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Literature and Civilization**

Entitled:

**Orientalism: Hollywood and the Representation of
the Other**

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Dedication

*This work is dedicated to my dear parents for their patience, help,
understanding and support during all the years of my studies*

To my sister and brothers

Also, I dedicate this work to my best friends and colleagues

It is dedicated to all whom I love with no exception.

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Résumer

Le but de cette thèse est d'analyser la vision orientaliste à Hollywood et la franchise cinématographique tout au long de son histoire. Les représentations injustes de "l'Autre" ont été prévues dans de nombreux films, dont chacun avait un motif biaisé. Ce travail est divisé en trois chapitres, mis en évidence pour mettre en évidence les vastes changements qui ont eu lieu dans les représentations de Hollywood vis-à-vis des orientalistes depuis ses débuts jusqu'à la deuxième décennie du XXI^e siècle. Chaque chapitre aborde de manière critique un couple de films et la façon dont ils ont été perçus. Les résultats principaux de cette thèse illustrent que les représentations de Mille et Une Nuits et Sinbad le Marin par exemple, sont le résultat de diverses raisons interculturelles et politiques. En plus de cela, ils confirment que les images orientalistes contenues dans les films sont faites d'autres suites similaires telles que les premières histoires des contes d'Arabian Nights. Les autres résultats s'articulent autour du thème de l'altération de l'oriental: Moyen-Orientaux, Asiatiques du Nord et du Sud, où ils sont toujours considérés comme inférieurs et inférieurs. Heureusement, il s'est avéré que les représentations modernes à Hollywood sont devenues moins stéréotypées. Les images négatives ont été légèrement supprimées, comme dans le cas de Kingdom of Heaven (2011) et Victoria and Abdul (2017).

Mots clés: L'Orient, L'Occident, Whitewashing, Yellowface, Blackface.

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to analyze the orientalist view in Hollywood and the filmmaking franchise throughout its history. The unfair representations of the “Other” were forecasted in numerous movies, each of which had a biased motive. This work is divided into three chapters, set to highlight the vast changes, which occurred into Hollywood’s representations vis-à-vis the easterners from its early beginnings up until the second decade of the twenty-first century. Each chapter critically addresses a couple of films and the way they were perceived. The primal outcomes of this thesis illustrate that the representations of *Arabian Nights* and *Sinbad the Sailor* for instance, are the result of various intercultural and political reasons. In addition to that, they confirm that the orientalist pictures contained in the movies are made of other similar sequels such as the early stories of *Arabian Nights*’ tales. The other outcomes revolve around the theme of othering of the easterner: Middle easterners, North and South Asians, where they are always seen as inferiors, and lower-classed. Yet fortunately, there turned up that the modern depictions in Hollywood have become less stereotypical. The negative images were slightly gotten rid of, such as in the case of *Kingdom of Heaven* (2011), and *Victoria and Abdul* (2017).

Key Words: The orient, The Occident, Whitewashing, Yellowface, Blackface.

ملخص

الهدف من هذه المذكرة هو دراسة وجهة نظر المستشرقين الغرب وامتيازهم بصناعة الأفلام المتحيزة بالصور النمطية في هوليوود طوال تاريخها، فقد تم ترقب الوصف غير العادل لـ "الأخر" في العديد من الأفلام، وكان لكل منها دافع متحيز وعنصري يرسم نظرة شاملة عن الشرق. ينقسم هذا العمل إلى فصلين. والسبب في ذلك هو تسليط الضوء على التغييرات الكبيرة التي حدثت على مستوى عروض هوليوود من بداياتها المبكرة إلى غاية الزمن الحديث في مخالفة الشرقيين وتشهيرهم اعلاميا يتجزأ كل فصل بهذه الأطروحة إلى قسمين فرعيين يتضمنان أمثلة عن أعمال هوليوود التشهيرية. توضح النتائج الأولية لورقتي البحثية أن الوصف السينمائي لـ "ألف ليلة وليلة" و"السندباد" على سبيل المثال، ما كان إلا نتيجة لأسباب متعددة، ثقافية منها وسياسية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك؛ تؤكد أن صور الاستشراق الواردة في الأفلام معدة من سلاسل مشابه لهذه الأخرى، مثل الحكايات الغابرة لروايا "ألف ليلة وليلة". وبالطبع عواقب هذا التصوير غير العادل يؤدي إلى نبذ "الأخر" والذي يتمثل في الشرق الأوسط، آسيا، والقارة السوداء حيث ينظر إلى شعوبهم دائما على أنهم أقل أهمية، وأقل مرتبة. لكن لحسن الحظ، بعض الأفلام الحديثة أتت لتزيل تلك الصور النمطية في هوليوود، فمنذ ظهورها أصبحت أقل تحيزا، حيث تم التخلص من الصور السلبية بشكل طفيف إلى حد ما، وخير مثال على ذلك فلم مملكة السماء 2005، وفلم فيكتوريا وعبدول 2017.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الآخر، الغرب، الشرق، صراع الحضارات، هوليوود، السينما.

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General Introduction

This thesis aims to uncover the factual forms and ideologies that the westerners had against the peoples of the Orient, as well as the way they keep representing them whether in textual accounts or visualized media. It was believed that the figure of the easterner was not a mere simple case of analyses made by the west. However, the process of representations was performed due to numerous factors, which were kept low-key. This work focuses on some Hollywood films, which were based on a prejudicial thought (that can be traced back to Orientalism).

The aim of this work is to review and reflect on the various cinematic representations from the early beginnings of cinema to the contemporary ones. We do not claim that the West is a flawless utopia and the Eastern on the other hand is a dystopia. All we seek is to show how power and political intentions can influence the representation of an ethnic group (Arabs and Muslims) in this case. It would not be legitimate to show the West as a flawless civilization, which is guided by reason, intellect and modernity, whereas the East is always looked down at, as barbaric and fanatic, and as a place full of evil people who are not well educated, and who are guided by their own sexual urges. What we intend from this work is to clarify that indeed the world is not the same, because diversity is what makes it interesting. However, some people would feel positive about it. They would not welcome this diversity.

The differences, which the world contains, are judged by bias, prejudice and racism. Therefore, coexistence is an essential factor to be spread globally for the best of all humanity. Still Arabs, Muslims, Asians and Africans are the center of a prejudicial argument, and of course these efforts of stereotypes against them, are not new. The negative representations directed against them were something that existed and grew

throughout history in the archives of written materials, works of arts, and paintings made by European orientalists.

Apart from that, there were documents recorded throughout the Europeans quests for knowledge about the east, during which the Americans also borrowed these documents and shaped their own image in respect to eastern peoples. One example of this biased knowledge is the historical written materials, which were made into different films. As in the Arab world, most of the people have heard numerous tales about the mesmerizing adventures of Ali Baba, Aladdin, and Sinbad, mostly those that were carried out through the historical Arabic folklore. We knew about Arabian Nights' *Sinbad* and learned that it is an Arabic heritage tale, which was developed from the ancient Persian mythology. "Arabian Nights, more properly known as One Thousand and One Nights is a collection of Middle Eastern and South Asian stories and folk tales, compiled in Arabic during the Islamic Golden Age. This period lasted from the eighth century to the thirteenth century (*Pook Press*).



Fig 1: An Abbasid manuscript of the *One Thousand and One Nights*

1.1. Introduction

The East and the Arab nations have always been referred to as the lands of exoticism, oddness and contradictions, where the things you have never thought could exist do enroot their beings there. According to the West, showing these features of the easterners in films is not a way to mock them nor to disrespect their traditions. What they aimed was to try to enlighten and educate them. Edward Said claims that Orientalism relies on letting westerners interact with the *Orient* without even losing the upper hand.

That is to mean, the relationship that bonds Arabs and Westerner is built on *Power*. He said that the East is seen with an imaginary vision, as a mysterious place, full of dark secrets and untold stories (Said 31). However, these prejudices were not only revolving around the excortication for Orientalist art. Literature helped so much in widening it and making it more serious. It is believed that “one of the most important ideas behind orientalist art, has been to show the *Islamic World* in a position of either moral or cultural inferiority to that of the west” (Denny). These representations do not only affect Arabs, they can also refer to black Africans, Gypsies, Asians, and Indians.

In this chapter, we are going to show both the Occident and the Orient as binary oppositions. The chapter discusses to what extent is it true that the East is exotic, under what circumstances, and how is it possible that the West is seen to be the appropriate entourage to live in, and who made this norm in the first place?

In this chapter, we will shed lights on the exotic portrayals by Hollywood of Arabs and the metanarrative of the mystique Arab land. These motives were claimed to reflect the images of Arabs as a barbaric radical group throughout the screenplay. Films such as *Sinbad* and *Arabian Nights* inculcated the western publics a negative idea about Islam

and the Middle East. Sinbad's tale is based on the Persian-Arab heritage of the *A Thousand and One Nights* book, which is slightly different from the depictions of the action films. When it comes to the screenplay one can notice that the prejudicial touch is too carried out, portraying all Arabs as fanatics and religiously hardened nations in terms of the application of Sharia, especially against women.

The embodiment of women in these orientalist films is an indirect inclination to represent them as ineffective trivial characters, where their roles are for pleasure and entertainment only. Since the beginning of the history of filmmaking, whether a timeworn black-and-white or a modern film, many cinematic works held images of exoticism, terrorism and violence.

Some of these showed Arabs as evil sorcerers mending witchcraft (*Jafaar*), and some included images of the lusted wealthy Sheikhs and Sultans as people thinking only about their pleasures. A point that is focused on in this chapter is the philosophy of the Western and the American hero within the exotic and extraordinary Arab land. He is often portrayed as the savior who comes all along from abroad to fight the tyrannical evil. His task is believed to be a divine mission to rescue and educate the barbaric peoples from their ignorance. The stereotypes have always been engraved in many cinematic works, including the chosen film: *Indiana Jones* that shows the protagonist as a brave hearted man against a group of fanatical Arabs and their Nazi allies in Egypt. Its geographical characteristics on the screenplay were uncivilized and old, whereas people are dressed up shabbily roaming the street markets.

1.2. The Literature Review

Concerning the two different representations of *Arabian Night* and *Sinbad*, the images were clear that both of them were represented from an occidental angle, one that serves the needs of the American greed over the Arab and Muslim countries. We take *Iraq*, and the *Desert Storm* propagandas as examples. The critical method that was asserted into analyzing the movies and the ideas behind them confirms the overused waves of prejudices and hatred towards Arabs and Muslims. This message was engraved into western public opinion with no pre-knowledge about what is happening in the world. Various critics advance that the problem was not put forward just for the sake of demolishing the Arab's picture. Instead, it is stated that this whole agenda was put forward for some hidden reasons. Actually, what lies behind all that was justified by the neo-imperialistic thought of the American ideology, and mentioning the Gulf war which took place in the 90's would be a legitimate proof against what was projected into the movies (Shaheen).

These movies transported various insinuations, and hints about the Middle East and the Muslim countries in order to legitimize the neo-imperialist attempts held by American officials. One factor was the characteristics of both the Eastern model and the Western model. *Sinbad* as the protagonist, and the other main characters adapted westernized appearances, which reveals they are more likely to be assimilated by western youth, neglecting the fact that the *Sinbad* tale was derived from the early representations of *One Thousand and One Nights*. Thus, the characters were supposed to be Arabs by look, tradition, and costume.

The actors in both *Sinbad the Sailor* and *Arabian Nights* were Caucasian Anglo-Saxons who did not fit the image properly. *Sinbad* and his empathy towards the other

miserable sailors who are begging for a loaf of bread in the allies, features the American Robin hood's conception. In other words, the ordinary goodhearted westerner figure who is so helpful, and aims always to take a good care of the needed. Additionally, there are several similarities between *Sinbad* and the neo-imperialistic philosophy in other shows. We would consider *Fox's Family Guy*¹ and the prejudicial depiction of "Bad Arabs" where, it directly projects biased images about Islam and Muslims into so many episodes. Likewise, the villains in the Arabian Nights and *Warner Bros' old* cartoons, such as *Jafaar* from both adaptations *Sinbad the Sailor* (1947) and *Sinbad of the Seven Seas* (1989) were always portrayed as a cancer which affects the Arab world. Bad Arabs using their barbaric methods to oppress the weak, and use them as suicide bombers for the sake of religion, they are forced to go through that in order to grant their masters the seventy-seven *houris*² in returns.

This whole idea might have been interpreted wrongly from an Arabic point of view, but still the stereotype is represented against the peoples of the Arab countries, regarding the conflicts in the Middle East precisely. However, the misrepresentations are exaggerated, and politics is holding the strings in order to fuel up the tension against the Arab regions. On the other hand, the Orientalist thoughts in *Sinbad* are not asserting their strength to show all what was happening in the Middle East as a whole, but to point out the Arab leaders, as seen as the "owners" of their countries.

¹ An American Cartoon series, directed by *Seth McGraig*

² The *houris*: plural of *ḥaurā'* or *ḥūrīyah* are beings in Islam, described as companions of equal age or well-matched, lovely eyed, of modest gaze, virgins of paradise, denoting humans and jinn who enter Jannah (Paradise) after being recreated a new in the hereafter.

The pictures of the orientalist thought in the movies depict the ruling structure in the Middle East, and claim that the political basis in this region was built on dictatorship. This cliché was represented by the media means to the western public, which later on was justified by military interventions. The plotters aimed from the beginning to unify the enemy with both the government and the public, so that there would be no problem when the steps are realized. This agenda would let the Americans realize their goals, which were justified by the over talked claims of Weapons of Mass Destruction, and War Heads in Iraq as an example. The main villain to be accused here was the former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein, therefore, automatically the American society would support its government against this evil, no matter what would happen overseas.

When the Libyan events started to unfold in 2011, and long after Gaddafi had fallen, a film was made by Cohen Sasha baron³, under the title *The Dictator*. The film came as a satire, not only against Gaddafi's dictatorship and unreasonable ruling, but also as a mockery of the Libyan public, showing them as uncivilized people driven by their animalistic lusts seeking to be intentionally dictatorship-ruled. This image was seen in the representation of the shepherd who used to care only about his goats and at a sudden moment, he was given such a difficult task to rule the country *Wadiya*, which is an imaginary land hinting towards the Arab countries. The representation of the bearded shepherd was so racist, because it portrayed him as the barbaric retarded figure, which was engraved into the westerner's perspective.

Similar to this notion in *Sinbad the Sailor* (1947), there is a notable image regarding this stereotyping. Some of the characters are similar binaries in *Gaddafi, the Dictator*, and the *Shepherd* from *Cohen Baron's* film. The main villain is seen not only

³ An American actor who is famous for his satiric roles.

as *Saddam Hussein*, but also as *Muamar Gaddafi*, and this can also refer to any Arab leader who is seen by the American policy as a threat to their interests. It is obvious that *Sinbad* as the protagonist represents the westernized figure that found reason, and got inspired by how mesmerizing the world outside his own village is. Therefore, his scope is to travel and adapt the cultures of the foreigners. However, he believes that his own land will not be as lovely as needed unless a change was to happen, and unless the public there does as he does.

1.3. Orientalism Disambiguation

Orientalism refers to an academic tradition, in which an occident studies the *East*. More specifically, it is the prejudice made by westerners attempting to understand and interpret the nations and other ethnic groups from the East, based on their own perspectives and the incomplete resources they collected about it, without even engaging into the fact-finding process. It is “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and (most of the time) “the Occident”⁴ (Said).

This separates the world into two parts, that of the East and the other of the West. This division is predominant by westerners over the peoples of the Middle East and Asia. “Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said 3). The whole ideology of Orientalism was not based on facts, even if some descriptions are true. However, it happens that Orientalists overreacted in their narration about the Orient, because Orientalism’s main point is built on “a system of

⁴The Orient: The Easterner, an Oriental is someone who lives in the East, i.e.: in the Middle East or Asia. The Occident: The Westerner, an Occidental is someone who lives in the West, i.e. Europe and The American continent.

myths and lies” (Said 6). In their archives and representations, Orientalists always embody the Orientals’ ideas and speak for them (Said 65).

The representation of the Orient or the Eastern is all the time biased and not legitimate. In Edward Said’s seminal book *Orientalism*, there are various points about how the Orient is represented in the occident’s repertoire. Said begins by uncovering the truth, that the Easterner highlights an essential scope in the construction of European culture. Not that it completes it, but instead it became spoken about, in a prejudiced way, which has nothing to do with facts and truths based on history. Said believes that Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, West, “us”) and the strange (the Orient, the East, “them)” (Said 43).

Orientalism in other words, is a scholar discourse, which exerts its effort to study and analyze the relationship between the two poles, the West and East. On the other hand (the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and it constitutes one of the main connections between them (Said 13). This means that the valid truths, and facts about the easterners as a whole, were concealed by the false narrations of European historians, thus documenting only what was taken, and observed as biased resources. However, the definition differs from the American standpoint. It is based on the historical accounts they borrowed from the European imperialist history, there is not much differences between European Orientalism, and the American one. For the American definition of Orientalism focuses on nonconcrete virtualizations, which means it is abstract, unlike the European Orientalism, which was evidential, because they were the first who set foot in the Arab and Asian worlds, and transformed their traditions to the public (Said 57).

Westerner politic figures grasp the teachings of orientalism and the way they view the rest of the world, because orientalism sharpens their own concealed imperialist desires. These imperialist agendas aim to realize their intervention in the Eastern world on the claims of fighting the core of evil within these societies in order to save the persecuted from their abusive leaders. This image itself was formed not on factual facts, but it was a mere excuse the west has created. The western political figures took advantage of media, thus *Hollywood* was seen as the most suitable means to realize their aims. Along with propaganda through media, and the use of falsified news, Hollywood is admired so much by the western audiences, and it transmits the intended message perfectly.

This thesis as mentioned before will be elaborated through numerous cinematic works, which Hollywood filled with political agendas in various occasions. Likewise orientalist movies, such as *Three Kings* (1991) and the war against Iraq, displayed intense images about Iraqi people and terrorism, and the NATO's intervention into the Libyan conflict, and the prejudicial representations in *Back to the Future* (1985), portrayed Libyan characters as ruthless terrorists.

Some of the movies selected for the research include *Sinbad the Sailor* (1947), which was directed by Richard Wallace, and *Sinbad: Arabian Nights* (1942), the work of John Rawlings. Yet other cinematic works would elaborate more and support the analyses. These include *The Thief of Bagdad* (1940), where all secondary characters were dark skinned, except the main protagonists who were portrayed by Caucasian Anglo-Saxon characters such as Ahmed, who was played by John Justin, Jaffar by Conrad Veidt and Halima by Mary Morris. The character of Abu who was played by Sabu, a young Indian actor. We see him in the movie as a half-naked poor Arab thief who roamed around the markets of Bagdad and stole food to survive, because of the unjust ruling of the

Caliph. There is also, *24* (TV series) which always portrayed Arabs and Muslims as terrorists. The whole show is based on this idea. The same point goes to *Homeland*, (SHOWTIME NETWORKS), which also portrayed Muslim individuals as people who are untrustworthy no matter what, even if they were our best friend.

The Dictator film, on the other hand, by Sasha Baron Cohen, comes as a satire against what happened in Libya in 2011, and the whole Arab Spring manifestations⁵ dilemma, which took place there. One of the sequels of the *Indiana Jones* films, was Harrison Ford as the leading protagonist. The movie helped so much in projecting an orientalist overall image against Arabs, African, and Asians. *Indiana Jones* came as an alternative for the main characters from *Arabian Nights*, such as Ali Baba, Sinbad, and Aladdin. The movies of *Indiana Jones* succeeded in drawing attention to the exotic lands the movies were filmed in.

These films were supposed to have a westerner characteristic, since they revolved round a *Westerner Hero*, yet Hollywood still portrayed the scenes within an oriental entourage. However, it could have been the opposite, the heroic theme was adapted, and the exotic Arabic environment was still there. This only would make the adaption more stereotypical, and prejudiced, for it was only the character that had been changed to represent the West this time. The orient would be represented in a more inferior form. *Jones* finds himself caught up in the bizarre east each time a new tale begins, and of course, these tales do not take place in the West as we mentioned before. In addition to the mentioned movies, there are some animated works by *Warner Bros* such as *Ali Baba's Pound*, *Porky Pig* and *Ali Baba the Mad Dog of Arabia*.

⁵ The manifestations help by some of the Arab countries, starting with the *Bouazizi's* revolution in Tunisia, to the contemporary unstable Syrian dilemma.



Fig 2: *Ali Baba the Mad Dog of Arabia*, from Warner Bros Looney Tunes, 1940.

Actually, this latter states it as direct as could be, because it initiates the cartoon show with a catching sentence “Sahara desert, where it is so hot , even the fan dancers use electric fans” (*Porky Pig* 1940). In this mentioned quote, a stereotypical point is overstressed, the west has always labeled the picture of belly dancers to the Islamic countries, Arabs and Middle Easterners. On the other hand, there lies the metanarrative of the mysterious Arab land and the symbols of exoticism, “Sahara Desert, where it is so hot”. It is rather obvious that the motives chosen by an orientalist are categorized neatly, Sahara, extreme heat, sands, camels, turbans, bearded men, wrapped up women, belly dancers...etc.

This research aims not so sympathize with the stereotypes, and misrepresentation, as much as it tries to show the picture from another angle, and of course, it is not idolizing the West’s ideology. However, all it seeks is to try to give a superficial image about both the Occident, and the Orient, and tries to understand the reasons that led to this gap between both of them.

1.4. Overview of the Thesis

This work attempts to analyze various adaptations of films made by Hollywood throughout its history. The films chosen have a close-fitting connection with the Orientalist thought projected against the nations of the East. The first chapter aims to give

a general picture about the early orientalists in the East and how they transformed multi narratives about it through their textual and artistic works. It also aims at unveiling the ideology behind the Western policies and their disruptive plans through the use of the filmmaking franchise.

The second chapter analyses the prejudicial depictions in cinematic works such as *Arabian Nights* (1942), *Sinbad the Sailor* (1947), *Indiana Jones; Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) and *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962). This chapter gives a clear picture about the motives of exoticism used by Hollywood filmmakers. In addition to that, it discusses the symbols of the American-hero in the East. The final chapter reflects on the contemporary representations of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood. It argues about the scope of whitewashing the orient characters and the way eastern actors are being substituted with Caucasian ones. On the other hand, the chapter also recognizes the positive depictions of the Orient in several films, such as *Victoria and Abdul*, and *Kingdom of Heaven*. This thesis was based on Edward Said's theory of Orientalism, and Jack G Shaheen's conceptions. Edward Said as one who is experienced in the study of Orientalism, for he is among the few authors who reviewed orientalist prejudices which were directed against Arabs, Asians and Africans.

The process followed in analyzing the selected films, was developed using criticism, hypotheses, and analysis, which built up the sections of the subtitles in this research. The aims to unveil and uncover the ideology behind the orientalist wave implanted in works of media and cinematography. This research does not focus only on the negative depictions brought up by Hollywood. Apart from the prejudicial and the stereotypical works that were constructed on different agendas, this work presents the image of Hollywood from another angle. An angle where some filmmakers aimed to show

the East as uncivilized, mysterious, and extreme, where others have chosen to portray its positive side. These films showed actual verities from a neutral viewpoint, films such as *The Kingdom of Heaven* (2005), and the remarkable role of the orient actors alike Ghassan Massoud, and Khaled Nabawy. This film has held a successful transformation upon the development of the filmmaking.

For the same reason, the film *Victoria and Abdul* (2018) which represents Islam in a positive way, takes place in England. The story is about *Queen Victoria* and her Indian servant *Abdul Kareem* who taught her about the teachings from the Holy Quran and Indian tradition. The film is based on true historical events where the representation of Victoria and Abdul is tolerant, supportive and empathetic.

1.4.1. Research Methodology

This dissertation includes a multidisciplinary research, and thus, it applies a multidisciplinary paradigm. The work goes through the field of literary theory when it discusses orientalism, and exerts a sum of critical approaches of literary criticism using Edward Said and Shaheen's concepts and conceptions. The research, moreover, applies an analytical research methodology, since it uses orientalism's concepts and applies them to analyze certain films selected to highlight and compare the orient and the occident through literary critical lenses to highlight the cultural prejudices and misunderstandings depicted in them.

1.4.2. Research Scope

From a vintage point, the aforementioned ideas in the literature review highlight that the majority of the assumptions were rooted in a political background. The whole idea is centered in the unified standpoint which states that the *Sinbad* films projected

negative images about uneducated, lustily and evil easterners, whereas on the other hand, there are illuminated intellectuals and good westerners or Americans. Such metanarrative was always the main point in the orientalist American filmmaking.

Cinema and the film franchise was simply being politicized, as Don Lucchesi puts it, “Finance is a gun. Politics is knowing when to pull the trigger” (*The Godfather, Part III*). Actually, the missing pieces in the analyses of *Sinbad of the Seven Seas* (1989) were that of the mysterious gaps, for it was not so clear how the adaptation of such films from the original source “*Arabian Nights*” were not sketched or planned. In other words, how did the operation of transferring the textual context from the original work to the cinematic version happen? And how did the so called biased representation in the films appear in the first place?

One illogical point is that, the original text of *Arabian Nights* did not contain such representations and contradicted plots. Yet it only contained the tales and sorties of mythology taken from the folklore. Therefore, the developments of the orientalist thought began with the first prints of translations from Arabic to European languages, and here lies a proof that the facts about the tales from the original book *Arabian Nights* were manipulated. The characters, their names, and the places, might have stayed genuine, but still westerners falsified the storylines.

One hypothesis can be put forward is that this manipulation was done out of prejudice. Another hypothesis theorizes that Muslims have always been looked down at, ever since the Middle Ages in Europe. However, Muslims at the same time knew a flourishing period, that of the *Golden Age*, it was the peak of the Muslim civilization back then. Even after centuries, westerners claim that the majority of the scientific discoveries they have reached were thanks to several Muslim figures during the Muslim Golden Age.

“You cannot continue to victimize someone else just because you yourself were a victim once—there has to be a limit” (Said 1996), and this is apart from the eternal religious conflicts, which are masked behind the diplomatic relationships, yet they are still there.

Another aspect within the representations contained in the films was that the assimilations between the American culture, and the figures in the film were not the basis of the orientalist thought. The filmmakers’ goal is not giving much attention to Arabs in order for them to be liked, but instead to show the huge differences, and what Arabs lack from civilization, intellect and social backgrounds. Thus, the main protagonists in the films reflect the American view towards the complexity within the Arab world. The films’ producers aimed to create a social image to the westerner public about the circumstances with which an Arabian figure lives. Thus, instead of sympathy, the American public would look down at these peoples, and welcome the idea of civilizing them. This ideology was not so political, because in these films, which held an orientalist thought, the main point serves the social factor more than the political one; regarding foreign interventions plans towards the Middle East.

However, the use of such social factor would be helpful, for it prepares the western society mentally to adapt the biased prejudices about Arabs and Muslim. Thus, this step would later on be realized into a political agenda easily, and would not make a social buzz. The American political touch itself was not directly projected in the films, for it was hidden somehow. It would work on a more subconscious process; that is to mean, that an individual westerner would watch the films, observe the westernized motives in them, but still would not easily be able to tell the differences. The reason would be that they were already born in a western environment, and they have no clue about what lies

overseas apart from what the media presents. Automatically, the westerner individual would believe that the American way is the only way to be globalized.

What a westerner sees later in the films, like the places, the orient names, the costumes and the characters, would look exotic compared to his. He would believe that the protagonists in the films aim to make a change because they assert the best of themselves to reject the predominant evil of the villains in the story line. The villains are seen always with rugged clothes, dirty faces, bushy beards, and living in magical houses. They always use certain books to perform their spells and charms to control the public who are always seen as poor and illiterate. These features are more like to be categorized as social symbols, and they strengthen the subliminal political messages; messages that are not received directly, messages that are instead engraved on the subconscious mind.

This research tries to put in plain words from the films that have been selected as cases of study, like *Sinbad the Sailor* (1947), and *Sinbad: Arabian Nights* (1942), which are different in some points. The differences lay in some factors, which have to do with the incidents that took place in the Arab world in years between the two films. That is to say, the Six-Day-War in 1967, the war against the Israeli occupier, the war conducted by unified Arab forces, (Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and supported by Algerian forces)⁶ of course the westerners would not welcome such events. Therefore, they built on abhorrence towards the Arab world. Another example is that of the shaken relationships in the Middle East, and the sensitivity between Kuwait, and Iraq, long before the Gulf War of 1990.

⁶ The Six-Day War of 1967, also known as the June War, 1967 or the Arab–Israeli War. It was fought between 5 and 10 June 1967 by Israel and the neighboring states of Egypt (known at the time as the United Arab Republic), Jordan, and Syria.

The analyses of these two different films with the same storyline, would go through a deep study about how both of them were represented and what kind of motives and symbols they contained. In order to have an accurate idea about all of that, as well as the reason behind the orientalist thought and how it was expanded and bottled up in the second film, the scope of research in this stage is to weigh the overused orientalist prejudices in the films selected as a case study. This would assert the best to give legitimate proofs about the philosophies used making them, the differences between each one of them, pointing out the motives behind each film, and the slight changes, which were made throughout Hollywood film industry.

1.5. Conclusion

In the process of bringing the orient's tales from the translated scripts into Hollywood, the film makers made them into a powerful ideological machine. Hollywood during the 1940s and the issue of the Gulf war in the 1990s added meanings to *Thousand and One Nights* (1945) and other Arab stories of the original folklore. The American foreign policy is influenced by the dependence of American imperialism on the east. It has also influenced the images of Arabs and Muslims in several movies such as the depictions of the story sequels which were taken from *A Thousand and One Nights* book; stories such as Aladdin, Sinbad and Ali Baba.

During the 1990s with the Gulf War, American propagandists and politicians transported orientalist images about Arabs and Muslims to the American public. The degree of orientalism in the filmmaking franchise was getting more intense with the escalation of prejudice against peoples of the east. This is due to the fact that their overwhelming hunger for the imperialist agendas brought a more orientalist image about Arabs and Muslims. Despite the fact that the American earlier interest in the east, and the

Middle East specially, was remarkable during the 1940s, it was not like the 1990s when there was an entire war for against Iraq for instance. The American propagandists at that time (the 1940s) were scheming to get complete control over the east by appearing as the main power which tries to reestablish peace in the Gulf region. Moreover, the colony of Israel was still at its beginnings. Jewish people and Zionists during the 1940s sought to beautify their picture through Hollywood. Their presence was so noticeable during the 1990s in so many films such as *Ernest in the Army* (1998) and *True Lies* (1994) where Palestinians among Arabs were demonized.

The context is what makes the adaptations different. There is a focus on the exotic Arabs in *A Thousand and One Nights* whereas there is a focus on the coward Arab Muslims and the cruel rulers in *Navy Seals* (1990). However, the political and cultural contexts did not operate separately to produce orientalist connotations in the films. There is a very intricate network of texts which occurred between the English texts of *Arabian Nights* and its different adaptations that created the main theme and the binary representation of characters in *Thousand and One Nights*.

2.1. Introduction

There is a clear misconception that was brought about the Arab culture and Islam and how this image came to be in the films. In *Indiana Jones Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), there is a disparity between two very different societies; Muslims and Americans with two antagonistic cultures (the civilized superior and the barbaric inferior cultures). This hierarchical classification of culture is designed by American politicians who celebrate the American way. This collision between two contradictory cultures puts the Arabs and Muslims in a retrograde picture, because of the motive of exoticism and the American hero metanarrative.

The stereotypes in the films arouse stereotypes linked with Islam being connected to primitivism. In order to vilify the Muslims and Arab culture in *Sinbad the Sailor* (1947) and *Arabian Nights* (1942), the filmmakers like American orientalists demonize Islam. Images of barbarism, exoticisms, violence and bigotry are insinuated in both films. Prejudice and abhorrence towards Islam is easily noticed in the discourse of characters. The filmmakers in the movies expose Islam and underestimate its ethics. They show a brutal and an evil depiction of Islam and the one billion of Muslims scattered all around the world and reduce Islam to few negative images. Indeed Islam did not remain pure by the orientalist discourse.

The argument about Islam has been perceptibly growing in centuries. There is an unreasonable abhorrence and phobic feelings against Islam. Western orientalists hold mysterious grudge against Islam and Muslims. They associate everything evil to Islam and Muslims whenever they discuss subjects related to culture, civilization, women-related issues, oppression and danger. Politicians in the West associate Islam with Arabs, Orientals and Middle East even if the Muslim is not necessarily an Arab. This is

because their interests lie in countries where Islam is held by the majority of the community.

2.2. The Motives of Exoticism in *Sinbad the Sailor* (1947) and *Arabian Nights* (1942)

Hollywood has always been effective in filmmaking. In the adaptations of various tales from the *Arabian Nights*' epic tales, there have been various representations of Sinbad the Adventurer. Those adaptations have been bottled up with orientalist images against Arabs and middle easterners.

2.2.1. *Sinbad the Sailor* (1947)

Sinbad the Sailor is a film inspired from the famous *Arabian Nights* tale, which revolves around the Arabian young man *Sinbad*, who lives in the city of *Bagdad*. This sequel of Sinbad is filled with typical oriental portrayals, such as the strange features of the Arabic environment, the exotic buildings, the satin markets, the snake charmers, the sword jugglers, the slaves and slavers. Not to mention the belly dancers, the city-criers who spread news about the orders made by the Caliph *Jamal*. Even the representation of the Caliph is a symbolism of the typical oppressor who misuses his people. Execution is seen in the film as the penalty for the simplest mistakes that shall occur. The images are similar to that of *The Thief of Bagdad*, where *King Ahmed* observes a citizen being executed in public, he wonders about the reason, wondering, "An execution every day! Why was he executed?!" (*The Thief of Bagdad* 1940).

Jaffar answers that the executed had thought bad about the Caliph, which led him to his end. Jaffar claims afterwards that "men in Baghdad, fear only three things;

the Whip which stings, *the Sword* which kills, and *the Terror* which is caused by all those” (*The Thief of Bagdad* 1940). In this exchange between King Ahmed, and his Vizier Jaffar, an orientalist image is asserted, that the Arab citizen is seen as an oppressed individual who has no right to stand for justice. The same image can be observed in Disney’s *Aladdin* intro, where the song says “where they cut off your ear, if they don’t like your face, it’s barbaric. But hey! It’s home...” (*Aladdin* 1992).

Walter Denny, a professor of Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and a teacher of Orientalist art contends that, “Like those first three or four minutes of the Disney film *Aladdin* are basically very prejudicial. They create a very, very false and a very, very prejudicial view of the Islamic world” (*Al Jazeera Plus*).

King Ahmed with his westernized features represents the goodhearted character that is manipulated by the brownish evil plotter, Vizier Jaffar. The latter represents the exotic image of the ruthless fanatic Arab figure, which is driven by his own selfish desires. The Caliph Jamal from *Sinbad the Sailor* is similar to this latter, because their interests are the same, living in luxury at the expense of the oppressed public. One other symbol which had a lot to do with belittling Muslims, in a scene where Sinbad is fleeing Jamal’s fortress, the camera all of a sudden shows a Sheikh performing the Prayer call of Fajr, then it shows some citizens and troops kneeling down, their foreheads, knees and palms touching ground, as a sign of Muslim prayer.

Although the scene might show the characters as if they were praying, yet in the final snapshot of the camera it is shown that both the citizens and troops were tied up in ropes while kneeling down as a sign of humiliation in this culture. This image happens to be an additional one, because the main plot was that Sinbad would flee the fortress,

but the addition was made to give a more exotic image of the Arab land and to show their sufferings. The storyline could have followed the main event, yet, comes this scene filled with a typical orientalist representation. (See illustrations 03)

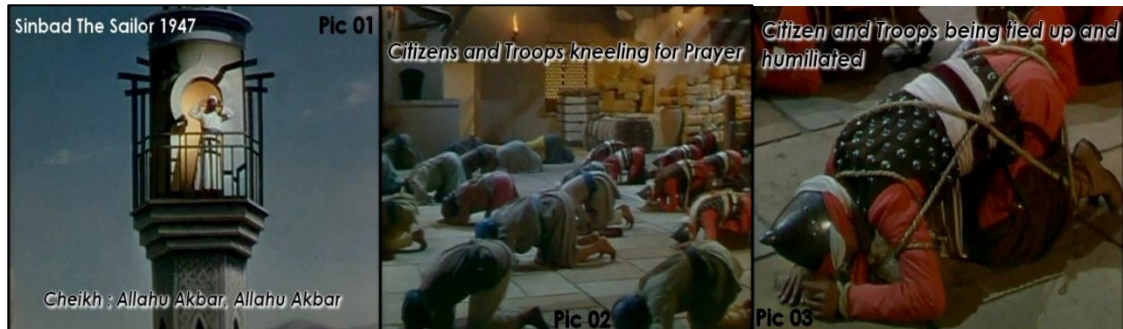


Fig 3: Sheikh, citizens and troops in Al Fajr prayer.

2.2.2. *Arabian Nights* (1942)

Arabian Nights 1942 is another sequel produced by Universal Pictures. The tale was extracted from the original text of *One Thousand and One Nights*. The main protagonists are, Harun Al Rashid, played by Jon Hall, Scheherazade, Maria Montez, Ali Ben Ali by Sabu and Kamar Al Zaman by Leif Erikson. As usual, the main characters are always played by Caucasian actors, which gives the film a westernized theme, except for the secondary characters, who are supposed to give an image about the Arab society. The film was filled with various images of exoticism about the East. Amongst the most repeated scenes in the film similar to *Sinbad* and *Arabian Nights*, we find the exotic eastern belly dancers, whose job is to entertain the Caliph and his men. (See illustrations 04).



Fig 4: Belly dancers in *The Arabian Nights* 1942.

The motives of exoticism in this film in a particular do serve the falsified narrations of the occident. In his book, *Reel Bad Arabs*, Jack G. Shaheen says that the “Arab women...are humiliated, demonized, and eroticized in more than 50 feature films. Half-Arab heroines as well as mute enslaved Arab women appear in about sixteen features, ranging from foreign legion films to Arabian Nights fantasies.” (Shaheen 13).

Regarding the scenes from *Arabian Nights*, which portrayed women as such, William Zinsser says that the context “is a place where young slave girls lie about on soft couches, stretching their slender legs, ready to do a good turn for any handsome stranger who stumbles into the room. Amid all this décolletage sits the jolly old Caliph, miraculously cool to the wondrous sights around him, puffing his water pipe.” (Qtd. In Aburwein 10). (See illustrations 05).

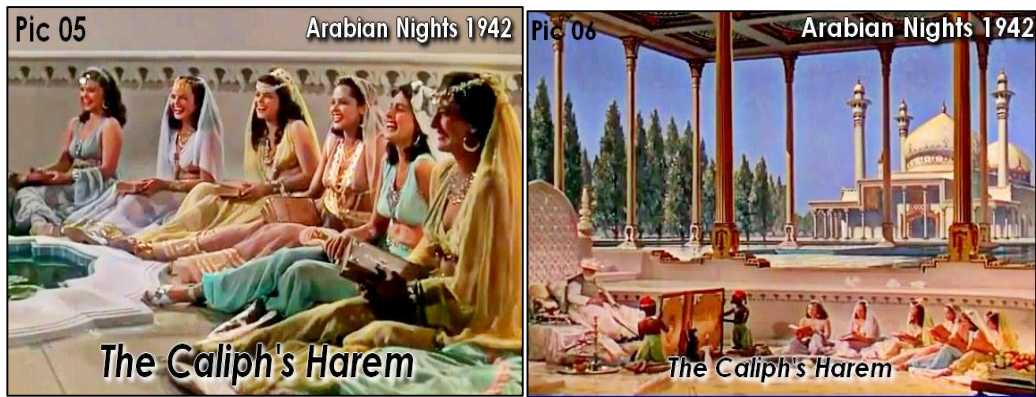


Fig 5: The Caliph's Harem depiction in *Arabian Nights*.

Apart from that, if the Arab woman is represented in such films as inferior to males, a woman whose only job is to entertain and serve the urges of the lusted male. The most legitimate status of hers is that she would play a role of someone who seeks freedom, and equality. Yet this is not the case in this film. The female figure in particular is seen for instance as a character who actually enjoys being demonized and misused. From another point of view however, when Arab females are represented in Media such as news reports, the concept shifts from the jolly cheerful character to an oppressed one who seeks to be liberated. The western media does know how to manipulate the smallest details regarding these matters. This prevails the Arab male as a figure who looks down on females and deprives them from their slightest rights and speak on their behalf, whereas the westerner figure is the lovely figure who grants women their total rights and more.

The images Hollywood tries to spread aim not to unravel this stereotype but rather to show the exoticism of the eastern lands overseas, and how the Arabs do live their regular days. Of course, this argument does not mean that the Arab world is innocent, but all it tries to prove that the metanarrative is somehow overreacted, and overdone. The reason of course is the Arab figure. “What is an Arab? In countless films,

Hollywood alleges the answer: Arabs are brute murderers, sleazy rapists, religious fanatics, oil-rich dimwits, and abusers of women” (Shaheen p3). “They [the Arabs] all look alike to me,” quips the American heroine in the film *The Sheik Steps Out* (1937) (Shaheen, p3). However, the metanarrative states that females are being overshadowed only in lands of those of the Orient. Yet women are being persecuted all over the world, be it in the east or the west.

2.3. The Westerner Hero in the East

When the occident speaks about the east and how glamorous it is, they first have to compare it to somewhere else. Somewhere with enough exoticism to point out the huge differences between each of them. One world is superior, rational, enlightened, and developed, whereas the other is inferior, irrational, mysterious, and underdeveloped.

2.3.1. *Indiana Jones: Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981)

Indiana Jones: Raiders of the Lost Ark 1981 is a film produced by Paramount Pictures, and directed by the exceptional Steven Spielberg. The lead actor starring the film was Harrison Ford as *Indiana Jones* an archeologist who is fascinated with the exotic history of the east and its mystery. One would never come across the Indiana Jones film sequels, and not be able to point out the oddest scenes, which represent the East as a whole. The term *East* itself is only making sense for Europeans and Americans looking outward to the rest of the world as different, this only means that the whole East-West construction is ideologically made. Take a middle easterner as an example he would look down on Asians, say because they locate far east from his own land. Asians as well would look down at the other easterners, bearing in mind that the Asians’ east is America.

This proves that the whole schemata is built on wrong perceptions made by the Occident. The idea asserts itself in the majority of the Hollywood's Indiana Jones franchise, ever since its early beginning. Indiana Jones, the film's main protagonist is shown as the exclusive outsider who sets foot in the orient, trying to solve the wittiest and most dangerous quests. In his adventure, Jones is seen with a friend roaming the city of contemporary Cairo. The scene shows the city as undeveloped, exotic, and uncivilized, where all people are dressed alike. Men with turbans and cloaks chilling in tea houses or selling jars and carpets, whereas women are wrapped up in black burqas¹ and rarely to be observed. Jones comes as the oddness, the only civilized among a pile of the barbarous people. (See illustration 06)



Fig 6: Jones depicted as the only modern and civilized among the primitive people.

There is an overreaction about the scene itself. The image is supposed to represent the contemporary city of Cairo during the 80's and what really does catch the attention is the representation of the past, whereas in the 80's Cairo was one of the most developed cities of the middle east.

¹Burqa: an Islamic clothe which covers all the body. It is worn by some of the Muslim women.

Jones' heroism is portrayed via various symbols throughout the film, where the filmmakers do insist on showing the protagonists far from their own lands as the saviors or the so called messiahs. They came all the way from the enlightened west to liberate the miserable pathetic Arabs from other bad sinister Arabs, there always has to be that stain of evil, when talking about Arabs and Muslims. It is more likely to be politicized, "One can certainly make the case that film land's pernicious Arab sometimes reflected in the attitudes and actions of journalists and government officials" (Shaheen 06).

2.3.2. Lawrence of Arabia (1962)

Lawrence of Arabia 1962 is considered as one of the most successful films in Hollywood. The winner of seven Academy Awards, it portrayed Peter O'Toole as a national humanitarian hero, one who sought an ethnic group's wellbeing rather than his own. The main protagonist chose to lead a group of uncivilized Bedouin tribes from the Arabian Gulf towards victory against their foes. The film was a hit, and it caused a tremendous buzz, back in the U.S, which eventually granted it later on the Oscar. The success factor was definitely the geographical context. The entourage was extremely *exotic*. We are talking about a scene where the Saharan sand borrows its gold color from Lawrence's silky-hair, and the sun is so hot that it creates mirages of Eden gardens in front of men. Camels are rode by Bedouins who make it seems that only they who can bear such heat and such harshness of the exotic Arabia.

Throughout the film, in a conversation between Lawrence and Sir Dryden, the latter says, "Lawrence, only two kinds of creatures get fun in the desert...Bedouins and Gods, you are neither, take it from me. For ordinary men, it's a burning fiery furnace". (*Lawrence of Arabia* 1962)

However, Lawrence did not abandon it; it was his quest to play the role of the superhero who saves the day. After the victory, he claimed in Aqaba² that Bedouins have grown love and respect towards him. He was so appreciated because no one before him could make such a brave decision to face off the Turks, “A hero rescuing the Orient from the obscurity, alienation, and strangeness which he himself had properly distinguished” (Said 45).

The symbolism, which Hollywood portrays, is obvious because it only keeps on retelling the usual over spoken cliché of the Whiteman’s burden. A westerner always worries about the third world’s problems and flaws taking them as if they were his. The character of Sherif Ali who was played by the famous Egyptian actor, Omar Sharif, was the opposite of Lawrence. Unlike the latter, Ali is barbarous, ruthless, cruel, and greedy. The stereotype of an Arab man who would shoot another Arab easily for drinking in his well. The symbolism is evident. Sherif Ali and Lawrence, Evil versus good, insanity versus reason and basically Occident versus Orient.

2.4. Conclusion

Despite the large numbers of Arabs around the world, be it in the Middle East, North Africa or within the Western countries as immigrants. Arabs are now proficient in various fields of different sciences. However, this fact has been distorted by Hollywood and its cinematography, which has depicted Arab people in many of its films as extremists and treacherous. Arabs were not the only target of such biased agenda; other ethnicities such as Blacks, Asians and Aborigines were too.

²A district in the old Arabian Gulf

However, more prominently for the West, the number one reason of excessive evil and terrorism is the Arab people from the beginning of time. The Arab figure has appeared in so many pictures through the history of Hollywood, either as a fanatical terrorist, or a stupid character who knows nothing about civilization. Sometimes Hollywood portrays Arabs as wealthy people who gained their possessions effortlessly, this kind of figure always chases pleasures and craves the western women. In *the Arabian Nights* 1942 film, for instance, there is a prejudicial embodiment of the character of Harun al-Rashid surrounded by his harem and maidens. It shows the Arab society more sensual than other societies, and displays the oppressed Arab women always as belly dancers swaying in front of everyone while dressed in scandalous clothes.

Hollywood and its film producers aimed to give the over exaggerated negative impression about the Orient and of course, this was not done by accident. Hollywood aimed to give such prejudicial and biased images about the east for subliminal political reasons. In order to adapt the westerner audiences' opinion about the orient such as theirs which would justify their moves later on. Jack Valenti, former president, and CEO of the Motion Pictures Company claims that, "Washington, and Hollywood spring from the same DNA" (Qtd. In Hussein). The motives in *Sinbad the Sailor* 1947, *Arabian Nights* 1942, *Indian Jones* 1981 and *Lawrence of Arabia* 1962 held the exoticism veil, from the early forties until today.

The thought, which is held by the Occident, is that the east was always underdeveloped, illuminated, and stepping for hundred years. The West's justification for this was later represented by the traditional philosophy of the Whiteman's Burden. It indicates that the Whiteman was given a divine mission to bring the peoples of west to

light and save them from the ignorance they have been living in. This mission was said to be directed not only to the middle easterners, but Asians, Africans, and the aborigine minorities from South America, Africa, and Australia as well.

This western conception came as a justification for the imperialistic *urges* and colonialism against those *exotic* lands. However, in their perception, westerners do not seek out to unify the west and the *Other's* east, they only aim to westernize it under an imperialist agenda. The poet Rudyard Kipling wrote, "East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet" (Stedman). The mindset of such philosophy held by the westerners, is based mainly on their strong belief, that Othering, refers to the exotic peoples, who are desperately in need for guidance to the righteous path, in such stage, the Other himself is not given a chance to speak for themselves, because, their fate is already decided by the Oriental.

In his debate regarding *The Clash of Civilization* (1996), which he referred to as the Clash of Ignorance, as a counter attack, Edward Said, speaks about the dominance of the Oriental's ideology on the people of the West, by having said that "there's an official culture, a culture priests (people of the Christianity religion), academics, and the state. It provides definitions of patriotism, loyalty, boundaries, and what I have called belonging. It's the official culture that speaks in the name of the whole".

The filmmakers in Hollywood have not tried to point out and identify the encouraging truth of the Arabs and Muslims around the world, but instead they showed these nations in a prejudicial negative image that has offended their traditions and civilization. Throughout the analyses of a great deal of racist and prejudicial films we cannot help but say that this propaganda has achieved an immense role in indoctrinating

people of the West with falsified understandings about Arabs and Muslims. It makes no difference that the Hollywood franchise purposely aimed to serve the ugliest picture.

3.1. Introduction

Hollywood's power serves as an influence on the westerner audience, for a single film has the privilege to change an individual's perception about any matter. The images film producers tend to use in the filmmaking are not randomly selected or haphazardly put. Every single detail is carefully constructed in order to reach the wanted aim. As we mentioned earlier, there are numerous examples of how Hollywood represents negative stereotypes against what is seen as exotic. The early representations of Hollywood had negative effects on how people viewed the Other, unlike what we have discussed within the previous chapter, that most of the representations of films were put forward into a one-dimensional stream, which always has to vilify people and class them according to an orientalist agenda.

Hereby we present a different point of view, which is totally unusual and unexpected. Despite the fact that Hollywood had hundreds of films, which were negative, the idea slightly changed through some contemporary films. There is a glimpse of hope. In the past couple of years, Hollywood has unveiled a new face, apart from the works that were based on stereotypical images. There came the new positive image. The image is more accurate and realistic. The Arab, and Islamic characters now have the privilege to counterattack the waves of stereotypes, and prejudice held for so many years.

In this chapter, we are going to present a couple of positive films, ones that show the Arab individual as a normal human being who is like every other man around the world. The slight shift into the filmmaking in Hollywood balances the huge gap between the West and the East. However, there still are some cinematic works, which are being whitewashed. The characters of those films do indeed give a good impression

about the Orient, but Caucasian actors are still representing them. In these analyses, we will try to explain the reason behind this, in addition to the change in the filmmaking policy.

3.2. The Orient Protagonist versus Whitewashing

Although something has changed about Hollywood's persona concerning the representations of Arabs and Muslims in filmmaking lately, whitewashing is still present. The roles which are supposed to be played by Arabs or Americans of Arab heritage actors, are most of the time substituted by Caucasian actors thus whitewashed. According to Merriam-Webster's dictionary, Whitewashing refers to casting white actors as characters who are non- Caucasian or of indeterminate race. It can also refer to preferring Caucasian actors, directors, cinematographers, and so on, over equally qualified people of color, as in the Oscar nominations.

3.2.1. Ridley Scott's *Exodus: Gods and Kings* (2014)

Exodus: Gods and Kings is a film which was produced by 20th Century Fox Pictures. Its overall story portrayed ancient Egypt and the epoch of pharaohs. Thus, the film would appear exotically adequate for the western audience overseas. It has become customary to watch the orient through the silver screen as the vessel of mystery and paradox. The film exemplified the biblical contents of Prophet Moses and Ramses the Second. It is common knowledge that ancient Egyptians were a colored group of people and that is what the historical heliographic drawings have certified. (See illustration 7).

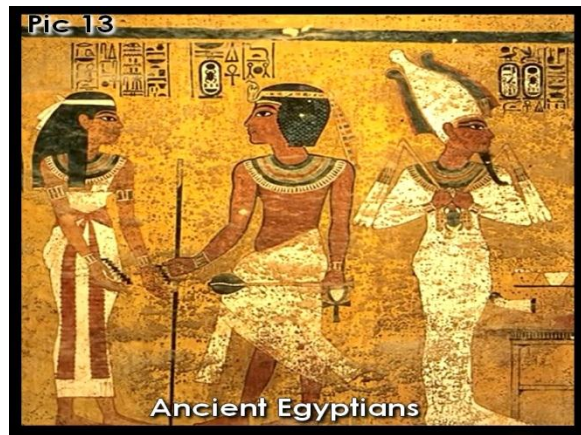


Fig 7: Ancient Egyptians were not white. They were a people of color.

Thus, by hearing those names one would assume that the characters would be portrayed by colored people. However, the filmmakers have assigned the roles of both Moses, and Ramses to a couple of well-known actors; Christian Bale, and Joel Edgerton, although the protagonist and antagonist were supposed to be of an Arab, or an Arab Egyptian descent. Perhaps it is bothersome to film producers being a Middle Eastern-American actor inside Hollywood's franchise. Regardless of the slight change in the portrayal of the other races, which has rationalized the depictions of Arabs, Asians, and Africans, there still is a modern stereotypical trend, that of Whitewashing.

In its subliminal viewpoint, it aims to exclude the Arab-American, Asian-American, and African-American actors from the roles, which are primarily associated to them in the first place. For instance, the roles of a Middle Easterner or an Arab in Hollywood films would not end up being played by an actor with the equivalent ancestry, but instead it would be offered to Caucasian actors. This biased practice has made a wide-ranging buzz in all around the world in opposition to whitewashing.

When Ridley Scott, the director of *Exodus* was hosted on the American magazine *VARIETY* vis-à-vis the boycotting of his film, he was asked about the choice

of picking up Christiane Bale and Joel Edgerton as the main characters, knowing that he could have selected other actors of an Arab origin, since the roles were not accurately fit. Ridley responded that apparently his film would have not succeeded if he had substituted those skilled actors with rookie ones who are non-Caucasians. He said, “[I] cannot mount a film of this budget! And say that my lead actor is Muhammad so-and-so, from such-and-such, I’m just not going to get it financed.” (*Newsweek*, 7 Mar. 2016). Arab-American actors are not the only case of whitewashing.

The representation of the orient be it Arabs, Asians, Africans, or ancient Egyptians in films has been always whitewashed all through the history of Hollywood. It is the role of the protagonist which has always to be a Caucasian. Whereas it is all satisfying to assign a colored actor for the role of the antagonist, or the villain. Obviously, animated shows and films do differ from the live action adaptations in Hollywood because, it is noticed that the orient characters within the animated works do always look identical to the figures they are portraying. Unlike the live action portrayals, as stated earlier, they substitute the orient characters with Caucasians. (See illustration 8).

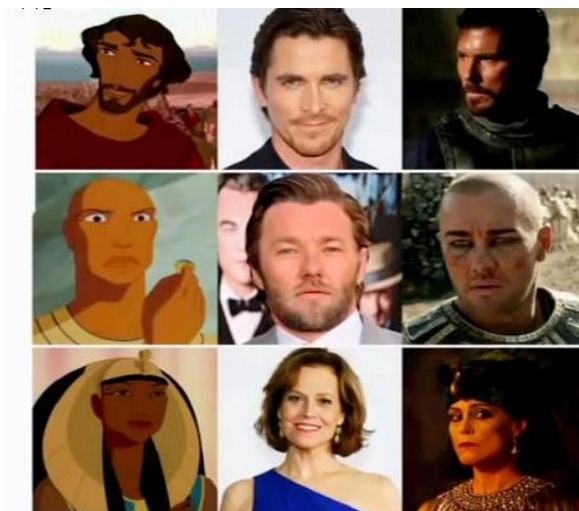


Fig 8: Whitewashing between animation and Live-action depictions

Why is there still an exclusion of the Middle Eastern actors in Hollywood? Most of the roles that debate the orient's culture and heritage are still being whitewashed, yet when it comes to the negative portrayal of villains, the filmmakers make sure to look for the meanest actor of an Arab origin during the auditions. It is not as if people do not observe these prejudices and biases, for instance as when Walt Disney Pictures, came up with an adaptation of the famous video game Prince of Persia into a live action film in 2010. Both the geographical settings and the characters were swept under the carpet.

The lead actor in the film was supposed to be at least a colored figure, someone with Middle Eastern features. However, the role was granted to Jake Gyllenhaal, another Caucasian actor, as if Hollywood is declaring that a certain ethnic group is not fit into the big screen. For instance, what would be your impression if filmmakers told you that your ethnicity is not adequate for a given role? That it will be something exotic and outlandish on the silver screen. However, help actors who differ from you would portray your ethnicity into numerous films.

The Caucasian actors will substitute you, they would say that they would perform a better image of *you* on the big screen, as Caucasians, they can be multiracial, Asians, Black-Africans, Aborigines, and Arabs, but if you tried that on the other way around, it would definitely a big mistake which has to be notoriously criticized. Probably Hollywood is aware that there are so many successful colored actors; Asians, Middle Easterners, and blacks who have proven themselves through years of thriving performances, yet it still does not see them as admirable as Caucasians.

3.2.2. *Black Gold: Days of the Falcon* (2011)

Black Gold: Days of the Falcon (2011) is another film which portrayed the overstated metanarrative of “Arab sheikhs and the precious oil”. The story takes place inside an exotic region within the tribal Arabia where there are two clans who hold a strong rivalry against each other. *The Al-Hubayqa* clan and the *Salmah* clan. The reason behind this conflict was a small intermediate land situated between the clans’ territories. The rivalry continued for more than ten years because the tribal chiefs did not solve their misunderstandings. The Al-Hubayqa’s sheikh is portrayed as a greedy man who was deceived by Americans in order to excavate raw oil out of the prohibited intermediate land between the two clans, whereas the *Salmah’s* sheikh stands for the rational character who always sought reason, peace, and stood against the arrival of the Americans upon Arabia in the first place.

The protagonists personated on the screenplay are famous Hollywood actors once again. The Oscar award winner Mark Strong as Sheikh Amar and Antonio Banderas as Sheikh Nesib. Banderas’ persona is perceived as the absolute and qualified alternative to the abnormal image of the Arab-American actor. He is praiseworthy, rational and heroic from an occidental perspective. Actually, this is not the first time that Antonio Banderas has performed the role of an Arab figure. In 1999, he was selected to symbolize the role of an Iraqi poet taking part in *The 13th Warrior* film. He mastered the Middle Eastern accent, gestures and even learned some Arabic words.

Black Gold: Days of the Falcon has an optimistic and positive reflection on the Arab world as a whole, because it showed the Arab figure as a common human being, who is not different from the westerners as the previous cinematic works have displayed. The descent representations within this film in particular were objective and

fair because both Mark Strong and Antonio Banderas have done a magnificent job. Nevertheless, the uncanny argument about the film is the process of whitewashing which it went through. Why would the oriental roles be granted to Mark Strong and Antonio Banderas if Hollywood is already loaded with Actors of Middle Eastern origins in the first place? Take the example of Rami Said Malek in his outstanding roles, and Khaled Nabawy in the masterpiece *Kingdom of Heaven* 2011 that we are going to see later on, or Amr Waked perhaps with his skilled abilities to portray the role accurately, authentically, and rationally.

Undoubtedly, the problem lies in Hollywood owners and the distribution of roles in the filmmaking franchise. If the oriental actor is provided with an opportunity to perform in a given film, it is uncertain whether he will be successful with the performance. Thus the whole cast is not going to be fairly financed and producers will certainly drop the proposition out of fear of failure. So here, we have a biased belief that the non-Caucasians are not fit as protagonists on the big screen, unless the role is malevolent. In such case, it is all okay to have auditions set for choosing the vilest looking performer. The problem gets even worse as the filmmakers and Hollywood prejudge the limited roles for characters of the multiracial actors, forgetting that the colored audiences make a great deal of their franchise all over the world.

3.3. The Positive Representations of the Orient

Arabs and Muslims in addition to Africans, Asians and aborigine peoples around the world had a strong negative reputation in the West. This latter was based on prejudicial thoughts. Probably, the Middle Easterners were the most victimized people among them. This was due to the metanarrative of terrorism. Whenever, the term Muslim is mentioned abroad, tension could be sensed. Arabs and Muslims have hidden

their identities when mingled with westerners, because it would change the way they are treated in a given perspective. However, this could slightly be changed, thanks to the positive change in the representations of the Other. These stereotypes might fade away degradedly.

Shaheen notes that the trails of these slight changes into Hollywood's filmmaking after the 9/11 incident. He optimistically corresponds, "Even though the majority of post-9/11 films do, in fact, vilify a people, I am somewhat encouraged to report that since 9/11, silver screens have displayed, at times, more complex, evenhanded Arab portraits than I have seen in the past. Some producers did not dehumanize Arabs, and instead presented decent, 10 heroic characters—champions, even, in several films" (35).

3.3.1. Ridley Scott's *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005)

Apparently, one of the most influential films in Hollywood is *The Kingdom of Heaven*. Its importance lies in the fact that it balanced the apposition of the West, and the East, the historical contents it portrayed were not falsified but accurately portrayed. When he aimed to bring such historical context, Ridley made sure to dig deep down on both the Christian western account, and the Muslim eastern one, relying on archives from the Arabic tradition. The film was played by some of the most successful actors in Hollywood, Liam Neeson as Godfrey, Orlando Bloom as Balian, and Eva Green as Sibylla. In addition to that, a few of the qualified Arab actors have been part of the film cast. They had essential roles, thus they represented Islam and Arabs accurately and justifiably.

Among the important roles was that of Salahuddin Al Ayubi (Saladin), portrayed by the successful Syrian actor who made it through Hollywood with his spectacular acting skills Ghassan Massoud. The way Ghassan represented such a historical figure was extremely outstanding. He showed him as truthfully as the Islamic history accounts retell, the kind of a wise leader who always sought peaceful ways to avoid conflicts with the crusaders who craved for Jerusalem. This role in particular is so significant to the film script because the whole scenario stands behind the religious conflict on the Holy land of Jerusalem, between Saladin and the king Baldwin. The motion picture is inspired by actual historical events.

However, through the film, certain characters and dialogues portrayed in the storyline were improvised for the purpose of fictitious dramatization. Still this has not affected the roles given to the Arab actors. For instance the secondary roles were as important as the principal ones. They included a couple of skilled performances by the British-Sudanese Alexander Siddig as Nasir, Saladin's right arm and the Egyptian Khaled Nabawy as Mullah, the Muslim army's leader. The most appealing motive of Ridley Scott's film revolved around the everlasting religious conflict over Jerusalem, the Holy land, which could bring both sides together, or set them apart. This point highlights the geographical aspect, which bounds both Christians, and Muslims, being the point of the intercultural clash. There are various scenes from the film that portray this image. (See illustration 09).



Fig 9: City of Jerusalem, values of religious tolerance

Saladin as one of the main characters in *Kingdom of Heaven* 2011 was not overshadowed by the performances of the westerner actors, who represented the Christians in Jerusalem. Such big Hollywood stars could have taken all credits, in contrast Ghassan Massoud provided numerous occasions to demonstrate the legendary leader's wisdom, forgiveness, democracy and justness. In the last minutes of the film and after the city of Jerusalem is seized by the Muslim troops, Lord Balian worried that there would be a massacre against the Christian minority.

However, Saladin showed the contrast, he made an oath, promising that no one would be hurt under his lead. In a given scene, when Saladin entered one of the city's churches, he observed a dropped trinity cross on the floor, and, as a sign of religious respect, he picked it up, dusted it off, and put it up on the table. This representation was something new in the filmmaking philosophy, for the first time in Hollywood's history; a realistic portrayal gets the chance to be attached into a film based on reasonable historical events. (See illustrations 10).



Fig 10: Salahuddin values of religious tolerance

3.3.2. Stephen Frears' *Victoria and Abdul* (2017)

Based on *Sharbani Basu's* book *Victoria and Abdul*, Stephen Frears came up with a new pace in the filmmaking schema. Although it was adapted from a textual content, which conveyed the true story of Queen Victoria of England, and her closest Indian Muslim Munshi¹ Abdul Kareem, the film did replicate what has been written in the original work fairly, and therefore it was not embodied with prejudice, or discrimination, unlike what has occurred with *Arabian Nights*, and its countless adaptations.

On the other hand, *Victoria and Abdul* conveyed a humanitarian message, about an old lady, who is tired of the pretentious atmosphere around her. Queen Victoria's state changed when she confronted Abdul Kareem with his companion Muhammad for the first time in 1887. The the Muslim Indian actor Ali Fazal played the role for such an inspiring main character of Abdul, and Adeel Akhtar played the character of Muhammad. Ali thrived with his contribution in providing a valid image of the ordinary devout Muslim, who unlike the Queen's acquaintances treats her with no exaggeration. Victoria for him was more like a simple human being, an old lady who is cast behind,

¹An Urdu Muslim Scholar, a teacher who is consulted in matters of daily life.

deprived of the meekest emotional aspects, after her children were scattered all around Europe for royal arrangements, there came Abdul, who treated her as a human, regardless of her prominent title, as the Queen of England, and the Empress of the British colonies.

He stood by her side at her sorrowful as well as her cheerful days. In a fast time, Abdul gained Victoria's gratitude and appreciation. Their relationship grew even stronger, which granted him the position of an exotic nobleman dressed in a turban and a *Sherwani*². This, of course, was not tolerated from the Royal family. As if the queen was not supposed to have commoner friends. He was considered as an internal threat to her majesty because of his belief basically, and that he seized a chance to educate Victoria about the Urdu language, the Islamic faith and the Quran. She enjoyed her time with the Munshi and she was able to learn several customs about the British Indian colony. (See illustration 11).



Fig11: Queen Victoria and Munshi Abdul Kareem

²A traditional Indian outfit.

The film could unveil some legitimacy about what really happened concerning the tale of the *Queen Alexandrina Victoria* and the *Munshi Abdul Kareem*. The filmmaking of such storyline might change the audience's standpoint about Islam and its manners, for Hollywood has reserved so many years in forging its own biased prototypes about Arabs and Muslims. Besides all those prototypes were negative and illogical. We could say that the role which *Ali Fazal* has played during this film in particular is breaking the early tradition of the orientalist's depiction for the other, eventually, the middle-easterner and Arab actors are given the chance to symbolize themselves unpredictably.

This was a positive marker from behalf the Hollywood filmmaking franchise. In its third annual, the Film Festival, which was hosted in New York City on March 17, 2008, the American-Egyptian actor Sayed Badreya stated that all along his acting career, and for fourteen years in Hollywood, he has been requested to perform the permanent role of the Middle Eastern terrorist. Probably one of his modern-day roles, which we recall, was his stereotyped cameo in Marvel Studio's *Iron Man* 2008.

Badreya is aware of the sensitivity of such concern that he finds over exaggerated. He noted that it is about time such roles stop. Therefore, he grew selective regarding the roles which serve his background as being a Muslim Arab before being a Hollywood actor. He states, "We have to continue to tell our story – nobody is going to tell it for us" (On *the Film Festival*, New York, March 17, 2008). Like this latter, in *Victoria and Abdul*, we can note indeed that the orient at the present day is asserting efforts to reconstitute the image which Hollywood extinguished throughout its many portrayals.

3.4. Conclusion

Prejudice, bias and stereotypical agendas have been effectual icons within Hollywood's filmmaking history ever since its early beginning. It always sought political motives to portray something discriminatory into the big screen against the East as a whole. The philosophies of othering Arabs, Asians and, Africans from the world's showground are like the early basic portrayals of the orient into films. The orient has always been depicted as an underdeveloped individual and laid behind the screen. Despite this fact, some changes were observed in the playground of Hollywood.

The prejudicial representations disappeared with time giving birth to whitewashing. The oriental characters in films and shows are wiped out due to their ethnic background, thus, they are replaced with Caucasian actors. As it is thought, portraying a middle easterner into an Arabic-origin film produced by Hollywood would not be moneymaking, and eventually it will be vulnerable to be financed. Therefore, the solution which the filmmakers came up with towards this problem was appointing white recognized actors to embody the image of the orient, even if this latter caused the lack of accuracy and the absence of legitimacy.

The required objective was all the times a financial purpose than a representative one. These cases of whitewashing prevailed within the two cases chosen in this work. The first was Ridley Scott's *Exodus; Gods, and Kings* 2014, were the story chews over the ancient Egypt's biblical narrative of Moses and Ramses II, the pharaoh. Their original ethnicity spread out of the African continent. However, the film's portrayal would not select colored actors to perform the role. Obviously, a Caucasian actor is seen more appropriate.

On the other hand, one might wonder what if the orient actors, be it Arabs, Asians or Africans were given a chance to speak for themselves hence representing their own images, culture and background. Would that make any difference from the way Hollywood views their performance on the big screen. This whole matter is certainly absurd, because whitewashing is already being criticized and rejected by audiences from all races and from all around the world. The paradoxical turn is that white people themselves think whitewashing has gone too far.

Accordingly, what they really want to see on the screen is the accurate representation of a given ethnic group by its own representatives. Fortunately, that has started off contemporarily. Hollywood unexpectedly, has slightly adjusted its comprehension regarding the outlandish actors on the American playground. Muslims and Arab-American actors now have, after a long wait been afforded an opportunity to represent themselves starring in the film industry with no anxiety of being whitewashed. A couple of films selected to elaborate this case study which reclaimed the orient's image back, include Ridley Scott's production *kingdom of Heaven* (2005).

It is probably one of most praised contemporary films in the history of Hollywood, because it contains positives connotations towards Islam and the Arab nations. The respectable noble portrayal of the characters was well-brought-up, such as the major role depicting Salahuddin, which was played by the Syrian actor Ghassan Massoud. He literarily did a great job embodying the role. One of most recognized figures in the Islamic history. Would the film have made it this far if the main protagonists on the screenplay were whitewashed? Probably it would have been criticized doubled over, for this time the portrayal is clipped to an influential figure, not only to the Islamic world, but to the Christian public as well. Both Salahuddin and the

holy land of Jerusalem sustain a significant record into their history. Hence, the options vis-à-vis the historical characters being whitewashed is not debatable at all, for it would only create a critical disapproval.

General Conclusion

Overall, it should be stated that the orientalist discourse all throughout the history of Hollywood has been strongly hosted within its cinematography franchise. The process of othering the easterners had offered stereotypical images against the east as a whole in spite of the wide variety of hybrid depictions. The very first genre of such depictions was symbolized via the motives of exoticism. Take Arabs and the metanarrative of barbarism as an example, or Africans and primitivism. The camerawork has provided a close at hand and easily consumed depiction about various narratives on behalf of the orient.

Through these kinds of depictions audiences from the west were to hold a biased picture about what they saw as the *Other* because of what has been projected on the silver screen. The portrayal of so many cultures and nations, like for instance the geographical backgrounds which the movie producers choose for a given film (like the choice of *Indiana Jones* and Morocco) was an essential technique in representing people of the East. This research dealt with a couple of cinematic works which held the viewpoints of westerners about the mystical land of the orient and the way they used to be portrayed and displayed. Yet, how can someone with no further evidence be able to narrate fantasies about somewhere that they never came across? Thus, the representation scope was already fixed on behalf of all peoples of the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. In his argument, Karl Marx affirms, “they cannot represent themselves; they must be represented” (Qtd. In Said xxv). This only proved that the occident had no intention to adjust and revise the metanarratives, which were welded to the orient.

At first, Hollywood made sure to vilify the image of Arabs, and speak about the fictional tale of the exotic Arab land, the image directly goes to the Sahara desert, the unbearable heat, the wealthy Arab Sheikhs and their Harem maidens: “An Arab oriental

is that impossible creature whose libidinous energy drives him to paroxysms of overstimulation” (Said 311). This picture was comparable to the early recitations of the *Arabian Nights* tales, for what has been seen as an Arab figure had been merely obtained from the former European orientalists, their works of art and textual accounts.

The motives of exoticism had been applied in loads of movies by Hollywood, which created a biased perception amongst the westerners viewing the Orient as an inferior region. This research demonstrated certain patterns about Exoticism in two movies: *Sinbad the Sailor* (1947) then *Arabian Nights* (1942). What could be sized up is that the westerner’s awareness of the Arabs had begun in front of the silver screen, observing the mysterious Arabia, where billionaire Sheikhs enjoy their palaces alongside with belly dancers, Harem and snake charmers around them. Even if these symbols had been projected into the outdated Technicolor films, still contemporary and modern Arabia was as extraordinary as the early depictions in Hollywood, as Jack G Shaheen puts it, “yesterday’s Arab land is today’s Arab land...” (*Aladdin* 1992).

It has been demonstrated that the Arab land and Far east were tremendously different from the civilized and advanced West. As this crack between the West and East has prevailed, another motive appeared in the filmmaking process, which was represented as the Western hero in the East. Giving it attention as an excessive mission, it displayed the Caucasian actor in the same way as the savior and liberator who came all across the Middle East to fight the core of evil, enlighten and free the persecuted. In all probability it seems more like it has identified the Whiteman’s Burden belief.

Reasonably stating that without a doubt Hollywood was more than unfair and one-sided throughout its history in depicting the images of the orient as a whole, be it Arabs and terrorism, Asians and the yellow face or Africans and primitivism. On the other hand,

the initial question of the study was: why has not the orient stood against those discriminatory and prejudiced works? Them being repeatedly represented irrationally, yet still their image was held fixed until they were granted the chance years later to portray their own backgrounds traditions and identities. It was thanks to the influencer easterner figures who worked hard to reclaim back their image on the big screen of Hollywood. The orient then became a successful Actor, a talented moviemaker, and an intellectual scriptwriter, works as Tarek Ben Ammar's *Black Gold* (2011) or the remarkable Mustapha Akkad and his popular movies *The Message* (1976) or *Lion of the Desert* (1980). The last chapter analyzed two movies, which were represented positively about Arabs and Islam; *The Kingdom of Heaven* 2005 and the heartening role of Ghassan Massoud, then *Victoria and Abdul* and the objectivity it portrayed about Islam.

Hollywood's prejudiced representations against the *Other* are entirely the consequence of the orient's silence and irresponsibility. Easterners could have stood against this from the very beginning. They could have retold their stories properly and positively. The west was not familiar with orient's tradition, culture and identity. Nevertheless, it is not the proper time to quarrel about the past and what has already taken place, there still is a chance for the East to breakdown the metanarratives of past and recapture the truths back.

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Glossary

The Orient: the countries of the East, especially East Asia.

The Occident: the countries of the West, especially Europe and America

Whitewashing: casting white actors as characters who are non-white or of indeterminate race

Yellowface: make-up used by a non-East Asian performer playing the role of an East Asian person.

Blackface: make-up used by a non-black performer playing a black role.