The Muslim Male Character Typology in American Cinema Post–9/11

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Abstract

This article tries to discover whether filmic stereotypes of Muslims in general and Arabs in particular have undergone any changes since 9/11, and if they have, what new character types have been developed to reflect these images. In the course of this study, results from other researchers who have examined the presentation of Muslims on the screen both before and after 9/11 are referred to, with a view of highlighting the sustained, unchanging character features, as well as detecting new formations. A variety of films, which have been released since 2011, incorporating Muslim and Arab characters, are used in this research and the physical appearance attributes and behavioral attributes as described by Mastro and Greenberg have been utilized to help with the analysis. The most important finding is that in the 10-year period following 9/11, although some familiar characterizations still hit the screen occasionally, there has been a tendency to reconstruct more convincing Muslim and Arab cinematic characters. Also noticeable is the fact that the narrative at times focuses on their ethnicity or economic status more than their religious beliefs. Continued research will show if this is a passing phase or the beginning of an end to Muslim and Arab stereotyping in American cinema.

Introduction

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the development of Muslim characters in American movies has gone through various stages of prejudice, each stage with its peculiarities of misrepresentation, influenced by the sociopolitical realities of the time, sparking a wide and divisive range of arguments by many critics. Shaheen (2003), reviewing a colossal library of more than 1,000 films made since 1896, comments that Muslim characters in American cinema, despite a varied background of nationality and culture, have invariably been locked into the Arab cycle of identification, with no mention of the role of other Muslims, and always marginalized in a plot focusing on a white American protagonist. In the same way as all Indians were originally referred to as "savages" by Americans regardless of their tribal differences — as claimed by Kilpatrick (1999) — Shaheen (2003) says that Muslims of all countries have been blended and packaged together with Arabs and associated with the same character types, namely, notorious sheikhs, maidens, Egyptians, and Palestinians. This colonialism-driven Arab–Muslim equation, as Said

(1978) argues, has probably been kept alive as a result of more than half-a-century long Arab–Israeli conflict and the events of 9/11.

Characters in films are evaluated in terms of their physical, linguistic, and behavioral features and the way they look on the screen impacts the perceptions of the audience. Balazs (2011), for instance, suggests that physical aspects of a character influences the way viewers perceive them in terms of ethical stands. Specifically analyzing the action film genre, Wilkins's (2008) findings suggest a common ailment in how the Arab male is perceived on screen. A dirty and ugly appearance with an abundance of facial hair and unpronounceable name, further justifies his "otherness." Shaheen (2003) too says that the on-screen Arab is typically adorned with "dark glasses, fake black beards, exaggerated noses, worry beads and chequered burnooses." (p. 8).

In American films, these characters are frequently presented as warring primitives waiting to be rescued by the white protagonists rather than as individuals caught up in the social or political struggles in their country, as Lina Khatib (2006) has shown in her comparative work on the American and Middle Eastern films. Referring to Diner's (2009) views, el-Sayed El-Aswad (2013) also mentions that Arabs are seen to be "nomadic and non-democratic tribes relying more on power of the clan than on their own individual contribution" (p. 42).

American cinema has always been prejudicial toward minorities, but the degree of prejudice has not been the same for all marginal groups. Although the negative presentation of many groups (Jews, Asians, Irish, Italians, African-Americans, Indians, Hispanics, etc.) has changed for the better, the image of the Muslim is still underlined with some prejudice. One reason for this is probably the feelings of insecurity and fear. Many minorities have culturally been assimilated by now and as such, they do not pose a danger to the American public at large. Insisting on vilifying the celluloid Arab, on the other hand, suggests that continuous scenes of violence in the news programs about the Middle East take their toll on the viewers and keep them in a state of "alarm."

Motyl (2011, p. 223) divides the representation of the Orient into two classes: 1) an uncivilized place in which violent male despots oppress subdued women (barbarization), and 2) a mysterious and exotic place in which desires repressed in the West can be acted out (exoticization). Indeed, the Western interest in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in expansionism resulted in the demonization of the East on the one hand, and mystification and feminization of it on the other. This point is taken up by Said (1978), who claims in his seminal work, *Orientalism* that alongside vilification, there was also a romantic interpretation of the Arab lands, as portrayed in the classical Hollywood style cinema with lush desert oasis and dapper Arab men. Starting with the hard realities of the 1950s, and continuing to the beginning of the new century, this romantic interpretation was transformed into a desolate and rocky terrain, and the imagined sexually deprived Arab sheik, as originally conceived in 1921 by Rudolf Valentino, was similarly transformed into an evil and vile

terrorist. It is significant that the first celluloid Arab terrorist character appeared in the film *Sirocco* (1951), which was released only 3 years after the foundation of Israel in 1948.

Allport (1954), a psychologist and a pioneer in the study of prejudice, suggests in his well-quoted work, *The Nature of Prejudice*, that stereotype is the key to understanding prejudice. Allport's focus is on the psychological state of developing and sustaining prejudice when he says that it is generally found in institutionalized entities, such as the nation and religion. Said (1978), in comparison, purports that prejudice against Muslims started as a politically driven state of mind, designed to prepare the way to expand and take control of the East. With this purpose in mind, stereotypes have been created and publicized in numerous art forms, most notably in literature and painting. The more often the prejudicial statements are repeated, the quicker they become stereotypes to be "universalized and naturalized," as Hall (1977) claims.

Stereotypes do not become universalized and naturalized abruptly — they go through a period of consolidation, to get into the universal subconscious and taken as the only form of intelligibility. This state of affairs consequently brings to mind the question about their life span. While stereotypes can be established over a course of time, we know that they can also be eliminated over a course of time, as it happened in the case of other minorities in the United States. Indeed, Brown (2010) who has studied social psychology of prejudice and stereotypes says that old prejudices may disappear or are replaced with new prejudices when new social norms and changing political, economic, and social relations between groups necessitate readjustment (p. 182). It is plausible to expect, therefore, that an experience as traumatic as 9/11 is bound to make a noticeable impact on the way the American public view the Muslim resulting in a harsher depiction of the celluloid Arab. My findings however do not support this hypothesis.

Michalak (2010), in his analysis of 23 American films produced between 1999 and 2010, finds that 11 of these films project Arab, Muslim, or Middle Eastern characters in a favorable light. Of the remaining productions, five reiterate the old stereotypes (but three of these five were made before 9/11, only to be released after 9/11, so in reality, they were pre-9/11 productions.), and in eight of them, the Muslim character is neutrally represented. This change in character presentation occurring after the attack on the twin towers comes as a surprise, as one would have expected the vilification of Muslims to go from bad to worse in the post-9/11 period, as a reprisal or manifestation of fear.

Michalak's (2010) findings are an eye opener in terms of the changeability of stereotypes, but do not delve much into how and why this change has been occurring. Nor does he define in clear terms what is meant by "favorable" (in fact the Arab/Muslim portrayal defining adjectives used in his work are "positive" and "negative") representation of the Arab/Muslim.

In this article, I address an area that is largely dominated by the Arab/Muslim male character types in films, demography of such character types, the major categorical differences between them, and how much these characters are vilifications or realistic representations. In my research, I consider a genre-diverse selection of films that not only supports my methodological approach in the deconstruction of the Muslim male on screen post-9/11, but also encompass a wide enough scope of narrative to be indicative of the American sociopolitical climate of the time.

In my analysis, I use 13 successful movies, which have been produced by well-known production companies, achieved good box office (domestic) results, and received awards of various kinds (Table 1).

In evaluating the screen characters, I take into account two categories developed by Mastro and Greenberg (2000) who say that these are "the attributes the literature suggests as primary components of image formation and stereotyping" (p. 693):

1. Physical/Appearance attributes: Including but not limited to weight, height, skin color, hair color, accent as well as the attire (traditional vs. Western) and grooming; and

2. Behavioral attributes: Including but not limited to intelligence, aggressiveness, subversiveness, laziness, truthfulness, altruism, and likeability.

Demography of Muslim Characters in Films

Muslims outside the USA

Michalak (2010) suggests that the number of films with a Muslim element shot up in the 7-year period from 2001 to 2008, with an end-result of about 100 films. Of these, only 12 contain non-Arab elements, which mean that about 90% of them equate Islam with Arabs. In the same period, the majority of Muslim-related films released deal with war, which is understandable as this is the period when the audience has been subjected to political turmoil of Iraq and Afghanistan. Dark skinned, grim-looking people in devastated surroundings, holding machine guns and lurking in the doorways, on rooftops, and at street corners are common images. Terrorist bombs turn into a wasteland even the modern city squares (*Rendition* [2007]) or cosy American bases set up in Muslim countries (*The Kingdom* [2007]). In these scenes, primitive-looking individuals complement the defoliation of the location. Rather than being represented as guardian of his native land, the Muslim is thus propelled into an extreme process of vilification that requires the justified involvement of the white protagonist hero to try and resolve order from chaos.

Muslims in the United States

Muslims living in the United States are subject to different forms of portrayal, depending on whether they are *African-American Muslims* or *Immigrant American*

Table 1: Particulars of Films Used in the Current Study

Title	Year	Production	Box office	Awards
Black Hawk Down	2001	Revolution Studios Columbia Pictures	$108,638,745	Academy Award: Best Sound Mixing Academy Award: Best Film Editing
House of Sand and Fog	2003	DreamWorks' Studios	$13,040,288	Independent Spirit Award: Best Supporting Female
Man Push Cart	2004	Noruz Films Flip Side Film	$36,608	London Film Festival Fipresci Award Seattle Int. Film Festival: New American Cinema Award
Hidalgo	2004	Touchstone Pictures	$67,303,450	Western Writers of America Spur Award
Kingdom of Heaven	2005	Twentieth Century Fox (presents) Scott Free Productions	$47,398,413	European Film Awards: Best Actor Hollywood Film Festival: Composer of the Year
Syriana	2005	Warner Bros. (presents) Participant Media	$50,824,620	Academy Awards: Best Supporting Actor AFI Awards: Movie of the Year African-American Film Critics Association: Top 10 Films
Rendition	2007	New Line Cinema	$9,736,045	Mill Valley Film Festival: Best Narrative Feature
The Kingdom	2007	Universal Studios Relativity Media	$47,536,778	Screen Actors Guild Awards: Best Actor (nominated)
The Kite Runner	2007	DreamWorks Studios Paramount Vantage Participant Media	$15,800,078	National Board of Review: Top 10 Films BAFTA Film Award: Best Film Not in the English Language
Charlie Wilson's War	2007	Universal Studios Spyglass Entertainment Relativity Media	$66,661,095	Golden Globes: Best Motion Picture (nominated) Broadcast Film Critics Association Awards: Best Writer (nominated)
Iron Man	2008	Paramount Pictures Marvel Studios	$318,412,101	AFI Awards: Movie of the Year African-American Film Critics Association: Top 10 Films
Body of Lies	2008		$39,394,666	London Critics Circle Film Awards: Supporting Actor of the Year
Sex and the City 2	2010	HBO Films New Line Cinema Warner Bros. Entertainment	$95,347,692	People's Choice Awards: Favorite Comedy Movie (nominated)

Muslims. Under the rubric of the latter, it is generally Arab Immigrants rather than non-Arab Immigrants who are portrayed in films.

African-American Muslim

It is significant that the African-American Muslim male has remained outside the ongoing image formation for the believers of Islam. Moreover, in films such as *Ali* (2001) and *Traitor* (2008) one might ask why an Afrocentric illustration of these entities remain largely disconnected from the Orientalist approach, while in films such as *Black Hawk Down* (2001), the African Muslim is unforgivingly imagined as an anarchic savage, intent on the destruction of Western ideals as personified by their military presence. American cinema has helped to create a hybrid character in the form of the cinematic African-American Muslim male that not only is able to traverse cultural boundaries, but also is able to symbolically represent multicultural American ideals, without becoming victim to a stereotypical discourse. As such, the representation of the African-American Muslim male will not be within the scope of the present analysis.

Immigrant American Muslim

The merits of the Immigrant American Muslim depend on how well they have been or are likely to be integrated into the dominant ideology. Those who have successfully integrated themselves are more inclined to dictate to those less adjusted, as in *Man Push Cart* (2004). Ethnic variations of the American Muslim male are solely accounted for by the socioeconomic status of the character. What differentiates the two sets of characters seems to be the degree in which they invest themselves in an "American" version of Islam. Those who are unable to abide by the strict state-supported definition tend to be constructed as anti-modern, a potential threat and "un-American."

Immigrants persist in regarding themselves as the true authority on Islamic issues, and dialogue with African American Muslims is found to be sparse. McCloud (1994) states that the immigrant Muslim is more concerned with the injustice of communities from his country of origin, than in dealing with the realities that exist in America. Instead of acknowledging a priority toward religious identity (as the Black AfricanAmerican does) ethnicity is of paramount concern, when deciphering one's "Muslimness" (pp. 79–80).

Changes in Character Formation

The genesis of the Muslim screen character may be attributed to events surrounding the crusades. As such, the Muslim male aggressor has become a recalibration of past incantations as conceived in the 1980s and 1990s with the likes of *Delta Force* (1986), *True Lies* (1994), or *Executive Decision* (1996). In the past, the imagined

identity was used to essentialize the Muslim's cultural differences toward a centralized imperialist ideal, as the enemy who must be killed. Recently, however, the Muslim portrayals have been depicted as "Westernized" in their outward appearance, reflecting the transformation that a Muslim undergoes as a result of being in contact with the West.

As the filmmakers began to implement a need to separate the connotations of Islamic visual signifiers, the Muslim male has become chastised, not for the faith that he professed, to but rather due to his racial and economic standing. The portrayals in *The Kite Runner* (2007), *Man Push Cart* (2005), and *House of Sand and Fog* (2003), to name but a few, show a victimized Muslim male who is not able to sustain a respectable place in a financial hierarchy. The characters in these films are deprived of fiscal opportunities, and as such, are considered to be functioning outside of the perimeters of moral and acceptable behavior in American society.

The Muslim American was cast aside and deprived of his basic civil rights by those who felt morally obligated to exercise an interpretational justice as they saw fit. The U.S. cinema of the post-9/11 years was quick to identify this situation and create a Muslim far more complex than the previous Orientalist incantations. The result was a character that neither fitted into the classic antagonist role of former years nor was deemed impervious enough to withstand suspicion of an audience unable to empathize with his role as protagonist. The character of Colonel Behrani in *The House of Sand and Fog* (2003) is an example. He looks and talks like a Middle Easterner, but presents himself like an American gentleman. He is liberally minded, but at the same time a traditionalist. He can be despotic and slaps his wife, but also romantic to bring her flowers. He is generous with his money to organize a lavish wedding for his daughter, but is worried about wasted water when the kitchen tap drips. He boasts about his prosperous days in Iran, but does not mind doing manual labor in the United States. As a result, he becomes a focal point in the film that examines his moral worthiness and on this account, he is made to kill himself at the end. With the exception of *Ali* (2001) (that should be treated as an anomaly) it was not until the release of *The Kite Runner* (2007) that an audience was presented with a centralized character (Amir) that not only personified the immigrant experience, but was also deeply enriched with signifiers that pertained to his social position as an acceptable American male Muslim (educated, well dressed, well spoken, and a good family man with high moral values).

Character Types

As mentioned above, Shaheen (2003) has listed a number of stereotype characters that the Arab is cast in, consisting of "villains and notorious sheikhs, maidens, Egyptians and Palestinians," which is rather limited because two of these are not character types but nationality tags (p. 13). Michalak's (2010) list is not very different as he says the Arab antagonists are "villains — oversexed sheiks kidnapping white women, sword-wielding natives attacking foreign legion outposts, exotic

magicians on magic carpets, mummies lumbering after screaming women, spoiled potentates in oil-rich kingdoms and, of course, terrorists killing innocent Westerners" (p. 1).

In my analysis, although I find some of these two-dimensional character types, I also encounter more realistic and convincing depictions, all of which are listed below:

The Terrorist

The framing of the stereotypical villain has evolved into the terrorist Arab character and become part of the immediate and accepted mediated discourse. This aided in establishing a short-term rational response to the terrorist activities, but the simplicity of the approach meant that a redirection was needed in how "he" was to be conceived within the film's narrative structure. As Croft (2012) suggests, *United 93* (2006) may have been theatrically released toward the latter half of the decade, but it presented the terrorist and implemented a cinematic neorealistic approach that aided in authenticating the narrative (p. 217). What resulted was an echoing of a former Arab male stereotype that justified reasons for his irrational behavior. The stereotype was, in an instance, substantiated and legitimized because it appeased the viewers and maintained a trauma that had been inflicted upon an American audience. The administration of the hand-held camera not only emphasized this sense of anxiety, but used it as an exploitative artistic device (in the manipulation and replication of recent events) that was orchestrated through the use of *Cinéma vérité*.

As an example, the film *Rendition* (2007) has displaced the Muslim male by subjecting him to an assumed monolithic identity. The characters have been ascertained with notions of terrorist-like inclinations, merely due to a misrepresentation being cast upon them. The parameters of the stereotype in American-mediated discourses are transgressed by the way in which Islam and extremism are fused as one. The consequence is a dehumanization process that affirms the animalistic nature of the villains. Characters appear less human when not named, and when shown in large groups, viewers are less likely to identify with them. Thus, Christianity and Islam are conveyed as dichotomous, representing the hero whose righteousness is out in the open for all to see and the villain whose evil intentions have to be under cover.

Hidalgo (2004), although portraying a Muslim in the form of Sheikh Riyadh with some acceptable attributes (see "The 'Tolerable' Muslim" section below), contains some of the most anti-Arab stereotypes to have ever been conceived on screen. Treachery, deceit, cowardice, barbarianism, and savagery become integral to the colonial rescue fantasy, as epitomized in the role of Frank. The shots where the Sheikh beheads an Arab raider, showing the head fall on the ground while the desert hat is still on his shoulders is a grotesque scene. A man witnessing this act freaks out and kicks the head away. The violent nature of the desert people, who turn to terrorism in the following centuries, is displayed in the most graphic form.

Bodies are impaled on spears, knives are in hand ready to cut culprits' testicles off, bullets are fired, and the holes in the dying bodies displayed, all of which subject the audience to extreme atrocities.

Islamic Rage Boy

This is a noisy and unkempt teenager, referred to by Morey and Yaqin (2011) as the Islamic Rage Boy on account of his unpredictable, nervous, and quick-tempered configuration. His articulation is rarely controlled and common expletives relating to his faith are announced without consideration of retort. One of the films that shows these youngsters as a mob is *Rendition* (2005). A young Arab, Khalid brings his girlfriend Fatima (who happens to be the daughter of a hard-liner police chief) to the base where he, along with many other young Arab males, is being trained mentally as a terrorist. On this occasion, the mullah's exhilarating speech ends with an invitation for all of them to chant *takbir*, meaning "God is great" in Arabic, over and over again, and they do this with increasing enthusiasm as evident from the escalating volume of their voices, raised arms, and clinched fists, in defiance of Western imperialism. The activity is so contagious that even Fatima joins them, with her arm up in the air, shouting *takbir*. Examples of the Islamic Rage Boy have been realized in numerous other films including *Body of Lies* (2008) and *The Kingdom* (2007).

Naïve Sympathizer

A character type that surfaces in a number of films is the sympathizer of terrorism, not yet sufficiently trained to be involved in the action themselves, but used either as pawns to get enlisted at a later stage or as accomplices blowing the trumpet of hard-line terrorists.

In *Syriana* (2005), several storylines converge and one of these is about two 17-year-old, naïve Pakistani oil workers in Saudi Arabia. Wasim and his friend are sacked by the new owners of the oil company and face poverty and deportation. They try to find work, but as they do not speak the local language, their search gets them nowhere. During this desperate period, they join a school to learn Arabic and meet a fundamentalist Muslim preacher who provides them with food and lodgings but, at the same time, tries to lure them into becoming suicide bombers.

Victim(s) of War

The ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan led to clear distinctions being drawn in the characterizations of Islamic militant factions and those innocent victims of war. *Charlie Wilson's War* (2007) is an example that seeks solace in satirizing governmental disunity while illustrating the effects that the United States' involvement has had in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Rather than centralize a Muslim male figure, the film concentrates on the guilty conscious of an American

congressman who is only prompted into action after witnessing the aftereffects of U.S. military intervention. Charlie Wilson himself is characterized as a bungling fool with no real consideration and understanding of the cultural ramifications pertaining to Islam, but his ignorance is balanced with his "humanitarian" efforts. Those Muslim male characters that he meets are either represented as aggressive military politicians or hapless victims that provide insight and further educate him about the Orientalized world he inhabits. Evoking images that had plagued the television screens in news reports on CNN or the Fox News Network, the film tries to remedy the enduring plight of the refugees by differentiating their miserable existence with that of the militant. This is all through the imperialist gaze of its protagonist who is only stimulated by his Westernized notion of moral responsibility toward the victims that he encounters.

The Corrupt Tradesman

This is a caricature rather than a character but has been a recurrent feature in films about the Middle East, as has been observed by many analysts including Shaheen (2003), Said (1978), and Semmerling (2010). While the *Soq* manages to capture the essence of the historic Orientalized space of the Muslim male trader, it has also been a common premise to have conceived a one-dimensional salesman who more often than not is portrayed as a corrupt, grotesque, and conniving trader. When he is not actively involved in trading, he is shown to be lazing outside his shop or stall, singly, or in pairs or groups, playing backgammon or drinking coffee.

Although in actual reality, the *suq* or the bazaar in any Middle Eastern country buzzes with vitality and merriment, for some reason, this space has proven to be menacing for the American filmmaker who has a tendency to set the major escape routes through such locations where the fugitive and the chaser create havoc among the displayed goods and the sellers. In more tranquil conditions, the local tradesmen are projected as mysterious and ominous, either not taking any notice of the white protagonist or casting a threatening look at him, as if their peace is disturbed. In *Body of Lies* (2008), for instance, the market place is shown to be full of males that satisfy our preconceived Oriental stereotypes. Similarly, in *Sex and the City* (2010), the crooked, "forbidden experience" bag salesman's involvement reinforce the cinematic historical fantasy that has been so often realized. On the other hand, the same film is also a premise for the honest trader in the form of a slipper seller who, when asked by the main female character Carrie, produces from under the counter the pair of Oriental slippers that she had paid for but forgotten to take with her the previous day.

Use Value Muslim

This type is coined by Morey and Yaqin (2011) to refer to characters whose existence still remains in a state of structural subordination toward the leading

protagonists (p. 131). Their inclusion is usually at the level of tokenism, and seldom are they seen instigating the action sequences, although they may resolve a final conflict between the protagonist and antagonist. When contrasted with the Muslim Villain or Terrorist, they function as one of "us," and are purposefully distanced from their counterparts.

During the post-9/11 period, the "Use Value Muslim" surfaces quite frequently. One example is *Iron Man* (2008), which is notable for the ingenuity and superhero qualities of its protagonist, exemplifying Western achievements in the face of adversity. As Stark is wounded and captured by terrorists, he is only able to escape by constructing a marvel of technology, but with primitive tools and the assistance of an educated and "liberalized" Arab scientist. While still subservient to the protagonist, the Muslim male figure consequently sacrifices himself, so that Stark can escape. The terrorists are unable to replicate Stark's technological achievements and are considered mentally and physically inferior.

The Feminized Muslim

This is not a recurrent character type despite occasionally appearing in films. The feminization of the Arab's body has become a common device to emphasize the masculinity of the Western male. His relationship and configuration of "othering" determines his colonial subservience, which relates directly to Foucault's (1979) understanding of a disciplined power within a political field. He is tortured, degraded, forced to carry out tasks, and coerced into submission. One example is in *Rendition* (2007) where the unveiling of the concealed Muslim body reveals more about those doing the unveiling and their power, than those who are on the receiving end. The sexuality and release of voyeuristic tendencies can be attributed to our need to discern and place an identity according to our own doctrine. *Rendition*'s (2007) scenes of torture in the semidarkness of a dungeon offer further cause for examination in their ability to evoke sympathy for Anwar (an Arab American male). The feminization of his body with no hair and his articulate use of the English language are employed to involve and alert the spectator to his plight.

Muslim the Despot

A memorable character in this category is Abasi Fawal in *Rendition* (2007), but his is a full portrayal, which reflects him not only as despotic, but also as a loving family man. He does not hide his affections from his youngest daughter, aged seven, but his rule over the rest of his womenfolk (older daughter Fatima, his wife, and his sister) is tyrannical. His strict authority at home, however, is not because he is a Muslim (in fact he is not presented as a practicing Muslim — he drinks whisky at work), but because of cultural restrictions. For his sister, who broke free of him in the past and now leads a liberal lifestyle, he says to his wife, "She can never get married," indicating that an emancipated woman does not have marital prospects in

the society they live in. While he has a heart of stone at work, he can be broken down when it comes to his family members. Later in the narrative, the audience see him standing motionless, eyes closed, letting his wife silently beat his chest with her fists for being the cause of Fatima's death.

The "Tolerable" Muslim

There are some examples in which the Muslim in general and the Arab in particular is presented in a more favorable light. One of these films is *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005), which shifts the discourse toward the biblical narrative. Rather than focus on differentiation, Christianity is allowed to coexist in a state of harmony with Islam. Not only is the film the first of its kind to correctly pronounce Saladin's name, but it also takes unusual steps toward justifying and empathizing his actions, which had been provoked by the murder of his sister by a sinister white Christian. A scene involving Saladin respectfully restoring a crucifix on top of an altar after his attack on Jerusalem, is noteworthy in so far as it provides a unique attempt to humanize a character that has so often been vilified on the screen.

The Respectable Muslim

There have been some very positive Muslim male portraits presented in the post-9/11 films. One of these characters is Hani Salaam (*Body of Lies*, 2008), the head of General Intelligence in Jordan, whose character is based on a real-time individual. David Ignatius, the author of the book, *Body of Lies*, on which the film is based, reports on his own webpage (http://davidignatius.com/body-of-lies/) that, having heard from the CIA Director in 2003 about the Jordanian Intelligence Chief who was a most helpful ally in providing the United States with intelligence, he went to Amman to meet the General in question, and the portrait of Hani Salaam was developed as a result of these interviews. Hani Salaam is dressed impeccably, in contrast to the Americans in shabby clothes and has an aura of respectability so much so that the white protagonist always addresses him as "Sir." With his knowledge of the Middle Eastern culture, he cleverly manipulates situations to reach his targets and gets better results than the Americans who are more prone to killing in difficult circumstances.

Immigrant Muslim

A number of films focus on the difficulties faced by immigrants who move between locations because of globalized economies, and/or sudden political changes in countries where old school partisanship is under threat of persecution. This is not a matter concerning the United States alone, but is a state existing in several economically strong countries. Two young Pakistani migrant workers in the Persion Gulf as depicted in *Syriana* (2005) and the man servant from Pakistan working in Abu Dhabi as portrayed in *Sex and the City 2* (2010) are examples of this phenomenon.

Some of the films in this decade concentrate not on the "Muslimness" of the characters, but on the economic difficulties that they face and the harsh conditions that they have to work in. One example is Colonel Behrani in *House of Sand and Fog* (2003). Out of the lush lifestyle of the Pehlewi Dynasty's Iran into California's foggy existence, Behrani finds himself having to lead a double life — while convincing everybody including his wife and children that he can still afford luxuries, he in fact does several menial jobs during the day including working as a laborer on a construction site. His religious inclinations are not much reflected in the film, and in fact, he is presented as a very liberal Muslim, celebrating the purchase of his new house with a champagne party for his family friends while the "baddie" in the film is a white American policeman. This film is noteworthy because Behrani is not an Arab. He is presented as a secular Muslim and is the protagonist and a fully developed, three-dimensional character. It shows that the old stereotypes are slowly but noticeably being replaced with more true-to-nature character types.

In *Man Push Cart* (2005), Ahmed is another poor immigrant Muslim character from Pakistan where he used to be a famous pop singer. In New York, he earns his living by selling coffee and bagels on a street corner. The film shows not only the difficulties that newly arrived immigrants face, but also how they are being abused, especially by their fellow countrymen who have been in the United States for a longer period, and are now financially secure. Religion is not used in the portrayal of either Ahmed or the other Asian characters in the film, and it looks like the filmmaker's main concern in *Man Push Cart* (2005) is to reflect the social and financial difficulties and vulnerabilities waiting for immigrants.

As these examples demonstrate, the immigrant Muslim figure has occasionally been used in the films in the post-9/11 period to project socioeconomic realities of global migration rather than to personify him as the 'other' in a clash of ideologies/religions. This is a breakthrough as far as the Muslim image is concerned because for the first time in the history of cinema, the Muslim character has been presented, not as a threat or an object of contempt, but as the underdog of the capitalist system.

As can be seen from the examples above, the Muslim portrayals in films of the 2001–2011 period vary in terms of their presentation, the examples reflecting unfavorable as well as favorable personalities with well-developed and convincing character arcs. The above list is of course, not exhaustive, but incorporates the significant cinematic Muslim male figures appearing in films during the 10-year period following 9/11. In comparison, it is noteworthy that American cinema has done away with some of the recurrent old time images. The Oriental female dancer(s) and the lazy, good-for-nothing, oil-rich Sheikh(s) in pursuit of white damsels, although they had been the most common stereotypes in the past, do not seem to have any popularity with the filmmakers in the present times.

Conclusion

Stereotypes tend to evolve with the changes in sociopolitical requirements of the time. Of course, such changes in the portrayal of Muslim, as Browne (1989) claims, can teach us more about the American culture rather than of the Orient, which remains an object of study and spectacle. As the romance and mystery of film and filmmaking disappeared through technological achievements toward the end of the last century so too did the manner in which the cinematic Oriental was imagined. The mystery and allure of the East, which was dictated by a cinematic canvas filled with an oasis of desert, palm trees, flying carpets, and camels, was expelled to a period of time that I will now refer to as the Hollywood's *Historic Orientalist Movie*. In its place, the video camera managed to dispel the fantasy the audience once assumed and replace it with an alternate "reality" that could be identified with through exposure to televised news reports.

It is right to say that Islamist terrorist movements are a small minority compared with the overwhelming majority of Islamist movements, which are neither violent nor terroristic. The fact that movies reduced the diversity of Muslims and their multiple cultural experiences into a two-dimensional Arab stereotype can only be explained as America's fixation with Arabs and Islam. However, there are signs showing that this is changing. Despite the fact that movies released post-9/11 still involve some "cardboard" characters, emphasis has recently been placed on presenting a diverse commonality of ideas that form the basis in which the character of the "other" and "self" share a deeper understanding of and respect for one another. Positive depictions have started appearing. Narratives have started including non-Arab characters. There are also examples in which the Muslim image is projected as the victim of capitalism, irrespective of the character's religious beliefs, and this is a clear departure from the established stereotypical presentation. With continued attempts by Muslim intellectuals "to deconstruct Islamophobia and provide positive images and constructive representations of Muslims," as reported by el-Sayed El-Aswad (2013, p. 48), there will probably be further positive developments.

Whether the trend that has started in the shaping of the cinematic Muslim male escalates to a point whereby the favorable or neutral representations overshadow the dominant gaze productions or even eradicate the Orientalist stereotypes altogether, is something that time and continued research will show.

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