Representations of Muslim Bodies in The Kingdom:

Deconstructing Discourses in Hollywood *

Michelle Aguayo

Concordia University, Canada

Abstract:

In this post September 11 (9/11) climate of the "War on Terror", Hollywood political-thriller films carry a new cultural currency. Drawing from literature in postcolonial studies and its engagement with representations in popular culture, this paper analyzes the film *The Kingdom* (2007)—a fictional political-thriller with a storyline inspired by real terrorist bombings in Saudi Arabia. This paper critiques and notes the film's narrative practices, with particular attention paid to the racial and gendered discourses produced in it. In examining the representational codes and politics in the film's construction of Muslim bodies post-9/11, it is argued here that a critical engagement with Hollywood cinema is necessary in order to reveal the complex ways in which Muslim bodies are scripted as dangerous, pre-modern and uncivilized in American popular culture. This analysis will expose how representations of Muslims in Hollywood not only are essentialized, but act simultaneously to discipline these bodies, which is grounded in the trope of the "War on Terror", intimately linking it to the project of empire. A commitment to deconstructing Muslim bodies in Hollywood will illustrate the embeddedness of racialized and gendered imaginings of "Others" as they unfold not only "on-screen", but also their relationship to violent colonial projects "off-screen".

Keywords: Race; Gender; Representations; War on Terror; Hollywood; Muslims; Islam; Empire; *The Kingdom*; September 11

Résumé:

Dans ce climat d'après 11 septembre (11/9) empreint de la "guerre contre le terrorisme", les *thrillers* politiques produits par Hollywood établissent une nouvelle devise culturelle. Puisant dans les études postcoloniales et leur intérêt pour les représentations issues de la culture populaire, cet article analyse le film *The Kingdom* (2007). Il s'agit d'un *thriller* de fiction politique dont le scénario est inspiré de faits réels: des attentats terroristes qui ont eu lieu en Arabie Saoudite. Cette analyse critique s'articule autour des pratiques narratives de ce film en portant une attention particulière aux discours de race et de genre. À travers l'examen des politiques et des codes de représentation du film dans la construction des corps musulmans après le 11/9, il est donc postulé qu'il est nécessaire d'adopter une posture critique vis-à-vis le cinéma hollywoodien dans le but de révéler les voies complexes à travers lesquelles les corps musulmans sont représentés comme étant dangereux, pré-modernes et non civilisés dans la culture populaire américaine. Cette analyse permettra de montrer comment les représentations des musulmans à Hollywood font non seulement l'objet d'essentialismes, mais qu'elles disciplinent également ces corps, dans le cadre de "la guerre contre le terrorisme", elles-mêmes intimement liée au projet d'empire. La déconstruction des représentations des musulmans à Hollywood illustrera comment l'imaginaire de race et du genre de "l'autre" est scellé, que ce soit "sur écran" ou dans sa relation à des projets coloniaux violents "hors écran".

Mots-clés: Race; Genre; Représentations; Guerre Contre le Terrorisme; Hollywood; Musulmans; Islam; Empire; *The Kingdom*; 11 Septembre

---

Hollywood's cinematic *imaginaire* of the "Orient" as the culturally-different Other has long been debated amongst postcolonial scholars and cultural theorists examining media representations. *The Siege,* a Hollywood box office success, sparked great debate and anger amongst the Muslim community given its negative treatment of Muslims and Arabs as terrorists, such that the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)*,* and the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) protested and called out for greater attention to the ways in which Hollywood cinema depicts Muslim communities.[1] A post-9/11 politics of criticism of the ways in which movies like *Black Hawk Down, Jarhead* and *The Kingdom* is essential, as these terrorism-centred movies are reinvigorating Orientalist discourses and colonial violence disseminated through the negative images of Muslim bodies in Hollywood. This becomes particularly problematic given the previous Bush administration's pursuit of the "War on Terror", which has placed Muslim bodies as targets of unwarranted racism and violence. Drawing from literature in postcolonial studies and its engagement with representations in popular culture, this essay analyzes the film *The Kingdom* (2007), a fictional political-thriller taking place in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

This film is particularly interesting for several reasons. Firstly, it is inspired by bombings at a Riyadh American compound in 2003 and a Khobar U.S. housing complex in 1996, giving it a "based-on-a-true-story" narrative and, thus, an ambiguity not previously seen before in

terrorism-centred films (Boggs & Pollard, 2006). Its release post-9/11 is also relevant and should be contextualized within the current socio-political landscape, where heightened anxieties toward Islam, Muslims and Arabs is prevalent; where increased surveillance, detention and violence against this community is legitimated in the name of "public security"; where foreign policy coupled with military measures are deployed to remap countries; and where "saving" Muslim women and children (most recently in Afghanistan) is a priority both on and off-screen. Boggs and Pollard (2006) have noted the upsurge in the 1990s of the terrorism-centred film genre, which coincided with the first terror attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Oklahoma City bombing, undoubtedly feeding anxieties of foreign attacks. As Tzanelli, Yar, and O'Brien note, "Film is a 'social drama' in its finest form, because it enacts, criticizes and reconsiders socio-political realities, conflicts and dilemmas" (2005: 99). For these reasons, *The Kingdom* warrants further analysis of its thematic conventions and characters, which are undoubtedly informed by the current "War on Terror".

Accordingly, this analysis demonstrates how three figures that Sherene Razack has noted come to symbolize the "war on terror"—the "dangerous" Muslim man, the "imperilled" Muslim woman and the "civilized" European—are articulated *in relation* to the civilized European (2008). The regime of visual representations found in the film is not only symbolically violent, but *ahistorical* of Western colonial conquests that have acted to discipline bodies and communities deemed different. It is argued here that a critical engagement with Hollywood cinema is necessary in order to unravel the complex ways in which Muslim bodies are scripted as dangerous, pre-modern and uncivilized in American popular culture. This examination will reveal how representations of Muslims in Hollywood are not only essentialized, but also how these visual practices act as forms of domination in which Muslim bodies, both on-screen and off-screen, come to be disciplined through racialized and gendered discourses. This is intimately tied to the project of empire and further foregrounded by the trope of the "War on Terror".

Mediating Muslims, Arabs and Islam

The history of Western encounters with Others has a narration that can be found in various cultural artefacts, including paintings, advertisements, television shows, films and literary works, to name but a few. Mapping these interactions and, especially, the representations that the West has constructed of racialized Others has been an important task that many scholars have undertaken. These representations have evolved over time, thus retaining a fluid existence, but they are greatly influenced by different regimes of power or empires. The persistence with which the West continues to depict encounters with Others rests heavily on colonial discourses. As Jiwani has noted, "representations not only tell us about the world in which we live, they also categorize that world, giving it an order that is intelligible and makes common sense" (2005: 183).

In his analysis of over 900 Hollywood films, Jack Shaheen (2001) lays the historical foundation for examining how the Hollywood film genre has represented and stereotyped the Arab community in U.S. popular culture. He elucidates the ways in which Hollywood has vilified the Arab community by representing them as money hungry, dangerous men or eroticized women or maidens. He stresses the point that these stereotypes dangerously construct Arabs in limited roles that are purposeful and politically motivated given American foreign policy with the Middle-East. This becomes especially problematic, as the Hollywood genre is one that has transnational circulation and global appeal that, consequently, adversely represents a

community that is extremely diverse, with varying religious beliefs, political affiliations and concerns. This strategy not only erases historical imperial encounters with Others, but as Shohat and Stam suggest, "The flawed mimesis of many Hollywood films dealing with the Third World . . . has less to do with stereotypes[2] *per se* than with the tendentious ignorance of colonialist discourse" (1994: 201-202; *emphasis is in original*). Wilkins and Downing (2002) have also highlighted in their analysis of the film *The Seige* the way in which the U.S. entertainment media limits their discourses of Arabs, Muslims and Islam. They assert that Orientalist ideology structures the American media's discourses about Arabs and Muslims problematically, effactually perpetuating discriminatory relations and understandings of these communities. They are careful to assert that media texts are a "site of struggle" (Hall, 1980), and their deployment of an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the film, which includes news discourse and viewer interpretations, is useful to understanding the intricate ways in which Muslims and Arabs are scripted and perceived in clichéd roles.

Stereotypical roles are intimately tied to larger political policies and structures, which are pervasive and can be found in cultural artefacts such as editorial cartoons, as Gottshalk and Greenberg have recently examined. They locate in political editorial cartoons the anxieties toward Muslims and Arab communities and mobilize the concept of Islamophobia[3] in their analysis. Islamophobia "reflects a *social* anxiety toward Islam and Muslim cultures", and they suggest that it "relies heavily on a sense of otherness" (2008: 5; *emphasis is in original*). Their critique situates the unspoken but visually-explicit derogatory assumptions underlying Muslims and their politics, religion, traditions and threatening relationship with the United States. These editorial images resonate with audiences because they are derived from commonsensical knowledge and, as a result, are made intelligible, appealing to the audiences to which they speak. The knowledge or truths they produce of the collective myth of the Arab—who is *always Muslim*—circulates a vicious cycle of "us" and our way of life versus "them"—a major theme in U.S. politics, especially in the Bush administration's deployment in legitimizing the "War on Terror" and normalizing torture techniques and violence enacted upon Muslim bodies and communities.

Analyses of the news media have not proved to be any more favourable, as discussed by various scholars (van Dijk, 1991; 1993; Wolsfeld, 1997; Said, 1991). Even when the reporting surprisingly turned its head around in 2004 to focus on the American mistreatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, the coverage was selective and sympathetic to the U.S. When photos of the torture of prisoners were released to media outlets, there was a massive failure to recognize the outright colonial violence of these acts by American soldiers. This was accomplished by linguistic omissions of the word *torture*, which was replaced by language such as "wrongdoing", "mistreatment", "alleged abuse", or "abuse" (Nacos & Torres-Reyna, 2007). This logic goes hand-in-hand with comments by prominent U.S. leaders and military officers regarding the alleged "infrequency" of such violent acts. Another tactic employed by the news media has been to position these torture techniques as part of a collection of techniques—among many others—that are used to coerce prisoners to reveal information crucial to the security of the state and the global "War on Terror". In this light, the omission of the word torture and its replacement with less threatening vocabulary normalize the occupation and conquest of other countries in the name of Euro-American security and the salvation of Muslim women, rhetoric with which an American public can identify—especially when the images cast are of Muslim men as dangerous suicide bombers and of women as concealed under their burqas and oppressed by their men. Especially important to note here is how the rhetoric of salvation in the form of unveiling

Muslim women (both symbolically and literally) garnered relevance to the "War on Terror" (a point that will be discussed in detail later).

Race Thinking and Orientalist Discourses

In her book *Casting Out: the Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics*, Sherene Razack (2008) unveils an intricate treatment of race thinking in the post-9/11 period, particularly with its ties to the "War on Terror". Razack's analysis exposes three prominent figures who come to symbolize the "War on Terror": the "dangerous" Muslim man; the "imperilled" Muslim woman; and the "civilized" European. She mobilizes Hanna Arendt's definition of *race thinking*, which is "a structure of thought that divides up the worlds between the deserving and the undeserving according to descent" (2008: 8). This defines the world as "colour-lined", marking the difference between the white and modern and the coloured and pre-modern. As Razack states:

> [R]ace thinking undergirds the making of empire, and that the world is increasingly governed by the logic of the exception, each chapter is an example of the camp—that is, a place where law is suspended...and Muslims are evicted from national community. . . . Ultimately, all Muslims become marked as outside political community when they are assumed to carry *within* them the possibility of threat to the nation.
>
> (Ibid: 18-19)

Throughout her analysis, Razack (2008) deploys Giorgio Agamben's conception of the camp, a place/state of exception, and she localizes Muslims as being considered outside of the political community in the West, showing the intricate ways in which the Western quest for empire unfolds in a post-9/11 period. She classifies the Abu Ghraib torture and abuse of Iraqi prisoners by U.S. soldiers as examples of the camp, where the law was not applicable to the crimes committed against Muslim prisoners and functioned to normalize these violent acts. In her analysis of the "imperilled" Muslim woman, Razack advances the argument that Western feminists are complicit agents in the "War on Terror", as the violence that is executed upon the Muslim community is legitimized through feminist narratives of "saving" the Muslim woman from the clutches of "savage" men and archaic laws. But as Zillah Eisenstein has so powerfully expressed in relation to the violation of women's bodies, "women all over the world command their rights and freedoms on their own grounds—the assistance of the West and its women does not aid in this recognition, nor does it enlighten Muslim women to discover that abuse or violence upon their bodies is an outright violation" (Eisenstein, 2002: 96).

Visual practices survey, discipline and marginalize bodies, but this marginalization is not equally distributed among all racial communities. Consequently, it differentially excludes some communities from active participation in their respective countries and exposes them to unwarranted violence. The invocation of a negative stereotype for one community may make its members uneasy; but given the uneven distribution of power relations, some communities do have the resources and social power to resist such stereotypes. However, in our current "War on Terror" climate, these representations of Muslim communities might be seen as acting on a "continuum of prejudicial social policy and actual violence against disempowered people,

placing the very body of the accused [Muslim bodies or similar-looking racialized persons] in jeopardy" (Shohat & Stam, 1994: 183).

Accordingly, there exists a visual heritage of representing Others in problematic ways. To expose this symbolic heritage would be essential in understanding how the contemporary media, as a hegemonic institution, plays a role in diffusing regimes of knowledge that are intimately tied to relations of power. As Stuart Hall noted that "Racism, of course, operates by constructing impassable symbolic boundaries between racially constituted categories, and its typically binary system of representation constantly marks and attempts to fix and naturalize the difference between belongingness and otherness" (1996: 445)

The body and its investment in power relations are "directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold on it; they invest it, train it, torture it, force it to carry tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (Foucault, 1979: 25). It is in and through the body—and especially in its relation to other bodies—that we are marked as different or Other. A configuration of the Muslim body requires a construction of otherness that is not only marked by psychological imaginings, but also in embodied practices.

For example, Said's (1978) examination of 19th century literature and art works reveals that Western encounters with the "Orient" were highly problematic. Images of Turkish baths by famous painters invoked racial hierarchies—whiteness being the most valorised—establishing a knowledge of Others and informing the way in which the West came to know itself as superior and civil in relation to the East. Said denounces a number of inaccuracies in a wide variety of suppositions about the Orient that have set the stage for Western imperialist conquests. As Said remarks, "Orientalism is fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the West, which elided the Orient's difference with its weakness. . . . [A]s a cultural apparatus Orientalism is all aggression, activity, judgment, will-to-truth, and knowledge" (1978: 204). Consequently, this establishes a distinct divide between the active West and passive East.

In keeping with this logic of thinking, Stuart Hall (1997) mentions how Europeans constructed their encounters with Africa. Black Africans were caught in a binary of primitive/civilized, whereby *civilized* was appropriated by the enlightened Europeans who had etiquette and manners, while *primitive* was used to identify the Africans on an evolutionary scale. In this sense, looking back at imperial and colonial conquests, it becomes evident that these databanks of images are both epistemically and materially violent, and that "representations about Others that were formed and circulated at that time helped solidify a sense of European self" (Jiwani, 2005: 33).

Particularly relevant to my analysis is Anne McClintock's (1995) articulation of how race and gender are not distinct categories of experience, operating in isolation from each other or other categories; rather, they in fact not only inform one another, but are at times contradictory and conflictual, giving light to their complexity. McClintock's explication of the dynamics of gender and race in colonisation divulges that, although white men created and enforced laws in their own favour, "the rationed privileges of race all too often put white women in positions of decided—if borrowed—power, not only over colonized women but also over colonised men" (McClintock, 1995: 6). Accordingly, the revelation of white women's power in the construction of empire cannot be overlooked and must be taken into account in order to unravel their historical and contemporary complicity.

Unveiling the Muslim woman both literally and metaphorically has been a fantasy and mission taken on by both Western men and women and currently has worked to ground the "War

on Terror". As Razack affirms, "For the West, Muslim women[s] [bodies, especially their covered bodies] are the markers of their communities' place in modernity" (2008: 16). Discussion of the veil in the context of France by Bradford Vivian (1999) reveals how a politics of seeing and being seen—or what she claims is a philosophy of the "visible"—is embedded in power relations that establishes differential power dynamics by those seeing and unveiling the Other. Unveiling the concealed Muslim body then acts as a form of acquiring knowledge about the Other, and effectively says more about those doing the unveiling and their power and their voyeuristic desire to unveil. It can "visually 'open up' the Islamic 'ghetto' by unveiling and testifying to the internal violence of Muslim communities" (Leeuw & van Wichelan, 2005: 329).

All too often the unveiling of Muslim women by Western feminists is accompanied by discourses of liberation or rescue of Muslim women from their *dangerous* Muslim men; hence the proposition that when we interpose gender and race as categories that are mutually constitutive, we can begin to glimpse the way in which empire is realized not only as a masculine-oriented project, but one that white women actively complement. This project has historically set-up binaries between the West and Others, as previously noted in the works of Said, Hall, and McClintock—binaries such as values/culture, modern/pre-modern, civilized/uncivilized, nature/culture, and secular/religious. Saving Muslim women abroad, such as Afghan women from the Taliban, or banning the hijab in various Western countries, while complex issue, resonates especially when we inject the language of gender equality and human rights into the discourse. However, the language of equality and human rights are all too often tools of colonial violence; as history has shown, we also ahistoricize the voices and activism of a variety of women across the globe under male privileged regimes of power.

It is among these debates that this essay situates the cultural relevancy of the character, Janet Mayes, played by Jennifer Garner, who figures in the film as the *civilized* female Euro-American. Her role re-enforces the gendered and racial discourses of the legitimacy of the saviour/protectionist rhetoric, essentializing but also normalizing the formulaic stereotype of the "dangerous" Muslim man, the "imperilled" Muslim woman and, consequently, the violence that ensues not only in the film, but also off-screen in Muslim communities. This is intimately tied to the continual surveillance and disciplining of these communities and bodies both within and without the West.

The Kingdom—Whose Kingdom?

The Kingdom is a film directed by Peter Berg in 2007 and features a cast of well-known U.S. actors such as Jamie Foxx, who portrays FBI Special Agent Ronald Fleury, and Jennifer Garner, who plays Janet Mayes, a forensic examiner. Other main characters include a bomb technician played by Chris Cooper, an intelligence analyst played by Jason Bateman, and Colonel Faris Al-Ghazi, a member of the Saudi State Police (SSP), played by Israeli Arab actor Ashraf Barhom. The story follows a team of FBI agents investigating the terrorist bombing of an American foreign workers compound in Saudi Arabia (as noted earlier, this story-line is inspired by two bombings in Saudi Arabia). The afore-mentioned four U.S. Special Agents are deployed to investigate the bombing, but have only five days to catch the criminals, giving the film a sense of urgency and *ticking time-bomb* logic. The team is paired up with Col. Al-Ghazi, who will work with them throughout the investigation.

From the beginning, there is tension between the Americans and the Saudis, as the former are forced to live in a gymnasium that is locked overnight, limiting the hours of investigation and

collection of evidence to which they are accustomed as U.S. authorities. Col. Al-Ghazi allies himself with the Americans as he too wishes to catch the terrorists, but he is also constrained by the Saudi Royal Family, who do not want any harm to come to the FBI agents on Saudi soil, since that could jeopardize U.S.-Saudi relations. Eventually, after much pleading, the FBI team is given permission by the Saudi Prince to probe the crime scene according to their American methods. As the story unfolds, they find the perpetrator, a wanna-be Osama Bin Laden named Abu-Hamza. The closing scenes end with a major car chase and shootout between the "good guys" (the Americans and Col. Al-Ghazi) and the "bad guys" (the terrorists). Violent, bloody scenes follow in an apartment building where they search for the FBI intelligence analyst, who has been kidnapped, but whom they eventually rescue.

In the final shootout scene, the agents find themselves in a room filled entirely with Muslim women and children, save for one older Muslim man lying on a couch. Mayes passes a lollipop to a frightened Muslim girl, who responds by handing her a blue marble.[4] Mayes, Col. Al-Ghazi and Fleury realize that this is the same type of marble that suicide-bombers strap onto themselves before they self-detonate. This dramatically changes the feeling in the room because the team is now aware that a potential terrorist is in there with them. Col. Al-Ghazi offers to help the old man on the couch get onto his feet in an attempt to get a glimpse of the man's hand since, as we are informed earlier in the film, bomb-makers are known to have missing fingers due to their dangerous craft. The man accepts the offer, which exposes his missing fingers to the Colonel, who utters, "Abu-Hamza". A shoot-out occurs in which Abu-Hamza and the Colonel, as well as the latter's murderer—the former's teenaged grandson—are all killed. In the end, the Americans find their target, Abu-Hamza, but at the expense of his young grandson, who is trying to follow in his grandfather's footsteps, and the Saudi Colonel.

The final scene depicts two overlapping conversations, the first between a young Muslim boy and his mother, and the second between Fleury and Mayes. What these conversations tell us is that this war between 'us' and 'them' will never end. The hate and need for revenge is so consuming that both sides articulate wishes to "kill them all". This leaves us with a feeling that the differences between both sides are incommensurable and will continue to erupt in violence.

Methodology

The methodology for this analysis borrows from Stuart Hall's "communication circuit", which examines how Hollywood during the encoding process produces meaningful discourse for its audience because "the institution-societal relations of production must pass under the discursive rule of language for its product to be 'realized'"(Hall, 1980: 130). Although Hall appreciates that texts can be read in various ways, he nonetheless posits that looking at the 'discourses in dominance' is paramount because a culture is inclined to "impose its classifications of the social and cultural and political world. These constitute a *dominant cultural order*, though it is neither univocal nor uncontested" (Ibid: 134). Here he introduces how societal discourses are hierarchical and ordered by "*dominant or preferred meanings*" (Ibid; *emphasis is in original*). Within my analysis, looking at *preferred meanings*, especially those that have become naturalized, is vital to reading the visual and verbal language of *The Kingdom*, which is organized in an order that is made intelligible to the culture in which it resides.

Here, the above concepts are applied in the textual analysis of the film, wherein it is noted the narrative strategies and the performance of main characters, with a particular focus on the only lead female character. The units of analysis are various scenes that feature Janet Mayes,

especially those that showed her in dialogue with her male colleagues and Muslim men. Although there are many ways to decode a scene, the paper pays particular attention to verbal and visual codes. It is noteworthy to mention here that there are very few occasions where other female characters occupy a visual presence in the movie, and during those occasions these characters are always veiled Muslim women. Accordingly, my choice to analyse the role of Janet Mayes (Jennifer Garner) is especially rich as this makes her visual presence hypervisible—a gendered and racial point of reference in stark contrast to the hyperinvisible-but-always-veiled Muslim women. Exposing this motif of the exclusion of Muslim women from the visual repertoire thus becomes central to my analysis.

An analysis of Jennifer Garner as *text within a text* is also employed. This takes into consideration her televisual performance and her star status as a text, whereby the paper scrutinizes her performance on a popular television show, *Alias,* with the specific intention of unveiling discourses associated with her performance on that show and her subsequent stardom as seen through celebrity magazine headlines and award shows.

> Stardom is one of the most devalued forms of social knowledge, yet it is a form of knowledge that we all possess, often with a high degree of expertise. Discourses on celebrities are capable of carrying a range of significant forms of information in regard to what we think we know about the world. What we say about stars is often a displaced form of discourse about our culture at large, and the belief systems that structure it.
>
> (Negra, 2001:8)

What is important to note here is how her performance is mediated not only in the film, but through various media. Although this analysis is far from exhaustive, it is significant because it points to the fact that we bring cultural knowledge as viewers to other media, which informs our viewing practices.

In examining this particular film, the paper mobilizes Razack's three *Allegorical* interrelated figures of the *dangerous* Muslim man, the *imperilled* Muslim woman and the *civilized* European (by extension the Euro-American), who is seldom clearly articulated, but is the backdrop against which the other two figures come to light. These figures, as noted by Razack, come to represent the "War on Terror". According to Razack, these allegorical figures in the post-9/11 period can be linked to a powerful resurrection of old Orientalism and technologies of surveillance, detention and outright suspensions of the law as applied to those remotely "Muslim-looking". These figures come to inform the narratives practices and characters of the film, but they also explicitly visually embody the techniques of objectification and subjugation through which the West has constructed itself as civilized and moral—a notion based on liberal claims that are especially problematic in a post-9/11 war in the Middle East.

Gender as a Technology of Empire: Decoding Janet Mayes

As previously mentioned, Janet Mayes' white, American body anchors the hyperinvisible Muslim woman's body and informs the scripting of the 'dangerous' Muslim man. It is argued here that Mayes' gender functions as a technology of empire, scripting the 'imperilled' Muslim female body through her position among her male Western colleagues as a gender-equal member of the team; her job as forensic examiner, which provides occasions in the film where the

oppressive, gender-biased traditions of Islamic religious practices thwarts the practice of Western scientific examinations of the body; her engagement with Saudi authorities, whose disdain for her references, her hyper-sexualized body as needing to be veiled; and her off-screen, mediated character on *Alias* as well as her star status, which undeniably also informs the way we can analyse her presence throughout the film. All of these discourses are centred on the construction of the *civilized* European—one who is a male-oriented subject, but with whom Western feminists are complicit in adopting a stance of saviour/protector toward Muslim women.

Throughout much of the film, Mayes appears to be out of place; the character is given very little dialogue, which consequently hinders her development as a character. Her seemingly arbitrary placement in various scenes and, specifically, as the only woman in an otherwise all-male team is arguably a deliberate decision by the filmmakers to accentuate the differences between American *liberal* women and Saudi *traditional* women. This out-of-placeness demonstrates the way in which Mayes' gender actively operates in the project of empire. This logic is demonstrated in several scenes, including one in which she and her male counterparts visit the Saudi Prince to plead for a more active role in the investigation. The narrative in this sequence develops by placing Mayes in opposition to the customs and traditions of Islamic culture, which are depicted through a gendered lens. Special Agent Fleury is told by Col. Al—Ghazi that Mayes cannot attend the meeting with the Prince because she is a woman. Fleury responds by telling the Colonel that it will be his job to report that to Mayes. This translates into a moment of tension, where the Muslim Colonel must act as a conduit through which Western modernity, in the name of gender equality, is transmitted and articulated. This displacement of Fleury onto the body of the Colonel is indicative of the power dynamics at work in this scene.[5] The representations here feed dominant discourses about how the West does not restrain or oppress its women (implicit here is the possession of the female object by the male subject); Western women are equal members of the team, government and society, such that to verbalize their gender inequality is to go backwards, which is reflective of the civilized Euro-Americans that the United States represents. What is interesting is that Fleury is the black "good guy", but given the differential racial hierarchies always at work, his power translates to a transnational level, exercising itself upon the body of the Muslim Colonel; here, his blackness is decontextualized and superseded by his American-ness.

In the case of the Colonel, this moment of strain appears to stem from the fact that he wants to catch the terrorists, therefore he feels he is in alignment with the morals and goals of the American's "War on Terror". However, this is positioned as irreconcilable with his religion, Islam, which, according to the diegesis of the film, is highly gender-biased and oppressive. In this situation, we see the *dangerous* Muslim as someone who exists not only in the Western imaginary, but whom "good" Muslims who are aligned with American politics also want to catch. Nevertheless, we also observe the "dangerous" Muslim as keeper of his women, who are imperilled by these men; as a result, the Colonel, a Muslim, is at odds with his religion. Thus, further analysis tells us that since there is no fluidity to the representations of Muslims in the film, the Colonel cannot be viewed as a complex character, as seen when he is forced to articulate the gender-biased traditions of Islam to a white Western woman.

Another encounter where Mayes' gender is shown to be a marker of difference and a technology of empire in relation to the Muslim woman's veiled body occurs when she attempts to examine the bodies of the casualties from the blast while under strict surveillance by the SSP. This scene is important for several reasons, the foremost being exemplified by the outrage expressed by the SSP when Mayes, a white woman, touches the bodies of dead Muslim men,

which is represented in the film as "*haraam*", or forbidden, by the Islamic faith. Again, this representation feeds hegemonic discourses dividing the scientific West against the backward and *primitive* East. Mayes' confusion and, later, frustration is obvious. Consequently, an SSP officer is called upon to take the fingerprints under the watchful and knowledgeable eyes of Mayes, the preferred meaning here is to draw upon discourses of gender inequality in Islam. Noteworthy here is the fact that many Muslim countries allow autopsies to be conducted, and although variations exist between countries, both men and women can perform them; yet in this scene we are lead to believe otherwise. So while Mayes is positioned as a white woman who has the expertise and knowledge to catch the terrorists—she, like her male peers, has had the opportunities in the U.S. to access higher education and has evidently succeeded in her field and in the FBI, which is a highly male-dominated agency—on Muslim soil her gender becomes evidence of her inferiority, which in turn highlights the backwardness of Islam. This feeds into and mobilizes a liberatory discourse in the film, and although Muslim women are representationally disembodied here—potentially a way to silence or marginalize their voices— they nonetheless exist as a central backdrop to the dominant imaginary that grounds this discourse. According to this line of argument, these racialized, oppressed and exoticized bodies should be unveiled, stripped before Western eyes, and given equal opportunities, like Mayes has, to succeed.

        This type of rhetoric can often be seen in Western news coverage and popular media. A bias towards how liberating the *unveiling* of Muslim bodies can be is often evident. For example, coverage of the fall of the Taliban is synonymous with this rhetoric in that it mobilizes the idea that 'unveiling' eradicates the plights of Afghan women. With their ties to the war, the images of Afghan women ripping off their veils feed hegemonic discourses of freeing these women (Stabile & Kumar, 2005: 773). What is interesting here is that, although not mentioned in the film, the East/West divide privileges a male perspective on saving women, albeit in different ways. It is not suggested here that white women are operating under a *false consciousness*, but it is important to elucidate the ways in which gender and race intersect—specifically how Western white women subscribe to a saviour discourse that is intertwined with a male protectionist stance, as Iris Marion Young (2003) has noted. In the story-world of the film, this stance is marketed as the ultimate gender ideal observed in the West, fusing the trope of the "War on Terror" with a global women's liberation movement, as if to suggest that liberation is not without its power dynamics, experienced differently by women of different races everywhere. As Razack asserts,

> We cannot forget for an instant the usefulness of her [Muslim] body in the contemporary making of white nations and citizens. Her imperilled body has provided a rationale for engaging in the surveillance and disciplining of the Muslim man and of Muslim communities.
>
> (2008: 144)

Another way Mayes' body is represented and codified in relation to the veiled Muslim body is demonstrated through her interactions with Muslim men. Throughout the film, Mayes is dressed in military pants with a t-shirt in an attempt to masculinize her body while still show her female curves, with specific emphasis placed on her breasts. On several occasions, she is commanded to cover herself up when in the presence of Muslim men, and she abides (though with contempt); this positions the *dangerous* Muslim man as lecherous and hyper-sexual.[6] Representing the

Muslim man as such evacuates the ways in which white men are perpetrators of sexual violence. This allocation of the lecherous, dangerous Muslim man also positions *imperilled* Muslim women's bodies as targets of such unlawful violence. Once again, this scene helps inform the discourse off-screen of Muslim women's bodies needing salvation from Muslim men. Here, a Foucauldian pastoral power takes form in this representation, whereby the West, through and by Mayes' white body, can save Muslim women from their violent, patriarchal communities; Mayes becomes the signifier of modernization and liberation. This pastoral power is exercised at the expense of both the women and their communities, consequently limiting these women's active role in commanding their own rights and freedoms without the assistance of the West. Following this, it is unavoidable to note that the construction of Mayes as a non-sexualized person, given her neutral clothing, represents the very small threshold within which the lecherous, dangerous Muslim man can be provoked into becoming a violent, sexual aggressor.

Lastly, an analysis of Mayes must be placed in the wider socio-cultural context of Hollywood and its visual representations, which include the mediated selves that are constructed around her portrayer, Jennifer Garner, residing outside the film—namely, her role on *Alias* and her mediated star status. These external realities that dwell outside the film's story-world undeniably inform her character within it. Her jump to fame came with her role as CIA agent, Sydney Bristow on the TV show *Alias*, for which she has been nominated for an Emmy Award for Actress in a Dramatic Series and has won a Golden Globe. Her role on the show can best be characterized as physically tough, deploying an emotionally strong character associated with masculinity and femme fatale qualities. In her role she often goes undercover and assumes various aliases, evoking a fluid, chameleon-like quality to her character. Jeremy Butler (1991) suggests that a casting team's choice of any actor to play a role always depends not only on the history of roles played, but also on the meanings within a particular star's image. It is suggested that her role as Janet Mayes is based on the assumption that a U.S. audience would decode her body in relation to the autonomous, tough, femme fatale role she plays on *Alias* as well as her hypersexual star status. Her star status is witnessed through such popular public accolades as being crowned one of the "50 Most Beautiful People" in *People Magazine* in 2002 as well as being named the "#1 Sexiest Woman of 2001" by *MAXIM*, a well-known men's magazine. Her off-screen character maps neatly onto the narratives of *The Kingdom*, as her American whiteness and gender are associated with liberal progress, modernity and gender equality. Consequently, reading her body off-screen as a sexual object—as associated with a male-oriented hegemonic discourse—also links her with a rhetoric of sexual liberation, which transposes itself in the film onto the act of unveiling Muslim bodies.

Sexual liberation here is coded as Western discourse, but one which Muslim women should strive for, as well. This narrative puts the veiled Muslim woman at odds with her own body as a sexual being; however, this also elucidates how her unveiling becomes paramount to her liberation through sexualisation under Western eyes/gazes. Although it is appreciated that the very mystery behind the veil and the fantasies that accompany its uncovering is indicative of a sexualisation and eroticization of the Other, the point here is that there is a need to address the way in which the Western gaze unveils the Other via the sexualized representation of a white body is a process wherein the white female body is also complicit. And here, Garner is the transmitter of that sexual male gaze through which the veiled Muslim body should reveal itself in the name of liberalism and feminism.

Conclusion

The continued production and successes of such movies as *Black Hawk Down, The Kingdom* and *The Siege* cannot be overlooked in light of the power struggles resulting from the 'War on Terror' and hegemonic representations of Muslim men and women in a variety of Western media. The visual narrative in *The Kingdom*—with its deployment of the only American female main character, Janet Mayes, whose body was scripted to represent essential differences between white and brown women—illuminates imperialist discourses, with Muslim bodies becoming the battleground upon which such discourses are both visually and literally being fought. It was argued that a critical engagement with Hollywood cinema is necessary to unveil the complex ways in which Muslim bodies are scripted as dangerous, pre-modern and uncivilized in U.S. popular culture. My analysis of various scenes, accompanied by verbal and visual narratives within the film, have elucidated how the *dangerous* Muslim man is scripted as lecherous, pre-modern, and uncivilized; and when he is not, as is the case with Col. Al-Ghazi, he is at odds with himself, given that his limited character is fixed in a rigid binary system. The 'imperilled' Muslim woman, although representationally disembodied throughout the film, is in fact hyperinvisible *through* Mayes, thus shaping public discourse about Muslim women on and off-screen. Here the paper has elucidated on how gender functioned as a technology of empire, in that the superior and ruling race, as embodied by the white American Mayes, marked Muslim women and their communities as the quintessential different Other.

Deploying an American white woman's body into the film is a strategic move not only to engage an audience who identify Garner as a star of TV's *Alias*, but also to visually mark the incommensurable difference between white nations and their liberated citizens, who include women and Others from nations with theocratic, oppressive regimes where women are in need of protection and salvation. The essentialized stereotypes that Hollywood invokes can only continue to feed the already material hierarchies of oppression that are grounded by the trope of the War on Terror. The main intention of this paper has been to deconstruct the Hollywood spectacle of Muslim bodies on film and reveal how these representations have been historically and contemporarily negatively charged and embedded with racial and gendered imaginings. What my engagement with these representations attempts to do is to deliver a more complex development of these characters, whose lives are materially affected by these representations off-screen. It is this point that becomes crucial in analyzing the ways we stigmatize Muslim bodies and communities, especially when we are living in a post-9/11 climate where security within and without borders is of outmost importance and has embodied consequences for Muslims in the U.S. and abroad. As Boggs and Pollard contend, "If present discourses and images surrounding war and terrorism are nonetheless illusory, their capacity to reproduce intensely patriotic and militaristic feelings across the broad population are likely to be heightened rather than diminished" (2006: 346).

Notes

*   The author would like to thank the Guest Editors, the anonymous referees, and Kenza Oumlil for their detailed comments on the paper.

1   For a review of the film, see: http://www.nydailynews.com/archives/entertainment/1998/10/29/1998-10-29_studio_under__siege_____arab.html. [Last accessed May 18, 2009].

2   For these authors, a stereotypic analysis is individualistic, much like my comment on Gottschalk and Greenberg's usage of Islamophobia, which does not capture the ways these frames of representing and thinking about Others are embodied in larger ideologies, social structures and categories.

3   These theorists do not explicitly articulate the basis of the construction of "otherness" that resides in categories of race, class, and gender, which do not function in isolation and are inextricably tied to projects of empire. Their definition relates the problem to the realm of psychology, which does two things: it personalizes and, consequently, individualizes the problem. Subsequently, this makes it noticeably less violent, which displaces the embodiment of the material impact this type of thinking has.

4   This scene is particularly powerful, as it is the final one of the movie. In this paper, the semiotic resourcefulness of this scene is grounded in the trope of the "civilized" West on a mission to civilize the ungrateful Arabs, whose response to the West's beneficence in helping with the material development of the primitive and hateful Arab is to return the gesture with hate represented by the marble. The marble generally is a "lovely" object, but prior to this scene in the film, it was constructed as a key ingredient in the making of the suicide bomber's arsenal. The child is generally considered to be an innocent, lovely thing. So combining the child and the marble to deliver a message of hate is cinematically a powerful construction that the viewer needs very little effort to decode.

5   Although I am unable to examine closely Jamie Foxx's role as Fleury (a black actor playing a black character) given space constraints, this is certainly a topic that can be further discussed. Particularly powerful in decoding this scene is how the "grammar of race" is used by Hollywood to deflect simplistic notions of racism. It was invented as an instrument of colonialism in India and perfected in Northern Nigeria, whereby the native is used to do the work of imperialism.

6   Although covering up or veiling in the presence of devout Muslim men is a sign of respect shown to the religion, here it is represented not only as the essence of patriarchy in the backward East, but it is also relayed through the gaze of the white males and their understanding of veiling/unveiling, which is ultimately sexualized. Accordingly, if the gaze is always sexualized, religious practices such as veiling cannot be legitimated.

References

Boggs, Carl & Pollard, Tom. (2006). Hollywood and the spectacle of terrorism. *New Political Science*, *28*(3), 335-351.

Butler, Jeremy. (1991). *Star texts: Image and performance in film and television*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Eisenstein, Zillah. (2002). Feminisms in the aftermath of September 11. *Social Text 72*, *20*(3), 79-99.

Foucault, Michel. (1979). *Discipline and punish*. Hammondsworth: Penguin.

Gottschalk, Peter & Greenberg, Gabriel. (2008). *Islamophobia: Making Muslims the enemy*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Hall, Stuart. (1980). Encoding-decoding. In Stuart Hall et al. (Eds.), *Culture, media, language* (pp. 128-138). London: Hutchinson.

Hall, Stuart. (1996). New ethnicities. In David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (Eds.), *Critical dialogues in cultural studies* (pp. 441-449). London: Routledge.

Hall, Stuart. (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. New York: Routledge.

Jiwani, Yasmin. (2005). The Eurasian female hero(ine): Sydney Fox as the relic hunter. *Journal of Popular Film & Television*, *32*(4), 182-191.

Jiwani, Yasmin. (2006). *Discourses of denial: Mediations of race, gender, and violence*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Leeuw, Marc de & van Wichelen, Sonja. (2005). "PLEASE, GO WAKE UP!" *Submission*, Hirsi Ali, and the "War on Terror" in the Netherlands. *Feminist Media Studies*, 5(3), 325-340.

McClintock, Anne. (1995). *Imperial leather: Race, gender, and sexuality in the colonial contest*. New York: Routledge.

Nacos, Brigitte & Torres-Reyna, Oscar. (2007). *Fueling our fears: Stereotyping, media coverage, and public opinion of Muslim Americans*. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Negra, Diane. (2001). *Off-white Hollywood: American culture and ethnic female stardom*. London: Routledge.

Razack, Sherene. (2008). *Casting out: The eviction of Muslims from western law and politics*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Said, Edward. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Random House.

Said, Edward. (1997). *Covering Islam: How the media and the experts determine how we see the rest of the world*. New York: Vintage Books.

Shaheen, Jack. (2001). *Reel bad Arabs*. New York: Olive Branch Press.

Shohat, Ella & Stam, Robert. (1994). *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the media*. London: Routledge.

Stabile, Carol & Kumar, Deepa. (2005). Unveiling imperialism: Media, gender and the war on Afghanistan. *Media, Culture & Society*, *27*(5), 765-782.

Tzanelli, Rodanthi, Yar, Majid & O'Brien, Martin. (2005). "Con me if you can": Exploring crime in the American cinematic imagination. *Theoretical Criminology*, *9*(1), 97-117.

van Dijk, Teun. (1991). *Racism and the press*. London; New York: Routledge.

van Dijk, Teun. (1993). *Elite discourse and racism*. California: Sage Publications.

Vivian, Bradford. (1999). The veil and the visible. *Western Journal of Communication*, *63*(2), 115-139.

Wilkins, Karin & Downing, John. (2002). Mediating terrorism: Text and protest in interpretations of the siege. *Critical Studies in Media Communications*, *19*(4), 419-37.

Wolfsfeld, Gadi. (1997). *Media and political conflict: News from the Middle East*. London: Cambridge University Press.

Young, Iris Marion. (2003). The logic of masculinist protection: Reflections on the current security state. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, *29*(1), 1-25.

About the Author

Michelle Aguayo is completing her doctoral studies in the Joint Doctorate in Communication Studies at Concordia University. Her research interests include gender and racialized representations in popular media from a critical race perspective. Her current work focuses on the concept of hybridity in relation to Latina identity mediated through popular culture with a specific interest on self-identified Latinas in Canada.

Citing this paper: