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Filthy

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English 101

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Filthy

“something that never touches the ground shouldn’t be so dirty”

-“My Josephine”

To Mark Mallory

“My Josephine,” a title derived from Napoleon Bonaparte’s first marriage, one based on love, takes a shot at society’s perception of Middle Eastern Americans. The film does not directly challenge stereotypes, but allows the viewers to walk in the shoes of Aadid, the protagonist and narrator of the story. Aadid is of Middle Eastern descent, he works in a laundromat with his love, Adela. Like most laundromats post 9/11, Aadid and Adela wash flags for free. This film brings attention to what actually makes the American flag “dirty” – racism.

For a free service, there is a great amount of detail and care that goes into the cleaning. Aadid makes the claim that cleaning the flags is not hard nor tedious, but delicate work. Each flag is washed by hand, as if to cleanse the intrinsic blood stains of sharing the same pigmentation as Saddam Hussein. Each flag gets its very own dryer. While watching these flags tumble over themselves, Aadid states, “it makes you feel like you should be in love with something.” Is that “something” a country spiraling out of control, tumbling over itself? It is certainly hard to love something so unstable. The meticulous thought and attention put into

each flag by Aadid and Adela is a true display of patriotism. Selfless hands pour such precious time and effort into a symbol often used to contort bigotry and racism as pure “American pride.”

This patriotic symbol is commonly found in the backdrop of news anchors. Such sly media stations demonize the mass of Middle Eastern people. The hyper-visibility of terrorism certainly terrifies the public eye. Although Arabs never been accepted in society, according to thenation.com, “Today’s islamophobic rapture, should not come as a surprise. Arabs and Muslims have a long history of being portrayed as utterly foreign to America.” Media outlets give absurd stereotypes such as tiny hands and partaking in rape to people of middle eastern descent.

This film also displays the tender care Middle Eastern people are capable of experiencing. But could those barbaric “towel heads” truly be capable of deeper thought, emotion, or maybe even love? One scene displays Aadid and Adela gleefully dancing and laughing. While this is a mere act of comradeship, many Americans may be tempted to see the dance as a celebration of “death to America.” Aadid speaks of Adela with great passion. Although his description of her is rather peculiar, with adjectives such as “simple, gracious, and lovely,” the connotative meaning of his diction makes Adela seem normal... as though she may actually be a person, but you and I know better don’t we?

It is common for someone to feel self-aware when people speak in foreign languages around them. Aadid narrates completely in Arabic, although the brief scene of dialogue is odd because while Aadid speaks to Adela in Arabic, she responds in English. Aadid asks Adela to repeat the phrase “of love” in Arabic. She complies, but goes on to ask, “what is wrong with English?” “nothing,” he responds. This dialogue exemplifies bi-culturalism. While Aadid does not wish to be relinquished of his culture, Adela wishes to not be judged for hers.

The United states of America a country where bigots run rampant, where the first guaranteed right is freedom of speech and religion (not to be impeded upon by Uncle Sam), is now being operated by an Oompa Loompa whose agenda directly targets people of Middle Eastern descent. Said strategy directly plays off America’s irrational fears. According to politifacts.com, an individual is far more likely to die in a mass shooting- an occupation primarily held by white men- than being blown to bits by a Jihadist. There have been 301,797 deaths attributed to gun violence between 2004 and 2015, compared to the 71 deaths caused by terrorists on American soil in those same years. While this does not include the tragedy of 9/11, should we allow one act of terrorism to define an entire race of people?