view, as evidenced by their numerous jingoistic productions. For example, during the 1980s films such as *Delta Force* portrayed a distinct pro-Western view, which demonstrated and supported the use of hard power in the region. The films politicized the situation and portrayed the Palestinians as the inventors of terrorism (McAlister, 2005, p. 225).

Technological, social and political change has caused a shift in the purpose and ideology of information operations in America and has involved certain members of the Hollywood community. In the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup>, the US realized that they were involved in a new type of Cold War, where its values and interests were under attack. It was feared that the fundamentalist organizations were seriously competing in the propaganda war (Dierejian, 2003, pp. 6-7). New initiatives were introduced at both the tactical and the strategic levels of information operations in order to win the battle of "hearts and minds". The aim of the new initiatives was to move from just defending to actively promoting American values, in order to engage rather than alienate Middle Eastern culture. The debate was an appeal to common high moral values (Taylor, 2002, p. 16). However, the question remained, what method should best be employed to operate this strategy to brand American values? In addition, would it be possible for the American government to enlist its media for this purpose?

Perception Management aimed to create a new policy for information operations. It functionalized the human dimension to represent the American image via cultural outlets, which aimed to persuade. Examples include Smart Soft Power, Public Diplomacy, Shared Value Initiatives, Depiction and Psychological Operations. This campaign transformed the traditional message or propaganda of "us" versus "them" into a more complex "on-side conflict" (Taylor, 2002, p. 3). A casual examination of recent output, including some from Hollywood, shows that there has been a shift away

from traditional American cultural rhetoric regarding the Middle East. This might be a consequence, directly or indirectly, of changes in US Public Diplomacy designed to promote the process of persuasion. As former Secretary of State Colin Powell noted, "We should define ourselves in the region, and if we do not the extremists will define us" (Dierejian, 2003, p. 8).

This shift in US Public Diplomacy represents a modern form of cultural imperialism involving propagandist activities. Nevertheless, the concepts of propaganda and persuasion are intimately linked, as both aim to influence the opinion, emotion and attitude of the receiver through communication strategies (Fullerton and Kendrick, 2006, p. 49).

In their book *Propaganda and Persuasion*, Jowett and O'Donnell made a clear distinction between persuasion and propaganda. The key factor is that propaganda is intended to benefit the interests of the propagandist but not necessarily those of the receiver. Propaganda is progressive by nature and allows the sponsors or the propagandists to use whatever means they have available, including manipulation or outright lies, to promote their values (Jowett and O'Donnell, 1999, pp. 1-5).

Some contemporaries distinguish between two different types of propaganda. Fullerton and Kendrick state that "black propaganda" is associated with deception, misinformation and lies. This type of propaganda includes coercive, aggressive, and non-objective communication, which may be false, as seen for example in the Joseph Goebbels fabrication stories in Nazi Germany. The second type, "white propaganda", "involves selective use of the truth or the promotion of positive and suppression of negative information" (Fullerton & Kendrick, 2006, p. 49). The latter type is used when America defends its foreign policy or promotes its values through Public Diplomacy.

The definition of black propaganda is almost an exact fit for Jowett's definition of propaganda. It is, however, far from the concept of Perception Management, which is closer to the definition of white propaganda because the message is contrived by a sophisticated organization and may be functionalized as a one-sided and self-serving deception. Perception Management acts as an advertising system, which operates to

omit the negatives and accentuate the positives. In his definition of the term, Dearth links Perception Management to white propaganda. He describes it as:

Action to convey and/or deny selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives and objective reasoning and to intelligence systems resulting in foreign behaviour and official actions favourable to the originator's objectives. (Dearth, 2002, p. 2)

According to Dearth's definition, Perception Management is a progressive technique of information operation that is commonly employed not only in advance of armed conflict but also during the post-conflict era. It is a complicated process not only based on technology but enhanced and facilitated by it. Today's cultural associations are much more complex than those of ten years ago, and therefore the State Department will base their agenda not on old propagandist methods such as Frank Capra's *Why We Fight*, but on fictionalized elements of psychology, artistry, and imagination (Dearth, 2002, p. 2). This includes the American motion picture industry, which is considered to be one of the means that are supposed to convey the US message and inspire foreign audiences about US goals.

### 3.3 America and Soft Power

The notion of empire is predicated upon military force. In the twenty-first century, it may be asked whether the United States has realized that the foundation of power has been moving away from an emphasis upon military supremacy and conquest? If so, what is the nature of this new power and how can it be controlled?

Joseph Nye, Assistant Secretary of Defence under President Bill Clinton, expressed it best. A distinguished university professor, and former Dean of the Kennedy School, he said that,

Power in the global information age is becoming less tangible and less coercive, particularly among countries, but most of the world does not consist of post-industrial societies.

In such a variegated world, all types of sources, military, economic, and soft power remain relevant, though to different degrees and different relationships. (Nye, 2002, pp. 11-12)

Nye focused on intangible resources such as culture and ideology, for it is soft power, as Herbert Schiller defines it, which aims to control communication and definitional power. It is, in Schiller's phrase, "cultural imperialism with a semantic twist" (Schiller, 2006, p. 300).

Without denying the significance of the role of hard power, Nye underscores the nature of the intangible force of soft power. Essentially, it is the ability of a nation to persuade and influence other countries not by threats or coercion but by the attractiveness of its society, its values, its culture and its institutions (Nye, 2004a, pp. 5-7). Nye argued that this attractiveness could be expressed by various means, including popular culture, public or private diplomacy. He asserted more specifically that America's global influence could not solely depend on its economic potency, military force and coercive capacities. Nye held that America should set up a new agenda based on her supremacy in the information and telecommunication industries, especially in view of the global appeal of her pop culture and Hollywood movies, as a means of stimulation and seduction. However, it would be necessary to include some mutual benefit to bring Hollywood on board and convince its community of the value of this new media initiative. In a free market society, the US government could not coerce Hollywood outright to accede to its wishes.

Stimulation and seduction is the soft power method by which to convince nations of the value of the American dream and her goals, without the need to use a provocative carrot and stick policy. Most political leaders realize the importance of soft power. It was a former French Foreign Minister who observed that the Americans are powerful because they are able to



Inspire the dreams and desires of others, thanks to the mastery of global images through film and television and because for these same reasons, large numbers of students come to the United States to finish their studies.

(Vedrine & Moisi, 2001, p. 3)

Countries like the US who use soft power widely find that citizens of other countries aspire to share their values and institutions, and their leaders legitimate their policies based upon the imported culture. Therefore, if the American leadership wishes to be internationally influential it will be more effective when it is morally based. As Nye put it,

If I can get you to want to do what I want, then I do not have to force you. (Nye, 2004a, p. 6)

Soft power has the advantage of being much less violent than brute force; in addition, it is less costly than hard power. Nye questioned why America keeps basing her policy on aircraft carriers, ground troops and inter-continental missiles (the implications of which are heavily conveyed by Hollywood films, as we detail in Chapter 6), when her soft power acting through Hollywood, music and McDonalds can help attain the same long-term aims (Pilon, 2005, p. 126).

After World War II, the United States managed through the process of Americanization to become the main cultural determinant in the West, usurping the place previously occupied by Europe. It did so by using soft power such as Hollywood, pop music, fashion, education and education exchange. America had thus expanded its sphere of influence beyond its geographical backyard. Soft power not only provides the components for America to appeal as a prosperous nation, but also works to legitimize its political purposes (Fraser, 2006, p. 29).

Nye warned that the transformation from seduction to coercion would lead to a deplorable decline in US power and influence, similar to that experienced by the Soviet Union after the invasion of Hungary and Czechoslovakia (Nye, 2004a, p. 9). He insisted on wielding smart power, which is essential for mobilizing co-operation

from others rather than by threats or economic sanctions. Nye also stressed the power of attraction as the best way to achieve the US's political goal, whereby worldwide American popularity could be crystallized by means of soft power or Public Diplomacy. To that end, Nye cites approvingly none other than President George W. Bush, who during the 2000 campaign observed that as the most powerful country in the world,

We've got to be humble and yet project strength in a way that promotes freedom. (Pilon, 2003, p. 127)

Nye categorizes types of soft power as high culture (theatre, museums, books, art, orchestras, and educational exchange) and popular culture (films, radio music, food, internet and the media). The government should invest in popular culture as much as in its popularity and efficiency. It was the poet Carl Sandburg who in 1961 said,

What, Hollywood's more important than Harvard? The answer is, not as clean as Harvard, but nevertheless, further reaching. (Nye, 2004a, p. 47)

However, it seems that Nye forgets that controlling popular culture is an entirely different thing compared to cultural programmes via the State Department. Even if Hollywood's productions fit the American imperial goal around the globe, it is hard to compare, for example, educational exchange with a film's content. Until around twenty years ago, when Hollywood was monopolized by the economic power of corporate capitalism which had an excellent relationship with the US government, the film industry played an instrumental role in political and cultural defence for a range of reasons including commercial, political and humanistic. Today Hollywood does not always serve or legitimize US government policy. The comments of many critics indicate the degree of disparity that now exists inside Hollywood's community. Ben Dickenson, for example, writes about the new dissent in Hollywood (Dickenson, 2006), while Alan Scott focuses on a new map for the production and distribution of Hollywood's motion pictures (Scott, 2001). Nevertheless, some of Hollywood's post-9/11 films continue to employ the persuasion process, albeit from the other side, showing negatively the extent to which Nye's assumption could not be based on realistic grounds (as we will expose in the following chapters).

### 3.4 Terms of Soft Power

#### 3.4.1 Public Diplomacy and Persuasion Efforts

Some scholars believe that propaganda and persuasion work in tandem, and are involved in the dissemination of ideas. Nancy Snow, a professor of communications and a former United States Information Agency (USIA) employee, concedes that Public Diplomacy is an embodiment of propaganda. In her view, "Public Diplomacy is a euphemism for propaganda". She believes that the American authorities replaced the term "propaganda" with "Public Diplomacy" because "it doesn't want the American public to think that its own government engages in psychological warfare" (Snow, 2002, p. 13).

However, Jowett and O'Donnell's definition of propaganda shows that despite employing persuasive strategies it differs from persuasion in its purpose. They believe that it is essential to distinguish between its definitional and functional aspects (Jowett & O'Donnell, 1999, p. 2). Pratkanis and Turner defined the function of persuasion as, "debate, discussion, and careful consideration of options to discover better solutions for complex problems" (Pratkanis & Turner, 1996, p. 191).

James and Sara Combs pointed out that the concept of persuasion should be liberated from its traditional view since,

Material is disseminated by the advocates or opponents and perceived with open-minded practice. They routinely sift through various aspects of persuasion or even propaganda, much of it in the form of advertising. (Combs & Combs, 1994, p. 6)

If we employ Jowett and O'Donnell's definition of propaganda then the key issue is not the process of persuasion and dissemination of ideas, but whether the content is false. Before the content is "labelled" it must be evaluated carefully; thereby, it is hard

to say that Washington has never substituted propaganda for persuasion, but it is also hard to say that everything Washington has substituted in their persuasion is misleading or fallacious (Fullerton & Kendrick, 2006, p. 52). Most films include some elements of propaganda, but they cannot be part of a propagandist effort unless they are purposefully created to sway the public's mind.

It was in the early days, under Woodrow Wilson's administration, that a government propaganda commission was established, known as the Creel Commission. It aimed to find justification for American involvement in a European war by leading a pacifist population into an enthusiastic campaign under the slogan "Go to War and Save the World". Wilson openly promoted films such as *Battle Cry of Peace* (1916) and *Civilization* (1917), which characterize the American military as "invincible and honourable" against the "nefarious traits" of the Germans. In fact, these films heralded the era of the propaganda movies (Christensen & Haas, 2005, p. 54). They offered a progressive kind of persuasion that was different to that of the Nazis' black propaganda. According to Combs and Combs,

The movies had proven to be powerful stuff and now that power was available to anyone who wanted to propagate a social or political message.

(Combs & Combs, 1994, p. 34)

In all of this, the film industry became a willing ally of the US government. David L. Robb states that studios making war films could base their production on government assistance, since they could access military resources if the script met the official criteria that propagated a positive image (Robb, 2004, p. 59).

With the outbreak of World War II, Washington took the initiative by establishing an alliance with the Hollywood moguls through various governmental entities, such as The Office of War Information and the War Activities Committee. As Combs and Combs describe, and as we will discuss in detail in the next chapter,

Washington did not merely want Hollywood to confirm, it also wanted the creative genius of the producers, writers, technicians, and directors. (Combs & Combs, 1994, p. 34)

During this period, Hollywood provided moral justifications and presented the US military as innately driven by noble motives. Early films routinely portrayed the enemy (Nazis and Japanese) as primitive and barbaric. For example, Frank Capra's motivational film *Why We Fight* (1943) projected these characteristics. In the face of the Cold War and the Communist threat, Washington and Hollywood engineered ideological shifts. Examples of government inspired propaganda films cited by Carl Boggs and Tom Pollard in *The Hollywood War Machine* include Alwyn Lloyd's *Attribute to Strategic Air Command* (1955) and Dave McLaughlin's *Take the High Ground* (1953).

The common belief that until twenty years ago Hollywood was subject to US imperial objectives can be easily disputed by examining the nature of this relationship (as we will do in the following chapters). Certainly however, the cosy relationship between Hollywood and the Pentagon fizzled out after September 11<sup>th</sup>, a situation further exacerbated by the onset of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (as we will detail in Chapter 5).

With the rise of counter-propaganda and the anti-war movements, the United States realized that its propaganda operations were becoming less effective and influential, especially with respect to the so-called "war on terrorism"; therefore, a new strategy had to be developed. This would involve representing American values via its cultural outlets; in other words, the non-commercial aspects of American values and culture, using cultural and exchange programmes. It was felt that these could enhance American credibility and soft power in a way that propaganda never could, and Hollywood became a major weapon in this war (Sardar & Davies, 2004, p. 121).

George W. Bush's administration realized that the war on terrorism required a successful campaign, with a strategic Perception Management Operation that employed various conventional anti-terrorist techniques to rival the "Hydra" of anti-America networks, especially that of Al Qaeda (Garfield, 2002, p. 33). The aim of this

campaign was to win the “hearts and minds” of people in the Middle East. That would require the re-vitalization of America’s soft power strategy, as Josef Nye had recommended. This new perception of US Public Diplomacy insisted on emphasizing persuasion rather than propaganda, but questions remained as to what were the means of this power, and whether it would be possible to include Hollywood in their strategy.

### **3.4.2 The US Information Agency (USIA)**

In its struggle to win hearts and minds in the Muslim world, the United States government conducted a Public Diplomacy programme to reach Arab public opinion and hence to inform, educate, and understand Arab attitudes. It was believed that initiatives such as international information and cultural exchange programmes would influence foreign audiences by familiarizing them with American culture, its policies, institutions, and people (Robert, 2003, p. 131).

The United States Information Agency (USIA) was formed in 1953 (Roberts, 2003, p. 132). According to Rugh,

The Mission of the US Information Agency is to help achieve US foreign policy objectives by (a) influencing public attitudes in other nations and (b) advising the President, his representatives abroad and the various departments and agencies on the implication of foreign opinion before the present and contemplated US policies program and official statements.

(Rugh, 2006, p. 51)

However, America was at a disadvantage even before the onset of this policy. Much of the Arab world had already formed a jaundiced view of the US, suspicious of the country’s motives owing to her pro-Israel policy and record of interventions in the Middle East, such as the compulsory return of the Shah.

One of the earliest devices used was broadcasting the Voice of America (VOA) in the Arabic language. However, this was opposed by the growth of Arab nationalism and

the imposition of restrictions by the Egyptian government upon USIA activities. Another early device was to invite those who were hostile to visit America for an extended period to experience the political system. It was under this initiative that the young Anwar Sadat visited the US in 1960, and it may be speculated that this contributed, at least to some extent, to his later pragmatic view of the West which enabled him to sign a peace treaty with Israel (Rugh, 2006, p. 1).

President Kennedy and later President Johnson gave uppermost priority to soft power strategy, and the decade following 1958 witnessed a huge increase in USIA activities, including exporting propagandist movies and expanding programmes designed to convey a broad and balanced picture of American society and culture, as well as economic aid. The aim was not only to inform but also to persuade. However, the Arab media was active in countering the ingressions by creating distortions. The US was condemned not only for its foreign policy but also for its culture. For example, the Egyptian radio commentator Ahmad Said, who elaborated on Nasser's aggressive rhetoric with flourishes made to rally Arab support, had a significant impact on Arab public opinion (Rugh, 2006, pp. 54-57).

This period witnessed the growth of political Islam, which utilized existing resentment against the US to emphasize that recovering Arab nations required more fervent adherence to Islam. USIA offices were attacked, with books in the libraries being destroyed and windows smashed. The slogan "Islam is the Answer" became popular, and the United States realized that mutual trust would be difficult to obtain. Such incidents were seen in all the Arab countries except Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, indicating perhaps that despite its vital role, cultural influence or public communication could not easily adjust to the political situation (Roberts, 2003, p. 133).

These developments demonstrate that the USIA was unable to promote properly its cultural programme or soft power in Arab and Muslim countries. Hollywood, which played a significant role in cultural defence, concentrated its propagandist effort on fighting the ideology and the expansion of the Soviet threat, so there was a gap between American interests in the Middle East and its soft power programme.

President Carter gave a multi-dimensional function to the USIA, which he renamed the ICA, by involving other sorts of media, including journals, documentary programmes and educational exchanges, particularly at an academic level, to assert the concept of mutual understanding between the nations and reduce the degree of misconception about the American image. He believed that to achieve this, America must adequately understand foreign public opinion and culture.

In many ways, Hollywood served American interests but failed to adjust to US Public Diplomacy; despite the Middle Eastern resentment that was reaching a peak during this time, Hollywood still projected the Arabs as an ongoing threat. This might be because Carter never tried to encourage Hollywood to project the new diplomacy, and allowed it to continue to portray Arabs and Muslims as inferior "Others". To the Arab World this ambiguity was seen as a lack of credibility in US policy, and therefore counter-productive. The credibility gap remained, despite Carter's directive to the CIA to undertake no activities which were manipulative, covert, or propagandistic, in order to demonstrate that the USIA did not serve the CIA (Rugh, 2006, p. 84).

The success of the Camp David agreement gave US soft power policy a fillip. The Voice of America Arabic Service broadcasts were increased to counter the hostile rhetoric from the Arabic media (Miller, 1997, p. 9) The Carter administration also authorized economic aid to Jordan, Egypt and many other Arab countries as part of the soft power process, but this action proved unsuccessful in bringing about a change in opinion.

During the Reagan Administration, the USIA experienced a "quiet" time. There were no functional changes but tasks were defined more specifically. This may be because Reagan also believed in hard power, and the Middle East was a minor issue compared to the challenge of the Soviet Union. In fact, the most effective tool in the American arsenal was popular culture, notably Michel Jackson and Madonna (Fraser, 2003, p. 186). In addition, many people had access to American movies through videotape and international journals.

It was during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait that for the first time the USIA found the ideal atmosphere in which to work. American action was welcomed by most Arab



countries. Soft power tools were re-invigorated to deal with the accelerated development of events. For example, VOA broadcasts were extended, while a noticeable cooperation developed between the American and the Arabic press. President Bush Snr.'s address to Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi people was broadcast on Arab and other television stations, and the Kuwaiti government supported the reporting of the deployment of Arab military forces to the Gulf region. In fact, the USIA played an instrumental and sustainable role in the liberation of Kuwait.

For Bush Jnr., it was essential to reform the information operation to enable it to serve in the war against terrorism. This was because American ideas and values were now under attack. The US administration was experiencing a new type of Cold War; therefore, American principles and values needed to be defended and promoted via both strategic and technical levels of information management. However, the question remained as to whether Hollywood would “come onboard”, embrace the new strategy, and portray Arabs and Muslims in the way that would serve American policy.

### **3.4.3 The Shared Values Initiatives (SVI)**

The attack on the Twin Towers made the US realize the importance of the global nature of the struggle to capture the hearts and minds of Middle Easterners. George W. Bush echoed the need to reformat the role of Public Diplomacy before a joint session of Congress, when he rhetorically asked, “Why do they hate us?” (Fullerton & Kendrick, 2006, p. 24)

The then Secretary of State Colin L. Powell thought that America’s principles had been somewhat obscured by the first military campaign against the fundamentalist regime in Afghanistan. He therefore decided to undertake a very progressive form of propaganda and functionalize American soft power within Public Diplomacy.

The instrumental role of Public Diplomacy, which seemed to have lost its importance after the demise of the Soviet Union, needed reviving. This process would require a change from just selling the US in the old USIA way to branding American values,

ethics and foreign policy in a way that would engage the people in the Middle East rather than alienate their culture (Fullerton & Kendrick, 2006, pp. 20-24).

Powell was successful in obtaining a fifty percent budgetary increase and secured the services of Charlotte Beers, a communications expert from the advertising industry, to implement the new strategy. Indeed, with all the facilities Powell afforded her, the mission was extraordinary. She replaced the USIA programme with the Shared Value Initiatives (SVI), which served as the principal international communication service. She needed to bridge the relationship between the product and the user by branding America's image in the Arab and Muslim world and to find the best way to attain mutual trust in order to "foster free, candid, and respectful engagement and exchange between the American and Muslim world" (Kaiser, 2001, p. A1)

During a press conference in October 2001, Beers told reporters,

Over time, we have to attempt to blunt and deflect the hate that some Middle Easterners feel towards the US and its foreign policy.

She felt that the starting point was to target the Arab and Muslim consciousness through a common ground of humanity, together with discussions and debates about the tolerance of the American people and US political aims in the Middle East, otherwise the policy could not gain the influence required (Kaiser, 2001, p. A1). She said that she needed to "open a dialogue of mutual respect and understanding with audiences overseas", and described her new policy in holistic terms as a discipline that involved the philosophical and psychological as well as the factual. This new policy of "from people to people" would offer an alternative to the formal diplomatic route followed by most US ambassadors, and would need to harness the power of telecommunication and media tools to establish a new informational management system in the region.

Polls showed that one of the main reasons behind the growing hostility of Muslims towards America was that many Arabs and Muslims viewed America as decadent and irreligious. Beers worked to dispute this notion by demonstrating the freedom and

flexibility of American society that allowed Muslims to engage in all aspects of American life, including teaching and religious practice.

Beers' project officially commenced in October 2002. It included mutual conferences, speeches by diplomats and American Muslims to international audiences, the publication of American magazines in Arabic, internet sites and chat rooms, a series of newspaper advertisements, and five television commercials or adverts that included "mini-documentaries" based on reality. Muslims were interviewed about their satisfaction of and freedom in American society, and about the lack of any kind of harassment (Fullerton & Kendrick, 2006, p. 34).

The project also included a television campaign. However, many of the targeted countries, even friendly ones like Egypt, Jordan and Qatar, rejected this idea, which Arab intellectuals perceived as a new form of American propaganda (Al-Jazeera, 2007), and after one year the broadcasts were cancelled. Although it was claimed that the campaign had only been intended to last one year, the *Wall Street Journal* wrote that SVI was banned for two reasons. First, many official and commercial channels refused to air the broadcasts; and second, it failed to register well with the Muslim world (Fullerton & Kendrick, 2006, p. 36).

However, the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) managed to obtain government resources to introduce a new Arabic television channel, Al Hurra, to oppose Arab news stations such as the Pan-Arab Television Station. Al Hurra means freedom in Arabic, and its name symbolizes its message. It broadcasts to more than forty-four countries from Virginia. Nevertheless, although the channel was well presented, polls show its failure to compete with Arab news stations, because of the scepticism associated with the American owned media outlets (Fullerton & Kendrick, 2006, p. 98).

The BBG also introduced a new radio station, Radio Sawa. This tactically aimed to attract Muslim youth by using the same ratings-driven style as any commercial musical radio station. As a result, it gained vast popularity in the Arab world, simply because it focused on pop music, both American and Arabic, and used popular singers (Harris, 2003, p. A64).

The station used creative ways to promote informational management or progressive propaganda that facilitated the promotion of American values according to a common ground of trust and persuasion; for example, it used listener call-ins and exclusive interviews with Arab singers and actors. The work of Sawa was particularly significant as it aimed to use pop music to target the youths who may become future leaders (Bayles, 2005, p. 54). However, many Arab listeners perceived Sawa in terms of entertainment rather than propaganda.

It is essential to clarify that Radio Sawa was different from the SVI radio campaign. The latter contained spots similar to television adverts, as well as cultural programming such as religious programmes, talk shows, local music and news. Its budget, which was \$200,000, was separate from that of Radio Sawa.

*Hi* magazine was an attempt by Beers to win over Arab youths by providing them with a window on American life in order to attract them to American cultural values. The magazine sought to address their interests by featuring new articles about Hollywood, American music, technology and fashion. It tried to fill the niche between a political newspaper and a glossy beauty and fashion publication, by offering cultural information about the United States not readily available in the Middle East (BBC, 2004). However, it was unable to find a foothold amongst the forty magazines in the region.

SVI also published *Informational Pamphlets on Network Terrorism*. These identified terrorist cells in order to maintain security and gain Muslim cooperation. They worked in conjunction with a similar programme called *Rewards for Justice*, which provided monetary rewards for any information leading to the capture of a terrorist. Beers also used communication programmes such as educational and cultural exchanges, annual conferences, and speeches.

Beers tried to enlist the assistance of Hollywood but this proved abortive. It was hoped that Hollywood's successful film, *The Senator* could be utilized, together with the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA). The intended strategy was to meet with approximately fifty film executives to ask them to support jointly Bush's

campaign to “win the war on evil”. However, the request was widely ignored. Shaheen says that Beers attempted to revive the initiative by persuading Hollywood to develop a soap opera following the lives of an Arab-American family in the US. However, according to Shaheen, she never received a reply (Shaheen, 2008, p. 19).

Despite a multitude of initiatives, SVI failed. Indeed, even before the campaign ended, some news commentators considered the campaign a failure (Fullerton & Kendrick, 2006, p. 98).

Experienced diplomats and old employees of USIA described the SVI campaign as a waste of resources. In March 2003, Beers resigned from the SVI campaign for “health reasons” but many commentators believed she had failed.

In July 2005 Karen Hughes was appointed head of the US State Department’s Public Diplomacy operations. In an interview with the *Globe* Newspaper Hughes described her job as, “work of generations, an imposing challenge at a time when the United States was fighting wars in two Muslim countries and when words like ‘water boarding’ and ‘Abu Ghraib’ had entered the world’s vocabulary” (Knowlton, 2007, p. 1). She concentrated on enhancing the American image via cultural outlets, such as by extending TV and radio broadcasts without using the “mini documentary”, and with summer camps and English classes for Muslim youths in forty-four countries. She also embraced the term Public Diplomacy rather than SVI. However, her efforts were of limited success and on the 31<sup>st</sup> October 2007, the State Department announced that Karen Hughes was quitting her post to “spend more time with her family in Texas”.

Some news media and political commentators, especially in the Middle East, concluded that Hughes was unsuccessful simply because she was not an expert on Middle East issues. She could not speak Arabic, and so was unable to communicate and achieve a convincing dialogue with Arabs and Muslims. Indeed, the opinion polls showed that the image of the United States in Muslim countries had, if not deteriorated, then certainly not improved over the past two years (Knowlton, 2007, p. 2).

The Public Diplomacy campaign attempted to provide viewers with background information about American policy in the region, which was based on common values

of human rights. However, its lack of success appeared to be because in the Arab mind the association between the success of soft power or the SVI campaign, and US foreign policy in the Middle East, was logically inseparable.

SVI was a creative attempt to promote American values via sophisticated propaganda. It aimed to drive Arab and Muslim consciousness to become receptive to the level of influence that was required to evoke a positive response. Beers and her successor Hughes tried to work at both the tactical and strategic levels of information operation by playing on the common ground of values and ideas. They adopted unprecedented communication tools to gain psychological and strategic level effects when the propaganda benefits coincided with the desires of the originator. The concept was an extension of Joseph Nye's theory that the best way to galvanize influence is through the powerful attraction of American culture and ideas, and this notion fits in better with the aims of Public Diplomacy than with the commercial interests of Hollywood.

Persuasion and attraction is an acceptable policy in any region, but in the Middle East the difficulty is to attain equilibrium between soft power outlets and hard power implementation, which Beers described as unbalanced. In order to effectively influence the Middle East, the US needs to fractionalize the human dimension because the political legacy is complicated. As Beers commented,

The counsel, why don't we just wait until Middle East peace is resolved, is tempting, but it's even more dangerous than silence. (Beers, 2005, p.1)

#### 3.4.4 Movies

Hollywood films first participated as an agent for soft power under President Wilson (Fraser, 2006, p. 40). Its studios created scores of propagandist films aimed to bolster the war effort, and Hollywood thus promoted US national commitments. President Roosevelt recognized the instrumental role that Hollywood played in the public consciousness when he said,

Ominously the motion picture industry propaganda for war had reached the point where legislation might be needed to ensure a more impartial attitude on Hollywood's part. (Koppes & Black, 2000, p. 20)

By the end of World War II, the use of soft power to reinforce US hard power had become well established in the US arsenal. For example, the Marshall Plan comprised not only an economic component but also a cultural one. The use of soft power was palpable during the democratization of Europe after WW2. The Austrian historian Reinhold Wagnleitner commented on the significant contribution that popular American cinema made to the democratic reconstruction of those societies (Nye, 2004a, p. 48). It is also important to note that the coordination of US films in Europe to democratically reconstruct European nations was achieved through the Motion Pictures Export Associations of American.

Hollywood was, therefore, used as a progressive medium through which to promote the American way of life, and hence its image, in a positive light to all the nations of the world. To this end, Hollywood interpreted historical events to convey the American perspective. This was achieved through the mass production of morale boosting and troop rallying adventures, which espoused so called American virtues. Hollywood created a castle of war effort entertainment (Giovacchini, 2001, p. 195).

Most of the Hollywood productions shared the same features technically and ideologically. This was because of the co-operation of the American "Big Five" studios, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Warner Bros, R.K.O, Paramount, and Twentieth Century Fox. This caucus monopolized the production and distribution of films, making it very hard for any single outside production to succeed. However, over the last decade new independent companies have come to participate in Hollywood, consequently raising the possibility of breaking its ideological monopoly, especially in response to political events such as the American war on terror.

The American government has attempted to confute the anti-propaganda of the so-called "New Crusade" over the Islamic world by denying it. However, a simple denial is not convincing, so a new form of propaganda needs to be introduced. In Tony

Blair's words, they need to address "a gulf of misunderstanding" to assure the Muslim world that this is not a war against Islam (Taylor, 2002, p. 16).

The film *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005) suggested that there had been a shift away from depicting Middle Easterners in highly negative ways to what appears to be a more subtle representation. These recent changes came after more than a century in which Hollywood had portrayed Arabs in stereotypical images that stoke up feelings of distrust and loathing. They might be a consequence, directly or indirectly, of changes in US Public Diplomacy, but as previously illustrated the SVI campaign and the policy of Public Diplomacy in the region make this assumption questionable.

Charlotte Beers and her SVI programme failed to persuade Hollywood to embrace the new policy. Many Hollywood filmmakers refused to serve as watchdogs for the American government, especially after the consequences of the so-called Iraq quagmire and the war on terrorism. However, given the vast resources at its disposal, Ms. Hughes felt that the private sector had a responsibility to support national issues. She travelled extensively within the US to solicit advice and assistance from entertainment executives in Hollywood, technology companies in Silicon Valley, bankers, advertising executives and TV producers in New York. She sensed that there was a growing awareness of their responsibility in this matter, and felt that, particularly after the spate of recent corporate scandals, should "put something back" (Hyde, 2007, p. 115).

### 3.5 Conclusions

Hollywood has made a crucial contribution to US imperial objectives since the 1910's. It has acted as an unsurpassable source of cultural and ideological influence (as we will detailed in chapter 6). The relationship between political activism and the film industry was motivated by business rather than subservience. From the time of the Creel Committee to the current transnational media empires such as Disney, Time Warner, Viacom, News Corporation and General Electric, collaboration has been based on mutual benefit. Hollywood, which carried the "gospel" to the world, was actually celebrating the blessing of the "free-market" and government patronage.



The fraught and controversial relationship between the filmmakers and the military that began with the onset of the Vietnam War and continued with the invasion of Iraq clearly shows the gap between US Public Diplomacy and Hollywood. This chapter attempted to highlight the distinction between American soft power and their soft power strategy, the latter being designed and led by the State Department.

US Public Diplomacy does not officially promote propaganda. Instead, it engages with persuasion via limited cultural and exchange programmes in order to win the battle of hearts and minds. To remind people of this, non-commercial values and culture are emphasized. It is true that the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup> gave rise to a new genre of inventive portraits that humanized the Arabs and Muslims, but this change is mostly based on individual initiatives without official sanction. Both positive and negative cinematic features of Arabs and Muslims continue to proliferate on the big screen, but the undeniable fact is that this comes as a response to the political chaos and the ongoing struggle at both actual and ideological levels. There is a question as to whether there are films that rebel on American hegemonic policy; therefore, the next two chapters will illustrate the relationship between the growth of Hollywood's new initiatives and its centralized system.

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## 4 THE CENTRALIZATION AND TRADE POLICY OF THE FILM INDUSTRY

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### 4.1 Introduction

As we concluded in Chapter 3, the growth of American imperial power and the reach of its military rule became institutionalized and were extended by an ideological framework. It was not only a national requirement but also a moral one. This ideological support has existed at various levels over the years. In 1910, Hollywood's standard text provided a wide panorama of idealistic images that became firmly imprinted upon the public consciousness. With the beginning of the Cold War, mainstream cinema became the linchpin of the United States' ideological hegemony. The cinema was used to project images of superpower virtue, which was based on a repository of values, attitudes, myths and illusions (Boggs & Pollard, 2007, p. 1). For many years Hollywood played a substantial role in preserving and legitimizing this strategy, which was enhanced by the intervention and surveillance of the US government.

Psychological as well as technological themes have been vehemently employed in the process of furthering American supremacy. The US is represented as an idealistic nation replete with a peaceful democratic system and virtuous values, a nation which is forced to rely on military action only when threatened by demonic enemies. We might disagree with Carl Boggs and Tom Pollard in their argument that US imperial power has been measured in political, cultural, economic and, most importantly, in military terms. This idea implies that the militarization of American popular and political culture allows the perception that American expansion (attacking, invading and occupying) is the natural and spontaneous reaction of choice (Boggs & Pollard

2007), not because of its rationality but because the generalization of his argument involves all periods including the present day.

It is true that the representation of militarization is intensely associated with the rightward shift of US foreign policy, but at different levels. From the birth of the motion picture, Hollywood has played an instrumental role in propagandist activities against anti-capitalist campaigns. Indeed, this correlation between militarization and Hollywood was spearheaded by Theodore Roosevelt's vision of American imperialism as the "refashioning of British imperialism and social Darwinism" (Sardar & Davies, 2004, p. 127).

This vision differs from Woodrow Wilson who, led America into the First World War by developing a new vision of American hegemony, thus creating a new vision of America's place in the world and, what is much more important, eliciting a positive response from the filmmakers to the challenge of reproducing this vision to suit national interests (Sardar & Davies, 2004, pp. 127-129). Yet, in the early revolutionary and settler periods up to the twentieth century, Hollywood played on the convergence between patriotism and militarism to explore and reform the ideological framework. As Ward Churchill said,

Racially oriented invasion, genocide and subsequent denial are all integral, constantly recurring and thus defining features of the Euro-American makeup from the instant the first boatload of the self-ordained colonists set foot in the 'New World'.

(Churchill, 1998, p. 25)

Washington always hoped to grant American policy ideological support by reproducing an ideal image tied to the concepts of superiority, adventure, heroism and nobility (Hedges, 2002, p. 3). Some scholars believe that these concepts are articulated by combat against "Otherness". From the Revolutionary War period and the campaigns against the Native Americans, the "Others" or the enemy are portrayed as a hated barbaric threat. More historically recent examples include the Nazis and the Japanese in World War II, through to the gooks, the Communists in Vietnam and the barbaric terrorist Arabs in the Gulf Wars. As with the Indians in the Western movies,

Hollywood shows a great tendency to label them as sub-human agents of destruction without any moral motives. A long chain of combat genre, action, sci-fi, horror, adventure, comedy and Western movies articulated this pattern (Sklar, 1994, p. 22), resulting in the general acceptance of the "good war". Indeed, this pattern was politically approved by congressional legislation and subsidies to cover American imperial acquisitions, and endorsed by Presidents Woodrow Wilson, Theodore Roosevelt, Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush, all of whom have attempted to sell at least one war and spread the "Gospel of Americanism" (Fraser, 2005, p. 40).

The twentieth century was considered the "American century", bolstered by unprecedented levels of supremacy in political, technological and economic global affairs. Hollywood mythology contributed to ideas of American supremacy in which characters such as Donald Kagan assumed that they had an undeniable right to play the grand role upon the world stage (Kagan, 2003, p. 86). Norman Denzin takes an extreme view when he observes that the influential role of Hollywood upon the political culture provided a chain of fantasies, myths and illusions. Denzin writes,

Within this birth, American society became a cinematic culture, a culture which came to know itself, collectively and individually, through the images and stories that Hollywood produced. (Denzin, 1991, p. 14)

This explains why most US military actions seem to be justifiable as long as their mission is in support of peace and democracy. For example, Hollywood has long projected the idea that the Orient is a perilous place that should be controlled, wherein Arab associations continue to be a threat, not just to the West but to the East itself. This is demonstrated in *Three Kings* (1999), where the American Army protects Iraqi civilians from their oppressive government. Carl Boggs and Malini McAlister claimed that Hollywood, by its militarization process, led the American public to support the concept of invading Iraq irrespective of UN permission. Boggs and McAlister consider that Hollywood is a monolithic presence, and its relationship with Washington preserves this image and its rhetoric. However, there have always been dissenting voices, advocating various "radical" causes, from members of the Hollywood community. These have included the left communist writer movements after WWII,

the anti-Vietnam movements (Jane Fonda, Donald Sutherland, Robert Vaughn), the civil rights for Native Americans (Sidney Poitier, Sammy Davis jnr. and Harry Belafonte) and the American Movement for Libertarian Rights (Charlton Heston and the National Rifleman's Association). Significantly for this research, there are Michael Moore, Robert Redford and Warren Beatty, with their objections to American foreign policy (Wheeler, 2006, pp. 139-140). This will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, but it is important here to note Wheeler's comment that, "since 9/11, Hollywood Liberals have been vilified rather than deemed credible" (Wheeler, 2006, p. 140). In light of this point, it is crucial that this study take into account the different perspectives that exist within Hollywood.

Herbert Schiller was careful not to label Hollywood as one of Washington's lackeys, despite his argument about Hollywood's contribution to American cultural imperialism, especially in terms of its politics and economics. For example, Hollywood films manifested and reflected the development of the economic power of American corporate capitalism, especially with its reliance upon economic output, technological mastery and cultural expansion (Schiller, 1973, pp. 143-145). The motion picture system supplies unsurpassed sources of information, opinion and entertainment, and not just the influence of the political culture. It also captures markets for cultural commodities, and establishes ideological domination by shaping popular consciousness (Petras, 2004).

Hollywood plays a gigantic role as a corporate, transnational, media empire. It is one of the most important sources of capital accumulation and global profits, displacing manufactured exports. It involves a great repository of values and myths that contribute to shaping the political culture, as well as societal and personal consumption on a daily basis. Washington and Hollywood are interlocked through mutual benefit. Many scholars may have confused the ideas of "subservience" and "correlation". The former is based on compliance while the latter is based on mutual benefit. This might preserve Hollywood's rhetoric but not necessarily its monolithic character.

Washington enhances the transnational media empires such as Disney, Time Warner, Viacom, News Corporation and General Electric with the privilege of power and the

free market economy. In return, they are used to share the peace and war with US foreign policy to protect against enemy threats to capitalism. By taking militaristic images, scholars such as David Slocum, Ziauddin Sardar, Terry Christensen and Carl Boggs have asserted that on numerous occasions Hollywood has provided significant support to legitimate the record Pentagon budget and American military projects (Slocum, 2006; Sardar & Davies, 2004; Christensen, 2005; Boggs & Pollard, 2007). Hollywood plays a vital role in supporting the American economy because it exports American goods and so helps to stem the nation's balance of payments deficit. By focusing on US products, Hollywood movies advertise and present American goods and values to an international audience (Wheeler, 2006, p. 163).

By the 1990s, the American media culture had grown more pervasive, assisted by the Telecommunication Act of 1996, wherein its powers were concentrated. The Act regulated the relationship between the Establishment and Hollywood in a way that preserved their mutual benefits. It did not subjugate Hollywood as in the USSR. Hollywood was transformed from being an "industry" into a "business" with the blessing of government support. Robert McChesney distinguished between Hollywood as a function and other means of media and communication, which compete ever more fiercely for consumer markets under the banner of "market forces". McChesney deliberated the relationship between the American media's credibility and "market forces". He writes:

The clear trajectory of our media and communication world tends toward ever greater corporate concentration, media conglomeration, and hyper-commercialism. The notion of public service – that there should be some motive for media other than profit – is in rapid retreat, if not total collapse. (McChesney, 1999, p. 77)

This means that "market forces" have consigned the notion that the media ought to inform and educate to the history books. However, if the corporate studios are to reflect the dominant interests and values, then "market forces" certainly would not tend to achieve political or cultural neutrality. Despite its well-known liberal label, Hollywood's main target is profit-making rather than educating in propagandist form. This can be explained further if we closely examine the conventional narrative, or so-

called "Traditional Hollywood", in which the movie production involves violent extravaganzas, high-tech and talking images. The combat genre, from the early productions of D.W. Griffith to some of today's movies, is conducted using the same structure, moving from heroic enterprise to a happy conclusion. The result is the rendition of Hollywood with an ideological framework based on the combat picture, but the question that remains, brought about by the changing role of the telecommunication and industrial context, is whether we are going to continue to witness or live with the same structure (Gabler, 1988, p. 231).

The above question will be discussed in the next chapter, but first it is important to show that the relationship between production context and the media culture or the audience is obsessed by profit and marketability, more than by the level of quality or originality. In his book *An Empire of their Own*, Neal Gabler pointed out that the Hollywood of the old studio system had become radicalized. He also concluded that it was "essentially defunct" (Gabler, 1988, pp. 431-432). Only a few of the old studios remain, and these are controlled by corporate entrepreneurs who are looking for the quality of return more than the quality of the script. Thus, the production strategies are full of risky adventures, with entrepreneurs following a financial agenda to cover their expenses.

Ironically, Carl Boggs shows that this involves forming partnerships with independent studios, bankers and wealthy businesspersons, not to mention brokers, and sharing the profits to avoid any possible losses. Boggs, however, ignores the possible effects of this partnership in the centralization process. He also asserts that in just a few years Hollywood witnessed rapidly increasing production costs for actors' contracts and technical support. The year 2004 was labelled the "monster budget" year, in which the average budget reached \$63.6 million per film (Boggs & Pollard, 2007, p. 1).

Under these conditions, Hollywood entrepreneurs have shown an aversion to risk an investment on creative or original films, or even those that are simply outside Hollywood's commercial style. Thus, they vacillate between two choices: to produce films mainly with the corporate studios and preserve the alliance with the government, or to co-produce films with independent companies or Hollywood subsidisers, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. The latter choice could involve

“controversial” or “political” topics. The relationship between Washington and corporate studios has mostly been based on mutual benefit, as the government granted the filmmakers free military stock footage and protection against illegal piracy. For the most part, Hollywood responded by providing ideological legitimacy for the imperial goals of the US government.

#### 4.2 Distribution and Exhibition

For many years, Hollywood has been centralized around corporate studio empires that include Twentieth Century Fox, Paramount Pictures, MGM, Universal Studios, Columbia and Warner Bros. From the economic depression of the 1930s to the beginning of the twenty-first century, Hollywood controlled ninety to ninety-five per cent of film production (Hayward, 2004, p. 205). Later, the studios began to engage in mergers or partnerships to cover the costs and minimize financial risk, as with the Fox-Paramount \$200 million production of *Titanic* and the *Star Wars* series. However, the most important aspect of this centralization of content is that global media conglomerates essentially own Hollywood or the corporate studios (as we will discuss in the next chapter). In addition, they have vast holdings in other sections of the media, such as television stations and satellite channels, the internet, talk radio and popular magazines (Christensen & Haas, 2006, p. 56).

Hence, the same firms go far beyond mere ownership of the studio; in recent years they have become the owners of a huge proportion of production, distribution and exhibition rights in films, including theatre ownership, video and DVD sales. For example, Viacom owns Paramount Pictures and Blockbuster Video and co-owns Vivendi Universal, which in turn owns several studios, including Universal Studios, as well as controlling distribution through Ticketmaster, Ticket Web, Home Video, Music Distribution and MCA/Universal Merchandising (Bart, interview, n.d.).

Compared to the golden age of the studio system, Hollywood is centralized into a small number of huge organizations. In seeking profitability, they tend to provide their theatres with sophisticated technology like digital cinema, full-length motion pictures



and, very recently, high definition pictures, all allied with electronic transmission methods such as satellite or other broadband services. Christensen and Haas sound a warning when they assert that, "such centralized ownership of the cinemas could result in a limitation on the viewing of politically controversial films" (Christensen & Haas, 2006, p. 57).

Christensen and Haas felt that the most common consequence of this centralization would be that the studios would be reluctant to become involved with films concerned with controversial political themes, preferring to stay safely with profit making and government support (Christensen & Haas, 2006, pp. 57-58). However, there are always exceptions and while films that display "counter-rhetoric thought" are in the minority, they are influential, as for example *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962), *Platoon* (1986), *The Candidate* (1972), *All the President's Men* (1976), *Bulworth* (1998) and *Lions for Lambs* (2007). These films and others are associated with activist movements, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Nevertheless, it is significant to mention here that opportunities exist for film production in studios outside Hollywood. Here producers are free from the constraints found in Hollywood, politically, artistically and in some respects, financially. These films have an increasingly vital role to play in the American cinema industry, not just for their political content but also for their controversial and aesthetic approach. Some of them have won awards, for example Susan Seidelman's *Desperately Seeking Susan* (1985), Bryan Singer's *The Usual Suspect* (1995) and Michael Moore's *Bowling for Columbine* (2002).

Of course, corporate studios do not produce all the movies. However, some non-Hollywood films or independent companies enter into partnership with Hollywood corporate studios for distribution and exhibition, especially if these films are commercially successful. Philip Anschutz for example, the owner of the Anschutz Corporation, is an economic entrepreneur who supplies these films with loans but at the same time tends to limit the exposure of films whose controversial content or political message he dislikes. Rupert Murdoch is ever-mindful of the bottom line, preferring safe theme content, a state of affairs famously lamented by a studio

executive when he observed, "Rupert Murdoch isn't looking at the quality of script I promise you. He's looking at the quality of return" (Rich, 2005).

At the same time, independent movie producers inevitably tend to move from "modest production" to worthwhile investments, starting with co-production with Hollywood's Big Five and moving on to distribution and exhibition (Levy, 2001, p. 504). Perhaps one of the best recent examples is Robert Redford's *Lions for Lambs*. This film was produced by Andell Entertainment without corporate studio support or governmental stock footage, because of its political content (Jackman, 2009, p. 8). Concomitantly, independent filmmakers cannot achieve much success at the box office without national distribution and support for their films (Levy, 2001, p. 504). Significantly, the numbers attending non-Hollywood films are too small, accounting for approximately five per cent of the domestic marketplace. Yet despite their modest production, some of these films may prove to be politically and socially influential, especially with regard to the critical situation of US foreign policy in the Middle East (Christensen & Haas, 2006, p. 56).

#### 4.3 Washington's Deregulation of Hollywood's Trade Policy

Until recently, therefore, the capitalist system meant that Hollywood conglomerates were able to control the production, distribution, and exhibition of films produced by the American cinema industry. However, we should also illuminate the way that the US government was involved in creating the business conditions that allowed this expansion to occur. These conditions formed the foundation that boosted Hollywood's business from a fairground sideshow to a global phenomenon. Washington's involvement in the cinema industry was led by political motives, starting with the post-World War II period when President Harry S Truman welcomed Hollywood's "soft-power arsenal" to support the US hard power military triumph. Beginning with the economic and cultural influences that worked in tandem with Marshall's European Recovery Plan, Hollywood received roughly \$10 million in direct subsidies (Fraser, 2006, p. 55).

However, if Washington utilized Hollywood's boom period to enhance its imperial goals, they also did the same thing with its later collapse. From 1955 to 1970, America witnessed a clear decline of the classical studio system because society embraced television, which required Hollywood to reform its production and distribution. The Hollywood moguls tried to reverse the declining profits and re-attract their audiences with innovations such as widescreen, Cinemascope, the occasional novelty of 3-D and lavish costume dramas. These initiatives failed to revive the situation, resulting in an unprecedented crisis in the revenues of most of the studios. In fact, MGM and Paramount Studios were in danger of being declared insolvent. Howard Hughes sold RKO and the new buyer closed it after a short time. Nevertheless, the government used this situation to link its subsidies with conditional restrictions, whereby the films continued to be subject to the Production Code Administration (PCA) (which derived from the collaboration between (MPAA) and Washington and have the authorization to for approval). Of course, as we will see later, this association, as well as the House of Representatives' Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), hampered the cinema industry and subjected a great deal of it to American national interests (Wheeler, 2006, pp. 30-31). It could be considered as the first line of production to which movies were subjected.

With the rise of the conservative right-wing in government, Wall Street began buying up American film production studios via Trans-National Media, who undertook a "re-structuring programme founded on their ethic of gross financial accumulation" (Dickenson, 2006, p. xiv). For example, Warner Bros became a subsidiary of the Kinney Corporation; MGM was sold to the property magnate Kirk Kerkorian. The Reagan Presidency witnessed a period of development in which the Hollywood studios became cross-corporate media conglomerates facilitated by new legislation to promote corporate efficiency rather than restricting trade. Of course, these changes were unpleasant for the left-wingers, who showed their objection in many ways. As a protest they produced non-Hollywood films like the anti-Reagan *Wall Street* (1981) for Michael Moore, which attacked the way that conglomerate forces control Hollywood (Dickenson, 2006, p. xiv).

These changes created a contemporary Hollywood within the US communications industry in which media conglomerates financed a chain of activities, including higher

production costs, the marketing and merchandising of blockbusters and the development and use of new production technologies. These changes were mirrored in a vertical integration between the government and the media conglomerates or Hollywood moguls (Wheeler, 2006, p. 37). Carl Boggs described this synergy as a honeymoon period where elements of the mass media can be viewed as producing outright propaganda (Boggs & Pollard, 2007, p. 1). Regrettably, Boggs built up his argument based upon a one-sided view of the situation, which boosted his militarization process without taking into account the rise of the new Hollywood left-wingers. They did not pose a threat to the Establishment, but their presence was an undeniable fact, showing dissent with Hollywood moguls, especially regarding American foreign policy (Dickenson, 2006, p. xiv).

Before we examine this change, it is significant to mention the influential efforts behind the collaboration between Hollywood and the Establishment. Here "Establishment" includes the political motives not only of the US government, but also those of private individuals who are part of the US power base, and other non-government bodies.

#### **4.4 Hollywood Enforcer Jack Valenti**

Hollywood set up the the Motion Picture Producers and Distribution Agency (MPPDA) as trade representative body to operate out of New York and Washington to represent their interests. The moguls originally appointed the former Post-Master General Will Hays in 1922 to both clean up the films and to present their trading interests to the political classes and government. In 1946 Eric Johnston redefined the organization into two separate sections; the Motion Picture Export Association of America (MPAA) to operate domestically and the Motion Picture Export Association of America (MPEAA) to operate internationally. The MPEAA was reformed into Motion Picture of Association (MPA) in 1994 under Jack Valenti. The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), played a substantial role in representing the big majors on many issues. These included the administration of the audience ratings system, protection of their rights against any injurious legislation, lobbying to protect

their trade policy, free-marketing, monitoring piracy and other “illegal activities” such as product splitting (Fraser, 2006, pp. 64-66). It is significant to mention that politicians with a close relationship to the White House have attempted to monitor these institutions. The head of Music Corporation of America (MCA) and the head of Universal Studio who became the president of the MPAA Wasserman, was seen as kingmaker for John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson he is commonly known as ‘the last Nogul’ and once was the most feared and revered figure within the permanent convergence of Hollywood; Then, The United Artists president Arthur Krum, was one of LBJ’s most trusted associates and act as informal advisor and confidant during the Johnson’s presidency . Wasserman could introduce many of Washington’s interests to Hollywood’s ideological influence. However, it was the presidency of Jack Valenti that undoubtedly showed Washington’s close affiliation with Hollywood in lobbying, influencing and promoting the American cinema industry to serve the country’s political interests (Wheeler, 2006. pp. 40-41).

In 1966, Wasserman and Krim proposed that the “special assistant” to Johnson's White House, Jack Valenti, become the new president of the Motion Picture Association of America. Wasserman believed in Valenti’s abilities to preserve the collaboration between the Hollywood moguls and Washington (Bruck, 2004, pp. 235-6). For Hollywood, Valenti was qualified to play on the common ground according to his influence and connections with the White House as well as his good creditability among foreign diplomats (Bruck, 2004, p. 235). For Valenti, this new career improved his financial position, as his salary increased from \$30,000 to \$150,000. Furthermore, this post allowed him to pursue his business and his interests in global politics and international affairs (Bruck, 2004, pp.235-6). As he said,

To my knowledge, the motion picture is the only US enterprise that negotiates on its own with foreign governments. (Fraser, 2006, p. 56)

Valenti’s zeal and connections were highly valued by the MPAA/MPA. He was seen as a shrewd lobbyist in Washington who had good access to the President as well as to the US authorities, and was qualified to engage and retain the cooperation of both Democrat and Republican administrations. An early example showed that Valenti had friends on both sides, when his bipartisan cunning persuaded Lyndon Johnson to

approve military footage for John Wayne's pro-Vietnam film *The Green Berets* (1968) despite Hollywood's support for the Democrats. These close affiliations continued with several presidents including Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton, who both had particular connections with the MPAA and Hollywood moguls; the main concern was to ensure that Hollywood did not have to rely exclusively on its own resources but could operate with the backing from official authorities (Wasko, 2003, pp. 212-213).

Valenti was shrewd on both political and financial issues; he made great efforts to criticize those foreign governments that did not allow the American film industry to trade its products and compete fairly in the world entertainment market place. Indeed, Hollywood benefited from his diligence as well as his close relations with successive presidential administrations, Congress, the State Department and the Office of the US Trade Representative. Valenti worked hard to liberalize the international film trade; as he explained, "Our movies and TV programs are hospitably received by citizens around the world". However, that did not mean that they would not need a little help from friends in authority (Wasko, 2003, p. 181).

With Valenti's efforts, the MPA successfully overcame all the difficulties surrounding the film trade by becoming involved in various pacts, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Entertainment Industry Coalition for Free Trade (EIC), the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS) to ensure free trade and intellectual property rights. However, the giant step for the MPA was to find permanent access to foreign theatres following on from political events such as the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in the late 1980s. This enabled the majors to extend their product access to Eastern Europe and the Far East, despite the reservations of some governments who remained conscious of cultural imperialism (Segrave, 1997, pp. 257-260).

With the unprecedented success of Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (1993), the conspicuous issue was whether the big majors would invest in high-cost productions unless they could have a free marketplace pact and access to private capital (Guttman, 1998, p. 25). This was especially important in the case of French resistance to the inclusion of cinema and broadcasting sectors within GATT and their call for "cultural exemption". Valenti worked furiously behind the scenes to sabotage the French effort, approaching

several high-profile directors like Martin Scorsese and Steven Spielberg to make a public statement against "protectionism", and reminding people that Europeans like Ridley Scott, Paul Verhoeven, Alan Parker, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Jean-Claude Van Damme form part of Hollywood's success.

The truth is that Valenti faced many challenges in maintaining his collaboration, such as the rise of the Hollywood Guilds (Screen Actors, Screen Directors) and National Labour Relations, as well as the activities of the prominent Communist writers, directors and producers who refused to cooperate with him, not to mention the anti-war movement. Valenti's mission should not be associated with HUAC (as we will examine later) because he carefully played on the social, financial, and political aspects.

Politically, Valenti was considered Hollywood's foreign secretary, reflecting his great influence and connection to the White House. Several meetings between Hollywood moguls and President Bill Clinton were arranged by him to discuss Hollywood's strategy regarding American interests (Wheeler, 2006, p. 41). The immediate response of the American president became apparent when Clinton telephoned the French Prime Minister Eduardo Balladur and the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl to inform them that he would fight to remove the GATT restrictions on the audiovisual industry (Puttnam, 1997, pp. 6-7). Furthermore, Valenti enjoyed various privileges with the American presidents, especially George W. Bush, who had an open-door policy towards him. In recent years, Valenti's attempts to repair the gradual break between the Hollywood moguls and Washington, which started after 9/11 and was exacerbated by the invasion of Iraq, were complicated by the corporate ownership of the studios, the emergence of a new industrial context and independent organizations with diversified interests inside Hollywood's society, which weakened his role. Former Democrat Congressman Dan Glickman finally replaced him in 2005. He had little experience for the role compared to Valenti, Jack Valenti who was the cornerstone of the Hollywood studios and American interests died 2007. It is no exaggeration to claim that, "Jack Valenti had been one of the most powerful men in Washington for four decades" (Fraser, 2005, p. 73).

#### 4.5 Hollywood, Washington and the Pentagon

Many scholars believe that through Hollywood productions, American culture has become a public spectacle distributed creatively to the nationwide audience. Jean-Michel Valantin, for example, suggested that these productions are used to articulate institutional and battlefield terrains, providing ideological backup by propagating their content to support US imperial interests (2005, p. 110). Douglas Kellner heartily supported this argument when he said that the power of Hollywood to manipulate the political culture dramatizes and legitimizes who is allowed to exercise force and violence and who is not (Kellner, 1995, p. 2). This might explain why it is vital for Washington to heighten public support for American armed ventures abroad. In the same vein, Carl Boggs argued that American political culture has been galvanized by Hollywood's flood of fantasies, illusions, myths and violence. It is not surprising, therefore, that early public opposition to the second Iraq war stemmed not from moral revulsion but because of the escalating costs of a war and an occupation viewed as a failure (Boggs & Pollard, 2007, p. 13).

However, those scholars regrettably attempt to generalize their ideas by pointing to Hollywood as a Pentagon device. In addition, their argument is based on manipulating the political culture and the militarization process without exploring the actual relationship between Hollywood and the Pentagon. In order to examine Hollywood's propagandist nature it is vital to address different levels and periods and to take into account the diversity inside Hollywood and the structural changes to the production context. It is true that many times Washington and the Pentagon have identified their "good wars" through Hollywood, while at the same time Hollywood propagates crude messages to manipulate the public consciousness.

In his book *Operation Hollywood*, David Robb reveals the secret collaboration between the Pentagon and Hollywood. The use of propagandist images as a tool to achieve political ends had not hitherto been part of the American experience, but Robb disclosed the secret arrangements that existed in most of Hollywood productions, which allowed the most powerful military nation in the world to control and place propaganda into that most powerful of media called Hollywood. He claimed that the film industry had become transformed into a great repository of values and the most



powerful opinion-forming mechanism ever known. Thereby Robb's discussions reveal the unconscionable and unconstitutional process of Pentagon censorship (Robb, 2004, p. 365), which many scholars feel is comparable to HUAC activities.

Robb believes that a great deal of Hollywood's contribution to the formation of political culture, and the Pentagon's censorship of some movies, accords with the canons of "patriotism". He also believes that the concept of "Otherness" is reinforced by a great many stereotypical images of both heroes and Villains. As Robb asks, "What makes a hero? What makes a villain?" By the process of distinguishing these characters, the US managed to pass on its image of superpower virtue via the motion picture industry (Robb, 2004, p. 361). However, Robb felt that, in general, he did not describe the stages of the manipulation process and its relationship to the levels of Hollywood power.

#### 4.6 Censorship and Regulations

According to Hollywood, the United States was, until recently, involved in a "good war". This democratic nation uses its gigantic military arsenal only to maintain justice and peace, especially when threatened by demonic enemies. The US government, through the Pentagon, accesses Hollywood's movies by means of censorship and regulations. For Hollywood studios, making films is a business and a financial enterprise; thus, it is essential to reduce the production costs. Many Hollywood producers can rely on the government whenever they require special assistance and military access: for example, to its film archive, and the use of actual warships and equipment (Robb, 2004, p. 13). In return for this patronage, Hollywood is prepared to cooperate and project American foreign policy interests and not be blacklisted or pursued by HUAC as it was in the period 1945-1955. Lawrence Suid notes that the solid relationship between Hollywood and the Pentagon has strengthened over the years, with the provision of troops and equipment such as aircraft carriers, airplanes and vehicles for combat movies, thus allowing substantial cost reductions. In return for this *largesse*, the Pentagon insists on a positive depiction, not just for its personnel and operations but also for its version of history (Suid, 2002, pp. 431-432).

Robb (2004, p. 25) agrees that the Pentagon has accessed Hollywood by providing stock footage on condition that the movies depict the American military and its operations as winning “noble wars”. For Hollywood studios, what they like more than a good movie is a “good deal”, so being provided with all the support needed to make high-profile mainstream films has been very attractive. This liaison has been well organized through the MPAA, which managed to create the rating system that is still in effect (with a few changes over the years) (Suid, 2002, p. 432).

Phil Strub, the head of the Pentagon’s liaison office, was responsible for obtaining approval for the “good films”. As he famously said, “Any film that portrays the military as negative is not realistic to us”. He established a number of criteria that allowed military footage to be shown in combat films. These were to present a “realistic” image of the military as much as possible; produce an image of American military power; and assist in maintaining American supremacy (Robb, 2004, p. 143). Historically, this agenda achieved substantial success. Based on thousands of pages of Pentagon documents, Robb presents a long list of movies that were subject to censorship and regulation according to these criteria. He notes how the Pentagon interfered and changed many films to function as a cultural arm of American global interests, and how the process continued to be applied to sci-fi movies such as *Star Wars*, *Jurassic Park*, and *Armageddon*. One example is *Thirteen Days*, where Strub insisted on making changes to the historical account of the Cuban Missile Crisis (Robb, 2004, p. 18).

Suid, like Robb, questioned the reasons why Hollywood studios yielded to this process, or to being censored and monitored despite their cognizance of the moral and legal consequences (Suid, 1988, pp. 431-432). In fact, some directors departed from this modality to enhance the “credibility” of their films. Oliver Stone’s trilogy on the Vietnam War is one example. Furthermore, a few movies broke the accords between Hollywood and the government. As a result, they were deprived of military support. These instances involved well-known names and demonstrated clear divisions inside Hollywood’s society. For example, Clint Eastwood, director Robert Aldrich, writer Douglas Day Stewart and producer Peter Almond all refused to cave in to pressure

from the Pentagon to change the content or the scenes of their films to fit its vision (Robb, 2004, p. 363).

Robb also agrees with Said's argument that collaboration between Hollywood and the Establishment formulated the image of the enemy, which was constructed in terms of political as well as cultural justifications. From Soviet villains to the Islamic terrorist, Said described the process of reasoning as "they must be foreign devils, otherwise what is our gigantic military machine doing there?" (Said, you tube, 2003)

One of the clearest examples of Strub manipulating the rules was the provision of unprecedented military support to authorize the production of *Executive Decision* starring Kurt Russell, who saves the passengers of a hijacked 747 from the brutal Islamic terrorists who were planning to blow up the nation with a nuclear weapon (Robb, 2004, p. 145).

Carl Boggs insists that successive US governments have emphasized the militarization process; his assumption could be true if the relationship between Washington and Hollywood was based on "coercion" instead of "collaboration". Boggs also insists that driving American popular and political culture was an essential requirement in the global realities of the current period. This argument is partially true. American imperial power has indeed grown and the structure of this power needs ideological support, especially at this moment, when the United States' image is threatened by the daily coverage of their occupation of Iraq; coverage which includes, for example, pictures of Abu-Graeb and Guantanamo prisons. The Pentagon's response to these distortions is simple - change reality.

#### 4.7 The Instrumental Role of Hollywood in Cultural Defence

The collaboration between Hollywood's studios and the US government contributed to entrenching American interests and dreams, boosted the dynamic mythology of her image and served to achieve its imperial objectives (Sardar & Davies, 2004, p. 148). This occurred in two distinct ways:

First, there is a general tendency to formalize the construction of the threat. Jean-Michel Valantin believes that the construction of the American political culture is essentially based on the exclusion of the "Others" as a threatening "Otherness", and that this process is operated by Hollywood and conventionalized onto the vast majority by a process that may be termed national political identity construction (Valantin, 2005, p. 4). Here, relationships with the outside world are perceived as potential threats that should be countered through frontier myth rather than the flow of populations or cultural exchange. Thus, through a combination of political discourse and its presentation the concept of an outside threat is authenticated in American society (Valantin, 2005, p. 5).

Michael Rogin explains the construction of threat in political discourse as "the foreign demon, the anarchist bomb planter, the tentacular Communist plot, the agent of terrorism [who are] familiar figures of daydreams which so often dominate American politicians" (Rogin, 1987, p.1). Rogin also believes that the notion or the construction of a threat, which is augmented by the concept of "Otherness", is circulated in the world to justify the production of a strategy and a military power, and to boost ambitions to play a grand role on the world stage (Rogin, 1987, p. 1). Donald Kagan considered that this issue has become a deeply-rooted part of American culture (Kagan, 2003, p. 86). He sees the US as presenting most of the outside world as an uninhabitable place that is satiated and brutalized with unending chaos, violence and corruption, with only the United States able to tackle these problems under the banner of modern civilization (Kagan, 2003, p. 86). Furthermore, the notion of the outside threat has been institutionalized through Hollywood's emotional dimensions. Jean Valantin explains,

The notion of threat cannot be strictly conceptual. To be effective and meaningful, it has to have an emotional dimension, to provoke genuine feelings of collective concern, even fear and horror, at the idea that destructive forces, underscored by a malevolent political ideology or will, could overturn American daily life, and wipe out its people. (Valantin, 2005, p. 5)

Michael J. Strada and Harold R. Troper agree that relations with the USSR brought about the production of a threat at the beginning of the Cold War. They discovered that Hollywood overwhelmingly constructed and depicted the Soviet/Communist threat in a very "negative" way and with a great deal of political intervention. They showed three chronological stages for these depictions: Pre-WWII, the construction of "Otherness" was represented in a villainous form but not as a dangerous threat, as is obvious in *Ninotchka*. The second stage, during WWII, showed Hollywood's rhetoric as converging towards the Russians, as shown in *Mission to Moscow* where, according to Strada and Troper, the film fawned over the Stalinist regime and justified his purges as an understandable policy to weed out "spies and wreckers". It was in the third stage, the post-war period, that Hollywood started its ideological attacks against the Soviet Communists. The construction of the threat was conventionalized according to political events such as the aftermath of Sputnik, the arms race and the Cuban Missile Crisis (Strada & Troper, 1989, p. 13).

During this third period, Hollywood represented the Russians/Communists as a worldwide symbol of evil, and the United States as uniquely equipped to counter and maintain peace. As shown in *The Manchurian Candidate*, the Soviet image is presented as a serious threat to American and modern civilization. In fact, there are many examples that utilize this Soviet metaphor, such as *Red Dawn*, *The Invasion of the Bodysnatchers*, *Patriot Games* and *Invasion U.S.A.* However, Strada and Troper conclude that the rise of anti-Russian rhetoric was politically motivated and originated from President Ronald Reagan's administration (Strada & Troper, 1989, pp. 13-18).

Nora Sayre detailed Reagan's early efforts at boosting collaboration between the American leadership and the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). Many of Hollywood's filmmakers joined this collaboration, including moguls like Walt Disney, Sam Wood, Clarence Brown, Gary Cooper, Norman Taurog, Robert Taylor and John Wayne. This alliance against the Soviet threat led to the creation of the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals; indeed the American public consciousness toward the "demonic Soviets" was used politically until the demise of the Soviet Union.

From the WWII era through to the First Gulf War (1991), Hollywood represented Middle Easterners as a secondary threat. However, by the end of the Cold War, US imperial ambitions needed to be revived. The aftermath of Desert Storm allowed Americans to establish a durable military presence in the Middle East. A new enemy had to be framed to meet the United States' political agenda, so Arabs and Muslims became the target of American or Hollywood cultural rhetoric. "Rogue state", "Jew haters", "drug traffickers" and, most widely, "terrorists", are some of the terms used to embody the Arab threat (Boggs & Pollard, 2007, p. 181). As Sindi described,

Hollywood and the rest of the American mass media have carried out a campaign to disparage Arabs and tarnish their image. (Sindi, 1999)

The Arab/Israeli conflict was presented with little concern for the daily suffering of the Palestinians, caused by their eviction by occupation troops. There was also an emphasis on the Israeli presence as an American ally (Fries, 2005, p. 144), as well as the Orientalist use of the typical Arab stereotype (as will be discussed in Chapter 6). These depictions have been embedded in the American popular consciousness through excellent collaboration between the media (the Hollywood moguls) and the US government.

Many scholars, such as David Slocum, Ziauddin Sardar, Terry Christensen and Carl Boggs, asserted that this new threat would be conventionalized in order to legitimize it. They also concluded that this shift in the corporate media target was led by a political demand to match US imperial aims (Slocum, 2006; Sardar, 2004; Christensen & Haas, 2005; Boggs & Pollard, 2007). There was essential agreement between the big studios and the US government to fashion the new conflict as between the force of savagery (i.e. Arab and Muslim) and the power of freedom and justice (i.e. Anglo-American) (Boggs & Pollard, 2007, p. 181). Consequently, the combination of old savagery with new terrorism increasingly became a fact in Hollywood movies. Some films characterize Arab savagery within the Islamic context, as shown in William Friedkin's *Rules of Engagement* (2000), Edward Zwick's *The Siege* (1998) and John Moore's *Behind Enemy Lines* (2000) (Fries, 2005, p. 144).

Most of what Boggs and Fries provide is true, but they overlook one issue. During its construction, the threat re-formed differently according to the various stages of political events. These events shaped the relationship between the "Others" and American imperial objectives in the region. The intensification of the Arab image over the last century, from "comic villain" to "foreign devil", did not occur in a vacuum. It involved an intertwining of both political and cultural interests in the region. Boggs, for example, released his study in 2007, but he ignored the structural change in the political culture after 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq (as we will examine in the next chapter).

Second, there is projection of the arrogant idea that the United States is a universal nation with the natural right to invasion and domination (Sardar & Davies, 2004, p. 148). Through the remarkable victory of Desert Storm, along with the events of 9/11, US power reinforced the long-held myth that its presence in the region was, by definition, benevolent. How this presence came to be viewed as the agitator of violence, chaos and terrorism needs to be dealt with. Based on the Iraq case, Allman believes that the manipulation process will lead to dysfunction in American power. He writes that Americans are now posing "the greatest threat to world peace" (Allman, 2004, pp 366-369). US engagement in the second Iraq war without UN validation can be seen as supporting this view. Floyd Rudmin comments that this political culture is framed by Hollywood, and that,

There is something wrong at a much deeper level in American political culture. The American malady of militarism extends across decades, across generations, and is so deeply rooted in the American mind that attacking another nation seems to be the natural spontaneous reaction of choice. (Rudmin, 2006, p. 5)

However, the second invasion of Iraq creates an obvious disparity between the invasion as concept and the occupation as practice. The facts are palpable: a tortured prisoner, the arrest and killing of thousands of Iraqis, the failure to secure the country, not to mention the expenditure of billions of dollars on the occupation force. All this

agitates the intellectuals as well as American political culture, and it has influenced the motion picture industry and its moguls, as we will deliberate in this research.

#### 4.8 Conclusions

Chapter Four has described the relationship between Hollywood and the US government. From an early stage, the government realized the value of the media to promote its cultural values and ideas. The relationship was not a one-sided one. In return, Hollywood received financial and material support and the patronage of political leaders if its films promoted government actions, especially those relating to foreign policy. However, the relationship required enforcement by government appointees such as Valenti and Pentagon officials to determine whether the candidate film met the criteria for depicting government policy and promoted it in a positive light suitable for Western public consumption.

The outcome of this relationship was a subversion of the truth. It created falsities and distortions about the true state of affairs pervading the Middle East, which led to a sense of injustice among the people of the region. They were unable to be heard upon the international stage and this led to a sense of frustration, which has been partially satiated by a resort to violence and terrorism. However, these very acts provided the ammunition that the US used to justify its policy of perpetuating the myth of the "good" nation fighting the "evil" Arab or Muslim to secure, from the US perspective, a better and peaceful world. This state of affairs inevitably sows the seeds for an upward spiral of violence with little hope of resolution.

The affiliation between Washington and Hollywood was based upon mutual benefits. Hollywood's response to the demands set by the US government was grounded in a framework of collaboration rather than coercion or subjugation. Therefore, it is unwise to label Hollywood as a Pentagon lackey, despite their excellent association. It may be expected that this relationship will break down if there is any change to the forces that bind it. Certain examples show that Hollywood is not monolithic, and that the affiliation evolved through different stages: from WW1, to full collaboration, and then



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gradual break up after 9/11. Furthermore, there have been recent changes in the infrastructure of Hollywood. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the hegemony of the major studios has weakened. Independent production companies have appeared, owned by free thinkers who refuse to be shackled by government diktats or the practices of Hollywood.

## 5 THE NEW HOLLYWOOD: STRUCTURAL CHANGES

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### 5.1 Introduction: From Centralization to Decentralization: the process

The label "New Hollywood" is bewildering and contradictory in many ways. In his book *New Hollywood Cinema* Geoff King refused to give a single definition of the term "Hollywood" because it is passing through a momentous period of transition at both structural and political levels (King, 2002, pp. 1-5). Carl Boggs went so far as to describe Hollywood, because of its rhetoric, as a "political war machine". However, he dealt with Hollywood in a particular aspect, namely, the militarization of American culture. By so doing, he ignored the other aspects of Hollywood.

Of course, our argument in this chapter is not to reduce to a single essence "Old" or "New", but to deliberate the changes and the influential role they play in defining the political culture and the construction of "Enemy" or "Otherness" in the representation of Arabs and Muslims. We do agree with Murray Smith's suggestion that New Hollywood is a "multi-faceted creature" and any change at one level relates to changes at another (Smith, 2002, p. 2).

Historically, Hollywood has witnessed many changes since the "classical" or "studio" era. These changes harmonized and preserved Hollywood's monolithic rhetoric. New Hollywood has sought to bring about a change in the traditional depiction of Arabs and Muslims and has drawn our attention to it more than at any other time. It is crucial in our study of the evolution of Hollywood's representation of Arabs and Muslims to

demonstrate the structural as well as the political changes in America's film industry, which now provides an adequate space for contradictory text regarding American foreign policy.

The aim of this chapter is not to disclaim the previous one, but to add to it by describing a new industrial context, which is related in varying degrees to broader contemporary cultural and political changes. With the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the invasion of Iraq, two aspects can be identified concerning the representation of Arabs and Muslims. The first is to do with the more advanced image that is portrayed. The second concerns the stylistic approach. Both of these aspects represent a break with Hollywood's conventional style. These aspects are a new attempt to separate the old centralized Hollywood described by Boggs and McAlister from the new decentralized one.

## 5.2 The New System of Production

Historically, Hollywood operated through what is known as the classic studio system; however by the 1980s this model had undergone evolutionary change into what was termed "New Hollywood". According to Scott (2001), this change "finally resulted not only in a new business model but also a new aesthetics of popular cinema". The new trend has continued to evolve to the present day, becoming more sophisticated and driving change in the motion picture industry.

Christopherson and Storper (1986; 1987) argue that this transformation is due to the disintegration of the classical vertically-integrated studio system into a vertically-designed production complex of agglomerate proportions.

The classical model was based upon the caucus known as the "seven major studios" (Fox Entertainment Group, Walt Disney Motion Pictures Group, Time Warner, NBC Universal, MGM Holdings Inc., Sony Pictures Entertainment and Paramount Motion Pictures Group). These major studios used to dominated production, distribution and exhibition. They mass produced films. With the rise of television, this system could

not sustain itself. Furthermore, anti-trust legislation aided the system's demise. These two factors brought about the breakdown of studio-based mass production, heightened competition and caused uncertainty and instability in the film industry. As just one example, Paramount was forced to divest itself of its cinemas in 1948.

As a result, the old studios evolved into film production co-ordination and financing centres, having divested themselves of much of their productive capacity. The studios began to outsource services as required. As Kranton and Mine-Hart note,

This turn of events allowed the majors to cut their overheads, to pursue ever more diversified forms of production and eventually to flourish in the new high risk Hollywood. (Kranton & Mine-Hart, 2000)

A significant effect of this change was that the majors suffered some loss of control over production. However, the position of the majors in this new world remains strong. Although the new system is characterized by small, specialized and complementary firms the majors act as the adhesive holding the structure in place and localizing the industry in its geographically traditional area, Southern California, ensuring employment for many independent businesses and their employees. Thus, the majors continue to play a central role in financing, business decisions, distribution and exhibition.

This revolutionary change provides new opportunities for the motion picture industry. Large numbers of small independent production companies and their service providers have appeared. These companies tend to be specialized film producers and concentrate on making a limited number of films, with each one having a distinctive character. For their part, the majors still involve themselves in productions directly, focusing on fewer but more grandiose films.

Wasko (2003) describes the new Hollywood's production system as comprising major and independent film companies trading with an ever growing circle of direct and indirect suppliers. She further describes that these small companies have a complex relationship with one another, depending upon the demands of the film producing process. Wasko defines the film making process as consisting of three phases: pre-

production, production proper and post-production. Each independent company contributes at a particular point to the production of a film according to their specialism (Wasko, 2003, p. 24).

There now exists, according to Scott (2001) "a bifurcated production system". By this, he means that the system has become polarized into the majors and a multitude of independent production companies. It seems that operations conducted by each pole infrequently meet. However, this chasm has allowed many activists and intellectuals to seize the opportunity to break Hollywood's stylistic conventions at both actual and ideological levels.

One of the main effects has been the rise of Hollywood's counter-rhetoric, which disputes or contradicts the established line of the majors. For example, this could be achieved by demolishing the construct of the "Enemy" by representing The Middle East not as Orientalist discourse (barbaric sub-human agents of destruction), but in a more positive light or at least in a rational manner. Examples such as *Rendition* (2007) and *Syriana* (2005) show that the new portrait is associated with new conventions of stylistic approach and political context, as these and other films were highly critical of American foreign policy in the Middle East.

The majors' traditional spheres of operations have been in the 'financing, production, distribution' and exhibition of films; but with changing market conditions they have diversified by forming specialized divisions to meet niche demands, for example multimedia or television. However, even some of the majors have become subsumed and now constitute mere "operating units" within even larger multimedia conglomerates.

The chart below shows the ownership relationship between the majors and their parent companies, as well as with their subsidiary film-production and distribution companies.

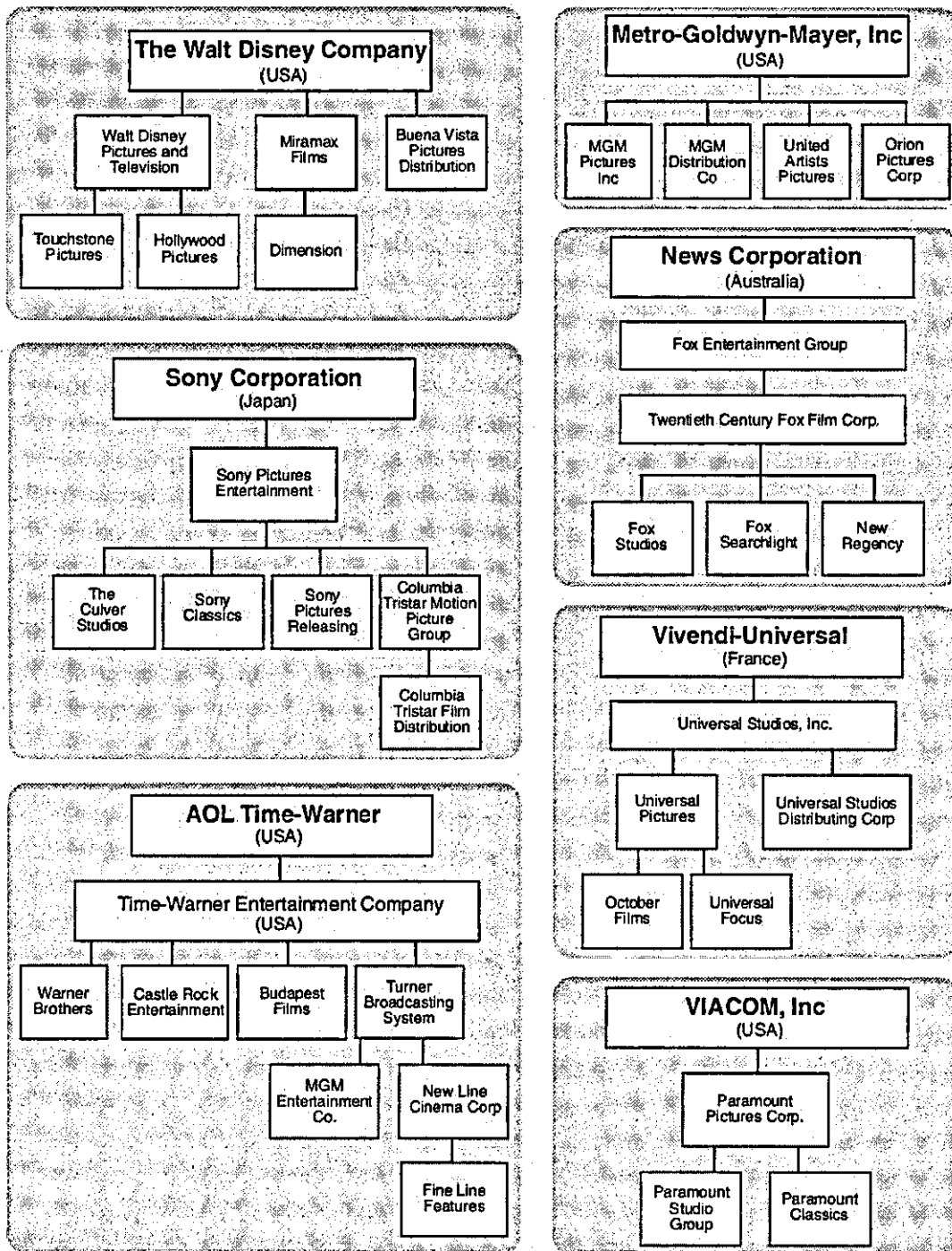


Figure 2 The Hollywood majors: Corporate ownership relations (after Scott, A. J., (2001) *The Production and Distribution of American Motion Pictures*, p. 962)

The majors tend to be involved in feature film production, and use vertical integration and disintegration to varying degrees. This usually involves in-house shooting and editing, and in this respect it should be noted that the majors have never fully surrendered their ability to produce films in-house. However, it is now usual to subcontract this work to companies and individuals such as producers and set designers.

Sometimes the majors work with different or small production companies, which may be owned by a major, or with an independent one. For example, Dream Works SKG was founded by media moguls Steven Spielberg, Jeffrey Katzenberg and David Geffen in 1994, before entering into a partnership with Paramount Pictures 2007. They released *Munich* (2006). The film shows an unprecedented attempt to break the cycle of violence by providing a rational depiction of both sides (as we will illustrate in Chapter 8). Another example is Miramax, which was founded by the brothers Harvey and Bob Weinstein and works in partnership with the Walt Disney Company. These new conditions of production allowed Michael Moore to release his satirical film *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004).

There are also small companies that are not owned by majors. These include Working Title Films, which co-operates with the majors in the distribution sector, as for example with *United 93* (2006). The major assumes overall responsibility for financing, production and editorial rights, while the independent companies may specialize in assembling scripts, finding actors or seeking a suitable director.

Independent companies are increasingly becoming involved in films about the Middle East. It is therefore essential to evaluate their position in Hollywood. Scott (2001) gives statistical information, calculated from data released in the *Annual Index to Motion Picture Credits*, about films released by majors and their subsidiaries during the years 1980-2000. The results show that the number of films released by the majors remained constant, while the subsidiaries increased their number, with parallel increases made by independents. It seems, therefore, that the majors are becoming dependent upon subsidiaries and independent production companies. This policy tends to distribute risk, allows experimentation with new opportunities and increases diversity in their range of products.

Independent production companies have increased over the past twenty years. Some of them have become an important and booming sector in Hollywood, especially in recent years. They make films for niche markets, including creative art films, TV commercials and documentaries for both domestic and overseas consumption. Independent distributors handle the distribution of their films. Some independents

work with the majors, while some never encounter them, the latter being involved in an entirely separate stream of creativity.

Although it is argued that there is a two tier system, nevertheless, the tiers are not completely polarized, because they both produce outcomes that are valuable to one another. In addition, independent companies spend part of their time working with the majors, as well as independently. In fact, it is arguable that a middle tier exists, composed of independent companies that work closely with the majors and the majors' own subsidiaries; this tier tends to widen the gap between majors and pure independents.

Molotch (1996) sums up the current Hollywood production system by referring to four features:

1. There are a number of production networks in various stages of disintegration.
2. There are a large number of personnel with various skills required by the industry.
3. There are representative organizations/associations that constitute an institutional environment.
4. It is located in a defined geographical area where its practices, traditions and institutions exist and give Hollywood a palpable expression. In fact, Hollywood has evolved into a regional complex.

These features give Hollywood a competitive advantage and maintain it as a leading centre for the production of movies. Like all megaliths, Hollywood is susceptible to stagnation and inertia, but the industry has always been able to effect successful adjustments to meet ever-changing situations and so ensure its survival, as for example with the development of digital technologies. Nevertheless, the film industry is not hermetically sealed within the geographical boundaries of Hollywood. A number of production companies have moved away to distant locations.

This decentralization has come about for two reasons: the quest for authentic outdoor locations and the reduction in production costs. Monitor (1999) refers to the firms involved in this movement as "creative runaways" and "economic runaways". The



move to distant locations such as Canada, UK, Australia and Mexico has resulted in dollar losses to the US, which in 1998 were in the order of \$2.80 billion (Monitor Company, 1999). This substantial loss is emphasized by the fact that of 1,075 US films and TV projects in 1998, 285 involved runaway productions to foreign countries (Monitor, 1999). Runaway affects TV productions rather than cinematic ones.

The creative runaways are a substantial element in the decentralization process, and accumulate various advantages in terms of financial and cultural gain. Both major and independent companies have followed this policy, to produce films such as *Munich* (Paris and Budapest), *Babel* and *Kingdom of Heaven* (Morocco) and *Syriana* (Canada). These productions were conducted without actual governmental support, military footage or observation. Thus creative runaways are one of the crucial alternatives that could degrade Hollywood's monolithic or cultural rhetoric.

Many recent productions have shown a great desire to reduce the financial cost and to find a supportive infrastructure. An analysis of runaway productions shows that amongst the advantages gained are low wages and rentals for equipment, beneficial foreign exchange rates and financial assistance from foreign governments. These advantages offset the high set-up costs of a distant or satellite location. There are also transaction costs, which include expenses for transport of personnel and equipment, as well as communication charges. Most significant are the implicit costs due to a decrease in managerial and creative control, which affects the quality of the product.

Transaction costs will be large for a high-budget film but small for ordinary TV productions. The economic feasibility of runaway production depends upon the interaction between average production and transaction costs at particular levels of scale for a given production. Low production costs can be nullified by high transaction costs. Therefore, it is important that transaction costs be kept to a minimum in order to encourage production to move to a satellite location. It is for these reasons that TV productions tends to be the result of runaway production. This means that Hollywood can continue to expect to lose particular types of productions to distant locations if the infrastructure is just as good. Currently however, runaway productions do not seem to be capable of seriously threatening the vibrancy of Hollywood, much less sound its death knell. This is for two reasons. First, Hollywood will be able to maintain its

competitive advantage in pre- and post-production work. Second, films that require close supervision and complex customized inputs will continue to form an important element in Hollywood's product range.

Therefore, Hollywood has a number of competitive advantages. These include a skilled and creative work force and the presence of institutions such as guilds, labour unions and producers' associations. In addition, there is a supportive infrastructure and the striking imagery of the geographical region and its closeness to other related cultural product industries. All these factors confer a certain durability, which is enhanced by a highly sophisticated distribution system.

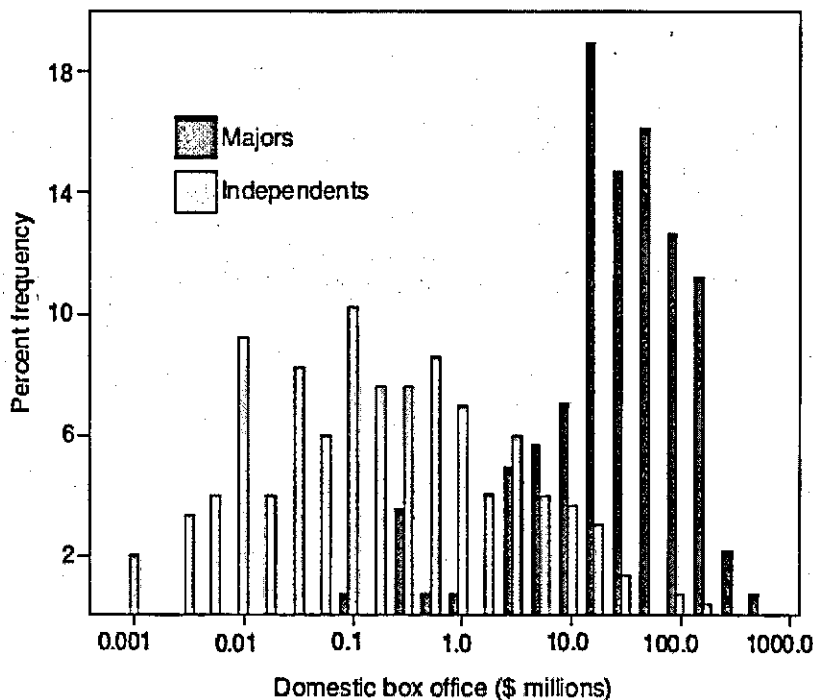
### **5.3 The Majors Still Dominate the Distribution Process**

Distribution is an essential component of the film industry. It not only disseminates Hollywood's products globally but also returns revenue and feedback. It therefore supports the health of the industry.

The distribution sector employs a large number of people, particularly in the Los Angeles area. Owing to this concentration, distribution companies tend to form extensive networks consisting of strong central management with diffused regional offices. Cones (1997) observe that these networks operate on a repetitive basis where the transmission of the product becomes routine. This has the effect of concentrating their operations, which reduces costs. Cones further notes that the economics of "blockbusters" (a staple diet of the majors) intensifies this concentration because of the high degree of marketing and distribution associated with such projects. This is particularly significant as these costs may be equal to or greater than the production costs of a blockbuster.

The intensity involved in marketing a blockbuster, which includes co-ordinated exhibition viewings, necessitates that majors work closely with the theatre chains. Waterman (1982) and Blackstone and Bowman (1999) point out that the above factors provide a rationale for vertical reintegration which, in fact, seems to be on the

increase. If this trend continues then a bifurcation similar to that in Hollywood's production activities is possible. For example, in 2001 an independent distributor, USA Films, was the first to displace a major, MGM, from the list of the top ten distributors, all the rest of whom were majors or subsidiaries of majors. This trend is illustrated in Figure 3



**Figure 3** Frequency distributions of domestic box-office returns for films released by majors and independents, 1999 (after Scott, A. J. (2001) *The Production and Distribution of American Motion Pictures*, p. 962)

Scott's study (2001) investigated frequency counts for domestic box-office revenues for major and independent producers. The figures were based upon 142 films released by majors and 304 films released by independents. The resulting bar chart shows a definite bimodality, which characterizes the frequencies. There is only a little overlap in the intermediate zone. The average domestic box office per film for the independents is \$2.3 million, while for the majors it is \$46.1million. This is a great difference and it implies that the majors are able to prevent the independents' entry into some of the more lucrative markets. The majors are concentrated in those lucrative areas, and this is why independents tend to cooperate with them in the distribution sector. Cones (1997) is of the opinion that this concentration is enhanced by what he refers to as the studios' "creative accounting" practices, where monies are

skimmed off at the distribution phase, reducing flow-back to production and payments to contractors as a percentage of producers' incomes.

It is obvious that Hollywood's power is more concentrated in the distribution rather than the production sector. Collaboration of independent companies with Hollywood subsidizers and majors show that whatever the production source, their films would not find lucrative areas without engaging in a partnership with the majors in the distribution sector. These films, of course, will not be subject to a major's policy, but they should meet the essential requirements of quality, cost and profitability. Steven Spielberg emphasized the difference between consultation and subjection when he stated that many politicians, including former President Bill Clinton, acted as consultants for his film. Spielberg, who is a co-owner of the Dream Works company, realized that the best way to achieve success for his film was to distribute through Paramount Studios (Schuker & Marr, 2008, p. A1).

A few further examples reveal more of this collaboration. Working Title Films had a partnership with Universal Pictures for *United 93*, while George Clooney's company engaged in distribution and exhibition with Warner Brothers for his controversial film *Syriana*. The rationale for this partnership is that the concentration of the majors in the distribution sector is an impediment to competition, as it is difficult for the independent to gain entry into the top tier. Furthermore, it is possible that the financier or bank will require a guarantee from the producer that the majors will distribute the film, so that the producer cannot exceed the film's budget (Wasko, 2003, p. 63).

Distribution with majors brings many advantages, as Hollywood's products are distributed not only domestically but also on a global basis. There has been a large growth in Hollywood exports since 1986. Intelligent marketing and distribution is required if overseas markets are to be successfully penetrated. Some majors own their distribution facilities abroad, while others enter into joint ventures and agreements with local distributors.

Vogel (1998) shows that since the mid-nineties the costs of Hollywood features have on average grossed more than their domestic box office returns. It seems, therefore, that foreign box-office revenue is essential to overall profitability. Therefore, the

presence of Hollywood films in overseas countries is not, as some critics would have it, a case of "dumping", but one of economic necessity.

The term "strategic trade" may be applied to this scenario. Strategic trade is about increasing returns in an environment of imperfect competition. It is therefore a source of revenue over and above normal profits. As applied to the film industry these effects are derived from the potency of the agglomerated economy of Hollywood and from efficiencies of size and distribution. These factors have impelled US films to the forefront in many overseas markets; while Chase (2000) point out, they are less well developed in overseas film industries, so that those industries are prevented from penetrating the US market to any great degree. Other factors that militate against penetration into the US market are language and culture. However, these last two factors do not seem to apply to US films going in the reverse direction (i.e. export). This is because the US based multinational conglomerates have very sophisticated commercial propaganda machines and far flung product distribution, which have successfully Americanized the overseas markets and made Hollywood's films competitive compared to domestic products.

In addition, monopolistic practices are encouraged by the US system. The Webb-Pomerane Act of 1918 allowed American firms to penetrate overseas markets and dominate them in a way that would be illegal in the US. Therefore, US film distributors are able to make block-bookings in foreign markets.

This is not to say that the role of the government has vanished, but the revenues gathered by strategic trade can be improved by what Scott (2001) terms "agencies of collective action", for example, industry associations and government bodies. These influential bodies can work towards removing obstacles to US market penetration of overseas markets. The MPAA for example (as we mentioned in the previous chapter), a highly financed organization representing the combined voice of all the majors, has proved very successful in helping the US film industry to penetrate foreign markets. In fact, it is because of their successful lobbying that Hollywood has received enormous assistance from the US Commercial and State Departments.

The success of US films has raised concerns not only about the economics of the trade, but also about the ensuing cultural issues (Feigenbaum, 1990; Chase, 2000). Films are cultural products that project particular sets of values that may be alien to the culture of the country where they are shown. Thus, there is both political and cultural resistance from countries around the world to the globalization of Hollywood. Culture involves many deep issues, such as identity, ideology and power. According to Scott (2001)

The current situation poses predicaments that call for some more imaginative framework of supra-national regulation than approaches based on the erroneous proposition that cultural products are essentially just inert commodities, like steel or car parts. (Scott, 2001)

Developments in information technology, which allow ever faster speeds of distribution across the world, will increase the cultural predicaments alluded to above. The massive resources at the disposal of the majors will ensure that they dominate this new world despite the fact that the new technologies will afford the small independents improved opportunities to tap into global markets.

In the longer term, the position of the Hollywood majors may be assailable. The new trends that have arisen can change Hollywood rhetoric, cultural context and stylistic form (as we will examine in the following chapters). The factors that contribute to success are available and the challenges are based on sophisticated means, and challenges may be mounted from other regions of the globe. Other countries are now developing their own agglomerate industries to produce indigenous cultural products, for example the Media Plus Programme in Europe.

Preferences and tastes in popular culture are ephemeral and susceptible to competition from elsewhere, so Hollywood's position is never absolute. However, Scott (2001, p. 972) states that,

Hollywood in its current incarnation is nonetheless one of the most remarkable examples of a successful industrial agglomeration anywhere in the world.

The analysis of the distribution sector shows that independent companies work out of necessity with the majors if their films are to appear in theatres, video or DVD stores in the United States and around the world. The films examined by this study have been subject to this regime. It is difficult for independent companies to gain success outside a major's distribution network. Attempts to do so, as for example with Bandwagon Filmworks' *Two Degrees*, Capital City Entertainment's *Fatwa* and Inspired Movies' *Red Mercury*, have been ineffective.

Thus the major distributors still maintain a powerful hold on the film business, and this hold is cultural as well as financial. Hollywood in effect became a propaganda machine projecting US culture, its values, national and international political agendas. It is axiomatic that change will occur through the evolution of new ideas by radical thinkers. Like any other institution, Hollywood is not immune to the process of change, and the films examined in this study are the products of a new structure known as "New Hollywood". As will be discussed, a new political activism has arisen, which challenges the established cultural values through the medium of films. This movement offers Hollywood the opportunity to liberate itself from the forces of government hegemony and evolve into an institution capable of reflecting the widest possible spectrum of free thought.

#### 5.4 Hollywood Celebrities and New Political Activism

It is true that American interests have been shaped through the vital association of US politicians with the motion picture industry. Mark Wheeler describes the association between politicians and Hollywood as a "two-way street" because the leaders of the film industry make contact or sometimes inroads into the centres of political power, while politicians use Hollywood's imagery and glamour to publicize their goals to a wider constituency. Inevitably, this association became significant to the international film world (Wheeler, 2006, p. 139).

The link began with Hollywood moguls such as Lew Wasserman, Arthur Krim and Jack Valenti, as they attempted to protect their business interests by building an influential relationship with the strategic power of the political classes. This relationship was nurtured by galas and through donations to election candidates, mostly to the Democratic Party. At the same time, politicians utilized celebrities' popularity to provide ideological support for their policies. The celebrity gradually became a fixture on the political scene, especially at times of presidential elections. This was witnessed during the presidential election of John F. Kennedy and continued with Bill Clinton, who courted Hollywood's favour more than any other president did, and was criticized for being a "tele-visual president" (Doherty, 2001, p. 156). Clinton appeared briefly with Jodie Foster in Robert Zemeckis' *Contact* (1997). His public relationship with Hollywood activists and moguls led Thomas Doherty to write,

President Clinton is seamlessly edited into the action...contemplate the all-but-inevitable credit line of a future production: starring, as himself, the President of the United States. (Doherty, 2001, p. 157)

Furthermore, Clinton received donations from studio bosses such as David Geffen, Jeffrey Katzenberg, Barry Diller, executives from Time Warner and Seagram (owners of Universal Studios), and director Steven Spielberg (Cooper, 1999, p. 1).

While both Republicans and Democrats have enlisted a host of Hollywood celebrities, it is the Democrats who have received more donations and support. Clinton received enormous support from Hollywood figures such as Robin Williams, Paul Newman, Dustin Hoffman, Sharon Stone and Whoopi Goldberg. Al Gore received funds and support from Hollywood corporations including Time Warner, and from individuals such as Oliver Stone, Rob Reiner, Kevin Costner, Jack Nicholson and Tom Hanks. The donations continued for the John Kerry presidential campaign. Some politicians, especially Republicans, considered that this sort of action would damage the nature of films by damaging "the nation's characters". Hollywood executives responded that Republicans were the first to subject Hollywood to regulation and censorship (Wheeler, 2006, p. 145). At the same time, Republicans were swift to counter with their own Hollywood supporters such as Bruce Willis, Arnold Schwarzenegger and



Sylvester Stallone, but their largest contributions were from their friends in the oil and gas industries (Nelson, 2001, p. 1).

Perhaps this explains why most of Hollywood's outlets tended to be pro-government during the Clinton period, especially in the presentation of Middle Eastern issues. For example, the role of terrorism was expanded in many films (as we will examine in the next chapter), thus sustaining American foreign policy by showing Muslims as a threat.

As described in the previous paragraphs, politicians are increasingly using Hollywood celebrities as credible figures in public life to support their aims and objectives. For Hollywood liberals this is a good opportunity to pursue their political goals, whether by affiliation or disputation. Until around 20 years ago, Hollywood's interest was increasingly determined by ideological fervour rather than business, which reflects Hollywood's tendency to articulate US imperial interests. The dominant sentiment of this material tended to be pro-Israel, if judged by Jack Shaheen's exhaustive survey of 900 Middle East related films, as well as similar work conducted by others (Shaheen, 2001; Suleiman, 1999; Edward, 2001; Fries, 2005; McAlister, 2006; Khatib, 2006; Semmerling, 2006).

Most of this work has shown that Arab people are represented in a highly negative and dismissive way. However, after September 11<sup>th</sup> a new phenomenon appeared. The previous and largely negative stereotypical representations of Arabs identified by Shaheen and his colleagues started to diminish, to become increasingly replaced by images that closely relate to the attitudes of the post-9/11 US Public Diplomacy (Bayles, 2005, pp. 47-48; Wakim, 2006, p. 21). Middle East related films now appear, at least superficially, to provide a more nuanced, complex and even somewhat positive depiction of the Arab and Muslim character.

The counterproductive consequences of US foreign policy in the Middle East created a negative reaction toward the United States, described by Chalmers Johnson as the blowback phenomenon. This involves a lot of social activism showing either confrontation with or submission to the government (Johnson, 2003, p. xii). The negative images of the occupation of Iraq led to enquiries into the legitimacy of US

political power at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and the rise of Hollywood's new radical activism brought into play strongly conflicting tendencies amongst Hollywood celebrities (Valantin, 2005, p. 121).

Hollywood activism is not a new phenomenon. The first attempt was in 1950, when the new left rallied against the subjectivity of the film industry, proclaiming that movies had become a "weapon of mass culture" (Christensen & Haas, 2006, p. 43). Later on, with the American onslaught on Vietnam, many celebrities articulated their opposition to the military operations. Activists such as Bert Schneider, Robert Vaughn, Jane Fonda, Donald Sutherland, Dick Gregory and Peter Boyle opposed the American war in Vietnam, but these objections did not find their way into Hollywood productions until several years into the war. This was because Hollywood's rhetoric was unified and played a legitimate role in political affairs (Valantin, 2005, p. 137). By 1980, Hollywood activism showed a rising opposition toward the Reagan Republican administration's hawkish ideology during the second Cold War, with activists such as Richard Gere, Mike Farrell and Capitol Hill questioning the morality of supporting dictators in Central America, while others like Newman and Sally Field rallied against nuclear weaponry (Wheeler, 2006, p. 152). Nevertheless, these activities did not blur the relationship between the White House and Hollywood, which still boosted the American empire with glamorous images (Sardar & Davies, 2004, p. 149).

The issues that made up the activists' agenda were diverse and encompassed many political and social objectives. Tim Robbins and Susan Sarandon objected to the single-minded military solution to terrorism (besides other issues). Mike Farrell and Warren Beatty called for economic justice and the implementation of real freedom, while Richard Gere asked the US government to support the Free Tibet movement. John Sayles called for an end to nuclear defence. Woody Harrelson organized a rally for environmental protection (Dickenson, 2006, p. 80). However, with the dramatic events of 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq, which turned into a "political quagmire" for Bush, the different movements combined to mount a serious campaign against US foreign policy, objecting in particular to the blowback effect of American imperialist actions. This started a chain reaction that political scientists call "political participation", diverting people from organizing campaigns, making donations,

leading rallies and political organization, to actually disclosing the negative consequence of US imperial objectives. In this new situation, Hollywood liberalism had been replaced by a more radical movement.

Ben Dickenson describes the new activism as Hollywood's "New Radicalism", because of its harsh and unprecedented criticism of the Bush administration's "realist" foreign policy post-9/11 (Dickenson, 2004, p. 107). Anti-Iraq activists such as Tim Robbins, Michael Moore, Alec Baldwin, Susan Sarandon, Jodie Evans, Sean Penn, Samuel L. Jackson and George Clooney disputed the militarization of US supremacy, which had been authenticated via a partnership between the media and the official authorities. They focused instead on anti-war activities and refused to participate in a popular media culture that helped and legitimated the war machine. Their work in movies such as *Lions for Lambs* (2007), *Home of the Brave* (2006) and *Syriana* (2005) shows a clear rebellion against the relationship between the Pentagon and the motion picture industry, on many occasions disputing what they believed to be attempts to colonize the world under the banner of freedom and the American justice system.

In feature films Robbins remained Hollywood's leading polemicist, making Bob Roberts's *Dead Man Walking* (1995) and *The Cradle Will Rock* (1999), which associated the new capitalism with fascism. Oliver Stone's *Nixon* (1995) and *America* (2001), also attempted to disclose politicians' contradictions. As well as making films, Hollywood activists organized an anti-globalization campaign to demonstrate against the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle, while Robbins and his partner Sarandon allied with Ralph Nadir during the 2000 American presidential election campaign to rebuke Hollywood for its ideological rhetoric in support of the militarization of American power (Wheeler, 2006, pp. 152-153).

However, the American invasion and occupation of Iraq also brought into play conflicting tendencies concomitant with the complex internal political developments. Consequently, Hollywood activism became more controversial in 2003 during the preparation for the invasion of Iraq. Cinematographer and radical campaigner Haskell Wexler pointed out that in 2004 Hollywood witnessed an unusual growth of anti-American campaigning. He suggested that with the daily publication of negative

images from Iraq the movement was likely to become more influential politically and socially (Dickenson, 2004, p. 108).

The actual confrontation between the new Hollywood left and the conservative hawks came with the catastrophic events of 9/11. The left castigated US foreign policy, presuming that it was responsible for the blowback phenomenon. Tim Robbins, Susan Sarandon and Michael Moore disputed the military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq to establish freedom by indiscriminate bombing, claiming that both the corporate media and US politicians were war-mongering (Wheeler, 2006, p. 153). The new left supported Robbins when they attended his play *Embedded*, which satirized the compliant coverage of "Operation Iraq Freedom" and defamed and caricatured George W. Bush and his Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld as co-plotters intent on taking over the world. Robbins inspired other new activists to conduct similar work. Accordingly, Sean Penn promoted his new film *The Pledge*, which disclosed the contradictions in US foreign policy and sought to express a scathing anger at the way American President George W. Bush had mobilized the country since the end of the Clinton era.

Nevertheless, their actions could not be compared to the intensity of Moore's, who criticized outright the militarism of the US government, especially George W. Bush, during his acceptance speech upon receiving his Oscar for his documentary film *Bowling for Columbine*. In that speech, he proclaimed his opposition to the war and called upon the President to be publicly shamed for his role in it (Dickenson, *Tongues Untied*, 2003).

This attack was not without precedent. Moore's earlier film *Fahrenheit 9/11* had led a ferocious attack on US foreign policy. Moore argued that the Republican administration was conditioning US society to wage what was in effect an immoral war. This enraged the traditional sector in Hollywood and as a result some of the studios, for example Disney, refused to distribute the film. Senator John McCain, the Republican Candidate for the 2008 presidential election, led the counter-attack. He characterized Moore as a traitor for working against American interests. However, these sentiments were not universally shared and Moore won the Palme D'Or at the

Cannes film festival, which showed the extent of the international recognition of his views (Bacharach, 2005, pp. 108-15).

The media conglomerates and some US politicians realized that they were facing an unprecedented growth of activism that could adversely affect Hollywood's power as a crucial pillar of ideological hegemony. They could identify in these movements three main features:

First, they took the protests seriously, as the activists had the capability to form coalitions, speak at demonstrations and organize rallies using the press and media. In addition, the activists mounted other projects to protest about militaristic images and discourses that infused the media culture, as well as being active in challenging the war and the death penalty.

Second, most of the activists had broken with the Democrats, feeling that Hilary Clinton had betrayed them by not distancing herself from her past support for Bush. George Clooney criticized the Democratic Party for backing "themselves into a corner", saying that they "didn't have the political resolve to tough it out and now they are paying the price" (Mills, 2006, p. 5). Alec Baldwin believed that Clinton's policy was a continuation of the Republican imperial project, while Danny Glover offended the Democratic Party by asking "Where have the Democrats gone?" (with regard to the war in Iraq) and arguing that "voting is a means to an end" (Dickenson, 2004, p. 145).

Third, the activists were breaking Hollywood rhetoric and using their movies as a means of personal protest by utilizing Hollywood's recent structural changes in production context to show their objection over US foreign policy. The new activist films are unprecedented, because they intervene in a live debate with a mass audience, unlike reaction to the Vietnam War, which did not occur until several years after the conflict. The new activists also showed a great desire to release their movies from the political influence of Hollywood's affiliation with the corporate media. They rejected Hollywood's typical combat genre, which has helped to sustain the US Empire and the military system that has protected it. George Clooney, Michael Moore, Paul Haggis, James C. Cusack, Brian De Palma, David O Russell and Robert Redford are all

activists whose political concerns are the "war on terror" and a critique of the US political agenda in the Middle East, which provides a rational image of the Arabs and Muslims (Dickenson, 2007).

In Paul Haggis's *In the Valley of Elah* (2007), Hank Deerfield is searching for his son, who has gone AWOL after serving in Iraq. Haggis explored the human consequence of the Iraq war, including the abuse of prisoners and the loss of American youths. Haggis sums up the common feeling about the war among a significant minority of Hollywood personalities. He said:

This is not one of our brighter moments in America... We should not have gotten involved.

James Cusaks expresses his anger more explicitly in *Grace Is Gone* (2007), which depicts a husband's patriotism in speaking out about the Bush administration's crimes for hiding the death of soldiers in Iraq. Questioning his wife's death during military duty, he says,

It's the most brazen, cowardly, egregious political act I'd seen in my lifetime. (Dickenson, 2007)

In the same year, Hollywood witnessed a new wave of anti-war movies, such as Robert Redford's *Lions for Lambs* (2007), with major actors including Tom Cruise and Meryl Streep. The film portrayed the corruption in the Bush administration and the unbalanced decisions that led the country into a futile war. This theme was continued in Gavin Hood's *Rendition* (2007), starring Reese Witherspoon and Jake Gyllenhaal, which depicted the CIA's role in Guantanamo as a major example of corruption and an assault on civil rights. The film also tends to portray Arabs as victims, so breaking Hollywood's stereotypical image of the Middle East.

George Clooney gave expression to the central argument of Hollywood liberals through a chain of anti-war movies such as *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind* (2002), *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2005) and *Syriana* (2005). In the last mentioned film, Clooney criticizes the US role in the Middle East (as we will discuss in Chapter 9) and demonstrates petroleum's critical role in US foreign and military

policy. Clooney refused to demonize the young terrorists; instead, he questioned the role of the CIA in turning Pakistani boys into suicide bombers. He explained,

You need to understand what creates those elements and what parts we are responsible for.... I'm not condoning or defending horrible, heinous acts, but there's a reason these things happen. (Mills, 2006, p. 9)

Clooney, along with his screenwriter Stephen Gaghan, emphasized that the war against terrorism is a war of ideas as much as a war of military power, because violence brings violence. In the same vein, Steven Spielberg's *Munich* (2005) shows a serious attempt to break the cycle of violence in the Arab-Israeli conflict by referring the endless war to ideological differences rather than the savagery of Arabs or superficial fighting between "good" Westerners and "bad" Arabs.

The new Hollywood activists show a great desire to release Hollywood's rhetoric from the political influence caused by its affiliation with the corporate media. The attempt to question the counterproductive policy of the Bush administration is seen particularly in Tim Robbins' call to globalize his movement to stop Bush and the US imperial agenda, especially with its new strategy of remapping the Middle East, a call which attracted the support of Susan Sarandon, George Clooney, Ed Begley, John Sayles, Woody Harrelson, Clint Eastwood, Ed Asner, Tony Kushner, Tom Cruise, Danny Glove, Barbra Streisand and Michael Moore. The new activism shows a clear tendency to demonstrate Hollywood's moderate rhetoric regarding US foreign policy in the Middle East by replacing Hollywood's traditional role with a more sophisticated one (as we will see in later chapters).

### 5.5 American Counter-action Against Celebrities' Activism

Hollywood activists claim that, as a result of attacking US foreign policy, they have experienced prejudicial treatment. They have been either blacklisted or ignored by Hollywood producers. They claim that they have been repeatedly warned to keep their

views private. Certainly, in the view of many critics, they have brought these criticisms on themselves

Social problems present themselves to many of these people in terms of a scenario which, once certain key scenes are linked...the plot will proceed inexorably to an upbeat fade...if poor people march on Washington and camp out there to receive some bundles of clothes gathered on the Fox lot by Barbra Streisand then some good must come of it... and doubt has no place in the story. (Bacharach, 2005, p. 108-15)

The activist movement has been criticized for intruding into complex issues and endangering American security, particularly during a period of war. The movement was ridiculed in Trey Parker and Matt Stone's puppet satire *Team America: World Police* (2005). Moore, Robbins, Penn, Baldwin and Sarandon were caricatured as the Film Actors Guild (FAG), which had supported the North Korean dictator Kim Ill Song (Wheeler, 2006, pp. 153-154). Many other activists were viciously maligned. Clooney, for example, became the butt of abuse by the political right when he questioned the Bush administration's strategy on Iraq. He was attacked on daily chat-shows in a personal manner, and portrayed as being ignorant of the issues and compromising US security (Mills, 2006, p. 9). Clooney, who has been described by Bush supporters as a traitor, tried to understand what motivated the terrorists. He argued that,

The truth is you still have to ask questions. We do have Syria, Iran and North Korea. We've got a lot of other issues and we don't want to have to go into these with an [ideological] agenda and then fake whatever information we need to back up our agenda again. (Allen-Mills, 2006, p. 9)

Robbins and his partner Sarandon were ignored and disinvited to the Baseball Hall of Fame's celebration to celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of *Bull Durham* (1988). They were excluded from the commemoration despite playing the leading roles in the film.



They were criticized for their statements against the President and the war effort. Robbins responded that,

I had been unaware that baseball was a Republican sport. I was looking forward to a weekend away from politics and war to celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of 'Bull Durham.' I am sorry that you have chosen to use baseball and your position at the Hall of Fame to make a political statement. ... As an American who believes that vigorous debate is necessary for the survival of a democracy, I reject your suggestion that one must be silent in a time of war.

(Mackay, 2003, p. 18)

The confrontation between the media conglomerates and Hollywood's new activists could influence the structure and the practice of the media culture and US ideological rhetoric. Hollywood's recent productions have shown a great desire to transcend the typical combat genre in representing the American "good war". Moreover, today's media are granting the Middle East a central position, with the result that Arabs can no longer be vilified by the same rhetoric or easily ignored. This applies not only to news coverage but also to all cultural productions including cinema. The cinema is a powerful tool, whose representations lie at the heart of the public's image of the modern Middle East.

As described above, the changes in political context were consequences of the obvious changes to the industrial context of Hollywood, which provided adequate opportunity for counter-rhetoric or contradictive text regarding American foreign policy. The main changes can be found in the structure of new productions and their distribution.

## 5.6 Conclusions

Films are cultural vectors, which Hollywood is able to manipulate either positively or negatively to varying extents. Manipulation is impelled by the policies and motives of those that have a stake in maintaining the prevailing power structure in a society.

Films are able to transmit true cultural values as well as those that are engineered with bias and those that contain untruths.

Independent film production companies are free from the influence of the Establishment. They provide opportunities for free, independent thinking and the formation of new ideas. These ideas can be enshrined in films without interference from the Establishment.

New Hollywood is characterized not only by the rise of the independent film production companies, but also by a stylistic approach that moves the new image of the Middle East away from Hollywood's traditional one. Therefore, despite the commercial domination by the majors over the distribution sector, New Hollywood has the opportunity to liberate itself from government influence and interference and its slavish adherence to US Middle East foreign policy. Some of the resulting films, including those mentioned in this chapter, are available for the public to view. It is apparent that this genre of film attempts to redress the balance by presenting an unbiased view with a less politically and socially condescending portrayal of the Arab and Muslim character. This radical movement may in time cause a shift in public sentiment, which the US government may find irresistible. It is at this point that government policy is likely to change and become reflected in Hollywood films. If this is the case, even the majors will reflect the new thinking.

Before we describe the new changes that are found in post-9/11 movies, the next chapter will examine the political motives that are enshrined within the US government, and their influence upon Hollywood's portrayal of the Middle East.

## 6 THE MIDDLE EAST ON THE BIG SCREEN

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### 6.1 Introduction

The Middle East has long been ubiquitous in American cultural rhetoric; topics featuring Arabs and Muslims appear in various American media including discussions, news coverage and, most accessibly and influentially, in films and television entertainment programmes.

From the earliest days of Hollywood, filmmakers have portrayed Arabs and Middle Easterners in exotic ethnic terms (Khatib, 2006, p.2). This has served as the perfect backdrop for film productions in which they have played the villain opposite American “good guys” and so created a stereotypical image of “Otherness”. Many attempts have been made to analyze this negative Arab stereotype by showing how American cultural fears, which stem from challenges to national ideologies and myths, have led to the creation of the dangerous “Arab Other”.

This chapter will begin by tracing the evolution of Hollywood’s representation of the Middle East, from the days when the camera first started cranking to the beginning of our current century, wherein the stereotypical image is highly negative. It is useful to study the origins of this defamation as described by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* (1987). He pointed out how Orientalism contributed to the creation of the dichotomy between the West and the East, whereby the first dominated the second and the East was depicted or identified as the West's “Other” and the source of its identity.

## 6.2 The Representation of the Middle Eastern in Hollywood Films

Said shows how eighteenth-century British officials embraced Orientalism as a self-serving view of Asians, Africans, Arabs and Muslims in terms of their perceived deficiencies and inferiority. This allowed the imperialists to rationalize and justify their activity in the East. For the British Orientalist,

Ottoman despotism, Islamic obscurantism and Arab racial inferiority had combined to produce a backward culture that was badly in need of Anglo-Saxon tutelage. (Little, 2004, p. 10)

With power shifting from Britain to America after 1945, Said followed the subconscious transfer of this image and discourse to American popular attitudes and foreign policies towards the Middle East (Said, 1978, p. 284).

Said mentioned that Orientalist works or representations of the East were intimately entangled with the military, economic and political strategies of western countries. This was also pertinent to literature, where Said provided a significant framework for Orientalism as practised in the West, with particular attention to the United States. However, he presents no specific criteria for the evolution of this negative image in the western media, chiefly in the cinema, where some examples would have been welcome.

Said presented Orientalism as a multifaceted discourse, a “textual relation” (McAlister, 2005, p. 9) focusing on the characterization of Arabs and Muslims according to three major dogmas. The first of these was the creation of a systematic difference that distinguished the civilized West from the backward East. This can be seen in American films, especially the earliest productions where Egyptian Arabs are comically portrayed as villains: cowardly, barbaric, awful and sinister (Khatib, 2006, p. 5). Later, Hollywood represented Middle Easterners not only as villains but also as lacking in morals and honour, as is obvious in movies like the *Hostage* series (1986-1992), in which we see Arabs on a plane brutally raping and killing not only young

females but also mothers and the elderly. In addition, we traditionally see that the American hero captures the Arab criminal. The most important point is that these Arabs really need and will continue to need American assistance, as represented in *Three Kings* (1999), where the American Army protects Iraqi civilians from their oppressive government. In this way, Orientalism reduces the "Other" in a systematic process of distortion to justify America's role in the region. As Said described,

They must be foreign devils, otherwise what is our gigantic military machine doing there? (Said, you tube, 2003)

The second dogma, according to Said, was the tendency for Orientalism to generalize the Western perception of the Orient and to purposefully ignore the diversities between Middle Eastern countries. Thus, the presentation of the East was "scientifically objective". This is another way in which the West tries to justify its hegemony over the East (Said, 1978, p. 301).

Finally, Orientalism produces the idea that the Orient is a perilous place that should be controlled. This is presented clearly in Hollywood movies, wherein Arab associations continue to be a threat, not just to the West but also to the East itself. Thus, Said states that the relationship between the Orient and the Occident is that of imperialism, domination and hegemony and, it "is hegemony ... that gives Orientalism ... durability and strength" (Said, 1978, p. 7).

### 6.3 Different Stages of the Middle Eastern Representations

Unlike Said, Jack Shaheen (2001), in his huge documentary book *Reel Bad Arabs*, deliberated on the Arab stereotype as shown in nine hundred films. Shaheen scrutinized the slanderous history of representation of the Arabs, dating from the cinema's earliest days to the year 2001, and concluded that Hollywood rendered the Middle East in exotic terms that stoked ill feeling, distrust and loathing. Shaheen emphasized that Hollywood's presentation of Arabs as a pestilential threat was wildly

alienating, pointing out that "The Muslim Arabs continue to surface as the threatening culture of 'Others'" (Shaheen, 2000, p. 23).

Shaheen believed that this depiction changes and fluctuates according to the evolution of world politics. The consistent movie representations of Middle Easterners that he has documented include

Bearded Mullahs, billionaire sheiks, terrorist bombers, Black Bedouins and noisy bargainers. Women surface as either gun toters or bumbling subservients or as belly dancers bouncing voluptuously in places and erotically oscillating slave markets. More recently, image-makers are offering other caricatures of Muslim women: covered in black from head to toe. They appear as uneducated, unattractive and enslaved beings, slowly attending men, they follow several paces behind abusive sheiks. (Shaheen, 2000, p. 23)

In his documentary work, Shaheen dissected the perpetuation of this malignant stereotype, examining how and why it had grown and spread in the film industry. He also warned of the deleterious effect of the alienation process of the American social construction, asking what may be done to change Hollywood's defamation of the Arabs. Although Shaheen's earliest research was on US television, he found that motion pictures use images of the Middle East quite like those he observed in television depictions.

In fact, today's "Reel Arabs" are more stereotypical than yesteryear's. The portrayal of Arabs in the cinema may actually be getting worse, with representations that are drawn in specifically racial and religious terms (Muscati, 2002, p. 132). Shaheen argued why Hollywood seems averse to staging the more positive side of the Arab heritage. He pointed out the Arab contribution to American and other civilizations in science, arts, architecture, agriculture and literature. He argued that it is hard to find any Arabs represented as talented and hospitable citizens, lawyers, bankers, doctors, homemakers, engineers or environmentalists. From 1896 until 2001, filmmakers have projected all Arabs as a public enemy bent on terrorizing civilized Westerners (Shaheen, 2001, pp. 3-4).

Jack Shaheen stressed that he was not saying that Arabs should never be portrayed as villains, but that it is unjust that all Hollywood depictions of Arabs are bad ones; the slanderous image of Arabs literally maintains these adverse portraits across generations without even one exception. The image of Arabs as detestable includes women and older people, as well as infants and young people, who are usually portrayed as grimy children, killers' assistants and robbers. These, along with many other examples, simply maintain the rigid, repetitive, scurrilous and stereotypical image. Shaheen's book aimed to guide the reader by presenting more than nine hundred films in which Arabs, either on the screen or in the scenarios, are grouped into five defamatory Arab character types - Villains, Sheiks, Egyptians, Palestinians and the members of a Harem - many of which overlap.

Shaheen's *Reel Bad Arabs* is an indispensable reference tool to help find films that abuse Arab characters. However, his work is capable of expansion in order to investigate the source of propaganda images, despite his assertion that the perpetuation of the attitudes he describes was purposeful and politically motivated.

Tim Jon Semmerling (2006) argues that Shaheen's descriptive work does not reveal all it could about these films. He adds that the construction of "evil" Arabs as an evolution of exoticism should be explored in greater depth: for example, Shaheen's discussion of *Rules of Engagement* takes up only two inches of text, which is "by far too little" (Semmerling, 2006, p. 3). While the films themselves drive the audience to be aware of their obsessive cultural use of "evil" Arabs, Semmerling suggests that Shaheen should add a section to his book exploring the use of the Arabs as a replacement threat for the Soviet Communists.

Brian Edward, Assistant Professor of English and Comparative Literary Studies at North-western University, is one of the few authors to have made a direct link between the end of the Cold War and a shift in Hollywood, leading to Arabs and Muslims playing the "enemy role" instead of Soviet Communism. Edward wrote that

With the end of the Cold War a new foe quickly took the place of Soviet communism in the imagination of many Americans. Much of the

same energy that animated American fear of the "red" menace (allegedly the Soviets) shifted during the 1990s in panic in response to the "green" terror, which is the use of terrorism by militant Islamic fundamentalism. (Edward, 2001, p. 13)

Edward draws on his experience as a literary critic and finds that the negative stereotype of the Middle East - designated as "Hollywood Orientalism" - is persistent and insidious.

In his study *The Evolution of Hollywood Portrayals of Soviet and Middle Easterners 1980-2000*, Jamie C. Fries criticizes Edward's work, describing it as lacking in historical documentation with conclusions that "lean toward the overwrought" because the exotic elements of the depiction of Arabs were already in existence. Fries sees the real questions as concerning the way in which this stereotype was amplified, and why (2005, p. 33). He points out that the different stages of substituting the Middle Easterners served American foreign policy objectives, and he tries to examine the link between US diplomacy and popular films' portrayals of both the Soviets and Arabs. Fries claims that this determination, although hard to prove, is true (2005, p. 33).

Fries agrees with Michel Suleiman, who suggested that the image of Arabs and Muslims in the American media, and Hollywood's representation of the Middle East, "ebbed and flowed with the foreign policy realities of the United States across time" (Fries, 2005, p. 320). Fries addressed various examples of Hollywood productions and posited that, whether it facilitated its mission or not, the American evaluation of countries and political events such as the Iranian revolution and the Arab oil embargo of the US was observable. He categorized two levels for these depictions. The early depiction of Middle Easterners, before WW2, showed the absence of a diplomatic strategy in the region, focusing only on ethnic and stereotypical exoticism rather than politics. The second depiction gained in popularity after the Iranian revolution, when the Middle East took on the role of the enemy in American films. As time passed, the growing numbers of attacks by Middle Eastern terrorists gave Hollywood many opportunities to show Middle Easterners in a strongly negative light (Fries, 2005, p. 320).



Michael Suleiman asserted that Hollywood's stereotype of Arabs purposefully persists with the concept of "Otherness" in order to segregate them as primitive, backward and dangerous people that need, and will continue to need, American help. He believed that the US has used propaganda to facilitate its political objectives, inquiring why Hollywood has, for more than a century, been perpetuating a hostile relationship with most of the Middle Eastern world (Suleiman, 1999, p. 34). He concluded that this has been purposeful and highly motivated, especially when it comes to the Arab-Israeli conflict. In addition, he traced the origin of American Middle Eastern stereotypes to when US superpower and oil interests clashed with Arab nationalism and collided with the Iranian revolution and Islamic influence (Suleiman, 1983, pp. 340-341).

To obtain a considered and wide-ranging view, the research will also lean on one of the most comprehensive treatments of the Middle Eastern stereotypes, the book *Split Vision: The Portrayal of Arabs in the American Media*, edited by Edmund Ghareeb. The book's complex form offers a variety of sources and information and reveals previously unknown aspects of American media policy towards the Middle East through a variety of opinions, including interviews with influential media personalities such as Richard Valeriani, Jim McCartney and Peter Jennings, as well as a scholarly analysis.

In her study *Images of the Middle East in Contemporary Fiction*, Janice J Terry, Professor of History at Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti, agrees with Suleiman's assessment that Arab stereotypes are politically motivated. Terry studied the image of the Middle East before 9/11, and notes that portrayals of the Arab-Israeli conflict are obviously unbalanced. She writes that

Pro-Zionist supporters quickly recognized the effectiveness of popular fiction as a vehicle to establish and reinforce sympathy for Israel. (1983, p. 315)

In her study *Arab/Muslim "Otherness"*, Sina Muscati pointed out that the American media, including Hollywood, always orchestrates its outputs to serve American foreign policy objectives in the Middle East. Thus the concept of "Otherness" is amplified accordingly (2002, pp. 131-132). Lina Khatib has explored this opinion in

detail in her book *Filming the Modern Middle East*. Khatib emphasizes that the alienating picture of Arabs as threatening “Others” is profoundly linked to political events associated with the Middle East (2006). Thus, in this chapter the research will illuminate the evolution of this stereotype from the early stages to the present day.

### 6.3.1 First stage: Early Hollywood productions

Dating from the earliest days of the movies to the period of the Cold War, the Middle East image has been badly blurred. The image of the Arab had been formed by magic lantern shows of various epics, and crusades against the “murdering infidel” in *Sultan of the Arabian Nights* and the Sheik films of Rudolph Valentino in the 1920s (Ghareeb, 1983, p. ix). McAlister reminds us of the influential role of Orientalism, especially in this period, in creating a certain type of lens through which Americans have represented the Orient as the “stuff of children’s books and popular movies” (2005, p. 8), a world of fantasy bundled with funny caricatures of Arabs (2005, p. 9).

Sumiko Higashi agrees with McAlister that Americans drove the image of the Middle East in the Orientalist world. This image was highly supported by Siegel-Cooper productions such as a six-week-long Carnival of Nations, and an Oriental Week that was a classical representation of Arabian fantasy (Higashi, 1994, pp. 89-90) in which the Orient became a “highly visible symbol in the emerging structures of a consumer culture” (McAlister, 2005, p. 21). Conquering new markets was an essential requisite to improve both production and consumption in the American economy (Jacobson, 2000, p. 6). Many of these narratives found their way onto the big screen; for example *Garden of Allah*, transformed into silent films in 1917 and 1927, was about an English woman who finds sexual adventure in the Sahara with an Arabian sheik, wherein Arab life was satirically characterized. With such themes, Arabian fantasy consequently became a phenomenon in the cinema (Leach, 1993, p. 111).

*Garden of Allah* displayed the classic features that were embodied in Orientalist work about the Middle East, where most of the action takes place in the desert and the Arabs function as “mystics and dimwits” (Shaheen, 2001, p. 215). Most of the films that followed, such as *Flame of the Desert* (1919), *An Arabian Night* (1920), *Arabia*

(1922), *Tents of Allah* (1923), *Fleetwing* (1928), and of course the famous versions of *Aladdin*, *Ali Baba* and *The Mummy*, were repeating or even documenting the stereotypical portrait of Arabs and Muslims.

Hollywood productions in this period show a great desire to expel or expose Middle Easterners as "Others"; they are depicted as "the white men's burden" in movies like *The Desert Song* (1929) and *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad* (1934), which show white Western men rescuing the Eastern people from primitive barbarian sheiks. Another side of the defamation is to be seen in *Hollywood Harems*, with reference to which Diya Abdo has illustrated that while Arab males are typically portrayed by Hollywood as disgustingly sinister and ruled by their sexual desire, Arabian females are stereotypically represented as being humiliated, demonized and eroticized (2002, pp. 235-236). *Hollywood Harems* also provides a good example of Hollywood's paradoxical portrayal of Arab females either as bosomy belly dancers leering out from diaphanous veils, or as shapeless Bundles of Black driven by their males (Shaheen, 2001, p. 22). Abdo claimed that this delusive representation was complementing "some concepts in postcolonial theory, the most relevant of which is Orientalism" (2002, p. 229).

Another stereotypical idiosyncrasy of this period of Hollywood movies is the representation of the Arabian sheik. Shaheen pointed out those American films began to present a perverted image of a typical sheik. Instead of portraying him as an elderly man of wisdom, screenwriters damaged the real values of this type of Muslim religious leader through one hundred and sixty films portraying the sheik as a "stooge-in-a-sheet", slovenly, hook-nosed, dwelling in tents, always intent on capturing pale-faced blonde-haired women for their harems. In *Sheik Hadj Tahar Hadi Cherif* (1894), *Power of The Sultan* (1907), *The Sheiks* (1921), *The Fire and The Sword* (1914), *The Sheik's Wife* (1922) and *The White Sheik* (1928) Arab sheiks move swiftly and violently to deflower Western maidens. As Edward Said noted,

The perverted sheikh can often be seen snarling at the captured Western hero and blonde girl...and saying "My men are going to kill you, but they like to amuse themselves before they do". (Said, 1978, pp.19-20)

In addition, these films tend to defame or destroy the Middle East culture by mixing its heritage with Islamic principles. As Shaheen claimed, "Producers have tarred an entire group of people with the same sinister brush" (2001, p. 11). He mentions hundreds of movies that call Arabs jackals, rats, bastards, pigs and devil-worshippers and show them in ruthless, uncivilized and filthy images (2001, p. 11).

The basic strategy is to assert American superiority; that is, brutal Arabs versus heroic Americans. Actually, this was indicative of the interplay between US policy and businesses, based on economic interests (McAlister, 2001, p. 30). During this period America was replicating its model of economic, political and cultural development (Raines, 1983, p. 69), and later this strategy proved to have been a suitable preparation for a second period of military expansion.

### **6.3.2 Second stage: After WW2 - characterization of the Middle East in the light of the Arab-Israeli conflict**

The best reference for this period is Melanie McAlister's *Epic Encounters* (2005). She is uniquely placed to reveal what she calls "the often invisible significance of the Middle East to American policy", and claims that Hollywood reconfigured American investment in the Middle East through biblical constructions. She points out that with the creation of Israel, Hollywood released epic films such as *The Ten Commandments* (1956), *Exodus* (1960), *El-Cid* (1962), *The Prodigal*, (1955), *Solomon and Sheba* (1959) and *Ben-Hur* (1959), an endeavour she describes as an overlapping between religious and political interests on one side and seeking to repulse Soviet influence in the region on the other.

This period witnessed the beginning of Hollywood's substitution for the US propaganda machine (Robb, 2004, p. 15). Cultural, economic and political conditions in America led to a further extension of presentation of the Orientalist model of the Middle East to the American audience. With the creation of Israel in 1948, the representational dynamic became associated with the meaning of the Middle East as an historical construction as well as (of course) societal depiction; thus, biblical and historical stories were used to define the original rights for Arabs and Muslims in the

Holy Land (McAlister, 2005, pp. 55-56). Films of the period support the allegations that the Holy Land, in particular Palestine (which had been ruled by the Ottoman Empire since 1517), was connected to the West through Jewish and Christian history (2005, p. 13). In *The Ten Commandments*, the story is told as described in the Bible; Moses frees the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, leading them to the Promised Land (Shaheen, 2001, p. 473). The film was religiously inflected with moral and political lessons about freedom, revolution and slave states.

Alan Nadel claims that the biblical form of these movies should be read in terms of both the policy of containment and American foreign policy in the Middle East (Nadel, 1993, p. 421). The strategic importance of the Middle East required a full containment of the Soviet influence in the region, based on the Truman Doctrine of 1947, by which the US committed itself to providing military assistance for any country threatened by oppression or outside force. In his study *The United States and the Middle East, 1945-1993*, H.W. Brands proposes that the Truman Doctrine "amounted to an American declaration of the Cold War" (1994, p.17). Later, President Eisenhower wrote that "no region in the world received as much of my close attention and that of my colleagues as did the Middle East" (Brands, 1994, p. 19).

US commitment to the Middle East referred to three essential interests that heighten its strategic importance: religious origins, support for Israel and access to oil wells as an irreducible material interest (McAlister, 2005, p. 35). America started its project in the Middle East by separating the region from European imperialism (the process of decolonization) on one side, and the control of the threatening influence of Communism on the other. The Hollywood production *Exodus* employs very similar strategies in describing the Israeli foundation of state of Israel. The story, based on Leon Uris' book of the same name (Shaheen, 2001, p. 189), deliberates the Zionist perspective on the founding of Israel. The film shows Jewish endurance under the British Mandate and in Nazi Germany in order to reach Palestine. While the film includes a moral message about revolution against oppressive power, it was heavily weighted towards Israel in her conflict with the Arabs and (of course), confirmed the "American impressions of Israelis as heroes, and of Arabs as villains" (Shaheen, 2001, p. 189). Also, this film reflected American involvement in the Middle East, because it

did more to polarize American public opinion in favour of Israel than any other presentation by Hollywood or the media in general.

Another prime example was one of Hollywood's greatest productions of the last century, *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), with its unforgettable performances by some of the greatest actors of the period, Alec Guinness, Anthony Quinn and Omar Sharif. It shows the adventures of the British hero (Peter O'Toole) in the colonized Arab states, which ironically gave the movie unexpected popularity, especially with Middle Eastern audiences. The eponymous hero strives to unify the Arab tribes to fight the brutal and self-serving Turkish imperialism (Fraser, 2006, pp. 131-132). Although the film included an advanced portrayal of the Middle East people and their countries, the notion of exoticism did not vanish from the screen; Lawrence's presented in psycho-sexual pathology in which it is made explicit that his self-directed love of the desert is at odds with Arabic vision, so the old feature was painted with moral lessons.

During the colonial period the US defined itself as the alternative power. Although Britain granted Egypt nominal independence in 1948, she still considered that country to be part of the British Empire. When Nasser came to power in 1952, Britain failed to maintain the same political influence, and after the nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956 the former colonial powers - Britain and France - proceeded to make a military intervention. President Eisenhower decisively refused to support this action and threatened to stop shipments of American oil to Britain, while the US worked to eliminate the British influence in the Middle East. For the Americans, it was crucial to replace the imperial powers and gain what they felt to be appropriate access to the Middle Eastern oil (Lenczowski, 1983, pp. 40-55).

Thus the representation of the Middle East has been depicted by biblical themes, the foundation of Israel, the Arab-Israeli conflict and separating the Middle East from the colonizing powers. All these issues were deliberated stressing the region's "Otherness". Hollywood's representation of Arabs maintained the stereotypical image, which was actually an extension of the Orientalist perspective on the Middle East, as inferior and backward and having only a minor role to play. However, movies were beginning to show the Middle East in storylines with a political bent (Fries, 2005, p. 7).

### 6.3.3 Third stage: The 1970 Arab oil embargo - Hollywood offensive against the Middle Eastern countries

The Hollywood offensive against the Middle Eastern countries was dramatically accelerated in the early 1970s with the Western oil crisis. The Arab-Israeli conflict produced unexpected problems when in October 1973 OPEC, an organization of mostly Arab Oil Petroleum Exporting Countries, announced an embargo on oil shipments to Israel's allies. Arab leaders declared their solidarity with Egypt and Syria in their confrontation with the West by embargoing the oil until Israel pulled out of the occupied territories. When Saudi Arabia imposed its oil embargo against the US, Hollywood came to see the Middle East as a growing threat (Brands, 1994, p. 19). In this period, the American media and Hollywood represented the Arabs outside their biblical context with more emphasis on their "Otherness" (Khatib, 2006, 10).

Arabs were viewed as primitive people living in the desert; but where Arabs were found so was oil, and this indispensable energy source gave them the power to control Western livelihoods. Michael Suleiman believed that Hollywood was repeating the government line by showing that Arabs were the real threat and that they are united only in their hostility to the West and in their opposition to Israel (Suleiman, 1983, p. 389). During this period, a new breed of politically minded films made its way to the big screen (Fries, 2005, p. 144). This was especially so after 1972, when political events followed the already distorted image of the Middle East, as a strike force of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) calling themselves "Black September" hijacked and murdered eleven Israeli athletes at the Olympic Games in Germany. This event advertised the idea of the existence of radical Arab opposition to Israel. Later, Hollywood released *Black Sunday* (1976), a film that shows how terrorism was spreading from the Middle East to the Western world itself (Shaheen, 2001, pp. 104-105).

In *Black Sunday*, a group similar to Black September is planning to use the Goodyear Blimp to blow up Miami's Florida Stadium, where the American President and the audience are attending a game. It was obvious that the massacre at Munich and the

furious public response to it had damaged the Palestinian cause to the extent that the PLO leader pledged to end all guerrilla or terrorist activity outside Israel. However, for Americans, the propaganda machine was working to bridge the gap between worldwide security and Arab terrorism, and Hollywood often began to fictionalize terrorism within the Islamic context (Semmerling, 2006, pp. 99-101). Although *Black Sunday* involved the same genuine incidents and realities, the film showed an extension of the Orientalist practice of obscuring other realities and distorting the image of the Middle East in a way that obviously served the American imperial objectives in the region (Fries, 2005, p. 144).

America's presence in the Middle East has been censured for many reasons. These have included their assisting in the overthrow of the Iranian elected government to impose the brutal dictatorship of the Shah in order to guarantee the oil supply from the region; their intervention in the Lebanese civil war in support of the beleaguered pro-Western (mainly Christian) groups against an increasingly turbulent and radicalized Arab majority (Lockman, 2004, pp. 119-110); and finally and most importantly, their supporting Israel in her ideological conflict with the Arabs. In all this, Hollywood presented the US role in the region as the power of "protection" rather than "invasion": *The Ambushers* (1967), *Operation Thunderbolt* (1977), *Slavers* (1977), *The Jerusalem File* (1973) and *Embassy* (1973) often showed America protecting the region from the growing threat of Middle East terrorism and radicalism.

These movies support Israel in her conflict with a clear ignorance of the Palestinian perspective and a lack of concern for their sufferings under the occupying authority. They represent the Zionist effort to ensure US support for Israel as an American ally by presenting it as a civilized country surrounded by radical nations. In *Operation Thunderbolt*, for example, Arabs are presented as an extension of the Nazi threat and all Westerners stand side-by-side with Israel against the Arab hijackers. In the film, an Israeli tells a German (who does not believe him), "I don't trust Arabs. They are really dangerous. They will kill us like the Nazis" (Shaheen, 2001, p. 358), and the film later shows this to be true.

Middle Eastern terrorism increasingly became a fixture of Hollywood's films. The American-Israeli alliance was further vindicated in *Prisoner in the Middle* (1974), in



which the US took the decision to save the world from Arab terrorism, sending the hero, Tony Steven, to find and disarm a missing nuclear weapon. The film explicitly shows Hollywood's partiality against the Arab and Muslim world (Shaheen, 2001, p. 380). With the same theme as *Black Sunday*, *Rosebud* (1975) shows a CIA agent trying to save three wealthy young Greeks who have been kidnapped by PLO terrorists (Shaheen, 2001, pp. 402-403). *The Next Man* (1976) shows even more inclination to associate terrorism with the Arab-Israeli conflict; in the film, Arabs opposing peace kill the Americans, and Palestinians kill the Israelis (Shaheen, 2001, p. 349). The film provides a clear example of the Orientalist practice of obscuring other realities about the region.

Marouf Hasian explains that these movies were serving the government's political line and giving the justification for American presence and activity in the Middle East. Hence, the Arabs should be depicted as a filthy and backward nation that needs and will continue to need Western aid (1998, 1998, pp. 210-215). Michael Suleiman asserted that the manipulation process involved not just media moguls who control most of Hollywood's output, but also the American government via an FBI project, the so-called "Abscam Operation" (1983, p. 340). Suleiman emphasized that this project aimed to reinforce the popular image of the Arab sheik as a filthy person living off oil well revenues; as a liar and a cheat who lusts after women; and as one who may resort to bribery and corruption to get what they want from American legislators. Suleiman believes that the "Abscam Operation" was the first indication of the collaboration between the American Administration and the media moguls, including Hollywood. He added that, via this project, a negative Arab image was implanted in the American public consciousness, whilst Israel's importance as an American ally was emphasized and strengthened (1983, pp. 340-341).

Thus the presentations in this period still relied on the theme of Middle Eastern exoticism, but this was extended to include for the first time the Arab involvement in political events. So the process of alienation continued.

### 6.3.4 Fourth stage: After the Iranian revolution: from villains to demonized threats

In 1980, events in the Middle East hit the United States as never before. In 1979, America regretfully watched as its long-time Iranian ally, Shah Muhammad Reza, was toppled by the Islamic revolution. The situation was exacerbated dramatically when the leader and spiritual guide of the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, declared that the revolution should be exported throughout the Middle East and that Israel should be destroyed. Hence, America believed that military and/or cultural containment was required (McAlister, 2005, p. 2), and terrorism and the oil threat served as the perfect backdrop for Hollywood movies. The tension between the US and the Middle East heightened, reaching a peak when Khomeini and his supporters denounced the United States as a satanic enemy of Islam (Donovan & Scherer, 1992, p. 146).

In 1980, a group of militant students managed to break into the American embassy in Tehran, taking the fifty-two employees inside as hostages. The 444 days of their captivity not only strengthened Khomeini's power to control Iran, but also helped to topple American president Jimmy Carter, who failed to secure the release of the hostages (Donovan & Scherer, 1992, p. 147). Whatever the impulses were, this action was a significant moment that authenticated the Orientalist discourse regarding the image of the Middle East. Edward Said presents the best analysis of the impact of this crisis in his text *Covering Islam* (1981). He argued in *How the Media and Experts determine how we see the Rest of the World*, that Muslims are associated with militancy, danger and anti-Western sentiment because, in all reports, the Iranian revolution symbolized the Muslim world and resulted in the perception of Muslims as terrorists holding the US hostage (1981, pp. 42-43).

Said pointed out that the media and the "cultural apparatus" of America and the West presented a concept of Islam based on their ignorance, cultural hostility and racial hatred; thereby, Islam was already "covered up" (1997, p. 43). Said believed that the media images received are "informed by official definitions of Islam that serve the interests of government and business" (1997, p. 9). The American authorities labelled the region and emphasized the Orientalist ideological framework to justify their

imperial objectives (Dahlgren & Chakrapani, 1982, p. 45). Also, Kellner has shown how the Western governments were involved in managing the media, covering, manipulating and driving public consciousness in order to convey distorted depictions that were consistent with imperial objectives and government ideologies (1992, pp. 12, 544-7).

This spectacle was consistent with a long line of tragic events. These included the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982; the attacks against a group of American marines in Beirut in 1983; the increase in the PLO's military operations against Israel, and Arab support for these activities; along with the appearance of Islamic fundamentalist organizations such as Hezbollah, Amal and Hamas with their anti-Israeli operations, including bombing and the hijacking of airplanes. The growing role of Libya's Muammar Qaddafi and his support for anti-American activity, especially the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie in the UK in 1988 following the US bombing of Libya in 1986, was a notable source of Arab-US tension. In addition, the Iran-Iraq War, concerns for the oil supply, and the expansion of arms sales to Saudi Arabia were significant events (Herman, 1982, p. 44), and all helped to underline the association of the Middle East with the concept of terrorism. This concept was reflected visibly in American foreign policy and plot devices for films and novels. Ironically, there was a mismatch between the actual events and their interpretation through plot: for example, instead of Israelis it was Americans who were brought into the primary position as victims of, or eventually fighters against, terrorism, which is believed to be a new addition within the Orientalist discourse and an extension of the concept of the dangerous "Other" (McAlister, 2005, p. 199).

With the demise of the Cold War, Hollywood focused on the Middle East, where Arabs/Muslims were locked in battle with America's ally Israel. A new genre of thriller movies not only authenticated the Arab image as ruthless and dangerous, but also placed Arab characters in the main part of the plot. In fact, Arab instructional descriptions worked to contrast the greatness of the American hero with the mediocrity of his Arab counterpart, as represented in movies such as the *Delta Force* series (from 1986 to 1991), which were made in Israel and either financed or backed by Israelis (Boggs & Pollard, 2006, p. 338). It is also significant to mention that the *Delta Force* series was produced by Golan-Globus and their Cannon production base which was

known for notoriously low budgets, poor product and an eye for the exploitation market, For instance, Delta Force films were marketed as vehicles for Chuck Norris. The terrorist enemy were seen as atrocious religious fanatics who showed no mercy to families and were capable of horrendous crimes, and thus suitable for extermination.

The *Delta Force* (1986) fictionalized the 1985 TWA hijacking, with Hollywood intensification, showing the Arab terrorists on a mission to attack Miami using a nuclear weapon. The terrorist leader, who was following Khomeini's fatwa, considered his hijacking to be a "jihad" against Zionism and American imperialism. Within the thriller framework, the American rescuers released the passengers and destroyed the terrorists. Lee Marvin, cast in the first *Delta Force*, is quoted as saying,

I like what the picture says...Audiences love to see the bad guy get it. We start blowing up everybody. That's good old American revenge. (Shaheen, 2001, p. 158)

*Delta Force* was part of a new wave of hitherto unprecedented movies that associate Islam directly with terrorist activities. Perhaps the most provoking part for the Middle Easterner is the association of the cry "Allah Akbar" with awful actions. McAlister believes that the films reflect US foreign policy concerns in the Middle East, noting that *Delta Force Entebbe* functions as the successful (Israeli) model that could revise the US failure in Iran (2005, p. 227).

Hollywood developed the theme of terrorist activities in the *Hostage* series (1982-1986-1990). Here Arab terrorists, showing no mercy towards woman and children, are brainwashed into being ready to blow up not just Westerners but also the Middle Easterners themselves. These films illustrate the Orientalist discourse in which the Orient is seen as a vulnerable society and presented as needing the Occident to rescue it from itself (Khatib, 2005, p. 75). Such themes were widely featured in movies like *Navy Seals* (1989), which justifies American involvement in the Lebanese civil war. The film makes a great deal of the oppression in the country and distorts it so that it could be considered the "Swaziland of the Middle East", while Beirut is described as a "shithole" filled with "rag heads" (Shaheen, 2001, pp. 14-15). The film shows Charlie Sheen coming to disarm the Arab/Palestinian fanatic groups (Hezbollah, Amal, and

Druze) of their US made Stinger Missiles. In his mission, he manages to rescue Israelis and Americans who have been brutally hijacked by Arabs.

In Roman Polanski's *Frantic* (1988), a platoon of drunken Arabs sets out to obtain a stolen device used for a nuclear weapon, but they encounter Harrison Ford, who stops the terrorist mission (Shaheen, 2001, p. 210). Commenting on the common themes within these and related films, Douglas Kellner pointed out that,

Such racist caricatures of Arabs were hauntingly similar to earlier fascist and Nazi depictions of Jews in European popular culture during WW2. (Kellner, 1995, p. 86)

Indeed, in his book *Hollywood Goes to War* (2000), Koppes argued that Hollywood was similar to the German propaganda machine in its use of stereotypical frameworks for manipulation and general mobilization in favour of war to support the Nazi cause (Koppes & Black, 2000, pp. 40-44).

Hollywood equated the Middle East with the Nazi threat in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), which starred Harrison Ford as a professor of archaeology who sets off to Egypt to prevent the Nazis and Arabs stealing the valuable ancient Ark of the Covenant. The film relied on religion and the Mummy theme; however, it shows the development in Hollywood's representation of the relationship between Nazis and Arabs, especially when compared with *Lawrence of the Arabia* (1962), which shows Western efforts to unify Arab tribes against the German/Ottoman threat during WW1. This indicates the growing desire to exclude Arabs and Muslims as "Others" by featuring them as a isolated society (Khatib, 2005, pp. 74-75). In *Not Without My Daughter* (1990) starring Sally Field, a brutal Iranian social system is depicted through the story of an American woman whose Iranian-born doctor husband (Betty Mohmody) refuses to allow her or her daughter to go back to the US. She begins a dangerous plan to escape from the country, with Iran depicted as a society of the dark ages.

During this period, Hollywood rendered the Middle East with a hint of exoticism, which was essential for its ideological and cultural containment, and it is hard to deny

the interplay between Hollywood and US foreign policy to drive the public consciousness. In his book *The Mind Managers* (1973), Herbert Schiller pointed out the growing desire of the controllers of the American media to monopolize and restrict informational choice wherever they operate, to offer one version of reality that should meet the interests of US foreign policy in the Middle East (1973, pp. 19-20). The Middle Easterners in this period were seen as brutal, aggressive, lacking in sympathy and, most importantly, presenting a cultural and ideological threat that should be contained militarily and culturally. Mustafa Faheem describes this new generation of movies as amplifying the concept of "Otherness" and serving the American imperial objectives in the region (Faheem, 1999, p. 24).

### **6.3.5 Fifth stage: After the first Gulf War and the end of the Cold War - confronting the exotic terrorists**

Many scholars agree that with the end of the Cold War, Hollywood's defamation of Arabs was becoming increasingly frequent and extreme. Russians as the traditional enemy disappeared from action movie plots. Instead, a Muslim peril increasingly dominated the cinema and this shift was in keeping with both American interests and political developments. However, the depiction of the Middle East remained qualitatively different from those movies that had shown the Russians as screen villains. Brian Edward is one prominent writer who has made a direct link between the end of the Cold War and the shift in Hollywood, which replaced the Soviets with Arabs and Muslims as the growing threat and America's new rivals. Like many scholars, Edward referred the distorted image of the Middle East to a new genre of Orientalist discourses and the highly persistent notion of exoticism (2001, p. 15). Carl Boggs agreed with Edward that Middle Easterners were a replacement for the Communist threat, and the chosen foil for the American heroes of the US motion picture industry (2006, p. 338). McAlister argued that it is essential for the US to keep the image of its soldiers and its ability as a morally superior nation in the public eye (McAlister, 2005, p. 250). Also, Daniel Mandel believed that the 1990 Gulf War and the appearance of Islamic fundamentalist movements provided the perfect backdrop for the film industry's new cycle of violent high-tech spectacles (2001, pp. 22-23). Salam Al-Marayati wrote that the State Department was leading public opinion

towards the notion of "Islamic terrorism". She said that after the Cold War, "Muslims and Arabs are unfairly singled out" (*America's Best Political Newsletter*, n.d.).

Mandel asserted that "Islamic terrorism" is a media invention, and the allegation that Muslims commit all terrorism is propaganda without any basis in fact. He gives a few examples of US government cooperation in media performances, ranging from the NBC television series *The West Wing* to Hollywood productions such as *The Siege* (1998), which depicts a "series of terrorist bombings by 'Muslims'" (Mandel, 2001, p. 20). The clear implication from this film is that terrorism is associated with Islam. Hollywood's productions in this period show clear ties to Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* motif.

Arabs as terrorists appear once again in the action film *True Lies* (1994), directed by James Cameron and starring Arnold Schwarzenegger. The film tackles the terrorist threat with a Bond-style combination of gangster, western, thriller, comedy action, and romantic styles. It reflects American concerns at being increasingly targeted by Islamic terrorism, with Schwarzenegger playing an undercover agent (Harry) who works with his sidekick to foil the machinations of a ruthless Arab terrorist group (Crimson Jihad). Harry manages, with his friend Tom, to follow the criminal plans of the splinter group's leader (Salim) by hacking into computer data at his mansion. The plan had been to obtain stolen nuclear weapons from Kazakhstan and force the American government to respond to his demand to pull out its troops from the Arabian Gulf, or he would blow up one American City each week.

Indeed, the film is not just extolling an American triumph against "Islamic Terrorism", but presents the Americans themselves as victims. In fact, US policy was in a critical situation. The coalition of the first Gulf War was breaking down, because of the effects of the American enforced UN sanctions regime that caused the deaths of hundreds of Iraqis and helped impoverish the Iraqi nation to this day (Muscati, 2002, p. 131). The film shows that America is there to foil the "bad guys" (Shaheen, 2001, p. 501), so Harry will satisfy the audience and tackle the terrorists and give them their just desserts. In one scene, Harry flies a Harrier and wipes out all the Arab terrorists. Salim ends up hanging by his gun belt and the rest are "squelched" in droves. In familiar Bond style, the film ends with sexual shots of Harry with his assistant Helen.

The film exports the notion that deadly Jihad, who will show no hesitation in using weapons of mass destruction, threatens Western global interests. It attempts to label all Arabs as being like "Crimson Jihad" (Shaheen, 2001, p. 501) and hence, the Arab portrayal is an authentication of Said's Orientalism, i.e. civilized Occident versus primitive Orient. *True Lies* also perpetuates the ruthless image of Palestinian Muslims as dangerous fanatics wearing the traditional *kuffiyeh*, which is symbolic of their struggle with Israel.

Arab-American groups objected to the film, which they described as a "distortion machine". They said that the association between terrorists and Islam in the movie was because they were Arabs (Fries, 2005, p. 205). Commenting on this picture, Janet Maslin noted that

The terrorists are crude, outrageously unflattering ethnic stereotypes; the action and the dialogue are sometimes needlessly vulgar; the body count is high: like it or not, those are the rules of the game.

(Maslin, 1994, p. 1, column 1)

Even if Hollywood was not following the US political agenda, the cooperation between the two has been observed many times. The government gave *True Lies* its full support, leading director James Cameron to remark:

I think the nature of how we create movies is really changing now.

The studio thanked for their cooperation the US Department of Defence and the United States Marine Aviation Corps (Shaheen, 2001, p. 500).

In the same style, *Executive Decision* (1996) continued the Middle Eastern terrorist-themed action and was highly facilitated by the Pentagon (Robb, 2006, p. 146). The film shows Kurt Russell as a civilian consultant to Army Intelligence who saves the nation's capital from Arabic-Islamic terrorists who have managed to hijack a Boeing 747 with four hundred and six passengers aboard *en route* to Washington DC. The Arabs are shown randomly beating and killing all the passengers on board, including



families, while chanting "Allah Akbar". Their plan is to use the plane as a weapon to deliver a nerve gas attack to kill at least forty million people. Using familiar action solutions Russell's crew manage to get into the hijacked plane through the remarkable manoeuvring of an F-117 stealth fighter, using a special hook-up device which, once the fighter secretly docks with the hijacked plane, allows the commandos and Russell to board and swiftly tackle the hijackers. Despite the fact that no airplane in the military's arsenal has such capabilities, the Pentagon supported the filmmakers with all assistance to achieve these scenes on the essential condition that "fictional portrayals must depict a feasible interpretation of military life, operations and policies" (Robb, 2006, p. 146). Thus, the military's image was a major concern for the Pentagon and the State Department, along with the criterion of presenting the "approved" portrayal of the Middle East. (Robb, 2006, p. 147)

*Executive Decision* reflects Hollywood's assault against Islam (Boggs, 2006, p. 341) by again representing the Middle East in anti-Arab clichés and depicting Palestinians and Muslims as international thugs. The film shows the terrorists holding the Holy Koran in one hand and a bomb in the other, while showing no regret at blowing up civilians in the name of Allah and saying nothing to explain their hatred; it exists, apparently, because they are Arabs and Muslims. As Maslin commented, the movie's terrorists are "unexplained Arab fanatics who draw on every known ethnic cliché" (1994, p. 3, column 1).

In 1998, Hollywood released *The Siege*, which is considered the most bizarre foreshadowing of September 11<sup>th</sup>. It dramatizes a harrowing conspiracy to attack Manhattan by an Islamic extremist organization (similar to al-Qaeda) that is distributed in secret cells. The terrorists are followers of their spiritual leader, Ahmed Ben Talal (a Saudi name that bears a close resemblance to Osama Bin Laden). When he is captured by the CIA for his anti-Western activities, his followers begin to set off high-explosives across New York City, a situation very similar to what happened on September 11<sup>th</sup>. American politicians are united in facing the threat, one Senator demanding "find out who they are and bomb the shit out of them". The film also investigates, or speculates about, the terrorists' connections outside America, for example in Syria, Iran, Iraq and Libya. It reflects American anxiety at the rising

danger from fanatical organizations like al-Qaeda, which began their activities by bombing American interests in Saudi Arabia and different parts of the world.

Jack Shaheen described his meeting with the Council on Arab Islamic Relations (CAIR) and producer of *The Siege* Edward Zwick, which proved to be almost worthless. Shaheen asked Zwick not to portray 1.1 billion Muslims and Arabs as ruthless gangsters, but Zwick responded that he had one "good guy" fighting with the FBI (2001, p. 431). This could be efficient only in one situation, if the story was not about Islam. Shaheen insisted that the film reflected the strategy of Hollywood, which was repeated in later productions such as *Rules of Engagement* (2000), *The Mummy* (2000) and *The Sum of All Fears* (2001). All these films persisted in the use of Orientalism's recognizable elements, depicting a dichotomy between the civilized West and the backward Orient. The concept of exoticism was highly achieved by a process of alienation, showing Middle Eastern brutality as well as women's vulnerability. The situation in the region is shown as badly in need of Western, and in particular American, help. Arabs are politically characterized as "soldiers of Allah" with no mercy and perpetrating terrible deeds; they are not just villains, but also dangerous and they need to be politically and militarily contained.

In his study *Muslim Arab, the Muslim World*, Jack Shaheen commented that alienating Muslims by portraying them as a growing threat throughout the world reflects more "the bias of Western reporters and image-makers than the realities of Muslim people in the modern world" (2001, p. 23). Indeed, the notion of "Otherness" has been extended to ever-higher levels, and the Middle East represented as a place of corruption in a way that serves American imperial objectives.

#### 6.4 Conclusions

It should be realized that Hollywood's representation of the Middle East was outlined using multifaceted factors that shaped the relationship between the stereotypical portrait and American imperial objectives in the region. The early period of Hollywood depiction of the Middle East reflected perfect collaboration with

Washington, with the exception of some minor examples which did not really reflect decision making inside Hollywood. The evolution of Hollywood's stereotype shows strong emphasis on Said's Orientalism, whereby Arabs and Muslims are staged with a set group of characteristics identifying them as "Others" for filmmakers and their audiences. This helps to set the two unequal halves, Occident and Orient, in opposition to one another, the first versus the second, a cognitive construction for the region and a certain type of lens that allows America, through Hollywood, to alienate the Middle East and helps to make it an acceptable area for the exercise of American power.

It is significant to analyze Hollywood's portrayal of the Middle East within its historical framework; the evolution of political events provides different, often contradictory, interpretations in Hollywood's representation of Middle Easterners. The interplay between American films and Arab stereotypes, bounded by the American-Russian Cold War and marked by the Arab-Israeli conflict, suggests that this intensification in the Arabs' image over the last century from "comic villains" to "foreign devils" did not occur in a vacuum, but by the intertwining of both political and cultural interests in the region. It is believed that imperial objectives motivated this indirectly.

Both the American authorities and the corporate media helped to outline the Middle East within an ideological bias that shapes public understanding of the region. Such a cultural discourse has stressed an epic struggle between the civilized, democratic, modern West and the brutalized, barbaric, primitive East. As Said and his colleagues pointed out, this manipulation should be processed to maintain the notion that these nations need and will continue to need American protection not just from their enemy, but from themselves as well.

## 7 REEL BAD ARABS AFTER SEPTEMBER 11

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### 7.1 Introduction

After the catastrophic events of 9/11, and in the face of the ensuing national trauma, many Hollywood executives took the decision that they would not produce films that contained gratuitous violence, and several action films were deferred (McAlister, 2006, p. 332). Hollywood responded by generating a new depiction of the Middle East. For example, it started to produce films containing ambivalent depictions, which challenged the existing negative stereotypes. By so doing, it provided a cognitive construction for the region and a certain type of lens that allowed America to expose Islamophobic distortions whilst helping to make the Middle East an acceptable area for the exercise of American power. Certain examples, such as *United 93* (2006) and *The Kingdom* (2007), show that the post-9/11 world clash of civilizations is becoming increasingly manifest, and for Hollywood conservatives these films are a vindication of Huntington, Pipes and Lewis's arguments about "aggressive fanaticism", which compare Islam with the horrors of totalitarian communism.

Many intellectuals have sounded warnings about linking the national trauma with the new depiction of Muslims. For example, Professor Paul Silverstein, who studied the intersection of race and immigration at Oregon's Reed College, stated that,

Law enforcement measures, politicians, religious leaders and Hollywood image-makers have contributed to stereotyping Arab Muslims as a race. (Silverstein, 2005)

As a result, according to Zbigniew Brzezinski, national security advisor to former US President Jimmy Carter,

TV serials and films [displaying] evil characters with recognizable Arab features are sometimes highlighted with religious gestures that exploit public anxiety and types.

He further states that these films, “have at times been rendered in a manner sadly reminiscent of Nazi anti-Semitic campaigns” (Shaheen, 2008, p. 14).

The president of the Union for Reform Judaism, Rabbi Eric Yoffie, accused the American media of demonizing Islam, especially in some of the post-9/11 productions, in which “clash theory” was clearly adopted to assert the concept of “aggressive fanaticism” (Yoffie, 2007).

This chapter will examine the controversial issues of Hollywood’s negative depiction of Muslims, how it has dealt with the war on terror, and the symptoms of Islam phobia. It will also give clear examples of the divisions inside Hollywood’s mainstream.

## 7.2 *United 93*

To make a clear judgement about the representation of Arabs and Muslims in *United 93*, it is essential to analyze the intertwined factors in the film. These factors include the way in which the stereotype has been approached, the film’s style, the director’s background, the production timing and its relation with the United States’ war on terror and its goals in the Middle East.

Five years after the tragedy of September 11<sup>th</sup>, Working Title Films along with Universal Studios released a fiction film about the fourth hijacked plane, which had failed to reach its planned target. *United 93* was “a stark and heartbreaking re-creation

of what happened to that flight” (Jacoby, 2006, p. A11). Writer-director Paul Greengrass approached his film in a way that invites controversy, by taking an ambivalent attitude towards the ideological issues. In analyzing *United 93*, we discover that the film uses a realistic style in a way that converges with *cinema verité* and the stylistic techniques of Roberto Rossellini and Jean-Luc Godard. This genre allows the director to expose his central theme (the hijacking) not as a construction of entertainment, but by using the conventions of cinematic realism as a depiction of the visceral and disturbing violence in the plane.

For a vast majority of Muslims it is not annoying to begin the film with terrorists praying before they start the attack, which could have happened. However, by displaying a ritual sentence from the Quran as a justification for terrorist action and using it as a voice-over for a long-pan shot over the city’s darkness, along with an heroic sound track, the cognitive image of a depraved ideology is hard to bear, especially since such tactics are used repeatedly in several subsequent scenes. For the director, realism is an appropriate technique that demonstrates the contrast between these divine sentences and their actual interpretation in the minds of the terrorists. It also enables him to comprehend the moral nature of the event he is depicting.

In order to adopt a realistic style, the director tends to avoid recognizable actors and has no place for well-known stars (Daragis, 2006, p. 1). There is no attempt to present the passengers or even the terrorists with histories. The director is dealing with the audience’s background about the events. To follow the events through the eyes of the terrorists - Ziad Jarrah (Khalid Abdulla), Saeed al-Ghamdi (Lewis Alsamari), Ahmed al-Haznawi (Omar Berdouni) and Ahmed al-Nami (Jamie Harding) - who gradually grasp the enormity of the attacks, the director creatively used a Camera Point of View (POV). This technique also aims to introduce a few key characters as we are settling in beside them: the angry businessperson, and a father talking lovingly to his family. Then, an extreme close-up of Ziad’s face tells the audience more about his deep depression, bound up with his underlying sadness for the passengers as the terrorists take their decision to dedicate themselves to God.

Later, as we follow the passengers boarding the plane, Greengrass increases the tension by using a formula described by critic Rob Vaux as making for “exquisitely

Hitchcockian suspense" (Vaux, 2006). However, here it is much harder to endure because we are about to watch these characters die. The director uses a handheld camera to follow all the characters and events inside the plane, and this technique closes the distance that could open between the plane's passengers and the audience (Douthat, 2006, p. 4). Technically, this works to hold the audience's attention, inviting them to board the plane and share the crisis. Such cinematic methods could increase the fear, extend the exotic theme and functionalize the Orientalist fear through the huge contrast between the passengers and the Muslim terrorists, and by asserting American suspicions of an aggressive outsider (Arti, 2003, p. 33).

The film's editing accords consistently with the stylistic approach; it switches frequently between two intertwined scenes: what happened in the plane and what happened in air traffic control on the ground. There is no clipped relief from the editor to bring the audience to an exterior shot of the plane, nor a sub-plot that could disconnect the audience from the action. There is no montage to spare us; every detail in the film is exposed in the present tense, with no flashback or future scenes; we know what they know when they know it, without any details about al-Qaida or the American government (Maguire, 2006).

Greengrass adopts a specific strategy in narrative and style that allows him to grasp our attention and, although we know the end, he leads us to think that perhaps, for the terrorists, the hijacking will fail. In addition, the elliptical editing combined with the portable camera in the plane and the extreme close-up of Jarrah's face makes the viewer feel his self-conflict and suggests that he might still retreat and save all the passengers (Podhoretz, 2005, p. 7).

As the events come into focus, uncertainty and confusion overwhelm the air traffic controllers as well as the audience. First, it is reported that a small plane may have crashed into the towers; then the man in charge, Ben Sliney (playing himself), combines the evidence and reveals the relationship between the missing planes and the attack. He warns all the planes in the air not to open their cockpit doors in order to prevent a similar hazard, but it is too late. In the name of Allah (a divine sentence in Islam, used before approaching anything), the terrorists proceed with their hijacking. Greengrass sets their attack and violence in context by means of film techniques using

the conventions of realism. The director makes the hijackers' violence visceral as well as disturbing. Furthermore, the cluster of violence emphasizes the exotic theme of the fundamentalist Islamic group. Most of the scenes include shouts such as "Allah Akbar", and the scene in which the pilots are slaughtered among the passengers is shot using the techniques of cinematic realism: a handheld camera and full daylight along with discontinuity of editing and the tracking of the ominous action with vivid sounds of screaming. This is a cinematographic method defined as "disturbing violence". Similar frames or influences can be found in Martin Scorsese's *Raging Bull* (1980), "...the shots emphasizing grimaces. Backlighting, motivated by the spotlights around the ring, highlighting the droplets of sweat or blood that spray from the boxers as they are struck". It is hard for the audience to accept the violence in the context of entertainment and this could boost or deepen antipathy toward the characters in the shot (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p. 428).

The full scope of the plot slowly emerges when the staff in air traffic control and the military operations in the Air Defence Sector realize that many hijackings are taking place simultaneously, and they might be involved in the attack on the Twin Towers. Technically, the use of extended shots with handheld and second-skin cameras in the air or on the ground, and rapid elliptical editing, ensure that the audience shares the confusion and horror of the characters, with a real feeling that it is living these moments and has convincingly become part of the complex narrative (Turan, 2006, p. A1). Greengrass is careful not to propagandize his film as a part of Bush's war in terror. The film contains scenes that are a harsh criticism of the President's role in those moments when Operation Military wants to send up two unarmed jet fighters to intercept the hijacked planes; the mission is scrapped because Presidential authorization cannot be obtained. An unbearable period passes, with no response (Ebert, 2007, p. 732).

Many critics believed that the ex-BBC documentary director might not be a good choice for American propaganda. Of course, Greengrass is not filming *Executive Decision* (1996); he presents his characters without explanation or even background for their actions. There is no waving of the patriotic flag or evocation of the American frontier myth; his vision for *United 93* was not necessarily to justify the American war on terror or to cast blame. He "wanted to craft a film that would bring people together,



not split them apart along political or ideological lines” (Maguire, 2006). The film’s title can be understood as an iconic image or clear invitation for liberal American unity against the depraved ideology of Islam.

Whether intentional or not, Greengrass’s stylistic approach failed to draw a line between terrorist action and Islamic culture. The hijack could be understood in the context of Islamic doctrine. This is enhanced by shots in which the outline of the terrorist nightmare emerges from the dark, as they seize control of the plane and turn it towards Washington DC. The terrorists start to slash flight attendants, and are seen killing, swearing, threatening with fake bombs and, most importantly, yelling “Allah Akbar”. Meanwhile, the handheld camera moves among the terrified passengers, searching for answers and desperately probing a chance for a reaction. In panic, the passengers huddle together in the back of the plane, piecing things together. Through telephone calls they discover what has happened in New York City and that they are facing the same fate.

The passengers’ reactions come into focus when Greengrass makes clear his message: do we sit passively and wait for these terrorists to decide our fate, or do we firmly resist and fight back before they strike at us? If we do the latter, then we deserve a better life (Spark & Stuart, 2006, p. A1). The director proceeds to make the events as real as possible by making this a group rather than a personal drama. The “collective hero” is going to take action. After they discover that there is an ex-pilot among them, they decide to unite and storm the cockpit in order to regain control of the plane – or die trying. Actually, there is no clear evidence that the passengers took this action in real life, as we do not know the final moments inside the plane, but Greengrass wants the audience to be aboard the plane and act accordingly (Turan, 2006, p. A1).

Dylan McGinty criticized Greengrass’s assumptions, saying that he “relied almost exclusively on official government reports and documents”, and thus he cannot be neutral. McGinty contends that “serious questions remain unanswered about what really happened with Flight 93” when the plane was on its way to crash. He adds that there were “several other planes in the area...and the heavily guarded crash site was devoid of plane parts and bodies”. McGinty also points to the evidence such as the

black box and the flight data recorder, which raises questions about the way Greengrass approached his film (Shaheen, 2008, p. 176).

The final moments of the movie are characterized by high levels of tension, created via the cinematographic method of crosscutting as the desperate passengers act, with their famous words "Let's roll". The editing elliptically cuts between the cabin where the terrorists are hysterically yelling and praying, bent on assassination, and the furious struggle that ensued inside the cockpit. Silent moments are achieved with an extreme close-up on Jarrah's frustration and the angry passenger who wrestles for control over the terrorist. The final shot was technically crafted to keep the balance between audience anticipation and their hope for a solution; with a silent and shaking picture, the sad soundtrack comes to dominate the scene with the view from the cockpit window as the plane spirals to its death towards the onrushing ground. Similar to Rossellini and Godard's endings (Magulie, 1996, p. 142), *United 93* fades to the darkness as it began.

Among these heroic events, Greengrass presents the Muslim characters with a great deal of controversy. The hijackers' image is provided within the construction of religious belief by exposing the growth of fundamentalist Islamic beliefs and the ongoing threat to the complex and liberal order of Western society. Hence, his attack is levelled at systematic beliefs more than at the characters. For the terrorist group, Flight 93 was a salvation and expiation to God, showing that those who proceed to suicidal martyrdom may well triumph over those liberals who prefer human life over holy books. However, many critics noted that Greengrass tended to humanize the terrorists instead of demonizing them. This might be true at many points during the film. For him it is not just the action, but the culture and the ideology behind this brutality on which he seeks to focus. In order to pursue his goal as a writer and director Greengrass goes to extraordinary lengths to use an academic style in order to seek credibility and to make the film as real as possible on the screen and for the actors.

Indeed, the film's image of terrorist groups was frustrating for those who supported Bush's foreign policy and his war on terror. For some of media conservatives it is unfair to represent all the passengers in the same manner. Fox's Bill O'Reilly criticizes

the new change in the production system in Hollywood that allows minor or outboard companies to penetrate and undermine the integrity of a major one. The conservative right want to invest American emotion and anger politically and they fear that a film such as *United 93* “will touch our hearts and not enrage us to attack the attackers is a fear that the right labels: liberal” (Leighcarol, *United 93*, 2006).

In fact, one of the main factors behind the controversial representation of terrorists in the movie is the production system. A British company, Working Title Films, produced *United 93*. Founded and co-chaired by Thomas Doehy and Eric Fellner during the late eighties, Working Title Films began its projects with Hollywood in the early nineties, when money for film production was exceedingly tight. Today the company has come to occupy a certain niche by producing more than fifty films from 1997 to 2007, including *Interpreter* (2005), *Johnny English* (2003), *O Brother Where Art Thou* (2000)?, *Shaun of the Dead* and *Mr Bean's Holiday* (2008). All its films are promoted and distributed by Universal Pictures, which owns a 67% stake in the company. Private investors, including the BBC and the company's founders, own the rest of the shares (Doherty, 2006, p. 73).

The iconic feature of *United 93's* production is the eclectic mix between academic art and commerce in a way that breaks Hollywood's stylistic conventions, as shown by directors such as Ron Howard, Peter Morgan, Steve Brill, Nick Moore and Richard Curtis (Working Title Films, 2007). Perhaps the pivotal point is that Working Title Films is independent of Hollywood's centralization, restrictions, censorship and regulations. Therefore, the company does not have to play an instrumental role for Hollywood in terms of political or cultural defence. In *Interpreter* (2005), Working Title Films breaks Hollywood's stereotypical image of Arabs and Muslims when it presents Muhammad as a CIA member fighting the African terrorists alongside his fellows.

*United 93* avoided superficial or typical depiction, for which it had no need (Ebert, 2007, p. 733). The film's strategy is to depict all the characters as victims trapped in an inexorable progress of depraved ideology. The Muslim terrorists are depicted in a rational manner, or at least without Hollywood's typical exaggeration into “bloodthirsty” monsters or barbarous murderers with long beards. *United 93* presents

the four hijackers with no explanation of their background, because Greengrass's goal is not to sympathize with or demonize them. He believes that they have approached their mission as individuals misguided or blinded by a cause.

For the terrorists in *United 93*, responding to their religious duty is, above anything, a salvation that has to be achieved. Yet the film starts with them, not with the passengers as we are used to. We watch them in the airport before boarding the plane, gazing at the passengers with feelings of sadness for the innocent people who will soon lose their lives. This is clearly shown when in the cinematic gaze the terrorist's leader Ziad Jarrah (Khalid Abdalla) regretfully places a call to his father and says, "I love you" to his daughter. Another shot shows him reluctant to order the start of the mission or the start of the attack. Extreme close-ups of his face are used to show his scepticism about the righteousness of his actions and his desire that they should be achieved swiftly.

From the religious perspective, what they go on to do later is morally justified. Consequently, *United 93* is underlining the ongoing threat of religious belief at both the actual and ideological level. For Greengrass, fundamentalist Islam was the role model for the unavoidable collision between Western culture and religious radicals, who are portrayed as devotees of a giant murder machine. Although *United 93* reveals the extraordinary strength of Islam phobia, Greengrass's depiction should not be understood as explicit support for Samuel P. Huntington's "clash of civilizations", simply because the criticism includes all the religious faiths, including Christianity itself.

Alasdair Spark and Elizabeth Stuart write that Greengrass defames the constructions of religious belief as either dangerous or futile, "exposing our largely unconscious faith in the systems which underpin contemporary western living" (Spark & Stuart, 2007, p. 19). Stuart goes on to claim that "All religious faith is depicted as desperate and ultimately futile, no matter what God one may believe in" (ibid).

Greengrass made clear his depiction of religion in his statement that,

There are lots of ways to find meaning in the events of 9/11. Television can convey events as they happen. A reporter can write history's rough

first draft. Historians can widen the time frame and give us context . . . Filmmakers have a part to play too, and I believe that sometimes, if you look clearly and unflinchingly at a single event, you can find in its shape something much larger than the event itself - the DNA of our times. (Spark & Stuart, 2006, p. A1)

The operative concept is “disturbing violence”, which links Islam with totalitarian and brutal action. This is unjustifiable for most Muslims because Greengrass’s movie fails to draw a line between the terrorists’ actions and Muslim culture. He makes the spectacular claim that in the entire corpus of Islamic culture the concepts of nonviolence, mercy and coexistence are absent. Greengrass goes a step further when he employs some Quranic sentences in an improper situation, giving them a very bad interpretation. In this way the film is in accord with Pat Robertson’s reading of jihadist sentences - “The Koran makes it very clear. If you see an infidel, you are to kill him” (Sizer, 2008, p. 2).

In the film, the Divine is manipulated and displayed to support the terrorists’ “disturbing violence”, as the audience heartily shares the passengers’ struggle to take control of the plane while the four hijackers annoyingly respond in another direction, yelling “Allah Akbar”. In the scene inside the cockpit, where Jarrah and Khaled are hysterically reading jihadist sentences, the Muslim audience will simply realize that Greengrass is using the wrong sentences. It is impossible for assassins who seek martyrdom to invoke those sentences. Instead they should use the sentences that ask for forgiveness or mercy, whether their actions are purposeful or unintentional. The use of these (incorrect) sentences revives fears of Islamic principles and portrays Muslims as hostile and alien. Greengrass overlooked the various passages of the Quran that encourage the followers of Islam to maintain co-existence with other religions and to practise peaceful restraint: “Know that God is with those who exercise restraint” (Quran 2:194); “There is no compulsion in matters of faith” (Quran 2:256; 10:99; 18:29). In addition, if unbelievers “send you guarantees of peace, know that God has not given a licence [to fight them]” (Quran 4:90; 4:94) ( Abou El Fadl, 2001, pp. 34-36).

Regrettably, what can be inferred from *United 93* is that the terrorists' murders are models for all Muslim nations. While Greengrass' depiction might victimize the four hijackers as misguided devotees, it surely demonizes Muslim culture; hence the inference will include all Muslim societies, including the liberal ones. Jack Shaheen noted that the film raised American Arab fears of viewers' revenge and of ongoing harassment, which did in fact occur later. Thus, the presentation of Arabs and Muslims helps to reinforce the cycle of stereotypes and functionalizes the Orientalist fear through the huge contrast between the "good" and "bad", by exposing America's suspicions of an aggressive outsider.

In general, the film is considered a remarkable attempt to depict the heroic tragedy of Flight 93. Through its narrative structure and its realistic style the director manages to reach his goal using cinematic methods of "disturbing violence" to emphasize his argument on both the actual and intellectual levels. The film did poorly at the box office (Shaheen, 2008, p. 177), but it will remain in the American memory.

### 7.3 *The Kingdom*

Although most critics labelled *The Kingdom* as pro-American and anti-Arab (Smith, 2007, p. 4C), the film did make a serious attempt to touch on many of today's topical issues, such as the perpetuation of Islamic fundamentalist terrorism, the role of the oil industry and the scope of US-Arab political and financial relations. Unfortunately, the film failed to address any of these intertwined issues in depth (unlike, for example, *Syriana* or *Munich*, as we will analyze in the following chapters). Instead, it serves to provide a superficial portrait of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. However, it does attempt to discuss one political issue, which was portrayed as a police procedural/investigative thriller including stereotypical portraits of Arabs using a Saudi Arabian backdrop.

The issues of ideological and political struggle and the emergent war on terror between America and fundamentalist Islamic communities require deep intellectual and geopolitical exploration. In this light, *The Kingdom* only provides the single

message that firepower alone is not a proper solution to the conflict of values and beliefs in the Middle East. Within the conventions of fiction and conventional stylistic realism the director, Peter Berg, has tried to capture the fact that “there are no good choices in the war on terror” (Fazio, 2007). However, Berg’s message has been relegated to an unnecessary subtext in order to comply with the needs of the production. Universal’s \$70 million thriller turns Berg’s political debates into what some critics describe as an “uncertain vision” that is, in essence, nothing more than traditional Hollywood entertainment (Smith, 2007, p. 4C).

The New York Times’ critic A.O. Scott wrote that,

Just as *Rambo* offered the fantasy of do-over on Vietnam, *The Kingdom* can be seen as a wishful revisionist scenario for the American response to Islamic fundamentalist terrorism. (Scott, 2007, p. 8)

The Los Angeles Times’ journalist Kenneth Turan shared this opinion, stating that “*The Kingdom* provides the most vivid, across-the-board portrait of malevolent Arabs it can manage”. He added, “The film’s theme is similar to those jingoistic World War II-era ‘Yellow Peril’ films” (Kohm, 2006, pp. 407-29).

*The Kingdom* drops the Orientalist fear by focusing on the film’s key theme, the “illusion of coexistence” that is fostered by a belief in American supremacy. Berg and his screenwriter Michael Matthew Carnahan tried to use the stylistic convention of realism to maintain the balance between political debate and the needs of the box-office, but they lost credibility when their premise became immersed in the typical gunfire that taps into the fount of Orientalist fear.

The film wastes no time establishing its fearful fantasy. The opening scene is that of a suicide bombing. There are gunfights galore and explosions. Worst of all there is an attack on civilians on a softball field in an American compound in Saudi Arabia. In its negative depiction, the film promotes the belief that in the war on terror safety and security are destroyed not by the Saudis or Arabs but by the infiltration by a depraved ideology. Thus the main premise of the film is, in Jack Shaheen’s words,

We had better kill them before they kill us. And we do kill them - again and again. (Shaheen, 2008, p. 128)

Graphic digital effects are used in the opening scenes in order to invoke two catastrophic events: the September 11<sup>th</sup> 2003 attack on an American compound in Riyadh, and the 1996 bombings of the Khobar Towers in Dhahran. Berg cleverly employs the common theme to play on the audience's emotions and lead them to think that what happens in his imaginary scenes is what actually happened in Saudi Arabia, the home of Wahhabi fundamentalism. *The Kingdom* redirects the audience's attention to the founder of the jihadist *madrasahs* in Pakistan, the depraved ideology of the Taliban, the country of Osama bin Laden [Saudi Arabia] and most of the 9/11 hijackers (Fazio, 2007).

In the style of Oliver Stone, the film opens with a short clip summarizing the modern history of Saudi Arabia and providing the political background of the American relationship with the Saudi monarchy, especially as these affect the oil industry, which has shaped everything we are living through, including the complexities of the political situation (Fech, 2007). Berg uses a political realistic tone when he includes borrowed archival footage and narration to reveal the historical evolution of the conflict over Saudi oil and how it involved the US in geopolitical events such as the first Gulf War and the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. However, the tone of the clips presents this enterprise as a mythical success.

The relationship between this clip and American supremacy was addressed in Thomas Dibacco's *History of American Business*, in which he works to convince his reader that "capitalism and entrepreneurship reach deep into American's past and, therefore, are part of its international character" (DiBacco, 1987, p. xi). The clip ends with the voice of A&E's Bill Curtis bringing us into the present. More than its political tone, Berg believed that such a clip was essential to refresh the audience's memory by providing an illuminating insight into the complicated conflict and the delicate political situation in Saudi Arabia and the rest of the area.

Following this clip, the film begins with a tragic terrorist attack on American oil company workers, their families and community during a softball game in Saudi



Arabia. Berg provides a systematic structure of contrast: on one side a medium shot shows more than a hundred Americans, including women, the elderly and children; whilst on the other side, the camera pans from medium shot to an extreme long shot where two Saudis on one of the high buildings are spying and preparing for the coming attack. "Allah will give us the victory" declare the terrorists. It is not hard for the audience to anticipate what will happen next. In the action scenes that follow, Berg makes sure that he shows us the brutality of the terrorists' violence.

Berg, who co-adapted *Friday Night Lights* (2006), generally does a fine job setting a realistic tone by shooting the attackers' movements with a hand-held camera. When two terrorists (dressed in police uniforms) penetrate the "Rahman Compound" and fiercely and indiscriminately slaughter everyone by machinegun fire, the camera pulls back so that we continue to see the menacing predator's view of the compound through the binoculars of the two terrorists. The continuity in elliptical editing between camera movements and long shots creates a cinematic method close to what film scholar David Bordwell calls "intensive continuity". It provides a systematic structure of the enemy by allowing us to see all the events through the terrorists' binoculars. The same scene shot continued in two ways with intercutting between them. Where a group of Americans are under attack, a good looking police officer asks them to be calm and follow him; suddenly he yells "Allah Akbar" and explodes himself and everyone nearby into pieces.

The first part of the film represents America's worst nightmare, along with the Orientalist fear that is represented through the paradigmatic structure of terrorism. By this means, the atmosphere of the film seeks to sell to the audience the notion that "there's a quick fix to such problems and it's called the FBI" (Fazio, 2007).

The crime scene provides enough excuses for American political involvement in Saudi Arabia. The action of the film returns to America, where the American characters are presented through a systematic approach at both syntagmatic and paradigmatic levels. The son of an FBI agent tells his father, Fleury (Jamie Foxx),

There are a lot of bad people out there.

Fleury responds by saying,

Yeah, but you're not one of them.

The scene tells the viewers who are the “bad” and “good” people. When Fleury is informed that his FBI colleague has been killed in this crime he decides, with his team Janet (Jennifer Garner), Sykes (Chris Cooper) and Leavitt (Jason Bateman), to travel to Saudi Arabia and find whoever was involved. However, Fleury and his military forensic experts find the Saudi authorities and State Department officials reluctant. They are stereotyped as pro-Arab wimps. Ironically, the scene reveals the unprecedented disparity in tactical and strategic levels of information for propaganda operations. For example, while the State Department, via the new policy of Shared Value Initiatives (SVI), was to move from just defending to actively promoting American values in order to engage rather than alienate Middle Eastern opinion (Taylor, 2002, p. 16), Universal Studios depicts the American ambassador as a cowardly villain who seeks only to pacify the Saudis.

However, who can say “no” to the traditional American hero! Indeed, Fleury sets up a secret mission to enter the Kingdom to investigate and find the bad people. Not surprisingly, the FBI agents find that Saudi officials are reluctant to co-operate with their mission and attempt to restrict their movements. The Orientalist fear is presented through the threat to the paradigmatic structure. Echoing the theme of *Mission Impossible*, Fleury and his fellows have to achieve their mission within five days in a place that agent Sykes (Chris Cooper) describes as being “a bit like Mars”, a sinister desert that hides the lurking terrorists. Using a documentary style, Berg insists on exposing the differences between the cultures. For example Janet (Garner) is forced to cover her hair and is not allowed to touch any Muslim dead body. Berg and his screenwriter Michael Matthew Carnahan present their enemy using an ideological structure: the desert becomes “Mars” only when people of depraved ideology are lurking in the shadows.

The film continues to use the stylistic conventions of realism to focus more on Muslim fundamentalist ideology by pointing out the differences between rational Arabs and those who are contaminated by a sinister ideology. We meet two Saudi officers who

show no mercy to the terrorists and are gradually engaged in a friendly partnership with the FBI team. Colonel Fares Al-Ghazi, played beautifully by Ashraf Barhom, along with his colleague Maythem (Ali Suleiman), fight with Fleury against the terrorists and risk their lives to save him. With his broken English, we feel the pain Fares and his community have for the loss of innocent people and at the terrorists' outrage.

Such a depiction could improve the stereotypical image of the Arabs. This has been disputed by the scholar George Gilder, who claims that in traditional Hollywood convention the paradigmatic structure of the enemy is induced positively only in allies within the "western myth" (Gilder, 1984, p. 123). However, for Berg and his screenwriter Carnahan the two officers are not exceptions but a paradigm of reasonable Arabs. As Berg explained,

There are rational people on every side who are trying to do the right thing but whose efforts are thwarted by those who capitalize on chaos and brutality. (Carnahan, 2007)

What is wrong with depicting some decent Saudis if they show a serious attempt to cooperate with American officials? In his book, *My FBI: Bringing down the Mafia, Investigating Bill Clinton and Fighting the War on Terror*, former FBI director Louis J. Freeh highly commends Saudi support for the FBI's investigation into the 1996 bombing of the Khobar Tower in Dhahran (Freeh, 2005, p. 92). The "good Saudi" shows extreme support for Americans and a great desire to slay the jihadist murderers.

*The Kingdom* presents the attractive but unknown side of Fares' life, emphasizing his humanity by showing him as a family man who wakes early, helps his partially disabled father to walk and plays with his sons when off-duty. Then, with soft music, the family gathers and reverently prays to God. Through this bond of humanity a representation of Islamic attitudes, as well as a common outrage at the massacre of innocents, is clearly expressed.

Similar scenes could dispute Shaheen's argument that *The Kingdom* presents Arabs either as terrorists or as their supporters; but certainly, he was right in describing the

film's "unbalanced view" (Shaheen, 2008, p. 130). In fact, this \$70 million thriller was aimed at the box office. The producer, Michael Mann (*Miami Vice* and *Heat*), has shown no evidence of any political convictions. Traces of his style can be seen in two things: first, the ferocious action and gunfights, such as when Fleury and his comrades raid the jihadist safe house; and second, the casting of Mann regular Jamie Fox in the leading role.

In an interview with *New York Magazine*, Berg claimed that his film conveys a political message. As he said,

Do you think the film has a political message? I hope that it's pretty clear that the movie doesn't support religious extremism but that it does support dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims. (Lindgren, 2007, p. A1)

However, Berg's claims are not justified by the film. Instead of exploring dialogue between the two nations, the director and his screenwriter dealt with American pre-conceptions of exotic Arabs. When Fleury sets up a secret meeting with the Saudi ambassador Prince Thamer, he threatens him saying,

If we [agents] don't get clearance, then it will be brought to the press...how Saudi wives donated \$3 million to an Arab-American organization outside of Baltimore and how this money's been used to help fund terrorist groups.

Many Arab critics have condemned this scene. Jack Shaheen, for instance, asserted that Berg provides a prejudiced vision of Arabs and Muslim organizations in the US, which are not linked to any fundamentalist organization. In fact, activist Arab women, especially those involved with charitable organizations such as the Washington DC Mosaic Foundation, have donated to American educational charitable institutions and health programmes under the supervision of the American government (Shaheen, 2008, p. 124).

Of course, Peter Berg is not Stephen Gaghan. Despite the script's superficial depiction, the director scarcely maintains the film's political tone. In its use of the stylistic conventions of realism, such as the documentary style and the combination of handheld cameras and elliptical editing along with shooting in natural daylight (HMI light), the film converges technically with Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* (1960). However, it seems that Berg failed to catch up with the script; thus, *The Kingdom* presents nothing more than standard-issue action (Grady, 2007).

This might be more explicit in the last thirteen minutes of the film, which rely on action senses that remind us of the Jason Bourne movie *Bordwell's* and his technical means of "intensive continuity" (Scott, 2007, p. 17). Berg manages to lead his viewers to "join the dots" with the FBI team, who discover clues that involve the Islamic leader Abu Hamza. The team also shows great talent in revealing details of the jihadists' base by analyzing a videotape of the attack, which had been posted on a terrorist website. The camera angle leads the team to the exact place from which the jihadists had been filming. In these last thirteen minutes, gunfire and frantic chases take place in a war that is presented mainly as being between the American FBI and al-Qaida. The film's war tries to please everybody. For most of its running time the audience live through a straightforward movie thriller of murder or terrorist revenge.

Throughout the film, the paradigmatic structure develops of evil Arabs in contrast to good Americans, in which the possibility of the victory of evil, as happened on 9/11, will create a feeling of fear, insecurity and rage within the viewers. The film conforms to the Hollywood tradition whereby the hunter becomes the hunted, echoing the theme of *Rules of Engagement* (2000). The violence is always justified as a matter of security, with wicked Arabs offering gunfights, explosions and rocket-propelled grenade battles, even involving civilians. Of course, the effortless slaughter of thirty-five bad Saudis fits in with the structure of the American frontier, as does the involvement of the FBI team in a race against time, and their final success in closing in on the jihadists and their leader Abu Hamsa, where thousands of domestic secret police and national guards have failed.

Berg attempts to deepen the impression of reality by constantly using handheld cameras that work with the foreign setting, thus breaking the familiarity of what the

audience are watching. Just as *Rambo* offers a fantasy of Vietnam, the actions of Fleury and his fellows in exotic places unconsciously drive our feelings to identify with the good American.

As the FBI team reaches the terrorist hideout, *The Kingdom* reveals the other side of Saudi Arabia, where jihadist hideouts have thrived conspicuously. For Saudis, the subsequent scenes are insulting, not just because of their faulty depiction (as if Saudi Arabia is a part of Tora Bora), but because of the absence of Saudi officials in the final thirteen minute battle, except for the two “good Saudis”. In fact, since 1996, the Saudi government has recruited thousands of anti-terrorist security personnel between the police, the National Guard and the secret police, and they have successfully undertaken several missions (Boucek, 2008, p. 21).

It may be asked, if the team were so superior and smart, then why did they send a woman into a country that forbids her to go out or touch a Muslim, and where did they suddenly get the arms of which they had been deprived? The answer is that

Berg’s film is driven not by logic but by simple needling. Like his heroes, he does not particularly want to understand the Saudis, get along with them or play by their arcane rules. He just wants to get in their face. (Lane, 2007, p. 105)

Berg’s approach would certainly have a negative implication for the cycle of violence, and accords with the clash theory, which stresses that the enemy is “necessary for identity formation as well as for promoting cultural hygiene”. The construction of the enemy in the clash theory and its implication in Hollywood movies could serve as a driving force for US foreign policy (Trumpbour, 2003, p. 90).

Indeed, Berg hardly attempts to avoid superficial stereotypes (Shaheen, 2008, p. 128). As Fleury reaches the terrorist leader, the audience is shocked by his depiction: instead of the typical monster we expect to see, Abu Hamsa is presented as an elderly man having a loving relationship with his family. With a cynical smile Fares cleverly detects him, but the action costs him his life. The scene closes with huge regret for the

loss of a brave Arab who sacrificed his life fighting side-by-side with the Americans against the terrorists.

In order to conclude his political message, Berg tends to break the film's storyline by switching from a realistic style to one of aesthetic and expressionist images, relieving the audience's nervousness and preparing them for his debate. The final scene, in which Fleury and his comrades meet to console Fares' relatives, provides a great deal of sympathy for his family by showing their deep sadness. The shot was harmonized using such aesthetical means as soft eye line matches and a yellow-Tungsten back light along with a smooth, beautiful soundtrack and close-ups showing the family, including his two children, and their appreciation of the American mission.

Haytham: This is his son, Sultan.

Fleury: Sultan, Hey. (To Haytham) Tell him that his father was a very brave man.

Haytham: (speaking Arabic)

Sultan: Do you know my father?

Fleury: Yes, (hardly speaks) I knew your father; your father was a good friend of mine.

Haytham: (speaking Arabic)

Fleury: (holding Sultan's hand) All right.

Then there is an extreme close-up, which crosses the FBI members before they leave, and the film closes with the most controversial moment, where two scenes are overlapped. The first invokes the earlier scene when Fleury whispers to Janet; in fact, we do not learn what he said until the last shot when Bateman asks Fleury in their department in the US.

Bateman: Fleury Tell me what you whispered to Janet in the briefing, to get her to stop crying about Fran, you know before all this, before we even got airborne...what did you said to her? You remember?

(Overlap with next scene in Saudi Arabia)

Abu Hamsa's daughter to her son: Tell me my son, what did your grandfather whisper in your ear before he died?

(The scene moves again to the US)

Fleury: I told her we were gonna kill them all.

(The scene moves back to Saudi Arabia)

Child: Don't fear them my child, we are going to kill them all.

The camera moves to an extreme close up of the boy's eyes then fades out to dark.

Many critics misunderstand this moment, including Jack Shaheen, who believes that the shot provides a hostile indication and gives a moral approval for the death of children in Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon and elsewhere, as they may become the future terrorists (Shaheen, 2008, p. 131). This is because he only concentrates on the stereotypical image, without scrutinizing the relationship between the director's technical style and the political implications. It might be true that *The Kingdom* suggests that killing terrorists, while no doubt satisfying and indeed a necessary solution that offers plenty of temporary gratification, "doesn't address and may even exacerbate the root problems" (Suderman, 2007).

Berg and his screenwriter Michael Carnahan tried to impress their political view of the ongoing struggle in the war on terror, namely that even justified vengeance is no solution and that it will continue the cycle of violence. However, with their "commercial" approach, their influence will be superficial and not comparable with that of *Syriana* or *Munich*.

*The Kingdom* might fail to express its political message simply because it fails to specify its enemy in a convincing framework. Instead, it provides that enemy in a traditional paradigmatic structure for mass consumption. It is not just that the film presents Saudi Arabia as backward, stupid and incompetent; but it satisfies the American viewers by denigrating Islamic culture in many ways. Excluding the two "good" Saudis, this American frontier myth deals with Muslims as a stupid nation and shows no respect for their culture: "You have to be living under a rock these days not



to know the customs of the Arabs". The construction of Orientalist fear, which appears to find its reality within Saudi society, especially between the few moderates and the many zealots, provides a superficial vision as well as an ineffective context for highlighting the ongoing struggle and the present intractable situation.

#### 7.4 Other Films with Bad Depictions:

##### *Team America: World Police* (2004)

A year after the invasion of Iraq and the ensuing chaos, Paramount Pictures released *Team America* saying that, although it never mentions George Bush, the policy that represents Americans as the "World's Policemen" "is right out of the current administration's doctrine". There is, of course, a widely held belief around the world that the human crisis in Iraq and elsewhere is a direct result of the US government's tunnel vision on the war on terror. Hence, there are satirical scenes in which *Team America's* heroes are plied with various weapons at home for taking-out terrorists, even though Paris and Cairo are targeted and destroyed in the process. Jack Shaheen described this film as another version of *True Lies* (1994) or *True Lies II* (Shaheen, 2008, p. 171), as both these films depict "American frontiersmen" terminating the turbaned bad people and preventing them from launching weapons of mass destruction (WMD) against innocent civilians. The only distinctiveness of *Team America* is that it uses puppets instead of live characters.

The film was produced by *South Park* co-creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone, who are also the brains behind the *Madcap Marionette Show*. The film provides a satirical portrayal of fundamentalist societies, both Islamic and North Korean, which conspire to unleash WMDs to destroy the Western nations. The following quote from the film's major character, Spottswode, clarifies the Team's motivation:

Every single minute of every single day, the terrorists are planning new ways to kill you and everyone else who lives in a free country.

The comic film shows that it is a dangerous world we live in. The opening scene has turbaned Arabs in Paris gazing at the children in a sinister way and toting a briefcase full of WMD. Of course, this situation requires quick intervention; hence, the elite Team America appears in order to terminate them before the city is annihilated. The team leader addresses the terrorists condescendingly: "To the ugly people who are wearing pyjamas, you are under arrest."

After a comic gunfight battle with Osama Bin Laden look-alikes, the team discover that terrorists and a pint-sized North Korean strongman/arms broker Kim Jong II are conspiring to unleash "9/11 times 2,356". They aim to demolish the Eiffel Tower and the Louvre, but the Team manages to prevent the disaster.

The film presents events and important issues with great frivolity and hilarious caricatures. The reality, however, is that anti-Bush's foreign policy continues to escalate inside America. Since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, more than three thousand eight hundred American soldiers and nine hundred Americans who were under contract to the Department of Defence have lost their lives. TV news coverage shows the harrowing human crisis in which, according to the UN Refugee Agency, more than seventy thousand civilians have died and nearly one million Iraqi families have left their homes, not to mention the damage and chaos to the infrastructure and regional stability (Al-Atraqchi, 2005). The film trivializes the arguments in a way that confuses the audience as to whether the film is for or against the war on terror.

Will Team America, led by the enigmatic Spottswode, be able to destroy the terrorists' plans and maintain world security before the secret conspiracy is set into action? Well, only if they manage to enrol the help of the Broadway actor Gary Johnson. The plan is that they need an actor to use his skills to distinguish who is the enemy and since Gary is an excellent actor, he will make a superb spy (after all, according to Spottswode, spying only entails acting): He will therefore be able to reach and penetrate the terrorist organization. At first, Gary refuses to cooperate with them, but later joins the rest of Team America in their lair inside a mountain.

The plot of *Team America* failed to provide a graded logical progress. The main process was to satirize its characters. The issue here is that the Arabs and Muslims are

satirized in their stereotypical image more than as actual characters. It is obvious that the production primarily sought box-office success, which made any political implication look shallow and subservient. The script overflows with rather banal action. The songs in the movie are not melodic or tightly structured with the plot; they are just funny, hilariously jingoistic songs such as America: F\*\*k Yeah! and Kim Jong II's "I'm So Ronery".

In his first mission, Gary flies to Cairo where the bad Muslims meet in their Arabic disco bar. The terrorist characters are not only caricatures of Osama Ben Laden, but also speak in a laughable language, which sounds like Arabic but is in fact a spurious, garbled, mumbo-jumbo: for example, "Salam Muhammad jihad. Allah Allan jihad"; "I've got five terrorists going southeast on Bakalakadaka Street Elizabeth Taylor, Derka derka, Baka Sherpa, Abaka-la!"

The second half of the film turns to finding a connection between the terrorist organization and North Korean dictator Kim Jong II and, surprisingly, some Hollywood stars too! If this film reveals a fact, it will certainly be the dissent within the Hollywood community. As we mentioned before, it confirms the conflict between the corporate majors and Hollywood's new activism.

Indeed, *Team America* saves its hardest gibes for self-righteous Hollywood activism and the Film Actors Guild (F.A.G...get it?) (Wheeler, 2006, p. 153). The F.A.G. is characterized by puppets representing numerous left-activist celebrities including Alec Baldwin, Tim Robbins, Susan Sarandon, George Clooney, Martin Sheen, Danny Glover, Sean Penn, Liv Tyler, Janeane Garofalo, Samuel L. Jackson, Helen Hunt and Matt Damon. They are shown as "stupid traitors" as they attempt to maintain peace around the world. Thus, they object to the Team's mission and invite the terrorists to their peace conference. Since they are committed to peace, they attempt to help the North Korean dictator to achieve his ends. Therefore, the activists and their ilk get their deserts in a horrible hail of machine-gun bullets, having their heads blown up and being eaten by cats. Furthermore, while Team America strive to secure the world by preventing the arms deal, Michael Moore "the Hollywood socialist and activist" is represented as an idiot, whose dirty and unpolished puppet commits suicide during a

visit to Team America's top-secret Mount Rushmore headquarters, robotically repeating the anti-war rhetoric and armed with a hot dog in each hand.

Perhaps the main reason behind this depiction is to support American foreign policy, especially in its war on terror, and to show the F.A.G. as myopic elitists. Yet again, this argument was endorsed by making a cheap joke without any intellectual value or real point about the actors' activism. The film critic Roger Ebert was offended as much by the movie's content as by its nihilism:

At a time when the world is in crisis, the response of Parker, Stone, and company is to sneer at both sides - indeed at anyone who takes the current world situation seriously. They may be right that some of us are fools and dead wrong that it doesn't matter. (Ebert. 2007, p. 686)

The film made a good profit despite its production-design. The film making includes puppet design and control, pyrotechnics, cinematography and screen tests, besides the deleted scenes (some of which are very funny and shallow).

### *Looking for Comedy in the Muslim World (2005)*

It seems that Sony Pictures (the first branch of Sony Corporations), along with Albert Brooks, have failed to provide long-term innovative ideas regarding the cultural clash between the West and Muslims. The film dramatizes the American effort to understand the Muslim world by dispatching it not to the Arab world but to India! Thus, I found that it is appropriate to place this film in the 'bad' category for two reasons.

First, the film authenticates the Orientalist context and thereby assures the contrast between civilizations. This is illustrated by the work of Hamid Dabashi, Professor of Islamic Studies and Comparative Literature at Colombia University, who points out that this context, manipulates the regional and cultural authenticity of the Eastern countries and places

Indian, Chinese, Iranian, Egyptian or Turkish cultures within the general rubric of an Islamic civilization. Such colonial behaviour aims to authenticate and super-ordinate Western Civilization. (Dabashi, 2006, p. 365)

Second, it suggests that the inability of the United States government to promote its soft power strategy regarding Muslim countries is due not just to the State Department's vulnerable vision, but also to the foolishness and silliness of Muslim communities. Failure to understand the background of Western jokes is an issue for some developing countries. Without a shared context, a Muslim will not understand the premise of an American joke, and so the joke will be silly in the Muslim's mind (Ebert, 2007, p. 418).

Launched from a fictional premise, the film provides comic scenes with some very sharp culture-clash moments. The opening frame shows the US government, chaired by Fred Dalton Thompson, who says that the President is attempting to "understand better the Muslim peoples of the world" and that the President thinks, "The only way to really understand somebody is to see what makes them laugh". Thompson says, "He tried wars and spinning, the usual stuff, and now he thinks he might try humour." To do so, the State Department recruits Albert Brooks to find out what makes Muslims (who are actually Hindus!) laugh. Ironically, Brooks never engages with their community; instead, he goes to ask Muslims in the street about their jokes. As he fails to gain what he wants, he decides to go on the stage and speak to the audience directly.

Brooks Q: Why is there no Halloween in India?

Brooks A: They took away the Gandhi.

No one responds to or laughs at his comedy. The scene provides many opportunities for fun. His Muslim friend Rondy angrily shouts to the audience "Folks! Folks! There's a guy up here onstage telling jokes." Brooks pays no attention to the audience and then decides to use a dummy without moving his lips to facilitate his connection with them. Brooks is not motivated by fanatical or political goals, all what he wants is the "Medal of Freedom"; thus he must complete a five hundred page report. The film

does not have to provide a distorted image; instead, Brooks approaches the cinematic method with the theoretical authenticity known as "Black Comedy". For the "Muslim audience" the real laughter starts when it comes to their reality, when the comedy is interlocked with their bitterness.

Brooks chooses to undertake his mission in New Delhi. He interviews several Muslims until he finds an appropriately attractive girl, but the problem is not that she is Hindu or cannot meet his goal of understanding Muslims, but that she hates Jews! Nevertheless, Brooks' absurd satire (LaSalle, 2006) insists on keeping the Muslim image the same as Hollywood's typical stereotype, since in many situations Muslim locals are presented as villains. In the film, things get worse when Brooks needs to use the bathroom, but because it is far from the auditorium his "stupid" Muslim stagehand takes his place and ironically the Muslim audience, those "humourless stoics", admire his stupid acting. Furthermore, both actors and audience are portrayed as if they might be terrorists. Even the Arab-Israeli conflict is touched on in a valueless way. For example, When Brooks fails to play the Jewish character, we see a producer for Al-Jazeera, the Arab TV network, panic and shout three times: "Get me another Jew".

Finally, if this film reveals any fact, it will certainly be the disparity between the State Department and the Hollywood community. The former is represented as a villain who has lost its political compass regarding the Middle East. The question remains, if the soft power strategy campaign is designed to win the hearts and minds of Arabs and Muslims by marketing American values, then why does *Looking for Comedy in the Muslim World* take place in India rather than in the Middle East?

The following movies are not Hollywood productions or those of the major studios, but are profoundly engaged with the portrayal of Islam phobia and the fear of Middle Eastern terrorism. They are very low budget films and reflect a commercial need without any intellectual value; therefore, it is important to raise public awareness of their content.

*Fatwa* (2006), the second production released by Capital City Entertainment, was directed by John Carter and written by Scoot Schafer. The film's title is based on the

Arabic word that refers to permission for any action in favour of or in the name of God. The film's main character is a crazed Arab cab driver from Libya called Samir Al-Faridi. He is portrayed as bearded and uncivilized, and as wildly killing innocent Americans and their Israeli friends as well as a conservative senator who has been seeking harsher anti-terrorist laws. We meet the extremist American frontier person Maggie Davidson, who has discovered an Arab conspiracy to develop "Cobalt 47 to build a radioactive weapon...he wants to construct the bomb in the trunk of his cab and then let it loose in [New York's] financial district".

The film shows no artistic value except for a humble attempt to overlap editing to create cinematic contrasts. It moves between many cuts; for example between victims and murderers, Samir making the bomb and praying to Allah, and Maggie struggling to save the innocent.

In the film, we see one customer at a restaurant comment sullenly about Samir's praying:

Those of us who were brought up in this country we live for ourselves.  
[But Arabs like Samir] live for God.

*Fatwa* presents an unbelievable model of a Mullah (the person behind the fatwa). He is portrayed as an evil fundamentalist who addresses crowds to the dark ages. *Fatwa* plays on the audience's pleasure finding solution in terms of violence and sex. In his cab, Samir shows extreme and brutal violence towards his hostage Maggie. He raises a picture of his son and exclaims, "You kill my child and I kill yours." Of course, a stereotypical American hero kills Samir, but the message is that the threat from Islam remains (Shaheen, 2008, p. 113).

The fear of Islamic terror is also clearly demonstrated in *The Stone Merchant* (2006) produced by Martinelli Films, an Italian company owned by the film director Renzo Martinelli. The film portrays an exaggerated distortion of Islam, confirming the myth that Islam and Fascism are the same. Arabs and Muslims are presented as dissolute Mullahs who thirst after killing innocent civilians without mercy for the elderly or the young. Once again, the terrorists start their attack by using a dirty bomb, which

contains radioactive material. They are portrayed as consummate villains. The film is completely bereft of intellectual or artistic value and it presents nothing more than a bad embodiment of the clash theory. The protagonist, a disabled professor, preaches to the audience that Muslims are “in a religious war to conquer the world”, adding that “only an army of Christians can thwart the Muslim invasion”.

*The Stone Merchant* plays on the audience’s emotions and ongoing fear of Islamic terrorism. There is no serious-minded deliberation of this fear; instead, the audience sees the Muslim world in terms of al Qaeda (Bacharach, 2007). The film did badly at the box office.

There is also *Red Mercury* (2005), which again features the rising threat of Islamic terrorism. The film, produced with a low budget by the Inspired Movies Company, was released soon after the tragic London bombings of July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2005, which caused the death of more than fifty commuters. The film portrays three Muslims terrorists holding hostages inside the Olympus Grill Restaurant. The owner and the hostages are threatened with explosives. Despite the screenwriter’s laudable attempt to show the terrorists’ different levels of commitment to their task, Farrukh Dhondy fails to offer any credible portraits of his Muslim characters. In fact, their portrayal is no more than a continuation of fear of the Orientals, as they are all presented as one-dimensional villains (Shaheen, 2008, p. 154). The solution comes when the police prevent the terrorists from unleashing their deadly bomb, and dispatch them to the fate they deserve (Thomas, 2006, p.1).

Many other films too tend to dramatize the concept of Islamic terrorism as an ongoing threat that results in a savage war between the modern West and the inferior East. These include Bandwagon Filmmaker’s *Two Degrees* (2002), HDNet Film’s *The War Within* (2005), the BBC’s *Love+ Hate* (2005) and Luxembourg’s *The Point Men* (2001).



### 7.5 Conclusions

The common theme between these movies is the ongoing fear of Islamic terrorism. The films discussed in this chapter are a direct response to September 11<sup>th</sup>, and furnish clear examples of how Hollywood has dealt with the war on terror and the symptoms of Islamophobia. In addition, these films confirm Brzezinski's conclusions that they portray evil Arabs who display religious gestures. This is simply to exploit public anxiety at a time when many Hollywood executives have suggested that there should be no more mindless and violent action that depicts the national trauma (McAlister, 2006, p. 332).

This new depiction can be understood in a number of ways. For Jack Shaheen and Carl Boggs these films are no more than a justification of the American war on terror. For others they provide a cognitive construction for the region and a certain type of lens that allows America to expose Islam phobic distortions whilst also helping to make the Middle East an acceptable area for the exercise of American power.

A close analysis of stylistic techniques shows that these films were approached with a cinematic method that transcended the typical commercial framework to create a new genre. This reveals three main facts: First, this genre allows the directors to expose their central argument that firepower alone is not a proper solution to the conflict of values and beliefs in the Middle East. Within the conventions of fiction and conventional stylistic realism, Berg, the director of *The Kingdom*, tried to capture the fact that "there are no good choices in the war on terror". Thus, exploring cinematic methods such as "disturbing violence" in the depiction of the Islamic threat does not exist as a construction of entertainment, as a means to open intellectual debate.

Second, although the new depictions of the Middle East and Muslim characters are less obviously negative than in the past, they remain controversial. Although sometimes provided with moral, religious and human dimensions, they should not be regarded as good depictions, because all of the films described above fail to draw a line between terrorist action and Islamic culture. The killings, bombings and hijackings in the films could be understood in the context of Islamic doctrine, and at

the same time as exposing the growth of fundamentalist Islamic beliefs and the ongoing threat to the complex and liberal order of Western society.

Third, the new productions allow Hollywood to liberate itself from subservience to the US government, as we see in Working Title Films' *United 93*, where the director refused to propagandize his film as a part of Bush's war on terror. However, the fact remains that these films are an actual extension of Hollywood's negative depiction that authenticates the historical debate of Oriental discourse.

On the other hand, it is unwise to label all characterizations of Arabs in post-9/11 movies as bad. There are some examples that show that since September 11<sup>th</sup> the silver screen has displayed, at times, a more sophisticated, rational and even-handed treatment of Arabs rather than dehumanizing them. Arabs and Muslims have been represented with a great deal of complexity, decency and heroism, and most importantly as victims in their ongoing struggle with Western domination at both actual and ideological levels. The next chapters will discuss a few attempts by Hollywood to explore intellectually Middle Eastern issues, breaking the cycle of violence and preaching a new period of coexistence between the two cultures. This has happened with different levels of sophistication, and it is essential to study the films concerned as part of Hollywood's representation of Arab and Muslim stereotypes.

## 8 COMPARISON BETWEEN *BLACK SUNDAY* AND *MUNICH*

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### 8.1 Introduction

As mentioned at the end of the last chapter, 9/11 was a Rubicon because it marked the beginning of the change in Hollywood's attitude towards the Middle East. The existing stereotypical image of the Arab was beginning to be discarded in favour of a new one. This change was aided by contemporary structural alterations in Hollywood, i.e. from centralization to decentralization, with the rise of independent production units or studios. These factors gave activists a media free from US government hegemony to express revolutionary ideas concerning a whole range of issues regarding the Middle East.

As a result, Middle Eastern issues were treated in Hollywood productions in an intellectual rather than a belligerent and bellicose manner. The difference is clearly seen by contrasting two films: *Black Sunday* and *Munich*.

Eighteen months before the 1980 presidential election that swept Ronald Reagan into the White House, leading conservative intellectual Kevin Phillips published a significant article about the emerging phenomenon of neo-conservatism. Phillips felt that although the movement was made up of well-known intellectuals and activists, they had initially failed to gain real political power. In 1976, however, they had begun to take strategic steps to increase their power. One such step was to focus on Israel as a

foreign investment. They began to be quoted in the press, interviewed on television and consulted about their policies (Phillips, 1997, p. 221).

The right wing activist Jerry Falwell called for moral principles (not necessarily of a religious nature) and declared a readiness to work with anyone who shared their values about family, strong national defence and the security of Israel (Snowball, 1991, pp. 50-53). At the same time, Evangelists and Fundamentalists organized themselves to take part in political campaigns and made an enormous contribution towards the election of Reagan in 1980. Most significantly, the ties between these organizations and Israel moved from being emotional to explicitly political. Furthermore, they competed amongst themselves to demonstrate that support. Falwell had already visited Israel twice, and give clear support for Israel in her conflict with Arabs when he said,

In recent years, there have been incidents at the very highest levels that would indicate that America is wavering at this time in her position on the side of Israel. I believe that if we fail to protect Israel we will cease to be important to God. For the Christian, political involvement on this issue is not only a right but a responsibility. We can and must be involved in guiding America towards a biblical position regarding her stand on Israel. (Snowball, 1991, p. 167)

Several Jewish intellectuals were concerned about the new political power of the Evangelists and anti-Semites. They set about working to form a coalition between conservative Jews and Christians. By 1980, the Evangelists and most of the other right wing organizations were showing unprecedented support for Israel and became involved in the Republican primary process. Melani McAlister asserted that Jewish influence on the Christian right played a key role in the 1980 election. This fact is often overlooked. American cultural rhetoric about the Middle East was vehemently reformed to benefit Israel, and after the election many evangelical Christians shared with many American Jews a commitment to support Israel both politically and militarily. Historically Israel had played a significant role in the rise of a conservative political culture, especially after the 1973 Arab-Israeli war (McAlister, 2005, p. 196).

Israel was presented as an alternative to a direct American presence in the Middle East and as a strategic asset able to exert force. Many American organizations have stressed Israel's role in serving American interests in the turbulent Middle East, especially after the oil embargo in 1973. Hollywood was one of the media tools that focused on Israel as an icon of a power for good used only against terrorism. Some Christians reformulated the story of Israel as the protagonist in another just war, that of Armageddon.

## 8.2 *Black Sunday*

*Black Sunday* (1977) provided an incisive model of the way the connection between Israel and the Vietnam Syndrome was reflected in American popular culture. The nation-saving role of the Israeli protagonist in *Black Sunday* was an example of US mainstream public discourse about Israel in the seventies. The starting point for this period was a remarkable intersection between different groups: American Jews, Christian Conservatives, Conservatives, evangelical Christians and military policymakers. They all developed their own ideological rhetoric about Israel, which was enhanced and strengthened after the Iran hostage crisis in 1979 (McAlister, 2005, pp. 196-197).

Significantly, although Hollywood disclaimed any connection between the Arab stereotype and political events, in 1977 Paramount Pictures released *Black Sunday*, directed by John Frankenheimer. This film, adapted from Thomas Harris's best-selling novel of the same name, postulated that the nation could be an easy target for an aggressive outsider. The film opened to enthusiastic reviews. It was inspired by and loosely based on a real event, the infamous massacre of twelve Israeli athletes at the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich. It suggested a nightmare scenario in which a group from the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) conspired to attack another iconic sporting event, the climax of the American Football season, the Super Bowl. The plot involved an outrageous plan to massacre more than eighty thousand American spectators including the US President.

The film dealt with audience concerns about a similar terrorist attack by extending the typical Arab stereotype as primitive villains and “rag heads”. *Black Sunday* was based on a real event transposed to the real context of the Super Bowl and the terrorists were given the real name of “Black September” rather than a fake organizational name. However, although the film tried to derive its credibility from the real events, many critics noted at the time that the film failed to bridge significant credibility gaps (McAlister, 2005, p.187). The film’s headline nevertheless grabbed the audience’s belief that a similar threat by Arabs was “possible as near as tomorrow”.

*Black Sunday* was released to the American audience at the time when, as Richard Slotkin put it, the “American Frontier Myth” had been shattered by such terrible experiences as the Vietnam War, the Arab oil embargo, Watergate and economic “stagflation” (Slotkin, 1998, pp. 625-627). In addition, McAlister described this period of American history as one in which “the public image of the US military was quite low and the assessment of Vietnam as a misguided intervention and an unwinnable war was commonplace” (McAlister, 2005, p. 183).

The film presents the Israeli hero as a surrogate American, especially in the aftermath of what were considered Israeli victories over the Arabs in 1967 and 1973. This attached American culture to the victorious Jewish nation. McAlister notes,

The long arm of Israeli vengeance extended the body of an American nation no longer sure of its own reach. (McAlister, 2005, p. 187)

The “long arm” was embodied in one of the three major characters in the film: the Israeli hero David Kabakov becomes a protagonist who has to take the role of an American frontiersman, the surrogate who is ready to save the American nation from itself and ready to give the Arab terrorists the redemption they need. The film switches frequently between the two centres of the plot: on the one hand the psychosexual intrigue between Dahlia and Lander as they conspire to massacre the innocent Americans; and on the other hand the heroic effort to uncover this conspiracy by Israeli commander Kabakov, who works together with American officials. All this takes place against the background of the real City of Miami hosting a real event, the Super Bowl.

These characters help to functionalize the Orientalist fear through the big contrast between the “good” and “bad”, by asserting America’s suspicions of an aggressive outsider, mainly Palestinian Arabs, bent on revenge. For the first time Hollywood presents an Israeli protagonist in the context of the American frontier myth. Kabakov (Robert Shaw) is the leader of an anti-terrorist commando unit who discovers the initial indications of the Super Bowl attack. Ironically, *Black Sunday* does not paint a flattering image of the Americans. For example, despite Kabakov’s attempts to protect US citizens, FBI Agent Corley sternly tells him to leave the country. Indeed, *Black Sunday* presents American characters as what Susan Jeffords describes in her book on the Vietnam War as “feminized” Americans. Jeffords shows that the weakness and passivity of the American characters reflects the vulnerability of American society as a possible target for aggressive attack (Jeffords, 1989, p. 167). Simultaneously the film represents the Israeli role against the outsider’s threat in a favourable way; indeed the film reflects Jeffords’s assertion. It presents a “feminized” America facing a “feminized threat” from a Palestinian Arab, this time one of the female gender (Jeffords, 1989, p. 167). Her name is Dahlia.

The film opens with Dahlia’s arrival at Beirut airport where, pre-civil war, the city is presented as a labyrinth full of events and symbols that reflects chaos and instability in political life. We are presented with shots of military barracks, gunfights, soldiers standing behind a row of barbed wire and deadly explosions. In his study of the construction of Hollywood Martin Rubin described the scene as presenting for the audience an exotic frontier, which is important in order to establish the thriller aspect of the Arab environment of the film (Rubin, 1999, pp. 25-30). Jack Shaheen notes that Hollywood’s defamation continues to include not just Arab history and presence but also Arab places, such as Beirut, which is considered the Swaziland of the Middle East and portrayed as a huge quagmire. He adds that *Black Sunday* was one of the twenty-eight movies that were filmed in Israel (Shaheen, 2001, p. 27).

Indeed, the exotic theme is extended with scenes including *kaffiyeh* head coverings, running children, and covered women passing by with their goats and donkeys, pictures that bear the obvious imprint of Orientalist discourses. Furthermore, technically the director used a creative approach to enhance the concept of a chaotic

Arab country by using a handheld camera to follow Dahlia. Tim Jon Semmerling described the cinematographic method as one that creates “a sense of unsteadiness and disorientation inside the labyrinth for the audience”. This method is one of the alienation elements that help to keep distance between the audience and the characters and prevent any kind of sympathy or homogeneity (Arti, 2003, p. 33).

Another alienation element embedded in the character of Dahlia is that, although she wears a European-style skirt and blazer and has blonde hair, her heavy accent when she speaks English alienates her and keeps her at a cognitive distance. She is now on the level of the American enemy, which suggests to the audience that Palestinian terrorists are hiding among them. Later, the film reveals that Dahlia is a member of a Black September cell, when she is shown meeting Nageeb, who is also behind the Black September massacre, and a group of Palestinian (PLO) commandos, including Japanese, as they are watching a Vietnamese propaganda film. This scene, which allows the audience to share the movie with the guerrillas, provides the film with two significant elements. First, it identifies one of the main characters in this film, Lander, who appears as a POW in Vietnam apologizing for his “war crimes”. He had been unable to withstand Vietnamese torture and so testified against his country. Lander is the pivotal link between Palestinian terrorism, American soil and the legacy of Vietnam. Second, and more importantly, it shows that the PLO group has access to propaganda films and makes it clear that they have political links to the Communist party in Vietnam and hence with the international Communist movement.

The director tried to use another technical approach to functionalize the contrast between “good” and “bad”: the film in this scene, which is in black and white, is reflected on the faces of Dahlia and the guerrillas while they speak Arabic and the conversation between them reveals the brutal plan to attack America. The same technique continues with another scene: while she is in bed with her lover Nageeb, Dahlia records a tape message saying that they have decided to strike American civilians “where it hurts, where they feel most safe” unless the US government “stops helping the Israelis with arms and money”.

*Black Sunday* shows the contrast between the “bad guys” Dahlia and Lander and their psychosexual relationship as they plan and prepare the attack, and the “good guy”



Kabakov as he bravely works to uncover their plan. Later, Kabakov manages with his partner to penetrate the guerrillas' camp and without sustaining even a minor injury he kills all the PLO members except Dahlia. Of course, this is because she is a female, thus guiding the audience to make comparisons between Western and Israeli morals and those of the Arabs who perpetrate this brutal crime. Indeed, later Kabakov discovers that he has made a mistake and that his masculinity has failed him, which leads to several frustrating encounters with the FBI, who ask him to leave while he insists on protecting them. Although Kabakov does later suffer injury, it is not in the cause of honourable battle but in the terror attack prepared by Dahlia and Lander. The director provides a cinematic insight into Kabakov's personality as he lies in hospital. He is shown to be a Holocaust survivor who is facing another savage war.

The presentation of the savage war in *Black Sunday* is entirely one-sided. Dahlia uses her femininity to carry out a brutal crime which, in fact, she is not qualified to do; instead, Kabakov is the masculine hero who possesses the proper frontier spirit that can defeat the "feminine" Arab plan. As Tim Jon Semmerling put it, Kabakov is "the epitome of Slotkin's man who knows Indians"; he is, Semmerling adds, the "man who knows Arabs", capable of dealing with them on their own savage level (Semmerling, 2006, p. 110).

Lawrence Davidson pointed out that the image of the "Israeli frontier" became entrenched in American popular culture with the start of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Zionists were seen by Americans as the "reincarnation of the American pioneer", living the American experience on the Eastern frontier (Davidson, 2001, pp. 39-51, 65).

Michael Suleiman agrees with Davidson that Hollywood replaced Indians with Arabs. As he put it,

The ideology towards Savages and the basic orientation towards Indians were then applied to the Arabs, especially Palestinian Arabs in their conflict with Zionism and Israel. (Suleiman, 1988, p. 10)

Although PLO leaders took the decision to stop their operations abroad directly after Black September, Hollywood continued to represent them as a perpetual threat. *Black Sunday* sets out to present all Arab characters as continuations of the Black September massacre, while Kabakov's effort continues to uncover Lander and the Arab terrorist plan. Dahlia secretly meets with Mohammad Fasil, who is identified by Kabakov as the leader of the Munich Olympics murderers, and they opt to proceed with their plan to blow up the Super Bowl.

The director combines a close-up of Fasil's face and Kabakov's advice to FBI agent Corley to "take care, these people are professional, they are really dangerous". In addition, while he is attempting to elude the FBI's trap Fasil takes a young woman hostage. He is so alien to the standards that America claims for itself that he brutally kills many civilians in order to escape, but his end comes with the "final solution". Kabakov, "the man who knows Arabs", uses his superiority to solve the problem and achieves what the FBI agents fail to do. Unlike the Arabs, Kabakov and his partner Moshevsky are very responsible with their guns and do not fire, even at the bad people, without reason. They think many times before shooting at Dahlia in her shower and Fasil in the street. For the Israelis there is only one shot, and that should be lethal and final for an Arab terrorist.

Prior to the sporting event, in order to find Dahlia Kabakov secretly meets an Egyptian diplomat in the National Mall in Washington. The audience witnesses a mini conflict, which is actually symbolic of the peace process between Egypt and Israel following the 1973 October War, which forced Egypt to sign the peace agreement in 1975. Through his manoeuvres Kabakov forces the Egyptian diplomat to agree to his demands and makes him provide a picture and details of Dahlia. The film is suggesting to the audience that the only way to deal with Arabs is through force. Dahlia's picture possesses a stereotypically threatening Arab nature; it shows her dressed in a Palestinian *kaffiyeh* and holding a machinegun.

Nevertheless, Dahlia's image does not match Hollywood's stereotypical portrayal of Arab women. Faegheh Shiraz's book *The Veil Unveiled* shows that Westerners have learned to culturally accommodate the portrayal of female Arabs or Muslims as veiled or covered (Shiraz, 2001, p. 23). Yet in another way, the film supports Hollywood's

image that these women are exotic, threatening, seductive, backward and dangerous (Semmerling, 2006, p. 106). In her seduction and control of Lander and Nageeb, Dahlia is not far from the belly dancer. Jack Shaheen believed that this picture shows a modern, beautiful woman that could break down the stereotypical image into one that is more complicated (Shaheen, 2001, pp. 104-105). Semmerling commented that Dahlia's character represented a new dimension of threat. He said,

It is not the veil that threatens, but the absence of it from her body [that] make us fear her. (Semmerling, 2006, pp. 106-107)

However, the new terrorist character is more suited to the PLO's new construction, especially with their cultural and political equation with the Communist party.

The final scene provides real events. This aims to position football as America's national game, attempting to give it the iconographic status of what happened in Munich with the Israeli Olympic athletes. The camera cuts to the coaches Chuck Noll, Tom Landry, Pat Summerall, and a President Jimmy Carter look-alike. The Goodyear Blimp is above the stadium as Dahlia and Lander decide to try to detonate a cluster bomb over the spectators. The film reaches its climax with an extreme incarnation of Israeli heroism. There are many close-ups of Kabakov's eyes as he gazes for clues of the Arabs' attack, and in a rather unrealistic scene he tames the enormous and murderous blimp with his bare hands. Now the American nation (the audience) can rely upon him. He jumps on the blimp from a helicopter without any fear or vertigo, bravely gets the hook into the eyelet and motions to the helicopter to pull upward to see where the spraying darts are hitting the water. The film closes with the heroic Kabakov swinging from the dangling cable and raising his hand for the victorious end. Indeed, the Israeli has not just saved America, but has also taught the nation what is necessary to save it.

*Black Sunday* authenticates the Orientalist discourse by alienating Palestinian Arabs as savage terrorists infiltrating a weakened and feminized America. It suggests that extermination is the final solution to deal with savage Arabs who, by a combination of their blood and culture, are dangerous to the modern world and retard the progress of civilization. The film treats the terrorist attack as a "phenomenon", not as a "result" of

a complicated conflict, although it does at least present some minimal background information to suggest Dahlia's motivations. Information provided about her to Kabakov reveals that she and her family suffered greatly with the beginning of the Israeli occupation of Palestine in 1948. They were made refugees and endured many years of life in the camps. She also lost a member of her family during this conflict. However, the main issues behind the Israeli-Palestine conflict are mostly ignored and are clearly subsidiary to the film's primary concerns.

The structure of the characters in the film (the bad Arab will try to destroy America and the good Israeli will try to save it) and the plot line could be interpreted as being politically motivated. During this period, Hollywood moguls had strong connections with the new conservative political forces in the USA. They suggested that Israel's positive use of force was a strategic asset for the United States in the Middle East. Thus, they connected American security with Israeli heroism (Blitzer, 1985, p. 193). Jointly the mainstream media, including Hollywood, invested in Israel. It was the answer to the US defeat in Vietnam (McAlister, 2005, p. 197).

In 1970, Israel was deeply engaged in the occupation and oppression involved in settling the newly acquired territories (Semmerling, 2006, p. 110). *Black Sunday* provides a serious attempt to cover this up. Ironically, none of the Palestinian movies released in the 1980s and 90s (nineteen in 1983-1989 and nine in 1990-1998) tried to raise the Arab-Israeli conflict as the primary issue, or even to show the Palestinians as innocent victims or Israelis as brutal oppressors. Jack Shaheen described this as not accidental but rather "propaganda disguised as entertainment" (Shaheen, 2001, p. 26).

### 8.3 *Munich*

*Munich* (2005) is perhaps the first Hollywood movie that dramatizes the Arab-Israeli conflict. It uses a rational approach and is comparable with *Black Sunday* (1976). Both films are about not only the Munich event, but also the dramatic aftermath when the Israeli government recruited a secret squad to track down and assassinate the eleven Palestinians whom they believed responsible for the 1972 attack. Unlike *Black*

*Sunday, Munich* attempted to deliberate on the Middle Eastern conflict and its consequences as the primary issue rather than as a secondary one. The film, which used real events and characters as iconic images, functions both as a thriller and as a study in the psychology of the Israeli agents chosen for the mission.

Spielberg's *Munich* does not use the massacre to support the Israeli frontier myth. In "cowboy" or "wild west" movies, the hero is synonymous with American mystery. Here the hero is contrasted in a systematic process that is very close to an Orientalist discourse. The Israeli frontier myth has taken many different forms in Hollywood movies. For example *Exodus* (1960) and *Ben-Hur* (1959) were the construction of a Jewish frontier myth with overlapping religious and political interests (McAlister, 2005). *The Ten Commandments* (1956) narrates biblical events: Moses frees the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, leading them to the Promised Land (Shaheen, 2001, p. 473). Later on, the political development of the Jewish frontier myth was idealized in its confrontation against the growing threat of the Arabs in the construction of "Otherness" (Khatib, 2006, p. 10). *Black Sunday, Operation Thunderbolt* (1977), *Slavers* (1977), *The Jerusalem File* (1973) and *Embassy* (1973) show how the Jewish or Israeli hero protects the region from the growing threat of Middle East terror or radicalism.

In *Operation Thunderbolt*, for example, Arabs are presented as an extension of the Nazi threat, and all Westerners stand side-by-side with Israel against the Arab hijackers. In the film an Israeli tells an unbelieving German, "I don't trust Arabs. They are really dangerous. They will kill us like the Nazis" (Shaheen, 2001, p. 358), and this is later shown to be true. Therefore, America has a moral responsibility to trust the Israeli myth and view them positively in contrast to their hateful Arab enemy.

Instead, *Munich* presents both Israeli and Arab characters as operating in muddled and passive modes, sharing the same mind-set and capabilities. By so doing, Spielberg is transcending Hollywood's stereotypical image of the Middle East, where Arabs are foreign devils or typical villains. Both Spielberg and the screenwriter Tony Kushner were suggesting an explanation for the Middle Eastern conflict.

Tony Kushner, a Jewish liberal playwright who has been criticized for his views by some of America's conservative Jews, provides an intellectual view of the Arab-Israeli conflict. He edges away from Hollywood's ideological rhetoric, which often acts as a proponent of Israel against the Arabs. He is a very harsh critic of the Zionist movement. He also believes that the Zionist establishment has achieved a remarkable success in convincing others that Israel and its supporters are representatives of high moral values compared to those of the Arabs. Kushner has been called a "bloody Jew" because he condemns Israel's ongoing dispossession and oppression of the Palestinians in the occupied territories. He draws as a parallel example the sufferings of black people under apartheid (David, 2007, p. 140).

Kushner has tackled some of the most difficult subjects in contemporary history. These include AIDS, the conservative counter-revolution in his award-winning play *Angels in America* (2003) (Wills, 2009, ), the dilemmas of American capitalism in *The Death of Dr (2001). Browne*, the complex relationship between a young Jewish boy and his family's black house cleaner in *Caroline Change*, and the West's oppression in Afghanistan in *Homebody/Kabul*. He also translated and adapted Bertolt Brecht's *The Good Person of Sezuan* (1943) and *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1939). Kushner is considered a proponent of minorities, giving voice to those who have been rendered impotent by the forces of circumstance (Barclay, 2008). Notoriously, Kushner rejects the idea that the Jewish nation's historic suffering somehow exempts it from any moral reproach for its abuses against the Palestinians. This is exemplified in *Munich* through the verbal exchanges between Avner and the PLO's man Ali.

Kushner smoothly migrates between aesthetical expressionism and epical criticism. When he adapts a play for the screen, as he did with *Angels in America*, he does so with theatrical authenticity (Barclay, 2008). This is seen in *Munich*, especially with his representation of the humanistic consequences of the Arab-Israel conflict. Indeed, Spielberg told Belfast Telegraph reporter James Mottram that he asked Kushner to "humanize" what he felt was "too procedural a thriller" (Mottram, 2007, p. 6).

Spielberg's *Munich* refers the savagery of war, including the Olympic massacre, to ideological differences and to "endless war" rather than superficial fighting between "good Westerners" and "bad Arabs". He is, therefore, able to make a serious attempt

to explore the controversial question, "When is it going to end?" The significant scene is where the Israeli, Avner, and his Palestinian opposite number set out their perceptions of the problem between their two people.

Without that exchange, I would have been making a Charles Bronson movie, good guys vs. bad and Jews killing Arabs without any context and I was never going to make that picture. (Schickel, 2007, pp. 2-4)

Spielberg had been aware from an early age that Middle Eastern politics are complicated and the issues difficult to solve. This made him reject the script in 1998. He believed that it could provoke the Jews because of its exploitative context. He recalls saying, "I'll leave it to somebody else, somebody braver than me." However, after September 11<sup>th</sup> Spielberg felt the need to produce the film (Schickel, 2007, pp. 2-4).

Some features of *Munich* show that Spielberg utilized Kushner's theatrical background to portray his vision about the "endless war". To achieve moral equivalence between the terrorism and counter-terrorism, or Palestinian attack and Israeli reprisal, Spielberg functionalizes the human dimension to question the intellectual as well as moral motives behind the ongoing cycle of violence. He does so in two main ways.

First, Tony Kushner utilized his theatrical background in promoting his vision aesthetically: *Munich* functionalized a dramaturgical experiment that approaches the theatrical conventions of Expressionism. Kushner dramatizes his vision spiritually, presenting his characters in a poetic world of individuality, suffering a growing fear for the future and progress their actions by flashing images from the past .

Creatively then, Spielberg managed to convey most of his vision to the screen with an expressionist goal in mind. A close reading of *Munich's* visual functions makes it comparable with the Swedish playwright August Strindberg, the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen or even the German actor and dramatist Frank Wedekind, as they expressed human concerns emotionally as well as aesthetically.

The expressionist movement arose apolitically. It provides an intellectual as well as an artistic reaction against social change in older middle-class generations and dramatizes the struggle against bourgeois or materialist values and established authority (Styan, 1998, p. 3). The expressionist style often requires an emotional response; for example, Strindberg presents his plays with a thematic structure of isolation and naturalist repertoire. This was obvious from his early productions, such as *To Damascus* (1898) and *The Father* (1888). Later on, his plays disintegrated into “dream visions” or “confessional monodramas”, in which all the action is reflected through the eyes of the protagonist. The result is interpersonal conflict that is aesthetically expressed by visual language, as shown by his last plays *The Swan's Blood* (1904) and *The Stranger* (1909) (Moonstruck, 2009).

The expressionists' characters took their stereotypical portrait from the Austrian painter and writer Oskar Kokoschka, who provides extensive use of visual language and elements such as lighting and body movements in order to express his painful depiction of the individual and society. His early plays, *Murder Hope of Women* (1909), *Sphinx and Strawman* (1911) and *The Burning Bush* (1913), show a capacity to communicate with the audience through “a language of images, visible or tangible signs, graspable reflections of experience and knowing” (Britannica, 2009).

By the end of WWI Expressionism took on a more overtly political complexion, mainly due to the German playwright and director Der Tribune. He gave the expressionist stage an ideological position spiritually expressed through the director, dramatist, or protagonist. For Tribune there was no contrasted enemy; all are engaged in a mutual suffering, and find it hard to cope with their community. His characters show clear fragments of a unified consciousness, and as such are comparable to Spielberg's characters in *Munich*. Technically the dialogue was highlighted through visual language, which underlined or expressed the power of the protagonist's position (Britannica, 2009).

Spielberg achieves similar effects through a visual solution involving the use of an extensive range of technical elements. For example, the camera is combined with significant use of POV shots to explain the protagonists' strong emotional appeal



regarding this savage war in a way that blurs the lines between attackers and counter attackers.

The second way in which Spielberg utilizes Kushner's theatrical background to put forward his vision about the "endless war" is purely dialectical. It explores the contradictions between the interpersonal relationships of the five ex-Mossad agents and their assassination mission. *Munich* plots the violence and the growing doubt that the killings are justified, or that they will even ensure Israel's future and security. Spielberg put his faith in this idea and that it will endure. The image of the massacre is invoked and evaluated not according to what it adds to reality, but to what is revealed about its dramatic structural depth. *Munich* opened a wider dialogue, which helped one to debate the undebateable and transform the incredible into the credible. These features were attached to Kushner's fantasy and expressionistic style.

Spielberg opens his film with a Hitchcockian stylistic pattern of creating suspense by a heart-stopping re-enactment of the event that shocked the world, the Black September massacre. It depicts the infiltration of the Olympic Village in Munich by the would-be assassins and then mixes archival with simulated footage in order to seek credibility in telling the tale of the tragic event that transpired like the famous archival shot of a ski-masked terrorist leaning over a balcony (shot A). The scene is followed by ABC sports announcer Jim McKay's real-life eloquent reportage (shot B). Its sense was technically enhanced by using medium long shots, straight-on angles, both of which aimed to create a rhythmic relationship between shot A and B and present different segments of time, space and pictorial information about the event. A similar technique was used in the bridge scene in John Huston's *Maltese Falcon* (1941) and the death shot in Minoru Chiaki's *Seven Samurai* (1954). Next, by using three cuts the shot was joined up so that the audience could share the thrill of his game.

The scene is crafted in a way that controls our knowledge about the Munich attack. Spielberg achieved this by using various optical points-of-view by employing a combination of camera movements to provide rhythmic relationships between the two shots that aim to employ subjective depth and attract the audience's attention, not to what they know but to what they see, diverting expectations away from the classical presentation of "bad guys". Spielberg was careful to present the Arab squad as

believing strongly in their just cause and motivated by national goals. For example, there are two brief close-ups on their faces and guns followed by an extreme long shot as they begin the attack, crosscutting with their families in Gaza where the same rhythmic relationship continues between the two shots, which were taken in different places at the same time. This generates an expressional authenticity that emotionally combines irreverent senses as shown in David Byrne's *True Stories* (1986). It is the way that they express their feelings as human who have rights and the belief in their case. On the other hand, the reverse-shot is of the Israeli Olympians yelling for help with clear *mise-en-scene* to show that in this savage war this kind of attack is to be expected. Spielberg managed, therefore, to drive our minds toward his main question, of why they did it and whether it was justified.

More striking than the *mise-en-scene* shots, however, is that the scene is implemented aesthetically by chilly lighting using yellow tungsten, along with elliptical crosscutting between gun fire and children playing in the mud. All of these images fade into the sky in a spectacular shot that provides evidence that Spielberg is breaking with Hollywood's traditional conventions for portrayals. Hollywood clearly defines the boundaries between terrorism and counter-terrorism. *Munich* tends to blend the characters from both sides into one frame of terrorism or hateful violence.

On the heels of this massacre, Golda Meir, played by Lynn Cohen, gives terse approval for a new eye-for-an-eye policy. For the sake of Israel's strength and survival she orders retaliation to be carried out in secret by a group of specially chosen Jewish agents. In one of the movie's most crucial lines she says,

The men who planned the Munich terror must be hunted down and killed...every civilization finds it necessary to negotiate compromises with its own values.

This scene was taken by several shots using elliptical editing along with different patterns of light that achieved a smooth contrast between Meir's sentences about civilization and the moral consequences of the ongoing conflict. Spielberg stressed the sense needed to direct the audience's attention about the squad's mission, which came within a national requirement. This sense was achieved by using spatial shots (moving from extreme medium close-up to extreme close-up), which were aimed to disclose the conspiracy and invite the audience to re-assess the situation. The sense is similar to those found in many political films, such as, John Frankenheimer's *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962). It is a unique process that Nimmo and Combs describe as a "fantastic displacement". It is the process of placing contradictory emotional feelings with political fantasy (Nimmo and Combs, 1983, p.105).

The film attempts to follow a team of five assassins whose mission is vengeance. Ironically, the events reveal that they are anything but seasoned killers. The group, led by Avner (Eric Bana), begin their secret mission to exact revenge on those they are told are responsible for the killings in Munich. They proceed to carry out the assassinations one-by-one with the help of a list of contacts and funding from the Israeli government. Unlike the photograph of Dahlia in *Black Sunday*, the pictures of the Arab victims present them in their everyday lives and sometimes with their families. Spielberg swiftly passes through Palestine with a minimum of shots equitably exploring the assassins' reactions in a dramatic way.

Spielberg switches frequently between the two underlying features of the plot: the assassins' mission and their suspicion about it, while allowing a great deal of contradiction and internal conflict derived from the personalities of the characters. Avner, the team leader, is the son of an Israeli war hero. He is handsome, with gentle brown eyes; a tender husband and family man whose wife is about to have a baby he will scarcely see for the next two years. He is a very good cook. Avner is looking to live with his small family in peace. The team also includes Steve (Daniel Craig) a South African getaway driver; demolitionist Robert (Mathieu Kassovitz), the toymaker who trained only to defuse bombs not to make them; antiques aficionado Hans (Hans Zischler); and the even tempered "cleaner" Carl (Ciarán Hinds), a calm and quiet man who cleans up after the crimes. Spielberg's novel characterizations show an absence of

the Hollywood frontier spirit that has been used in other films heroically to defeat the savagery of the Arabs.

Along with the intelligently crafted and aesthetical pictures that *Munich* presents, the film also approaches dialectical questions through a remarkable interchange between the image and the dialogue. For example, two significant and controversial questions raised are the cost or the price to turn a good man into a killing machine in the pursuit of a righteous cause, and the price paid by the countries that sponsor the Killing Machine (Richter, 2007, p. 140 (37)). *Munich* is as much a meditation on ethics as a political thriller (LaSalle, 2006, p. 20). The film's technical resources and varied use of camera movements asserts the role of its visual means in maintaining political themes. The film's various shots play a vital role in shaping our sympathies towards the ethical motives behind Avner and his fellows' "national" wars with the Palestinians. In his book *Film Art*, David Bordwell explains the influential role that POV plays in moulding the viewers' emotions to the scene by driving an affective as well as an intellectual response (2008, pp. 388-426).

As the action progresses, this espionage thriller drives the audience to make ethical judgements, because the director invites the public to share Avner's doubts about the counter-terrorism utility of his mission. At first, that mission is determined by patriotic fervour. He is sure of the righteousness of his actions until the first killing, when he hesitates to shoot and the task falls to one of his confederates. As the killings become easier, his moral compass is battered, skewed and obsessed with betrayal and paranoia. Avner's scepticism is spiritually conveyed through a stylistic technique that combines an expressionist approach with a Hitchcockian thriller. The purpose of the esthetical shots in the killing scenes is to invite controversy and expose the questionable morality of killing innocent persons who might have had nothing to do with Black Sunday.

For the first assassination, the director uses a handheld camera. A 180 degree shot follows the Arab storyteller's face and then we crosscut to Avner's team as they prepare for the attack. Visually, Heart-stopping Foad Zayter, an old man dressed in a western suit, enhances the shot. He is a storyteller who spends his time in cafes sharing with the customers lovely stories about Cleopatra and Arab literature. The

camera follows him into the shop where he is warmly welcomed. He is very friendly and everybody wants to help him. A brief focal lens and a close-up shot with a daylight camera show that he is a good citizen who is kind to his family, especially his grandson. Such cinematic patterns support the director's aim to remove any contrast between the Israelis as an assassination group and the Arab characters as victims with a marvellous wry hostile courage. The killing scene drives our sympathy unconsciously toward old decent Zayter. The assassins ask him for his name and, with clear hesitation, they draw their guns. Zayter kindly asks them to put their Guns down, Avner replies "Now what are we going to do?" He then suggests that they put down their weapons and start to talk.

Avner (again): Are you Zayter?

Robert (talking to Avner): Shut up, he already said yes.

Avner: Now what are we going to do?

They start shooting Zayter.

The political theme was progressively enhanced by the aesthetic use the expressionism style. The shot was taken with a camera angle that reveal the psychological conflict of the squad as they failed to find a justification for their first assassination against a civilian. The camera angle was functionalized to extract a feeling of guilt while the final shot created a dramatic influence by using the depth of the field that framed Zayter lying down in his blood as the camera moved from a high-angle to a horizontal one. This on the one hand victimizes Zayter and on the other emphasises the inner conflict, which the Israeli group suffer. This technique of Spielberg had been achieved in other contemporary films especially with a political hue. Terry Christensen and Peter J. Haas commend this kind of directing when they said,

"The greatest movies are dominated by the personal vision of the director. A filmmaker's signature can be perceived through an examination of his or her total output." (Christensen and Haas, 2005, p.26)

As the old man falls, slowly another mis-en-scene shot focuses on the Israeli squad by cutting the backlight to an extreme close-up shot of Avner's face emphasizing his grief for what he has done. The shot is followed by moments of silence mixed with focal

length (wide-angle). Instead of rendering the Israeli action with a patriotic hue, the shot portrays Zayter as the victim and casts criticism upon the squad's action. Technically the shots approach a cinematographic method of expressionism that could transform the scene from a construction of entertainment of good versus bad, to a depiction of visceral and disturbing violence (Bordwell, 2008, pp. 428-429).

Spielberg's camera continues to follow the group's mission and shows how, across Europe, Palestinians begin to die at the hands of the assassins. The Israeli squad have begun by believing that these men were the perpetrators of Munich, but with the next target the image of this Mossad group as capable killers begins to dwindle. Dr. Mahmood Al-Hamshri is a very intelligent man who is living in Paris. He is good-tempered, dresses in a western suit and gently welcomes his guest Robert (now disguised as a journalist) into his luxurious apartment, offering him Arabian coffee. The audience see, unexpectedly, an adorable family, a gorgeous wife in western style clothes and a lovely girl playing the piano. Most importantly, Spielberg and his screenwriter Tony Kushner have re-broadcast the Palestinian voice, which is provocative to the Zionism movement (Jackson, 2007, p. 87).

Dr. Hamshri reminds the audience how for more than twenty years Israel has turned the Palestinians into the world's largest refugee group, and that while the international community and the media opened one eye to the Munich massacre it closed the other to Israel's bombing the next day of two hundred refugees in the Palestinian camps.

Edmund Ghareeb claimed that the media coverage during this period was biased towards Israel and prone to distortion. He pointed out that although Israel was deeply involved in exterminating Palestinian civilians as well as settling the newly acquired territories, American official and commercial TV networks were supportive of Israel (Ghareeb, 1983, pp. 159-160). Edward Said stated that during this period, Islam and the Palestinians were guilty by association, and only the weakest evidence was used to discredit them (Said, 1997, pp. 50-51).

*Premiere's* Glenn Kenny explains that Spielberg's intentions were to edge away from Hollywood's traditional representation of Arabs, for

The purpose of narrative is to ask questions, not to pronounce answers.  
(Kenny, 2005)

The film was conducted in a manner that was intended not to attack Israel but “to ask a plethora of questions” (Kenny, 2005). It drew adverse criticism from many conservative Jewish-American commentators, among them Charles Krauthammer, Leon Wieseltier and Andrea Poyser. According to Jack Shaheen, the Zionist Organization of America called for a boycott of the film because of its clear sympathy towards the Palestinians. They claimed that *Munich* was nothing more than “vicious propaganda” (Jackson, 2007, p. 87). In addition, Spielberg told Newsweek’s David Ansen that unfortunately many fundamentalist Jews in the United States condemned his attempt not only for portraying the Palestinians as victims but also for “allowing the Palestinians simply to have a dialogue” (Weiss, 2006, p. 2).

This new depiction does not just change the portrayed image of the Arab, but creates an aura of scepticism that gradually drives the squad’s internal conflicts into unexpected arguments.

Who exactly are we killing? Can it be justified? Will it stop the terror?

Spielberg maintains the thriller style during the second assassination. There is an air of Hitchcockian suspense while the team waits for Hamshri’s little girl comes back to the house few seconds before the assassinate bomb explode. The scene deepens the human dimension when they manage to keep her away from the deadly explosion. (The toymaker tries to keep Hamshri’s daughter away from his bomb.) Spielberg’s camera seems to be everywhere at once; he switches to the assassination scene, where John Williams’ score is like a tell-tale heartbeat. As Roger Ebert describes,

We reflect how it is always more thrilling in a movie when someone needs to run desperately for it to be an awkward older man. (Ebert, 2007, p. 482)

The film critic E. W. Owen Gleberman claims that

The result is a thriller that seeps into your central nervous system. With each assassination things go awry in a different way. (Gleiberman, 2005)

Spielberg in some way reminds the audience that the Arabs are not able to justify themselves. The scene shows a glimmer of fractious comedy when Dr Hamshri talks about the Palestinians' sufferings. His wife enthusiastically interrupts him, which leads him to snap at her in Arabic saying, "The interview is with me not with you". The discord between him and his wife could be symbolic of the dissent between Fatah and Hamas. This discord weakens and exposes them to derision in front of the world, especially Israel. While they are arguing Carl manages to stuff the phone with explosives, but when Hamshri's young daughter enters the flat the team scramble to abort the mission.

With the third assassination attempt, things go awry in a different way. The squad's discord increases and is reflected in their mission. The bomb is too potent and blows up an entire hotel floor in Cyprus. The effect is so immense that it almost kills Avner, and the no-harm-to-civilians rule begins to collapse. The group find themselves effectively acting as a gang of terrorists using horrible devices to kill.

On the other side, the KGB-Palestinian connection, Abo-Ayad, appears as a friendly Western style person. He enters into conversation with Avner warmly and offers him every help. Spielberg's questions are reflected marvellously in Avner's face as he gradually realizes that his actions come at both a personal and emotional cost. Unlike *Black Sunday*, which creates an Orientalist fear by showing the savagery of Palestinian Arabs vs. Israelis or the American frontier myth (Semmerling, 2007, p. 122), in *Munich* the group begin to feel that their actions are little better than those of the terrorists. Along the way they are tested by the assignment, by each other and by the growing fear that perhaps they are being used more as political tools than as instruments of justice (Olsen, 2006). This contradiction was used to reveal the squad's implicit conflict toward this savage war. Spielberg used both wide-angle and short focal lenses to support his message about the moral cost of this bestial war. Extreme close-ups of the faces of Carl and Avner enhanced this technique. Object that are filmed in a frame whether they exclude or include a person's feelings could reveal



other facts that are not explicit as they would be in ordinary movies or by Hollywood conventions. It is obvious that the Israeli group is losing its moral compass. The killing scenes are not presented with feelings of disturbing violence but rather with a construction of entertainment. The use of different lenses can produce interesting and peculiar transformations of scale and depth. (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p. 170) The same technique was used in Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversations* (1974) when Gene Heckman's obsession was dramatically illustrated by various use of zoom lens.

Spielberg's message is delivered as the film progresses to the fourth target. A controversial scene sees Avner and his Palestinian opposite number, Ali, meeting and talking calmly. Ali portrays a vision of the Palestinians as a people dispossessed of their land and without sovereign rights, but determined to continue their struggle for many generations if necessary. He compares their struggle to that of the Jews, who regained their own country after many years. He tells Avner,

It will take a hundred years but we will win. How [long did] it take the Jews to have their own country?

Avner views the Palestinian cause as weak and hopeless, and as heading inevitably to disaster. He tells Ali,

F\*\*k you! I'm the voice inside your head telling you what you already know, your people have nothing to bargain with, you will never get the land back, and you will all die in refugee camps waiting for Palestine.

Moreover, Avner argues that the land they covet is barren, desolate, and inhospitable, and has little to offer in terms of natural resources, while there are many other places for Arabs to live.

Ali refutes this argument and poses a rhetorical question. He says to Avner,

You don't know what it is like without land; [tears in his eyes] we want to be a nation.

The exchange continues, deliberating on the moral issue of terrorism and how it is counterproductive to the Palestinian cause as Avner asserts,

You kill Jews and the world feels bad. They will think that you are animals.

However, Ali tries to assume the moral high ground, stating that by their actions in time the world will come to see the justice of their cause when:

They will see who turned us into animals.

(The camera pans to take in both of them in a silent moment.)

Spielberg sets this conversation in a dark room symbolic of the dark future. He deliberately gives Ali a strange accent to keep the cognitive distance between him and the audience. From the point of view of the camera, Ali talks with passion while Avner is impulsively obsessed. Later, Avner is forced to kill Ali and is overcome with feelings of guilt. Unlike Kabakov in *Black Sunday*, where the man carries the tool to civilize the wilderness, the confrontation in *Munich* carries more nuanced message. The scene means everything to Spielberg and his screenwriter Kushner. As Schickel reports, Spielberg's view was that,

The only thing that's going to solve this is rational minds, a lot of sitting down and talking until you're blue in the gills. (Schickel, 2006a, pp. 2-4)

The worst conflict in the lives of individuals and nations is the kind that breaks out between those who are persecuted:

They see in each other's faces a reflection of some larger oppressor. That may well be the case with the 100-year conflict between Arabs and Jews. (Schickel, 2006a, pp. 2-4)

Cinematographic methods combine with the film's narrative structure to impose a dialectical argument in a way that explores the contradictions that question the righteousness of the characters' actions. It becomes increasingly clear that Avner and his fellows are losing their moral compass, especially when they discover that they too are targets. The script provides Avner with a growing desire to live in peace (famous father, gentle mother, very pregnant wife). The same feeling sweeps over the entire group as they struggle between their desire for justice and their growing feelings of guilt. These doubts weaken their mission and put them in a critical situation. It is obvious that the longer they remain in the hunt the more they are in danger of becoming the hunted.

Avner and some members of his squad begin to lose their morality and their justification. They become emotionally entangled in the moral ambiguity of their mission, which becomes obvious in the scene where Avner questions Steve about the right to kill the bodyguards who, although armed, were not targets.

Steve: Well then, they're not civilians. I'd have done it if you'd give me half a chance. I'm the only one who actually wants to shoot these guys.

Avner: We only go after our targets.

Steve tries to justify his actions despite by now having discernable reservations, claiming that they are too involved not to continue; that is, it is too late to stop. The group members involve themselves in an exchange to justify the morality of their mission but the debate soon becomes acrimonious and the group is filled with self-doubt.

Steve: You know what your problem is, Habibi. You're disorientated. Because the people we're killing are dressed in expensive suits and this is London and not some ugly Arab village. But it's the same old war we're fighting over the same old scrap of desert.

Carl (overlapping): I'm not disoriented; I'm keeping my sanity by occasionally reminding myself that in spite of the work I do I'm still at least in principle a human being, a thing which I've noticed some people surrender all too willingly.

As the confrontation continues, Spielberg intensifies the debate by using the sensitive issue of anti-Semitism. Members of the group accuse each other of acting like anti-Semites; however, an attempt is made to justify this when Carl says,

We act like them, all the time. What, you think the Palestinians invented bloodshed? How do you think we got control of the land? By being nice?

The debate degenerates to personal attacks on each other when Steve says,

Somebody pull down this man's pants, see if he's circumcised. I think we have a double agent in our midst.

It becomes physically violent when Carl suddenly attacks Steve. Avner and Robert impose themselves between Steve and Carl, who keep struggling to get at each other and trade personal insults. Carl (talking to Steve, over the above) says,

Don't you dare accuse me of that! My son died in '67, you foulmouthed son of a bitch! Everything you can ask I've done for Israel.

Despite all this, Steve maintains his steadfastness to the mission and is not repelled by it. He says

No. 'Cause the only blood that matters to me is Jewish blood. (Then to Avner) Nice job eh, nice job leading.

The scene ends with Avner attempting to justify the necessity of continuing the mission. Robert is losing his soul and questioning their task:

All this blood, it comes back to us... We're Jews, Avner. Jews don't do wrong because their enemies do wrong.

Avner argues that the mission will succeed in time and although Jews are taught to exhibit the highest morals,

We can't afford to be that decent anymore.

The scene was conducted with short focal length (wide-angle), as in Nicholas Roeg's *Don't Look Now*, especially when the camera swivels towards the protagonists in the street. Technically, the previous shot helps to expose the agonized question of the squad's mission and creates a cinematographic method to exaggerate the characters' performances while excluding any background details (Bordwell & Thompson, 1993, p. 190). In the above exchange the group's concerns are deeply entangled with moral inquiries; Spielberg is "humanizing monsters" and the camera asks us whether it is possible to think about terrorism without having first to dehumanize the terrorists.

The scene is harmonized with chilly lighting while shadows conceal the details and draw our attention to Carl, who consistently voices legal and moral doubt against the angry certainty of Steve. The contrast between dark and light functions as an iconic image of the conflict.

Avner as the leader desperately tries to give moral justification and defuse these doubts in order to complete the mission. His moral certainty does not waver until the final sequences of the film. Here Spielberg registers the psychological cost of Avner's denials when the agent rebels against his masters and exiles himself to Manhattan to live as a native Israeli. Avner's change is dramatized via technical means such as flashback in which the events in Munich are presented as being subjective to him. This technique is similar to the one employed in Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries*, where mirrors are employed to fade in the flashback while lighting is used to emphasize deep shadows. Through this technique, Bergman effectively renders a chronology affected by time and memory as viewed from the present (Singer, 2007, p. 132).

Creatively Spielberg and his screenwriter Tony Kushner support their argument through a very balanced view of both sides. They maintain the controversy between terrorism and counter-terrorism throughout the film. This is achieved by not portraying the whole of the Munich attack in one part of the film. The action is technically distributed over four parts, one in the beginning and the rest in flashback pictures in Avner's mind. By using this expressionistic style, the sense of flashback was crafted by special effects. The director digitalized the original copy of the massacre and extend the use of zoom shots to magnify the human or emotional sequences of this endless ideological war. The killing shots were used to achieve not what they add to reality but what they could reveal. Spielberg victimizes both sides (despite his Jewish roots), and puts the action in various forms of disturbing violence. The film invites the audience emotionally to share Avner's paranoia. Cinematographer Janusz Kaminski, who has worked with the director on more than ten movies, acclaimed the way Spielberg uses the camera in the flashbacks to create the correct atmosphere (Jackson, 2007, p. 87).

The first flashback is introduced by Avner looking out of the window of a night flight, until the camera fades in to the beginning of the Munich massacre. Despite the outrageous nature of the event, there is an aesthetical hue. Spielberg attempted to mute the colour contrast to give the shot of the massacre a murky greenish-blue tint. This helps to find a psychological connection between Avner and the event. Andrei Tarhovesky employed a similar technique (Bordwell & Thompson, 1993, p. 186). The same scene shows that the terrorists were involved in a difficult situation and that they desperately sought a way out.

In the second flashback Avner has just called his wife Daphna. He breaks down and falls on his back crying when he hears his daughter's voice for the first time, but has a nightmare about the massacre from which he awakens screaming. This dramatic feature exposes Avner's world of darkness, dispartateness and scepticism. It is a world that becomes more pervasive as the assassination attempts become more difficult and less and less cleanly executed. Avner's fear is portrayed by alternating the scene with a process called "flashing". . The process reminds us of Fritz Lang's *The Big Heat*, especially as it is accompanied with effects such as thunder and lightning (Arti, 2003, p. 176). The purpose of this second flashback scene is to make clear the regrettable

situation that Avner and his team have reached. The spiritual world is the film's main theme, used to explore the humanistic issues behind the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The third flashback occurs during an unusual sex scene between Avner and his wife Daphna. It primarily features Avner's face while connecting the final part of the massacre with his sexual position. Critics have described the scene as the most controversial one of the film. It is a puzzling scene, but it can make the viewers speculate upon the logic behind the story (Richter, 2007, p. 140 (27)).

The final scene presents the strongest piece of evidence that *Munich* "equates terrorists and counter-terrorists". Technically Spielberg functionalizes Avner's viewpoint to align with that of the Arab terrorists. Apart from the spiritual there is also dialectical aesthetics. The scene reminds the audience that the flashbacks are not part of Avner's memories, but they morally trouble him. The final sequence uses a most influential montage, a "montage by attraction", which is defined by Andre Bazin as "the reinforcing of the meaning of one image by association with another image, not necessarily part of the same episode" (Bazin, 2004, p. 42).

We see Avner and Daphna lying on their bed under a shadowy light. With the extensive use of chilly light, the shot was harmonized with camera movements. These movements involved changing camera angles between mis-en-scene, medium and medium close ups, These shots were designed to portray Avner's aggressive feelings, as his eyes gaze at the sky but he is sinking into his darkness as she tries to seduce him. He responds in a strange way. The camera, using the same speed, goes to the final sequence of the massacre. Two helicopters arrive at the airport carrying the terrorists and their nine remaining hostages. A shoulder camera follows the terrorists checking out the airliner provided by Lufthansa. They discover that the plane is empty, there is no pilot and the German police have trapped them. The scene is projected slowly so that the audience is able to see the terrorists full-faced looking at each other in dismay. The camera then returns to Avner's face. He climbs onto Daphna's body just at the moment the terrorists discover their danger. Avner gazes towards the window and his face acquires a grin. The camera switches to the terrorist attack. Then shooting breaks out, as they have nothing more to lose. With a flashing effect the shoulder camera pans again to the terrorists' faces as they desperately resolve to fight

to the death. They turn in deep anger and vengeance as they come under attack; they want to make sure that none of the Israeli athletes will survive. The camera switches to Avner. He grows silent with the terrorists' anger but strangely concentrates because he is trying to exterminate the monster of bad memories. His lovemaking becomes rough and outrageous but without stopping him Daphna begins to scream fearfully.

Avner's face is contorted with hate. The camera is switching and its speed increases. In the fifth switch, a terrorist hesitantly machine-guns four Israelis shackled in a helicopter. His features tell us that he is reluctantly forced to do it and is still looking into his victims' eyes when a second terrorist desperately shoots the five remaining hostages in the second helicopter. The first terrorist follows his friend and shoots his hostages while crying regretfully. The camera switch fades to Avner who is screaming as the terrorists gun down the hostages. Despite the agony expressed in his face, Avner fails to exorcise his monster. The scene is accompanied by John Williams' music that laments the Arabs. It is hard to judge whether Avner is sympathizing with the victims or their killers. The shot conveys drastic violence but the final flashback does register the terrorist point of view about the victims before they are killed. The audience is invited to explore the uncomfortable question, "When is it going to end?"

Thus *Munich* uses a spiritual and aesthetical style to deepen the human dimension of the Arab-Israeli struggle. Spielberg developed the technical means to condemn the Israeli response to the Munich massacre. The former American diplomat for the Middle East Dennis Ross commended this style of directing. He said that,

Viewing Israel's response to Munich through the eyes of the men who were sent to avenge that tragedy adds a human dimension to a horrific episode that we usually think about only in political or military terms.

By experiencing how the implacable resolve of these men to succeed in their mission slowly gave way to troubling doubts about what they were doing, I think we can learn something important about the tragic standoff we find ourselves in today. (Halbfinger, 2005, p. 10)



With most films stressing predominantly one side of conflict, *Munich* represent an expression of a growing desire to portray the other side using a suitable approach. The counter-action is not based on Hollywood's contradictory "bad" vs. "good". Instead, both sides are presented on the same level. Kushner and Spielberg constantly attempt to preserve a balance between the characters' inner conflict and the conventions of the thriller's genre, which is reflected equally in the Palestinian attack and the Israeli retaliation. *Munich* is deliberately re-serving the old chestnut that fighting helps no one, and it reminds the audience what this bleak vision of endless violence has to offer.

*Munich* presents a good image of Beirut, unlike *Blackunday S* and similar movies, which symbolize the Arab world as a large quagmire full of *kaffiyeh*-covered heads and wild deserts (Shaheen, 2001, p. 13). The film follows the group to their next target in Beirut, where the camera cuts to a romantic night-time scene of a live concert made up of about six extras. This represents to the audience the labyrinth of ideological differences.

*Munich's* depiction of the Arabs and the Middle East takes a central place in the plot. It reflects, in particular, the inner struggle of Avner and his group in accepting an ideal without necessarily coming to terms with what that ideal is. The film bears witness to an Israeli confession then unprecedented in Hollywood's history, when the group says,

We started it, and it is not going to end.

They do not want to think of themselves as "anything like the men they are pursuing" (Schickel, 2006a, pp. 2-4).

The lighting, editing and directing creates a cinematographic effect of antipathy that impresses on the minds of the audience the questions of whether the murders will help to preserve Israeli security or are just yet more actions in an endless circle of violence, and whether Avner can live with himself. These concerns are clearly embodied in Avner's dialogue with the group's coordinator Abraham. Spielberg deliberately visualizes the Manhattan skyline along with the World Trade Centre building, providing one of the controversial scenes in the film that goes beyond 'noirish'

shadows. Indeed in that shot he is not just suggesting the historical veracity of his work, but he also indicates two uncomfortable facts. First the shot symbolizes the high (and endless) concerns of the perpetual threat and the ideological differences behind it. Second, it connects the fate of the Israeli athletes and the fate of the victims in the World Trade Centre. In his article "Spielberg Takes on Terror", Richard Schickel stated that the destiny of those Towers "tinctures our thoughts". He added that we have to take into account that a man like Avner was sent to improvise the response to terrorism, and the result is an endless cycle of violence and anxiety (Schickel, 2006b, pp. 2-4).

There is no comparison between *Munich*'s outcomes and the propaganda machine in *Black Sunday*, which authenticates the Orientalists' fears by depicting the savagery of the Palestinian Arabs. Spielberg told critic Richard Schickel that he was proud that he, his screenwriter Tony Kushner and the actors did not demonize anyone in the film. As he stated,

We don't demonize our targets, they're individuals. They have families although what happened in Munich I condemn. (Schickel, 2006b, pp. 2-4)

He also told the *Entertainment Weekly*,

One of the things that people make a terrible mistake with in terms of thinking about the Middle East conflict is to think about it in terms of a clash of religions...Behind Muslim fundamentalism, there's a history of colonialism and oppression that needs to be thought about intelligently. (Shaheen, 2008, p. 143)

The film is not branding Israel as the reincarnation of the American pioneers; rather it deliberates what are uncomfortable truths for Israel, as is obvious from the reaction of Israel's Ambassador to the United States Daniel Ayalon, who described the movie as "ridiculous" (Al-Nowari, 2005, p. 97).

In his article "Hollywood Goes political", Steve Pratt said that Spielberg's "bravery" breaks Hollywood's conventions, after a long period during which loading a film with political context was likely to be considered box-office suicide (Pratt, 2006, p. 12). With the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the invasion of Iraq, new breeds of movie-makers are struggling to present these profound issues seriously. *Munich* provided its controversial argument far removed from any propaganda images. Furthermore, Mark Steyn assumed that with the rising role of Hollywood activism, especially with regard to Republican inspired foreign policy, it is to be expected that there will be collaboration between Hollywood intellectuals and leading actors, as for example in *Syriana* and *Munich*. Steyn believes that the new breed will find its way to the audience. As he puts it, "People are becoming braver" (Steyn, 2006, p. 4).

Spielberg took extra care with *Munich* due to its sensitivity not just for both sides but also for American policy, which is directly involved in the peace process. Spielberg confirmed that he did not face the slightest objection from the government. The biggest pressure was from society in general "not to stick out your neck" (Steyn, 2006, p. 4).

The emergence of *Munich's* counter-rhetoric, especially regarding the construction of the enemy or the "Others" might have been encouraged by the new production system, which is described by Christopherson and Storper (1986, 1987) as a transformation due to the disintegration of the classical vertically-integrated studio system into a vertically-designed production complex of agglomerate proportions. *Munich* played on this significant change, especially after the majors' loss of some control over production. The film was also involved in co-production and financing. *Munich* (2005) was a co-production between Dream Works SKG founders Steven Spielberg, Jeffrey Katzenberg and David Geffen, along with social activists Kathleen Kennedy, Barry Mendel and Paramount Pictures Corp, in which Paramount took the distribution rights.

Besides its political involvement, the film disengaged from Hollywood's established central production system by using creative and economic runaways. Distant locations such as France and Hungary were used after receiving competitive offers from both countries compared to those of the Hollywood studios. This was possible because of the changes to the tax law in 2004 brought about by the Motion Picture Act (MTI,

2005). These changes allow Hollywood productions to use diverse scene settings with a minimum tax cost. Spielberg, who took the major portion of the film production, wanted to expose his view of ideological endless war without any side influence except that of Tony Kushner. He also wished to maintain good relations with the politicians.

Although Spielberg co-operated with many Hollywood's organizations, such as, MPAA, his movie was not submitted to anybody, including the US Department of State. He did however show the script to a raft of political and public relation experts, among them former President Bill Clinton, White House spokesperson McCrery and Clinton's former Middle East envoy Dennis Ross (Halbfinger, 2006, p. 10).

Emotionally as well as intellectually, Spielberg convinces the viewer that counter-terrorist actions using force cannot stop terrorism, and that striking back with force is not the solution. The film's message says that military responses lead to an endless cycle of violence, whether they are targeted assassinations, the invasion of Afghanistan after 9/11 or the Israeli actions against Palestinian terrorists. Such responses simply cannot work and just provoke more terrorism (Richter, 2007, p. 140).

Of course there are some, such as Bernard Lewis, who refer to the failure of the Iraq project as being due to the softness of the US use of force against the Iraqis or armed cells: "Not enough force was used" (McGreal, 2004). Alternatively, there is the Orientalist discourse that is reflected in Huntington's blame of multi-culturalist movements in their attempt to reconcile with the "unbridgeable culture" of Islam (Huntington, 1993, pp. 22-50). Spielberg and Kushner however exclude the religious factors in their presentation of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Instead, they preserve liberal discussion that involves concerns regarding the unpredictable consequences of endless war.

By making the significant link between 1972 and 2001, Spielberg suggests that countering terrorism with hard power is always counter-productive. He is therefore approaching Joseph Nye's view that the US is unable to impose its total will on the Middle East by force. Iraq, for example, has slipped away from its control. In his lecture about the political situation in Iraq Nye referred the chaos there to America's

reluctance to apply properly its soft power. Nye also showed the need to restore Iraqi trust by reviving the American values (Aqoul et al, 2005). Spielberg agrees with Nye in suggesting alternatives with which to engage Middle Easterners rather than alienating them in an “unavoidable struggle” (Huntington, 1993, pp. 22-50).

In terms of adversaries, Spielberg showed his concerns about Republican solutions against “depraved ideologies”. He has stated that counter-terrorism would be a bad choice because hate begets hate and violence begets violence. Thus, he believes that the true enemies in Middle Eastern conflict are neither the Palestinians nor the Israelis but rather “absolute irreconcilability” (Sporl, 2006). In terms of ideological differences, Spielberg believes serious discussion should take place about Hollywood rhetoric. This would be the result if the film were designed solely for popular entertainment. As Spielberg said in an interview with *Der Spiegel*,

As I grow older I feel the burden of responsibility that comes with such an influential instrument as making films. I now prefer to tell stories that have real meaning. (Sporl, 2006)

Other indications make compatibility between Nye’s theory and Spielberg’s plausible argument possible. For example, Spielberg is involved in campaigns that oppose armed intervention in Sudan and North Korea. He believes in harnessing the power of public opinion by drawing attention to human crises throughout the world, for example, in Darfur. In addition, he used his moral influence on Beijing in order to convince the Chinese government to end the killing in Darfur, which was financed by China. Moreover, the legendary director had offered to place his experience at the disposal of the Chinese to help them create the spectacular opening and closing ceremonies of the Olympic Games. Despite being ignored, he made similar offers to North Korea, which confirms the value of the soft power process when dealing with adversaries.

Nye’s soft power may have influenced *Munich*, as both target the audience’s mind by the power of persuasion and attraction rather than by coercion or denigration. Moreover, former American President Bill Clinton, whose former Assistant Secretary of Defence Josef Nye was, acted as a consultant for the film’s script.

*Munich* provided a depiction of the Middle East unprecedented in Hollywood's history. Beyond the new depiction, there is a courageous discussion. For the first time Palestinians talked at length about their home and their suffering caused by the loss of their land. The land referred to is not only Gaza or the West Bank, but also what in 1948 became Israel.

#### 8.4 Conclusions

*Black Sunday* is a film that continues and heightens the established stereotype that Hollywood has projected of the Arab and the Arab terrorist, while *Munich* attempts to falsify it.

Spielberg represents both sets of protagonists in very human terms without making value judgements on their respective causes. This is very much in contrast to *Black Sunday*, where Western interests occupy the moral high ground. *Black Sunday* promotes, therefore, the idea of a "clash of cultures", but *Munich* shows the Arabs and Israelis as two sets of people who have historically suffered similar injustices, which now need to be redressed. Spielberg appears to want to use this commonality of experience as a humbling means to cut across the opposing ideologies to effect mutual respect, bring about reconciliation and end what seems an endless war.

The new genre of Hollywood films, such as *Munich*, can play a role in this. These films represent Middle Eastern issues in an enlightened apolitical way. This new approach has come about, as previously discussed, by a decentralization of Hollywood and the rise of independent studios, which have given the opportunity for freedom of expression by film industry activists. These new pictures will convey a more enlightened image of Middle Eastern people and show that although their practices may seem to Western eyes overtly different and culturally bound (as with any culture), they fundamentally represent the universal moral values that we all share. The image of Arabs and Muslims will therefore be enhanced from the Western point of view, and

it is to be hoped that in time it will lead to the establishment of mutual respect and peaceful co-operation.

## 9 COMPARISON BETWEEN *ROLLOVER* AND *SYRIANA*

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### 9.1 Introduction

*Black Sunday* and *Munich* were two contrasting films. The former used the gratuitous Western Arab stereotype to portray Muslims. The latter took an enlightened approach and portrayed Arabs and Muslim as neither good nor bad, but as responding to their perception of the political realities and how these affected them in many personal ways.

*Rollover* and *Syriana* also offer a comparison, but one that reflects the geopolitical concerns that have made the Middle East a region of strategic interest for the United States. Political changes in the Middle East have not favoured American interests. Instead, concerns have been raised about the US "being at the mercy of foreign oil producers" (Said, 1997, p. 36). This was particularly the case after the Arab oil embargo in 1973 and the Iranian revolution in 1980. These events sent the message to the United States that energy and power was no longer "theirs" for the taking.

### 9.2 *Rollover*

In 1981 Warner Brothers released *Rollover*, starring Jane Fonda and Kris Kristofferson, directed by Alan J. Pakula and written by Howard Kohn. The film tackled a new dimension of Orientalist anxieties, the fear that the Middle East was threatening the American economy and that the capitalist system had wrapped itself in



an “illusion of safety”. This was the fear that Americans experienced during the oil embargo and the consequences of the sudden OPEC price rise in 1974, and which remained with them throughout the decade (Semmerling, 2006, p. 60). This dread, which swept through American life and threatened their economic safety, is the key theme in the movie.

Pakula’s plot combines the thriller genre with economic issues, which are developed by focusing on how America’s sense of security is destroyed by the infiltration of Arab treachery, thus promoting Orientalist fears. The film is about Lee Winters (Jane Fonda), the widow of the chairman and primary stockholder of major chemical company Winterchem Enterprises. Early on in the film we learn that the late Winters had been astonished to discover a secret “slush” fund, made up of illegal assets, in account number 21214. The main action switches between two main threads: Lee’s attempts to save her company from bankruptcy by obtaining financial support, and her seeking to discover the secret behind her husband’s murder.

The film introduces Hub Smith (Kris Kristofferson), the American entrepreneur who takes over as the president of Boro National Bank. Hub, who has accepted the job at the insistence of American Capital mogul Maxwell Emery, finds that the bank is in such a bad financial situation that it is unable to pay its next dividend. The only solution is to borrow the money and so stave off intervention by the Federal Reserve.

Unfortunately, federal lending limits mean that the bank is unable to support its largest customer, Winterchem, other than by acting as intermediary between the company and some other lender capable of providing the money needed by the plant. In return, Boro will receive a finder’s fee of one per cent commission on the five hundred million dollar loan.

Hub is not just the architect of the deal, but also represents a new form of American entrepreneurship, which is symptomatic and paradigmatic of the success myth of American capitalists. The intricate plot is unified by involving him financially and romantically with Mrs Winters in her attempts to finance her petrochemical plant and to discover the secret behind the mysterious account 21214.

Pakula loses this unity when Smith and Winters travel to the Arab countries, mainly to the Saudi Arabian desert, to broker a deal with some Arab investors. The film presents caricatured images of Arabs who want to take control of Winters' stock as security for the transaction. These character representations leave a gap between the caricature and the image of threat. Smith discovers that account 21214 was connected to these Arabs. It was a "slush" fund where First New York Bank chairperson Maxwell Emery transferred their money into gold as a safe haven against any losses if the dollar were to collapse. Pakula insisted that he was directing a thriller not a mystery film, and that creating puzzles was less important than creating suspense. The film goes on to portray Arab anxiety about the secrecy of their assets.

Mrs Winters discovers the secret and uses this knowledge to try to redeem her stock in exchange for her silence. She mistakenly believes that her partner Smith is betraying her to the Arabs, but discovers that her fears are unfounded when Smith saves her life from a bogus driver hired by the Arabs. Consequently, the Arabs panic and withdraw all their money from the American banks, leaving the United States and the entire world in a monetary crisis that destroys the world's economy, causing unimaginable chaos.

*Rollover* applied a new structure with historical authenticity to the Orientalist fear. It particularly targeted American ideology and the myth of their economic safety. The film emphasized the need for American self-reliance, fostered through the success myth of the American entrepreneur, a new form of American frontiersperson and the right kind of capitalist who is able to tackle the question of power. On the other hand, it recognized an enemy of American progression and the wrong kind of capitalist. The Arabs are distained and depicted as a treacherous race, irresponsible but in possession of unfathomable wealth. They represent the new threat, which must be revealed and vilified. *Rollover* raises its questions through a fearful fantasy of what will happen to the American economy and their worldwide domination if the American businessperson loses control of the domestic economy because of treacherous Arabs. It therefore boosts the concept that American entrepreneurs or businesspersons should win this war and establish America's dominance (Semmerling, 2006, p. 61).

Pakula begins the film with a long shot of the world that is inhabited by the upper echelon of American society. The audience is introduced to a luxurious gala and to the heroic characters of Hub Smith, Lee Winter and Maxwell Emery. American entrepreneurs are celebrating their influence and wealth, but the mood soon starts to change when Winters is informed that her tycoon husband Charlie has been murdered. The event is staged from Smith's distant point of view as the camera pans to show Winters huddled in painful grief.

"What is it, Hub?" asks Emery as Smith looks on sympathetically.

"Nothing Emery, I was just thinking about the illusion of safety."

The scene ends with theatrical effect, lights dimming on a devastated Mrs Winters.

*Rollover* lauds the American entrepreneur as a knight of the capitalist world. He is characterized as systematic and absolute in contrast to irrational Arabs, and as a paragon of the nation's life and the myth of success. In his study of the history of US business Thomas Dibacco asserted that capitalism and entrepreneurship are America's inheritance, forming part of the national character. As a result, the US became the world's first and most successful capitalistic nation; in Dibacco's term, "a mature business civilization" (Dibacco, 1987, pp. 15-20).

Burton W. Folsom, Jr. and George Gilder have written what are believed to be the "dogmas" of American entrepreneurship. They outline in paradigmatic terms the required characteristics of the success myth of the businessperson. The morphology of this character dictates that one should be a young man with creative abilities and the desire to succeed and build his own fortune. He possesses a visionary strength and creative capability to tackle financial issues. He always has an idea that impresses other investors. This entrepreneur is ambitious, hard working and most of all able to deal with his enemies who want to protect the status quo of the marketplace and their position (Folsom, 1996).

In the film Smith is portrayed as a hero and the best solution for Boro's financial troubles. At the gala event, Smith walks across the screen with an accelerated zoom-in while the orchestra announces his special status. The audience learns more about him

when entrepreneur Maxell Emery tells a colleague that this “glamour boy” is able to take on the mission of saving the bank. Emery himself has been introduced earlier as a paradigm of American entrepreneurial success. Described by a newscaster as the “Lion of American Banking”, Emery always recommends Smith as “My Boy”. Thus the film establishes Smith’s suitability prior to the narrative. The audience are driven to acknowledge that he is experienced and mature in the workplace. When Emery offers Smith the job, he replies full of confidence that he has had enough of “crash and burn”. He undertakes the mission to save the international value of the dollar after Boro resorts to dumping one hundred million dollars onto the international market in order to prevent the bank from becoming bankrupt.

The film advances Smith’s mission by switching between two main plots: the financial drama with mysterious account number 21214; and the quest for Mrs Winter’s safety from the “treacherous Arabs”.

A theatrical long shot depicts Smith on his first day of work at Boro Bank, heading to his office on the trading floor surrounded by a cryptic and quickly changing price board. The scene provides the audience with iconic images of the complexity of Smith’s task, which demands the right sort of experience and literacy. After scrutinizing the bank’s documents, he finds that it is in deep trouble. As he says,

The patient has been dead for six months and doesn’t know.

In accordance with Folsom’s “dogmas” he impresses his colleagues with the correct ideas, solutions, dreams and entrepreneurial vision. The plan is to broker a substantial loan of a few hundred million dollars to meet the bank’s commitments to its customers. Mrs Winters accepts Smith’s recommendation on behalf Winterchem Petrochemical and becomes his both business and romantic partner.

In order to avoid the monotony of economic issues *Rollover* tends to ignore the finer details and quickens the pace of the film with accelerated shots between entrepreneurial action and the warm atmosphere of the romantic partnership between Smith and Mrs Winter. Now that Smith is managing her business he sets his sights on the Arabs and their immense oil wealth.

The American hero calls for suitable villains to stand in contrast and play the role of the enemy. *Rollover* presents the Arabs as “greedy”, ready to finance Winterchem’s project but with the deadly condition that puts a hold on the money, leaving Boro Bank dangerously exposed. Pakula emphasizes the thriller aspects by giving the audience more information than is possessed by the characters, exposing the Arabs as “economic conspirators”. We see Emery, Naftari and Prince Khalid become involved in a secret deal to turn their assets into gold outside their country, and Smith’s money is part of this deal. Emery warns Khalid, “You are playing with the end of the world.” Prince Khalid replies disparagingly, “The end of the world as... you know it.”

Orientalist discourse is factored into the film through the deadly challenge of Arab financial power to the systematic success myth of the entrepreneur. The conflict is heightened by the expectation of victory for the evil Arabs, made possible because of their growing potency due to their super wealth. The character of the hero is developed through the action of the entrepreneur when he discloses that the Arabs are behind the secret account 21214. We know already that it was Charlie Winters’ discovery of the truth behind that account that led to his murder by assassins hired by the Arabs. The key sentiment is that Arabs are villains, are penetrative and have total capitalistic control. Hence Smith’s warning to Emery when he says, “You’re moving the Arabs into gold. You’re taking them out of the dollar”; and his point that the government should interfere to control them.

The presentation of the Middle East as a schizophrenic place creates a suitable contrast between the worlds of evil-doers and heroes. *Rollover* authenticates Orientalist fear. The Middle East is an exotic world far away from civilization (Khatib, 2006, p. 5). As the camera follows Smith and Mrs Winters to Saudi Arabia the landscape is depicted as a vast desert terrain with sandstorms and a single ribbon of road, an iconic image of the “illusion of [economic] safety” (Shaheen, 2001, p. 401). Ironically, in the midst of this sublime isolation there is a pay telephone. Moreover, a large shabby tent is found erected in the sand and decked with Oriental carpets. The director provides the scene with caricatured *mise-en-set* showing Rolls-Royces surrounding the tent. Inside, there is no indication of a civilized world: no

sofa, chair, table or anything else except primitive exotic characters of unfathomable wealth.

A medium shot shows the contrast between Smith and Lee dressed in their modern suits, and the filthy Arabs. A satirical close-up shows Mrs Winters' disgust when she is seated in front of large trays of steaming rice and meat. She is expected to share from a communal plate using her fingers not only to eat but also to compete with others to reach the food. Nobody talks during the lunch, but Lee whispers to Smith, "I feel like a beggar asking them for alms, and I hate it". Hub affirms, "You and the rest of the world".

This utterance does not just exclude the Arabs from humanity, but also makes clear that doing business with them is irrational. Clearly, the preconceived image of the Oriental is authenticated. *Rollover* does its best to expose the systematic differences between Arabs (irrational, inferior, and bizarre) and the West (rational, intellectual, and superior) (Said, 1978). The film avoids any scenes of sophisticated and capital-intensive oil factories or refineries that generate the wealth.

The process of alienation is emphasized in many scenes. For example, when Smith and Winters enter the Saudi palace to discuss the loan they find themselves in an immense room where there is no distinction between waiting room and office. The furniture is placed at the end wall. There are no windows, only a series of skylights. It seems clear that the director confused the design of the set with the inner hall of a mosque. The contrast is also emphasized by cultural differences in dress. Smith is clean-shaven and looks smart in an American suit and tie. Winters wears high heels and a fashionable dress. The camera cuts to a medium-long shot of twenty robed Arabs with red-checked *kaffiyehs* and sandaled feet. In addition, the men suddenly stand up when they hear the call to prayer and remove their shoes and congregate in the centre to pray. The camera switches to a close-up of Winter's face articulating her frock, and barking, "I thought we had an appointment". The Arabs become laughable as businessmen and the object of comic relief for the audience (Semmerling, 2006, p. 84).

The audience is now informed that the Arabs were responsible for the murder of the two Americans who tried to reveal the secret of account 21214. This opens a new dimension of the Orientalist image and shows a crack in the certainty of Western dominance over the financial power of the Middle East. The discourse aims to heighten awareness of the possible recklessness of the Arabs, who have managed to penetrate capitalist ideology and the American economy. They are invisible and dangerous.

Tania Modleski pointed out that invisibility is one of the main elements that create horror or fear (Modleski, 2004, p. 765). The Arabs in *Rollover* are difficult to reach in person in their far-off land and so they communicate through electronic messages. They are slow to communicate; for example, after the American hero signs the loan agreement. Their final decision to withdraw all their funds from America is sent by Naftari, who contacts Emery during the night via a short message on the teletype. This action causes not only domestic financial disaster but also global chaos: "The world teetering on the edge of anarchy".

The Arabs do not suffer from their actions. The final shot shows the mosque where they are praying as they are blamed for a "bankrupt world" (Shaheen, 2001, p. 401).

Pakula underlined his message by featuring news reports as an indication of possible future action. He also used classic scenes of the 1929 Wall Street Crash to develop the fear of financial disaster. This film does not just alienate the Arabs, but justifies the United States' policy toward the Middle East. Smith tells Emery that these people are "unpredictable", and therefore a governmental role is suggested. This paralleled recent events: in 1980, the year before the film was produced, the US authorities had taken the decision to freeze Iran's accounts in American banks in the aftermath of the Iranian Islamic Revolution, in order to prevent any similar action occurring in the future (Al-Sabky, 1999, p. 132).

Melani McAlister pointed out that cinema and politics divulge the reasons for the way Arabs were depicted during this period. Neo-conservatism emerged as the intellectual power inside the US administration and, in addition to their connections with the Hollywood moguls, neo-conservatives also worked for strategic ties with Israel, which

could support an active, even aggressive US position in the Middle East and control the local sources of power (McAlister, 2005, p. 196). Jack Shaheen noted the American media offensive against Arab business from 1973 to 1980. They claimed, for example, that Arabs were buying American farmland; yet Department of Commerce figures reveal that the amount of land owned by Arabs was less than one per cent.

Jane Fonda's opinion about the Arabs was not far removed from her role in *Rollover*. After the film was released, she told Copley News Service correspondent Nancy Anderson that,

We have allowed the Arabs to have control over our economy and if we aren't afraid of Arabs we'd better examine our heads. They have strategic power over us, they are unstable, they are fundamentalists, anti-woman, anti-free press. That we have depended on them is monstrous. (Shaheen, 2001, p. 402)

One year after this statement, she said

I love Israel and I think it represents to the United States what a true ally should be. (Shaheen, 2001, p. 402)

### 9.3 *Syriana*

In 2005, Warner Brothers released *Syriana*, directed by Stephen Gaghan and produced by George Clooney's company Section Eight. The story was inspired by Robert Baer's memoir *See No Evil*, an apolitical thriller in which the hero turns to fight his own government when he discovers that he is a victim of corruption and used as a pawn. *Syriana* uses the same story as Gaghan's *Traffic*, which was an adaptation of an original BBC mini-series. Section Eight together with Participant Productions



produced the film. Jeff Stoll, the e-bay millionaire set up Participant Productions with the explicit purpose of making politically insightful and liberal films. The film proceeds through a cluster of intertwining stories jumping between the Persian Gulf, Texas, Washington DC, Spain and finally back to Texas. It features multiple characters appearing in rapid succession and their connections to each other are based on conjunctions of religious, economic and political inspirations.

While *Rollover* is an assertion that one of the US government's roles is to protect American business from the "devilish" oil power of the Middle East, *Syriana* poses many questions about the dubious presence of US power in the region. The relationship between the American government and big business is cynically exposed. Gaghan reveals the corruption in which the American government and corporate conglomerates are profoundly involved, particularly in their attempts to control the world's oil supply at the expense of their citizens, without considering the consequences of this collaboration. Corruption, lobbyist Danny Dalton says, "is not deviation but business as usual". *Rollover's* safety could be an illusion, but *Syriana's* corruption is real.

*Syriana* provides an unprecedented depiction of the Arab world far from the familiar Orientalist implications. The movie tends to treat Middle Easterners as victims in the face of American despotism. It is rational even in its depiction of Hezbollah, albeit that some critical depictions are used for dramatic rather than political reasons. There are no "good" or "bad" people. What separates the villains from the protagonists is not, as Ben Lee states it, "a question of who's good and who's bad, but rather how bad he is willing to be" (Tryon, 2005).

*Syriana* is an example of a "hyperlink movie" (Ebert, 2007, p. 676). It makes your head spin, but more critically your mind ponders (Turan, 2005, p. 1). The film's plot is so complicated that we are not actually supposed to follow it; rather we become immersed in it. The characters are deeply lost amongst the maze of paradoxes, contradictions and complications.

The film has an extraordinary beginning by framing spatial relationships between three shots, beginning with a T.V. news report (shot A) announcing that an unnamed

Gulf state is signing a deal to supply oil to China. This comes as a strategic defeat for Connex, an American based oil company competing for the same supply. The camera then moves to the second shot using long-focal lens framing while at the same time, an obscure oil company named Killen wins a contract to drill for oil in Kazakhstan. We know from the voiceover that Connex intends to merge with Killen to secure Kazakhstan's oil and recover its losses (shot B). Before we know the details of the deal the camera turns to show CIA agent Bob Barnes (George Clooney) who appears in a different cinematic pattern compared to the previous one. Here a medium focal length close-up shows a filthy bearded man delivering two sophisticated American stinger missiles to a young Iranian in Iran. He discovers, however, that the Iranians are deceitful and are giving the missiles to one of the fundamentalist organizations (shot C). At first glance it seems that these shot are technically irreverent. They were shown in terms of light and dark, volume and depth with the camera movements. In addition, they do not seem to add to the progress of the film. These scenes provide a spatial method, which creates a noticeable perspective of distortion and invites the audience into the film's labyrinth, it is a game of power and money, which is about to rollover.

Meanwhile, in the United States, Killen has secured access to Kazakhstan and Connex has lost the battle for a drilling contract in the Persian Gulf. The two petroleum conglomerate are about to merge. From the point of view of the American entrepreneur, the conditions is not final but rather justifiable. The American conspiracy is led by big business through Jimmy Pope (Chris Cooper), who appears to have a major role as a power player with the support of the United States government. They manage to interfere in the succession issue between the aging Emir and his two sons. The elder, Nasser (Alexander Siddig), has sold the drilling rights to the Chinese instead of to Connex. The younger son is the uncouth Prince Meshal (Akbar Kurtha), who leads an anti-Nasser caucus.

The action now moves to Washington and to Dean Whiting (Christopher Plummer), a well-connected Washington lawyer whose firm is hired to handle the political implications of the merger. His assistant Bennett Holiday (Jeffrey Wright) is assigned to pay "due diligence" and support the merger, but is shocked by the level of political corruption.

A new relationship is presented. Bryan Woodman (Matt Damon), a young man working in Geneva as an energy analyst, becomes involved with Prince Nasser after suffering a horrific family tragedy for which Nasser feel guilt, and they begin a close relationship.

Through a series of complex events the film shows that the big decisions that are taken at the top affect the people at the bottom. For example, young Pakistani refinery labourer Wasim Khan (Mazhar Munir) is unfairly laid off together with his father because of the merger. In his disenchantment, frustration and depression Wasim becomes an easy target for the radical Islamic clerics in the Gulf. This multiple plot structure means that *Syriana* is not easy to follow. The sequence of events does not form a linear progression from start to finish. As Roger Ebert describes it,

We're like athletes who get so wrapped up in the game we forget about the score.

The film's theme was greatly supported by technical means, which rather than harmonizing it contradicts and discloses U.S. political corruption in the Middle East. For example, the action progresses by previous sense and flashbacks and sometimes we witness irreverent events or miss sequences prior to the previous shot. In addition, different functions inside one shot are shown by discontinuity in editing. For instance there is no actual relationship between two senses besides the jump cutting that appears to be an interruption of a single shot. Moreover, the jump between long and short takes and the use of lenses, such as, wide angle ones, which are used in many situations, are intended to exaggerate the acting. The unfamiliar use of camera movements (oblique or Dutch) and angles could contribute to separate the audience from any emotional response. This approach finds its echo in contemporary cinema, such as, Jean-Luc-Godard's *Here and Elsewhere* (1976) the process of distinction or estrangement has theatrical authenticity with Bertold Brecht's dialectical theatre and it is commonly used in political movies (Arti,2003, p.146).

Thus *Syriana* presents its message through a complicated structure with an unfamiliar drama. It is a Hollywood fantasy, designed to elicit fundamental interests and strong

emotions, but there is no instant gratification. It is worth noting that Gaghan conducted his film with theatrical authenticity approaching that of Bertolt Brecht's dialectical theatre (Willett, 1992, pp. 121, 122). He uses the "alienation effect" to disgrace worldwide capitalism and challenges the audience by forcing them to reappraise reality. Gaghan's message is implemented in *Syriana* through technical and structural methodologies.

The alienation or estrangement effect brings theatrical authenticity to the cinema via technical methods such as narrative structure, combining and accelerating editing, switching between different lighting, and the use of voiceover. It is not a new approach. Many European directors have used it for political purposes. For example, we see it in Jean-Luc Goddard's *Her and Elsewhere* and *Breathless*, Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* and *the Seventh Seal*, Woody Allen's *Stardust Memories* and *Manhattan*, Federico Fellini's *8½* and Peter Greenway's *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife & Her Lover*. However, this approach is not the usual Hollywood style (Arti, 2003, p. 132).

Gaghan opens his film with a call to prayer, thus informing us that we are in the Middle East. It is dawn in the Gulf desert, and we see migrant workers struggling to live. The director uses excessive ultraviolet light to impress the scene on the audience's memory. In the second scene, Gaghan invites us to look behind the curtain, where CIA agent Bob Barnes is attending a party in Tehran. Gaghan uses a hand-held camera and chilly light to heighten the experience of a labyrinth, exposing scenes of drinking and debauchery intended to shock the audience. This cinematographic technique breaks the illusion and prepares the audience for the next event. What is Bob, an American, doing delivering two advanced stinger missiles to a young Iranian? The audience's curiosity is aroused, especially when they realize that Bob is a CIA agent and the Iranian is deceiving him by dealing with a fundamentalist organization. The scene is loaded with "estrangement elements" such as switching between three languages - English, Farsi and Arabic - with long silent pauses between dialogues without sound effects.

The audience begins to feel the strangeness of *Syriana's* structure as the action moves very quickly from place to place: the Middle East, Tehran and Washington DC.

Gaghan's assault against American entrepreneurs begins with a "de-familiarization effect", brought about by using visual action to portray the transfer of drilling rights from the giant American firm Connex to the higher-bidding People's Republic of China, and the merging of Connex with Killen in order to recover its losses. The question is open to the audience as well as the characters as to how this unknown small company could acquire drilling rights in Kazakhstan without corruption. Technically, the director invites his audience to think critically by accelerating his editing between a long-shot of the oil refineries and a close-up of the face of an old man who is cutting roses in a garden while talking to a collared moustached man about the corruption of this merger.

Later the audience realizes that the two men, Bennett Holiday and his boss Dean Whiting, are lawyers hired by the Ministry of Justice to deal with the sordid aspects of the merger. Holiday finds himself in an ethical dilemma when it is discovered that he is a government watchdog and the corruption issue begins to overlap onto the government itself. When Connex's Washington Counsel Sydney Hewitt tells Bennett, "You've just visited what someday soon could be the most profitable corporation in America", Bennett points out that this will depend on government approval for the merger. Sydney, however, makes it clear that this will be granted:

Provided we don't start running automobiles on water and provided there's still chaos in the Middle East.

The film raises serious issues, which make believers in American entrepreneurship, capitalism and the principles of the US government go beyond the bounds of usual emotions. Gaghan invites his audience to witness the game of power and money, and we enjoy the process rather than the progress, because there is no linear progression from the problem to the solution. There is no American frontier or absolute hero; instead, heroism is distributed between all the characters. Amongst these equals, however, there is a chief: Bob is back in Washington to inform the CIA about the missing missiles. The CIA's neglect of this case creates suspense and surprise. The technical effects are aesthetically embodied. The film's narration could contribute in controlling the audience's attention and keeping them thinking critically about the numerous optical point-of-view (POV) shots (which are a combination of zoom

enlargements and various uses of camera angles). For example, handheld camera shots of a car driving on the highway, Bob's eyes reflected in the mirror as he sings "US Capitol the House Exit Only", are accompanied by accelerated editing of different positions, which detaches the audience from an emotional pull. It is a game in which we see more than the characters see (Bordwell & Thompson, 1993, p. 372). One of the cinema's most intellectual critics, Sergei Eisenstein, endorsed this cinematic method when he asserted that, "Cinema is foremost, montage". The process requires a sensitive balance that reflects the director's needs for the film (Eisenstein, 2004, p. 13).

As well as creating mysteries, Gaghan provides suspense by giving the audience more information than Bob possesses. He is struggling to serve his country but at the same time the CIA is conspiring to send him to his death. Stephanie Zacharek pointed out that the CIA and conglomerate business will stop at nothing to protect their oil interests:

The CIA is willing and able to carry out vile deeds, sometimes by taking the advantage of the loyalty and dedication of its employees.

Bob is no more than a tool in the game of power and money (Zacharek, 2005, p. 5).

Bob is asked by a CIA agent to gather information about the possibility of engineering a regime change in the Gulf State that would be favourable to the US government and business. The CIA agent repeats that America's main concern is to secure the supply of oil regardless of issues such as democracy and human rights. From a technical point of view, the conspiracy scene is functionalized by using a combination of frontal chilly lighting with a wide angle lens. This provides both esthetical and intellectual effects by excluding all the details and maintains attention on the sore of corruption. This technique is very effective in dramatizing a conspiracy, and the scene has similarities with Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* (1972). According to Josef von Sternberg,

The proper use of light can embellish and dramatize every object.  
(Bordwell & Thompson, 1993, p.153)

Regardless of the film's process Gaghan added his personal touch aesthetically by providing the audience with a spectacular sense of the Arabian desert, unlike *Rollover*, which represented the Arabian desert as part of "Mars". The shot was long one, which used a natural daylight camera with horizontal panning. During the film, the audience experiences the spirituality of the East. Another middle focal lens reduces the distance along the camera's axis so diminishing the feeling of space for the following shot. Here using a medium shot, Nasser appears with a falcon on his hand and the sense only deteriorates when Bob appears, his greying beard, solid girth and crumpled suit, is a pawn operating within a gigantic corrupt system. He is sent to assassinate the sheikdom's Prince Nasser for selling the drilling rights to the Chinese. Like the rest of the Arab characters in the film, Nasser is presented in a positive way as an intellectual who studied at Oxford and gained his PhD from Georgetown University. He is more interested in social and economic benefits for his country than in creating opportunities for US business interests. He wants to create a real democracy, advocating women's rights and the sharing of wealth. As the eldest son it is presumed that he will inherit the throne from his ill father.

The character of Nasser's callous brother Meshal (Akbar Kurtha) is more familiar, if not to say stereotypical. He is ready to do anything to inherit the sheikdom. He too is an intellectual, but palpably dishonest, predictable and manipulative. Most importantly, the Americans prefer him because he identifies with their interests and policies. Gaghan successfully illustrates how some leaders in the Middle East, especially oil-rich Arab nations, have become followers beholden to the US government. The audience observes perhaps for the first time how lawyer Dean Whiting arranges a second deal with Prince Meshal to dislodge Nasser from his succession to the throne. The father is lobbied to name the callous second son as his heir, but trying to avoid the manoeuvre and keep the status quo he says, "I'm tired and I want to relax."

*Syriana*'s structure leads the audience to focus on the idea behind the scene, the link to the current situation of instability in the Middle East, which works to the West's advantage. The US presence is to secure the oil supply, not for the people or their

future but for big business, thereby bequeathing chaos and underdevelopment (Anderson, 2005).

Gaghan directs an argument between Prince Nasser and energy analyst Bryan Woodman (Matt Damon), the consultant that is Bringing in the bill for the United States policy in the region.

Nasser: Your president rings my father and says I've got unemployment in Texas, Kansas, and Washington State.

A phone call later:

Nasser: We're stealing out our social programmes in order to buy overpriced airplanes. We owed the Americans but we've repaid that debt.

Bryan (embarrassed and looking to the floor)

Nasser: I accepted a Chinese bid, the highest bid, and suddenly I'm a terrorist I'm a godless communist.

It is important to say that *Syriana* avoids presenting the Arab countries in a repugnant way. Most of the scenes are shot in luxurious places: palaces, hotels and upmarket areas. Bryan calls his wife Amanda to tell her that Beirut is the "Switzerland of the East". In fact most of the sense is digitalized and edited by graphically matching shapes with colours. This gives an overall composition in a beautiful style that exaggerates the appearance the city. In contrast to *Rollover*, the business dinner is arranged at a five star hotel with the guests resplendent in traditional dress.

Bob is greeted by a Hezbollah welcoming committee and is taken to meet their leader. In the second part of the film, the relationships between the characters finally become clear as the camera follows Bob on his mission to assassinate Prince Nasser. The CIA agent has manipulated Bob in that Prince Nasser is using his money against USA interests and supporting al-Qaeda.



The game of power and money includes a subplot weaving its way through the sophisticated intrigues, intended to demonstrate the social consequences of selling the oil to the Chinese. A young Pakistani refinery labourer Wasim Kham (Mazhar Munir) and his father are laid-off from the Emir's oil company with threats instead of counsel. This subplot is treated in documentary style; as father and son suffer the unpleasant realities of unemployment they fall fatally under the influence of al-Qaeda. The director makes great use of "estrangement effects", such as, handheld camera work and spatial relationships between different shots as well as various exchanges between them, such as, short, medium and long ones. "Estrangement effects" are further demonstrated by functionalizing certain types of lenses and familiarised acting without sound. In this way the film attempts to enlighten the audience about the jihadist process and how capitalistic blunders could accelerate the status of the jihadists in the region. A conversation between Whiting and an oil broker clarifies this situation:

Oil Broker: Capitalism cannot exist without waste. We should write thank-you notes to Mr. Whiting and the USA for producing one-quarter of the world's garbage and one quarter of the demand.

Dean (laughing): You're certainly welcome ...my pleasure, really.

Lawyer Holiday finds himself in a critical situation when he discovers that government concerns about Killen are true and that the company and its owner are deeply involved with corruption. Ironically, the big business lobby persuades the American government to ignore the ensuing corruption report and instead the owner is honoured as Oilman of the Year. Pope's lobbyist, Danny Dalton (Tim Blake Nelson), states that this is not deviation but a capitalist system at work. He tells Holiday

Corruption is government intrusion into market efficiencies in the form of regulation ...We have laws against it precisely so we can get away with it. Corruption is our protection, corruption keeps us safe and warm, and corruption is why we win.

In his book *Living in the Number One Country*, Herbert Schiller analyzed the US imperial role in the Middle East. He points out that corruption is a critical device used by Americans to maintain their dominance:

The great economic wealth and power of the United States has been used as a lever either to bribe or to coerce the compliance of others. The weaker the targeted country, the stronger the exactions demanded. (Schiller, 2000, p. 28)

Gaghan offers a cynical outlook on global politics to show how money moves the world. James Berardinelli believes that *Syriana*'s cynicism is understandable in view of the complicity between politics and economy. He said that US political decisions are profoundly subject to the greed of big business, for

Government doesn't do what's best for the people; it does what's best for Big Business, with enough occasional misdirection. (Berardinelli, *Syriana*, 2005)

*Syriana* uses George Clooney's CIA agent character to show the darker side of American policy in the Middle East. The US will stop at nothing to protect its oil interests, even at the expense of their loyal employees, while American entrepreneurs or big businesses escape because they are able to manipulate the Justice Department. Bob turns against his CIA employers after he discovers that he is nothing more than a disposable device in the game of power and money. Finally, the camera moves our attention to Bob's desperate mission to save the life of Prince Nasser, but the CIA satellite bomb is faster. Emotionally the audience allies with Nasser. He is the victim of the bad Americans. Creatively, the director creates a sense of disconnection when he switches the dramatic sound of the explosion with silent moments and the sound of smooth music. The same technique is used for Wasim's mission using CIA stinger missiles against American business. This technique could prove that the director is more interested in building up a collection of ideas that show his political convictions than in producing a compelling drama.

Unlike most Hollywood movies that deal with the Middle East, and despite the historical affinity between the film community and US politicians, *Syriana* is not partisan to American policy. Indeed, some have dismissed the film as anti-American. It also reflects a breach with the Hollywood moguls regarding US policy in the Middle East.

*Syriana* provides extensive use of technical means in a way that contradicts any dramatic influence, instead it invokes a dialectical debate questioning the interdependence between US foreign policy and the strategic use of oil by disclosing the lack of parity between moral and political interests. The film provides a significant assessment of the critical role that petrodollars play in preserving US imperial power, and joins with various intellectual movements in lamenting the conversion of American military power into an oil-protection service. In his book *Blood and Oil* Michael T. Klare examines the dangers and consequences of America's imperial policy regarding the Middle East. It is a policy deeply predicated upon oil (Klare, 2004, p. xiv). Klare traces oil's impact on American foreign and military policy from World War II to the present through a chain of legislative acts. Moreover, oil-influenced action is expected to increase over the next decade, as the United States will need to import twice as much fuel as it did in the last twenty years. *Syriana* shares Patrick E. Tyler's argument, revealing the collaboration between various American leaderships and corrupt Middle Eastern monarchies that has secured a US presence or influence in these countries and therefore the supply of oil, regardless of the moral consequences. As Tyler states,

By this means, the new imperial power will exercise its control over the unstable area of the Persian Gulf by fear and violence. (Tyler, 2003, p. 1)

In their book *The New American Imperialism: Bush's War on Terror and Blood for Oil* (2005), Fouskas and Gokay emphasize that this neo-imperialistic phase is the most truculent one in the line of thought and action established after World War II as the US replaced its long war on communism with a perpetual "war on terror". The authors warn that with Bush's "pre-emptive military action" the US is entering a period of deep crisis and confrontation with the developing world, whose resources the US aims

to deplete. President Bush described military intervention as not only an obligation but a “moral commitment”; however, it is in reality an attempt to control the region’s oil and energy resources (Fouskas and Gokay, 2005, pp. 4-5).

*Syriana* agrees with Chalmers Johnson’s argument regarding US foreign policy. Most Americans are unaware of what their government has wrought on many nations on their behalf. By its corrupt intervention in Iran (1953), Indonesia (1965), Vietnam (1961-73), Lebanon (1974), Chile (1973), Palestine and most importantly Iraq (1991 to the present day), America will become enmeshed in global resentment and conflict and will suffer the consequences of “blowback”, which played a causative role in 9/11 (Johnson, 2003, pp. xi-xii).

A set of anti-war genre films have illuminated the consequences of invading Iraq and the perpetual “war on terror”. It is possible to trace this thread through Michael Moore’s *Fahrenheit 9/11*, David O Russell’s *Soldiers Pay*, Paul Haggis’s *In The Valley Of Elah* and Gavin Hood’s *Rendition*. This genre is rooted in a new intellectual activism that is not part of the policies of either the Democratic or the Republican parties (Dickenson, 2007). Indeed, in the case of *Syriana*, Clooney made it clear that the film does not solely oppose Bush’s policy. Rather,

It’s basically a statement about sixty years of flawed policies in the Middle East. This isn’t stuff that all came together in the last five years. (Allen-Mills, 2006, p. 9)

Furthermore, while it is true that Stephen Gaghan presents the Republican administration as greedy oil brokers who thrive on the “chaos” America generates in the Middle East (Gainor, 2005, pp. 1-2), he also disparaged the Democrats for showing passivity and collusion with Bush’s administration during the prelude to the war in Iraq. Clooney refused to support Senator Hillary Clinton in her presidential race because she “backed herself into a corner” and voted in favour of the war (Allen-Mills, 2005, p. 6).

It is significant that Clooney is not a member of the formal political community. Unlike Hollywood activists such as Warren Beatty (or even his own father, the former

news anchorman Nick Clooney) Clooney shows no intention of entering politics (Applebaum, 2005, p.18). He has insisted that despite the film's political theme, its criticism is mainly based upon social and moral interests within the American periphery. The film is a new attempt to replace propagandist rhetoric with a more realistic tone. Clooney rejects the accusations made by Bush's supporters that he is a traitor, responding that he is not projecting a communist vision against American capitalism, but that he and his writer and director Stephen Gaghan reveal the true motives for sending 150,000 "kids" into an unpredictable war (Allen-Mills, 2006, p. 9).

The controversial gap between American declared statements and the policy espoused by the film reveals a clear asymmetry with Joseph Nye's soft power policy. In his lecture about soft power in Iraq Nye asks for the application of the power of persuasion to assure America's role in applying democracy as the best way to counter terrorism and dispute the allegation that its occupation of part of the Middle East is to serve greedy oil interests (Aqoul, 2005). Nye considered the use of oil as a strategic commodity according to four criteria: its value, availability, possibilities of disruption and the cost of substitute energy (2004b, pp. 16-20). He asserted the significant role that oil plays in shaping American foreign interests with regard to the first two criteria, and questioned the cost of a substitute that could keep oil from becoming a single market commodity (Nye, 2004b, pp. 16-20). While *Syriana* rejected this argument and blamed the US "petrodollar policy" for creating unpredictable wars, Clooney has shown a great deal of enthusiasm for substitute energy by launching the campaign "to reduce our dependence on oil".

Stephen Gaghan believes that giving a new image to American foreign policy faults will be nothing more than a desperate attempt to protect its interests. He said that he wanted to highlight,

How we try to get the world to dance to our tune and what the consequences of those actions can be. (Gainor, 2005, pp. 1-2)

In *Syriana* Clooney and Gaghan managed to address a barrage of questions regarding American foreign policy in the Middle East. These questions were motivated by

Clooney's liberal agenda and his activism towards political and social issues (Calif, 2006, p. A2). Clooney's attitude is the main reason for the rational portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in the film.

Clooney was highly attacked by the establishment and Hollywood conservatives for his political statements, especially his criticism of Bush's strategy regarding the war on terror and the invasion of Iraq. He was pilloried on daily talk-shows and branded a traitor to his country, accused of jeopardizing American security through daring to disagree with the President (Chenery, 2007, p. 24). In a similar vein, *Syriana's* suggested links between terrorism, government and the oil business prompted some US film critics, and James Bowman, resident scholar at the Ethics and Public Policy Centre in Washington, to suggest that *Syriana* is

Putting forward the bizarre contention that the major threat to the progressive forces of democracy, economic liberalization, and women's rights in the Middle East comes not from terrorist jihadists but from - you guessed it - the CIA in cahoots with Big Oil. (Urban Cinefile, *n.d.*)

Clooney's previous films *Three Kings* (1999) and *Good Night and Good Luck* (2004) had also been labelled anti-war movies. Referring to his objections to the contradictions in American policy and its unpredictable consequences he said,

I did *Good Night and Good Luck* and *Syriana* because I was really pissed off. I was angry because I was on the front of a magazine being called a traitor to my country because I was saying that maybe we should ask some questions before we send 150,000 people to be shot at. It felt like we were being silenced; there wasn't anybody in America talking about it then because you got called a traitor. It had this thick cloud effect on people who wanted to protest against it. Those films certainly weren't easy to get made or comfortable. (Chenery, 2007, p. 24)

Clooney made it clear that he rejects any propagandist or superficial images that delude Americans about the negative outcomes of their policy. He also emphasised that wars are not always a good solution. In this way Clooney, along with Hollywood activists such as Harry Belafonte, Susan Sarandon, Sean Penn, Tim Robbins, Danny Glover, Jane Fonda and Martin Sheen, contributed to creating the new Hollywood counter-rhetoric, in which they refused to be employed prejudicially in propagandist activity (Person, 2007, p. 10A). Clooney asserted that the complex situation in the Middle East should not be staged simply as a battle between the good and bad people. It would be unacceptable for him as a film producer to become subject to the war machine, because war is a bad choice, especially in its ideological form. Through war, Clooney said,

You create an entire generation of people seeking revenge. Our opponents are going to resort to car bombs and suicide attacks because they have no other way to win. (Monetti, 2008, p. 62)

Clooney's political interests were improved by joining the Democratic Party. He became a friend of Senator Barack Obama, now President of the US, sharing his ideas about the withdrawal of the American army from Iraq and reducing US reliance on oil as the main source of power for economic activities (Parker, 2008, p. 40). He advocates finding alternative sustainable energy resources. Thus, in *Syriana* Clooney and Gaghan attempt to disclose the conspiracy in which a great deal of Arab and Muslims are victims. As he describes it:

I do believe oil isn't the way we do it anymore. We have to get to that point. Instead of fighting a war on terror and killing people, [let's decide] we just don't need that product anymore. I believe the trick is electric and the fuel cell is the way to do it. (Chenery, 2007, p. 24)

Indeed, Clooney is keen to prove his principles by being among the first owners of an electric car in California. He has continued his activism by participating in America's biggest alternative energy campaign dedicated to implementing positive changes in the community and the nation's life (Wells & Star, 2005, p. Lo1). He was sent by the UN to Darfur, to help inform public opinion about the genocide there. This goal was

achieved impressively when he spoke with passion and insight about the disastrous situation in Darfur in front of the UN Security Council with the powerful assistance of many of Hollywood's actors, directors and scriptwriters. He is seen as the "unofficial President of the Hollywood A-list".

Sandro Monetti comments that what really distinguishes George Clooney and persuaded the UN to send him to Darfur is not his high profile as an activist, but his wide popularity and his ability to raise awareness by getting cameras to follow him (Monetti, 2008, p. 62). Other commentators have expressed doubtful opinions about Clooney's activities. For example, Eevan Wright believes that *Syriana* was not Clooney's project but was inspired by Pat Dollard (Wright, 2007, p. 444). Nevertheless, Clooney has proved his ability to raise controversial questions at political, social and human levels. In *Syriana* he managed, together with Stephen Gaghan, to explore a cluster of intertwining stories leading the audience to focus on the underlying idea that in the current situation there is no need to demonize the "Others" in the traditional conflict between good and bad.

Hollywood's new rhetoric, which disputes or contradicts the established line of the majors, is one consequence of the new system of production. *Syriana* is a co-production between George Clooney's company Section Eight, which had previously produced *Good Night and Good Luck* (2004), and Warner Brothers subsidiary company Warner Independent (W.B.), which took the distribution and exhibition rights. Kyle Smith claims that in the last decade W.B. has tended to engineer a new breed of production that echoes sentiments of the Democratic Party's Middle Eastern foreign policy. These productions, therefore, show a more temperate attitude towards American activities around the world. Smith lists some examples, including *Michael Clayton*; *Blood Diamond* (2007), which shows impoverished Africans being victimized by American trade; *Letters from Iwo Jima* (2007), with its even-handed portrayal of Hirohito's soldiers, and of course *Syriana* (2005). W.B. is certainly not preaching for a new revolution against mainstream thought, but they meet Clooney's demands socially and financially (Smith, 2008, p. 36). Thus, there is a significant link between the new production system and the evolution of Hollywood's representation of the Middle East.



#### 9.4 Conclusions

*Rollover* provides the extreme Arab stereotype, characterized as evil and inferior as traditionally perceived by the Western world. *Syriana* represents an evolutionary landmark. In the film there are both good and bad Arabs as in any other racial group. Here individuals are seen with all the frailty of their human characteristics and their acts are not judged according to stereotype but by value judgements based upon universal morality. *Syriana* is a major step forward in the removal of the established Arab stereotype which, of course, has been nurtured as part of US hegemony.

Many of the films about the Middle East that are discussed in this thesis demonstrate a tension between two conflicting forces. In this situation, it is right to investigate the truth through discussion. The films described in this chapter and in the preceding one are vectors for this process. Well crafted and directed scripts can raise many questions, as evidenced by *Syriana*. These questions stimulate debate, which is intended to resolve conflict and reconcile two contradictory ideologies by establishing truth on both sides rather than disproving one argument. The process of debate is facilitated by the new system of production, which allows directors to rebel against Hollywood's conventions and activists to take advantage of freedom of expression, something denied them by the old system wherein the majors were under the hegemony of the US government. Therefore, new and revolutionary ideas are openly presented via films for public debate, which ultimately brings about political change and new policy directions.

The West is beginning to be presented with a new image of Arabs and Muslims, moving us away from old stereotypes. It is hoped that this will be an on-going process and will result in both sides gaining mutual respect from each other, thus enabling debate, not war, to resolve conflict. Ideally a Hegelian process should occur, wherein the thesis and antithesis become combined in a unified whole, the synthesis.

## 10 KINGDOM OF HEAVEN – BREAKING THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

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### 10.1 Introduction

The comparison between the two films in the previous chapter illustrated the revolutionary change that is taking place in the film industry's depiction of the Arab and Muslim character, as it attempts to remove existing gratuitous stereotypes and replace them with an informed and enlightened image.

Another important insight into Arab and Muslim stereotyping is presented by Ridley Scott's *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005). This film takes issue with Hollywood's long history of prejudicial portrayals of the Middle East, which had become ingrained in American mainstream culture and labelled Arabs and Muslims as "inferior others". After the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, Americans and Europeans were jolted into a new phase of fear and distrust of Islamic culture. The argument of a clash of civilizations became increasingly manifest, particularly in the American media where the war on terror seemed to be a struggle solely against Arabs and Muslims. Heightened anxiety revived the medieval notion of the Crusades to meet the ongoing conflict between Christian West and Muslim East; indeed, George W. Bush "unintentionally" described his war on terror as a "new Crusade".

When Twentieth Century Fox declared their intention to release a new film about the Crusades directed by Ridley Scott, many Arabs and Muslims assumed that the film would be a justification for Bush's policy in the Middle East and the invasion of Iraq. However, Scott confounded all expectations by directing a liberal anti-war film that

condemned the use of religious contexts to rationalize political actions abroad. *Kingdom of Heaven* preaches tolerance. It is strongly opposed to religious extremism and presents a relatively balanced view. Scott's "modern Crusade" provides a serious attempt to bridge the opposing cultures by disputing the clash theory and exposing the root of Western fear and suspicion of Islamic civilizations. Therefore, our analysis will be based on three issues: clash theory; film analysis; and third party opinions about the film and clash theory.

## 10.2 The Clash of Civilizations Theory

The idea of a new crusade meets head-on the emergent theory of a clash of civilizations between the East, specifically Islam, and the West. As the historical battle of faith still smoulders around the globe the concept of an unavoidable struggle between the two sides has been heightened at both the actual and ideological levels. Thus, the conflict between Islamic values and Western culture has revived all the concerns about a clash of civilizations, concerns which have often been fuelled by wider debates among scholars over how to think about the post-Cold War world and its civilizations.

The expression "clash of civilizations" gained publicity from a 1993 article in *Foreign Affairs* by Harvard political scientist and former National Security Adviser Samuel P. Huntington. He argued in his first sentence that "world politics is entering a new phase" (Huntington, 1993, p. 22) in which the recent post-WWII conflicts will develop at an ideological level grouping the first, second, and third worlds into fighting or warring camps. He predicted that,

The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source will be cultural ... The clash of civilizations will dominate the global politics. (1993, pp. 22-50)

He also explained the role of culture and religion in dividing the world into distinct civilizations. Civilizations are not only defined by such things as religion, history,

entire cultures and languages, but also by individuals who define themselves as “people of different civilizations”. Huntington explained that these groups

...have different views on the relationship between God and Man, the individual and the group, the citizen and the state, parents and children, husband and wife, as well as differing views of the relative importance of rights and responsibilities, liberty and authority, equality and hierarchy.

(Huntington, 1993, p.23)

As the “product of centuries” these differences assert that regionalism and civilizational borders are increasing (Lockman, 2004, p. 234).

Huntington classified seven major civilizations: Islamic, Turkish, Confucian, Japanese, Hindu, Latin American, and Western (including Western Europe and the United States). He also argued that today and tomorrow’s conflict with the West will no longer be economic or social in essence, but ideological. Thus, war will continue but with a different structure of values and ideas (for example Islam and Confucianism) striving to attain an unprecedented ascendancy over the West. In perhaps the same way that Pope Urban II called for Western unity against Islamic expansion, Huntington provides a brief survey of the best way for the West to weaken its putative opponents, in particular Islamic civilization, by dividing them in order to retain Western superiority. This argument was highly criticized by Edward Said, who disagrees with Huntington’s insistence on the notion that clashes between the West and Islamic and other civilizations are inevitable. In addition, Said disputed Huntington’s chauvinistic tendency, especially the prescription to keep the West superior to other civilizations. He argued that,

We are forced to conclude that he is really most interested in continuing and expanding the Cold War by other means rather than advancing ideas about understanding the current world scene or trying to reconcile between cultures. (Said, 2003, p. 69)

Indeed, Huntington did highlight the cultural component in the relationship between different countries, cultures and beliefs. Thus, the article is a serious attempt to maintain a wartime status in the minds of Americans and Westerners, as he claimed that to face a hostile civilization like the Islamic one the West should follow a strategy that treats Islam as the enemy it is. The West should be prepared not just for a military or economic threat but also for "the most dominating source of conflict, which will be cultural" (Huntington, 1993, p. 24).

Huntington also believes that demographic changes in the US, contemporaneous with the end of the Cold War, may have rendered the United States less able to define its enemies and hence to preserve its national culture and putative civilizational borders. Hamid Dabashi points out the contradictions between Huntington's civilizational thinking and the growth in power of the globalizing empire of capital. He argues that the categorical constitution of "civilization" is an "Enlightenment invention" for specific reasons; for example, either social or religious orders of scholasticism or feudalism. Dabashi believes that Huntington is reviving ecclesiastical rhetoric to preserve national culture from the impact of multiculturalism and liberalism in the post-modern period. He writes,

We are facing massive subterranean change in the material composition of the world and moral correspondence is yet to come. (Dabashi, 2006, p. 362)

Certainly, Huntington warned of the cultural and social consequences of liberalism as a de-Westernization of the United States, especially in the face of the surge of third world immigration into the United States and European countries. He believed that the distance between certain civilizations is unbridgeable. Huntington, therefore, is calling for the rescue of the West from "Islamic Fragmentation", which he claims is "now eating away at...the binding cement of American society" (Huntington, 1993, pp. 24). John Trumbour describes this tendency as having medieval Spanish origins. He is referring to the period of the Crusades, or the conflict between Christendom and Islam (Trumbour, 2003, p.107). Huntington sees that in the Cold War period finding an "enemy" is necessary for identity formation as well as keeping domestic cultural superiority compared to other cultures. Islamic culture in particular, because of its

ideological features and what Huntington famously calls “Islamic bloody borders”, is separated from the West by an unbridgeable chasm.

Some intellectuals reject Huntington’s portrait of the relationship between Islam and the West. For example, the Harvard Historian of Islam Roy Mottahedeh shows that civilization as a category simply does not work well because it ignores or merges all the differences and variations in cultures and histories between Muslims in the Arab countries, South Asia, Turkey and Indonesia as if they belonged to a single civilization. Huntington often uses the terms “Arab” and “Islamic” as if they were interchangeable, and in Mottahedeh’s view his clash of civilizations hypothesis is “far more a description than an explanatory system” (Mottahedeh, 2003, p. 146). Many scholars, including intellectuals, writers and directors, reject Huntington’s conclusion and his fundamental division of humanity. Instead they believe that the post-Cold War world is in a period of globalization, which will certainly witness increasing levels of economic, political and, most importantly, cultural integration. By this means it will transcend the old barriers left over from centuries of war and become more interactive and integrated.

Huntington was not the first person to put forward the concept of Islam and the West being in a state of fundamental hostility. Previous to his work Bernard Lewis, Professor of History at Princeton University, published “Roots of Muslim Rage” in which he characterized the conflict between Islam and the West as dating back to the emergence of Islam. He traced the conflict to the “classical Islamic view” of the world divided into two opposing forces: the house of faith (Islam) and the house of infidels (the West), which he says shows that Islam is by nature hostile to the West. Lewis believes that Islam by that very fact is not prepared to accord with other beliefs or with the West because it considers that any civilization outside Islam or not Islamic is an enemy; thus the “bloody borders” remain in the post-Cold War world.

However, Lewis’s view of Islamic history overlooks the horrifying story of the Crusades and the creation of a recent so-called “Holy War”, which Riley-Smith (1977, pp. 20-25), one of the most radical interpreters of the Crusades, elaborates as a “Christian invention” to justify their crusading experience in the Middle East. Lewis’s

interpretation of the relationship between violent intolerance and the origins of Islam is explicit in this regard:

In Islam the struggle of good and evil very soon acquired political and even military dimensions. Muhammad, it will be recalled, was not only a prophet and a teacher like the founders of other religions; he was also the head of a polity and of a community, a ruler and a soldier. Hence, his struggle involved a state and its armed forces. If the fighters in the war for Islam, the holy war "in the path of God", are fighting for God it follows that their opponents are fighting against God. In addition, since God is in principle the sovereign, the supreme head of the Islamic state -- and the Prophet and after the Prophet, the caliphs, are his vicegerents -- then God as sovereign commands the army. The army is God's army and the enemy is God's enemy. The duty of God's soldiers is to dispatch God's enemies as quickly as possible to the place where God will chastise them -- that is to say, the afterlife.

(Lewis, 1990, p. 22)

Michael Sells disputes Lewis's interpretation of Islamic text, pointing out that it is not based on a particular school of Islamic history or version of Islam. With a great deal of exaggeration Lewis presents Muslims as being recruited to dispatch God's enemies and this duty "is presented as incontestable" (Sells, 2003, p. 4). Indeed, Lewis's hypothesis relies on the single interpretation favoured by the Orientalist discourse, which was that Islam is politically motivated. It sustains the belief that Islam, as a coherent transnational monolithic religion, is by nature hostile to the West and has been engaged in a linear confrontation with it throughout history (Poole, 2002, p. 32). For many scholars Lewis's work is an extension of the Orientalist discourse, which led to global theories of "Otherness", with the Islamic "Others" being depicted as morally and ontologically corrupted and violent and hostile to other civilizations (Turner, 1989, pp. 629-38).

Accordingly, some might believe that Islam by its very nature could be violent, but in order to clear up any misunderstanding about the clashes between civilizations we need to examine the relationship between religion and violence and how it is

motivated and justified in sacred texts. The expression "God's enemies" is found in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. From Moses of the Jewish scriptures to the Christian Bible it conveys a divine command to threaten unbelievers and to destroy God's enemies. We also find that each of these religions contains references to the Holy Land, that is, modern Israel/Palestine. Christianity and Islam share many common beliefs, as they claim the heritage and covenant of Abraham's religion. Yet instead of a careful examination of Islamic texts, it seems that Lewis's interpretations merely rely on the Orientalist discourse, which was essentially designed to alienate other civilizations and contained a deliberately manipulative anti-Islamic polemic with the specific function of limiting the growth of Islam as a threat to Christian orthodoxy (Huntington, 1993). As Sells argues, the issue is not whether Islam is violent, but the singling out of Islam and its prophet Muhammad as being unique in calling for the dispatch of God's enemies (Sells, 2003).

For Lewis the brutal ideology of Islam prevents most Muslims from coping with modernity and other civilizations. He asserted,

This is no less than a clash of civilizations - the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular presence and the worldwide expansion of both.

Lewis also referred to the "pent-up hate" and "mob's anger", which is directed essentially "against two enemies, secularism and modernism". He believed that "Muslims had suffered successive stages of defeat". First was "his loss of domination in the world to the advancing power of Russia and the West", and then "the undermining of his authority in his own country through an invasion of foreign ideas, laws and ways of life". Lewis concluded that,

The last straw was the challenge to his mastery in his own house from emancipated women and rebellious children. It was too much to endure and the outbreak of rage against these alien, infidel and incomprehensible forces that had subverted his dominance, disrupted his society, and finally violated the sanctuary of his home was inevitable.



He believed, therefore, that it was, "natural that this rage should be directed primarily against the millennial enemy and should draw its strength from ancient beliefs and loyalties" (Lewis, 1990).

Lewis gave his social analysis of Muslims as if they are one community; moreover, he considered all Muslims (and their history) to be part of a fundamentalist society wherein this rage created a gulf of disparities between them and the West. Responding to this analysis C.M. Naim, Professor of South Asian Studies at the University of Chicago, harshly criticized Lewis's argument concerning American policy in the Middle East, using the same expressions in a stunning display of role reversal:

The American has suffered successive stages of defeat. The first was his loss of domination to the advancing economic power of Japan and Germany. The second was the undermining of his authority in his own country through the invasion of foreign ideas and ways of life brought in by waves of non-European immigrants and the enfranchisement of the vast African-American and Mexican-American populations within the country. The third - the last straw - was the challenge to his mastery in his own house from emancipated women and rebellious children. It was too much to endure. It was natural this rage should be directed primarily against the millennial enemy and should draw its strength from ancient beliefs and loyalties. (Naim, 1992, p. 116)

Naim refuted the assumptions that Muslims who resist Western imperialism or their power of domination are acting out of rage; instead he referred to such resistance as "a serious analysis of President Bush's recent actions in the Middle East" (1992). The main problem with clash theory is that its creators have taken up the binary logic of opposition between the rational West and the irrational East. Moreover, this theory debates the ontological political development within Islam in its response to the modernizing and secularizing universalist politics of the West, which allowed not just the circulation of ideas of superiority, but also a distancing from incomprehensible Islamic extremism (Kappert, 1995, pp. 35-57).

Fatema Mernissi points out that the overeager adoption of Lewis and Huntington's theory "turns the world's 1.2 billion Muslims into potential enemies" and thus itself constitutes "a bellicosity smacking more of irrationality than of cold analysis" (Mernissi, 2007, p. 53). Regrettably, Lewis and Huntington's articles neglected most of the historical periods in which the "House of War" and the "House of Peace" have managed to interact peacefully and constructively in Palestine and elsewhere. Historical evidence clearly shows that Muslims and Christians have lived a common experience in a great many places for extended periods (Irwin, 1995, pp. 217-226).

The clash theory is useful to maintaining a wartime status in Western minds in general and in America in particular. As Edward Said points out, the assumptions of Lewis and Huntington have to be understood from the "standpoint of Pentagon planners and defence executives who temporarily lost their occupations after the end of the cold war" (Said, 2003, p. 70). The loss of an actual rival in the post-Cold War period led the United States to seek a new source of conflict in its global hegemony, and that involved reviving the old but still powerful notion that the world is divided into ideologically and fundamentally different clashing civilizations.

Indeed, the clash theory has been hailed by many representatives of American political and academic life, including former director of US foreign policy Henry Kissinger. In a speech about Peace and Freedom at the National Policy Conference in the Richard Nixon Centre, Washington DC, he asserted that, the "the contemporary world is confronted with "civilizational opposites", and declared Islam to be one of the gravest threats to global stability in the post-Cold War period (Trumpbour, 2003, p. 94). Supporting Kissinger's claims, the former Reagan official and director of national security programmes at the Nixon Centre Peter Rodman believes that Islamic fundamentalism is "replacing leftist extremism as a political force motivating assaults on Western interests on many continents" (Rodman, 1995, p. 3). Officials and academics have made considerable efforts to associate Israel with the modernized West in its conflict with Islam, and any attack on or even resistance against Israel would constitute an actual terrorist attack. In his book *Fighting Terrorism* (1995), former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described Arab and Muslim enmity toward Israel as an authentic continuation of the millenarian political enmity between Islam and Christendom. It is, therefore, impossible for them to cope with the

West. He stated that "The soldiers of militant Islam and Pan-Arabism do not hate the West because of Israel", and tried to generalize the idea that on the contrary, the Muslims "hate Israel because of the West" (Netanyahu, 1995, p. 87).

The clash theory contributed to the production of two major camps. First, there is the reaction in the US to the political events in Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia. These countries are considered "rogue states" because of the danger they pose to domestic security. The second is the growing fear of multiculturalism and the domestic school that "fears that Muslim immigrants will subvert Western Civilization from within" (Pipes, 1990, p. 28). Moreover, Lewis and Huntington warned the West of demographic change because "all Muslims have the same ambition, which is the 'Islamization of America'" (Trumpbour, 2003, p. 97). This means saving the US by transforming it into a Muslim country." As the American new conservative patriarch Irving Kristol described, this ideology can find its way through fragmentation and multiculturalism, which is "as much a 'war against the West' as Nazism and Stalinism ever were" (Kristol, 1991, p. 5).

A similarity between the clash theory and Orientalism is that both produce the idea that the East, symbolized by Islam, is a reactionary terrorist ridden and perilous place that should be controlled. This is clearly presented in US foreign policy as well as most Hollywood movies, wherein Islamic civilization continues to be a threat not just to the West but also to the East. Both theories reduce the "Other" in a systematic process of distortion with the intention of justifying the American role in the region. As Said pointed out, the American media repeats the political line that,

They must be foreign devils, otherwise what is our gigantic military machine doing there? (Said, you tube, 2003)

Directly after September 11<sup>th</sup> President George W. Bush declared,

This crusade, this war on terrorism, is going to take a while.  
(Baker and Baldwin, 2008, p. 18)

Whether this statement was intentional or accidental, the American reaction to September 11<sup>th</sup> led to one fact; namely, that like the Crusades the US war in Iraq was waged by exaggerating and fabricating a threat to justify imperial goals and to create metaphorical divisions of the world according to alleged civilizational boundaries.

### 10.3 Film Analysis

Ridley Scott's *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005) tackles head-on the emergent idea of clash theory between the East and West. In this movie, Scott rejects the argument that Islam is by nature hostile to the West and that the clash of civilizations will dominate global politics, by dramatizing one episode from the year 1187, with the city of Jerusalem portrayed as a multicultural and multiethnic paradise. The film has been interpreted by Sheldon Kirshner as a plea for tolerance and amity in a world smouldering with religious triumphalism (2005, p. 37). The film opposes religious fanaticism, clearly condemning extremism on both sides. Scott and the writer of his screenplay William Monahan remind us that God's War is a common concept in both Islam and Christianity. The contemporary relevance of a story in which nations' feuding and hatred leads to armed conflict and the waging of a holy war according to "God's will" to take control and ownership of Jerusalem is unmistakable in *Kingdom of Heaven*.

Roger Ebert described the film as a brave attempt, released as it was during this time of struggle between Christian and Muslims to dominate Jerusalem (Ebert, 2007, p. 377). Some Muslims had expected that a Twentieth Century Fox film about the Crusades would be a thinly-disguised justification for the American imperial project in Iraq and the Middle East, especially when George W. Bush had likened his "war on terror" to a crusade (Edge, 2005, p. 31). Responding to this, however, Scott commented that,

Bush was forgetting that the Crusaders were the bad guys. (Scott, No Wonder, 2005)

Scott depicts the Crusaders as young fighters betrayed by religious illusions that they could defeat the well-armed Saladin. These illusions ended in the bloodcurdling massacre of Hattin and the subsequent Crusades (Johnson, 2005, p. 30). Indeed the word "Crusade" would undoubtedly invoke in Muslim minds the concept of "endless war", which is entangled in religious impulses. In *Kingdom of Heaven*, the historical religious rhetoric of both sides inflames the clashes in which "killing infidels is a path to Heaven" and the misunderstanding of sacred texts is used "to justify acting out of political expediency or for financial gain, rather than out of a motive of faithfulness to the holy author of that text" (Tom, 2005, p. 8).

Notwithstanding the above, the aim for Scott was to direct a historical epic, which would, especially at this time, "heal wounds, not reopen them". Professor Hamid Dabashi said that it is clear that Scott does not want to give his audience a "classroom lesson". Instead he tries to direct all his efforts to focus on one man's journey through the controversial wars known as the Crusades.

It is an examination of religious faith but in a generic sort of way that emphasizes commonality instead of differences. (Whip, 2005, p. U6)

Scott transcends the classical staging of the Crusades to functionalize the human dimension of a controversial episode, and presents his vision through characters who are more concerned about the advancement of personal power than arguing theological issues. Artistically this is approached in two ways. The first, primarily aesthetic, uses an expressionist style, the expression of spiritual reality in which dramaturgical experiments are functionalized technically. The second is purely dialectical, exploring the contradictions within the personality of the central character and the struggle between religious motivations and the noble purposes of life. The merger between Scott's historical and aesthetic vision had matured in his earlier movies such as *Gladiator* (2000), *Black Hawk Down* (2001), but this time he made use of dramatic conventions in such a way as to impose a twenty-first century sensibility onto the crusading twelfth century action. Scott explored two significant and controversial questions: To what extent could the power of religious fanaticism and extremism drive our consciousness of other civilizations? And how could the personal power of honour and chivalry reconcile the opposing cultures?

While most Hollywood productions focus on the first or the third Crusade (where the Westerners won), instead Scott bravely explores the period of the second Crusade (in which the Crusaders lost at the battle of Hattin), where thousands of warriors and knights were brought to their deaths in the name of the salvation of their holy land. Hence, Scott edges away from Hollywood's ideological rhetoric rather than supporting the Western frontier myth. Scott and Monahan present both Christian and Muslim characters even-handedly as sharing the same mind-set and capabilities. Moreover, the "baddies" in Scott's episode are the Crusaders. Scott defined his view when he said,

You have to give pause and think were they lunatics? Saladin was so well armed; he far outnumbered anything Jerusalem had. When you say, "God is on my side," and you think you'll defeat these 200,000 troops, are you being sensible, or driven by fervour? (Scott, No Wonder, 2005)

By asking these questions, Scott is rebelling against Hollywood's stereotypical image of Arabs as foreign devils or typical villains. Both Scott and Monahan were suggesting a rationale for the Middle Eastern conflict.

*Kingdom of Heaven* plots the second Crusade within a controversial as well as an aesthetical scepticism about faith and a healthy tolerance towards other cultures. These are views that were unthinkable in the twelfth century. All of these subjects are tackled through the odyssey of the central character Balian (Orlando Bloom), a village blacksmith in France who, as he grieves for the suicide of his wife that followed the death of their child, meets Godfrey (Liam Neeson), a Crusader knight who has just arrived from Jerusalem and who turns out to be his father. Godfrey tells Balian that he is his illegitimate son and asks him to join his band of knights on their way to Jerusalem. The cinematic stage begins with a camera fade-out and extra low-key lighting for the dark area of the shot as an iconic image of the melancholic darkness of life and culture in this period. John Podhoretz, contributing editor to *The Weekly Standard*, described the era as one

...where there was absolutely no frame of intellectual, historical, hermeneutical or philosophical reference for cultural relativism or agnosticism. God was an almost literal presence in the lives of the real people we see fictionalized on screen here. (Podhoretz, 2005, p. 7)

At first, Balian refuses his father's offer but after being disowned by and killing the village priest, who stole his wife's cross from her dead body, Balian joins the army for his legalistic, not for his religion. Scott provides a cynical motive behind the Crusade. Godfrey paints Jerusalem not in terms of a holy war but in terms of gaining worldly treasure and acclaim. He depicts Jerusalem as medieval Atlanta and a "kingdom of heaven", where the citizenry is too busy to hate: "There at the end of the world you are not what you were born but what you have it in yourself to be." Later Godfrey receives a fatal wound while protecting Balian from arrest; in so doing, he gives Balian a lesson about peace and chivalry that turns the blacksmith almost instantly into a high nobleman.

As Balian proceeds to Jerusalem, his interpersonal conflict is gradually animated when he discovers that his fellow pilgrims are driven by dark impulses. He is bemused when a pilgrim declares that killing a Muslim infidel is not murder but a path to heaven. The image was illustrated technically and harmonized in a setting that used lighting, costume, and figure movement. Scott's personal image was presented by the use of extensive chilly lighting and distance-framing of the French landscape using a long length lens. The snow drifts slowly down from the evergreen pines accompanied with strong chilly lighting that is allied to emotions in creating a cinematic method of expressionism. The grammar of this and previous senses moves the expression from its theatrical authenticity to cinematic form and this approach is very effective in understand the film's message as explained by Andre Bazin who said,

The human being is all-important in the theatre. The drama on the screen can exist with out actors. A banging door, a leaf in the wind, waves beating on the shore can heighten the dramatic effect. Some film masterpieces use Man only as an accessory, like an extra or in counterpoint to nature, which is the true leading character (Bazin, 2004, 44)

Constructing the setting to create an expressionism style or hue is often used in many films, such as, Roberto Rossellini's *Germany Year Zero* (1984) and Win Wenders's *Wings of Desire* (1987). This technique, as film theorist David Bordwell explains, plays an instrumental role in shaping how we understand story action and live with protagonist feelings. (Bordwell and Thompson, 2008, p.117) A complex linearity engages us in the story of how a man who was driven by noble purposes to the place where there is peace between Christian and Muslim desperately tries to give himself a moral justification and defuse his religious doubts in order to complete his journey to Jerusalem. Of course, Scott is not aiming for political wisdom but is seeking to explore the most toxic medieval legacy, the idea of a holy war to rescue the sacred pilgrimage sites of Palestine from the antichrists of Islam.(Jones, 2005, p. 24). Scott's vision was implemented aesthetically. Theatrical mise-en-scene was conducted by the full use of long focal lens on Balian as he approached Jerusalem creating over exposure of the city. The camera swivels to follow Balian's army the wide-angle lens makes Jerusalem's main gate that he passes appear, with the the aid of a Dutch vertical pan, like the gate of heaven. The immediate cut with a close-up Balian's face expressing his implicit appreciation to the Arab's country emphasizes his will to live in peace and coexistence.

Scott and Monahan wanted to underline the role of the zealots in the conflict between the Christian West and the Muslim East. In the century prior to the conflict both religions had shown a great deal of respect towards each other in the Holy Land. It was only when Christian fanaticism determined to control the Holy City in a way that inflamed the struggle that things began to go wrong. In Jerusalem, Balian meets the young King Baldwin (Edward Norton), who suffers from leprosy. Along with his knight Tiberias (Jeremy Irons), Baldwin is trying to remain at peace with the Muslim leader Saladin, who is well-known for his nobility and chivalry. Scott plots his Crusade in a way that transcends the typical conflict between good Christians and bad Muslims. Balian takes control of the city, which is when we meet the "baddie" Guy de Lusignan (Marton Csokas), who is married to the king's sister, along with his advisors the Knights Templar. They are a society of Christian zealots who have been severely punished by the sick king and his nobles for their aggressive actions towards Muslims. After the death of King Baldwin Lusignan manages to wage war on Saladin's army,



which results in the unprecedented massacre known as the “Horns of Hattin”, in which the Crusaders are defeated.

As a blockbuster director Scott knows above all else that he is not giving his audience a “classroom lesson”; rather he uses a stylistic pattern of expressionism, which provides suitable ground to depict his personal adventures and the chivalric code of its heroes. Many senses are conducted by the spatial use of optical and camera movements, for example, after the crusader’s defeat at the battle of Huttain the camera swivels from an extreme long shot of the bloodbath to an extreme close up of Saladin’s unpleasant gaze. Creatively the shot sympathizes with protagonist’s sadness, because both Balian and Saladin believe that “holy war” is undesirable. This he enlivens with the fictitious story of the romance between Balian and Sibylla (Eva Green), the sister of King Baldwin. In addition to its dramatic function, aesthetically this romance helps to reveal a model of nobility, devotion and compassion, especially after Balian refuses Sibylla’s offer to designate him as king instead of her husband. This might explain why *Kingdom of Heaven* divides its plot between the historical events of the Crusade and a personal adventure, leading Hamid Dabashi to believe that the film is “an act of faith” rather than a film about a Crusade (Ebert, 2005, p. 29).

As Saladin marches on Jerusalem, Scott realizes that his battle will involve good versus good. Dramatically, Saladin’s action is justified by the “fabricated” incident of the rape and killing of his sister. Spectacularly Scott staged the typical bloodthirsty battle with splendid scenes involving Saladin’s attack against the Balian controlled Holy City, using graphics matched with extreme long shots to show the set-pieces in which giant balls of flame hurtle from the deep dark to the land and the walls, but not too close to the characters. The flames’ shadows appear on Saladin’s face as iconic images of inner torment. Moreover Scott characterizes Saladin as merciful and compassionate, as in chilly lighting he weeps for the victims of his battle. Scott’s visual style was emphasized by John Mathieson’s cinematography and the set designs produced by Arthur Max, as well as the huge effort involved in creating the foregrounds and locations of ancient Jerusalem, which were constructed by CGI.

*Kingdom of Heaven* tackles one of the most controversial subjects, especially after September 11<sup>th</sup>, since when numerous conflicts, both actual and ideological, have

intensified. The production was designed to be anti-war and anti-religious and a serious attempt to celebrate not a clash of civilizations, but the reconciliation of monotheism with multiculturalism by preaching tolerance and breaking the cycle of violence (Jones, 2005, p. 24).

The film was produced by Scott Free Productions and distributed internationally by Twentieth Century Fox (MPC, 2005). It took advantage of Hollywood's new system of production by using an independent production company not tied to the majors. This was because Twentieth Century Fox expressed resentment regarding Scott's radical representations of the characters and the Middle East. To counter this pressure Scott and his executive producers Lisa Ellzey and Terry Needham managed to reduce costs without losing vital scenes by using "creative runaways" at locations in Spain and Morocco. Furthermore, the King of Morocco, Mohammed II (who was happy with the film's message) played a significant role in the production. When Scott and the film crew received a death threat, the king provided them with the security of the royal guards. In addition, he provided Scott with extra horses and 20,000 soldiers to provide realistic scenes for the film (Edge, 2005, p. 31).

As a professional director, Scott is aware of how to carry out a huge scale production involving a large army at an economic cost. Intense battle scenes, including mounted cavalry and fully manned siege machinery, was conducted graphically by MPC (The Motion Picture Company), which managed new technology including blue-ray High Definition to visualize over 100,000 infantry soldiers charging towards Jerusalem amidst atmospheric elements such as fire, smoke and dust (MPC, 2005).

Balian refuses to throw his nation into another war, and the final scenes involve interpersonal questions about the justification for a religious war. In one controversial scene the following conversation takes place:

Pope: It is unfortunate about the people but it is God's will.

Balian (deep gaze to the Pope and moves to speak to his people): It is fallen to us to defend Jerusalem... We fight over an offence we did not give against those who were not alive to be offended. What is Jerusalem? Your holy places lie over

the Jewish temple that the Romans pulled down, the Muslims' places of worship lie over yours, which is more holy? The wall, the Mosque, the Sepulcher, who has claim? No one has claim, all have claim.

Pope: That is blasphemy.

Balian: We defend this city not to protect these stones but the people living within these walls.

In one of the spectacular scenes of the film the director uses a close-up shot (CU) with a 180 degree rule excluding all those sitting behind in a way that unites the main heroes of the film when Balian meets Saladin. Their conversation is a lesson in gallantry and kingship. Balian agrees to surrender Jerusalem to Saladin, saving his people from certain bloodshed and preaching a new period of co-existence between Christian and Muslim. Technically the shot managed to reduce or conclude the film's message in to the eyes of the heroes in that it reminds us of Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's* (1992). When he reduced the sitting and dancing sense to nothing, as part of this setting the shot had been obliterated by darkness and it help to shape how we understand the story action. (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.117). Robert Ebert suggests that the film dramatizes the historical epic of the Crusades to preach tolerance and relieve what is supposed to be a clash between two nations. He stated his belief that,

Most Christian and Muslims might be able to co-exist peacefully if it were not for the extremists on both sides. This may explain why the movie has displeased the very sorts of Muslims and Christians who will take moderation as an affront. Most ordinary movie-goers I suspect will not care much about the movie's reasonable politics and will be absorbed in those staples of all historical epics: battle and romance. (Ebert, 2007, p. 377)

Scott might realize that after nearly nine years the world is slipping back into cycles of holy war and revenge. Thus, far from expressing political wisdoms he tries to be entirely fanciful in suggesting that the solution, too, is medieval:

If we're going to lose the Enlightenment we might at least rediscover chivalry. (Jones, 2005, p. 24)

The images attached to Scott's fantasy and expressionistic style have been invoked and evaluated not according to what they add to reality or to the story of the Crusades, but to what they reveal about the film's dramatic structural depth. *Kingdom of Heaven* opens a wider dialogue, helping to make the unarguable debatable, and the doubtful credible. Scott believes that there is a close link between the legacy of the Crusades and today's issues, especially after the catastrophic events of September 11<sup>th</sup>. As he said,

The funny thing is that both sides are fighting and killing each other in the name of the Bible or Koran and both books are actually against killing each other.....I'm saying that if you are Christian or Catholic you are a fundamentalist you believe the fundamentals of your religion so unfortunately the world "fundamentalist" has very bad associations when it just means you believe in this-and-that and you don't believe in anything else but you're willing to accept that there are other religions and one of the biggest things in the Koran is respect for the icons of other religions and the other religions so that's why the terrorist is not advocating what the Koran advocates they are two quite separate ideas. (Scott, DVD, 2005)

*Kingdom of Heaven* is both anti-war and anti-religious. It provides a liberal depiction of the Crusades, and rather than celebrating the clash of civilizations it makes an eloquent plea for peace. The movie is haunted by several thematic obsessions, such as tolerance and chivalry, as in the episode of the Arab doctor in the desert (who is actually Saladin in disguise) who comes to save the sick King Richard with his amulet in his tent. The movie shows how Saladin honorably dispatches his own doctors to attend the sick king.

Ridley Scott's liberal debating of ideological warfare accords with Steven Runciman's view in his *History of the Crusades 1095-1271*. Runciman denounced the role of

religious fundamentalists on both sides, in particular Christian zealots, who have been described as “a vast fiasco” whose main legacy was an undying enmity between the two civilizations, the Islamic East and the Christian West. Faith may have inspired the Crusaders, but not for long. According to Runciman,

High ideals were besmirched by cruelty and greed, enterprise and endurance by a blind and narrow self-righteousness; and the Holy War itself was nothing more than a long act of intolerance in the name of God. (Acocella, 2004, p. 92)

This opinion was clearly prominent in *Kingdom of Heaven*. God’s war masks endless depths of political and financial intent. As Balian admits,

We thought that this war was for God but we discover that this is a war for wealth and land.

In addition, all the historical characters in the film have been extensively dramatized. Scott strained to avoid facts based on religious associations, and to present a balanced view of both Muslims and Christians. As he pointed out,

Some facts are based on religious thought, anyway religions create wars. (Scott, DVD, 2005)

Moreover, in order to enhance the chivalric code of the film’s heroes and present a fair view of both sides many historical details have been excluded or neglected. For example, both Saladin and Balian killed many of their hostages in the name of God. Also, during the negotiations Saladin asked for 100,000 dinars as a ransom for each person. Instead, Scott focuses on Saladin allowing the rich and poor to be led out of the city, showing a mercy that puts the Christian soldiers to shame. Thus it could be said that *Kingdom of Heaven* goes beyond the liberality of Runciman’s *History of the Crusades* in a way that has provoked historical conservatives such as Riley Smith to describe the plot as “rubbish - not historically accurate at all”. According to Riley Smith, Scott and screenwriter Monahan seem to have relied on the view of the Crusades portrayed by Walter Scott’s nineteenth century *Talisman*.

It depicts the Muslims as sophisticated and civilized and the Crusaders are all brutes and barbarians. It has nothing to do with reality. (Riley-Smith, Truth is the victim, 2005)

In contrast, compared with the sympathetic portrayal of Saladin, the Christian Knights Templar are depicted as warrior monks. They are brutal villains, unequal to their enemies and driven by greed (Edge, 2005, p. 31). According to Browning,

It is Osama Bin Laden's version of history. It will fuel the Islamic fundamentalists. (Browning, 2005, p. 1)

These views were strongly rejected by Robert Fisk, who believed that the main motive behind Ridley Smith and other conservative critics was that they "felt uncomfortable at the way the film portrayed 'us', the Crusaders" (Shaheen, 2008, p. 132).

Fisk, who saw this movie in a Beirut theatre, described the audience's reaction in a country that has suffered a civil war between Christians and Muslims for more than seventy years. He noted that both sides admired the honour and chivalry between Saladin and Balian, and were pleased when the honourable king despises the Knights Templar for their temerity towards Muslims. He reports that the scene in which Saladin dispatches his own doctors to tend the ailing Christian king was deeply admired among the Muslim audience, who gave "spontaneous applause". In the closing scene, after Balian has surrendered Jerusalem, Saladin enters the city. He sees a crucifix lying on the floor of a church, knocked from the altar during the three-day siege. He carefully picks up the cross and places it reverently back on the altar. "At this point", describes Fisk, the audience were so pleased that they "rose to their feet, clapped and shouted their appreciation". They highly welcomed the chivalrous action as they saw an alteration in the political and religious rhetoric. Fisk refers to the audience's positive reaction to the extraordinary direction and performances (Fisk, 2005, p. 33)

Furthermore, *Kingdom of Heaven* disputes Riley Smith's justification of the Crusaders' "positive violence", showing the Crusades as a historical wrong that

created a chasm of misunderstanding between two civilizations, the Christian West and the Muslim East. Scott said,

I am trying to get across the fact that not everyone in the West is a good guy and not all Muslims are bad. The tragedy is that we still have a lack of understanding between us and it is nine hundred years since the Crusades. (Edge, 2005, p. 31)

*Kingdom of Heaven* provides a clear response to Huntington, Pipes and Bernard Lewis's analysis of "the mob's anger", perhaps joining in C.M. Naim's response to Lewis's socio-political analysis of the contemporary situation, that Crusaders have suffered successive stages of defeat. The first was the loss of domination over Jerusalem and the Middle East. The second was the undermining of Christian spiritual authority. The third was the challenge to their mastery over their own people and temples, and the final stage is the loss of seven Crusaders following the battle of Hattin.

It was natural this rage should be directed against the millennial enemy and continue the unavoidable struggle between the West and the East. (Naim, 1992, p. 116)

Scott's movie provides a new Hollywood depiction of Saladin and his fellows, and yet manages a balance in equal measure between Christians, Muslims and Jews. Saladin in *Kingdom of Heaven* is not the Saladin in *The Crusades* (1935) or *King Richard and the Crusaders* (1954). For the first time he is depicted as being equal to his foes. He is revered by Muslims and Christians alike as a great Muslim leader, intelligent, dignified, a politician, brave, merciful, a gentleman and great strategist. Moreover, Islam is not presented as the "demonic religion of apostasy and blasphemy" (Shaheen, 2008, p. 132). Arabs in *Kingdom of Heaven* are shown to be socially and medically sophisticated and able to co-exist with the other two religions. Scott strived to paint the Middle East and Jerusalem in glorious colours, with spectacular scenes of magnificent architecture, clothes and beautiful women. His aesthetic vision had no place for Orientalist discourses.

Although *Kingdom of Heaven* was a financial success overseas, reaching \$163 million worldwide, it took only \$47 million in the United States (Shaheen, 2008, p. 133). Simon Edge claims that this was due to the American Christian press, which urged America's 80 million born-again believers to boycott the film (Edge, 2005, p. 31). However, as Scott commented,

They have not seen the bloody movie. They keep going on about how offensive it is but that's absolute rubbish.

He argued that his film is a debate of serious issues about a clash of civilizations which, he says, "is all the more relevant in the post-9/11 world" (Scott, DVD, 2005).

#### 10.4 Opinions about the Film and Clash Theory

Many of the film's participants and observers endorse the idea that *Kingdom of Heaven* meets the clash theory head-on. Some commentators believe that Scott's *Kingdom of Heaven* is an indirect response to the ongoing debate about a clash of civilizations, which has often been fuelled by the wider debate among scholars on how to perceive the post-Cold War world and develop new ways of thinking about civilizations.

Responding to the film's message, Professor of Medieval History and Chair of the Department of History at Saint Louis University Thomas F. Madden argues that Scott and his crew are absolutely mistaken if they believe that changing history could challenge the clash theory and reconcile opposing cultures. That cause would be better served by candidly facing the truths and the actual events of our shared past. Instead, the film projects a mixture of 19th-century Romanticism and modern "Hollywood wishful-thinking".

Furthermore, So negative a representation of the Crusaders could be annoying for many Christians, who believe, rightly or wrongly, that they were involved in



“defensive wars ... an attempt to turn back or defend against Muslim conquests of Christian lands” (Madden, 2005).

The film certainly annoyed Cambridge University professor and expert on the Crusades Jonathan Riley-Smith, who described it as “the disaster of twentieth-century history, rubbish that was poisoned with fabrications that rely on imagination rather than reality”. He further stated that

It depicted the crusaders’ enterprise, which was besmirched by cruelty and greed. Scott and his screenplay writer Monahan could not understand although the evidence was there how intellectually respectable the Christian theory of positive violence was according to medieval culture. (Browning, 2005, p. 1J)

Many conservatives have commented on the representation of Saladin by stressing the fact that the historical Islamic leader spared the lives of the Christian and Jewish residents of the Holy Land. Dr Jonathan Phillips, an academic at London University, states that Saladin is shown as an iconic image of Islamic Justice (Edge, 2005, p. 31) when Balian reminds Saladin during the negotiations that the Christian army massacred the city’s Muslim inhabitants during the conquest of Jerusalem. That massacre could be interpreted as sparking the *clash of civilizations* and the adoption of the notion of jihad to justify the brutal action taken against civilians, which follows the example not of Saladin but of his enemies.

Phillips goes beyond questions of historical distortion to argue that the film could inspire terrorist activities. He believes that Scott’s veneration of Saladin will legitimize dictatorship in the Middle East and rebrand, for example, the former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and the current Syrian President Basher Assad, as both “commissioned huge portraits and statues of Saladin”. Since Saladin was Kurdish and from Iraq, Saddam’s invocation is “bitterly ironic”. The portrayal of Saladin as the reluctant victor who wins the battle of faith will revitalize the notion of jihad and characterize armed conflict with Western forces as a battle of faith (Kadivar, 2005).

Steven D. Greydanus stated that it is inadmissible to distort history to achieve certain purposes. It will lead to unavoidable contradictions. Indeed, some conservatives believe that the film could provoke fundamentalist societies. Greydanus states that,

The story could largely be described as the failure of moderate Christians to restrain fanatical Christians from oppressing innocent Muslims thereby provoking justifiable Muslim retaliation against the Christians, both fanatics and otherwise. Yet Saladin himself is a complicated noble figure. As he prepares to lay siege to Jerusalem, he explicitly rejects the possibility of showing mercy, relenting only when Balian fights him to a standstill. The film cross-examines the Christians in a way it doesn't the Muslims.

(Greydanus, 2005)

Ted Baehr accused the film of presenting bad and unfair depictions of the Christians, blaming their leader's role in the Crusades (Andrews, 2005, p. 11). However, Scott disputes these allegations, pointing out,

We are trying to be fair, and hope that the Muslim world sees the rectification of history. It's a serious look at the subject and the fascinating things about these two parallel religions which come into conflict. It is not a hack-and-thrust with a lot of sword fighting.

(Kadiva, 2005)

In fact, Scott dramatized the historical epic of the Crusades in order to trace and refer the historical encounter between Christian West and Muslim East to the religious fundamentalists bent on God's Will and Holy War. Guy of Lusignan and the Knights Templar are symbols of the religious "baddies" who create wars and spark the clash of civilizations, but their efforts are strongly opposed and altered by the power of tolerance and chivalry, and this is what the film is really about (Masoud, personal communication, July 22, 2008).

The American Arab Anti-Discrimination Centre in Washington shares this opinion. Laila al-Qatami asserts that what the film provides is essential in our inflamed era.

*Kingdom of Heaven* was a brave attempt to provide “a fair and multifaceted portrayal of cultural and religious realities during that time”.

Scott rendered his film with admirable credibility. Not only did he use two famous Muslim actors, but he also consulted them many times.

The film is relatively balanced and accurate in presenting both sides and opposing fanaticism and hatred and discusses communal existence not in [dar al-Islam] and [dar al-harb] as many alleged but in the place which Scott described as Kingdom of Heaven. (Andrews, 2005, p. 11)

Scott has countered criticisms of the film’s message. As he pointed out,

At the end of the day the message is really about tolerance. You have a man who finally meets a man who’s reasonable. One is saying, "Should we surrender?" Perhaps it's better because it will prevent men going crazy over what is essentially a dream. (Johnson, 2005, p. 20)

That message is praised by many intellectuals. For example Professor Akbar Ahmed greatly admires Scott for the way he placed himself firmly in the middle. He states that aside from the enjoyment, which is manifest, *Kingdom of Heaven* is a serious attempt to tackle the great political controversy surrounding its subject matter. The film challenges concerns about a clash of civilizations within a suitable space of time with credibility. If there is less attention to the storyline, that does not affect the film. Its liberal rhetoric should be enhanced in the face of right-wing ones. If the root of common rage refers to the Crusades then the historical context should be modified to sire commonality rather than animosity.

In addition, praise comes from an association that is typically hostile to Hollywood and vilifies their depiction of the Middle East. The Council on American-Islamic Relations gave *Kingdom of Heaven* “a thumbs-up”, praising Scott for his balanced positive depiction of Islamic culture during the Crusades. In the words of Rabiah Ahme, the Council’s communications director,

It is, unfortunately, a rare occasion when a Muslim filmgoer can leave the theatre feeling good about a movie's portrayal of Islam.

Similarly, Whipp noted that

This film managed to show the horrors of war without associating those horrors with a particular faith or culture. (Whipp, 2005, p. U6)

Andrew Curry argues that we have to accept the fact that the legacy of the Crusades highlights the misunderstanding and animosity between Christian West and Muslim East, and that they are still with us. Regrettably, most of the Western background about the Middle East came from this most vicious religious conflict. These wars have made an unfortunate "rhetorical comeback", and such analogies could obscure rather than clarify the reality of the Crusades. The West is so dominated by the vision of the past that it acts not according to the reality, but to its reflection. Presenting a balanced view of this historical conflict will challenge the conventional wisdom of the past and contribute towards the removal of common hatred and misunderstanding (Curry, 2005, pp. 38-43).

In a telephone interview, Ghassan Masoud (Saladin in the film) asserted that Ridley Scott and William Monahan provided a brave response to the clash theory, especially in the post-9/11 environment of embattled faiths. He said,

Instead of promoting the American political agenda to maintain their dominance in the Middle East Scott provided a liberal anti-war film that strongly opposed religious fundamentalism and preaching dialogue. Tolerance is the best way to bridge the opposing cultures. (Masoud, personal communication, July 22, 2008)

Masoud also revealed the unreported story about Scott's battle in the United States, where the film suffered at the box-office:

The main objection was political where Bush's advisors (ironically Foud Ajami who has Arabic roots) warned him that the film will

influence Arabs and Muslims and fuel extremist terror as the film portrayed a whole new vision of that violent time. (Masoud, personal communication, July 22, 2008)

He noted too that Scott had been warned by 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox that an imbalance should support the US interests and principles rather than branding the historical vision of Saladin:

Thirty-five per cent of the film's scenes included Saladin. Only one has been excluded. (Masoud, personal communication, July 22, 2008)

*Kingdom of Heaven* was also highly acclaimed by James Wall, who believed that Scott hoped his film would correct the stereotypical image that has led too many in the West to libel 1.2 billion Muslims as "evil Others" in a clash of civilizations. Wall stated that,

There is an examination of religious faith, but in a generic sort of way that emphasizes commonality instead of differences. (Wall, 2005, p. 45)

Scott was convinced that a certain balance had to be achieved in order to reach his goal. He relied on Hamid Dabashi to advise him during the making of the film on the best way to fictionalize the historical text of the Crusade equitably for Christians, Muslims and Jews. Dabashi was familiar with Scott's work in Hollywood from his previous films, such as *Black Hawk Down* (2001), *Gladiator* (2000), *Alien* (2006), *Thelma and Louise* (1991) and *Blade Runner* (1982). All the films share the same thematic element of a major character who goes on a journey to find answers for a troubled spirit (Dabashi, 2006). For this film, Dabashi was able to read the script and made some comments during the final stages of production (Podhoretz, 2005, p. 7). Subsequently, he commented in the British film magazine *Sight and Sound* that as Scott's adviser he deeply appreciated his brave attempt, which he believes is fair to Islam.

James Wall believes that Scott's movie displays a positive view, with more sensitivity to Islamic religious and cultural practices than any other film made during the history

of Hollywood. The critical turning point in the film is that Muslims had ruled Jerusalem in terms of Saladin's honourably. Thus, Wall believes that students of the Crusades who feel sympathy for Godfrey and King Baldwin IV because they dreamed of building a New Jerusalem, the "Kingdom of Heaven" where all religions and faiths would live in peace, will appreciate Scott and Monahan's story. It is a brave depiction that transcends the typical vision of the "enemy" as "backward and barbaric" (Wall, 2005, p. 45).

John Podhoretz described *Kingdom of Heaven* as very liberal-minded and successful in respect of the above; however, he noted that the director and the writer "have managed an amazing hat trick: they have made a very expensive film that manages to be annoying in equal measure to Christian, Muslims, and Jews" (Podhoretz, 2005, p. 7).

The claim by Lewis and Huntington that Islam is based on the division of humanity between the "House of Islam" and the "House of War" and that thereby Islamic civilization is subject to a totalitarian religion (Sells, 2004, p. 9) is disputed in *Kingdom of Heaven*. Saladin's religiosity and preoccupation with the meaning and requirements of jihad are understated. The Muslim leader shows a great desire to be the nexus of a successful co-existence of Christians, Muslims and Jews in the Holy Land. This reflects Scott's own belief that killing and expulsion are inexcusable actions, both morally and religiously, and should not be justified in terms of Riley-Smith's "positive violence" (Acocella, 2005, p. 92).

In Riley-Smith's view, "A number of historians now accept this belief [the concept of positive violence] as a key to the Crusades" (Acocella, 2005, p. 92). However, according to Joan Acocella, Riley-Smith himself attempts to justify the Crusades based on religious belief. She disputes his view, asking the rhetorical question, "Positive violence - what is that? Just what it says: the idea that killing is virtuous." She also points out that Every sermon they heard told them that killing was an rapprochement to God.

Smith's assumptions have also been disputed by Junaid M. Afeef, who states that it is a mistake to "equate historical balance with historical revisionism". He adds that it is

clear that the Crusaders' brutal actions in 1099 went beyond religious and moral justification. They were against not just Muslims but all civilians, including Jews and Christians. The main problem is that the Crusades have always been evaluated according to Western views. By presenting a balanced view, *Kingdom of Heaven* would inevitably be challenged not just by the conventional view of good and bad, but by those conservatives who believe that "Christian West" and "Muslim East" are headed for a clash. In Afeef's view however,

If *Kingdom of Heaven* stimulates American intellect then it is worth the price of a few ruffled feathers. (Afeef, 2005)

The French historian Amin Maalouf agrees with Afeef's assumption that the film's message is to heal historical wounds and not reopen them. Nevertheless, Maalouf added that,

It does not do any good to distort history even if you believe you are distorting it in a good way. Cruelty does not exist only on one side but on all. (Maalouf, 1989, p. 76)

Simon Edge believes that Scott had to tell the tale from an idealist's perspective. Scott and screenwriter Monahan tried to present a world without war, where people of different cultures live in harmony. Such a message will possess a certain influence, preaching tolerance between the two civilizations and boosting the peace process accordingly.

In fact, Scott puts his Crusade in a different light to today's crusades in the Middle East. In the film Balian and Saladin show that the Kingdom of Heaven will be successfully preserved by ensuring a multicultural internationalized Jerusalem, and that this will be achieved by liberal minds and not fundamentalist actions by those who claim to know and do God's will.

### 10.5 Conclusions

Scott's *Kingdom of Heaven* deals with many of today's critical issues, including ideological conflict and the fears of an ongoing clash of civilizations, as well as extremism, terrorism and Western perceptions of the Middle East. He relates these phenomena to their broader historical, political, moral and intellectual context. By this means, Ridley Scott remarkably manages to deal with four main elements. First, the film disputes the clash theory and exposes the roots of Western fear and suspicion of Islamic civilization by designing a "modern Crusade" that heals wounds and does not reopen them. Scott, along with his screenwriter William Monahan, chose the most vicious religious conflict in all of human history to embrace peace and break the cycle of violence between the two civilizations, emphasizing commonality instead of difference. As he told the *Guardian*,

We set out to tell a terrific story from a dramatic age - not to make a documentary or a piece that aims to moralize or propagandize. But since our subject is the clash of these two civilizations and we are now living in the post-9/11 world *Kingdom of Heaven* will be looked at from that perspective.

(Scott, *Kingdom of Heaven*, 2005)

Second, *Kingdom of Heaven* breaks the cycle of Hollywood's stereotypical image of Arabs and Muslims. The historical text was used not to dehumanize Arabs and Muslims but to provide an even-handed and fair portrait of both Muslims and Christians. Scott and Monahan project the historical Islamic leader Saladin as a model of chivalry, compassion and devotion, and most importantly as a victim of religious war. By this means, Scott challenged mainstream ideas and demonstrated that Hollywood is not a monolith, but a diverse community espousing different opinions about life and politics. Therefore, Ridley Scott's *Kingdom of Heaven* should be analyzed as a new attempt, which tackles head-on the emergent idea of clash theory between the East, particularly Islam, and the West.

Third, it is obvious that the critical issues of today, such as American policy in the Middle East, war on terror, extremism and the irreconcilable struggle of values



between Western culture and Islamic fundamental societies, especially in the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup>, have managed to breach Hollywood's established thinking. This has inspired some Hollywood intellectuals to adopt and respond to these complexities in a serious debate instead of boosting corporate profits with manipulative images. Scott launched his film from the intersection of politics, ideology, society and history. Thus, it stands at a great distance from American imperial objectives. Scott presents his Crusade as a plea for tolerance and amity in a world smouldering with religious triumphalism.

Fourth, Scott's argument bears a clear resemblance to Joseph Nye's soft power theory. Nye's argument focused on intangible resources or the ability to persuade and influence other countries (especially the Middle East) not by threats or coercion but by the attractiveness of its society, values, culture and institutions (Nye, 2004, pp. 5-7). *Kingdom of Heaven* combines all these elements in one project.

With everything considered Scott's *Kingdom of Heaven* should not be viewed as part of Hollywood's activist movement. The issues that make up the activist agenda are diverse and encompass many political and social objectives. In the end Scott is a Hollywood man who simply follows his creative ability without being functionalized as a linchpin of US ideological hegemony nationally or internationally. There is a certain resemblance between Scott and Spielberg. Both take head-on the ongoing ideological struggle between West and East. As the conflict continues to proliferate around the globe they commendably functionalize different means (intellectually and artistically) to demonstrate their fears about the on-going clash of civilizations through serious debate, far removed from the Orientalist discourse.

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## 11 CONCLUSION

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From the very earliest days of Hollywood when the camera first started cranking, until the present day, the representation of the Middle East has undergone many changes. The ideology of defamation was a product of the clash between Christianity and Islam. As competing worldviews they were bound to come into conflict as they each attempted to achieve domination, establish territorial security and provide a power base from which to achieve hegemonic success (Hasian, 1998, pp. 205-207).

The origins of Hollywood's representations of the Middle East can be traced to the early years of the last century, when the US started to promote its interests worldwide. The US government realized the potential of a burgeoning Hollywood as a medium to project itself, its foreign policies and objectives in order to influence opinion at home as well as abroad (Slocum, 2006; Sardar & Davies, 2004; Christensen & Haas, 2005; Boggs & Pollard, 2007). A close relationship based upon mutual benefit was developed. During this period, Hollywood faithfully projected and justified US foreign policy in return for government patronage. However, this alliance, while providing the ammunition for the US to justify its policy of perpetuating the myth of the "good" nation fighting the "evil" Arab or Muslim, inevitably sowed the seeds for a spiral of violence with little hope of resolution.

Hollywood attacked the Arab world in many ways, developing a negative image of the Arabs and Muslims by defaming their moral rectitude, social order, institutions, physical appearance and environment (Shaheen, 2001; Suleiman, 1983; Fries, 2005; Ghareeb, 1983; Khatib, 2006; Said, 1997; McAlister, 2005; Semmerling, 2006). Such

representations are rarely true because they are constructed by the dominant group. Furthermore, the Hollywood portrayal has not been consistent. It has been re-interpreted to meet changes in US interests born out of changing political and cultural events in the region. The result of one such re-interpretation, brought about by Arab terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism, was to suggest that Middle Easterners be regarded as "Others" and denigrated as "inferior", unable to regulate their own affairs and in need protection by the US not only against their enemies but also from themselves.

In order to justify these stereotypical labels Hollywood assigned to Arabs a group of racial features, such as a natural propensity to commit unwarranted violent and duplicitous acts. This reinforced the notion of "Otherness" and helped to justify American actions in the Middle East (Said, 1993, p. 120). Inevitably, this engendered a sense of resentment. The only certain outcome was an increase in violence with little hope of it ending.

However, this cosy state of affairs between Hollywood and the US government did not last. With the Vietnam conflict the relationship began to break down, and after the invasion of Iraq this process accelerated. The schism was due not only to changes in political and public opinion brought about by changing events, but to the inherent nature of the democratic system, where subjection of an institution such as the film industry to government control is difficult to sustain. In addition, in a capitalist system the commercial interest is also hard to control (Kranton and Mine-Hart, 2000).

The actual break between the government and the film industry started after 9/11 and rose to the surface after the invasion of Iraq. Individual free thinking activist members of the film industry responded to these events by participating in many of the social movements against American foreign policy, especially in the Middle East. The activists espoused a more advanced argument about the chaos in the Middle Eastern world in more controversial and humanistic terms. Some of these free thinkers, such as Steven Spielberg and George Clooney, co-own production companies. Therefore, new opportunities existed to incorporate their vision and ideas into their films free from government influence.

The films produced after 9/11 started to portray the Middle East with a greater complexity. It was realized that Arabs exhibited the whole range of human attributes. They began to be treated impartially, coming to be seen as victims as well as perpetrators. It is to be hoped that this new view will in time move public opinion towards a more positive view of the Arab world, to such an extent that government policy will have to be changed. It is likely then that mainstream Hollywood will begin to reflect this revision. If this becomes the case then the new representation will become more emphatic and universally accepted.

The films *United 93* and *The Kingdom*, both produced post-9/11, justify the traditional negative depiction of the Arab world, but without resorting to gratuitous violence. The films were produced at a time when the United States had become involved with the war on terror, and as a result, the fear of ideological conflict had been heightened. The films were a direct response to this fear, but attempted to portray the situation in a rational manner, rising above the level of commercial exploitation and traditional bias to a more balanced and intellectual debate. The films demonstrate how Hollywood represents the war on terror. They do not attempt to justify it but instead invoke a different cinematic style to create a new class of film. This new style allows the directors to demonstrate that conflict cannot be resolved by an appeal to arms, and that the use of force to combat terrorism is contentious.

In these films, the portrayal of the Arab world is more enlightened, but a measure of the negative stereotype still remains. They show violence as justified in terms of Islamic doctrine while at the same time sending out a warning about the growth of fundamentalism and its implications for world order. In terms of the portrayal of the Arab world these films may be considered to represent a transition between negative and rational representations.

*United 93* and *The Kingdom* also serve as examples of productions that are less subject to the influence of Hollywood and government control. *United 93* offers criticism of a President's actions, and its director maintained the film's independence by not allowing it to endorse the US government's war on terror. The two films are significant because they represent a change in Hollywood that allowed directors to

engage in a critical debate and refute established practices and superficial representations of the Arab world.

*Munich* represents the new set of Hollywood films in which the issues are treated in a rational, factual and enlightened way. In the film, no value judgements are placed on the Arab characters. They are seen as reacting to the political circumstances they face. This is in sharp contrast to *Black Sunday*, where virtue is the exclusive property of the West and makes a cultural clash inevitable.

Like other films of its genre *Munich* was made possible by the decentralization of Hollywood and the rise of free thinking independent production studios. The film's contribution to the debate is that all cultures share certain universal moral values, but these may be culturally bound and therefore appear different. These differences need to be recognized by both sides in the conflict. This can only come about by peaceful means.

*Syriana* refutes the traditional Arab stereotype in a very positive way. It raises many questions for debate. The film is significant because it projects the universal view that there is good and bad in all ethnic groups and that value judgements should be tied not to stereotypes but to the actions of individuals. Furthermore, because value judgements can be culturally bound, they must be based on universal truths. The film aims to find a way to reconcile the ideology of the West with that of the Middle East, by seeking what unites rather than what divides them. It seeks universal values.

*Rollover* is the antithesis of *Syriana*. It projects the epitome of the negative Arab stereotype as perceived by the West. It serves to remind the West of the catastrophic consequences of pursuing a policy based upon defamatory stereotypes. Little progress in resolving grievances can be made through this route. It therefore stands in contrast to *Syriana* and emphasizes the latter film's progressive nature, which holds out much more hope of achieving a resolution to the problems.

*Kingdom of Heaven* takes up the theme of ideological conflict with its resultant extremism, terrorism and distorted Western perceptions of the Middle East. The film presents an intellectual debate grounded in a political, moral and intellectual context

(Masoud, personal communication, July 22, 2008). It successfully argues against the clash theory and reveals the source of Western fears of the Arab world. Like other films of this genre it emphasizes commonality in terms of universal values. The film suggests a programme to repair permanently the damage that this conflict has wrought. It contests the traditional stereotypical portrayal of the Arab world by using its historical context; for example, it represents Saladin as a model displaying Western virtues. The film is also significant because it demonstrates the impact upon Hollywood of the struggle between the Arab world and the West. The response by a section in Hollywood has been to produce films that are aimed less at generating profit and more at stimulating serious debate. A measure of the success of this movement is the extent to which Hollywood has become disassociated from the aims of US foreign policy. In fact, an analysis of *Kingdom of Heaven* shows little or no adherence to American foreign policy objectives. The argument that the film presents is compatible with Nye's soft power theory, where influence is brought to bear not by militarism but by the art of persuasion.

Values such as democracy, human rights, breaking the cycle of violence, peacekeeping, and individual opportunities are strongly endorsed by both *Syriana* and *Munich*, but the accordances refer to goals that might contradict Nye's objectives, especially with regard to branding American ideals. In both these films, the argument is connected more to the rise of American social and liberal movements and Hollywood activism. In *Syriana*, for instance, US foreign policy is profoundly criticized.

*Kingdom of Heaven* is arguably a brave handling of a most contentious vision. It opposes any form of religious extremism by treating both Arab and Western cultures as equal, bound together by universal truths that transcend cultural divides. The film pleads for tolerance and mutual respect as a way to understand each other's grievances to accommodate and so resolve them (Andrews, 2005, p. 11).

Many of the films produced after 9/11, including those described in this thesis, use a stylistic technique that stimulates debate, aiming to reconcile two different ideologies by establishing truths rather than disproving the other case.

In *Munich* Spielberg and Kushner try out various artistic techniques to convey thoughts and feelings related to the mind, spirit or temperament of the characters, aiming to investigate through discussion the tensions, interactions and differences in ideas that existed between the Arabs and the Israelis.

*Syriana* uses theatrical techniques to achieve its ends. The plot is a dream created within the imagination of the producer, which aims to mobilize the emotions of the audience so that they come to realize the negative and insidious effects of international capitalism in Middle Eastern politics.

*Kingdom of Heaven* uses a similar aesthetical approach to that of *Munich*. Both films are based upon historical events associated with conflict in the Middle East. *Kingdom of Heaven* enlists aesthetics to convey emotions when religious beliefs conflict with secular ones, not only between different characters but also within individuals; for example, we see how Saladin compromises between his religious and temporal beliefs. These are investigated through debate that questions to what extent religious extremism affects one's perception of other cultures and how these differences can be reconciled by an appeal to moral virtues.

Admitting debate into their films has enabled directors to free themselves from the shackles imposed by Hollywood, which ultimately reflected US imperial objectives. Instead, a new system of production has evolved, allowing a freedom of expression that was not possible before. This has resulted in the presentation of new and rational ideas, which it has to be hoped will bring pressure to effect political change.

This research has shown that after 9/11 the old and accepted depiction of the Arab world began to change. These events acted as a catalyst that stimulated debate. As a result, Middle Eastern issues were viewed in a new light that challenged established ideas. The debate brought forward liberal ideas previously held by a minority of free thinkers on the centre to centre-left of the political spectrum and placed them into mainstream politics.

These films challenged negative stereotypes and presented the world with a more positive image of Arabs and Muslims. They were made possible not only by the

changes in the structure of Hollywood which allowed independent production companies to develop, but also by those members of the Hollywood community who shared these liberal ideas and views.

This research into the evolution of Hollywood's representation of the Middle East has documented a palpable change in terms of representation, the cinematic response to the catastrophic events of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the invasion of Iraq. The output of these new types of film not only attests to this conversion but may encourage the film industry and US society to debate the realities and challenges that the Middle East presents in a new light, and contribute towards resolving the common troubles instead of distorting them.



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