

**The problems of political representation in movies as being
rooted in an endemic cynicism that somehow cannot be refuted by
happy endings and convenient redemption**

Malak Hamad Alrashed

KSU, SA

It is not a new idea that Hollywood has manufactured progressive political ideas and positions that were incorporated into certain Hollywood films. Certainly, Communists and ex-Communists filmmakers had insinuated their progressive political ideas into mainstream genre productions; because they were aware of the ability of film of carrying influential ideologies to the various spheres of the American life. Hollywood's film studies, according to Tony Shaw, are fused with diplomatic, social, and political history by undergoing a deep analysis of the organizations involved in the filmmaking process.¹ It film studies explains why certain Cold War films have focused on certain issues at the expense of others. As well as exploring the relationship of Hollywood's coverage of events and America's conflicting political views, which ultimately considers the influence Hollywood film has on the public's of not only the Cold War, but other historical events in relation to the United States and other countries. "Certain films sought bluntly to instill hatred of the enemy among

¹ Tony Shaw. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2007) p1

the American people, while others tried in a more measured fashion to persuade Third World audiences of the virtues of Western-style democracy”². The representation of the Cold War battle highlighted themes such as “the dangers posed by the West by communist infiltration, the fears of a nuclear Armageddon, the ‘hot’ wars in Korea and Vietnam” in the films suggested by Shaw, for example Stanley Kramer’s *On the Beach* (1959) and John Wayne’s *The Green Berets* (1968).³

Cynthia Weber in her book *Imagining America at War* explores the relationship between film and politics and how cinema represents the war on terror. Weber, through giving examples of several films that were aired after the events of 9/11, investigates the debates about US foreign policy and a more fundamental approach about what it means to be an American. The events of September the 11th have inspired a great deal of work to be written and produced. In fact, Terry Nardin and Daniel J. Sherman comment that researchers have scanned the cultural landscape for signs of some fundamental shift in the mounts following 9/11. “It seemed inconceivable that an attack as sudden, as murderous, and as apparently unprecedented as that of 9/11 could have left no trace in the cultural domain”.⁴ Even studios have delayed the release of some movies, chiefly those relating to terrorism or those films that are in some way critical of the American military or of American foreign policy. Indeed, the events were turning up as plot elements in familiar places such as the TV series *Law and Order* and in a verity of movies. The aftermath of 9/11 had and still has a lasting effect on America as well as other cultures. The success of Micheal Moore’s film *Fahrenheit 9/11* might signify that not only America, but also the rest of the world are ready to seek answers and ask controversial questions on the event and the representation of it in popular cultures, specifically American films. Bruce Bennett on documenting the ‘War on Terror’ suggests that this so called ‘War on Terror’ has produced vast amounts of coverage on film, television, print journalism and online media. In his essay, Bennett recounts Jean Baurdrilard observation on the ‘first’ Gulf war (1990-1), she notes that it was the first war to be fought with live TV coverage, which resulted in such “an improbable orgy of material”⁵ that it was almost impossible to

² Shaw p2

³ Shaw p5

⁴ Daniel j. Sherman and Terry Nardin, Editors. *Terror, Culture, Politics: Rethinking 9/11*, 1vol (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2006) p1

⁵ Bruce Bennett, “Documenting the ‘War on Terror’”, *e-International Relations*, October 16th, 2013 <<http://www.e-ir.info/2013/10/16/documenting-the-war-on-terror/>>

distinguish between representation and reality in relation to what was actually taking place in Iraq. According to Bennett, live-TV has exemplified the way in which contemporary warfare “has become a media-spectacle so that the geographically-dispersed battlefield extends across the computer monitor, tablet, smartphone, television screen and cinema. Yet this is not new information; because propagandists have conducted parallel campaigns through news media and communication networks in order to generate support and consent for wars or military strikes or even gone to the measures of spreading disinformation in regarding terrorism.⁶ Furthermore, Hollywood movies have become essential in communicating, framing, and transmitting to the border general public a selection of prioritized facts, images of developments over others. Thereby consciously and sometimes unconsciously promoting a particular interpretation of events, which is the representation of the orient as being uneducated, uncivilized, and savage terrorists. Therefore, this essay will be investigating the ongoing political representations in America by film industries to form an idea of how the ‘War on Terror’ has been constantly explored under the context of Arab Muslim fundamentalists. This entails examining the motives that lay behind the making of ‘War on Terror’ films material at various stages of the conflict, and exploring the main post 9/11 themes addressed by key feature films and documentaries while assessing how films were received by a variety of audiences, and examining the ways in which culture and public opinions intersected with foreign policy-making in the United States, just like how it did, during the Cold War films. Edward Said wrote about the failure of the American media and US experts to understand and explain the Arab and the Muslim world. He argues that “Muslims and Arabs are essentially covered, discussed, apprehended either as suppliers of oil or as potential terrorists, Very little detail, the human density, the passion of Arab-Muslim life entered the awareness of even those people whose profession it is to report the Islamic world”.⁷ Perhaps this is the reason behind the problematic political representations of the orient in post 9/11 movies. Hollywood’s presentation of film reveals the story of America’s politics and metaphoric dimensions of ideological discourse and the critical role played by the state-private networks in mobilizing American and overseas public opinion always in the pursuit and

⁶ Bennett

⁷ Jenny Edkins and Nick Vaughan-Williams, editors. *Critical Theories and International Relations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009) p302

projection of ‘freedom’ and ‘independence’.

The events of September 11, 2001 led to a damaging split within the West over the future direction and goals of global political governance according to Jurgen Habermas in investigating the inaugurated dramatic changes in the international politics landscape since the early 1990s, which was the end of Cold War.⁸ Haberman remarks that the attacks of the suicidal hijackers who transformed the fully fueled airplanes along with their hostages into living missiles did not only physically demolish the tallest buildings in Manhattan, but they also “destroyed an icon in the collective store of images of the American nation”.⁹ Additionally, the presence of cameras and media has transformed the local event in real time into a global one that the whole world was a witness to. Haberman calls it the “first world historical event” where the explosion, the impact and the slow collapse were no longer a Hollywood production but a horrific reality, which was unfolded before the eyes of a global public.¹⁰ Yet, observations of such a unique event cannot really explain terrorism’s characteristics or if Osama bin Laden is the enemy or merely a convenient stand-in enemy created by media. This is precisely what Jon Lewis has proposed in his book on ‘The New American Cinema’ stating that the new Hollywood has taken shape as a result of a series of critical confrontations “between federal regulatory agencies and the Hollywood studios confrontations that took place since the 1980s have been settled in the studios favor”.¹¹ The entertainment business such as Time Warner Turner, Disney, Capital Cities and Blockbuster “reveal the extent to which antitrust regulation has become irrelevant or at least unenforceable in the new Hollywood”.¹² Lewis’s argument foreshadows and foregrounds an entertainment industry that may someday be controlled by companies that may be capable of implementing a cultural or a political agenda. This highlights The Communist Party of the United States of America’s decision to make the film industry a special organizing target in 1936, a movement that reflected Lenin’s and Stalin’s belief in the power of cinema.

Furthermore, Lewis gives the example of Oliver Stone’s movie *JFK* (1991) as a problematic

⁸ Jurgen Habermas ed. By Ciaran Cronin. *The Devided West* (Cambridge: Polity Press,2006) pviii

⁹ Habermas p6

¹⁰ Habermas p7

¹¹ Jon Lewis. *The New American Cinema* (Durham, N.C. ; London : Duke University Press, 1998) p3

¹² Lewis p4

representation of history in postmodern America, which conveys the idea that representations have always been problematic in the past, before the movies of 9/11. Lewis strongly urges the audiences of the dangers in believing everything they see. He argues that the “specific ways in which Stone has been vilified in the popular press for daring to tell such a story on screen says less about Stone’s intent or ability or good citizenship than it does about the complex set of relationships at work and at stake between the American political system and the various media that report on it”.¹³ The numerous attacks that greeted the release of *JFK* reflected the reactionary epoch that was ready to accept state doctrine as authorized history.¹⁴ However, the film did surprisingly receive the acceptance of the general public though Stone rejected the official public version in favor of one developed from the late New Orleans District.¹⁵ Though *JFK* does not sufficiently discredit conspiracy by giving the impression that such crimes are perfectly continuous as well as promoting the belief in the adversarial role of art itself towards a dominant ideology that substitutes for the further education and mobilization of the audience. *JFK* is just one sample of the many political influential movies that claimed to be a representation of history. One good example of a film that explored a very important event is Michael Moore’s *Fahrenheit 9/11*, which clearly from the title is a film/documentary on the aftermath of September 11 that aimed at exposing the Bush Administration’s agenda for pushing an unjust war in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The examples of *JFK* and *Fahrenheit 9/11* demonstrate the importance of popular culture in providing a space for lively, relevant, and essential debate of political matters. Since it has become a creative space where nuanced participatory debates take place among public citizens rather than with the elected representatives in Washington, DC. This created a room for the 9/11 events and the ‘War on Terror’ to be continuously reframed in discourse and films as it remains the focal point of American consciousness, as Jeff Birkenstein puts it: “a site demanding ongoing excavation, a site that marks *before* and *after* “everything” changed”.¹⁶ Indeed, the post 9/11 movies have produced more questions than answers, false representations of the so called “other” side of the world, and propaganda stereotypes of the characteristics of terrorists. This

¹³ Lewis p5

¹⁴ Lewis p217

¹⁵ Lewis p218

¹⁶ Jeff Birkenstein, Anna Froula, Karen Randell. *Reframing 9/11: Film, Popular Culture and the “War on Terror”* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010-2011) p2

unaccounted for representation of the Arab Muslim all began the moment president George W. Bush declared in his speech the words: “On September eleventh, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country, and night fell on a different world—a world where freedom itself is under attack”. The popular culture response of that day represents a pure distillation of the conflicts that the world faces, conflicts of the West vs. the (Middle) East, “capitalism vs. the vast class of exploited and underprivileged and religious fundamentalism vs. irreligious humanism”.¹⁷ In fact, Altheide argues that, by aiming to please the audiences and some key political leaders, major TV networks have embraced the emotional sweep of the 9/11 attacks and enabled the making of war.¹⁸ For instance, *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World* the 2003 mainstream film that many critics such as Jeff Birkenstein lauded to, had opinions that differed vastly on values for conservative political and religious commentators that appealed to a small yet passionate constituencies of a seemingly single-mindedness and ultimate success of an outnumbered crew fighting for God and the country. These commentators saw the film as a desirable narrative with which to support George W. Bush’s ‘War on Terror’ and how it should be fought. ¹⁹Proving that virtually everything lies within the domain of popular cultures. This means that no image, no voice and no political statement would lie beyond the potential boundaries of media consumption.

Saving Jessica Lynch (S JL) directed by John Fasano, illustrates the role of “Western motifs in the Bush administration’s depiction of the War in Iraq as a defensive struggle to protect “civilization” against the forces of “savagery”.²⁰ Stacy Takacs comments “ politicians and pundits alike depicted Americans as innocents besieged by wild savages and desperate for strong men with guns to rescue them”.²¹ S JL has used Western imagery to frame the invasion of Iraq as a defensive struggle to rescue civilization from savagery. They have represented images that claimed to make views, conduct research and describe the orient as if they have authority over it. Which is not completely a new idea, as it proved that Edward Said’s Orientalism is still alive and well as it is being exercised today but in a different form, a more dangerous entertaining form, that of Hollywood's. It continues to shape not only the American experience of Arabs and Islam, but also the

¹⁷ Birkenstein, Froula, Randell p4

¹⁸ Birkenstein, Froula, Randell p4

¹⁹ Birkenstein, Froula, Randell p5

²⁰ Birkenstein, Froula, Randell p7

²¹ Birkenstein, Froula, Randell p153

contemporary political realities of the Middle East. Through projecting such a negative image about Iraq, then America can claim that they have the right or that it is their responsibility towards humanity to free Iraq and civilize them. Said in writing *Covering Islam*, argues that Western work has a one sided representation of Islam, which is under a fundamentalism context.²² This is reflected in Paul Greengrass's film *Green Zone*, the movie which exposed that America's war on Iraq was not justified; because their claim that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction was not true.

Greengrass's *Green Zone* is a film that blurs documentary with fiction; it is a hybrid movie that is concerned with the unclear relationship between reality and representation that is according to Bruce Bennett a feature both of contemporary warfare and of contemporary culture. Bennett suggests that such hybrid movies as *United 93* (Greengrass, 2006) and *Green Zone* (Greengrass, 2010), *Battle for Haditha* (Broomfield, 2007), or *The Hurt Locker* (Bigelow, 2008) and *Zero Dark Thirty* (Bigelow, 2012)

Are gripping, tense narrative extrapolations from real historical events that fuse stylistic and formal elements of documentary film and TV (unsteady hand-held camera-work, natural light and location-shooting, sometimes employing individuals who were involved with the events depicted) with elements of fiction film (heroic protagonists, suspenseful narratives, dramatic and emotive musical scores) to generate the affective charge with which documentary is associated. However, a potential political problem with these films is that the documentary component can appear to present fictional passages as objective truth, leading to accusations that a film is at best, critically vacant and at worse, disingenuous and deceptive.²³

Bennett makes a legitimate argument since the film is based on Rajiv Chandrasekaran's book titled *Imperial Life in the Emerald City*, which is a nonfiction historical work. Hence, the representations in the film could perhaps appear to be factual depictions of not only the events but also the Iraqi people and their geographical location. Said notes that the representation of the 'Arab' in the West was a very peculiar sort. The usual writings on the Arabs depicted them as an unknown 'other'. This was translated in movies that emphasized the essential nature that enables one to observe the way in which the 'internal constraints' of the hegemonic

²² Edkins and Vaughan-Williams p303

²³ Bennett

systems were not just ‘unilaterally inhibiting’, yet actually productive for writers and thinkers who are operating within them. ²⁴Said argues that even when the authors themselves seemed to be representing the empire or imperial realities unconsciously, these issues constituted continuous inflections in their texts. This could also be applied to film producers such as Paul Greengrass, Peter Berg, and Micheal Moore, who sought out to present a sympathetic image of the Middle East, yet still managed to create an ‘otherness’ out of them through the way in which they have represented them.

For Said, the ‘Orient’ meant different things for Europeans and Americans, as Orientalism continued to shape not only the American experience of Arabs and Islam, but also the contemporary political realities of the Middle East. Said remarks that the Arab were portrayed as seemingly disjointed, as “a ‘camel-riding nomad’, a ‘caricature as the embodiment of incompetence and easy defeat’, the Arab took on a more menacing cast in popular discourse after the 1973 oil crisis”.²⁵ The Arab became and continued to become a subject without a history, the Arab was also someone who his ownership of the oil resources has threatened the developed world.²⁶ Said mentions that in popular cultures, “the roles reserved for Arabs were that of the ‘slave trader, camel driver, moneychanger, colour scoundrel...an oversexed degenerate, capable, it is true, of cleverly devious intrigues, but essentially sadistic, treacherous, low”.²⁷ This was precisely the case in *Green Zone* and *The Kingdom*. Jo Piazza in FoxNews, labels *Green Zone* as being “Anti-American” because he believes that the film “goes too far in blaming the United States government and that it manipulates the audience into rooting against American troops”. Indeed, Piazza quotes the movie reviewer Kyle Smith to support his claim that the American studio has perpetrated during an ongoing war vicious anti-American lies that are disguised as cheap entertainment.²⁸

Though one has to of course question if the invasion on Iraq was actually justified, was George W. Bush telling the truth when he declared that the goal of the American troops would be to ‘remove a threat and

²⁴ Edkins and Vaughan-Williams p298

²⁵ Edkins and Vaughan-Williams p299

²⁶ Edkins and Vaughan-Williams p299

²⁷ Edkins and Vaughan-Williams p299

²⁸ Jo Piazza, ‘Critics Decry Matt Damon Movie 'The Green Zone,' Calling It 'Anti-American' (Network: FoxNews.com, 2010) <<http://www.foxnews.com/entertainment/2010/03/11/new-matt-damon-movie-green-zone-called-appallingly-anti-american/>> [accessed 1 May 2014]

restore control of that country to its own people'. How can the United States claim at the time the armed forces were there to fight for the Iraqi people and will leave as soon as their work was done? Why would many critics be going against the film *Green Zone* when the themes of a once great civilization had fallen victim to tyranny and needs an intervention from a foreign power were of course not new. However, this essay does not aim at questioning or uncovering the lie behind the Iraqi war, but rather at the representation of the Iraqi Muslim people. American journalists have made a great deal of noise over the film in the sense that it went against America, yet non of them mentioned the misrepresentation of the Iraqi people as being uncivilized, living in a desert and exotically unfamiliar. The movie projected the nature of the Arab as a violent jihadist by using Islamic jargons such as "bism Allah" and "Allah akber" in the film as a way to create a detachment between the East and the West, and giving the impression that the Islamic civilization is fundamentally different from the so called 'Western civilization'. Though *Green Zone* was not the only movie that carried certain representations that may have been unintentionally planted there, Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* sought out to expose the Bush Administration for seeking at pushing an unjust war in Afghanistan and Iraq, yet managed to repeat the same misrepresentations as well.

"One of the most striking ways Anglo-American filmmakers have responded critically to this global explosion of violence and its spectacular hypermediation, is through a generic and stylistic turn to the production of documentaries".²⁹ Though, *Fahrenheit 9/11*'s genre is a little problematic because though it is categorized as a documentary, which therefore means that it is a nonfiction work, some critics have confused the genre. The film mixes sober outrage with mischievous humor that may blur the line between documentary and demagoguery. His work has been giving a great deal of names such as; a muckraking social satire, an op-ed piece, an editorial cartoon, and even a beer commercial.³⁰ Cynthia Weber quotes Christopher Hitchens saying;

To describe this film as dishonest and demagogic would almost be to promote those terms to the level of respectability. To describe this film as a piece of crap would be to run the risk of a discourse that would never again rise above the excremental. To describe it as an exercise in facile crowd

²⁹ Bennett

³⁰ Cynthia Weber .Imagining America at War: Morality, Politics and film. ((London and New York: Routledge, 2006) p132p134

pleasing would be too obvious... [it is] a sinister exercise in moral frivolity, crudely disguised as an exercise in seriousness... masking itself as a demonstration of 'dissenting' bravery.³¹

The movie is named after a famous Bradbury novel called *Fahrenheit 451*, published in 1953. It tells a story of a time when reading the written word was banned so people had to read images and moving pictures instead. In a way, the name is symbolic in emphasizing the importance of pictures in carrying importance messages. However, that is still ironic for a movie that aimed at resistance and revealing the complete truth. Because though the film did in fact try to assess the truth, it failed like other movies at representing the orient in an accurate manner.

The problems with maintaining an accurate political representation in films, is that the audiences might not welcome them. Since the cinema is supposedly a place for entertainment not for the allegedly anti-jingoistic, films as some dramas might "hit too close to the truth to be enjoyed as entertainment".³² Jeff Birkenstein suggests that movies such as "*Syriana*, 2005; *In the Valley of Elah*, 2006; *Lions for Lamp*, 2007; *Redacted*, 2007; [and] *Rendition*" have been box office failures perhaps for that reason. Birkenstein also comments on *Fahrenheit 9/11* as being the only film related to post- 9/11 to make a substantial amount of money and become a cultural force. "The production and post-production schedules for documentary-style films can therefore also be much shorter than for a conventional fictional feature, allowing a film to be released in a rapid response to current events with films taking on the role of journalistic commentary."³³ The film recounts the Bush administration's reaction to 9/11 mentioning the war on Afghanistan, the policies on homeland security, the passage on the Patriot Act, and finally the war on Iraq against Saddam Hussein.³⁴ Moore implies that the Bush family's ties to the Saudi royal family, the ties to their shared oil interests, have a large role in accounting for the Bush administration's actions and inactions in its 'War on Terror' Moore ties the invasion of Iraq to personal interests that the Bush administration had with the Saudi royal family. In the film, Moore shows the moment where president Bush heard of the attacks of 9/11 while he was in the famous Florida elementary school classroom, by one of his secret services that the nation is under attack.

³¹ Cynthia Weber p134

³² Birkenstein, Froula, Randell p70

³³ Birkenstein, Froula, Randell p70

³⁴ Cynthia Weber .*Imagining America at War: Morality, Politics and film.* ((London and New York: Routledge, 2006) p132

Moore shows the president's response, which was sitting there for almost seven minutes. During which, Moore's voice intervenes speculating over what Bush must have thought throughout these seven minutes by saying "who screwed me? Was it Saddam, the Taliban, the Saudis..."³⁵. To automatically link the terrorists attack with the "Saudis" just proves that Orientalism is still alive and may never have gone or is going anywhere for a very long time. Cynthia Weber notes that Michael Moore's "movie is ... about [his] use of sounds and images to speak "truth" to "power"...[yet he only seems to ask Americans to] see. Also, because of the way in which images function in a Michael Moore film, "seeing" may not mean "thinking" at all, unless it is about letting a morally certain Moore think for "us",³⁶ unlike Lila Lipscomb³⁷ who asks Americans to think. Moore's method of thinking for the audience is not new, as documentaries have "greater rhetorical force than conventional fiction film and television due to an abiding impression of immediacy or indexicality...[people usually miss the fact that] documentary production always involves staging and selection, the global explosion of reality TV suggests that documentary, nevertheless retains a fascination for audiences through the promise of immediacy".³⁸ This interpretation of events in a one-sided manner is not exclusive to documentaries as Bush himself has interpreted the Iranian filmmaker's Mohsen Makhmalbaf's movie *Kandahar* to help justify his bombing on Afghanistan.

Representations are powerful, yet what is even worse is a misleading interpretation that has used a nonwestern film for their own agenda. *Kandahar* is a story about an Afghani refugee called Nafas who undergoes a journey from Canada to Afghanistan in search of her sister, it is not only Nafas's journey but also Afghanistan's incomplete journey out of the legacies of war. The film stands as a critique of official US moral foreign policy impulses, yet surprisingly Bush makes an arguable plea for audiences to see *Kandahar*. Weber mentions that the Bush administration has encouraged Americans to view the film.³⁹ The Bush administration has read the film story as an allegory of the US troops in search of Osama bin Laden, just as Nafas is in search of her sister. The manner in which Nafas urgently needs to find her sister before hope is eclipsed by darkness is reflected within official US discourse as the US needs to capture bin Laden before

³⁵ Cynthia Weber p139

³⁶ Cynthia Weber p146

³⁷ A mother of one of the soldiers that died in Iraq. Cynthia Weber p146

³⁸ Bennett

³⁹ Cynthia Weber p72

more dark terrorist acts are committed against the West.⁴⁰ This is the moment where the Bush administration has turned *Kandahar* into being a representation that supports the war on Afghanistan. The need to imagine a terrorist subject and to put a face to the threat is essential for both a sense of personal security and for driving and justifying reactions to the war on Afghanistan and Iraq.

One has to admit that there are some limitations to Said's Orientalism theory; nevertheless, his focus on the Orient as an imagined threat does still continue and can be reflected on a great deal of contemporary films. Sara Upstone claims that the American media's attention on 9/11 and its aftermath has recreated an "imagined identity" of the "other" that has to be identified, scrutinized, and ultimately either rejected or reformed.⁴¹ Indeed, many media commentators pointed out the ways in which the reactions of 9/11 have to be seen within the context of Said's theory of Orientalism. The fear of the Muslims, Upstone writes, is an extension of the "othering" of the Muslim subject throughout history. Film representations of Muslims only echo the existing escalation of and the support of the stereotypes of Muslim communities by linking them to the image of terrorism. Islam comes to be represented as the unknown threat that so called dangerous "other" in the midst of "civilization". Orientalism becomes a layering of incidences, which together have built an overwhelming picture of Islam as being barbaric, reinforces the central events. What is more, is that movies such as William Friedkin's *Rules of Engagement*, Ridley Scott's *Black Hawk Down* and Peter Berg's *The Kingdom* have produced sounds within the narrative of a hyper-realistic battle-centered scene that are associated to the idea of terrorism. The role of sound should not be neglected in thinking about the representation in the production and reception including its pervasive, yet non-linguistic or nonmusical forms broadly categorized as "sound effects".⁴² The sounds of the 'War on Terror' movies have been constantly associated with sounds of loud explosions, weapon firings, and most importantly sounds that are related to an Islamic context such as the sound of prayer. Most of the films invoking Islam or the Middle East for that matter contained in the soundtrack, the sound of the *adhaan*⁴³ in the background as a sign of a change of a geographical location.⁴⁴ Yet, one has to argue that the *adhaan* sound does not only function as a way for

⁴⁰ Cynthia Weber p84

⁴¹ Birkenstein, Froula, Randell p36

⁴² Birkenstein, Froula, Randell p84

⁴³ The call for prayer <http://www.zawiyah.org/zawiyah/fiqh/adhaan> [accessed 1 May 2014]

⁴⁴ Birkenstein, Froula, Randell p87

identifying location, it has become a sound of dread, establishing narrative tension through an emphatic aural announcement of the narrative threat unfolding before the audience. This single sound functions as a means to confuse Islam with terrorism, which therefore means that Muslims prayer becomes the sound of Islamic fundamentalism rather than a common cultural practice. Corey K. Creekmur mentions a list of movies that contain Arabic words or Islamic prayer as a beginning of the movie; “*Syriana* (Stephen Gaghan, 2005) is actually invoked as a film – prior to the beginning of any narrative content—by an Arabic prayer that perhaps ironically accompanies the movie’s paratextual corporate logos. *United 93* (Paul Greengrass, 2006) more conventionally begins with a prayer by the hijackers on the morning of September 11”⁴⁵ hence, Muslim prayers invites the audiences to brace themselves for the terror that is sure to follow. “Islam’s soundscape is misrepresented not only through the simplification of the production of sound and language, but perhaps even more importantly, through scant attention to actual practices of audition in Muslim cultures”.⁴⁶ Popular media continues to represent sounds that have emphasized the clash between the Western and the Eastern civilization.

The soundtrack that was associated with the sound of ‘War on Terror’ also included some Arabic words. Which made the sound of the Arabic language an indication of fear. This could be related to Edward Said’s “aural Orientalism, the sound of cultural difference mediated through questionable forms of expertise and ideological control”.⁴⁷ Cory K. Creekmur mentions that in recent films the languages of Arabic, Farsi, Urdu or other Middle Eastern languages have been employed in order to signify mystery and danger.⁴⁸ Those languages are reduced as chatter or babble; they have become the mindless noise of indoctrinated mobs rather than the medium of individual expression. Thus, the American voices often become the distinctive voices of movie stars that cut through the din that is the collective voices of the terrorists “other”. Namely, this not only downgrades the Arabic language into an inferior, but actually creates superiority of the English language. In Ridley Scott’s *Body of Lies* (2008), for example, is about a CIA agent played by Leonardo DiCaprio who hunts down a powerful terrorist leader in Jordon, an Arab Islamic country in which

⁴⁵ Birkenstein, Froula, Randell p87

⁴⁶ Birkenstein, Froula, Randell p88

⁴⁷ Birkenstein, Froula, Randell p92

⁴⁸ Birkenstein, Froula, Randell p90

geographical locations in the Middle East are projected. *The kingdom* is a film that is based in Saudi Arabia where American agents are sent to investigate the bombing of an American facility in Riyadh. Both these movies and others reflect a pattern, a pattern that suggest that America sees itself as the so called hero that needs to rescue the world from itself; because surly the Middle Eastern countries are not capable of protecting themselves without the help of the Americans.

Still, one cannot claim that the representations by the Americans of the orient are a new aspect in Hollywood films. Hollywood may have been reluctant to explicitly represent the terrorists of the 9/11 attacks and their aftermath, reluctance similar to that of the lack of explicate engagement with the Vietnam War between 1968 and 1978. Projections of terrorism attacks in films have come to carry a fear of some sort that has created the politics of fear. Those films discussed in this essay have come to promote the politics of fear and numerous surveillance practices and rationales under the claim of keeping America safe. In fact, “by the mid 1990s, many high school students have “peed in a bottle” as a condition of participating in athletics, applying for a job, and in some cases, applying for student loans and scholarships”.⁴⁹ This has not only helped in endorsing the misrepresentation of the Middle East, the Arab and the Muslim, but also facilitated the American government into executing some hidden agendas. Hollywood’s history has proven that producers have always claimed to be representing political events in the question of what have the vigilance done to America truthfully. For example, John Wayne is said to have made the only major Vietnam War movie to come out of Hollywood during the divisive conflicts.⁵⁰ Even the Pentagon regarded Wayne as its single most effective recruiting agent in the decades after the Second World War. Though one has to observe the contrasting difference between Wayne’s *The Green Berts* for instance and *Green zone* in reflecting the relationship between Hollywood and the military. While the first received the support of the military, as it was a pro-war movie, the other was criticized for exposing the military’s hidden agendas. Though a handful of films questioning the military were produced long before the events of September 11 in the mid-1960s. The most influential was Sidney Lumet’s *Fail Safe* (1964) and James Harris’ *The Bedford Incident* (1965).⁵¹ *One movie Seven Days in May* (1964) had even “toyed explicitly with the military-industrial complex theme

⁴⁹ Birkenstein, Froula, Randell p13

⁵⁰ Shaw p 224

⁵¹ Shaw p 225

by showing a hawkish air force commander ...plotting the overthrow of the US government in order to prevent the ratification of a disarmament treaty.⁵²

In conclusion, Filmmakers have a difficult time in documenting a critical purchase on 'War on Terror' as cinema is a crucial element of the media environment where the conflict is conducted according to Bennett.⁵³ As a result, some of the more critically productive films are those that engage directly with the mediation of the conflict itself between reality and representation. Yet at the same time, audiences should be aware of the limitations of the representations in films even if the films are under the category of documentary or based on a true story. Moreover, film directors have a great deal of authority and control over what can and cannot be shown to the audiences. In other words, directors should try not to be biased in telling stories in movies that claim to be based on a nonfictional work such as the film *Green Zone*. Films such as *Green Zone* and *Fahrenheit 9/11* are projected as films that are interested in the problem of finding an adequate way of representing facets of the 'War on Terror', still those films cannot help but lead the audiences to the implication that Americans represented as American soldiers in movies, are the primary victims since a murder of one American soldier would probably be the dramatic core of any film representing war. In support of this argument, Bennett quotes the US philosopher Judith Butler in commenting that she observes, for instance:

The operation of cameras, not only in the recording and distribution of images of torture, but as part of the very apparatus of bombing, make it clear that media representations have already become modes of military conduct. So there is no way to separate, under present historical conditions, the material reality of war from those representational regimes through which it operates and which rationalize its own operation.⁵⁴

This emphasizes the dangers that come from representations, even if one is aware that films are not accurate and therefore should not be judged on accuracy, one cannot and should not forget that all movies for that matter are someone else's interpretation of a certain event. What is even more important is that, audiences should never let down their guards when they are watching fragmentary representations lost in a vast field

⁵² Shaw p 225

⁵³ Bennett

⁵⁴ Bennett

of sounds and moving pictures because all films are according to professor Ian Scot, are ideological. Indeed, Scot suggests that “Hollywood’s foreign policy history does have something to share about the nature, confluence and complexity of state power and authority; in this age, and many that have gone before it”.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Ian Scott. “International Relations on Screen: Hollywood’s History of American Foreign Policy”, October 20th 2013, < <http://www.e-ir.info/2013/10/20/international-relations-on-screen-hollywoods-history-of-american-foreign-policy/>>

References

- Bennett, Bruce “Documenting the ‘War on Terror’”, e-International Relations, October 16th, 2013
<http://www.e-ir.info/2013/10/16/documenting-the-war-on-terror/>
- Birkenstein, Jeff, Froula, Anna, Randell, Karen. Reframing 9/11: Film, Popular Culture and the “War on Terror” (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010-2011)
- Edkins, Jenny and Vaughan-Williams, Nick, editors. Critical Theories and International Relations (London and New York: Routledge, 2009)
- Habermas, Jurgen ed. By Cronin, Ciaran. The Devided West (Cambridge: Polity Press,2006)
- Lewis, Jon. The New American Cinema (Durham, N.C. ; London : Duke University Press, 1998)
- Piazza, Jo. ‘Critics Decry Matt Damon Movie 'The Green Zone,' Calling It 'Anti-American' (Network: FoxNews.com, 2010) <<http://www.foxnews.com/entertainment/2010/03/11/new-matt-damon-movie-green-zone-called-appallingly-anti-american/>> [accessed 1 May 2014]
- Shaw, Tony. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2007)
- Sherman, J. Daniel and Nardin, Terry, Editors. Terror, Culture, Politics: Rethinking 9/11, 1vol (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2006)
- Weber, Cynthia .Imagining America at War: Morality, Politics and film. ((London and New York: Rutledge, 2006)
- Scott, Ian. “International Relations on Screen: Hollywood’s History of American Foreign Policy”, October 20th 2013, < <http://www.e-ir.info/2013/10/20/international-relations-on-screen-hollywoods-history-of-american-foreign-policy/>>