

## Revisiting Binarism: Hollywood's Representation of Arabs

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**Keywords:** Cinema; Eurocentrism; Hollywood; Imperial Culture; Orientalism; Post-colonialism; Representation.

**Abstract.** This article throws into relief the tropes by which Hollywood has come to churn out identical Arabs bent on destruction, yet ones that need to be salvaged. However, the salvation process is never complete(d) because the Arabs are not worthy of redemption, which sinks them further into the abyss of darkness. The representation of Arabs in Hollywood movies mostly aims at disseminating a stereotypical image that demeaningly *homogenizes* their cultures and identities. Hollywood here participates in a process of imperial hegemony. The repetition in producing such *imagined culture* of Arabs and Muslims is seen as a hegemonic act of naturalizing orientalist ideologies that tend to over-idealize the Western culture and relegate the Eastern counterpart. In this light, this article attempts to deconstruct the visual representations (ideologies) produced to malign and vilify Arabs in Hollywood movies. Such movies are always premised upon a structure of binary oppositions that establish a motion picture of a civilized center dominating the margins, the so-called uncivilized subjects.

### Introduction

Orientalism is basically premised upon systems of representation. The latter almost always plays an exterior role where the object being *re-presented* is rendered submissive and subservient. Consequently, any production of an image on the Other is principally *imagined*. It seeks to entrench a difference in a Manichaeism of painter/painted, photographer/photographed, director/directed and so forth. The established singular “truth” about the other has always been a discursive approach to claiming superiority and authority over it as a mere subject. It is therefore to be studied, understood, and ruled [1]. On this wise, representation usually, if not always, entails a malicious act of stereotyping. As for Orientalism to survive, it must feed on these stereotypical representations. Whether deliberately or unconsciously, the *representer* is always seeing and sifting the represented from a higher vantage point in the hope of subjugating her or his<sup>1</sup> victims, the objects of the male gaze [2]. While so doing, the Western filmmaker, as a case in point, automatically elevates himself/herself to a position of controlling the images represented all the while relegating the abject object to an infirm and inferior position. By dint of his/her cinematic instruments, he/she is the meaning maker and dispenser who endows the shots with their shape, contour, movement or lack of it, and language. In the manner of the all-knowing sovereign subject, the *auteur*<sup>2</sup> assigns a linguistic register for all actors, telling this what to say and that how to say it. He/she is so empowered as to be able to dictate a language or make irony of it. His/her narrative shapes and molds the Oriental subject now becoming an object. His/her camera is an omniscient eye that sees without it ever being seen; it is this filmmaker who can see and control its movement from a panoptic position to breathe life into a mummified Orient.<sup>3</sup> He/she acts like a God who can create out of naught or decimate on a whim. In other cases, the *metteur-en-scene*, though having less authority over the narrative, yet

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<sup>1</sup> Some cases the Western Orientalist has been referred to as “he” because this discourse is itself patriarchal. In classical Orientalism, the West sees itself as a man characterized by manhood, intellectuality, and strength. It sees that power is in the hand of a Western man invading and feminizing the Oriental.

<sup>2</sup> See Francois Truffaut's essay “*A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema*” for further understanding of difference between *auteur* and *metteur-en-scene*.

<sup>3</sup> For further reading on panopticism see Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1975).

having the power to reinterpret and reconstruct, s/he brings back the same Orient to the screens, with identical stereotypical descriptions, or even amplified ones.

### **Orientalism, Re-Presentation, and Stereotype**

Initial approach to the concept of *representation* as explained by Stuart Hall and as correlated to Orientalism by Edward Said helps deconstruct the mechanisms by which Orientalist discourse operates. In one way or another, orientalist production of meaning inevitably entails *representational discourses*. Hall's understanding of the concept of *representation* is linked to what he calls 'the meaning process' and how it operates within a language system. In this overall process, two 'systems of representation' connects to produce meaning [3]. The first, Hall explains, avails us to link *the thing* – be it abstract or concrete – to our own 'system of concepts' to construct meaning. The second is based on the language and how certain signs *represent* our thoughts through setting a resemblance between our 'system of concepts' and particular signs. In the same line of thought, Stuart Hall deduces that "the relation between 'things', concepts and signs lies at the heart of the production of meaning in language. The process which links these three elements together is what we call 'representation' " [3]. For instance, the painting of Delacroix's *Street in Meknes* or *Women of Algiers in their Apartment* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Or even the Lumiere' first filming of the Maghreb, no matter how they resemble the actual subject in reality, are still a set of signs created from the producers' imagination (system of concepts) that intend to *re-present* and *re-affirm* orientalist narratives they were subject to way before arriving to North Africa. Basically, "we give things meaning by how we *represent* them – the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them, the ways we classify and conceptualize them, the values we place on them" [3].

As for Said's understanding of the concept of representation, it is worthy of notice how he, on the first level, urges for the necessity of representation as a "form of human economy", as essential as language for/between societies to keep going on [4]. However, on another level, representation is an act of weakening others and 'reducing' them, a form of violence exerted by the *representer*. In part, it is based on a contrast of being calm on the exterior as a mere representation (be it an artistic painting or a *literary imaginaire* novel) and being violent as an act or a system of *representing* the subject [4]. This very system, Said states, involves a repressive authority and control maintained by the *representer* [4]. For the subject being represented, or rather reduced and decontextualized as Said puts it, it is a form of 'confinement', 'estrangement', and 'disorientation' [4]. He urges everybody to terminate the systems of representation that are controlling and hegemonic in essence, for they never allow the represented to intervene in the process of representation, or as how Spivak would put it, *speak* for themselves [4].

Essentially, whatsoever is produced on the Orient as a practice of representation is aimed to add up to the whole discourse of Orientalism that has been active since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The discourses, or usually stereotypes in this respect, once brought forth by older generation are now taken as they were, reproduced, and remodeled to fit into the current media trend. Hall discusses how stereotyping succeeds to *reduce* and *naturalize* 'difference' in a way how principally it is based on an unforgettable, distinguished and apprehensible trait of the subject, then it wholly reduces it to simple and amplified descriptions, "to fix them without change and development to eternity." [5] And based on that, it starts its process of *splitting* and *othering*. It establishes a form of boundary between the "normal" and the "acceptable", all that "belongs" to *us*, and the "abnormal" and "unaccepted" that is the *other* [5]. Stereotypes are hence formed to operate as a *discourse* replete with power and control invented by those who are assigned the task of *representing* and therefore reducing and confining.

The "re-presence or representation"<sup>4</sup> of Orientals in Hollywood cinema in this respect comes as an extension of that which has been spread by Western literary texts that hark back to the remote

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<sup>4</sup> Said casts into doubt the veracity of such representations by dismantling their foundational basis by positing that "it needs to be made clear about cultural discourse and exchange within a culture that what is commonly circulated by it is

past. The story told about Africa in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* can be an extreme orientalist fictional example, but it hardly compares in its effect to a movie that creates and constructs pictorial sketches of Orientals. The power of cinema here lies in its production and control of these manufactured images. The image alone can have a deeper influence on its audiences, and it is far more efficient than reading a chef d'oeuvre in literature. It can also be easily understood by all types of audiences<sup>5</sup>, be they children or adults, illiterate or literate. Such visual images can remarkably be more powerful in standardizing and naturalizing an Orientalist image of the Arabs than any literary texts. The reader of a text no longer needs to try to come to terms with a textual representation; the Oriental is already made real and brought alive to her/him on the silver screen by Orientalist filmmakers. This, however, should not be understood to counteract the effect of literary writings, whose reach goes uncontested.

Along Said's thread of thoughts, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam approach equally "the burden of representation" in a way where "the connotations of representation are at once religious, aesthetic, political and semiotic" [6]. Yet, what matters here is "what all these instances [those of the connotations] share is the semiotic principle that something "standing for" something else, or that some person or group is speaking on behalf of some other persons or groups" [6]. In fact, the only difference here is that Orientalist representations always lack the approval of the people represented. The Orientalist does not need to take any permission to represent, since her/his representation has already oppressed their cultures. Instead, s/he creates an imagined re-presence of the Other. It is so because "the whole science or discourse of anthropology<sup>6</sup> depends upon the silence of this Other" [4]. To what is noted above, this exclusion of the Other, the Subaltern, is part of the exteriority of representation. Accordingly, Said argues that it is "always governed by some version of the truism that if the Orient could represent itself, it would; since it cannot, the representation does the job, for the West, and *faute de mieux*, for the poor Orient" [1].

The gaze of Eurocentrism<sup>7</sup> is not an innocent one at all. It is umbilically interlocked with an orientalist discourse that attempts to naturalize the European Self and denaturalize anything other than the Self. This radical view of the Self produces a racial tendency towards the rest. To maintain authority and power, the Occidental racially defames the distinction between itself and the Oriental, accentuating its own economic, political, and cultural superior vantage [6]. Along the same line of this Eurocentric thinking, "since the Oriental was a member of a subject race, he had to be subjected: it was that simple" [8].

The idea of Orientalism is based upon an ethnocentric *myth*. Its aim is to elevate the Euro-American Self to a pure centre and relegate the rest to the edge of marginalization by all possible means. By claiming all the modern principles of freedom and justice, this hegemonic part of the West is paradoxical, especially when it sees itself entrusted with the task of saving and protecting the world – *the big brother*. These ideological attributes represented in many Hollywood films vouchsafe the West indirect legitimacy and power to intervene in other countries in novel and smart ways to keep its interests. When flowered with the principles of humanity and civilization, these attributes appear peaceful to "passive" audiences. Once one looks beyond their face value, therein are buried latent and blatant ideologies that aim at control and hegemony that beg to stick out. What

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not "truth" but representations. [...] In any instance of at least written language, there is no such thing as a delivered presence, but a re-presence, or representation" [1].

<sup>5</sup> This can be more elaborated relying on Marshal McLuhan's argument in media studies. The images disseminated through a channel (e.g. movies or films on TV or cinema) being the medium can be more effective than the message itself. Filming a certain representation is more efficient than putting the same representation into words [7]. This shows how important the medium is in influencing its content (the message). That is to say, "the medium is the message" (1967).

<sup>6</sup> The controversy of this science is that it always deals with things that already lost its people. Therefore, the results are mostly representations of dead people and cultures.

<sup>7</sup> *Eurocentrism* here does not only refer to the European ethnocentric tendency. It also refers, as Ella Shohat and Robert Stamp states, to "the "neo-Europeans" of Americas, Australia, and elsewhere" [6].

is worse is that these ideologies always claim that these territories and peoples are in dire need of Western intervention and even domination.

### Deconstruction/Reaction to Hollywood's Orientalist Production

Based on stereotypical representations, Hollywood cinema reproduces its Orientalist visions of the Arabs as a fundamentalist and homogenous entity. In this regard, Jack Shaheen asserts that the image of the Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood cinema is always of "one and the same people". He respectively states that "repeatedly, they falsely project all Arabs as Muslims and all Muslims as Arabs," where in fact "only 12 percent of the world's Muslims are Arabs" [9]. Shohat and Stam deductively clarify this, contending that

since what Memmi calls the "mark of the plural" projects colonized people as "all the same," any negative behaviour by any member of the oppressed community is instantly generalized as typical, as pointing to a perpetual backsliding toward some presumed negative essence. Representation thus becomes allegorical; within hegemonic discourse, every subaltern performer/role is seen as synecdochically summing up as a vast but putatively homogeneous community. [6]

Shaheen's reviews of more than 100 movies uncover how Hollywood knowingly or unknowingly has a penchant for denigrating and vilifying the Arabs. The Arabs on display are constantly and persistently given a typically derisive and corrosive description, which precludes any possibility for change or evolution. For instance, he rightly observes how the American heroine wittingly remarks in *Sheik Steps Out* (1937) that "They [Arabs] look alike to [her]" [9]. He gives another instance of the protagonist in *Commando* (1968) who acknowledges that "All Arabs look alike to [him]." He gives yet another example in reconfirmation of the above, making a recursive statement which sounds almost like a fact: "I can't tell one [Arab] from another. Wrapped in those bed sheets, they all look the same to me" (*US Ambassador in Hostage* 1986) [9].

By this act of negative stereotyping the Arabs<sup>8</sup>, the West<sup>9</sup> –Europe and America in this case—highlights its ethnocentric view of the world where every facet of Oriental life is judged by Western standards. Its purity and immutable Self are therefore situated in the locus of prescribing the destiny of its Alter Ego. These negative stereotypes are but not limited to representing Muslims and Arabs as "literary, artistic, scientific, military, economic and administrative as different, inferior and exotic, sexually permissive, greedy, deceitful, incapable of logical reasoning, morally ignorant, traditional, violent, cruel, irrational, and in need of civilization" [15]. Hollywood cinema, as a tool of neo-colonization, plays a crucial role in disseminating and maintaining all the ideologies that justify the superiority of the West over the Arabs and Muslims. Such Western films<sup>10</sup> are therefore new weapons of cultural intervention. The latter unravels the fact that the so-called underdeveloped countries, even after attaining their independence, are still dependent on the West in more ways than one. The aim behind this is to maintain the economic, cultural and ideological Euro-American imperialism.

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<sup>8</sup> I quote here Shakuntala Banaji's discussion on stereotypes as positively attached to certain races where she highlights Hall's argument of "the ways in which discourses of difference and racism in the media can be contested over time through approaches such as positive representation (whereby racial and ethnic groups who are normally subjected to negative stereotypes are represented more positively in mass media); and through trans-coding - an attempt to take back the meanings of particular representational discourses of race from the mainstream stereotype and to attach different meanings to those representations." [15]

<sup>9</sup> By the word West, I simply refer to Western imperial powers.

<sup>10</sup> This does not necessarily mean that all Western movies are producing the same discourse of Orientalism. 'Western movies' is reservedly used here within the context of this paper, only for movies and films that discriminate the Arabs and Muslims.

By its misrepresentations, Hollywood films still insist on justifying Western control and hegemony. Their repetition in producing a homogeneous imagined culture of the Arabs and Muslims can be read as an act of naturalizing this lopsided orientalist discourse. As in Said's understanding of orientalism, it is this imagined knowledge that gives power to the occident, investing itself with the task of instruction in a re-enactment of the master-apprentice dichotomy [1]. Hollywood in this sense relies on *cultural production* to produce images about the Self – West – as the land of great ideas, opportunities, and freedom; and about the Arabs as savage autochthones of the desert. This consequently shapes and determines the image that Eastern audiences have of the West. This idealised narration of the west in Hollywood cinema drives these “subaltern” audiences to stigmatize and despise their surroundings on the one hand, and to instil in them the wish to migrate to the land of freedom and civilization, on the other hand. In sum, the West is featured in these movies as a fancy land of civilization, for which all peoples crave.

In her *Filming the Modern Middle East: Politics in the Cinemas of Hollywood and the Arab World*, Lina Khatib builds on Said's famous argument to state that

Orientalism has created a representation of the Orient which serves to justify the actions of the Occident. Applying that to cinema, one may argue that the representation of Arabs in Hollywood films is a creation aimed at preserving the status quo of the United States as a world policeman controlling, among others, Arabs and Arab countries. [10]

Describing the United States herein as the world's policeman recalls Louis Althusser's argument as regards *Ideological State Apparatuses*. Observably, Hollywood makes recourse to these ideological apparatuses, which are clearly manifested in virtually all its films that are concerned with the Arabs' representation, always in the hope of maintaining yet more power for the States. With this power at hand, it now becomes the task of America to save the world from the uncivilized, static Bedouins with their goats and camels.

These stereotypes are contemptibly fabricated in a bid to dehumanize the Arabs and declare them as the sworn enemies who “look different and threatening” [9]. The American hero who is given such scenarios is simultaneously granted authority in the film. His words are to be taken for granted, since he is laboriously and painstakingly present to defy evil. He is therefore speaking the truth and nothing but the truth. Consequently, his audiences would trust his banality which in turn could result in a fatal<sup>11</sup> situation, that of creating the imagined Oriental Arab.

The Euro-American Orientalist discourse, while some scholars think it is outdated, is still conspicuously and perspicuously present in recent filmic productions such as *Babel* (2006), a Hollywood film first released in 2006. It narrates a story that takes place in four different countries, Morocco, Mexico, Japan, and the United States. The very first shot of the film shows a Moroccan in his dirty traditional garb, walking in a vast rugged terrain devoid of any sign of life. Later, he reaches a house that bears the resemblance of a cave. Morocco is screened as a land of wilderness, emptiness and nothingness, and Moroccans themselves are presented as primitive and uncivilized. The film depicts Morocco as a barbarian society that bases its economy on herding goats. Hassan, for instance, barter the rifle that a Japanese has given him for one of Abdullah's goats in addition to 500 DHs (as a trade). The latter immediately gives it to his two sons who afterwards start testing whether it can reach the three-kilometer range or not.

Morocco here is depicted as a source of violence where even children know how to use rifles naturally and without any prior training. In this light, looking at how children are nurtured in the

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<sup>11</sup> Here, Meaghan Morris's “Banality in Cultural Studies” [11] can be a significant reference for more analysis of the banality of these Hollywood movies in the sense that they forge a reality and amplify it to produce nonexistent phobias in the mind of Western audiences. This would justify the alleged western superiority over the so-called “abusers of women,” the Arabs. When Western audiences start to believe that the Arabs are exactly as those featured in Hollywood films, the banality can become or becomes a fatality.

different societies (Morocco, America, Mexico, and Japan) would demonstrate Babel's vilification of the Moroccan culture. The shift from Fig. 1 to Fig. 2, for example, highlights a paradigm between Morocco's future generation and the American one. The first displays the two Moroccan boys running away from their atrocious act, while the second features an American boy running for fun. Interestingly enough, the second shot (Fig.2) is meant to confirm a fallacy that America is the real protector and home of children worldwide. On the other hand, the first shot signifies that the two Moroccan kids live in a backward and violent country where deadly weapons are put at the disposal of children. This very particular shot, in fact, signifies the absence of the Moroccan state.



Fig 1: In Morocco, two children running away from a crime.



Fig 2: In the US, a child running in a house playing with his sister.

Along this thread of thought, Hollywood cinema has always produced its own Eurocentric tropes<sup>12</sup> of empire to achieve its orientalist representation of the Arabs. At this point, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam present instances of these tropes rampant in orientalist cinema, and clarify how they always tend to play “a constitutive role in “figuring” European superiority” [6] They argue that this cinema attempts to reduce what is cultural to a matter of biology, creating thus a form of animalization. This trope of animalization is mostly used in the colonial discourse to “associate the colonized with the vegetative and the instinctual rather than with the learned and the cultural” [6]. Martin and Osa Johnson's *Trailing African Wild Animals* (1922) further highlights this trope of empire where Western characters interact with African ones whose life is painted as being undomesticated and wild.

In an assumption of “the political immaturity of colonized or formerly colonized peoples” [6], immaturity is deployed yet as another trope of equal significance and largely diffused in Hollywood

<sup>12</sup> Shohat and Stam quote Hayden White, stating that “troping is ‘the soul of discourse,’ the mechanism without which discourse ‘cannot do its work or achieve its ends’” [3].

cinema. Political immaturity is ironically ubiquitous in recently made Hollywood films including, for instance, Larry Charles' *The Dictator* (2012). Aladeen (Sacha Baron Cohen) is introduced to the audience as an immature dictator, who enjoys playing games in overly critical and untimely situations. Hollywood makes him appear as though he were an irresponsible kid, who takes everything for fun and finds fun in everything. The representation of the fake Admiral General Aladeen in scene 00'23''42'', where he addresses the U.N. humiliating fashion, is utterly irritating. He comes to deliver a speech on democracy, yet he stupidly and childishly urinates in a pitcher and drinks it in public. The Arabs in this way always appear incompatible and unfit with democracy. The ideology the film tries to maintain and disseminate is that this immaturity is inherent and instinctual in the Arab culture. The Arabs thus feature as docile bodies; they are made dependent on and subservient to America and the West in general to be taught proper conduct.



**Fig.3:** Aladeen sexually obsessed looking at all the photos of those he had intercourse with.



**Fig 4:** a traditional Christian altar

Sexual obsession is another trope Hollywood wields to depict the Arabs and Muslims as peoples mired in their lust. For instance, in *The Dictator* (2012), even leaders and presidents of Arab nations are represented as sexually obsessed and lustful; let alone the rest of the people who have no means to quench their lust. The beginning of the film introduces its audiences to General Aladeen's quirk and queer hobby, which is making love with all sorts of famous people, regardless of their gender. Shot 00'13''46'' (see Fig. 3) shows Admiral General Aladeen proudly looking at all of them in the thousand photos on his golden wall. This frame space is dominated by an unlimited number of photos. Aladeen is seen surrounded by these to the extent that he seems absorbed, possessed, and at last minimized. This connotes the dominance of sexuality over his life, a trifle when stripped of bodily pleasures. This gives the impression that he does not do anything other than have sex. The fact that he is put in front of a look-like altar, between two chandeliers on the wall, conveys his worship of sexuality. If one is to compare a photo of a church altar to figure 3, they can easily find how much they are similar (see Fig. 4). The next scenes, accordingly, show the fake Aladeen sexually obsessed with a goat. The following list of conversations from the script of *The Dictator* highlight this trope more lucidly and luridly.

General Aladeen (00:09:27): Now let's go back to the palace. It is the season finale of real housewives of Shachahmahahfalimi tahlicch!

General Aladeen (00:49:39): You have a center for rape here? Great! I'd love to go! Maybe another time, you know. Hire a limo, have some cocktails, bring my raping shoes.

General Aladeen (00:51:00): To thank you for what you did today at the police station, I have decided to bestow upon you a gift... (pointing at his penis) It is fine, please, gobble up my little mouse. Snack on my tiny raisin. Give her a mouth bath. Go.

General Aladeen (00:51:49): Where are you taking me to, the rape center?

General Aladeen (00:53:16): Give a man a vagina and he will shpichs for a day. Teach a man to use his hand as a vagina, and he will shpichs for a lifetime.

General Aladeen (00:51:49): Etra, is this because you are the only virgin guard that I left a virgin?

General Aladeen (01:12:31): I'm attracted to you in a really fucked up way.

A dictator or a general is a clear token of hunger for power, but this time an Arab general has an insatiable hunger and thirst for sex, which he elevates to the epicentre of the world. What is worse is that these whims are not kept within his nation, but he can only savour them fully when he is out of place. The West is the land of freedom where influential Arabs satisfy their libidos through bestiality, sodomy, masturbation and aberrant sex. The Arabs therein are depicted as people who are pathetically and pathologically driven by intractable sexual desires. For further precision, they seem to be both naturally and culturally attached to it in ways only death can bring to a close.

Disseminating such Orientalist representations on the Arabs is profoundly enmeshed with and incumbent upon imperialism. Edward W. Said explicates, in this respect, that "imperialism is not only a relationship of domination but is also committed to a specific ideology of expansion" [8]. The expansion goes beyond territory to neo-colonize people's minds. The result, therefore, is primarily imperialistic in that it oversexualizes the other reducing them to a state of constancy, hostility and childishness. To this end, the West is perennially bent on bringing into the fore eastern backwardness in all its aspects, be it economically, politically, culturally and even "naturally".

An insight into how such ideologies of orientalism operate can be relatively accessed by Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*. Anderson defines the idea of the nation as "an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" [12]. Apart from the census, the map and the museum, a citizen cannot possibly get to know every single fellow citizen of that nation excepting through imagining. Other compatriots come to be mentally constructed in ways that call to mind the self and how this self lives out moments of joy and moments of grief. Accordingly, Orientalism can form and map an imagined community of the Arabs in the minds of Western audiences. The difference here is that the citizens would be attached to her/his nation, and the audience<sup>13</sup> would be distastefully or repulsively detaching her/himself from the cultural Other, and thus destroy the possibility of an egalitarian negotiation. Anderson's argument can be used as a deconstructive tool to approach the notion of homogeneity. Bearing in mind that what a person thinks about his/her culture can be only imagined, the homogeneity of the idea is itself just imagined, perceived, and received as quasi-real. This invites one, I mean anyone,

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<sup>13</sup> There is no generalization of audiences here. In this research, the word audience refers only to those who consciously or unconsciously accept these orientalist ideologies.

to question all that s/he already knows about any people in a bid to reconstruct heterogeneous thoughts vis-a-vis the multitudinous Others.

Within an Ethnocentric dimension, it is undeniable that the West is far more developed than the East in different fields, and it is still separating and making itself better by all possible means. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam confess that the resources of the so-called East and how the West has exploited them are by and large the reason behind the Western industrial revolutions [6]. The West could not have been what it is today had it not been for contributions the Arabs had made, contributions which are still largely unacknowledged. The West and the East “cannot, in sum, be posited as antonyms” [6] but rather as complementary entities. Yet, the West sarcastically and cynically wonders

Was it not true, ran their new evaluation, that ‘we’ had given them progress and modernization? Hadn’t we provided them with order and a kind of stability that they haven’t been able since to provide for themselves? Wasn’t it an atrocious misplaced trust to be provided for themselves? [8]

How can one talk about favours and trust from the west when the colonized has been inevitably an economic store of the colonizer? Indeed, the civilized colonizer has built his industrial society on a cruel exploitation of the allegedly uncivilized colonies. It is this exploitation that unknots the so-called backwardness of the East. The East has never been given a chance to join the progress of the world. Instead,

To be non-Western (the reifying labels are themselves symptomatic) is ontologically thus to be unfortunate in nearly every way, before the fact at worst a maniac, and at best a follower, a lazy consumer who, as Naipual somewhere, can use but could never have invented the telephone. [8]

Eastern countries are “drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary possibilities wiped out,” a whole civilization has been under the destruction of another civilization [13]. Notwithstanding, Europe thus far turns its back on all its catastrophic misdeeds, attempting to use all possible agendas to change the East into merely a vacuous space devoid of any mark of civilization.

Up to now, the Western media in general and Hollywood films in particular are still adamant about circulating stereotypical images that barbarize and dehumanize the Arab. These films produced on Arabs are unbearably xenophobic and flattening in the sense that they collectivize into a single backward culture all the Arabs. They deny them any sense of difference. The Arabs for Hollywood are always the same people who were once and are still offered a chance to be civilized and domesticated, but they stubbornly prefer to damn and abandon themselves to fundamentalism and terrorism. Said attempts to impartially read between the lines and to shed light on such modes of discourse. He contends that

while it is certainly true that the media are far better equipped to deal with caricature and sensation than with the slower process of culture and society, the deeper reason for these misconceptions is the imperial dynamic and above all its separating, essentializing, dominating, and reactive tendencies. [8]

It is this media imperialism that shows how the West culturally and ideologically governs others from a distance with no direct interventions [8]. This new kind of cultural colonialism always counts on mass media to reach its goals. The media is thus the most crucial and yet dangerous

weapon that the West uses to expand its empire and create Eastern docile bodies. “The ownership of the means of producing and circulating images, news, and representation” is newly considered the greatest powerful apparatus of manipulation [8]. Accordingly, when the stream of information is controlled by the West, it becomes accessible to shape other cultures, inside and outside its borders.

## Conclusion

Hollywood, as a significant part of the Western media, does not rely on implanting actual settlements to colonize people; its orientalist discourse reveals it to be rather keener on cultural imperialism. Some of its simplest tools are the filmmaker<sup>14</sup> and the narrative, all buttressed with a huge budget. The filmmaker draws upon her/his cinematic experience to produce motion pictures in which s/he fits her/his reality to the film. This ‘reality’ becomes a discourse ready to be disseminated. The discourse is itself loaded with different ideologies that would target the audiences’ perception of reality. Now, the image produced about the Arabs as a singular reality is not only consumed by Western audiences. Hollywood’s huge budget makes it reach the Arabs themselves. Shohat and Stam argue that:

Hollywood films often arrive in the Third World “preadvertised,” in that much of the media hype revolving around big-budget productions reaches the world through journalistic articles and TV even before these films are released locally. [6]

Hollywood’s task seems thereupon to be one of homogenization and vilification of Arabs and their cultures and then make them believe that there is a suitable alternative, which is a secular Western culture. In sum, it always works within the same Binarism of good/evil, high/ low and so forth. This same narrative is repeated in many Hollywood movies, and as Shaheen puts it, “for more than a century Hollywood, too, has used repetition as a teaching tool, tutoring movie audiences by repeating over and over, in film after film, insidious images of the Arab people” [9]. Therefore, repeating the same image of the Arabs acting in a certain barbarian way in thousands of films would certainly make them disgusting enemies.

Hollywood further takes on the burden of self-representing other nations. Ella and Stam here give instances of how Hollywood self-represents and speaks in the name of many different nations. This usually goes parallel with the issue of language. They highlight how even “language as abstract entities” also functions within “hierarchies of power” [6]. Concerning this linguistic self-representation, they argue that

Hollywood, for their part, betrays a linguistic hubris bred of empire. Hollywood proposed to tell not only its own stories but also those of other nations, and not only to American but also to the other nations themselves, and always in English. [6]

If in some cases where the Arabs are speaking instead of being spoken for, they would inaccurately utter words that do not reflect Arabic itself. In *Father of the Bride 2* (1995) when Mr. Habib’s wife wants to speak, her husband stops her uttering inaccurate words that would only appear as Arabic for the Western audiences. This is also repeated in *The Dictator* (2012) where Aladeen utters strange words that have no meaning in Arabic or any other languages for that matter. “It is the season finale of real housewives of Shachahmahahfalimi tahlicch!”. Yet, these can have their own established meanings since they reach their orientalist purpose. Hollywood thus speaks

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<sup>14</sup> By this I don’t generalize that all Hollywood filmmakers attempt to produce Orientalism. As long as the purpose of this study is to approach Orientalism and Self-orientalism in cinema, I always refer only to those who produce them. However, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam argue that “even filmmakers not conventionally associated with lauding imperialism betray a shared discourse of Empire” (109).

for the Arabs, the Asians, the Chinese and other nations in non-sensical words or in English to encourage “the world-wide dissemination of English language, thus contributing indirectly to the subtle erosion of the linguistics autonomy of other cultures” [6]. In so doing, it is all about *subalternizing* nations through language [14].

In this manner, Hollywood works within its discourse of cultural imperialism to neo-colonize other nations through all its possible cinematic productions. Economic privilege herein plays a paramount role in rating certain productions on the Other, especially those which attempt to resist imperialism. Shohat and Stam also discuss this issue arguing that Hollywood “favours big-budget blockbusters, it is not only classist but also Eurocentric [...]”; to be a player in this game one needs to have economic power” [6]. This economic power does not only resist films and movies that attempt to oppose the already given images of the Arabs and their cultures, but also attempts to dominate the Third World audiences. Accordingly, this makes these audiences favour Western movies and, in some other cases, devalue films produced by local filmmakers.

Shohat and Stam highlight an aftereffect of this “cinematic neo-colonialism”. For them, after a while “Hollywood language becomes the model of “real” cinema” [6]. They provide an instance of this where some Brazilian critics claimed that the phrase “I love you” was more romantic than its equivalent in Portuguese “eu te amo”. From this very simple example, the cinematic linguistic neo-colonialism appears to impose “European languages as inherently more ‘cinematic’ than others” [6]. This case also happens in many Moroccan movies where the French language is more favoured over the local languages, not only as a Romantic language but also in many other different contexts.

Through (re)producing and (re)circulating homogenized stereotypical images of Arabs, representation then plays a significant exterior push for the discourse of Orientalism to survive. The tropes being deployed and employed by Hollywood coupled with ownership of the means of production and dissemination make the task of representation or rather misrepresentation a form of conquest no less pernicious and obnoxious than territorial occupation. The sphere with which Hollywood’s main concern is that of uplifting one culture to the detriment of lesser cultures which serve to set the Western world apart as civilized and civilizing of other breeds, namely the Arabs. However, denigrating these films are made to be, there still surfaces a moment, or perhaps one should say moments, of resistance which escapes the watchful eye of the camera, a moment worth recording for it upsets the whole narrative.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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