| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Hollywood's (Mis) Construction of Gender: The Aesthetics and Politics of Stigmatising Arab/Muslim Women

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| **ABSTRACT**

The image of the Arab and Muslim woman, whether as sexually obsessed and oppressed or simply a backward terrorist invented and reinvented in the studios of Orientalist filmmakers, has been an object for decades (and hardly a subject) of imperial Orientalist discourse. From being depicted as repressed mysterious harems sexually outfoxing one another to gain the sheik's attention to eroticised veiled belly dancers alluring the audience to eventually fanatical extremists threatening the United States, Arab and Muslim women's representation reflects that Hollywood cinema had reached its sexist and racist height long before the September 11 attacks. By presenting them as voiceless and unable to speak for themselves, the entire industry not only undermine the efforts of female Arab and Muslim activists to achieve gender equality but also acts and reacts within a vicious hegemonic patriarchal discourse that hinders their progressive attempts to better their image.

1. Introduction

> _Unchallenged, mainstream film coded the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order. In the highly developed Hollywood cinema, it was only through these codes that the alienated subject, torn in his imaginary memory by a sense of loss, by the terror of potential lack in phantasy, came near to finding a glimpse of satisfaction: through its formal beauty and its play on his own formative obsessions._ (Mulvey, 1975, p. 59)

Orientalists have always been fascinated and intimidated, attracted and threatened by unveiling anything that is obscurely veiled to them. From presumably unravelling the enigma of the Pyramids to uncovering the mystery of the Arabian nights passing through unclothing the veiled harem, they curiously yet fictitiously continue to strip off the so-called Orient from its autonomy secrecy and privacy. With a buried obsession to know every single facet of it, they are bent on fantasising about it as far as feasible, romanticising all of its elements, and so disguising it under the mask of _realness_ (that is, verisimilitude). A simple, repetitive, and imitated reality has always been favoured by Orientalist filmmakers to construct a conventional, monolithic, reductive image of Arab and Muslim women as seen on the silver screen. Throughout its stereotypical lenses, Hollywood cinema (along with other Western film production companies) thus colludes in constructing and maintaining its 'model' Arab female, who has been portrayed for decades as suppressed and oppressed, indecent and libidinous, ignorant and backward, violent and terrorist, devious and villainous and so forth.

'The Arab woman' in general, as has been sold by Western conceptions, has been an object (hardly a subject) of imperial Orientalist discourse brought to screens to be gendered, feminised, and last but not least, stigmatized in every way possible. This article, therefore, attempts to shed light on the issue of representation of Arab and Muslim women first as sexual/sexualised objects of

the late 19th and early 20th century postcards, and later as they were brought to the moving pictures as obsessed, eroticised and staticised harems pitted against their progressive Western counterparts. This representation, however, has changed drastically from sexualised to weaponised female bodies, merely depicted as terrorists saturated with fanatical thoughts.

2. Harem Fantasy; Harem Obsession
The suppressed/oppressed Arab woman as an ideal Orientalist theme has taken an immense portion of the Orientalist art and literature available since the nascence of Western Orientalism. Despite the fact that many Muslim countries are culturally and socially struggling against patriarchy, women have been held as sacred, almost unapproachable, members of society, representing the dignity of Arab and Muslim families. It goes without saying that, as much as this has been common knowledge to Orientalists, it has only made her a mesmerising subject/object to approach despite her inaccessibility. This inaccessible female is taken by the (neo)colonial discourse as a sexual object of desire to be tamed, dominated, and, last but not least, devalued and discarded. In line with the above, Shohat contends that

> The inaccessibility of the veiled woman, mirroring the mystery of the Orient itself, requires a process of Western unveiling for comprehension. Veiled women in Orientalist paintings, photographs, and films expose flesh, ironically, more than they conceal it. It is this process of exposing the female Other, of literally denuding her, which comes to allegorize the Western masculinist power of possession, that she, as a metaphor for her land, becomes available for Western penetration and knowledge. (Shohat, 1991, p. 57)

The 'Orient' as painted, narrated, or photographed is nonetheless a mere imaginative illusion brought to life by the libidinous and sadistic desires Orientalists project onto it. Recalling Ingres' reading through Lady Mary describing her trip to Turkey in 1716 and her experience in the *Turkish Bath*, one would assume how hyperbolically Ingres plunged into a phantasm that initially had nothing to do with reality other than seeking to carve all of his idiosyncratic and erotic cravings into his painting *The Turkish Bath (1863)*. His reading of Lady Mary is literally taken out of context to quench his oversexualised desires by depicting Turkish women as sexually obsessed with one another. This Western obsession with Muslim women has continued to satisfy such promiscuous drives through other 'artistic' means.

Photography, for instance, carried on the assumption of exposing the harem to its spectators through what Malek Alloula calls "the figural representation of the forbidden" (1986, p. 14). Alloula's analysis of a collection of colonial postcards of Algerian women and couples exposes the photographer's voyeuristic complexities ("*scopic* desires"), which he could partially yet discontentedly trespass only via the (mis)construction of a replacement of the veiled woman. The Muslim woman here, seen as the 'Orient' in the colonial eyes, is, in fact, on a vantage point, that is, a watchtower. She is on an observation post (the panopticon), availing herself of further *knowledge* by her own gaze through her veil; the attire that is seen as a form of oppression is rather her source of power and a significant tool of resistance the colonial photographer can by no means defeat. Her power here lies in both her 'feminine gaze' from under the veil and her denial of fulfilling the photographer's scopophilic desires. Seeing him without being seen by him, "she is the concrete negation of this desire and thus (she) brings to the photographer confirmation of a triple rejection: the rejection of his desire, of the practice of his "art", and his place in a milieu that is not his own" (Alloula, 1986, p. 7). Nothing else could fulfill his desires and gratify his frustrations other than creating his own version of the harem, a "double" or a "stand-in" (Alloula, 1986, pp. 14,18).

In his studio, the photographer has the authority over his models since they are there to obey his orders and fulfill his wishes. He then only veils or unveils the double to create an exotic version of the original, a simulacrum, to meet his own illusionary gratification and his "symbolic revenge upon a society that continues to deny him access and questions the legitimacy of his desire" and therefore his wanton "art" (Alloula, 1986, p. 14) and unwanted presence. The inconsistency here, as elucidated by Alloula, resides in the imperfectness of the model and the exaggeration of what stands for the original (1986, p. 18). This 'figural representation' is nonetheless an impecunious and inferior depiction of the original because of the excessiveness of the accessories arranged and placed by the photographer to generate his own Orientalist perception of the harem, that is, "an impoverished version of the original" (Alloula, 1986, p. 18). This excess of signs is supposedly reflective of the real calls to mind Jean Baudrillard's treatise of *Simulacra and Simulation*. In his examination of the role of images in modern-day societies, he contends that "Abstraction today is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: hyperreal" (1988, p. 166).

The harem in Western film perception is similarly exaggerated through the overuse of signs in pursuit of (re)constructing a mystical stand-in version of the Arab and Muslim woman. For instance, in an early classical Orientalist film, Edgar G. Ulmer's *Babes in Bagdad* (1952) reveals to its audience an *imaginary* "Arab custom" that permits Arab men to own as many harems as they wish to serve them all day (Gregory Ratoff's *Abdulla the Great* (1955) and later Frank Coraci's *Around the World in Eighty Days* (2004) repeated the same stereotype on Arab women). Hassan (acted by John Boles, a white American singer, and actor) has twelve attractive harems at his disposal, all locked for himself in one inaccessible private space and all cautiously guarded by his castrated servant

Sinbad (Sebastian Cabot, a white English film actor). Through the same phantasm of the photographer, the director here embarks on stripping off his actresses (similar to the photographer's models), dressing them in what he assumes stands for the harem, and objectifying their bodies in quest of fulfilling his suppressed desires. Not only can he control the movement of the camera, but he can also dictate his actress's movements, her gestures, and her expressions, imprisoning her in a film frame in an effort to capture a *fetishistic* image/representation of her *fragmented* erotic body, ready to be devoured by a passive *scopophilic* gaze. Ulmer's model is then eagerly developed based on his preconceived stereotypes of Arab and Muslim women, which must have been derived from previous Orientalist texts or paintings, or perhaps an amalgam of both.

In representing the harem role, the female actress, an extra, under the eye of the camera is at all times dressed unreasonably and excessively in *extra*vagant costumes and abundant jewellery, sitting in the middle of a luxurious Arab courtyard surrounded by attractive servants, belly dancers, amusers, and musicians as if she were constantly in a wedding banquet. However, she is not alone, for the harem in the Western Orientalist perception must come in 'a plurality of females' since the sultan or the sheikh mysteriously inherits or owns more than one. As in *Babes in Bagdad*, all the female characters are meticulously picked and chosen by the director to look sexual and attractive, yet they are all portrayed as inactively purposeless and mindless, as mere bodies and objects competing with one another over a night with their male owner. They are commodities to the director, the male characters in the film, as well as the male/female spectators, and hence "the camera's fetishization of (their bodies) is the ironic reminder of the Western projection of stars' bodies as a commodity" (Shohat, 1991, p. 76). The stereotype that harems are available at all times to their male owner is but a reflection of the availability and accessibility of the actresses themselves to the director's objectifying instructions, if not whims. To the male director, they are sometimes put at his disposal as mere objectified properties, bodies ready to encapsulate his concealed *scopic* desires to eventually form and feed his impoverished yet hyperreal version of the harem. For instance, some popular actresses were forced at some point in their careers to engage in sexual intercourse or nude scenes.

3. Hollywood's Binary Preference: Western Woman versus Arab Women
On the whole, there are two conventional versions of the harem fabricated and promoted by Hollywood and other American or European film productions: that which stands for the sexually complying and obsessed Arab/Muslim woman and that of the attractive, alluring, independent white Western woman who (un)willingly or accidentally ends up as one of the sheik's harems. This is nowhere better illustrated than in Arthur Joffé's *Harem* (1985), a classical captivity narrative wherein Diane (Nastassja Kinski), an American stockbroker trainee living a lonely yet independent life, is drugged and kidnapped right from the centre of New York by Selim (Ben Kingsley as an Arabian Sheik). Tricked to take a cheap ride to the Statue of Liberty (a symbolic scene celebrating the freedom she has in America), she finds herself held captive among dozens of Arab women in a timeless harem prison in the middle of the desert with no sense of spatial or temporal reality. In a fantasy akin to that of Ingres' *The Turkish Bath* (1863), she wakes up to the voice of an Arab eunuch proudly whispering in articulate English:

> Shhh... Keep quiet! My name is Massoud. If you can forget about before, everything, it's better to have it away. There is nothing to fear. You are in the most beautiful place in the world. No one has ever seen it but you. No one, not even painters or artists of any kind, has had the opportunity to come here. If you heard anyone say that they have been to this paradise, it's a lie. This place is much more private than any private property. This place is a garden, a hidden garden. If you let it, it will nourish you, and you will bloom in it like a flower. Let the water wash everything away. Swim! (Joffé, 1985, p. 00'13'18'')

The film embodies a continuation of the Orientalist phantasmagorical tradition of mystically claiming to reveal the hidden secrets behind the enclosed harem space as none has ever done before. Suggesting it exclusively a unique experience for his audience, the director embarks on uncovering the Oriental enigma, alleged *heaven on earth*. This time, however, he involves the Western body in the frame by gradually stripping off her clothes and putting her in contrast to dozens of nameless, naked/nude Arab women to frame his Oriental bath paradise, or, in other words, as Malika Mehdid calls it "to construct an occidental tradition of pornographic" garden (Mehdid, 1993, p. 23). Apart from how lecherous they are portrayed, the representation of the Arab harems in this film is nothing compared to that of the kidnapped American woman. While Arab women are too many to name, the film always addresses the American actress as a recognisable singular person, marked by that a clear division between unacknowledged Arab women (always defined by collectivism and dependency) and the identified Western woman as the centre of the narrative (always defined by individualism and autonomy). Basing this discourse on an imagined homogenous female community in which difference and diversity fade away, this "mark of the plural" prevails not only in this film but in most Orientalist cases where "the homogeneous image built (...) is that of idle females imprisoned within a harem, reduced to drinking coffee, smoking the hookah, dancing, reclining and conversing; above all, stagnating in immobility, inertia and insensitivity, marked with an 'inalienable non-evolutive specificity'" (Mehdid, 1993, pp. 23-24). Thus, the mystery behind the forbidden harem space is tainted with Orientalist illusions saturated with stereotypes that aim to stigmatise not only the female herself but all that is associated with her socially and culturally.

Figure 1: In a slow pan movement, the camera reveals unidentified number of harems staring at the abducted American heroine (Diane).

The film pivots around diametrical characteristics among the Western 'white' woman and the rest of the harem. While the Arab characters are always depicted as docile, malleable, and dependent, the American actress is resistant, controlling, and independent. While the first is oppressed, uneducated, and regressive, the second is liberated, educated, and progressive. Needless to say, the director is wary of always putting his American female protagonist in the centre of the camera frame with all the positive attributes, surrounded by the rest of the Arab female figures who are stagnantly and continuously gawking, glaring, and gaping in wonder and amazement at her body (see *figure 1*) – which is, ironically enough, an embodiment of the director's own gaze through their eyes. With this antithesis in mind, Mehdid argues that "such an ethnocentric pictorial erotic discourse conjures up the picture of a negative Eastern femininity which has been systematically devalued as it has been implicitly set in contrast to a more positive and refined view of Western femaleness" (Mehdid, 1993, p. 24). Thus far, cinematic Orientalist discourse is always constructed through dual paradigms of a negative relegating image of Muslim/Arab womanhood as opposed to an elevating positive depiction of the Western counterpart. Nevertheless, both versions remain products of the same patriarchal imperialist discourse, which aims to sell an obscene eroticised pornographic figure of the Oriental woman or at least an experience of being one by an *Occidental* woman (as in George Sherman's *The Veils of Bagdad* (1953) or Bernard Borderie's *Angelique and the Sultan* (1968) or most earlier films). This obsession with the harem fantasy, or "harem madness", as Alloula calls it, finds its way as one of the Western's most recursive themes across many filmic productions.

The object behind portraying Arab female characters as indecent and libidinous in Hollywood film productions is both racial and sexual, serving to reinforce and reposition the white female character as the core of the cinematic narrative while relegating the Arab and Muslim women to marginal roles. Besides the minor roles they occupy, Muslim and Arab women's roles in numerous film cases tend to be reduced, for instance, to either erotic belly dancers[i] or completely muted veiled bodies, to one extreme or the other. Taking both roles out of their cultural context to answer an imperial purpose, such filmic representations (in)tend to leave passive audiences with inadequate distorted impressions of Muslim/Arab womanhood. For instance, in Michael Winner's *Appointment with Death* (1988), a petrifying looking belly dancer had to be added with a medium close-up eye-level shot to the scene of the hookah teashop to leave the attractive Western actress (Jenny Seagrove) with discomfort and discontent. Although this shot has nothing to do with the main diegesis of the film, it is symbolically loaded to justify how sexual, yet terrifying and obnoxious, Arab women are after taking off their veil, remarking that it is the first time an Arab/Muslim woman is portrayed without a burqa or a cover in the film. This leaves one with a single forgone conclusion that there is no resemblance/comparison between the Western 'white' woman and her Arab counterpart, constructing by that a passive audience with complete antipathy to Arab or Muslim women.

However, in some other Western films produced much later, such as Jackie English's *Becoming Burlesque* (2017) and even in those by Arab directors such as Rachid Bouchareb's *Just Like a Woman* (2012) or Raja Amari's *Red Satin* (2002), the role of belly dancing stands for the efforts of the Western invasion in emancipating and liberating Arab and Muslim women from their fundamentalist determinist background. This form of 'liberal Orientalism' is meant to disguise and justify Western/American penetration of the Middle East and North Africa. Accordingly, Sunaina Maria maintains that "belly dance creates in the public sphere the image of the exotic Muslim female whose sexuality is potentially liberated through the preservation of belly dancing in the West, but who must

remain shrouded in a timeless Orient that can become 'free' and 'democratic' only through Western intervention" (2008, p. 340). The silent veiled women (under their husband's authoritarian rule) are, in this case, emancipated through unveiling and sexualising their bodies. If they are not, they are then portrayed as stuck to their backward and terrorist personas similar to their male barbaric Arab oppressors.
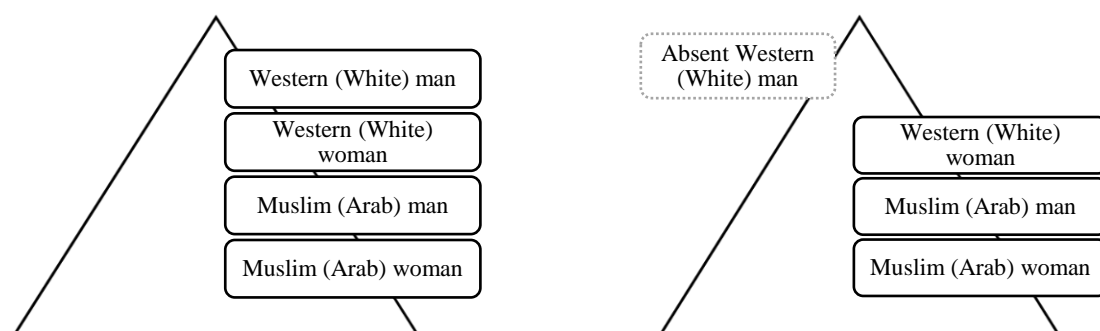

Figure 2: Hierarchy pyramid of female vs. male representation in classical Orientalist Hollywood films

Whether it is a lecherous Arab woman "on heat" in the presence of the 'white' male protagonist or a favoured Western 'blonde' model set to be the prize of the same protagonist at the end of the film, Orientalist cinema celebrates its classical subjugation and subordination of the female body as the sole property of men. Notwithstanding the fact that both are being gendered and sexualised by the male figures, there is yet a hierarchy between the two. *Figure 2* delineates a chart hierarchy wherein the Western man occupies the top while the Arab (Eastern) woman occupies the bottom level in Orientalist filmic representations. However, the chart can be modified in the case of the Western man's absence, enabling the Western woman to take his seat momentarily. Shohat comments on this matter through her correlation of gender discourse with the colonial discourse only to extrapolate that these produce a constant and consistent change/reposition in the hierarchy of Western women in film narratives. She can be in the margin and the core in the same filmic diegesis, depending on the existence of the Western male character. Contradictorily, she can be the master/the dominator of the non-Western men and women, embodying in this sense all the cruelty of the coloniser (so-called civiliser), while she can be the subordinated/ the dominated in the presence of the Western man. Nevertheless, she also occupies the position of a commodity for Hollywood, where she becomes a mere object of the male scopophilic gaze. In this sense, she provisionally acts as "the sole delegate of the Western civilization" (Shohat, 1991, p. 63). The norm is that this is nothing but a Western men's imperial responsibility, yet during his absence, she is finally yet superficially allowed to occupy the centre as the guardian of the Western empire. When she is in the presence of the Western man, the gaze is sexual more than colonial, making her a source of visual pleasure. Yet, when she is given the imperialist position, the gaze is colonial more than sexual. Thus, in cases where she encounters the native (dark) man, Shohat remarks, "national identity (associated with the white female character) is relatively privileged over sexual identity (associated with the dark male character)" (p. 64).

When she decides to go to the Middle East or Africa on her own, the Western (white) woman is not yet completely independent (as compared to the Arab woman in other film cases). She could not act by her own will, and if she did, she would be seen as rebellious as in *The Jewel of the Nile* (1985). In this case, the film narrative logically punishes her by an act of forcing her to endure dramatic conflict and obstacles. It could be rape or enslavement by a lecherous Arab character. Thus, rearranging the pyramid above (*Figure 2*) would reclassify her status to the lowest level, helpless and powerless under the mercy of evil Arabs till the appearance of her Western male saviour. The narrative then progresses to form a "rescue phantasy" where the protagonist, who must be a Western white man, decides to salvage her. For instance, in *The Jewel of the Nile*, novelist Joan Wilder (Kathleen Turner) finds an opportunity to broaden her writing experience when Omar (Spiros Focás) invites her to his kingdom to write about him and his project of unifying the Northern African 'tribes'. Rebelliously, she left her partner Jack Colton (Michael Douglas) and travelled to the *Oriental* land with Omar, where she was eventually abducted. As a woman, she is helpless without her male rescuer. The narrative dictates that she be saved by Jack, the white protagonist in his symbolic white dress. By the happy ending of the film, she is nothing but the carnal prize of the hero.

Unsurprisingly and surreptitiously, a similar narrative development occurs in Menahem Golan's *Sahara* (1983),[ii] in which Shohat comments that "the rescue phantasy, when literalized through the rescue of a woman from a lascivious Arab, has to be seen not only as an allegory of saving the Orient from its libidinal, instinctual destructiveness but also as a didactic Bildungsroman addressed to women at home, perpetuating, by contrast, the myth of the sexual egalitarianism of the West" (1991, p. 78). These films' rescue phantasy is similar to that of the princess and dragon fairy tale where a sleeping beauty (usually a princess), in its Disney version, is captured in a castle by a wicked witch who turns herself into a dragon. The abducted princess is blessed, or rather doomed, with a minor role of waiting and screaming for help from a castle donjon. Masculine heroism is the core of both the film and the fairy

tale since the female in the story is made docile and incapable of handling a situation; her entire faith is "to wait" for her knight to rescue her. Jack in *The Jewel of the Nile* is the dragon-slayer of *the Sleeping Beauty* fairy tale. He is the knight who must take all risks in a hot arid desert to ultimately develop a coherent rescue story for a film celebrating the supremacy of masculinity over femininity. Additionally, the princess or the heroine in the film (as well as in many classic conventional films) is supposed to be a blonde fair skinned Western-looking woman, preferably with features that could be sexually highlighted. Taking this into account, Laura Mulvey believes that Hollywood has a long history of objectifying women and telling them how to look like[iii], thus rendering them as mere bodies to "be-looked-at" on the silver screen. They are not portrayed as human beings, different from each other, but rather as a homogeneous commodities for the viewer's consumption. Whether with important roles or with static ones similar to that of the sleeping beauty tale, the sexual, voyeuristic gaze is always there feasting on their bodies (or body fragmentations): starting from "that of the camera as it records the profilmic event, (to) that of the audience as it watches the final product, (to) that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion" (Mulvey, 1975, p. 18). In addition to Laura Mulvey's three levels of the male gaze[iv], one could add the film crew behind the screen along with its director, who directs our gaze. That is where power and knowledge correlate.

For Michel Foucault, this imaginative discourse is inseparable from power. This power-knowledge correlation produces a distorted historical version of the women being sexualised and 'Orientalised'. What is more, Foucault argues that

> the deployment of sexuality has its reason for being not in reproducing itself but in proliferating, innovating, annexing, creating, and penetrating bodies in an increasingly detailed way and in controlling populations in an increasingly comprehensive way. We are compelled, then, to accept three or four hypotheses that run counter to the one on which the theme of sexuality repressed by the modern forms of society is based:
>
> 1) sexuality is tied to recent devices of power;
> 2) it has been expanding at an increasing rate since the seventeenth century;
> 3) the arrangement that has sustained it is not governed by reproduction;
> 4) it has been linked from the outset with an intensification of the body-with its exploitation as an object of knowledge and an element in relations of power (Foucault, 1978, p. 107).

Confident enough in the past as the source to understand present social and cultural structures, Foucault outlines and deconstructs the roots of power in relation to sexuality through his archaeological method. Women's bodies, in this sense, have been examined and studied since the 17th century for the purpose of containing sexuality and constructing knowledge and hence gaining control and influence over them. Since knowledge and power are both the vehicle of discourse, the production, and transmission of power and its mechanisms are generated through discourse (Foucault, 1978, p. 100). For Foucault, "we are in a society of sex, or rather a society with a sexuality" that is deployed, awakened, and charted by power mechanisms. Sexuality is nothing short of an "object and a target" for power mechanisms inherent in discourse itself (Foucault, 1978, pp. 147-148).

4. From Sexualising to Weaponising Arab Female Bodies

Hollywood film production is not limited to sexualising, objectifying, and feminising Arab and Muslim women, but this goes further to dishonouring them with roles of terrorists and roguish villains whose purpose in the film is merely to disrupt the peaceful state of the Western civilisation and its civilians. This is ironically a crowning moment that adds salt to the injurious stereotypes bestowed upon the image of Arab and Muslim women across the globe. The very basis of stereotype is to replace the 'real,' to reinvent and reshape the reality of a subject as it serves the interests of the *stereotyper*. The stereotype should then sound as simple as an 'idea' that even the most unaware member of society would be able to comprehend and remember. It should be as general and bare as saying: "Arabs are bombers", "Arabs are billionaires", or "Arabs are belly dancers" (Qumsiyeh, 1998). These clichés are so powerful that, often after repeating the stereotypes frequently through various forms of mass media, they prove to be exceptionally challenging to refute or subvert. The different types of stereotypes, however, gain popularity depending on the political status quo. In an early period of Western film production (primarily by Hollywood), Arabs were portrayed as snake charmers, magicians riding magic carpets, and sheiks owning dozens of harems; Arab women were seen either as harem or belly dancers. During the oil crises of the seventies and after, the predominant stereotype on the screen was the wealthy Arab, while Arab women were still portrayed as silent sex objects (Qumsiyeh, 1998). However, since the Persian Gulf war in 1990-1991, and especially after the September 11 attacks, Arabs are more likely to be portrayed as suicide bombers and enemies of America; this includes Arab women as well. All these common stereotypes are nevertheless bound to a certain period. Films such as John Frankenheimer's *Black Sunday* (1977), Bruce Malmuth's *Nighthawks* (1981), and Richard Brooks' *Wrong Is Right* (1982) were produced and screened before the Gulf War in which Arab women are embodied as hateful and dangerous terrorists who heartlessly kill innocent Americans.

From feminising and sexualising their bodies to weaponising them, American Hollywood films conquer defaming and demonising Arab women (thus subjecting them to *Islamophobia*). They are no longer only the sexually complying and obsessed object of sheikhs as they were represented in *Son of Alibaba* (1952) or *Harum Scarum* (1965); they are somewhat on the same level with

Arab men, both portrayed as fanatical as terrorists, well prepared to wear explosive belts and detonate themselves among any number of innocent American civilians. Hollywood sarcastically empowers Arab women only by portraying a Palestinian woman as the mastermind of a terrorist attack, as in *Black Sunday* (1977). Dahlia (Marthe Keller) is not simply a suicide bomber subordinate to the men around her (as her superior terrorist Najib), but she is rather an intelligent woman who monitors the entire operation on her own. Her villainy as a woman was underestimated by the Israeli spy (Robert Shaw as Kabakov), who had spared her life once. She is cunning enough to take advantage of a susceptible psychotic American barrage balloon pilot (Bruce Dern as Michael Lander) who would later help her build the bomb she needs.

The recurrent contradictory standard of *the psychotic* versus *the terrorist* prevails in *Black Sunday*'s storyline. Lander, represented here as a white Western man, cannot be comprehensibly a terrorist, and if he engages in terrorist activities, then the narrative is justifiable enough to blame it on an external cause: the man has a mental disorder caused by past trauma; he is insane and anti-social, outside the norm of Western civilisation. As a matter of fact, Western civilisation must not appear to be the bearer of a terrorist. Yet, since Dahlia is an Arab, she is always referred to as a terrorist. The diegesis had to make her the extremist case, naturally and unjustifiably. To support that, her sexuality and femininity (as instinct tools) are deployed to further her manipulation of Lander, distinguishing her with additional power to facilitate her terrorist plans. Yet, sexually she appears very mechanical with Najeeb and Lander as if intimacy were part of her career. Her body is seductive enough to facilitate the progress of their terrorist attack. Thus, as an alluring character, she is a reminder of Hollywood's libidinous harems who make use of their bodies as sexual tools to achieve their aims. Except in this film case, the Arab model is an amplified combination of a sexualised and a weaponised body; both set to incarnate the ultimate evil of Hollywood films.

After more than 40 years since Black Sunday's release, Dahlia's unchanging character traits reappear in Pete Travis' *Vantage Point* (2008) and Pierre Morel's *From Paris with Love* (2010) with significant villain roles of deceitful, evil Arab and Muslim women planning to target US delegates. While the story of *Vantage Point* starts unfolding through the eyes of different characters of the film, the viewer realizes that the Spanish policeman was deceived by the Arab decent Veronica (Ayelet Zurer) to pass a bag unchecked through security. Victimised, he falls apart when he realizes that all her love was part of a tactic to safely deliver a bomb. Similarly, James Reece or Richard Stevens (Jonathan Rhys Meyers acting as a double agent) is purely part of a terrorist tactic for his French Muslim fiancée (Kasia Smutniak acting Caroline) in *From Paris With Love*. The honest connection and affection between them introduced to the viewers since the opening of the film comes to a shocking end when the double agent realizes that he has been manipulated to obtain sensitive information about her target. Dressed up in an orange Abaya to conceal explosives built around her, she then enters the US-African Aid Summit as a delegate/ a suicide bomber fearlessly prepared to detonate herself among hundreds of innocent attendees. Here the figure of a woman or a group of women concealed in their Abayas (usually black with covered faces or not) is a frequent Hollywood signification/representation of backwardness and terrorism. Contemporary western media has shifted the dress code from its cultural space and reassigned it to new generalized negative meanings that make an attempt to further stigmatise Arab and Muslim women.

Caroline, Veronica, and Dahlia are all staunchly dedicated to their terrorist cells and the Muslim men behind them yet very unfaithful to their Western partners, an act suggesting a lack of affection and dishonesty supposedly inherent in Muslim women in both films. The portrayal of Arab and Muslim women as terrorists in mainstream Hollywood films has gradually increased after the September 11 attacks compared to those of them as the sexually possessed harems dressed in excessive colourful outfits. Since then, the female Arab figure in the films is more likely to be either a silent complying wife or a terrorist partner of the same Hollywood lecherous Arab man who oppresses her.

5. Conclusion
If we are to follow a chronological order, the equivalent sexual exotic (negative) image of the Arab and Muslim woman was invented in the studio of an 18th-century artist and reinvented in the photographer's studio during the rise of colonial photography in the 19th and early 20th century (e.g., postcards of Algerian women) is once again developed by Orientalist directors in their own film studios. Symbolically, the studio is, in this respect, a shared space where the painter, the photographer, and the director carve their own different versions of the Arab or Muslim female body grounded in what they once acquired from Eurocentric (colonial) stories about the so-called Orient of North Africa and the Middle East. All the different romanticised models of the Arab woman, or the doubles as Alloula calls them, are pure repetitions of what has been already produced, reproduced, and is yet to be mass-produced. Far from calling this repetition a form of art, it is rather a saturated representation and simulacrum with conscious or unconscious intentions to project a reductive monolithic image on masses of Arab and Muslim women who are, in the first place, uniquely different from one another, hailing from a mosaic of cultural, social, and economic backgrounds.

Regardless of its nature, Orientalism is a patriarchal discourse per se. Despite the fact that there have been several female authors, artists, ethnographers, and even filmmakers who devoted their work entirely to representing the Orient, speaking on its behalf, Orientalism has always been considered a male realm par excellence. What has compounded and contaminated this discourse, as Said states, is that it "viewed itself and its subject matter with sexist blinders. This is especially evident in the writings of travellers

and novelists: women are usually the creatures of a male power-fantasy. They express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all, they are willing" (Orientalism, 1995, p. 207). The entire realm itself feminises anything other than the European self. Since the Orient is feminised and always rendered inferior, femininity then is synonymised with inferiority. Chizuko Ueno debates how "the construction of femininity is only possible as a residual [therefore inferior] category of masculinity (1997, p. 13)". As a result, Arab women are doubly minimised, sexualised, and feminised, once by the occident and twice by their own men. Ueno calls this an act of 'double feminisation', stating that "if we consider that Oriental men have been feminized, Oriental women have been doubly feminized" (1997, p. 3). In this sense, women are seen to be nothing but a supplement, an accessory, to men (both to the so-called Occident and Orient), similar to those of the extras in a movie whose roles diminish in the presence of the main actors.

From early European Orientalism (with colonial motifs) to American (neo)Orientalism (with imperial interests), Arab women have been subject to different demeaning stereotypes. Hollywood, as well as other Western film industries such as the British or the French, have been dictating for decades what Arab and Muslim women are expected to be and how they are expected to behave. The imperial (mis)representation of Arab women comes in various stages and shades, from being initially depicted as suppressed exotic harems sexually outwitting one another to gain a night with the sheikh, to sexualised veiled belly dancers erotically captivating Western audiences (noting that most, if not all, early classical films only rely on Western white actresses often with racial brown faces), to ignorant oppressed wives desperately needing American salvation, to eventually fanatic terrorists barbarically posing a threat to the American civilians/civilisation. In most visual stereotypical cases, Arab and Muslim women are put in contrast to their American (or generally Western) counterparts for the purpose of constructing an imaginary difference to set them as two opposites and pit them against each other. Hollywood, in this connection, marks the Arab woman with a striking and incurable abnormality wherein, even if she happens to be American, she is still the other for the West, the very antithesis of anything Western. The American woman stands out as enjoying everything that the Arab woman supposedly lacks (independence, education, liberty, beauty... and so forth). In so doing, she is equally enmeshed, subjugated, and commodified by the very Hollywood narrative that supposedly uplifts her from the rest of Arabs or Muslims.

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[i] It is no surprise that among the very first film shots of the Middle East are exclusively on belly dancers as seen in Edison's Fatima's Coochee Coochee Dance (1896) and Fatima (1897).
[ii] Similarly, Breck Eisner's *Sahara* (2005) portrays the rescue phantasy with Drik Pitt (Matthew McConaughey) saving Eva Rojas (Penelope Cruz) several times evil Arabs in the desert of Mali.

iii Not denying that Hollywood made room for other standards to be more inclusive after being under constant academic and non-academic criticism, there are still many recently produced films that are yet very selective in their casting for choosing a female protagonist, and still, they can't escape the sexualisation and commodification machine.

iv "Laura Mulvey considers the spectator to be the male who derives his visual pleasure from the patriarchal representation of women. Gaylyn Studlar (1988) opposes this idea and, instead, argues that since the audience consists not only of males but also females – some of whom feel sadistic while consuming the reductive image of women – the audience's pleasure is somewhat masochistic. Mulvey, eventually, reconsidered her article/manifesto in her Afterthoughts on Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (El-Jawhari, 2018).