The East and West in Dialogue: Representations of ‘Integrated’ Muslims in Western Screen Culture

Muhammed Aksu, B.A. (Hons)/ B.Com

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
of the University of Western Australia
School of Humanities
English and Cultural Studies
2019
Thesis Declaration

I, Muhammed Aksu, certify that:

This thesis has been substantially accomplished during enrolment in this degree.

This thesis does not contain material which has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution.

In the future, no part of this thesis will be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of The University of Western Australia and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

This thesis does not contain any material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

This thesis does not violate or infringe any copyright, trademark, patent, or other rights whatsoever of any person.

This thesis does not contain work that I have published, nor work under review for publication.

Signature:

Date: May 02, 2019
Abstract

Since the early days of cinema, Western screen representations of Muslim people and nations have been primarily Orientalist, serving to develop persistent negative stereotypes about the humanity, intelligence and social standing of Muslims. Yet, by the last decades of the twentieth century, Western films and television programs began to include more positive or complex representations of Muslim peoples and geographies. This thesis analyses some of these representations of ‘integrated’ Muslims, through close readings of a number of texts produced between 1984 and 2017. An ‘integrated’ representation is understood in accordance with the work of intercultural communication scholar Milton Bennett (2004), who argues that when individuals begin to engage in empathetic dialogue and shift their frame of reference to understand issues through the eyes of others, they begin to develop a more integrated worldview. In other words, integration involves extending one’s range of beliefs and behaviours, rather than replacing one set for others (as in the process of assimilation). In tracking the evolution of the integrated onscreen Muslim, this thesis evaluates how the texts under discussion demonstrate the incremental development of intercultural sensitivity within Western screen culture. It also examines the cultural ‘work’ that such representations perform, including the extent to which representations of integrated Muslims may be contradictory; deeply influenced by Orientalist ideals of what a ‘positive’ representation may be, and burdened by the intent to counter all the stigma that Muslims have faced in popular media for over a century.

The analysis is also informed by methodologies associated with media and cultural studies, undertaking close textual analysis of both film and television texts, contextualised against relevant sociopolitical and cultural developments. Selection of texts accords with a transnational theoretical framework which understands screen cultures as shaped by a network of global forces linking people and institutions across nations in the context of declining national sovereignty. The first chapter analyses several Robin Hood and Crusades texts set in the
Medieval period, a subgenre in which the first integrated screen representations of Muslims appeared, and is followed by a chapter analysing a group of films in the military/political thriller genre – *Three Kings* (1999), *Munich* (2005), *Rendition* (2007) and *Traitör* (2008) – that attempt to counter the anti-Muslim sentiment typically associated with this genre. The third chapter considers aspects of multiculturalism and domesticity amongst integrating Muslims in television shows produced in Canada (*Little Mosque on the Prairie* (2007-11)) and Australia (*East-West 101* (2007-10)), and the final chapter then considers three texts – *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2012), the HBO series *The Night of* (2016) and *The Big Sick* (2017) – which foreground themes of masculinity through exploring the angst of being a Muslim male stuck between an ancestral homeland and post 9/11 America. All the texts considered feature individuals from the West and Muslims interacting. In some instances, Western heroes venture into the Orient; in others, Muslim Westerners and their non-Muslim neighbours and colleagues try to figure out how to co-exist; and still others feature characters trying to escape from either the East or the West. In most cases, the characters go through a process of cultural exchange and intercultural dialogue, which leads to increased intercultural sensitivity. Overall, the thesis explores how, over time, these integrated representations have evolved in dialogue with the sociopolitical context. Ultimately, it values this dialogic process as a vital component of intercultural understanding.
# Table of Contents

Thesis Declaration ........................................................................................................ i  
Abstract ......................................................................................................................... ii  
Table of Contents .......................................................................................................... iv  
Acknowledgments .......................................................................................................... vii  
Introduction .................................................................................................................... 1  
  East, West, and Orientalism: An Overview ............................................................... 7  
  Representations of Muslims on Screen ................................................................. 13  
  Social Justice and the Representation of Muslims ............................................... 20  
  Multiculturalism and the Representation of Muslims ......................................... 29  
  Changing Media and the Representation of Muslims ............................................ 32  
  Challenges of Integrated Representations: Exploring Some Key Texts .............. 38  
Chapter One: Integrated Representations of Muslims in Medievalist Television and Cinema .. 42  
  Acculturation in Sherwood Forest ......................................................................... 44  
  Towards Ethnorelativism in Hollywood ............................................................... 54  
  Female Muslim Sidekicks: ‘Jack’ in Sherwood .................................................... 60  
  Muslim Hero Ventures West: Reverse Orientalism? ........................................... 71  
  Towards Integration ... and Secularisation? ......................................................... 80  
  Integrated Muslims: A Thing of the Past? ............................................................ 88  
Chapter Two: Acculturation in the Military/Political Thriller ..................................... 91  
  Intercultural Sensitivity and Competence: A Framework for Analysing Character Development ................................................................. 97  
  Intercultural Sensitivity: Characterising Intercultural Knowledge and Attitudes .......... 100  
  Acculturation in Action: Characterisation of Interculturally Competent Skills and Behaviour ................................................................. 115  
  Succeeding in the Development of Intercultural Sensitivity .................................. 124  
Chapter Three: Canadian and Australian Multiculturalism and the Representation of Muslims ................................................................................................................. 129  
  Multiculturalism, Before and After 9/11 ............................................................... 129  
  Television, Gender, Race, and Multiculturalism ............................................... 135  
  Happy Multiculturalism in *Little Mosque on the Prairie* .................................... 143
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Modern Marginalised Muslim Males in Leading Roles</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding Contemporary Muslim Masculinities</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Dynamics of Interracial Romance</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>From Upward Mobility to Marginalisation: A Muslim Man in the Post 9/11 World</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Muslim Man in the Ghetto</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What Does it Take for a Muslim to be a Leading Man in Hollywood?</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Muslim Men as Cultural Hybrids</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusion: Keeping the Conversation Going</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Tenuous Visibility</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Muslims and Production Processes</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Representing Dialogue</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Filmography</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

Figure 1.1. Nasir (Mark Ryan) ........................................................................................................................................47
Figure 1.2. Nasir (Mark Ryan) and Sarah (Katherine Levy) .................................................................................49
Figure 1.3. Azeem (Morgan Freeman) and Robin Hood (Kevin Costner) ...............................................................57
Figure 1.4. Djaq (Anjali Jay) and Will Scarlett (Harry Lloyd) ..................................................................................68
Figure 1.5. Promotional Image for BBC’s Robin Hood (2006) .................................................................................70
Figure 1.6. Ibn Fadlan (Antonio Banderas) .................................................................................................................78
Figure 1.7. Balian (Orlando Bloom) and Saladin (Ghassan Massood) .................................................................85
Figure 2.1. Four main characters from Three Kings (1999) ......................................................................................102
Figure 2.2. Douglas Freeman (Jake Gyllenhaal) and Abasi Fawal (Igal Naor) .........................................................112
Figure 2.3 Agent Clayton (Guy Pearce) and Samir (Don Cheadle) .......................................................................115
Figure 2.4. Avner (Eric Bana) and Daphna (Ayelet Zurer) ........................................................................................118
Figure 3.1. Fatima (Arlene Duncan) ........................................................................................................................150
Figure 3.2. Mercy’s New Mosque .............................................................................................................................158
Figure 3.3. Amina (Tasneem Roc) and Zayn (Don Hany) ........................................................................................172
Figure 3.4. Zayn (Don Hany) and Ray Crowley (William McInness) ...............................................................174
Figure 4.1. Changez (Riz Ahmed) ............................................................................................................................196
Figure 4.2. Chalkboard from The Night Of (2016) .................................................................................................213
Figure 4.3. Kumail (Kumail Nanjiani) and Emily (Zoe Kazan) .............................................................................222
Acknowledgments

This PhD would not have been possible without the support of many people.

To begin with, I must thank my incredibly patient, supportive and understanding wife Ayse, who from the moment I expressed my desire to do this, never once waivered in her interest and desire to see me complete this thesis, who as always did everything she could to give me the time to conduct the research and write, and dealt with the challenges that came with this with the utmost patience and understanding. I would have never got to this point without you.

Similarly, thank you to my supervisor Dr Chantal Bourgault du Coudray, for all of your kindness, patience, understanding and inspiration throughout the whole process. Your expertise, guidance and flexibility have shaped my understanding of research, writing and critical thinking in ways you could not imagine. I will always be indebted to you.

To all of my friends and family, everyone who has always been supportive of my endeavour, many thanks. To the Aksu and Cimen families, thank you for your inspiration and patience. To all of the Canbros, who never judged and only inspired, thanks. To Brice Hamack and Renee Jones, many thanks for your valuable time helping with reading, editing and positive feedback. To Omer Demirbas, Akif Yucel, Ziya Sahin and Alper Ciftci, thanks for your unwavering support. To my brother in laws Muhammed Sabri and Ahmet Cimen, thanks for always believing and inspiring. To the Ceylans from 2502, who allowed me to vent and joke and didn’t judge, many thanks.

Finally I would like to thank Emre Kalafat for telling me I could and should write a thesis, the brilliant Khaliff Watkins for being an invaluable source of knowledge and critical thought and Dr Salih Yucel for showing me the way.

I would also like to thank the University of Western Australia for allowing me the opportunity and flexibility to complete my research.

This research was supported by an Australian Government Research and Training Program (RTP) Scholarship.
Introduction

The last half century has been a volatile and challenging period for Muslims in the global sociopolitical landscape. Events such as two Gulf Wars, escalation of the Arab/Israeli conflict, the Iranian revolution, the spread of terrorism, September 11 and friction caused by increased Muslim migration into the West have all been witnessed in this time frame. In keeping with the precedents observed by scholars of Orientalism, negative representations and stereotypes of Muslims in popular media have continued to flourish during this time period. Yet while this has been happening, a small number of distinctively complex representations of Muslims have emerged in Western screen culture, albeit at an excruciatingly slow rate.

This thesis analyses some of these complex or ‘integrated’ representations, and how they may be formed through a process of acculturation. The term ‘integrated Muslim’ is used throughout to define Muslim characterisations that challenge well-established negative tropes through the empathetic and humane portrayal of Muslims in a positive light, as equal and respected members of Western society.¹ The movement towards this integrated phase is called ‘acculturation’, which entails increasing one’s intercultural sensitivity.² In this thesis, an ‘integrated’ representation is also understood as ‘complex’ and comparatively ‘positive’; and as different from ‘assimilated’, in accordance with the work of intercultural communication scholar Milton Bennett. When tracking the process of acculturation, or development of intercultural sensitivity in people involved in intercultural exchanges, Bennett argues that moving towards an integrated worldview, in which individuals begin to engage in empathetic dialogue and shift their

frame of reference to understand issues through the eyes of others, is not assimilation. Assimilation demands that individuals give up their culture and adopt the worldview of their host culture, but integration involves extending one’s range of beliefs and behaviours, rather than replacing one set for others. Bennett sees integration as the capacity to move in and out of cultures, and comments that most people may not be able to function without anchoring themselves in one culture. Nevertheless, the cultural in-betweenness that he associates with integration is characteristic of a growing number of individuals in a globalising world. Indeed, the homelands of Muslims stretch geographically from West Africa, across the Middle East into Central Asia, the subcontinent and also into South East Asia, and this is without factoring the movement of Muslim people into the Western world that has increased over the past two centuries. Contemporary Muslims are diverse in racial appearance, language, ethnicity, culture, adherence to faith and political affiliation, and for many Muslims in the West, their experience is reminiscent of Len Ang’s concept of cultural hybridity. For Ang, the unsettling of identities through globalisation, whereby many individuals live in between cultures, engender an ambivalence and vulnerability which she argues is necessary to realise a notion of ‘global humanity’. Certainly, the concept of integration as an ongoing and often uncomfortable process through which individuals are constantly exposed to cultural difference and as a result may grow more able to negotiate difference and develop a more tolerant worldview, is central to this thesis.

The theoretical framework of transnationalism is useful for situating the integrative processes described by Bennet and Ang. Transnationalism has arisen from critiques of the ways in which

---

Western cultural studies represents the non-English speaking world, and is a particularly useful framework for exploring that which is ‘neither in nor of the West but has been problematically constructed by the West’. It spotlights how Western cultural studies and other modern frameworks have constructed the Western individual through ‘a complexity and a plurality of identity formations, while the non-western “other” is a uniform, conforming self whose subjectivity is confined within cultural, ethno-linguistic community’. Further, transnationalism is understood as the network of global forces that link people and institutions across nations in the context of declining national sovereignty. It focuses attention on diasporas and exiles and ‘supposedly stable indigenous cultures … [that] actively continuously participate in, and perpetuate, diasporic imaginings’. It also studies the manner in which new forms of ‘neocolonialist practices in the guise of popular genres or auteur-ist aesthetics’ can appear; overall, it examines how politics and power shape cultural flows across national borders.

Because of the ways in which these considerations affect the production and consumption of film and television, selection of the diverse texts chosen for analysis across this thesis is in accordance with a transnationalist framework. While they span the forms of both film and television, various genres, and were produced in different parts of the English-speaking world, they nevertheless share the commonality of depicting integrating Muslims.

The analysis is also informed by other methodologies associated with cultural studies, undertaking close textual analysis of both film and television texts, contextualised against

---

relevant sociopolitical and cultural developments. As a field, cultural studies is distinguished by its focus on relations of power, which are unpacked through an interdisciplinary synthesis of interpretive techniques and theories. The thesis draws most strongly on methodologies of narrative analysis associated with literary studies and strategies for historicising or contextualising the present derived from the study of history, and where pertinent, further conceptual support is supplied by theoretical frameworks drawn from a wider range of disciplines including gender studies, sociology, political science and film/media studies. Overall, the thesis analyses representations in film and television texts because of their huge social power in shaping how Muslims are perceived in the West, while also influencing the experiences of Muslims as minorities in Western nations both positively and negatively. By considering texts with integrated representations, the analysis aims to explore how constructive, sympathetic approaches to characterising Muslims have been undertaken by some film and television makers. Have these Western directors, writers and producers (some of them Muslim) challenged and subverted negative narratives and stereotypes? To what extent are Muslim communities reliant on their good will and intellectual ability to ‘get it right’? While the texts are challenging certain stereotypes and creating integrated characterisations of Muslims, do they still reinforce other stereotypes or create new ones that are equally problematic? What can these representations tell us about Western societies’ approach to questions of diversity and multiculturalism? The analysis looks at both film and television texts in the medieval and military political thriller genres, and other texts that are shaped by multiculturalism and domesticity (Muslims in everyday settings). As such, the texts are analysed through a variety of theories and frameworks, chiefly Orientalism and the work of scholars who have examined film and television that reinforces Orientalist and racist stereotypes of people from Muslim nations and geographies. It also engages with scholarship and critical thought that appeared in the latter half of the twentieth century as a result of social justice movements, namely theories grounded in critical analysis of race and gender, and political ideas surrounding multiculturalism and
‘desirable’ forms of acculturation and citizenship. Further, the analysis is informed by consideration of the changing technological and economic factors that shape screen cultures, with a particular focus on the impact of these for representing Muslims. Through a transnational lens, the analysis thus deploys a range of approaches and frameworks grounded in media and cultural studies in order to identify, contextualise and understand the appearance of integrated representations of Muslims in the Western public imaginary.

In tracking the evolution of the integrated onscreen Muslim, this thesis also evaluates how the texts under discussion demonstrate the incremental development of intercultural literacy or competence within Western screen culture. All the texts considered in this thesis feature individuals from the West and Muslim people interacting. In some instances, Western heroes venture into the Orient; in others, Muslim Westerners and their non-Muslim neighbours and colleagues try to figure out how to co-exist; and still others feature characters trying to escape from either the East or the West. In all cases, the characters go through a process of cultural exchange and intercultural dialogue, which supports intercultural competence. In aiming to evaluate how characters acculturate and experience a growth in intercultural competence, my analysis adds to the overall understanding of what an integrated representation is, and the cultural ‘work’ that it performs. By layering the concept of intercultural competence or sensitivity over considerations of whether the representation is ‘positive’, a fuller appreciation of the cultural value of certain representations can be developed. This approach also allows for a unique understanding of how characters change throughout a text – where they begin, how they go through a process of acculturation and where they end up – and also the manner in which films and television programs associate characters with different levels of intercultural sensitivity from the beginning of a narrative, and how this shapes their significance, value and potential to become integrated.
This development of intercultural sensitivity has been usefully explored within the field of intercultural communication which explores ‘communication between individuals or groups who are affiliated with different cultural groups and/or have been socialised in different cultural (and in most cases linguistic) environments’\(^{13}\) including class, gender, ethnicity, language and nationality. Some theories of intercultural communication concentrate on dialogical interaction between people from different cultural groups;\(^{14}\) for example, Bennett’s work maps the routes by which two cultures come to terms with one another, through this process of what he calls acculturation, where ‘as one’s experience of cultural difference becomes more complex and sophisticated, one’s potential competence in intercultural relations increases’.\(^{15}\) His Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) schematises how individuals experience difference and attain intercultural sensitivity along a continuum, where the above mentioned integration is the endpoint:

\[
\text{[denial – defence reversal – minimisation]} \quad \text{[acceptance – adaptation – integration]}
\]

\[\text{[-------------------ETHNOCENTRISM-------------------]} \quad \text{[-------------------ETHNORELATIVISM-------------------]}\]\(^{16}\)

The stages move from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism. Ethnocentrism is the experiencing of culture only through an individual’s own context, whereas ethnorelativism develops when culture is experienced with and through the contexts of others; the move towards ethnorelativism is the process by which individuals begin to develop deeper understandings of a culture that is different from their own. Bennett’s scheme provides a useful framework for trying to comprehend how individuals from different cultural backgrounds learn to interact with

\(^{13}\) J. Jackson, *Introducing Language and Intercultural Communication*, Hoboken, Taylor and Francis, 2014, p. 44.


each other, and is used throughout this thesis to map the development of intercultural sensitivity and the integration of characters across films and television shows.

**East, West, and Orientalism: An Overview**

To fully fathom the recent development of integrated or even-handed representations of Muslims, considering the evolution of Western perceptions of Muslims over the past few centuries will provide a framework from which an understanding of the current environment will be easier to comprehend. An established body of work points to how Muslims have been represented by the West in the last few centuries, in the context of the West’s return to Muslim nations as colonisers and in a position of military, social and economic superiority.\(^{17}\) This lopsidedness in power relations has formed the basis for the Western world viewing the East or Orient as exotic and backward, in need of shaping and modernisation.\(^ {18}\) Edward Said’s analysis of the West’s construction of the Orient along these lines formed the basis of his theory of Orientalism, which helps to explain negative representations of Muslims in Western screen culture in the twentieth century.\(^ {19}\) Both Stuart Hall and Richard Dyer have also used Said’s work to suggest that the West’s belief in its superiority over ‘the rest’ (Muslim geographies are part of ‘the rest’) relies on a number of central tenets.\(^ {20}\) One of these is the role of religion, specifically Christianity, in setting parameters for the definition of the Western individual, and thus being a basis for the mentality of separation that follows. Hall mentions how European explorers were astonished and sometimes repulsed by the religion and culture of the indigenous people they encountered, which reinforced their beliefs in the virtues of their own religion. The so-called pagan elements of the people of the Americas were shocking from a European perspective, with


\(^{19}\)Said, p. 23.

rumours of human sacrifice and other dark rituals very popular in accounts at this time.\textsuperscript{21} Similarly, European opinions of the Muslims and their homelands reflected in art and culture formed the basis of extremely dehumanising perceptions that flourished in the Middle Ages and by the colonial period were embedded in Western popular consciousness.\textsuperscript{22} This contact, and the exaggerated accounts of it, influenced the polarisation between the Christian West and its others and formed much of the basis for justifying the West’s invasion and cultural and social hegemony over Muslim nations.

European contact with the Islamic world has a longer history than European contact with the Americas. Hall claims that the first use of the word ‘European’ emerged at the time of Charles Martel’s successful defence against the Muslims at Tours in the eighth century.\textsuperscript{23} European Christian relations with the Muslim empires have been defined and influenced by periods of both conflict and peaceful co-existence, coinciding with the expansion and contraction of geographic borders, shifting military, political and economic relations, and philosophical exchange. Instances of the traffic between Europe and the Muslim geographies include the settlement and eventual destruction of Spanish Andalusia, the massive political, social and cultural exchanges that occurred during the Crusades, Ottoman influence in Eastern Europe and more recently European colonial expansion into Africa and the Middle East from the eighteenth century onwards. Sophia Arjana argues that these early interactions allowed the images of Saracens, Turks and Arabs to gradually enter into the Western imagination over an extended period of time. For example, Renaissance images of the crucifixion began to include Saracens or Arabs alongside the traditional Jew, which then began to foster anxieties about Muslim power and discomfort about Muslim bodies, which were regarded as monstrous.\textsuperscript{24} Though Arjana tries to extend the concept of Orientalism backward into the Medieval period, arguing that Muslims

\textsuperscript{22}S. R. Arjana, \textit{Muslims in the Western Imagination}, New York, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{23}Hall, ‘The West and the Rest’, p. 289.
\textsuperscript{24}Arjana, \textit{Muslims in the Western Imagination}, p. 4.
have always been constructed as nefarious enemies in Europe’s imagination, other commentators are wary of this perspective and maintain that culturally, Europeans considered the Muslim empires at this time as equal or even superior to the West in the premodern period. For example Gerald Maclean has argued that the Medieval Turk loomed large in the European imagination for a period from the mid-fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries. The economic and military superiority and aggressive expansion into Eastern Europe of the Ottoman Empire lead Europeans to develop an obsession with the Ottomans, ‘more than for any other Other’, to the extent that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries European views of the East were ‘emulative and rivalrous…..characterised as “imperial envy’”. Such attitudes are perhaps exemplified through the cultural significance of a historical figure such as Saladin, who is remembered and held in high esteem across many European written and visual works of the premodern period. Even when one considers modern film and television representations of the Muslim locales and empires in the premodern period, as will be explored in Chapter One, the majority of the texts explore the notion that Europe was backward in contrast to Muslim knowledge, civilisation and refinement. It can be surmised that the culture of exchange between the two worlds was at this time on a more equal footing, and that this only changed from the eighteenth century onwards.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the fruits of the Enlightenment and economic bounty from the New World allowed for the European return to Muslim geographies, which it had effectively abandoned with the end of the Crusades and Ottoman expansion into Europe. Culminating with the Allied victory in World War I, Europe came to establish its military,

---

25Arjana, Muslims in the Western Imagination, p. 7.
28Maclean, Looking East, pp. 20-23.
29Arjana, Muslims in the Western Imagination, p. 7.
economic and cultural hegemony over Muslim nations spanning from Africa to South East Asia.\textsuperscript{30}

The end of the First World War resulted in the Allied powers controlling almost all of the major Muslim populations across the globe. The Middle East, North Africa, India, Balkans and South-East Asia were all controlled or heavily influenced by Western military and political power. This overt control continued until World War II, and only ended as the power of Europe’s colonial nations began to wane, allowing for the emergence of newer Western powers such as America, the Soviet Union and Israel, which exerted their own influence on the Middle East.

It is important to note that this concept of the Orient is not apparent in European perceptions of the area in earlier periods; the conditions needed for the emergence of this discourse evolved from the eighteenth century onwards.\textsuperscript{31} The advancement of the West, coupled with the economic, scientific and military stagnation of the Muslim empires and nations were conditions that enabled the West to colonise and dominate it, while developing the cultural construction of the Muslim locales as the Orient.

In keeping with this idea of Muslim geographies, turn of the century films which portrayed Muslims were usually desert adventures or historical epics, with the Western hero thrown into a strange and romanticised world, a world he would change and transform into a better place. In these films, oversexed, oppressive sheiks and wild desert tribemen would come face to face with the Western hero and in some cases heroine, who would represent the strength, innovation and justice of the West, overcoming the oppression and backwardness of these lands.\textsuperscript{32} In such films Muslim nations was constructed as exotic, threatening and uncivilised; a place of deserts,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{30} Lewis, Islam and the West, p. 103.
\textsuperscript{31} Hall, ’The West and the Rest’, p. 313.
\textsuperscript{32} J. Shaheen, Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People, Massachusetts, Olive Branch, 2001, p. 78.
\end{flushright}
oases, palm trees, harems, mummies, magic carpets, scimitars and belly dancing. These representations constructed the Orient as a kind of theme park, or as Arab Land.\textsuperscript{33}

In more recent times, such early perceptions of Muslim geographies as exotic and in need of modernisation have undergone a series of transformations. Once the unique Orient became more than a tourist destination for romantics and travellers, and European powers had conquered and colonised it, representations of the Orient began to mutate. Especially after World War II, changes in population flow and migration combined with greater media coverage of the whole world – in other words the advent of globalisation – meant that the Muslim nations and the West began to develop a more intimate relationship, which modified the politics of representation. The flow of Muslim migrants from the Middle East and Africa to the West, and also highly publicised political issues such as the formation of Israel and its relationship with its neighbours, the OPEC crisis, the Iranian revolution and subsequent hostage crisis, and the Gulf Wars, all altered the association between the Muslim nations and the West. Representations of the desert, the evil sheik, and the oppressed woman yearning to be liberated, were replaced with politically and religiously motivated zealots, armed with hatred of the West and other forms of weaponry.\textsuperscript{34} These representations, loosely based on real life Muslims such as the Black September terrorist organisation or Osama Bin Laden, maintained all the crudeness of their original forms, but mutated to include this extremist perspective. Further, onscreen conflict was transferred from the Muslim nations and homelands into the West itself, just as the lives of those in the West began to be more directly influenced by occurrences in the Muslim nations.

Orientalism is central to the arguments of this thesis, yet it is important to understand its limitations as a framework in comprehending Western perceptions and representations of Muslims and their homelands. Since its inception, the theory has been used widely to construct

\textsuperscript{33}Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a people, dir. Jeremy Earp, USA, Media Education Foundation, 2006, [DVD].

\textsuperscript{34}Shaheen, Reel Bad Arabs, p. 180.
a unified conceptualisation of the West and its perceptions of the Orient, but some scholars have questioned its utility for apprehending the nuances of East-West relations. For example, Melani McAllister argues that using Orientalism to describe every Western image of every part of the Eastern half of the world has made the concept ‘too flexible for its own good’. She reviews scholarship that has critiqued the unified claims that Said makes, demonstrating that Western perceptions of the Orient have been more like an ‘uneven matrix’, and that Orientalist perceptions and attitudes towards the Orient were interpreted in varied ways across different time periods. Through her work on US media and popular culture in relation to the Middle East, she also claims that American perceptions and representations of Muslims and their homelands are different from European ones. She argues that there are elements of Orientalism in American representations of the Middle East in the nineteenth century, but argues that post-1945 US texts are ‘post-Orientalist’, because the US at this time was not a sufficiently unified nation to substantiate the ‘us vs them’ claim central to Orientalism; rather, America was dealing with its unique issues of multiracialism and privileging of whiteness over discourses of national unity. She therefore argues that not all stereotypes of people from Muslim geographies are Orientalist; they can be racist, imperialist and exoticising without falling into the binary logic of Orientalism. Bryan Turner also critiques the use of Orientalism as a framework to explore complexities in the divisions between Occident and Orient, arguing that Said’s motivation to contrast the two worlds was not simply to comprehend the division, but rather to overcome it through an ethic of care and humanism. Turner argues that Said’s later writings on Orientalism defend cosmopolitanism, which is the worldview of scholars in a political context ‘where

36McAllister, Epic Encounters, p. 10.
37McAllister, p. 11.
globalisation, cultural hybridity and multiculturalism are re-writing the traditional Orientalist agenda’, and that suggests that Said’s humanistic values are the true legacy of his work.

As these critiques have identified, nuance is needed when trying to understand how the West sees itself and its ‘other’, and analyses of Orientalism are therefore a starting point towards overcoming Orientalist binaries. As both McAllister and Turner suggest, processes of globalisation and cultural hybridisation are challenging Orientalist discourses, something that is explored across this thesis.

**Representations of Muslims on Screen**

Today, many of the elements that were first developed in the turn of century Orientalist epics persist. A number of scholars have considered these representations and their effects in some detail. Said is undoubtedly the pioneer of analysing representations of the Muslim geographies and nations and their inhabitants, yet his analysis centres on literature and art, and even in his later work *Covering Islam*, Said only mentions in passing Hollywood screen culture’s take on Muslims, arguing that Hollywood conforms to the ethos of all the other Western media when portraying Muslims on the screen, including an Orientalist tendency in screen culture to conflate Muslim identity with ‘Arabic’ identity, a merging which obscures the profound diversity of Muslim peoples. Said spends no time analysing film or television shows, instead analysing media coverage of profound events in the Middle East and Asia during the twentieth century, such as the Iranian revolution and the Arab Israeli conflict. However, more extended analysis of Hollywood’s representation of Muslims has been undertaken by Jack Shaheen.

---

Shaheen was the first scholar to scrutinise and catalogue close to one thousand films with Arab/Muslim representations, in his *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*. Tracking developments throughout the twentieth century, Shaheen argues that 80% of the films analysed portray Arabs in an extremely negative light, reinforcing the stereotypes that discourses of Orientalism pioneered. Shaheen is adamant in stating that the second half of the twentieth century saw Hollywood become sensitive towards the representation of other minorities, yet the same sensitivity was not extended towards Arabs. He wishes to understand why, in an era in which negative representations of blacks, Asians and Chinese people have been scrutinised and criticised, stereotypical and derogatory representations of Muslims are tolerated, accepted and remain popular. Briefly outlining the history of Arabs in Hollywood, Shaheen states that the Arab caricature remained almost the same from the turn of the twentieth century, even becoming worse as the century progressed. He uses the generic Arab sheik character to illustrate this.

According to Shaheen, the token sheik was originally portrayed as a shifty, power-loving character who typically meets the Western hero of the adventure in an oasis somewhere in the Orient. He is surrounded by his servants and wives, and is generally a significant nemesis of the Western hero. He is chiefly a womaniser, and will do whatever he can to get his hands on the innocent heroine, and his plans to add a foreign beauty to his harem are ultimately thwarted by the hero. The sheik is aggressively sexual, and implicated in the representation of Muslim women as oppressed, as well as fuelling Western fascination with the legendary harem, as a place of gratuitous sexual delights. But after the OPEC oil crisis in the early 1970s this sheik character was transformed into the rich and crude oil baron, whose greed is causing harm to the American people. A Ray-Banned version of the Jewish money lender, his extravagant wealth is

---

41Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, p. 156.
42Shaheen, p. 180.
funded by the average American. In many cases the sheik has also made his way to the home soil of the Hollywood audience, and is a threat to all people, rather than just the hero and some innocents. In even later variants, the sheik has also been given a dose of religion and fundamentalism, and is thus much more dangerous again. He has money; but he also has a grossly simplified version of his religion to justify his violence, and in particular his need to hurt America and its allies. As the conflicts in the Middle East became a greater part of Western life in the late 1970s, representation of the sheik thus turned to fundamentalism, reflecting the shift in cultural perspectives of Muslims and the role of politics in representation.

The representational evolution of the sheik as analysed by Shaheen parallels shifting sociopolitical relations. As Muslim nations and the West have come closer together, the caricatures have been modified, yet they still conform to the classic Orientalist trope in a number of ways. Shaheen emphasises the role of political issues in shaping representation, mentioning a number of Israeli filmmakers’ roles in the diffusion of propaganda against the Palestinian people, by portraying them as ruthless terrorists in a large number of Israeli-financed action movies. He sees current filmmakers as, at best, guilty of perpetuating the stereotypes they have grown up with, or, at worst, as motivated by anti-Muslim political agendas. Nor does he neglect to mention the role of governments and the news media in perpetuating such negative portrayals of Arabs. Shaheen sees these representations and stereotypes as serious barriers to the integration and acceptance of Arabs and Muslims in the Western world. He recommends that Hollywood producers and directors should aim to treat Arabs much like other minorities and ethnic groups, and that Arabs deserve to be represented even-handedly just like any other people.

Shaheen’s more recent analysis, *Guilty: Hollywood’s Verdict on Arabs after 9/11*

---

44 *Reel Bad Arabs*, 2006, [DVD].
45 *Reel Bad Arabs*, 2006, [DVD].
46 Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, p. 177.
47 *Reel Bad Arabs*, 2006, [DVD].
considers the decade after September 11, 2001. Once again, he takes a detailed look at the films produced in this time frame, and states that the vast majority of representations of Arabs continue to vilify them. But on a positive note, he does not forget to mention that percentage wise, there has been a small shift towards positive representations, even if not on the scale he desires.\footnote{J. Shaheen, \textit{Guilty: Hollywood’s Verdict on Arabs after 9/11}, Massachusetts, Olive Branch 2001, p. xv.}

Representations of Muslims in Western film and television may have gone through some transformations since the beginning of the twentieth century, but many commentators argue that September 11 and the subsequent sociopolitical environment that emerged as a result of the destruction of the World Trade Centre fundamentally shifted how Muslims are perceived, interacted with and evaluated across the globe, which has reflected upon consequent representations in film and television. Evelyn Alsultany considers police and law drama serials produced in post- September 11 America, and argues that many of these shows, fed by a frenzied sociopolitical environment in which the public felt uncertain and fearful, justified the suspension of law, torture, impingement of personal rights and extreme racism and discrimination towards Muslims in order to maintain an environment of safety across America.\footnote{E. Alsultany, \textit{Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation after 9/11}, New York, NYU Press, 2012, p. 40.}

It was at this time that the most persistent modern trope constructed around Muslims – the association with terrorism – became so entrenched that the emergence of a binary focus occurred: that Muslims were either with their governments in combatting terrorism, or were terrorists themselves.\footnote{Alsultany, \textit{Arabs and Muslims in the Media}, p. 28.} This binary has become so pervasive and widely accepted that with the exception of the Medieval texts covered in Chapter One and the film \textit{Three Kings} (1999) explored in Chapter Two, all the films and shows that are considered in this thesis are in some manner related to terrorism or extremism; their narratives are either rooted in it, or they are trying to
dispel myths in relation to it, or characters face prejudice because of it. In recent history, Muslims have not been able to distance themselves from this pervasive binary.

Similarly, Arjana traces the concept of monsters in the Western imagination and surmises that over time, Muslims have taken the place of Jews and Africans as the bogeymen in the collective Western imagination. She argues that in the post-September 11 world, there is a connection between the growing popularity of zombie films and shows, and Muslims; both are depicted as brainless, uncontrollable, and dangerous creatures who threaten to overrun and destroy all the progress that Western society has strived to create. She also stresses the significance of the torture that was brought to light at Abu Ghraib in the early months of the War on Terror, and how this treatment of Iraqi prisoners exemplified a Western view of Muslims as less-than-human. The torture, the manner in which it humiliated the prisoners and the nonchalant manner in which the soldiers documented their actions, is ‘part of the archive of Muslim monsters’. Certainly, Abu Ghraib highlighted the fantasies that ran riot in Western imaginations after September 11, fantasies that rendered the detention, torture, rape and murder of Muslims as acceptable. According to Arjana, Muslims have become so dehumanised in public discourse that it is acceptable to treat them as monsters rather than humans.

The research of Tim Semmerling also explores negative screen representations of Muslims. Instead of the systematic cataloguing approach that Shaheen takes with his work, Semmerling closely analyses a number of films he regards as Orientalist, examining how the codes and symbols within them continue to reinforce traditional representations of Arabs while also constructing an Orientalist fear that aims to make Western audiences nervous of the Middle East. He considers films across a number of different genres and decades, from the 1970s

---

51 Arjana, *Muslims in the Western Imagination*, p. 11.
52 Arjana, p. 171.
53 Arjana, p. 182.
54 Arjana, p. 183.
through to 2000, including the 1999 Gulf War adventure/political commentary *Three Kings* (1999), a film which Shaheen regards in a positive light. Shaheen, who acted as an advisor on the film, is approving of its even-handed representation of Iraqi civilians. He admires how the film refers to the fact that Americans started the first Gulf War but then abandoned the resistance fighters to finish off the job, and notes the happy ending in which the Muslim heroes of the film, who begin their quest to steal Saddam’s gold for themselves, end up sacrificing it for the Iraqi civilians.55 Semmerling, however, sees the film as reinforcing the otherness of the Iraqis, particularly their proclivity to violence, and suggests that this helps legitimate an American ‘militaristic national self through classic war stories’.56

Alsultany also analyses sympathetic representations that appear in some post- September 11 television shows, and evaluates them as ‘performing the ideological work of producing a post-race moment in which denying the severity of the persistence of institutionalised racism becomes possible’.57 While evaluating these representations on popular shows such as *24* (2001 – 2010) and *Law and Order* (1999 -), she determines that acculturating and integrated Muslim characterisations in these shows, which she characterises as ‘simplified complex representations’58 are little more than tools used to make producers and audiences feel less conflicted about how Muslims were being treated in America post- September 11. She feels that the established Orientalist stereotypes of the twentieth century are no longer socially acceptable by the public, and that audiences expect a level of complexity that hides the blatant racism that was once seen on Western screens. To this end, simplified complex representations appeal to these expectations while still maintaining representational schemes steeped in Orientalist notions. Alsultany also considers other methods by which these shows attempt to

---

55 *Reel Bad Arabs*, 2006, [DVD].
57 Alsultany, *Arabs and Muslims in the Media*, p. 28.
58 Alsultany, p. 38.
provide nuance and complexity to Muslim characters, but actually reinforce racist associations. For example, she analyses representations of courts or law enforcement agents that sympathise with Muslims who are racially attacked or discriminated against, where the audience is positioned to sympathise with their plight, but also to accept it as a necessary evil until the nation is deemed safe from terror. At times the shows humanise terrorists, characterising them with nuance and complexity, yet they evade exploration of the root causes for the emergence of terrorism, rather insinuating that extremism is a latent disorder inherent to all Muslims. Another method is to use fictional country names so as not to single out and offend certain nations and people, which nevertheless frame Muslims in the context of terrorism. None of these strategies effectively represent what Muslims experienced in post-September 11 Western contexts, nor do they challenge the persistent stereotypes surrounding Muslims.

The scholarship of Shaheen, Alsultany, Arjana, Semmerling and others\textsuperscript{59} is consistent in demonstrating the persistent negativity of Western screen portrayals of Muslims in both the pre- and post-September 11 world. Some of the texts that are considered in this thesis, especially the political and military thrillers considered in Chapter Two, have the tendency of

falling into some of the traps that Alsultany identifies, especially in regards to associating all Muslims with extremism and terrorism. But other texts considered in this thesis do try to address the root causes of extremism, and critically look at the role that issues such as Western intervention and economic interests in Muslim nations and geographies play in perpetuating these problems. Overall, this thesis aims to locate and analyse Western representations that do not simplify and denigrate; those which go against the established grain of portraying Muslims on screen. Thus, although I agree with much of what Said, Shaheen and others have written about Muslim representation, I wish to explore examples of representation that challenge Orientalist discourse.

**Social Justice and the Representation of Muslims**

If Western screen culture is not entirely unified in its hostility towards Muslims, then how are more positive representations related to the greater culture and cinemascape? Understanding the motivation for the development of even-handed representations in Western screen culture is complex, yet audiences are now seeing representations of Muslims from art house TV shows, to prime-time television and major Hollywood films that are more complex, nuanced and layered than the images that have been traditionally constructed by the West. There are many possible explanations for this development in screen culture. It is possible that Muslim migration into the West, which is a reversal of the Orientalist trope of Westerners adventuring into the East, has led to changes in the stereotypes that have long been brought back to the West. Interaction between the historically separate worlds could have chipped away at stereotypes. A shift in market forces is also a possibility, as the emergence of the Muslim nations as a viable marketplace for Western film and television may have motivated producers to appeal to box office ratings by including or constructing representations that appeal to Muslim audiences.
Any or all of these factors may be at work, but I would argue that the emergence of some favourable representations of Muslims in spite of the sociopolitical context is perhaps best attributed to an increased sensitivity to the politics of representing Others in at least some quarters of Western culture. This can be attributed to an evolution in the Western understanding of ‘toleration’, the conditional acceptance of or non-interference with beliefs, actions or practices that an individual may not agree with.\(^60\) Stemming from the need to deal with bitter religious conflicts in Europe in the seventeenth century, which aimed to separate virtues of justice and love from religious dogma, the notion of a ‘respect conception’ of tolerance has evolved in Western political thought and has made its way into modern societies, most clearly in multicultural societies.\(^61\) The ‘respect conception’ assumes a reciprocal sense of respect, where citizens recognise each other as moral-political equals in regards to social life, rights and liberties and distribution of resources and has formed the basis of many of the civil rights and other social justice movements that flourished in the second half of the century. These ideas and movements have played a significant role in the development of positive and inclusive media representations of minority groups such as Muslims because, as a result of these campaigns, inequality and negative discrimination has been addressed by successive governments, media organisations and other interest groups in the West.

Many commentators observe the role that the civil rights movement, which aimed for equality between races, had in the development of positive representations of blacks in Hollywood.\(^62\) As growing awareness of equality and the rights of minorities in many parts of the world developed,


\(^{61}\) Forst, ‘Toleration’.

tolerance towards negatively stereotyped representations in screen culture arguably reduced. The late 1970s and early 1980s became a time in which representations of black cultural history and family life became vastly more sympathetic, which allowed for critical analysis and interpretation of stereotypes and even the emergence of counter narratives such as the blaxploitation genre. These were developments that could not have been imagined two decades earlier, and have led to the emergence of a public that is more sensitive to the relationship between media and power. Examples of this can be seen in the backlash that Michael Bay’s sci-fi sequel *Transformers 2: Revenge of the Fallen* (2009) received for its inclusion of two minor characters, who were placed in the film for comic value; a pair of jive talking/rapping robot cars, one even sporting a gold tooth. This characterisation did not escape the observations of reviewers, who cited it as glorified minstrelsy; a one-dimensional representation of African Americans. At the same time, *The Last Airbender* (2010), a film based on a popular anime cartoon series, encountered a lot of criticism for the whitened casting in the film. The major characters in the film were Caucasian actors, which departs from the characterisations of the original anime. Critics, commentators and fans were vocal in their displeasure at seeing this shift in characterisation and representation from the original Asian story. More recently, accusations of whitewashing have also been levelled at films such as *The Great Wall* (2016) and *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) where producers chose to cast famous white actors as leads in stories that are set in Asia or once again where the characters in the source material were Asian, choosing potential Western box-office success through the inclusion of a white star over cultural sensitivity.

---

64 Casey, *Television Studies*, p. 25.
66 Dargis, ‘Invasion of the Robot Toys, Redux’.
These kinds of responses from audiences have led to a process of revision which includes popular franchises such as *Star Wars*, which have reimagined their stories with female and black leads driving the new generation of films, in contrast to the original movies in the franchise. At the same time, in *The Dark Tower* (2017) we have witnessed producers aiming to reverse or even challenge the trend of whitewashing by casting a black actor to be the lead in a movie in which the source material had a white protagonist. The popularity of comic book films and television shows has also allowed for black comic book characters, who have traditionally been sidekick characters, to have their own shows and explore their own narratives. It is important to note here the vital role that African American Islam has had in shaping the cultural foundations of Islam through black film and television. Often overlooked as members of the faith in a world that defines Arabic identity as authentic Islam, the work of director Spike Lee in portraying black Muslims in films such as *Malcolm X* (1992) or the exploration of powerful Muslim cultural figures such as Muhammed Ali in *Ali* (2001) must be acknowledged. These representations have played an important role in communicating aspects of Muslim culture in the West. Building on this history, contemporary television shows such as *Luke Cage* (2016) and the *Black Panther* (2018) movie allow for previously marginal African-American characters from multi-protagonist universes to be explored more fully.68 These developments have been rewarded through box office success, with films with diverse casts recording better ticket sales over the last few years, reflecting that audiences increasingly wish to see onscreen worlds that mirror their own.69

68 It should be noted, however, that *Black Panther* has been criticised for separating Islam from African Blackness. Three faiths are explored in *Black Panther*: two are fictional, and one is Islam. Islam is tied to terror, in a scene where some of the protagonists encounter a group of women who have been kidnapped and held by ‘Boko Haram’ looking Muslims. Instead of a more positive relationship to the faith, African Islam is seen as harmful and not representative of the religious and cultural standing of the film’s protagonists. This shows the continued challenges of representing minority faith in Western popular films. See: S. A. Aziz, ‘Is Black Panther Islamophobic?’ *Medium*, 20 February 2018, [https://medium.com/@Chaplain_Aziz/black-panther-is-islamophobic-f3ad73b7bc9f](https://medium.com/@Chaplain_Aziz/black-panther-is-islamophobic-f3ad73b7bc9f), (accessed 23 November 2019)
Feminist thought and scholarship has also significantly challenged established norms across society, including within the media. The ongoing struggle for women’s rights has included a critique of the absence of women in positions of authority within media structures, objections to the narrow and restricted range of representations of women, and the development of concepts such as the male gaze, all of which have increased awareness about how marginalised groups are given access to and constructed in the media. Feminism has also had an impact on representational economies in the West, evidenced through efforts to diversify roles for female characters in film and television, and challenges to traditional concepts of masculinity. Gay liberation and LGBTQI+ movements have also led to increased representation of gay men and women, particularly on television.

However, Muslim women continue to be represented as victims of an oppressive religion and culture, encapsulated through Orientalist stereotypes of oversexed males and repressed women waiting to be saved by a Western hero. Indeed, such representations of Muslim women have been used as justification for the West’s military campaigns against Muslim nations in the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa in the twenty-first century; non-Muslim and Muslim critics alike have argued that Western feminism has legitimised the war on terror, as the violence was justified as necessary in order to save Muslim women from the clutches of savage men and archaic laws. In Western popular culture, such dynamics are symbolised by the veil and burqa, with the clothing being seen as a symbol of oppression, and as marking Muslim women’s

---

70 Casey, *Television Studies*, p. 122.
exclusion from modernity. For the West, the liberation of the so called Muslim world is then literalised as an opportunity to unveil the oppressed, but the process of unveiling can also be interpreted as the voyeuristic desire of those in power. Complementing such imagery of Muslim women as oppressed, Muslim men are frequently constructed as less than human, soulless creatures full of hate and malice, especially in texts that emphasise extremism and terrorism. Yet although Muslim men are frequently represented as savage or oversexed, they are also, conversely, constructed as less masculine and virile than their Western counterparts in screen representations; often, they are depicted as irrational, bumbling, and less successful in negotiating the public sphere of life.

Muslim sexuality and intimacy has rarely been explored in any depth in Western screen representations, although one persistent idea that resonated in the post-September 11 world became visible after the tortures at Abu Ghraib prison came to light. The physical and sexual torture that occurred at Abu Ghraib became the lens through which the West interpreted Muslim sexuality, suggesting that Arabs are particularly vulnerable to sexual humiliation and that Arab sexual conventions are the product of severe repressions while also a prime mental preoccupation. Orientalist understandings of Muslim intimacy based on Ottoman ideas of androgynous love, combined with the depiction of homosexual rape in films such as *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) and *Midnight Express* (1978) are well known precursors to these perceptions, supporting a queered conception of Muslim masculinity. Such perceptions are also linked to the Orientalist perspective that Western individuals suffer from guilt because they have consciences, whereas Arab or Muslim individuals lack a moral sensibility and suffer only from

---

75 Jeffords, *The Film Cultures Reader*, p. 344.
shame.\textsuperscript{78} It is shocking to note that this persistent Orientalist belief was used by some Westerners to justify the violence that occurred during the liberation of places such as Iraq, with coalition forces seen as liberating a repressed and puritanical culture. \textsuperscript{79} Further, in the post-September 11 world anti-gay and misogynist viewpoints have been assigned to Muslims in contrast to the supposedly liberal and enlightened treatment of gay people in the West, framing Muslims are ‘axiomatically homophobic’.\textsuperscript{80} This binary, where homosexuality is represented as normatively white and opposed by a homophobic Muslim other,\textsuperscript{81} allows for European and American nations to define themselves as exceptionally tolerant in regards to sexuality and, alongside ideas about liberating Muslim women, justifies military operations into Muslim nations as a means of liberating gay people facing persecution.\textsuperscript{82} Evidently, gender and sexuality have affected and continue to affect Western interactions with Muslim homelands, and these patterns are addressed in various ways by certain texts considered in this thesis, which strive to construct non-stereotypical and desirable images of Muslim women and men in both their intimate and domestic lives and the public sphere.

Even critical race theorists like Alsultany who are alert to the continuing subjugation of those on the fringes of society, accept that changes in representation have been wrought by the efforts of various social movements.\textsuperscript{83} Thus, even though negative representations still persist, the role that social justice movements have played in adjusting the politics of representation cannot be denied. Negative stereotypes have not become a thing of the past, since they are still constructed often, yet diversity in the nature of representations has certainly increased; even if it is on a micro scale, stereotype-challenging characterisations have begun to be voiced within

\textsuperscript{79}Landry, ‘Queer Islam and New Historicism’, p. 152.
\textsuperscript{82}Puar, \textit{Terrorist Assemblages}, pp. 3-7.
\textsuperscript{83}Alsultany, \textit{Arabs and Muslims in the Media}, p. 28.
Western screen culture. This thesis therefore proceeds from Edward Schiappa’s proposal that when academics consider media representations they should ‘celebrate successful representations and offer reflections on how they could be improved’. There is no doubt that entrenched Orientalist stereotypes of Muslims do exist and continue to appear in screen representations, but positive representations have made their way onscreen, and are becoming accepted more readily across Western screens, representing an incremental shift in the manner in which Muslims are considered in the Western imaginary.

Nevertheless, there are several limitations that any attempt at representing Muslims faces, limitations that are paralleled by the challenges that non-mainstream cinemas, such as black cinema, have faced and continue to face today. In considering the development of black film and cinema in 1980s Britain, Isaac Julien and Kobena Mercer argue that as a culture is given more power to create representations, the less representative it needs to be. Those in power can spend more time simply telling stories, which, Richard Dyer states, assists in the positioning of such stories as representative of normality, and accords their images and assumptions a certain invisibility. But because film and television shows about black culture in the 80s in Britain or Muslims today are made one at a time and rarely, there is a tendency by filmmakers, especially if they are from the same culture, to construct representations that are aimed primarily at dispelling myths. With such a grave responsibility, characters in such productions often spend most of their energy being black or Muslim, rather than just being people. In the case of black cinema, the token black mother is a great example of this. This character’s aim was typically to show the strength of the black female. She would bring to light the struggle of being a black woman, while also dispelling the myths surrounding being black and female.

---

85Julien and Mercer, ‘De Margin and De Centre’, p. 357.
86Dyer, White, pp. 9-12.
87Julien and Mercer, ‘De Margin and De Centre’, p. 360.
Many of the films and television series considered in this thesis undertake similar work. They do not pretend to have the universal relevance or appeal that narratives about white people tend to assume; often, they become lessons in the conduct of relationships between Muslims and white Christians, or dispensers of myths. They primarily revolve around the controversial issues surrounding Islam that are familiar to a Western audience. They look at clashes between traditional first-generation Muslims with their own more progressive offspring, the place of women in Islam, and fundamentalism, and aim to explore how real Muslims deal with these various issues, by depicting Muslim women making choices independent of the males in their lives, Islam’s perspective on radicalism or the challenges of intercultural relationships. Frequently, movies or episodes end with the audience learning something that they didn’t know about Muslims, and at times this brings with it a preachy quality. In this sense, the Western makers of these texts are still facing the challenges of dealing with deeply rooted vilification rather than telling the kinds of universal stories that audiences around the world have come to expect from mainstream texts. Thus, while they are valuable for the ways in which they enrich the representation of Muslims, they also play a role in reinforcing Muslims as marginalised.

Mehal Krayem considers this burden of representation through the responses of Australian Arab audiences to screen representations of themselves and their communities in shows such as *East West 101* (2007-11). She reflects on how these responses indicate the personal experiences of Muslims such as their marginalisation, and their desire that these representations go beyond dispelling myths and ‘culture clash’ storylines. Krayem also stresses that Arab Australian audiences know that shows like *East West 101* are PR attempts, made for white audiences as an attempt to alleviate their fear of those different from them. In such scenarios, the burden of representation ironically compromises the task of representing.

---

**Multiculturalism and the Representation of Muslims**

Emerging in parallel to social justice movements, the project of multiculturalism has also played a role in facilitating media recognition and representation of ethnic and minority groups in Western nations such as Australia and Canada. Within a multicultural framework, minorities are not expected to assimilate, but rather to maintain and develop their own cultures, albeit in dialogue with other cultures. After World War II, Western nations such as Australia, Canada and Germany accepted many migrants to support their population and economic growth, and many of these migrants came from Muslim nations. To support such flows of immigration, the concept of multiculturalism was developed to help these newly relocated people to adapt to their new homes, while also making them productive citizens of their new nation. Through such policies, migrating populations were given a role in the development of Western nations that had initially been built on white, Christian values and populations. Though often enmeshed in national politics and other challenges, and at times seen as a strategy for accepting and promoting certain cultures and ethnicities over others (those that do not fundamentally challenge white Western hegemony), multiculturalism in theory and at times in practice allowed migrants to foster and maintain their own language, culture and religion, while integrating into a new society. It also allowed for Western people and audiences to be exposed to other cultures, and to some extent to understand and accept them. In practical terms, it allowed for the establishment of television channels such as the SBS (Special Broadcasting Service) in Australia, which provides a framework for programming about minority groups to be produced and screened.

---


Multiculturalism has thus played an important role in exposing the Western world to migrant cultures, and has allowed Western screen culture to be shaped by the migrant experience. At the same time, there is established scholarship that is very critical of multiculturalism in general, and specifically its approach to Islam and Muslims. Muslims that are from non-liberal nations are seen as a central challenge to liberal multiculturalism and its ideas around social cohesion.\textsuperscript{92} If aspects of Islam are seen as different and threatening, they are regarded as not adaptable to western liberal norms, especially in relation to controversial ideas such as Sharia. Nuance towards Sharia as a legal system is rarely applied in media, political and legal narratives, reflecting the continued expression of ideas about identity and citizenship through Western filters, where multicultural policies enshrine Western ‘tolerators’ in a position of power over the ‘tolerated’.\textsuperscript{93} This view amounts to a critique of the idea of ‘respect condition toleration’ and helps to explain how the majority of Muslims feel pressure to apologise for the violent practices of Islamic extremists, thus reaffirming the place of Muslims as intolerable subjects\textsuperscript{94} who challenge the limits of multicultural tolerance.

The two television shows that this thesis considers, \textit{Little Mosque on the Prairie} (2007-2012) and \textit{East West 101} (2007-2010), are clearly positioned in relation to multicultural discourses. \textit{Little Mosque} was produced for Canadian CBC, the national broadcasting channel of Canada, while \textit{East West 101} was aired on the aforementioned SBS. Both are series that can be regarded as fruits of multicultural policy, and allow for more complex and integrated representations of Muslims. More recently, and in the wake of Donald Trump’s election in the US, concerns over the increase in populist and racist rhetoric in Australia have seen the national broadcasters make an even more concerted effort to provide varied perspectives and endearing representations of

those on the periphery of society. Reality TV programming and television series such as SBS’s *Go Back To Where You Came From* (2015), *The Principal* (2016), *The Mosque Next Door* (2017) and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s *You See Monsters* (2017) are examples of how different broadcasters continue to fulfil their commitment to multiculturalism by giving voice to Muslims and other traditionally marginalised groups.

However, in the context of global anxiety about unprecedented population mobility in response to war, famine, climate change and political unrest, other government policies are now threatening multicultural commitments. Alsultany believes that the rhetoric of George Bush Jnr in the post-September 11 environment allowed for increased tolerance of discriminating against and even torturing Muslims, which was then reflected in screen narratives of the time.95 Her analysis in her 2012 book ends by placing hope in the election of Barrack Obama, hoping that his conciliatory approach would contrast with how Muslims in America had been depicted in the early years of the twenty-first century. Yet, the recent election of Trump has brought a resurgence of concerns about race and religion, to which screen industries are responding.96 On the one hand, it seems that the conservative background of Trump voters has pushed some media producers and corporations to increase investment in shows and films that move away from multicultural commitments,97 in order to better represent a conservative working class, middle-America ethos.98 In contrast to this, other creatives have been energised to amplify a multicultural sensibility; for example, one of the shows considered in Chapter Four, *The Night Of* (2016) looks at the life of a young Muslim charged with a crime in New York, and its producer

95 Alsultany, *Arabs and Muslims in the Media*, p. 57.

31
acknowledges that issues of Trumpism do appear in the show. Further, members of Muslim public advocacy groups were contacted by television networks and producers almost immediately after the election, asking for advice on content that may seem Islamophobic. Despite the film and television industry constructing discriminatory representations and characterisations of Muslims for decades before the election of Trump, his aggressively anti-Muslim policies including travel bans have apparently prompted, at least in some quarters, a renewed sensitivity to the importance of representation. Film and television production is thus shaped by ongoing flows, factors and events that continually prompt a 'common struggle to articulate more inclusive concepts and arrangements of justice'.

**Changing Media and the Representation of Muslims**

Changes in the forces involved in the production of television and cinema as industries since the turn of the century have also been a factor in allowing for the emergence of positive representations of Muslims. Changing technologies have led to an improvement in the production values and quality of television programs since the beginning of the twenty-first century, with shows such as *The Sopranos* (1999-07), *24* (2004-10) and more recently *Game of Thrones* (2011-) showcasing production values and casting that rival Hollywood standards. The popularity of such series has led to increased investment in television, and the emergence of extremely successful and profitable production companies such as HBO. This is a marked change for television, as the emergence of such high-status television challenges long-held approaches within screen studies that have devalued the aesthetics and artistic significance of

---


The fact that television shows can now be domestically screened in high definition, on demand, and without commercial intrusions has also meant that watching television at home now rivals the aesthetic experience of visiting the cinema. This increased investment in television has allowed for a huge increase in the number of shows being produced, which has led to the need for more plotlines, which has in one way or another enabled the inclusion of extended and integrated constructions of Muslim characters. Recent examples of this include BBC’s *Citizen Khan* (2012- ), *Quantico* (2015- ) and HBO’s *The Night of*.

At the same time, some commentators have evaluated these changes in television by observing the re-emergence of a virile, toxic masculinity, especially in the immensely popular programs made by companies such as HBO. Television has long been regarded as a ‘feminised’ domain in comparison with the cinema, with soap operas (associated with female audiences) understood as exemplary televisual texts, and sitcoms interpreted as challenging established notions of masculinity and sexuality. However, television’s convergence with the production values and popularity of cinema is arguably leading to the masculinisation of the medium. A further possible underlying reason for this shift is supplied by other scholars, who have noted that the attacks on the World Trade Centre were emasculating attacks, striking fear, pain and confusion into the psyche of the American nation, leading to hypermasculine responses by the American military. This has arguably led to sharpened representations of virile masculinity and this has extended to Muslims. For example, HBO’s *The Night Of*, which is analysed in Chapter Four, explores how a quiet, bookish Muslim man ends up in jail, learning to fight to survive amongst violent convicts. While exploring the plight of a complex, nuanced Muslim man,

---

104 Brundson, ‘Crossroads’, p. 78.
the show also manages to glorify violent hypermasculinity and fetishises the bodies of coloured men.

The hegemony of cinema has been significantly challenged by the aforementioned changes and in response, production companies have adopted a safer operating model, choosing to revisit or reboot film franchises that were once successful, or to convert established popular narratives into popular film franchises. Although, in keeping with the increasingly multicultural composition of Western societies, more diverse casting practices have been adopted by a number of franchises (e.g. Star Wars), it has therefore largely fallen to independent film producers to make films about marginalised groups in society, including Muslims. As an example, the 2017 romantic comedy The Big Sick, written and starring Muslim comedian Kumail Nanjiani, became a popular success. Loosely based on a true story, the film looks at Kumai’s love for a sick white woman he falls for after one of his stand-up routines. Initially made for 5 million dollars by an independent production company, its positive reviews at Sundance led to the film being picked up by major distributors and it grossed 55 million dollars, an unexpected success. Similarly, films such as Alex and Eve (2016) and Ali’s Wedding (2017) from Australia explore the everyday lives of Muslims in the West, constructing integrated representations and dispelling myths.

Independent producers and small national film industries currently have important roles in ensuring the continuation of positive representations of Muslims and other groups on the periphery of society, but Jane Mills questions the degree of separation between mainstream and independent cinema, using Arjun Appadurai’s theory of globalisation. Appadurai defines a global cultural model that is not based on traditional notions of cultural hegemony; rather, he


argues, there is evidence of more complex flows and constructions. These ‘flows’ are abstracted by Appadurai as a series of ‘scapes’: ‘ethnoscape (flows of people), technoscape (flows of technology), finanscape (flows of money and finance), mediascape (capabilities to produce and disseminate information) and ideoscape (flow of images and political movements’). Appadurai sees constant variation and movement in these flows, which are determined as desirable because they can lead to creative processes and the emergence of new ideas and constructs. In this sense, ideas, technology and people flow and come together in ‘temporal cultural constructs’. Going against the traditional belief that Hollywood destroys creativity while all other cinemas are smaller, less financially successful, but artistic, Mills argues that since Hollywood’s beginnings there has been a flow of ideas and film-making processes on a global scale that have shaped and helped define what and where Hollywood is. Importantly, Mills believes these flows move from the global to the local and vice versa. This flow of cultural processes is not a conflict between two or more cinemas where those who conform to Hollywood are seen as sell-outs, which is inferred in much of the film studies scholarship produced in the twentieth century; rather, Mills observes a trading of ideas where global meets local and the result is ‘productive tensions’ which lead to hybrid forms, where cultures mix and their similarities are emphasised.

Mills’s emphasis on the hybridity of cinema is important when aiming to understand the place of balanced or complex representations of Muslims in Western screen culture. Appadurai argues that current global cultural flows are occurring at a faster pace than in the past, and thus the flow of money, ideas, people and technology now disallows the development of permanent cultural structures in any one place. Thus the emergence of hybrid forms, ideas, and images

---

111 Mills, Loving and Hating Hollywood, p. 34.
112 Mills, p. 36.
113 Mills, p. 35.
114 Mills, p. 35.
is occurring faster in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In this context, it is hardly coincidental that the vast majority of representations in Western screen culture which place Muslims in a positive light have emerged in the late twentieth century and first decade of this millennium. Indeed, Ien Ang, when analysing the immense popularity of the soap opera *Dallas* in the 80s, argues that globalisation is not simply the growth of cultural hegemony; on the contrary, the popularity of *Dallas* forced various national televisions to develop their own shows in response, which become much more popular in the long run, thus leading to heterogeneity at a local level. This lead to ‘glocalisation’, the digestion of imported conventions and genres to suit local cultural tastes, knowledges and concerns. The increased emergence of positive representations of Muslims can thus be further understood through reference to such tensions.

The ideas of Mills, Appadurai and Ang can be situated in relation to the concept of transnationalism. Transnational film and television scholarship claims that the ‘flows’ between nations posited by Appadurai and Mills have been in existence since the inception of cinema and television, and that since the 1980s the exploration of ‘immigration, exile, asylum, tourism, terrorism and technology’ through film and television has been fundamental in trying to make sense of the world outside of national cinemas and of those people ‘caught in the cracks of globalisation’. This approach assumes that it is impossible to assign a fixed national identity to a film or television show and expresses film and television scholars’ attempts to understand the production, consumption and representation of cultural identity through screen cultures in

---

117 Ezra and Rowden, ‘General Introduction’, p. 3.
120 Ezra and Rowden, p. 1.
an increasingly interconnected, multicultural and polycentric world.\footnote{Higbee and Lim, ‘Concepts of Transnational Cinema’, p. 8.} Indeed, according to scholars of transnationalism, national cinemas and televisions are often understood as what they ought to be, rather than describing the actual experiences of making and watching screen content.\footnote{A. Higson, ‘The Concept of National Cinema’, in A. Williams (ed.), Film and Nationalism, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 2002, p. 53.} Overall, transnational film and television is vested in the ‘in-between spaces of culture’, between the local and global, and is adamantly against cultural purity and separatism.\footnote{Ezra and Rowden, ‘General Introduction’, p. 4.} Indeed, one commentator actually calls transnational cinema a ‘postnational version of Appadurai’s ideas of ethnicity slipping between boulders’,\footnote{Ezra and Rowden, p. 8.} meaning it concentrates on the stories of those not clearly defined by powerful nation states or identities, rather those who exist within the cracks of these powerful cultural and political constructs.

Selection of the varied texts that have been chosen for analysis across this thesis is governed by the logic of transnationalism. They span the forms of both film and television, genres ranging from medieval epics to political thrillers to comedies and police dramas, and are made in different parts of the English-speaking world, yet they share the commonalities of depicting Muslims caught in the cracks of globalisation from the early 1980s until today. They are all centred on the experiences of Muslims who have migrated to the West, or face the challenges of living in homelands which have been colonised and dominated by Western powers. They are all focused on the Muslim experience of being caught between cultures, feeling ‘out of place’, and struggling to belong. And, they are all shaped by themes of loss: the loss of homeland, identity, economic and social power, as well as the feeling of belonging in either the West or ancestral homelands.\footnote{Ezra and Rowden, p. 8.}
Challenges of Integrated Representations: Exploring Some Key Texts

This thesis engages in close analysis of film and television shows with relatively positive or complex representations of Muslims in interactions with the Western world, that it defines as integrated representations. Muslims are people who are adherents of Islam (that is, the laws and practice of the faith of Islam) and this adherence can be manifested in multiple ways, from those who practice Islamic customs daily, to those who simply identify with cultural markers of Islam, across a huge spectrum of political and economic associations. But as alluded to by Alsultany’s notion of ‘simple complex representations’ and the burdens of representation mentioned above, constructing integrated representations of a people on the periphery of society is fraught with challenges. There is always a risk that integrated Muslim characters are simply adopting Western multicultural liberal values which obfuscate cultural and social difference and reinforce notions of the dominant culture as ‘good’,¹²⁶ rather than genuinely promoting cultural hybridity or integration. Although many characters considered in this thesis increase their cultural sensitivities through dialogic experiences, at times the texts under consideration nevertheless fall into the trap of emphasising the values of one culture over the other, most of the time at the expense of the Muslim culture. Further, the characters who do truly integrate – that is, the ones who are able to move between cultures, extending their range of beliefs and behaviours – typically do not attain a great deal of happiness. Ang points to this when she speaks of cultural hybrids, people who decide not to take one culture as their overarching worldview and place equal values on different cultures. She observes that this cultural in-betweenness is not a comfortable place, bringing with it ambivalence and vulnerability that is challenging for an individual; but she sees this discomfort as a ‘necessary condition for living together in difference’.¹²⁷ Certainly, many of the protagonists in the texts

that are considered in this thesis are very ambivalent in their world views; they seem to carry with them a bitterness because of their struggles to exist in between their own homelands and the West, and their movement towards integration brings with it many challenges, including the creation of a dichotomy between individually integrated Muslims and the rest of the Muslim community. As Krayem contends, audiences then see these characterisations as exceptional or ‘uncommon’ Muslims, and not as representative of Muslims in general. These unique characters are thus seen as more Western and above the rest of their community, which continues to be essentialised in relation to extremism and backwardness, otherness and Orientalist stereotypes.

Thus, while this thesis seeks to identify texts that emphasise the capacity to recognise, value, respect, negotiate and even celebrate difference, identifying a film or television show that ticks all of these boxes is quite challenging. Nevertheless, each chapter identifies a cluster of texts that make a sincere attempt to develop narratives and characters along these lines. Chapter One examines Medieval and crusader texts, a subgenre in which Western and Muslim interaction occurs frequently but with a different dynamic to that which governs representations of modern interactions. The conditions for the emergence of the Orientalist paradigm emerged after the Enlightenment, with weak Muslim empires and states facing off against a dominant West, and Medieval texts are thus set in a world where Muslim/Western power relations were less unequal. Historical Muslim figures such as Saladin have been represented in a positive light for most of the twentieth century, and many texts such as Robin Hood have included complex characterisations of Muslims. This chapter looks at two English television series featuring Robin Hood; the 1984 series which offered one of the first integrated Muslim characterisations to appear in a Western screen text, and the 2006 BBC iteration that is very much shaped by modern day tensions. The 1991 Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves film is also considered, as the first instance

---

128 Krayem, Heroes, Villains, and the Muslim Exception, p. 120.
where an integrated Muslim characterisation appeared in a blockbuster Hollywood film. Two other films are also considered: the Hollywood action epic *The 13th Warrior* (1999), which reverses usual Orientalist scenarios when the Muslim hero ventures out from tenth century Baghdad into the wilds of Northern Europe, and Ridley Scott’s *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005), a twelfth century Crusade narrative featuring Saladin. Chronologically, these are the earliest screen representations of integrated Muslims and their dialogic interactions with people from the West; and as the Medieval period is removed from the issues of neo-colonialism and terrorism that plague relations between the West and Muslim geographies today, it is perhaps logical that this subgenre was the site for the first Western produced texts and representations that explored more complex characterisations of Muslims.

Chapter Two moves to the modern era, considering the subgenre of political and military dramas set in the Middle East. Traditionally this subgenre has been one of extreme vilification of Muslims, with films typically feeding audiences images of extremists and bloodthirsty savages bent on the destruction of the West. However, the films selected for consideration in this chapter – *Three Kings* (1999), *Munich* (2005), *Rendition* (2007) and *Traitor* (2008) – display considerable moral ambiguity with regard to topics such as the Gulf Wars and the energy trade in the Middle East. They also include complex Muslim characters, if usually in a supporting role to the Western hero; unlike the texts considered in other chapters, these films feature non-Muslim protagonists and are thus valuable for exploring how the development of intercultural competence and sensitivity in the Western hero also occurs. Each of these films also challenge traditional representations of Muslims in this genre, together with popular Orientalist assumptions about the West’s relationship to the Middle East. They are nevertheless also susceptible to the politics of ‘simple complex representations’ identified by Alsultany.

Chapter Three considers two television shows that were produced in Canada and Australia, nations that have pursued policies of multiculturalism in the second half of the twentieth
century. *Little Mosque on the Prairie* and *East West 101* look at the lives of Muslims in the post-September 11 West, exploring how Muslims can fit into the wider societies that they inhabit. In keeping with their identity as television programs, these shows are shaped by themes of everyday intimacy, gender and domesticity, dimensions of Muslim life that have rarely been explored and seen. They are also driven by a myth-busting ethos and hence the burden of representation, exploring how the experiences of Muslims living in the West are shaped by migration, terrorism and the political and social policies of the post-September 11 world.

The final chapter considers three texts – the films The Reluctant Fundamentalist (2012), the HBO series *The Night of* (2016) and The Big Sick (2017) – which explore the angst of being a Muslim male stuck between an ancestral homeland and post-September 11 America. The Muslim male protagonists in all three texts are caught up in a binary discourse that presses them to ‘choose’ between Islamist or Western affiliations, and in exploring the impossibility of this position, all three texts work to spotlight the ways in which complex and non-binary intersections of gender, race and class shape Muslim men’s experience.

Collectively, the productions under consideration in this thesis demonstrate the value of possessing intercultural competence in a society that is fraught with East/West tensions, and through their conscientious development of Muslim characters they also offer relevant and accurate snapshots of Muslim experience as it has unfolded in the West in recent decades.
Chapter One: Integrated Representations of Muslims in Medievalist Television and Cinema

Films about the Medieval period are a prism through which contemporary issues are projected onto a historical canvas; they are a form of Medievalism, or modern interpretation of the Medieval past, and through these historical representations we can reflect on current concerns.¹ Nicholas Haydock sees Medievalism as driven by popular culture and political forces such as capitalism,² and many other scholars observe other social and political influences in contemporary interpretations of the Medieval.³ For example, Richard Burt claims that the sword and sand epics from 1946–1960 paralleled government policy that had begun to question the cultural politics of colonialism.⁴ Similarly, as Lorraine Kochanske Stock argues in her discussion of Medievalist Crusade films, in the post-World War II period Western cinema gradually re-invented the Muslim antagonists of Medieval Crusade films as more politically correct figures, attempting to redress the well-known othering effect of Orientalism. She sees this re-invention as ‘backlash inspired re-imagining’,⁵ in which Western filmmakers have intentionally or unintentionally expressed a desire for more integrated Muslim characters in screen representations. Certainly, as this chapter argues, the social and political changes that have occurred in the second half of the twentieth century have informed the appearance of

increasingly empathetic and integrated representations of Muslims in Medievalist film and television during this time period. The texts examined in this chapter all feature integrated characterisations of Muslims, and act as ‘distant mirrors’, being set in the Medieval period but responding to the cultural concerns of the timeframe in which they were produced, including concerns about the West’s relations with the modern Muslim nations.

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, the earliest Orientalist representations of Muslims appeared in the historical epic genre, so it is perhaps not surprising that this genre was also amongst the first to challenge the stereotypes that it had helped to create and perpetuate. Medievalist representations have arguably acted as an initial testing ground for integrated representations of Muslims in Western screen culture, by allowing for Muslim characters to be developed in a time and place seemingly detached from today, but still affording the opportunity to reflect upon current social, political and cultural tensions, and Orientalist stereotypes. Such representations are explored in this chapter, beginning in the 1980s with a simple, one dimensional ‘good Muslim’ sidekick devoid of dialogue, followed by increasingly complex characterisations. Altogether, five screen productions are considered. Three of them are Robin Hood texts: the television series Robin of Sherwood (1984-86), the film Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves (1991) and the BBC’s television series Robin Hood (2006-09). The two other films to be considered are The 13th Warrior (1999) and Kingdom of Heaven (2005).

The incremental increase in the complexity of Muslim characterisations in these texts suggests a process of acculturation, whereby both Muslim and non-Muslim characters gradually learn to interact more constructively with each other, engaging in more sophisticated dialogue and learning to recognise their shared humanity. This chapter will map how the development of several different Medievalist representations of Muslims travel along Milton Bennett’s scale,

---

tracking movement from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism. As Western screen representations of Muslims have grown in complexity, I argue that they have reflected attempts by the West to bring more intercultural sensitivity to its engagements with the East.

**Acculturation in Sherwood Forest**

Robin Hood is a well-known Medieval figure whose origin lies in myth. Born out of the ballads, stories and plays of Medieval England, this popular cultural figure of resistance has been defined, shaped and reinterpreted by the cultural, social and political forces of various time periods. Robin’s mode of resistance has changed just as his social standing has; he has evolved from a yeoman with a personal agenda to a man of the people in the sixteenth century, to a romantic nobleman with concern for the common folk by the nineteenth century. It is obvious that the myth of this famous icon of resistance is very malleable and has been consistently adapted based on the social, political and cultural climates of storytellers.

In the nineteenth century, a number of Robin Hood texts were produced that were influenced by Orientalism. Joachim Stocqueler’s *Maid Marian or The Forest Queen* (1849) is a prime example. Robin saves a Muslim chief and his beautiful daughter while returning home from the Crusades. The novel then goes about constructing the pair as treacherous, overly sexualised enemies of the West, who ultimately become Robin’s adversaries and are vanquished by the hero. In a plot twist, when the two Muslims seek out the Witch of Deathwood to procure poison to use against Robin, the witch chooses to conspire against the pair, and it seems that the Muslims are even ‘too heathen for a witch’. Eric Martone evaluates this Orientalist perspective as a critique of European imperialism, since the text suggests that colonials have no place in

7Knight, *Robin Hood*, pp. 39-100.
8Knight, p. 131.
England and that isolationism should be promoted. Similarly, early twentieth-century Robin Hood films such as *Robin Hood* (1922) and the classic *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938) have been considered representative of American isolationism and anxieties about fascism respectively, attitudes which prevailed at the time of these texts’ production. Appearing later but along comparable lines, *Robin and Marian* (1976) is a dark revision of the previous light-hearted Robin Hood storylines, and was clearly influenced by American disillusionment in the post-Vietnam era.

It was less than a decade after *Robin and Marian* that the first screen incarnation of a Robin Hood story that included a Muslim character appeared. The British television series *Robin of Sherwood* (1984-86) is primarily remembered for its gritty rendition of the Robin Hood legend, containing many of the elements abandoned by its predecessors in the mid-twentieth century, with magic and myth driving much of the narrative. Robin of Locksley is chosen by the forest god Herne the Hunter to stand up for the oppressed people of Nottingham, who suffer at the hands of their Sheriff, his brother the Abbot, and the sheriff’s minion Guy of Gisborne. The series primarily revolves around Sherwood and Nottingham and unlike later television series, spends significant time exploring how Robin becomes a saviour of the people under the guidance of Herne and his band of merry men. Myth and magic play a significant role in Robin’s exploits, but the show also exhibits a historical sensibility. For example, there are a number of episodes in which the wider world influences Robin, as when Templars from the Holy Land come to visit

---

10 Martone analyses a number of Robin Hood texts from the nineteenth century, including plays and novels that all conform to the dominant nineteenth-century perspective which constructed Muslim homelands through Orientalist perspectives. These include *History and Famous Exploits of Robin Hood* (1806) and *Robin Hood and Richard Coeur de Lion* (1846). Stephen Knight also makes reference to these nineteenth-century Orientalist texts.


12 Aberth, p. 171.

13 Knight, *Robin Hood*, p. 165.
Sherwood. The struggle between King Richard and Prince John is also considered, but these plotlines are generally downplayed in favour of a focus on Robin Hood.

It is, then, noteworthy that a Muslim character is a member of the merry men in a show that sought to retain strong ties with the original Robin Hood legend. The Saracen character Nasir, played by Mark Ryan, features in all twenty-four episodes of the show, and he becomes a charismatic and essential member of the merry men. Initially conceived as Edmund the Archer, a conceptual ‘good bad guy’ whose purpose was to make the good guy look better, the character evolved into a Saracen in the later writing process. Producer Richard Carpenter believed that the Medieval period including the Crusades had an immense and positive cultural impact on Europe, including an influx of people, culture and ideas. This cultural influx is represented by Nasir, who also indexes the influx of migrants into England in the second half of the twentieth century. Indeed, Eric Martone claims that Carpenter incorporated Nasir into the show as a way of exploring the positive valances of contemporary migratory patterns. Nasir enters the series as a spellbound prisoner from the Holy Land. After Robin kills his enslaver in a confrontation and the spell is broken, Nasir is impressed with Robin’s courage and spares his life after testing him in a sword fight, thus repaying his debt. He then joins the merry men of his own accord and is silently accepted into the gang.

Throughout the series, Nasir’s primary function is fighting. It is important to note that he has little to no dialogue in the whole series, and in the first season he is only really seen dispatching victims, volunteering for dangerous assignments and sharpening his twin scimitars while the merry men talk and revel [Figure 1.1]. As the backgrounds of each of the merry men are explored, the audience’s knowledge of Nasir remains scant, but his mysteriousness adds to his charisma, taking the strong and silent stereotype to an extreme. Not having a substantial

speaking part relegates Nasir to the action scenes; in peacetime he hovers around the periphery as a member of the gang, never close enough to be completely accepted. On many occasions, the merry men engage in wrestling, target practice and practical jokes, with Robin even taking part in these more sentimental moments. Yet Nasir only takes part in one such event, a wrestle with Little John that he wins with some of his Eastern martial arts skills. Nasir is thus limited to viewing the bonding of the Westerners, rather than being allowed to bond with them himself.

Nevertheless, there are suggestions of an acculturating process that feature in the early episodes. For example, Nasir takes up the role of healer, using herbs to heal the wounds of his friends, and dealing with cuts and arrow injuries. An early example of Muslim medicinal knowledge in a Medieval film can be found in Cecil De Mille’s *The Crusades* (1935), where Saladin tends to the wounds of King Richard’s abducted wife, and Nasir’s characterisation builds on this theme (as do all the Muslim characterisations considered in this chapter). Thus, while this trope functions to facilitate sympathetic East-West interactions and a positive representation grounded in respect for Muslim scientific advancement, it also cements Muslim medicinal

*Figure 1.1. Nasir (right) fighting with a hooded Saracen figure. Nasir’s primary function is fighting and dealing with problems from his past.*
knowledge as an extremely common—even clichéd—representation of admirable Muslim characteristics.

Nasir is also established as brave and strong, a fine warrior who is never once bested with a sword throughout the whole series. (Robin is only superior to Nasir with the bow, giving Robin some leverage in the fighting stakes, and remaining true to the Robin Hood legend). Nasir is therefore afforded a desirable form of masculinity, because white male heroes have been traditionally constructed as ‘hetero, competitive, individualist and aggressive’.\textsuperscript{16} Muslim men, in contrast, have traditionally been either emasculated as martially deficient or unnaturally violent in Western film and television.\textsuperscript{17} Thus, Nasir’s ‘heroic’ blend of hetero aggressiveness and martial ability makes him an invaluable member of the merry men, and is most clearly seen towards the end of the first season, when King Richard returns to Nottingham and meets Robin in Sherwood. When the merry men save the King from bandits in Sherwood, Robin and the King debate the concept of liberty. Richard questions Robin’s concern for the people of the land, stating that he seems to own them. Robin explains that no man can be owned, and the King counters this by commenting on his own ability to buy four Saracens for a horse in the Holy Land. As Nasir approaches with the king’s horse, Robin says ‘Here is a Saracen that you could not buy for one thousand horses’,\textsuperscript{18} demonstrating Robin’s opinion of Nasir. This simple scene and comment is an early example of a respectful and mutually appreciative East-West relationship being constructed for television audiences.

\textsuperscript{17}M. Krayem, Heroes, Villains and the Muslim Exception: Muslim Arab Men in Australian Crime Drama, Melbourne, Melbourne University Publishing, 2017, p. 110.
\textsuperscript{18}‘The King’s Fool’, Robin of Sherwood, UK Goldcrest, 1984, [TV program].
Another episode of *Robin of Sherwood* considers the plight of the contemporary Middle East, namely the Arab-Israeli conflict, and suggests that there is similarity between Muslims and Jews. The merry men help a Jewish family escape from Nottingham after the Sheriff doesn’t want to honour a debt to a Jewish moneylender, and subsequently plots for the people of Nottingham to riot and murder the Jews in the town. At one point, the Sheriff says there is little difference between outlaws and outcasts, placing the Jews and Robin’s gang as equally debased in the eyes of the law. When the merry men catch up with the younger children of the moneylender, it is Nasir who can identify the children as Jews, because he understands some Hebrew. When Robin catches up to the kidnapped older daughter and saves her, Nasir is engrossed by her, and she is similarly impressed by him\(^{19}\) [Figure 1.2].

![Nasir shares some tender moments with a Jewess named Sarah (Katherine Levy).](image)

Nasir’s attraction to and empathy for the Jews is here positioned as a product of their shared marginalisation. Although the episode is a naïve Western attempt to imaginatively resolve a modern issue (the conflict between Israel and the Muslim nations surrounding it),\(^ {20}\) its exploration of the marginalisation experienced by both Jews and Muslims in the West

\(^{19}\)The Children of Israel’, *Robin of Sherwood*, Season 2 Episode 2, Goldcrest, 1984 [TV program].

\(^{20}\)Knight, *Robin Hood*, p. 164.
nevertheless has the effect of developing a more integrated representation of Nasir in particular. At the same time, the pairing (including its brevity) also reinforces Nasir’s perceived otherness. Cross-cultural intimacy and romance could have been a powerful method to humanise Nasir, affirming that he could enjoy companionship just as others would, and to explore relationships between people of different cultural backgrounds. Yet, it would take another thirty years for such a continuing relationship to appear in a Robin Hood television show.

By the end of the second season, the series began to elaborate on Nasir’s past. The season finale, an episode titled ‘The Greatest Enemy’,\(^\text{21}\) begins with the forest god Herne telling Robin that each man will face himself as his own greatest adversary; that a challenge to face an inner demon will be the greatest threat of all. The merry men are ambushed by the Sheriff’s forces in a village sympathetic to Robin’s cause. Half the gang flees while the other half is arrested, with the notable absence of Nasir from the whole event. Nasir is seen meeting with two Saracens in the forest; he is ambushed by them and in the ensuing fight Nasir kills one and spares the other. The visitor who Nasir spares bares his chest, revealing a snake-like tattoo, and Nasir says ‘One death is enough’ and leaves the assassin. The assassin immediately pursues him on horseback, after which Nasir dispatches him with his bow, stating, with relief, ‘It is finished’. He then makes his way to the village and tries to help some of the merry men escape but is overwhelmed and becomes a prisoner. He relates the events to his friends during their capture, stating that he was once an assassin, and that the assassins stood up for what they believed in just like the merry men. However, it seems the assassins do not let people leave their order.

These events provide a greater insight into Nasir’s past, while also reinforcing the character’s development as an integrated Muslim. Nasir’s hesitation to kill the members of his order contrasts with his normal tendency to kill without remorse. He has no hesitation in spilling blood for Robin, yet the men who come to kill him are spared; he seems to value their lives as much

\(^\text{21}\)‘The Greatest Enemy’, Robin of Sherwood, Season 2 Episode 6, Goldcrest, 1985 [TV program].
as his own, and still has a strong connection to the order and his own past. This is reinforced by the parallel between Nasir’s order and that of the merry men; both parties share ideals of justice. Through these developments, a more complex quality to Nasir is constructed.

When considering these events through the framework of Bennett’s acculturation process, these early episodes could be said to fall within the minimisation process, the stage in which similarities between two cultures are perceived, but at a superficial level. At this stage, it is reinforced that Nasir is a foreigner to England, with his personal challenges remaining external to the world of Robin Hood. However, two episodes in the final season of the series suggest that Nasir’s representation had moved a little further along Bennett’s scale, towards acceptance, where a person regards their own culture in the context of other cultures and other people as different yet ‘equally human’. In the first of the two, a replacement Sheriff is sent to Nottingham. Accompanying the new Sheriff is a man dressed in Middle Eastern garb, his face covered in a burka-like cloth. This companion is introduced as a bodyguard, executioner and torturer, and Nasir identifies him as Serak before even seeing him. Serak is introduced as a former member of Nasir’s assassin order, a man who betrayed the order for wealth. Nasir was then sent to kill him and this is shown in a flashback sequence, the only image of Nasir’s own world that is constructed within the series. True to Orientalist tropes, Nasir’s flashback takes place in a tent in the middle of an unnamed desert, a place beyond time and geography, with close-ups of vultures pecking away at a dead camel carcass around the tent. Nasir interrupts Serak in his tent while he is with a woman, and the bare chested, greasy haired Serak fights Nasir. The fight is filmed in slow motion, two experts with swords showing their skills. Nasir is able to cut down Serak, leaving him in the desert to die.

---

24‘The Sheriff of Nottingham’, Robin of Sherwood, Season 3 Episode 5, Goldcrest, 1986 [TV program].
Nasir once again shows hesitation in having to deal with an event from his past, and in an emotional scene, he shares his uneasiness with Robin. When questioned about who Serak is, Nasir mentions how close they once were, and how he fears Serak’s skill and strength. Robin does not accept this display of emotion, stating that he has never seen Nasir afraid; Robin argues that Nasir’s hesitation is because of his affinity with Serak. He tells Nasir that he must fight, not for himself, but for all of the merry men, and that he is no longer an assassin, rather ‘one of us’; the merry men will be with him at all times. Nasir, who has more dialogue in this one scene than in the rest of the whole series, allows Robin to convince him of what must be done. Yet despite the acculturating gesture of exploring Nasir’s past, the second fight between Nasir and Serak resorts once again to Orientalist tropes. The scene seems inspired by an Akira Kurosawa samurai epic, with long grass swaying slowly as the two prepare to face off. In further homage, the fighters do away with their scimitars in this scene, absurdly using ceremonial Samurai swords for their showdown, a conflation of the East that is common to many Orientalist films; and once again, slow motion is employed. Thus, while *Robin of Sherwood* may have an Eastern character that challenges established characterisations of Muslims, it does not escape the temptation to recycle visual tropes that are common in many screen productions of the East.

The second episode that illustrates a movement towards intercultural acceptance is when the merry men are ensnared by the spell of a powerful mage. The magic targets a weakness inherent to each character. Nasir’s weakness is once again his assassin past, which he believed he had dealt with in the episode with Serak. While under the spell, he comes face to face with another hooded assassin in the forest outside the village, and once again is forced to fight. After cutting down the hooded man, Nasir unMASKS him and under the effect of the spell he hallucinates that he has killed Robin, a shocking image that causes him to break down. He was able to rationalise killing Serak with Robin’s inspiration and the need to protect his new outlaw friends, but seeing

---

Robin die by his own hand is enough to destroy his will and wits. Through this scene, Nasir’s representation as a Muslim is given a new dimension, since the loss of Robin is more agonising than having to dispatch close friends from his Middle Eastern past. Through this development, Nasir is shown to have accepted his place within the band of outlaws, and his allegiance is primarily to Robin. This can be regarded as an attempt at constructing a more integrated Muslim, although by forsaking his former identity, Nasir in many ways models a process of assimilation, leaving his past and culture behind.

The limitations in Nasir’s character development are perhaps explained by what Eric Martone argues was a developing social need to construct a ‘fictional historical narrative of history’ that would help with the education of white English people on the cultural connections between England and its former British colonies.26 He argues that the post WWII migration of people from Britain’s former colonies such as South Asia and North Africa caused cultural and social tensions within a Britain that, even up to the war, had preached isolationism. He thus sees the representation of Nasir as a first step in the evolution of the integrated Muslim in Robin Hood lore, which is in stark contrast to the ‘treacherous Saracen’ pastiche that was part of the late nineteenth-century writings already considered.27 In this sense, Nasir’s character perhaps remained relatively under-developed due to his primary function of relieving social tensions; at any rate, the producers chose to relate the majority of the plotlines to magic and stories about the Normans and Saxons, and as Stephen Knight states, *Robin of Sherwood* suffered from vagueness in tackling contemporary concerns.28

Any opportunity to further nuance Nasir’s characterisation was lost when *Robin of Sherwood* was cancelled at the end of its third season. Ultimately, while Nasir is tolerated and valued in the *Robin of Sherwood* world for his value as a fighter, his acceptance as an Englishman is never

---

27 Martone, p. 68.
28 Knight, *Robin Hood*, p. 165.
canvassed. He remains for the most part on the periphery of the English world, and his greatest challenges, both mental and physical, stem from his own past in his ancestral homeland. Indeed, if Martone’s analysis of the need for a fictional historical narrative is correct, then Nasir’s conflict with his past could be considered a subtle expression of anxiety about the Muslims and immigrants of Britain, suggesting that their past lives in their prior homelands are the major barrier to their integration into their new homes. Nevertheless, the character of Nasir goes some way towards establishing similarities between and, in Bennett’s terms, minimising some of the major differences between the West and modern Muslim nations. His military prowess, medicinal skill and back story are simple attributes, but are a foundation upon which other, more sophisticated representations of Medieval Muslims would be built as Medievalist screen representations of both the West and East began to gain complexity and significance.

**Towards Ethnorelativism in Hollywood**

The Morgan Creek/Warner Brothers production of *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* (1991) had a well-known cast, huge set pieces and a popular soundtrack, the film linked itself to the golden age of the Robin Hood feature, the early twentieth century. Though financially successful at the time, the film failed to solidify itself as a memorable rendition of the Robin Hood legend; Kevin Costner’s bad English accent in the lead as Robin has been a sticking point with critics, coupled with Alan Rickman’s over-acting as the Sheriff. Yet even if the film was not critically acclaimed, it refined and expanded on the representation of Medieval Muslim empires and states, and the trope of the integrated Muslim that was introduced in *Robin of Sherwood*, placing a relatable Muslim character (Azeem) in the midst of a big budget Hollywood production. The film thus represents a step towards the acceptance phase of Bennett’s acculturation process, where culture is experienced as one of any number of different and complex world views, and others

---

are regarded as different but equally human. Through Azeem and his interaction with Robin, the audience witnesses a Muslim character who is distinct from those around him, while being portrayed as an equal of Robin Hood.

The film begins in Jerusalem in the year 1197, and once again the filmmakers construct an Orientalist vision of the East. Like many screen adaptations of Robin Hood, the action is contextualised against the Crusades, with Robin a prisoner in Jerusalem. A call to prayer is the first sound heard, under a dark city sky; domes, Arab carpets and dark abandoned streets fill the screen. The next sounds to be heard are screams of torture, from a group of white men with overgrown beards who are prisoners in a dungeon. A rapid succession of shots shows dirty bodies and hot fire, sweat and heat, screams and laughter. Robin (Kevin Costner) and his close friend Peter (Maid Marian’s brother) are shackled; their crime is stealing bread. An unknown English soldier’s hand is dispatched by a snivelling torturer, and Robin is chosen to go next; but demonstrating his English courage, he manages to escape, freeing Peter and Azeem (Morgan Freeman) in the process. Peter succumbs to an arrow on the streets of Jerusalem, and Azeem agrees to help Robin out of the city. Robin is puzzled by this new acquaintance, who seems to be very different from the Arab torturers that the audience was exposed to a few moments ago. The Saracen states that their ways lie together by the will of Allah. Azeem thus becomes the second Muslim to join Robin Hood as an important character on screen in the twentieth century.

While beginning in an Orientalist fashion, the film attempts to do more than reinforce stereotypes. As the story moves from Jerusalem to England (one scholar noting that the first

---

31 This trope finds its way into so many Western films set in the Muslim countries, managing to transcend geography and time. Most recently I came across it in X-Men Apocalypse (2016), in a scene where a young Arab mutant steals some food and is about to lose her arm when an evil manipulating mutant comes to her rescue. Yet, research has shown that such punishments were almost non-existent under Sharia law. For example, see J. Brown, ‘Stoning and Hand Cutting: Understanding the Hudud and the Shariah in Islam’, Yaqeen Institute, 2017, https://yaqeeninstitute.org/en/jonathan-brown/stoning-and-hand-cutting-understanding-the-hudud-and-the-shariah-in-islam/, (accessed 19 July 2018).
time the audience sees the Sun is in England, with Jerusalem set in perpetual darkness\textsuperscript{32}) it evokes the visual cues of \textit{Robin of Sherwood}. The realism and grittiness made popular in \textit{Robin of Sherwood} is continued here; England is full of mud, and Robin never resorts to wearing tights. Further, Azeem is depicted as serious, honourable and intellectually adept, and his observations of English life are amusing while also suggesting the social and cultural superiority of the Saracens over the West in this period. As Knight states, Azeem brings with him a range of Eastern knowledge communicated through familiar tropes; for example, his scientific knowledge is seen through the use of telescopes and explosives, and his medicinal knowledge is demonstrated when he is able to deliver Little John’s son during a difficult childbirth. Like Nasir, he also demonstrates exceptional warrior skills.\textsuperscript{33}


\textsuperscript{33}Knight, \textit{Robin Hood}, p. 168.
One scene that encapsulates the film’s celebration of Azeem’s Eastern refinement occurs when Robin and Azeem observe the approach of the Sheriff’s men after helping a boy (Little John’s son, who has been accused of killing a deer). Azeem produces a looking glass from his possessions that he uses like a pair of binoculars; he passes the contraption to Robin, who, after peering through the glass, draws his sword, thinking the enemy is upon them [Figure 1.3]. Azeem remarks in wonder, ‘How did your uneducated kind ever take Jerusalem’?

This exploration of the intellectual and technical capabilities of the East was briefly explored through Nasir in *Robin of Sherwood*, and is expanded upon and made more apparent in this film. In this manner, Azeem is constructed as modern, and thus relatable, and more easily accepted by the audience. Further, Azeem’s relationship with Robin also enables a critique of race relations. When he first arrives in England, Azeem is wary of how he will be received in this new world he has travelled to. He chooses to walk behind Robin and believes that being seen as his slave will be safer. Indeed, in saying ‘Am I not the infidel in this country?’ he draws attention to
the ideological gap between past approaches to West/East relations, and more contemporary approaches to the same issue.\textsuperscript{34}

Throughout, the film aims to promote dialogue as a means of breaking down prejudice. For example, Azeem is initially treated with contempt and suspicion by most characters other than Robin. He is refused a drink while the outlaws sit around a fire, as he is a ‘savage’. Yet Robin supports his friend from the Holy Land, stating that he is no more savage than any of the outlaws. As the film progresses, Azeem’s value as a human being is made more apparent, and established prejudices are systematically proven to be unjust. Within the world of the film, the West’s racism is seemingly based on Crusade propaganda and ignorance, and Azeem’s appearance in England is enough to challenge these entrenched ideas. Yet, although Azeem is portrayed as an equal in standing, capability and education, he is nevertheless also depicted as unique; he chooses not to assimilate but remains an ally to the Europeans around him while asserting his difference. For example, as King Richard appears at the nuptials of Robin and Marian at the end of the film, Azeem takes his place amongst his new friends. The King enters the forest chapel and the crowd all bow, except for Azeem. Similarly, at a pivotal point in the film when the outlaws need inspiration to fight against the Sheriff, Azeem addresses them, stating ‘I am not one of you, but I fight! I fight with Robin Hood!’

While there is much to be embraced in this representation, there are also aspects that are quite problematic, and most scholars have tended to concentrate on those aspects. Above all, the casting choice for Azeem has been controversial.\textsuperscript{35} The choice to cast Morgan Freeman, an African American, seems to conflate issues of representing Muslims with domestic American concerns about race relations. An early scene from \textit{Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves} reinforces this perspective. When Robin’s father’s manor is surrounded by the Sheriff of Nottingham’s men,

\textsuperscript{34}Aberth, ‘A Knight at the Movies’, p. 189.
\textsuperscript{35}Knight, \textit{Robin Hood}, p. 181.
enemies appear dressed in long flowing white robes with masks, and burn a cross in the dark. This is an obvious link to the Ku Klux Klan, echoing the contemporary issue of race relations in America;\footnote{Pages, ‘Robbing the Saracen to create the Englishman’.\footnote{\textit{Knight}, \textit{Robin Hood}, p. 170.} \footnote{E.L. Risden, ‘Resisting Manichean Delirium’ in N. Haydock and E.L Risden (eds.), \textit{Hollywood in the Holy Land: Essays on Film depictions of the Crusades and Christian-Muslim clashes}, Jefferson N.C, McFarland, 2008, p. 191.}}\footnote{\textit{Knight}, \textit{Robin Hood}, p. 170.}\footnote{E.L. Risden, ‘Resisting Manichean Delirium’ in \textit{Hollywood in the Holy Land: Essays on Film depictions of the Crusades and Christian-Muslim clashes}, p. 191.} certainly, Knight regards these as ‘domestic representations’, evoking American domestic issues.\footnote{\textit{Knight}, \textit{Robin Hood}, p. 170.} In this way, the film seems to consider African Americans and Middle Easterners as the same, belying an Orientalist tendency to lump ‘others’ into one broad category. The belief that one character can represent two distinct cultures/religions indicates a lack of cultural sensitivity towards both groups and for a film that seems to be striving to cast a positive light on contemporary race relations, this is problematic.

In addition to this criticism, E.L. Risden argues that the choice of including an ‘other’ as Robin’s sidekick serves the self-actualisation of the Western hero. The buddy film is an effective means of allowing this self-actualisation to occur, as an ‘other buddy’ facilitates sympathy for the white, Western hero while alleviating guilt about his privilege.\footnote{Risden terms this dynamic ‘incomplete equality’, suggesting that Robin is presented as rhetorically equal to Azeem, yet Azeem remains subservient, and Robin pursues his own good instead of Azeem’s. Indeed, Risden sees this relationship as the cruelest of all the buddy friendships he analyses, as true friendship is hinted at but is taken away with the conclusion of the pair’s adventure, where Azeem is relegated to the background of the finale, no longer relevant in the film’s England. Risden’s analysis of Azeem’s ‘incomplete equality’ with Robin arguably confirms that Azeem’s characterisation is at the \textit{acceptance} step in Bennett’s acculturation model, with Azeem presented as distinctly different, but with qualities that make him equally human, in contrast to the bloodthirsty Arab jailers who planned to cut off hands at the beginning of the film. The progress of acculturation would likely be seen as problematic.\footnote{\textit{Risden, ‘Resisting Manichean Delirium’ in \textit{Hollywood in the Holy Land: Essays on Film depictions of the Crusades and Christian-Muslim clashes}, p. 191.}
is evidenced through this positioning of Azeem as a seeming apology for the ‘previous cinematic essentialism’ of the Muslim other.

In terms of the contextual factors that shaped the development of Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves, most scholars aim to make a connection between the film and the first Gulf War. For example, Kathleen Biddick suggests that the film’s visual technique of placing a camera on the head of an arrow and watching it fly to the target was influenced by the footage of cruise missiles hitting their targets. She sees Azeem as symbolic of a Western ally like Syria or Kuwait, a symbol of new Orientalism, which pits progressive Arabs against Islamic fundamentalists. Yet, a second perspective on Azeem is that he does not represent the Saracens at all; rather, he is distinct from his own people, and distinct from other less ‘integrated’ Muslims. Azeem’s incarceration in and fleeing of his home is indicative of him not fitting into the East; he is distinct from the torturers at the beginning of the film and in his own words, he ‘has nothing to return to’ in the Arab world. This interpretation is relevant to many positive representations of Muslims, in which the integrated Muslim character is positioned either as distinct from radical Islam, or in some cases as distinct from both Islam and Western culture altogether.

Female Muslim Sidekicks: ‘Jack’ in Sherwood

The final Robin Hood text considered here is the 2006 BBC production Robin Hood. As the first post-September 11 Robin Hood text that features a Muslim character the show goes further in its integrating characterisation than any of the others considered in this chapter, while also introducing a positive characterisation of a Muslim woman. Building on a general understanding of how Muslims have been represented in the Western media, it is important to specifically

41Pages, ‘Robbing the Saracen to Create the Englishman’.
consider how Muslim women have been omitted, fetishised or othered in Western screen culture. While media representations of women in general continue to be a contested space, Muslim women are often depicted in the West as repressed, faceless and voiceless subjects within a religion and culture that subjugates them, in contrast to their freer Western counterparts.

The manner in which Muslim women have been constructed in Orientalist art and writing succinctly defines how Muslim women have fared in screen representations as well, in accordance with three significant tropes. Firstly, their absence speaks more of their place than anything else. Female Muslim characterisations are relatively rare in Western film and television; for example, in the case studies explored in this chapter and thesis, the overwhelming majority of film and television shows featuring positive characterisations of Muslims are focused on men. The absence of Muslim women in screen narratives is a clear reflection of Western assumptions about the standing of women in Muslim society, as subservient to men, controlled by dogma and the veil. Secondly, Orientalism positions Muslim women as victims, ready to be saved by Western heroes; this trope continues to be used to justify and then measure the success of conflicts such as fighting the Taliban or the War on Terror. Based on this reasoning, Franz Fanon does not see the forced removal of hijabs by colonisers as ‘a typology of victimisation’, but rather, as a trope which signifies ‘rescue from oppression’. A similar logic has also been used as a rationale for the banning of Muslim symbols such as the burqa in some countries. Some commentators have also argued that Muslim terrorism is a response to the new found freedom of Muslim women and children in the modern era, expressing rage at the

---

43 Hijri, ‘Through the Looking Glass’, p. 34.
45 Hijri, ‘Through the Looking Glass’, p. 36.
manner in which Muslim men’s patriarchal power has been compromised. 46 Thirdly, Muslim women are constructed as sexually available, represented by fantasies of the harem. 47 The harem contains both the victim and the sexually available exotic, as the women who inhabit it are forced to be there, while also fulfilling and proliferating the desires of their masters. 48 Overall, these three stereotypes of Muslim women – as absent, victims and sexually fetishized – serve to reinforce their difference from women of the Western world, and to underscore their status as other.

Before considering how Robin Hood (2006) constructs a positive Muslim representation, it is important to consider how females have fared in other screen iterations of Robin Hood. Arguably, the merry men in the forest, away from the eyes of the public, have been able to bond in intimately homosocial ways, allowing for ‘ambiguous non-traditional gender constructions’. 49 For example, the early films depicted Robin at odds with Marian, with Robin more comfortable spending time and getting close to the merry men and squirming when being touched by her. Further, Marian herself was given little agency; as a damsel in distress, her sexuality was repressed. She had no temptations or distractions, and it was actually Marian’s servants who resisted the advances of evil men on her behalf and were able to talk more about sex. 50 However, by the 1950s this had changed, with Marian and the supporting female characters transforming into ‘dangerous womanly others’ 51 who don’t defer to men, and are problematic to patriarchy. Marian became more flirtatious, and in one film she wrestles with Robin while dressed like a

---

48 Hijri, ‘Through the Looking Glass’, p. 35.
man to attract him. Marian concealing her gender to make an impact also occurs in the 2006 iteration.

By the time *Robin and Marian* (1976) was released, the women’s liberation movement was making its presence felt in the film text, with Robin being confused by the world-weary Marian who has learnt to cope in a world without men. The 1991 *Robin Hood* film (not considered in this chapter as it does not have any Muslim characterisations) has a very memorable Marian, full of subversive vitality. She flirts and speaks with double entendres, rejects her fiancé after finding Robin attractive, cuts her hair, dirties her face and kisses Robin dressed as a man. In the end she doesn’t marry Robin for the greater good, but rather to pursue her own desire; as Lorraine Kochanske Stock and Candace Gregory-Abbott argue, she is a ‘marriage between the Robin Hood myth and postfeminist ideology’. In keeping with this trajectory, Marian in the *Prince of Thieves* despises men, particularly their wish to return from the Crusades and rule even though women had been managing without them. She is also able to defend herself from foes. She is sexualized but is also permitted to witness a naked Robin, adding some balance to their relations.

Actress Lucy Griffiths described her rendition of Maid Marian in the 2006 series as a ‘modern woman who doesn’t fall into Robin’s arms, she fights physically and verbally and is very witty.’ Marian uses her allure to keep the Sheriff and Gisbourne at bay, trying to remain in close contact with her imprisoned father and keep their estate from being usurped, and helping Robin. The show also gives Marian the chance to dress up and do some of her own vigilante work; she dons a cape and mask and becomes the Nightwatchman, giving out food and aid to the poor, and proclaiming that her fight is against poverty. She is also placed in a conundrum, with her growing

---

52 Stock and Gregory-Abbott, pp. 203 – 207. The 1989 comedy television series *Maid Marian and Her Merry Men* is also extremely subversive, with Robin choosing to be a fashion designer and Marian leading her unique group of merry men on her own adventures.

attraction to Robin contrasted by her affection towards Gisbourne, whom she initially chooses to string along for her own ends, but goes so far as to kiss him, placing her in the centre of a love triangle. When she is free of Gisbourne (this betrayal is the ultimate cause of her death) and joins the merry men, she has difficulty following Robin, does not readily fall under his command, and challenges him openly. It is almost as if her presence in the forest clashes with the concept of the outlaws, which is defined by some as ‘a merging of homosocial forest world and military barracks with boys’ summer camp’. 54

This tradition of increasingly strong female characterisation and gender roles that challenge the norm was the context for the characterisation of a Muslim woman in the same 2006 BBC production, which ran for three seasons before being cancelled. It was billed as a reimagining of the Robin Hood legend for a twenty-first century audience and depicted a world where leaders have lost touch with the public. Producers chose to include political rhetoric to allow audiences to make connections to contemporary issues, 55 even going so far as to associate the merry men with terrorism. 56 For example, the Sheriff states that those aiding Robin Hood can be held without trial and executed while England is at war in the Holy Land, and in another scene the Sheriff actually says ‘war on terror’ in the background as other characters are speaking. This is extremely contemporary language, and at one point the merry men come across a money cart that one says looks like a kebab van, making overt the show’s modern inspiration. As Martone argues, this iteration of Robin Hood was an obvious effort to ‘achieve socio-cultural cohesion amongst diverse groups in Great Britain’ including a unique, Muslim female characterisation integrated at a level previously unseen in Medievalist productions. 57

55 Bashford, ‘Robin Hood’.
57 For Martone, the show was a significant step forward in combatting English ignorance of Muslims. Martone, ‘Treacherous Saracens and Integrated Muslims’, p. 73.
Djaq (Anjali Jay) appears about half way through the first season, when Robin and the merry men come across a wagon full of Saracen prisoners. The Saracens have been brought to Nottingham in response to a strike occurring at the local mine; they have been shipped to England as ‘outworkers’, cheap labour at the behest of the Sheriff (a reference to the contemporary flow of cheap labour from one part of the world to the other). After rescuing the wagon and prisoners, Much (Robin’s servant) tells the prisoners to renounce their God and they will be free. Djaq (with very short hair, looking like a young boy) responds, saying ‘you killed our people in the name of your God, so why should we forego ours for yours?’ She also volunteers to go into the mine to save the injured Little John, and proposes using chemicals to heal his wounds, at which the merry men scoff. Yet Robin, the most integrated of the group, understands Djaq, and allows her to treat John. They use her magnifying glass to light explosives and escape, and later Djaq uses her tools to confuse Much, by lighting his fire and making him think it is a gift from God. The group realise that Djaq is a girl, once named Sofia, who assumed the name and place of her twin brother who died fighting in the Holy Land. She negotiates her way into the group, but immediately states that she is a rubbish cook so the men should not expect her to look after them.

In one early episode after her introduction, Djaq falls prisoner to the Sheriff and Robin makes the choice to save her rather than putting Gisbourne on trial. Djaq is extremely grateful, cries, and says to Robin that she thought he would not save her because she is a female. In the same episode, she concocts a smoke bomb from chemicals and secures the escape of the gang. The merry men thank her, saying ‘but you are a girl’, to which she replies, ‘embarrassing isn’t it?’ Two episodes after this, one of the merry men says ‘apart from being a girl, Jack (Djaq) is one of the lads’ and for the rest of the first season she continues as a member of the outlaw gang,

---

58‘Tattoo? What Tattoo?’, Robin Hood, Season 1 Episode 8, BBC, 2007, [TV program].

although her gender and sexuality are repressed.\textsuperscript{59} The second season allows for her sexuality to be explored more; in an episode when Marian is used as sexual bait for a gambler the Sheriff wishes to rip off, Djaq also dresses revealingly, showing flesh to assist with a plan for the merry men to infiltrate the Sheriff’s castle.\textsuperscript{60} The gang approves of her more sexualised attire; and in different moments across the second season they comment on how they are attracted to Djaq, and flickers of a relationship between Djaq and Will Scarlett appear during this time. Further, the Sheriff now insinuates that she sleeps with the gang.

By the end of Season 2, the Sheriff realises that to remain in power, he needs to kill King Richard and decides to venture to the Holy Land with Marian as his prisoner. The merry men follow the Sheriff to thwart the plan, and the show shifts to Acre in Palestine for the final episode. Before setting out for Acre, the merry men are stuck in a barn, surrounded by many foes, thinking they are certain to die. Djaq says that they need to do one thing before they face death: have a ‘Khalil and Dimna’ night, a chance for the group to say what is on their minds, tell only the truth and share their most important secrets. The men are all hesitant to take part in this; they look more worried and uncomfortable about this than facing certain death outside. It is up to Djaq to begin the process. She explains how she admires them all, is proud to fight with them, yet she laughs that they are filthy, stink and have no souls. Then with tears in her eyes she says that she loves one amongst them more than the others, and regrets that she did not tell Will that she loves how strong and true he is sooner. Will replies that he loves how she always says what she means and how she fights like a man, how she is ferocious yet always a woman. Later, the two kiss before they run out to face the enemy and their relationship officially begins.\textsuperscript{61} For the other merry men, the process of sharing secrets is more difficult. They need to be prodded and cajoled into sharing by Djaq. This scene, facilitated by Djaq, shows a different side to the gang while also

\textsuperscript{59} ‘Peace? Off!’, \textit{Robin Hood}, Season 1 Episode 10, BBC, 2007, [TV program]
\textsuperscript{60} ‘Booby and the Beast’, \textit{Robin Hood}, Season 2 Episode 2, BBC, 2007, [TV program]
\textsuperscript{61} ‘A Good Day to Die’, \textit{Robin Hood}, Season 2 Episode 12, BBC, 2007, [TV program]
exploring the homoerotic affection that the merry men share with one another. It is one of themost poignant and funny scenes in the series, and probably the most significant one in which Djaq is the instigator and moderator of the events. Neither Azeem nor Nasir were ever given sway over such an important scene in their narratives.

The city of Acre, to which the merry men travel in order to thwart the Sheriff’s plan, conforms to the usual stereotypes of Muslim locations. Its dark streets are patrolled by men with scimitars, while in the day time, the only images of the city that the audience sees feature long stretches of desert. The only place that is inviting in Acre is Djaq’s uncle’s house, a beautiful light and water filled house called Bassam’s Aviary. The merry men make their way to it, and the audience sees some change in Djaq; she covers her head in the presence of her uncle. As the season draws to a close with the death of Marian at Gisbourne’s hand, Will and Djaq choose to remain in Acre and Djaq’s headcovering looks to have become a permanent part of her attire, although both she and Will still sport their merry men necklaces, indicating that their hearts still lie with Robin [Figure 1.4].

---

62 ‘We Are Robin Hood’, *Robin Hood*, Season 2 Episode 13, BBC, 2007, [TV program]
Robin and the remaining merry men return to King Richard, and Robin says to the King ‘for every man there is a purpose which he sets up in his life; let yours be the doing of good deeds’ – a quote he says is from the Quran. The King says they are to do those deeds in his name, that they are his representatives in England. So, the merry men return to England, having left in the Holy Land both of the show’s lead female characters.

Djaq effectively challenges stereotypes of Muslim women mentioned earlier; she is visible, and neither oppressed nor controlled by the merry men, and is a sexual agent without being oversexualised. Djaq makes the choice to stay with Robin and the Merry Men after they welcome her to be part of the group, unlike Nasir or Azeem who are bound by life debts and have no other choice. She also chooses to declare her affections for Will, and is comfortable in her sexuality, enough so to shut down unwanted advances and make fun of the male gaze in the instances that she displays her beauty. This element of choice is especially central to modern

---

68

Western notions of femininity and sexuality,\textsuperscript{64} the framing of her sexuality along Western lines is thus a concrete example of her adaptation to life in the West, and of how the text does all it can to challenge Orientalist stereotypes of women and construct a Muslim woman who can make England her home quite easily.

However, Djaq also perpetuates Orientalist tropes, with her Eastern refinement and mystic beliefs playing an important role in allowing the group to succeed. The casting of an Indian actress as a Saracen is also redolent of lumping all ‘others’ together in one category, as criticisms levelled at the casting of Azeem in \textit{Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves} also pointed out. An Orientalist approach is also evident in other aspects of the show; for example, in one episode a harem of sexy veiled female assassins, ‘Saladin’s hit squad’, attempt to kill the Sheriff and his followers; they twirl around with double swords, crying out in ululation before going into battle.\textsuperscript{65}

From the perspective of intercultural sensitivity, the series expands upon many of the tropes that have been laid out in the two previous Robin Hood texts considered here. From the outset, it is evident that Robin is aware of the wider world around him, having returned from the Holy


\textsuperscript{65} ‘Peace? Off!’, \textit{Robin Hood}, Season 1 Episode 8, BBC, 2007, [TV program]
Land brandishing an Arab scimitar and bow, while Much uses an Oriental looking shield [Figure 1.5]. Robin quotes passages from the Quran, knows of Saracen advancements in medicine and technology, and is adamant in trying to get King Richard out of the Middle East and back home to England. The show also features a core group of ethnorelative, and culturally aware characters interacting with less interculturally sensitive characters, who are incrementally educated by these interactions. Specifically, Much and Little John are characterised as culturally incompetent buffoons, and their interactions with Djaq, Robin and Will are important in dispelling myths about Muslims and the wider world. The character of Djaq (and also the characters of Robin and Will) can thus be read as exhibiting the adaptation phase of ethnorelativism, in which an individual’s worldview grows to comprehend constructs from other cultures, allowing for empathy and the ‘ability to take perspective or shift frame of reference vis-à-vis other cultures’ as a result of lived experiences. Each of these characters connects, empathises, challenges, criticises and in the case of Djaq and Will engages in romance with

---

66Bennett, ‘Becoming Interculturally Competent’, p. 70.
people from another culture. Yet Djaq has not assimilated, and not given up her own cultural worldview; the major difference between adaptation and integration is that an integrated individual can move between two or more cultures, with no central cultural worldview.\textsuperscript{67}

Further, by leaving her in Acre at the end of Season 2, the show cuts off any possibility of further developing Djaq as a Muslim woman in England. Just as Azeem is pushed to the periphery in the final wedding scene in the 1991 film, Will and Djaq are left behind in Acre, and the opportunity to explore romance between people from two different religious and cultural backgrounds goes unexplored. It is quite possible that Djaq and Will’s relationship and acculturation may have gone beyond adaptation to integration in subsequent seasons of the show, but in season 3, the show moved away from a fascination with King Richard and the Holy Land, turning its attention to family intrigues and Robin’s relationship with Gisbourne and others. Friar Tuck was introduced into the gang, played by an African actor, but the politicised tone that the show evinced in the first two seasons was toned down. Yet for all its limitations, the BBC production \textit{Robin Hood} broke new ground in allowing for the characterisation of a Muslim woman who dispels myths and successfully adapts to life in a Western context.

\textit{Muslim Hero Ventures West: Reverse Orientalism?}

Unlike the other films and television shows that have been considered so far, John McTiernan’s Medievalist action movie \textit{The 13th Warrior} (1999) features a Muslim as the central character and narrator of the film. It is one of the unique instances in which the Medieval world is shown through the eyes of a Muslim character. The film is based on the Michael Crichton novel \textit{Eaters of the Dead}, which itself was inspired by two Medieval narratives, the poem \textit{Beowulf} and the \textit{Kitap} by Ahmad Ibn Fadlan, a tenth-century Arab ambassador to the tribes of Northern Europe,

whose account centres on a group of Vikings from the Volga region in north East Europe. Crichton constructs a loose retelling of Beowulf, placing Ibn Fadlan at the centre of the story, and this is replicated in McTiernan’s film. Antonio Banderas plays Ibn Fadlan, with the choice of casting a Spaniard as a Muslim echoing the concerns that were raised about Morgan Freeman’s casting in Prince of Thieves and Anjali Jay’s casting as Djaq. Nevertheless, and although it is essentially an action film, The 13th Warrior builds on the themes of the previously discussed Robin Hood texts, complicating and challenging stereotypical images of a traditional other. Ibn Fadlan’s characterisation on screen continues the acculturation process from ethnocentrism towards ethnorelativism, as a Western audience is invited to accept its own culture as having much in common with the integrating Muslim protagonist’s, despite any differences that may be apparent.

The film is based on Ibn Fadlan’s journey to a northern Viking kingdom that is being assailed by a powerful, apparently inhuman foe called the Wendol. Ibn Fadlan is chosen by a seer to be one of thirteen warriors who will save the kingdom from the unknown terror. He accompanies the Norsemen on their journey, helps solve the mystery of the Wendol, takes part in the attack on the enemy and returns home to document the exploits of the group. The storyline parallels the journey of the Western hero in a traditional Orientalist film, but instead of a journey from West to East, the movement is reversed, with the West (specifically, northern Europe) becoming the exotic realm of the other. As Lynn Shutters observes, this constitutes a reversal of the narrative tropes of the ‘Eastern’, a term developed by John Eisele to define Hollywood films set in the East.

---

69 Bennett, ‘Becoming Interculturally Competent’, p. 68.
Eisele determined ten narrative tropes that he believed are common to Easterns, and signal the stages that a Western hero undergoes to bring about positive change in the Eastern world. The first steps are *Transgression* and *Separation* in which a transgression of the hero leads to separation from his home. This is followed by *Abduction* and *Reduction*, the process of making the Westerner powerless at one point in the narrative, through an event that engenders the audience’s sympathy for the hero who is eventually saved or empowered to escape. *Induction* involves the hero’s adoption of Eastern culture, and a lot of the time this includes adopting Eastern garb. *Seduction* occurs when the hero falls for a woman, followed by *Redemption*, *Revelation* and *Reaffirmation*; the processes involved in the resolution of the film’s conflict, in which the East is made a better place and the Western hero becomes a better man, reaffirming the social, cultural and political values of the West. *Mutilation* is more of a ‘sub-motif’, constructing the East as a location full of violence, weapons and bodily torture, and emphasising how the protagonist must use violence to act.\(^\text{72}\)

As Shutters suggests, it is instructive to examine the extent to which these tropes of the Western hero travelling East are reversed in the journey of Ibn Fadlan, a Muslim travelling West. Many aspects of Ibn Fadlan’s journey with the Vikings can be mapped unproblematically against Eisele’s schema; for example, the narrative is set in motion as a result of his *transgression* in falling for the wife of a powerful man in his home city of Baghdad, and subsequent exile (*separation*). The images of the poet’s home are in glaring contrast to the images of Jerusalem at the beginning of *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* and *Acre* in the *BBC Robin Hood*. The Baghdad of McTiernan’s film is full of light, with lavishly decorated interiors and impressive Arabic architecture. Elements of Orientalist filmmaking still find their way into the film, with women adorned in burkas and nefarious men plotting Ibn Fadlan’s exile, but the overall image of the

city is one of sophistication, and as Ibn Fadlan begins interacting with the Vikings, it is evident that Arab culture is at the centre of this world.\textsuperscript{73} The Arabs have an established political structure, with emissaries being sent to various kingdoms, and refinement in clothing, speech and hygiene. Shutters compares this construction of the East and its people to how it is traditionally constructed; it is usually shown as a passive static space, awaiting discovery and alteration by a Western hero.\textsuperscript{74} Another important image that reinforces the centrality of Muslims in this Medieval world is a map showing Ibn Fadlan’s journey northward. As Ibn Fadlan narrates his journey, a map appears on screen, on which Baghdad is clearly labelled and easily identified by the audience, whereas Europa is a large landmass on the periphery of the screen, with no discernible borders, towns or information to allow the audience to develop a connection with it. Europe is now on the margin,\textsuperscript{75} and the map places the Middle East at its centre, defying established stereotypes.\textsuperscript{76}

While introducing a sophisticated Muslim protagonist, the film also goes about constructing the Vikings as violent and unrefined. During the initial meeting between the two groups, the Viking’s new leader Buliwyf asks Ibn Fadlan to recite something to honour his clan’s recently dead King. Ibn Fadlan obliges and begins reciting a poem, but at this point Buliwyf is attacked by a clansman, seemingly in an attempt to kill Buliwyf for the throne. After slicing open the assassin’s chest, Buliwyf returns to his seat and continues to listen to Ibn Fadlan’s recitation. The audience also witnesses the Vikings using a single bowl to wash, spit and clean their noses, which is followed by a haunting scene that depicts the burial of Viking royalty, in which the recently deceased king is burnt in his ship, along with a woman who is burned alive as a sacrifice. Shutters considers the sacrifice scene as evoking images of Hindu bride burning, arguing that the film thus reverses

\textsuperscript{73}Shutters, ‘Vikings Through the Eyes of an Arab Ethnographer’, p. 79.
\textsuperscript{74}Shutters, p. 79.
\textsuperscript{75}Shutters, p. 80.
Orientalist views that Eastern women need protection and liberation from their own men by a white man. 77

While Ibn Fadlan is interacting with the Vikings at their camp, a messenger from a northern Viking tribe comes to Buliwyf asking for help, because a mysterious enemy has been attacking the kingdom. An oracle is called to help decide what should be done; the seer says that thirteen warriors are to be chosen from the clan, with the final member of the group to be a foreigner, a man not from the north. Ibn Fadlan is left with no choice but to join the group of warriors on their quest; his abduction occurs. As the group begin the journey north, Ibn Fadlan’s relationship with the Norsemen begins to develop. He is initially a source of comedy for the Vikings; his exoticness is mocked, his Arab horse is dwarfed by the Vikings’ steeds and is called a dog, and his value as a member in the group is questioned. This marginalisation is Ibn Fadlan’s reduction and begins the process of cultural exchange within the film.

In the beginning of the film, Ibn Fadlan speaks in English and needs a translator (and the audience needs subtitles) to understand the Vikings; he is the point of reference for the audience, and the Vikings are foreigners at this time. But the journey north allows for Ibn Fadlan to accustom himself to the Norse language. He eventually understands the language, and this is represented cinematically when the Vikings begin communicating in English and the subtitles cease. This event is the beginning of Ibn Fadlan’s induction and has a profound effect on the narrative. Firstly, Ibn Fadlan’s acquisition of the Norse language signifies his intelligence and impresses the Vikings, and he now becomes an important member of the group.

When the group arrive in the northern kingdom, Ibn Fadlan’s induction continues; he closely examines the people and is quickly able to adapt to the new world. He abandons his traditional garb, begins wearing armour and his foreignness helps him find a lover; 78 through this he fulfils

---

77 Shutters, ‘Vikings Through the Eyes of an Arab Ethnographer’, p. 81.
78 Risden, ‘Resisting Manichean Delirium’, p. 190.
the trope of seduction. These developments allow Ibn Fadlan to become an accepted member of the group, and his intelligence continues to be his primary form of assistance to the Vikings. His quick wits allow him to save a child before the Wendol attack the camp, and his ethnographic skills allow him to see through the myth, prejudice and superstition of the Vikings to help solve the mystery surrounding the origin of the enemy. After acquiring a small statue that the enemy left behind during the first attack on the camp, Ibn Fadlan deduces that the enemy must be human, and after the group consults another seer, he is able to solve the seer’s riddle, determining that the enemy is hidden in an underground cave. So, Ibn Fadlan’s intellect is a useful and crucial element to the overall success of the quest, with the cultural exchange between Muslim and Viking proving beneficial to all. This revelation by Ibn Fadlan is important to the film, but at the reaffirmation stage The 13th Warrior chooses to emphasise the significance of masculinity over all other social and political values, and it is here that the Western warrior trumps the Eastern ethnographer.

From the beginning of the film, Ibn Fadlan is constructed in opposition to the Norsemen’s image of masculinity; as Shutters argues, Ibn Fadlan’s effeminacy conforms to classic Orientalist ideas of associating the East with the feminine. He is a poet, wears eye makeup and when given a sword he can barely lift he hesitatingly states that he is not a warrior. Ibn Fadlan then makes a scimitar out of the sword that is given to him, once again showing his intelligence and ingenuity. His weapon is unique and effective, in keeping with Carl Grindley’s observation that the hero’s weapon has a significant place in many Medievalist films, but it is also an object of ridicule, as one of the Vikings sees the sword as fit for his own daughter instead of a warrior. Indeed, Ibn Fadlan is compared by Risden to Frodo in Lord of the Rings, because he has the least martial skill.

80Shutters, ‘Vikings Through the Eyes of an Arab Ethnographer’, p. 83.
81Shutters, p. 83.
amongst his group.\textsuperscript{82} For example, when the party secretly raid the Wendol’s lair, Ibn Fadlan needs to be saved from plummeting off a cliff, and it is Buliywfyf who kills the leaders of the Wendol. In the film’s climactic battle scene, Buliywfyf faces off with the head of the Wendol’s fighters even after being mortally poisoned, and after killing the Wendol leader, sits on his makeshift wooden throne amongst the defences of the town and succumbs to the poison, leaving the audience with a powerful lasting image of this character.\textsuperscript{83} This ending valorises the martial masculinity of the Vikings, which is justified as necessary to combat irrational, asocial creatures such as the Wendol. As Shutters argues, such representations of justified male violence contrast with examples of masculine violence in the Orientalist tradition, in which it is characterised as terrorism, and directed towards innocents, women and children.\textsuperscript{84}

Through recourse to such hierarchised evaluations of masculinity, Ibn Fadlan and the Vikings reach the limits of their cultural exchange. Ibn Fadlan is shown to \textit{adapt} by embracing a more Western approach to masculinity, with the influence of the Viking world on his values most clearly shown in two instances. One is before the final battle with the Wendol. As the enemy approach, Ibn Fadlan prostrates in Muslim prayer, and then joins in with the Viking prayer, the


\textsuperscript{83}Grindley, \textit{The Medieval Hero on Screen}, p. 161.

\textsuperscript{84}Shutters, ‘Vikings Through the Eyes of an Arab Ethnographer’, p. 86.
same prayer that shocked him at the beginning of the film when the woman was to be burnt as a sacrifice [Figure 1.6].

The second instance occurs at the very end of the film, after he has returned to his home and is documenting the exploits of the Vikings. Here, Ibn Fadlan asks that Allah’s blessing be on pagan men who shared their food and shed their blood so that he could be a real man and a useful servant of Allah.

It is clear that his interaction with the Vikings has been a significant event in shaping his life and masculine identity; yet, the same cannot be said of the Vikings. Ibn Fadlan’s presence in the north helped the success of the group, and their mutual admiration grew throughout their partnership; but he leaves no lasting mark on the Westerners’ world, an effect that most Western heroes can boast of when they venture Eastward.

Ultimately, Ibn Fadlan’s intelligence and sophistication is overshadowed by his lack of martial skill and valour, and Buliwyf is arguably the film’s true hero. The point at which Ibn Fadlan learns

85Shutters, Vikings Through the Eyes of an Arab Ethnographer, pp. 87-89.
86Shutters, p. 87.
the Norseman language and the Vikings begin speaking in English underscores this, because the Norsemen speak in a more Western sounding English than the protagonist, who maintains an Arab accent.\textsuperscript{87} The Vikings thus begin to replace Ibn Fadlan as the primary source of identification for the audience, and as the group get closer to their goal it is Ibn Fadlan and the East that is increasingly positioned as gaining from this cultural exchange. As the film progresses, Ibn Fadlan is increasingly positioned as an observer or documenter of events, again recalling the marginalisation of Azeem at the resolution of \textit{Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves}. In this way, the logic of the film does not exactly mirror the logic of Eisele’s ‘Eastern’, because a subtle infusion of Western values and preoccupations works to decentre Ibn Fadlan from his own narrative, incrementally installing a Western hero in his place.

\textit{The 13th Warrior} is unique in considering the Medieval world through the eyes of a Muslim. It reinforces many of the ideas that have been considered in the Robin Hood texts and goes further, offering a window into a strange Viking world through the eyes of a sophisticated Muslim with Eastern refinement. At least initially, this narrative strategy reinforces similarities between the modern West and the Muslim character; and at the same time, Ibn Fadlan’s characterisation conforms to the \textit{adaptation} phase in Bennett’s acculturation model. He develops empathy for another culture and learns to act in culturally appropriate ways,\textsuperscript{88} evidenced through his experience of life in the Viking world, friendship with the Norsemen, and engagement with Viking codes of masculinity and language. Fadlan has experienced a new culture, learnt from it and become more interculturally competent as a result. On the other hand, the Vikings remain at the acceptance phase; they leave the intercultural interaction with some appreciation of Muslim culture, but show little evidence of reflecting on their own cultural values as a result of the encounter. They adapt none of the Eastern man’s knowledge or

\textsuperscript{87}Shutters, ‘Vikings Through the Eyes of an Arab Ethnographer’, p. 82.
\textsuperscript{88}Bennett, ‘Becoming Interculturally Competent’, p. 69.
refinement, are not interested in his language or faith, and are mainly interested in shaping his masculinity according to their own norms. Further, their acceptance only develops after Ibn Fadlan breaks down the barrier of communication and begins adopting aspects of their lifestyle. Ultimately, the Vikings regard Ibn Fadlan as a quaint guest who helped them on a quest, and the dialogic element of their encounter is unevenly distributed, with Ibn Fadlan doing most of the relational work.

Towards Integration ... and Secularisation?

Six years after The 13th Warrior was released, well known director Ridley Scott made Kingdom of Heaven (2005), a Medievalist film that also featured complex Muslim characterisations. It was critically received by historians and other scholars even before shooting had been completed; Ridley’s choice to make a film about the Crusades at a time when the West was attacking the Middle East as the result of actions taken in the name of religion inevitably attracted commentary that linked events in the film to the contemporary world. Some labelled it as ‘Osama Bin Laden’s version of history’, a dangerous distortion that would feed the flames of radical Islam, while others thought that the film would be likely to provoke hate crimes against Arabs in the Western world. The alarmed reception the film received even before being screened was a clear indication of the state of Western / Muslim relations in the wake of September 11. Nevertheless, Kingdom of Heaven constructs a representation of Muslim and Western relations that can, like aspects of The 13th Warrior, be considered at the adaptation stage of the acculturation process.

Haydock argues that Western scholars such as Jonathan Riley-Smith try to distance modern military activity in the Middle East from the Crusades, by claiming that even the people living in Muslim empires of the time had all but forgotten the Crusades until romantic novelists such as

90Haydock, The Imaginary Middle Ages, p. 136.
Sir Walter Scott made a link between nineteenth-century colonial expansion and the Crusades. However, Haydock claims that trying to erect such a ‘chronological boundary’ between the past and present is unenforceable.\(^91\) Certainly, the use of the word ‘Crusade’ by both George Bush and Osama Bin Laden suggests how this chapter of history continues to play a role in shaping West / East relations.\(^92\) It is then difficult to argue against the claim that *Kingdom of Heaven* has more to do with the twenty-first century than the twelfth, and an analysis of the film will demonstrate this. *Kingdom of Heaven* is also the story of a protagonist heading East, but unlike traditional Orientalist films that send a European to change the Orient with their ingenuity and Western knowledge, this protagonist, much like Ibn Fadlan, enters a world that he does impact, albeit in a different manner from the traditional films in this genre. As a point of comparison with the 13\(^{th}\) *Warrior*, it is worth tracing the Western hero’s actions using Eisele’s ‘Eastern’ framework.

The film begins in France in the year 1187, with Balian the blacksmith (Orlando Bloom) mourning the recent suicide of his wife after the death of their child. The Europe of Scott’s film is sombre; the audience is introduced into a world of poverty, misery and religious corruption. Within this world the protagonist cannot find any peace.\(^93\) Balian is seen going through the mere motions of existence until Godfrey of Ibelin, a lord returning from the Holy Land, reveals to Balian that he is his father, and that Balian is his only heir. Balian is asked to return to the East with his newfound father; he initially refuses, but after killing a priest (his *transgression*) Balian is forced to flee his village (his *separation*) and join his father on a journey to the Holy Land (his *abduction*).

---

\(^91\)Haydock, *The Imaginary Middle Ages*, p. 139.


\(^93\)Finke and Shichtman, *Cinematic Illuminations*, p. 231.
Balian is religiously ambiguous; his faith has been tainted by the events surrounding his wife’s suicide. Nevertheless, Godfrey offers an escape for Balian, describing the Holy Land as a place where a man can repair his fortunes. In particular, he stresses that one’s social standing has no impact on one’s fortunes in Jerusalem, which is a land of opportunity that rewards individuals based on their endeavours; Jerusalem is a kingdom of conscience, a kingdom of heaven where Jews, Christians and Muslims live in harmony. Scott thus constructs the Holy Land as an analogue of the American frontier, and Balian, who hopes that he may atone for his sins and find renewed purpose in his life, is the American reformer hero, free from social ills, the greatest in this case being religious fanaticism. The film thus pits a core group of reformed, irreligious humanists, both Christian and Muslim, against the forces of intolerance, religious bigotry and class hierarchies.

The death of Godfrey makes Balian the lord of Ibelin, and charges him with the responsibility of protecting Jerusalem from conquest. The following scenes of the film are a learning curve for Balian, as he begins to realise what drives the men around him mad to fight and kill, and how religious extremism fuels these desires; this is his induction into the culture in this part of the world. Within the film, Jerusalem is most threatened not by invading Muslims, but rather by the actions of fanatical Templar knights. Balian’s time in Jerusalem is spent with Tiberius, the Marshall of Jerusalem, and King Baldwin IV. Both echo the sentiments developed by Godfrey and personified by Balian; that morality, religious tolerance and individualism, rather than zealosity, are the only way to secure a long-lasting peace in Jerusalem. The film’s antagonists, Guy de Lusignan and Reynald De Chantillon, are also introduced in Jerusalem; bloodthirsty Templar knights who spend most of their screen time slaughtering innocent Muslims, scenes of mutilation. In one of the many graphic scenes in the film, Guy and Reynald attack a Muslim

---

95 Finke and Shichtman, Cinematic Illusions, p. 233.
caravan. The camera lingers on shots of Guy’s face covered in blood, eyes half closed in orgasmic ecstasy during the slaughter. In this film, the Templars are the film’s fanatic, irrational antagonists; through their proclivity to prey on the innocent and weak, their religious rhetoric and generally evil demeanour, they substitute for the Muslim fanatics of so many screen representations. Balian’s enmity with Guy fuels his continued disillusionment with the Crusade and his affair with Guy’s wife Sybilla is a variation on seduction; instead of falling for a girl from the East, he is seduced by a European Princess who has embraced Eastern culture.

It is the Templars’ continued attacks on Muslims and Reynald’s murder of Saladin’s sister that leads to the end of the truce between Jerusalem and the Muslims, introducing the character of Saladin into the film. It is the presence of Saladin that really adds depth to the representation of Islam in this text, and acts as a revelation and tipping point for Balian and his realisation that the Crusades are futile. Immaculately dressed and eloquently spoken, Saladin has many of the qualities that are also apparent in Balian and is portrayed convincingly by the brilliant Ghassan Massoud. Saladin is shown as a compassionate and wise leader, with a subtle weariness that comes with the burden of power. His reluctance to spill blood parallels Balian’s; Saladin immediately agrees to a truce with King Baldwin when the opportunity arises and goes as far as to send his personal physicians to tend to the sick King, echoing the trope of Muslim medicinal skill that was first seen in Cecile De Mille’s film of 1936. Saladin shares the same concerns as the film’s Western hero, and crystallises Balian’s understanding of the futility of the war between the East and West.

Just like Balian and King Baldwin, the Sultan is also shown having to deal with radical elements amongst his own people. After signing the above-mentioned truce, a war hungry lord within the Muslim army questions Saladin’s decision to make peace, stating that it is only God who decides

\[96\text{Finke and Shichtman, p. 233.}\]
the outcome of battles. To this, Saladin has a very rational response; he states that the Muslim army could not have laid siege to Kerak while the Christian army was threatening its rear. He continues that without preparation the Muslim army cannot be successful and asks how many battles the Muslims had won before he appeared.98 This last statement is almost irreligious and helps solidify the script’s attempt to parallel Saladin with the film’s progressive protagonist. Indeed, Saladin is one of the film’s secular thinkers, placing him on an ideologically equal footing with certain Westerners in the text, and challenging traditional Orientalist representations that have defined Muslims as governed by their religion. By paralleling the concerns of Saladin and Balian about religious fanaticism, the film critiques the role of faith in extremism and ongoing global conflicts and suggests how reason and respectful dialogue could provide an antidote to the cycle of violence.

In the contemporary moment, the ‘acceptable’ Muslim is often constructed as one who has shed the burdens of religion and cultural traditions and has instead embraced universal values. Indeed, Scott’s choice to remove historically accurate scenes that were included in the original script, depicting Saladin’s approval of the execution of Templar prisoners after one of the battles in the film, underscores this trend. In an interview, Scott explained that he was interested in ‘iconic figures’ of history, those who are remembered for being on the cutting edge of the past.99 In choosing to exclude these events from the film, thus furthering Saladin’s distance from the fanaticism occurring around him, Scott explained that historically Saladin would have had to do things he didn’t agree with, such as the execution of Templar prisoners that was written into the script initially but dropped later. Scott remarks that it is ‘impossible to deal with fanatics’, and that overall Saladin had a very modern way of dealing with them.100

100 Burt, Medieval and Early Modern Film and Media, p. 126.
It is in the third and final act of the film that the audience sees a lot of the Sultan, especially in the assault on Jerusalem and the defence of the city by Balian, the scene which completes his 
*redemption* – not giving up the city without a valiant defence – in true Western warrior fashion. However, Saladin’s prominence does not threaten to displace Balian from the centre of the narrative, as occurs in the case of Ibn Fadlan. In contrast to the encounter between Ibn Fadlan and the Vikings, the interaction between Balian and Saladin depicts their equal participation in an intercultural dialogue. For example, Scott cuts between Balian and Saladin, mapping Saladin’s gradual realisation that Balian is a worthy adversary; at one point Saladin gives an impressed smirk as the Muslim army’s siege engines are destroyed by Balian’s defences. In other instances, Saladin is seen weeping over the Muslim dead that are being buried, articulating the guilt that he feels for the loss of lives within his army, the battle and defence of Jerusalem. Saladin’s most memorable scene is when Balian and Saladin come together to parley after a particularly intense part of the siege.

*Balian (Orlando Bloom) and Saladin (Ghassan Massoud) parley. The two characters are weary of the religious fanaticism that is occurring around them.*

Balian threatens to destroy the whole city and all of the holy places that he claims make men go mad, but to this Saladin replies ‘I wonder if it would be better if you did’ [Figure 1.7] and nevertheless reminds Balian that the city is full of women and children. Saladin then promises to provide all Christians safe passage out of the city. Balian has trouble believing this, stating
that a century before, the invading Christian armies had slaughtered everybody in Jerusalem. Saladin is then able to show his virtue, stating that Balian’s men are not those men, he is Saladin, and that Jerusalem is not being left to an inhumane leader. Balian then surrenders the city and returns to Europe.

The final scenes in Jerusalem are of Saladin walking through a hallway in formal garb, picking up a dropped crucifix and placing it on the table from which it fell. This symbolic image was celebrated by Shaheen as a positive representation of a Muslim. Although Balian plays an individual heroic role in ending the siege without any more bloodshed, it is Balian and Saladin together who enable the reaffirmation of the future of Jerusalem; Saladin’s actions reassure Balian that a new era in the East without crusading armies will be preferable, and that Saladin is a better man to rule than Guy or the Templars. Saladin is thus depicted in a fashion that is generally reserved for Western heroes – as masculine, virile, and righteous – and unlike other ‘Easterns’, the Western hero’s primary contribution to the Orient is not the imposition of a Western worldview. Although he defends the masculine honour of the West through a courageous defence of Jerusalem, his lasting contribution is to return Muslim lands to Saladin. This is a significant departure from what has been witnessed in past Orientalist or ‘Eastern’ films.

*Kingdom of Heaven* has been critiqued for its ideological vagueness; it is a frontier film that is also anti-imperial, a film full of technically impressive and aesthetically pleasing battle scenes that also preaches non-violence. It has also been censured for its historical inaccuracy.

Further, in conformity with other screen representations that have been considered in this chapter, the film cannot entirely overcome persistent Orientalist visual constructions of the East; empty and silent deserts, or crowded, dirty bazaars and streets within Jerusalem or on the

---

104 Finke and Shichtman, *Cinematic Illusions*, p. 233.
Veiled girls are seen drying the naked Balian after his bath, and his love interest Sybilla’s henna tattoos and even the echoing of the call to prayer before the first visuals of Jerusalem are seen, conform to Hollywood’s rich tradition of Orientalism. Even in Jerusalem itself, only the spaces occupied by the Europeans are constructed as pleasant.

Nevertheless, Scott’s Medievalist film places the Western hero and Muslim rival on an equal footing and invites the audience to consider solutions to contemporary issues not only through the lens of the West, but through the perspective of the East as well. The film builds on Hollywood representations of Saladin that, as John Ganim observes, complicate traditional Orientalist images of good and bad, focusing instead on negotiation, ambiguity and uncertainty.\(^{106}\) The equality of Balian and Saladin is an unparalleled example of cinematic dialogue between East and West, and in this regard, *Kingdom of Heaven* encourages the audience to consider highly contestable issues in an empathetic and interculturally sensitive manner. In this regard, the film can be mapped at the *adaptation* stage on Bennett’s continuum, very close to *integration*. The two protagonists retain their own cultural allegiances, but are very open to experiencing other cultures, and during their dialogue, the audience witnesses how the two men are quite critical of adhering to any singular religion and culture; their interactions point to the notion that it is ethnocentrism that leads to violence across the world. At the same time, both men are quite ideologically ambivalent, which pushes them close to the *integrated* phase in Bennett’s continuum, where one moves in and out of different worldviews, and can even experience a certain ‘cultural marginality’ which can lead to alienation from others.\(^{107}\) In many ways, Balian and Saladin are different from the cultures they ostensibly represent; they seem alienated from the people around them who do not share or understand their perspectives.

---


\(^{106}\) Ganim, ‘Set Design, Location and Landscape in Movie Medievalism’, p. 43; Also see Risden, ‘Resisting Manichean Delirium’, p. 291.

on how futile the conflicts are. If they had managed to live in the same realm, continuing their interactions and cultural exchange, further integration may have occurred; but Balian returns to his village and Saladin remains to rebuild Jerusalem, bringing their dialogue to a conclusion.

Integrated Muslims: A Thing of the Past?

From Robin of Sherwood to Kingdom of Heaven, Western screen representations of Medieval Muslims have played a significant role in instigating positive and integrating representations of Muslims and narratives of East/West acculturation. Medievalist texts are thus a pioneering genre through which East-West acculturation has been explored, acting as a kind of ‘sandbox’ in which more positive characterisations and integrating narratives were first tested. Medievalist screen culture has thus allowed for contemporary issues to be reflected onto a historical canvas, and as seen in this chapter, has championed the construction of integrated and nuanced characterisations that do much to counter entrenched Orientalist stereotypes. Further, as Martone argues in his evaluation of Muslim characterisations in Robin Hood films and television shows, the inclusion of Muslim characters enables a ‘retrospective illusion’ that minorities have been part of English history for many years, as equals and heroes; representing an ‘unreal reality’ that can play a role in overcoming the cultural disparities within the current nation and open up the possibility of a more acculturated future.¹⁰⁸ In doing so, he elaborates upon the notion of the past acting as a mirror for the present and suggests it is possible that the past could also act as a mirror for the future; an England that values and desires its immigrant communities.

Though it has been touched upon across this chapter, it is important to briefly comment on the overall casting practices of Muslims that has occurred across the texts that have been considered here. As much as narrative arcs and dialogue play important roles in constructing integrated representations, the choice of actors and actresses and their physical appearances,

dress and accent play a role in how they are racialised and can also reinforce or challenge long held stereotypes. Muslims are geographically and racially diverse, incorporating a huge variety of physical appearances; yet, Hollywood has established a Muslim look, which is essentially a ‘brown’ person who speaks English with an accent. With the exception of Ibn Fadlan, all of the Muslim protagonists in this chapter originally hail from the Holy Land, and this would dictate that they should bring with them a Middle Eastern look. Yet, the casting here is more diverse. Mark Ryan who plays Nasir is quite light skinned and does not look Arab at all; Morgan Freeman, as explored earlier, is African American; and Anjali Jay looks and sounds like she is from the Indian subcontinent. Only Ghassan Massood is stereotypically Arabic looking, though lighter skinned. This diversity may not make for good historical accuracy, but taken as a whole the casting is diverse and does slightly challenge the usual Hollywood approach. On the other hand, Antonio Banderas as Ibn Fadlan confirms the idea that a Muslim must be played by a ‘brown’ Hollywood star.

When it comes to accents, with the exception of Nasir who does not speak at all, the other protagonists all have thick accents, but speak with refined and educated language. This reinforces their exoticism, and in the case of Ibn Fadlan as discussed above, it problematises his legitimacy as the hero in the narrative. All characters are also physically appealing and dress well, and in most cases this makes them desirable, especially Djaq who is given quite a bit of sexual agency amongst the Merry Men; but in the case of Ibn Fadlan this arguably feminises him in contrast to the Norseman in their warrior clothing. Ultimately, the texts construct the protagonists as desirable by exoticising them, once again demonstrating how these texts create sympathetic representations of Muslims which are simultaneously racist or Orientalist.

Sadly, few Medievalist television shows or films with Muslim characterisations have appeared since Kingdom of Heaven, and as a result the chance to further analyse pre-modern representations of Muslim empires and their people have all but disappeared. Ridley Scott’s
Robin Hood (2010) had no Saracen characters, and the more recent Dracula Untold (2014) conforms to Bram Stoker’s classic narrative of portraying the Ottomans as the enemy. Popular shows such as Game of Thrones (2011-19) may allude to Medieval Muslim kingdoms and use Orientalist imagery\textsuperscript{109} to exoticise the show’s locales, but no contemporised sociopolitical commentary or analysis occurs. Even the most recent iteration of Robin Hood (2018) which includes a Saracen characterisation, does nothing of note to further the representations and characterisations that have been discussed here. Nevertheless, the appearance of Muslims as integrated members of the merry men, or as protagonists in their own stories, or as respected historical figures such as Saladin, did much to challenge entrenched negative stereotypes, and has laid the groundwork for the shifts in representations and characterisations that will be explored in the subsequent chapters.

\textsuperscript{109}There is a lot of Oriental and Muslim symbolism employed throughout Game of Thrones. Some of the tribes and clans clearly allude to Oriental peoples of the past; the Dothraki represent the Mongolian Horde, and the Dornish people speak with an Arabic accent and their names refer to the desert and sand. Yet, there is no overt exploration of Islam or Muslims throughout the series.
Chapter Two: Acculturation in the Military/Political Thriller

The early 70s saw a profound shift in global politics regarding Muslims. No longer was the Middle East and Africa obscure places on the map or an exotic locale that Western audiences witnessed only on cinema screens. The OPEC crisis affected Western consumers economically as global fuel prices soared and American and European citizens became targets and hostages of political groups in both the Iranian Revolution and terrorist activities.¹ These events fostered the development of a new subgenre of Muslim screen representations – the military/political thriller. These films modified the Orientalist trope of the hero’s adventure into the East; instead of venturing into the Africa, the Middle East or Asia to discover treasure or help an oppressed population, Western heroes now travelled through the Orient to fight radicalisation and terrorism, to protect their own interests and the Western way of life. Similarly, Muslim characterisations also changed, with greedy and over sexualised sheiks morphing into radical clerics, average Muslim men into gun toting terrorists, and Muslim women now using their allure and sexuality to kill Western innocents.² Although primarily located in the Middle East, such political thrillers have also been set in the West, with many films and shows considering terrorist cells and attacks occurring on home soil.

Most of these films do little to understand the motivations for the conflict between modern Muslim nations and the West. Audiences are not given much sociopolitical context for the actions of the Muslims, and the Western hero does not aim to develop much understanding of the world that has been entered or the people within that world. The films are primarily driven by political intrigue and action. A blockbuster film such as True Lies (1994) is a typical example of this genre. The film sets Arnold Schwarzenegger against a group of violent, hateful yet

completely incompetent terrorists who aim to spread destruction across America. The leader of the terrorists manages to lose the arming key of the nuclear device he plans to detonate while it is in front of him, and the film’s final action sequence cannot be taken seriously. The terrorist manages to get hooked onto the end of a missile on an airborne jet, and is fired into a skyscraper by Schwarzenegger, which is accompanied by the ridiculous one liner ‘You’re fired’. Although less tongue-in-cheek, well known action man Chuck Norris’s Delta Force films are very similar in their action driven storylines, remaining true to long-held and one-sided interpretations of conflicts within the Middle East. Jack Shaheen and Melani McAllister explicitly mention that the Delta Force films propagated pro-Israeli and anti-Arab and Muslim stereotypes. Many of these films have increased in complexity and nuance over time, doing away with the one-dimensional protagonists, especially after September 11, yet they maintain their virulent Orientalism and vilification of Muslim geographies and their inhabitants.

Yet, while Medievalist films and television shows had been the earliest movers in striving to counter Orientalist stereotypes, by the end of the twentieth century military/political thriller films also began to challenge negative perceptions of Muslims and the Middle East. Films such as Steven Spielberg’s Munich (2005), discussed in this chapter, emerged at the same time as Kingdom of Heaven (2005), so by about the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century, big name directors such as Spielberg and Ridley Scott clearly wished to counter the proliferation of news images and negative representations mentioned above. By 2007 films that foregrounded increased intercultural understanding between Western and Muslim characters had increased in number, to such an extent that one commentator claims that it was only in 2007 that acceptable Western Muslim characterisations began to appear on Western screens.

---

It is impossible to overestimate the role that 9/11 and the subsequent invasion of the Arab world had in prompting this shift. Even though Muslims did face a profound backlash after the events of 2001, as Shaheen identifies, there was actually a slight reduction in the number of films that negatively portray Muslims in the first decade of the twenty-first century.\(^5\) While Shaheen comments that people are becoming less tolerant of stereotypical Arab representations, Simon Philpott undertakes a more thorough analysis of why representations have become more even-handed since 9/11. He considers a number of films centred around American foreign policy in the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa post 9/11 that are openly critical of the American military’s role in the region. Like the films discussed in this chapter, many of the films discussed by Philpott feature Muslim characterisations that are integrated, American heroes who embark on a journey that leads to a degree of intercultural sensitivity towards the cultures that they interact with, openly negative portrayals of American servicemen and government representatives, and representations of the horrible effects that war has had on the people of the Middle East. Philpott speculates that the filmmakers responsible for these films were attempting to provide a political and contextual analysis of the war and an alternative dimension to the images that dominated the media during the campaigns,\(^6\) in order to disrupt collective blindness and rehabilitate Islam, Muslims and Arabs.\(^7\) Yet, it is worth nothing that most films that have attempted to critically consider the actions of the West in the Second Gulf War have not been box office successes, and have even been labelled Bin Laden cinema.\(^8\) Indeed, they are also reminiscent of conspiracy films that were overtly critical of the role of the American government in the 1970s, explored by Douglas Kellner and Michael Ryan in their book *Camera Politica*. As Kellner and Ryan observe, institutions such as the CIA were perceived to be corrupt

---


\(^7\)Philpott, ‘Is Anyone Watching?’, p. 336.

\(^8\)Philpott, p. 326.
and such representations appealed to popular distrust of politicians and state institutions.\textsuperscript{9} In a similar vein, the public and filmmakers were influenced by events such as the weapons of mass destruction (WMD) scandal surrounding the invasion of Iraq, together with torture and rendition policies that fostered a lack of trust in current governments.

Certainly, doubt about Western objectives is clearly articulated in all the films that are analysed in this chapter. Whereas Orientalist incarnations of the Western hero typically constructed the protagonist as an agent of change, one who comes into the Orient and brings order, freedom and Western values to make the Orient a better place, the films under discussed here challenge this well-developed trope. They all feature more complex portrayals of Western heroes who incrementally re-evaluate their role and significance within the worlds they have entered, and in this sense, they work along similar lines to \textit{Kingdom of Heaven} (2005), discussed in the previous chapter. They also increasingly feature a Western character type who, as one commentator notes, is typically a ‘vengeful, cupidinous and territorial creature who could operate on military and economic interests without a whiff of interest in personality, embodiment, culture, history or experience per se’.\textsuperscript{10} Development of greater intercultural sensitivity between the West and Muslim nations and peoples in these films has also occurred through the casting and exploration of integrated Muslim characters in supporting roles, who further encourage audiences to consider how regional conflicts and insincere Western interventions have impacted the lived experiences of Muslims. All of these strategies attempt to counter the caricatures that this genre has traditionally deployed, and to promote a more nuanced understanding of Muslims and the East.

Yet, in opposition to the interpretations suggested above, another perspective also needs to be considered. Evelyn Alsultany claims that despite their sympathetic representations, such films


are used to deny or cloak institutional and structural racism across American society.\textsuperscript{11} She argues that classic Orientalist stereotypes that have been used for close to a century are hard to accept by modern audiences, and that the positive representations that appear in these shows thus provide a level of complexity and nuance that is nevertheless still primarily racially motivated and aims at vilifying Muslims in a more sophisticated manner, allowing Americans to feel less guilty about what Muslims faced post-September 11.\textsuperscript{12} By including patriotic Muslims willing to help local authorities combat terrorism, or representations of complex, conflicted and nuanced terrorists, or plotlines where Muslims face discrimination or violence that is seen as an unfortunate necessity to safeguard the nation, or even by using fictional names for Muslim nations to not offend Muslim nationals, many ‘progressive’ texts still frame Muslims in the context of terrorism.\textsuperscript{13} In Alsultany’s view, these strategies do not effectively challenge what Muslims experienced in post September 11 Western contexts, nor do they challenge the stereotypes surrounding Muslims. As the discussion in this chapter will demonstrate, the texts considered here all run the risk of falling into these traps; certainly, through the actions of some of the Muslim characterisations and events, all of the films leave enduring and powerful images of Muslims engaging in scary violence.

Another key indicator of the validity of Alsultany’s concerns that is common to all the films considered in this chapter is the centrality of white, Western men in modelling or setting the bar for intercultural sensitivity. The films all portray integrated Muslims and/or intercultural dialogue between the Muslim and Western world, but it is white men who are centred as the experts in this field, with the necessary ethnorelative worldviews, experience and sensitivities to exemplify the exploration of cultural difference, dialogue and acculturation in the narratives. As relevant as the Muslim and brown skinned characters are, they are positioned to facilitate

\textsuperscript{12}Alsultany, \textit{Arabs and Muslims in the Media}, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{13}Alsultany, p. 22.
the development of the white male expert in leading the events that enact intercultural sensitivity. So, the films here work hard to develop more sympathetic portrayals of Muslims, and in many ways succeed, but they also re-centre white men as the facilitators and exemplars of that new and improved understanding.

As Bob Pease observes, white men continue to represent the normative dominant subject position across culture, gender and race, and critical engagement with their privilege and power has been slow to occur. He also argues that white men’s experiences are the dominant perspectives in masculinity studies, and that many attempts to explore difference within this field still involve the imposition of the dominant parties’ beliefs and modes of communication upon others. Similar criticisms have been made of scholarship on intercultural competence; it has been argued that, despite a focus on negotiating difference, models of acculturation still risk imposing a Western bias, particularly towards individualism. These tendencies are evident in the military/political thriller films examined here, where, despite the evident intention to represent a respectful and even-handed East-West dialogue, the hegemony of the white male is reinscribed, and the coloured or Muslim man, the traditional other, works primarily to facilitate the white male protagonist’s individual learning journey. As a consequence, the coloured or Muslim characters’ intercultural sensitivity does not develop to the same extent; rather, these characters seem to come preloaded with a certain ‘natural’ sensitivity, and function to draw out the same sensitivity in the white man. This pattern is arguably reinforced through enlightened or inferential racism, in which the coloured man is celebrated for being naturally adept at certain things, such as athletics or spirituality, but is seen to be lacking the

---

rational or cerebral knowledge, skills or strategy for other roles such as management or leadership.\textsuperscript{17}

Where Muslim characters are shown to be integrated, they also evince an ambivalence and discomfort that is not mirrored to the same extent by white and non-Muslim characters who move towards integration. The various Islamic characters in these texts have within them a bitterness\textsuperscript{18} that stems from their existence between the cultures of the West and their ancestral homes, not fitting into either. In such representations, integration is not really celebrated or constructed as desirable; rather, it is shown to be productive of discomfort and unhappiness. As Bennett suggests, integration risks detaching an individual from any one culture as the primary source of identity and while it may be valuable for acculturation, it can be a real burden on the identity and psyche of the individual, leading to alienation and loss of identity.\textsuperscript{19} In contrast, the white men in these films complete their narratives with more positive outcomes. They transform into more integrated individuals as a result of their experiences in these geographies, but their whiteness nevertheless allows them to maintain hegemonic positions within society, and relative enjoyment of satisfaction, comfort, and happiness.

\textit{Intercultural Sensitivity and Competence: A Framework for Analysing Character Development}

As explored in the previous chapter, a movement from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism can be observed within the genre of the military/political thriller, particularly through the character journeys of Western heroes. The first film that will be considered in this chapter is \textit{Three Kings}


(1999), the only film to be considered here that was made before September 11. Steven Spielberg’s *Munich* (2005) sports a popular cast and deals with the Munich Olympic massacre. *Rendition* (2007) deals with the controversial issue of the American government’s policy of extraordinary rendition and its effects on a Muslim American family. The last film is *Traitor* (2008), a little known but innovative espionage thriller. All the films chosen are located in Muslim geographies, though the nature of the thriller genre typically includes multiple locales. The films’ stories are all of Western protagonists and their interactions with local Muslims, generally Arabs in secondary or key supporting roles. The characters’ *knowledge* and *attitudes* (sensitivity), and ultimately their *skills* and *behaviour* (competence) are highlighted and challenged as a consequence of their experiences; accordingly, the following analysis will firstly identify the knowledge and attitudes (sensitivity) exemplified by key characters and secondly explore how the characters’ skills and behaviour (competence) evolves.

As Laura Perry and Leonie Southwall argue in their literature review of approaches to intercultural competency, the attributes of knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviour are consistently identified components of intercultural competence; they see them as common to the majority of scholarly research and models of intercultural sensitivity and competence that have developed over the last quarter of a century, including Milton Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, discussed in the introduction to this thesis.  

According to Perry and Southwall, *knowledge* is centred on the information one has about the similarities and differences between cultures, which can develop with interaction and exposure to another culture. Positive *attitudes*, which include empathy, curiosity and respect, are other qualities that an individual wishing to comprehend another culture effectively requires. These are labelled as ‘requisite attitudes’ by Darla Deardorff, who regards them as the precondition for an individual

---

to develop intercultural competence;²¹ they are an aspect of individual persona, that can be
drawn upon to support intercultural experience. Once individuals develop the necessary
intercultural knowledge and attitudes, their intercultural skills and subsequent behaviour will
manifest. Skills needed for intercultural exchange include the ability to communicate both
verbally and non-verbally, while also being able to discover information and interact with others
with critical awareness. Behaviours are the ultimate result of the development of knowledge,
attitudes and skill, because individuals with these attributes are on a path to developing a
worldview that leads to interculturally competent actions or, as defined by Bennett, an
ethnorelative worldview.²² This chapter will track the emergence of intercultural perspectives in
the films under discussion, using Perry and Southwall’s concepts in addition to Bennett’s
framework.

Additionally, the following analysis identifies a number of character types that provide different
points of identification for the audience, and which model different journeys of acculturation.
All the key characters fall into the categories of ‘family man’, ‘compliant agent’, ‘exotic on the
periphery’, and ‘hazard in need of containment’. Each character type has a different starting
point and undergoes different experiences to develop varied levels of intercultural skills and
behaviour. Importantly, and as the subsequent analysis will demonstrate, use of this typology
suggests that the move from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism is easier for well-resourced
white males, who are afforded the most rewarding and desirable journeys of acculturation.

²¹D.K. Deardorff, ‘The Identification of Intercultural Competence as a Student Outcome of
Internationalisation at Institutions of Higher Education in the United States’, in D.K. Deardorff (ed.), The
Intercultural Sensitivity: Characterising Intercultural Knowledge and Attitudes

Three Kings (1999) is the most light-hearted of the films considered here, even though it is set in Iraq just after the liberation of Kuwait during the first Gulf War. The movie begins like an adventure film and transforms into a rescue mission narrative. The premise itself is quite comical; one commentator compares the premise of the film to an episode of M*A*S*H. Three naïve regular American soldiers come across a map hidden in an Iraqi soldier’s anus, which contains the location of Saddam Hussein’s hidden bunkers. The bunkers are allegedly full of stolen Kuwaiti riches. With the help of a hardened and world-wise Major, the group embark on an adventure to find the gold. As the journey unfolds, they are exposed to the suffering of the Iraqi people under Saddam’s regime, develop a rapport with these people and ultimately choose to help the Iraqi people over their own material ambitions.

The film is lauded by Jack Shaheen, who sees it as a realistic and well-balanced representation of the Iraqi people who longed for freedom from Saddam’s regime. The fact that the filmmakers sought approval from Arab people (Shaheen was an adviser on the production) is an indication of director David O. Russell’s intention to consider the Iraqi people in a sympathetic light. The fact that the film is quite funny and at times poignant also adds to its appeal. On the other hand, Tim Semmerling dedicates a whole chapter of his book “Evil” Arabs in American Popular Film to a critique of Three Kings. Semmerling dismisses the positive representations of the Iraqi people, the critique of American intervention in the region and also the development of the Westerners’ empathy, arguing that the film is more interested in reviving a victory culture and the traditional masculinity of the American military that was lost during the Vietnam War. He sees the development of intercultural sensitivity between the Americans and Iraqi people as

---

a mere step that helps make the Americans’ fight against Saddam’s loyal and evil soldiers a just battle, attempting to ‘correct’ the approach taken in relation to Vietnam.26 Yet although Semmerling expects more from the interactions and characterisations, in light of the history of Muslim representations, Three Kings does much to foster a trend of questioning the West’s role in the Middle East and visualising the effects of the American activity in the region. At its time of release the film was the first Hollywood production to consider the Iraqi people in a humane light and was critical of American foreign policy in the region.27

The four main characters in the movie have varied interactions with the geography and people around them, and they move towards more ethnorelative perceptions of the host nation’s culture in varied ways. Between them, they also represent all four of the character types under consideration: ‘family man’ Troy Barlow (Mark Wahlberg), ‘compliant agent’ Archie Gates (George Clooney), ‘exotic on the periphery’ Chief Elgin (Ice Cube) and ‘hazard to be contained’ Conrad Vig (Spike Jonze). Barlow is the handsome and lovable young American man, who is serving to make things better for his young wife and daughter at home. Gates is the jaded

---

26 Semmerling, “Evil” Arabs in American Popular Film, p. 140.
veteran officer whose knowhow and wisdom is an important driver of the narrative. Elgin is seemingly the token African American sidekick, tough and no-nonsense while also being a critical voice against racism, with the character bringing instantly recognisable cultural capital through the actor’s real life persona as Ice Cube, a popular rapper critical of American race relations. Vig is a representation of the poor, gun crazy, uneducated Southerner, a demographic that is well represented within the American military. [Figure 2.1].

These characters have varied degrees of intercultural knowledge and tolerance; Barlow and Elgin come with some rudimental knowledge of and tolerant attitudes towards the world they have entered, which reflects their ability to adapt to the cultural exchanges throughout the film. Barlow’s sympathy towards Vig and his popularity amongst his platoon are suggestive of the attitudes of respect and openness that support intercultural competence, while Gates has the most developed intercultural knowledge and attitude. His experiences in Vietnam and understanding of the global and historical context of the Gulf War allows him to mentor the others and also the audience; he has been exposed to multiple cultures in the past, and so is more adept at handling his intercultural journey. It is Gates and Barlow that primarily facilitate integrating perspectives and understandings. In contrast, Vig’s lack of education and cultural
exposure prevents him from being able to connect with the world in which the film takes place. Early in the film, after extracting the map from the Iraqi soldier, Vig is seen worriedly washing his hands with alcohol and asks Barlow ‘What kind of vermin live in the butt of a dune coon?’ Elgin asks Barlow why he spends time with a cracker, to which Barlow replies that Vig is from a group home and has had no high school education. This criticism of Vig’s education is echoed many times throughout the film, while his knowledge of military procedure, American football and the Iraqi people is smugly ridiculed. For example, later in the film, in a scene of cultural exchange between the soldiers and the Iraqi civilians they are helping, Vig asks them if they believe that America is Satan, to which the Iraqis reply that they are interested in nothing more than stability and making business. The Iraqis then ask Vig whether he wishes to kill all Arabs, and Vig replies that that is what he was trained for, and needs to be corrected by Elgin, who reminds him that America actually has Arab allies. Once again, Vig’s lack of knowledge, or comprehension of cultural specificity, is openly critiqued. While the other main characters move towards ethnorelativism as the story progresses, Vig’s lack of requisite attitudes – that is, respect, openness and curiosity, as defined by Deardorff – hamper his ability to develop intercultural sensitivity or competence. In this way, Vig and Chief Elgin are contrasted, with the differences in their dialogue and world views providing a contemporary snapshot into the military and by extension American society.

Unlike Vig, Elgin comes with a level of knowledge that allows him to make sense of the world that he is in, and this requisite attitude is depicted as stemming from his blackness. Elgin’s comprehension of Middle Eastern culture thus builds on his own racial profile, and his challenges as a coloured man. He is more readily able to ‘naturally’ comprehend the Iraqis’ culture, without

---

28 Such representations of white people from the mid-West and south of America as backward and racist have been observed to have played a role in this demographic’s backlash against the liberal establishment through the embrace of Donald Trump as their leader.


the evident process of discovery that Barlow or Gates undergo. This may be evaluated as a positive attribute, as he is more culturally sensitive than the white characters around him, but at times, Elgin’s characterisation is reminiscent of the ‘magical negro’ trope; a religious or spiritual black man who has a special bond with nature and the supernatural, who provides advice and help to the white hero on his journey.\(^{31}\) Certainly, the text places him closer to members of the nation of Islam, and thus he is depicted as able to relate to the Muslims with little need for intercultural learning.

Examples of events that influence the soldiers’ *attitudes* in their journey towards intercultural sensitivity are seen early in the film when they venture into an Iraqi village searching for the gold; the villagers mistakenly think the Americans have come to liberate them. As the villagers attack the Iraqi soldiers holding them, the group realises it is in the wrong village, and that the Iraqi soldiers are more worried about controlling the local villagers than the threat of the American soldiers. The Iraqis destroy a milk tanker that approaches the village, and as the group leave the village in their truck, Barlow hands out rations to the starving villagers, and the audience hears Barlow complain about how the soldiers are taking rations away from the starving villagers; he is beginning to comprehend the plight of the Muslims suffering under the regime that America was supposed to do away with. In terms of portrayal and casting, only a few of the Iraqis speak English across the film, and all with heavy Arab accents, with the evil Saddam loyalists and other soldiers’ accents most pronounced and comical, reinforcing their lack of acculturation.

Gates, the capable and wise Major, acts as a disseminator of information for both the naive soldiers and the audience. For example, in discussion with his superiors, he questions the role of America in Iraq, arguing that the destructive military campaign followed by the lack of support

for the Iraqis who rebelled against Saddam has left the Iraqis vulnerable, as the American
government did not end Saddam’s rule. His philosophy lesson, offered to the other soldiers early
in the film, also succinctly summarises the initial attitudes of the protagonists, and gestures
towards what each needs to learn in order to grow. The dialogue from the scene is as follows:

**Archie Gates**: What’s the most important thing in life?

**Troy Barlow**: Respect.

**Archie Gates**: Too dependent on other people.

**Conrad Vig**: What, love?

**Archie Gates**: A little Disneyland, isn’t it?

**Chief Elgin**: God’s will.

**Archie Gates**: Close.

**Troy Barlow**: What is it then?

**Archie Gates**: Necessity.

**Troy Barlow**: As in?

**Archie Gates**: As in people do what is most necessary to them at any given moment.\(^{32}\)

The dialogue clearly displays the varying attitudes of the group members, while also
demonstrating their potential for intercultural competence. Barlow’s response is technically
‘correct’ but too ‘textbook’, suggesting that he has yet to be tested by the realities of war.
Gates’s dismissal of the responses of both Barlow and Vig, and his subsequent assertion that
necessity is the most significant motivator of people, suggests that he holds fiercely
individualistic and not particularly altruistic views that are ripe for modification. Vig’s response

is more altruistic, but also indicative of his naivete and his role as comedic relief. Elgin’s perception is governed by his faith, suggesting an ethnocentric worldview, or alternatively, a nascent capacity to understand the worldview of others who perceive the world in a similar way.

It is noteworthy that Gate’s attitude is significantly modified once the group must choose between the gold and the Iraqi villagers who are being repressed by Saddam’s soldiers. After loading the gold into a truck and beginning to make their getaway, the group witnesses the execution of the village resistance leader’s wife. She pleads ‘don’t leave’ in English, repeatedly, until she is shot, at which point Gates decides that helping these people is as important as finding the gold. Semmerling sees this execution of the woman as a reimagining of the famous video of a Vietnamese man being shot by a Vietnamese soldier; it makes the American audience relive the shame of Vietnam. Gates changes because of this, adopting a more empathetic attitude; he will not allow civilians to be persecuted as they were in Vietnam. Barlow is not so convinced; he asks Gates ‘What about necessity?’ to which Gates replies, ‘It just changed’. Elgin then reinforces Gates’s new attitude of empathy, pointing out the suffering Iraqis and asking Barlow ‘What if that was you?’ At this point in the film, Barlow continues to value his personal safety above everything else, and it takes a different event to shift him towards an ethnorelative perspective which, along with the development of the characters’ skills and behaviour, will be explored later in this chapter.

Stephen Spielberg’s Munich (2005) is a much more serious film that deals with a well-known controversial event; the kidnapping and murder of a group of Israeli athletes during the 1972 Olympic Games by the Palestinian Black September movement in an action widely condemned as a terrorist attack. The movie revolves around Mossad’s attempt to find and kill those involved with the kidnapping and murders is driven by Mossad agent Avner’s (Eric Bana) attempts to

---
33Semmerling, “Evil” Arabs in American Popular Film, p. 148. It is worth noting that McCarthy sees Gates’ sudden forgoing of his material ambitions for the good of those around him as a weak point of the story; see McCarthy, ‘Bold, Original “Kings” Stings’, p. 34.
complete the task that he has been given while also keeping his life and sanity. Before the release of the film, most critics, including Shaheen, expected the film to be staunchly anti-Palestinian and pro-Israel, yet after release, it garnered a reputation for the opposite; it has been criticised for its anti-Israeli stance and for showing Palestinians in an unrealistically positive light.

The film runs two narratives; one is a series of flashbacks interspersed throughout the film that retell the events that happened at the Olympics. These scenes are quite intense and very critical of the actions of the Black September kidnappers and the German authorities’ incompetence in handling the situation. The other is Avner’s journey with his group in different locales, tracking and assassinating the Palestinians involved with the kidnapping. Each assassination places more strain on Avner’s relationship with his group, the foreign intelligence services that he is competing with and finally his own beliefs. Avner’s narrative is much more anti-war and humanist than the other, with the Palestinians that are being assassinated shown as refined and humane, and Avner’s military and political superiors as insensitive people who see violence as the only way to deal with one’s enemies. From a casting perspective, the Black September terrorists are shown dressed in modern garb during the kidnapping, and the targets that Avner and his team take out are well dressed, heavily accented but well-spoken and seemingly rich and cultured individuals. This challenges the stereotypes of what a Muslim terrorist traditionally looks like. One analysis of the film suggests that it is less a cinematic perspective on the Munich event and more relevant to the post September 11 world, offering a critique of America’s

---

36Nachreiner, ‘Inspired by Real Events’.
continued use of war as a means to deal with foreign issues; this is reminiscent of the concept that the Medieval period is a ‘distant mirror’ used to reflect on contemporary issues.

Within *Munich*, there are shades of the characterisations from *Three Kings* amongst Avner and his group, where the knowledge and attitude that supports intercultural competence is varied amongst the characters. To begin with, while Avner is being briefed about the mission, his handler Ephraim (Geoffrey Rush) states that he has been chosen for the task because his family are Yeki, Jews from Germany. Even though Avner states that he was born in Israel, Ephraim tells him that he is not like the other Sabras (Jews born in Israel); Ephraim does not need a Charles Bronson Sabra who will kill indiscriminately. It seems that Avner has been chosen for the operation because of his background; like the African American Elgin from *Three Kings*, his knowledge and attitudes, stemming from his own sociopolitical positioning and experience, are shown to support his intercultural sensitivity. He is a combination of ‘family man’ and ‘good agent’ and these qualities are used to critique the mindset of the hard-line Jews in Israel, those that are identified with the tit-for-tat cycle of violence in the Middle East. Early in the film, Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir (Lynn Chohen) says ‘[e]very civilisation finds it necessary to negotiate with its values’, and this perspective is critiqued throughout the film, with Avner constructed as diverging from this mindset.

Initially, Avner regards the operation as a task of utmost importance, stating to his wife that he could not live with himself if he did not take it up. However, his exposure to the Palestinians, the challenges of killing terrorists and the dialogue he has with Carl (Ciaran Hinds), the senior operative in his group, lead him to begin questioning what his government has asked of him. This reconsideration of what Avner knows, and what he thinks about the Palestinians and his

---

38Nachreiner, ‘Inspired by Real Events’.
government, culminates when he meets with a member of the Palestinian Fedayeen. The
dialogue in this scene articulates the hopeless nature of the Arab-Israeli conflict, how the hard-
line stance taken by both parties does nothing but continue the cycle of violence. Spielberg
himself sees this scene as a means to plead the case that the only way for a solution to the crisis
is for both parties to sit down and speak long and hard about finding a non-violent solution to
the issue.40 It is after this scene that Avner rapidly re-evaluates his role in the operation, and the
audience witnesses his increasing deployment of interculturally sensitive skills and behaviour
that demonstrate an ethnorelative perspective towards the people he has been charged to fight,
and scepticism towards the organisations he works for. As in *Three Kings*, a white skinned man
is central to developing a more acculturated worldview.

*Rendition* (2007) is a political thriller that looks at the American government’s actions in a post
September 11 world and is inspired by the true story of a Syrian-born Canadian engineer who
was taken to Syria and imprisoned and tortured for a year before being released without
charge.41 The practice of relocating terror suspects to foreign countries to torture them for
intelligence purposes is a dark chapter in recent Western history. Shying away from being set in
Iraq, like so many other films that were made at this time, the film never reveals which nation it
is set in, simply indicating that North Africa is a hub for terrorist and American activity.42 It
considers the plight of an American/Egyptian engineer and family man, Anwar El-Ibrahim (Omar
Metwally), who is picked up by the CIA after a trip to Africa on suspicion of being involved in a
terrorist attack. After being transported to the unnamed African country, the film portrays
Anwar’s interrogation and the CIA agent overseeing the process, Anwar’s American wife’s
efforts at locating him and an Arabic intelligence officer’s role in the interrogation process.

40 Singer, *A Companion to the War Film*, p. 68.
The film also features an American government agent as a ‘hazardous’ antagonist. Corrine Whitman (Meryl Streep) is the CIA official who authorises the transportation of Anwar to Africa, and yet continually denies that the rendition has taken place. This characterisation is a direct critique of government policy that is grounded in an Orientalist understanding of Muslims and their homelands, or as one commentator puts it, a representation of how security apparatus saw Muslims right after September 11.\textsuperscript{43} The belief that the sacrifice of a foreign individual is justifiable for the perceived safety of America, together with the smug superiority that comes with power, are common attributes of such ethnocentric characters. The inclusion of this characterisation confirms the view of many of the commentators considered earlier, that these films critique the role that Western governments play in the Middle East and Africa. Anwar, on the other hand, seems like he has embraced the American dream to its full extent. He is married to the blonde-haired, blue-eyed Isabella (Reese Whitherspoon), they seem to have a functional relationship (unlike some of the other intercultural relationships explored in Chapters Three and Four), he is an engineer, and carries himself with the demeanour of a successful Western man. His success in both the personal and public spheres validate his masculinity and Americanness. In particular, his relationship with an American woman is a significant source of symbolic capital in the context of raced and gendered hierarchies; a white woman’s love ‘confirms’ his integrity and desirability. The depiction of his arrest, incarceration and torture are thus all the more shocking, and these confronting scenes force the audience to consider that there is a real chance that completely innocent Muslims could have fallen into such a predicament.

It is during Anwar’s incarceration that newly transferred CIA agent Douglas Freeman (Jake Gyllenhaal), who is tasked to oversee the interrogation, becomes the voice of reason, protesting against the torture. Douglas’s youth and inexperience are critiqued by his superiors, yet it is his rational and humane perspective as the ‘compliant agent’ that governs the narrative. After

\textsuperscript{43}Westwell, ‘Regarding the Pain of Others’, p. 827.
witnessing the death of a fellow CIA officer and Anwar’s torture, Freeman is able to perceive the injustice caused by both groups within the narrative, and much like Avner from *Munich*, the chaos around him reinforces his belief that violence does not yield effective results, and he begins to question the legitimacy of his government’s actions.\(^\text{44}\) The knowledge he is exposed to thus prompts a more humanist attitude. Like Avner, Freeman’s knowledge and attitude differs from that of his more cynical superiors, allowing him to move towards a more ethnorelative orientation.

It is important to stress here that besides these positive characterisations of Anwar and Freeman as integrated Muslim and Westerner alike, the film also constructs an immensely negative representation of a Muslim, through Abasi Fawal (Igal Naor), the local lead policeman and chief torturer. Negative Muslim representations appear in both *Three Kings* and *Munich*, which feature bloodthirsty and incompetent Iraqi and Palestinian soldiers, and dangerously suave Black September members, yet these are minor characters compared with Fawal, who embodies many traditional Orientalist motifs. Though Fawal can be regarded as a representation of Muslim states from the Middle East that are known for their use of capital punishment and inhumane treatment of Muslim prisoners, he goes to extremes in his actions and his background is a profound counterpoint to the Muslim protagonist in this text. The two main Muslim characters casted in *Rendition* cannot be more different than each other. Omar Metwally who plays Anwar is extremely fair skinned, and could pass as an everyday American; though he speaks with an accent, he is dressed impeccably until he is kidnapped and tortured, with the deterioration of his physical appearance adding to the overall impact of his experience. In contrast, the torturer Fawal is a swarthy, chain smoking Arab with a strong accent. This casting racialises notions of acculturation and integration by representing ‘desirable’ and ‘undesirable’ forms of Muslim. Although the CIA instigates the activity, Fawal oversees the torture of Anwar, even when

\(^{44}\)Westwell, ‘Regarding the Pain of Others’, p. 828.
Freeman asks him to cease, and even after it appears that Anwar knows nothing [Figure 2.2]. Fawal’s family is also explored as a sub-plot of the film, and the audience is exposed to Fawal’s harsh and stereotypical treatment of his daughter, who has fled their home to be with her boyfriend. Ultimately, Fawal is punished, as his daughter dies trying to save her boyfriend who tries to kill Fawal in a suicide attack.

![Figure 2.2](image.png)

_Figure 2.2. Douglas Freeman (Jake Gyllenhaal) and Abasi Fawal (Igal Naor) debate the effectiveness of torture on their prisoner. In a film aiming to critique Western policy and construct integrating representations of Muslims, Fawal’s character does not help this endeavour._

There is the possibility that Fawal and similar characters may have been placed into such narratives to provide a greater contrast to the characterisations of integrated Muslims, but the construction of such a binary is problematic, evoking Alsultany’s concept of a simple complex representation, where a text may espouse positive or sympathetic notions about Muslims which are then overshadowed by other references to how violent and dangerous they are. For all of the intelligent dialogue, nuanced characterisation and acculturating plot progression that occurs in such a film, what does the audience ultimately remember? The sheer power of the torture scenes in _Rendition_ and also _Three Kings_ risk overpowering any other events within these films that otherwise seek to counter stereotypes and dispel myths.
Another film that delves into the morally ambiguous world of intelligence and counter terrorism is *Traitor* (2008). This film follows FBI Agent Clayton’s (Guy Pearce) attempt to track down and ascertain the political allegiances of CIA agent and Muslim Samir Horn (Don Cheadle). For the majority of the film, the audience, like Clayton, is not completely sure of where Samir’s allegiances lie. Samir is seen selling explosives to terrorist groups in Yemen. Flashbacks to his childhood in Sudan are full of light, providing a snapshot of a positive and loving upbringing by his Sudanese father and African American mother, that is then curtailed after the death of his father. This is immediately contrasted with the backward images of Yemen and the prison Samir has been placed in to infiltrate a terrorist cell. Other snippets of information about his past follow; being sent to live in America after the death of his father, being expelled from school for standing up to bullies hurting a black girl, signing up to the army and then fighting in Afghanistan and Bosnia, fights that Samir believes were just. Samir is a devout, knowledgeable and modern Muslim but his cultural outlook is hampered by a lack of trust; in a world of shifting alliances, Samir does not trust nor is he trusted by members of the terrorist cell he is tasked with infiltrating or the American government, and it is only late in the film that his sincerity as a deep cover agent working for the CIA is confirmed. From an intercultural sensitivity perspective, Samir thus embodies the cultural ambivalence that Bennett identifies as a side effect of integration. Indeed, Samir’s conflicted relationship with both West and East compromises his professional effectiveness, which is under investigation throughout the film. Indeed, at times it is as though the filmmakers don’t know how to represent such a culturally ‘in-between’ character or have chosen a much too ambitious characterisation to explore within the limits of a two-hour film.45

After being freed from the prison in Yemen by members of the terrorist group, Samir’s progression within the ‘Nathir’ cell only occurs when he compromises his devotion. In a scene when he is introduced to an upper level member of Nathir, Samir is asked to engage in Taqiyya,

or blending in with the Europeans around him by drinking wine. Samir makes a point that Taqiyya has no basis in Islam and that it is used by non-Muslims to tarnish the religion’s name, which is an effective attempt at dispensing myths. Yet, Samir then drinks to show his allegiance to the group. He then goes on to recruit young impressionable Muslims to take part in terror attacks. While Samir and Omar, his friend from prison, chat to the youths, Omar talks of America as an enemy, and how fear must be struck in its citizen’s hearts – standard stereotypical dialogue for a terrorist. Samir, on the other hand, only mentions the power that a man who is willing to fight and die for his ideals wields. In this regard, Samir’s words would not be out of place at a civil rights protest. Unlike the other extremists willing to die for the destruction of the West or similar aims, Director Nachmanoff defines Samir’s jihad or struggle as one to stop the extremists around him from perverting the teachings of Islam.\footnote{J. Nachmanoff, “Writers on Writing: Traitor’, Script Magazine, September 2008.} Samir’s integrated worldview, knowledge and genuine Islamic morals are reflected throughout the film, but it will be shown in the next section that his unique situation as an individual who is truly between cultures, who has become integrated as defined by Bennett, comes at a cost; he lives in a state of isolated ambivalence and alienation that will be further explored in the final chapter of this thesis.
Figure 2.3. Agent Clayton (Guy Pearce) tries to ascertain the political allegiances of Samir (Don Cheadle).

While trying to locate Samir, Agent Clayton also demonstrates intercultural competency. He is educated in both Christianity and Islam and is one of the only characters to fathom Samir’s true motivations. In one scene, Clayton explains the different faces of every religion, stating that when he was growing up Ku Klux Klan members would burn crosses on people’s lawns in the name of Christianity, while his own father and others from the church would extinguish the flames. Clayton’s intercultural knowledge and attitude allow him to represent an integrated understanding that complements Samir’s, but he is able to lead a more balanced and well-adjusted existence than Samir [Figure 2.3].

**Acculturation in Action: Characterisation of Interculturally Competent Skills and Behaviour**

Having determined the knowledge and attitudes related to intercultural competence amongst key characters in the films under discussion, I now turn to explore the way in which they move towards a more ethnorelative worldview, and this can be usefully undertaken through reference to the character types of ‘family man’, ‘compliant agent’ and ‘exotic on the periphery’, since each type models a slightly different process of acculturation. Because each character
commences his journey with a different inherent level of intercultural competence, each also arrives at a different level of acculturation, and this sheds light on the intersectional dynamics that impact acculturating processes and outcomes.

The first category I have identified is that of the ‘family man’; Troy Barlow from *Three Kings*, Avner from *Munich* and Anwar El Salimi from *Rendition* are all husbands and fathers, and it is also their connection to their families that primarily allows them to develop greater cultural sensitivity. In the case of Barlow, his capture by the Iraqi soldiers and subsequent torture is a catalyst for the development of his empathy for and understanding of the Iraqi people. Initially, the torturer, Captain Said,47 launches into a tirade about how America makes Michael Jackson hate his own skin colour so much that he would change it, and links this to the manner in which they make their own citizens hate Arabs. Barlow is defiant after this bizarre introduction, stating that Michael Jackson’s choice is his to make. After a round of electrocution, Said becomes more personal, comparing Barlow’s pain to his own pain at the loss of his young son and maiming of his wife. Barlow, genuinely affected, explains how he is a new father as well. Said then questions why Barlow would mention this, as Barlow’s family is safe in America. He asks Barlow how it would feel if his daughter was to be bombed, and the image of Barlow’s daughter’s bedroom being destroyed along with Said son’s room is shown. Said then mentions how he only joined the army for money, just as Barlow did. Barlow is even more surprised when Said mentions that it was the Americans who trained him during the Iran/Iraq war. Barlow reminds Said of why America is crucial in the region, to right the wrong of Iraq invading Kuwait, citing regional stability as the reason for his nation’s involvement in Iraq. Said then forces Barlow to drink motor oil, saying ‘this is your stability my main man!’ By the time Major Gates knocks down the door of the torture chamber, kills the two guards in the room and shoots Said in the leg, Barlow has

47Captain Said is played by Said Taghmaoui, a veteran of both integrated and Orientalist Muslim representations. He also features in *Traitor*, as Samir’s friend within the terrorist organisation Nathir.
become a changed man. He is given a gun to execute Said with, yet only fires bullets into the wall next to him. His sparing of Said’s life is an indication of the impact of their exchange, and a statement that he will not respond with the violence that Said forced him to suffer. As he leaves the bunker to meet his comrades, he tells them that their journeying and fighting to help the Iraqi people was worth it, that they have made the right choice. Clearly Barlow’s close contact with Said, albeit in the form of torture, allows him to develop greater intercultural sensitivity; and it notably takes a comparison that strikes close to home – his family – for this family man to genuinely consider the similarities between his culture and another. The event has a profound impact on his attitude, which then allows Barlow to develop greater empathy for people in the Iraqis and their culture. Although Semmerling may have a point when he states that presenting the empathetic exchange between Barlow and Said in a torture scene reduces the likelihood that Said’s perspective will be considered seriously by audiences, its impact on Barlow nevertheless has the opposite effect, inviting a reflective response.

Similarly, in Munich, Avner’s developing distrust of his nation’s policies, and dismay at the seemingly never-ending cycle of attack and counter-attack, is cemented through reference to his family. As the film progresses, it increasingly suggests that killing members of Black September or other enemies of Israel is not an effective deterrent. At the same time, Avner’s comrades question their actions as Jews, stating that they are no different from their enemies. Robert, the unit’s bombmaker, is especially conflicted by all of the killing that has occurred around them, and before he leaves the group and subsequently commits suicide, he states, controversially, that if the Jews had ever been a decent people, they wouldn’t have suffered for thousands of years. Robert believes that Jews were born to be righteous, and that if they lose this through violence and war, they will lose everything. Thus, while the film depicts some Israeli agents transforming into the very people they are aiming to stop, it also makes a point of

---

48Semmerling, “Evil” Arabs in American Popular Film, p. 150.
showing some members of the group rebelling against this evolution.49 As a result, Avner starts to see the faults of his own culture, and through this realises that all cultures have toxic aspects to them. This in turn allows him to understand the plight of the Middle East in a more complex manner, ultimately prompting him to choose a different life. When faced with having to become like his enemies, who Avner realises aren’t that different from the people that he works for, he heeds his personal moral convictions, choosing to abandon the mission.50

Figure 2.4. Avner’s (Eric Bana) wife Daphna (Ayelet Zurer) does not understand his motivation to move his family away from Israel to America.

Although Avner’s characterisation bears many similarities to the role of ’compliant agent’, like Barlow, his change of heart is articulated primarily through reference to his family. Early in the film, it is stated that Avner was abandoned by his mother into a Kibbutz, and that Israel became everything for him. Yet, as an indication of his journey from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism, Avner aims to move his family to New York, to be able to see them more easily. His wife questions this decision, stating that his daughter will be a homeless Jew, to which Avner says she can be a Jew anywhere and that ‘You are the only home that I know’ [Figure 2.4]. Tacky as

50 Levine, ‘Munich: Warp-Speed Storytelling’.

118
the line may seem, and it is mocked by his wife, by the end of the film Avner no longer trusts his home nation and instead chooses to focus on his family in the multicultural capital of New York. Avner’s choice to leave the mission and his nation behind are behaviours that are the result of his newly acquired ethnorelative outlook. Through his experiences, he has acquired knowledge about other cultures, while also questioning the motivations of his host culture, and has moved towards increasingly ethnorelative tolerance for living between different world views.

Like Avner, rendition victim Anwar loses all trust in the nation he had called home. Even when he is released with the help of Agent Freeman, the pain which he has faced during his rendition has left him with nothing but distrust of and contempt for the US government, and his pain is only slightly relieved when he returns to see his son playing soccer in the front yard of his house. Anwar in this regard functions more as an example of reversed movement along Bennett’s continuum, to the extent that he is a shell of a man, disillusioned by the suffering inflicted on him by the Westerners who abducted him and the Muslim who tortured him. By demonstrating how Anwar’s new knowledge and attitude may undermine his capacity for interculturally sensitive skills and behaviours, *Rendition* shines a light on the detrimental effects of Western government policy on the lives of its own Muslim citizens. Overall, the three family men considered here all have tangible links to family that help shape their intercultural sensitivity. Of the three, it is only Barlow (a white Christian) who returns to America happy; but all three films suggest that in the post-September 11 world, family values are better placed to support and nurture intercultural sensitivity than the chaotic and meaningless machinations of war, politics or espionage.

After considering the family man, the second group of individuals that appear in these films are the ‘compliant agents’. These characterisations play a role in triggering intercultural sensitivity while simultaneously countering the negativity that is developed towards Western culture (and

America specifically) in the films considered here. The compliant agents are Major Gates from *Three Kings*, Douglas Freeman from *Rendition* and Agent Clayton from *Traitor*. Major Gates, the mentor of the group in *Three Kings*, is the catalyst for much of the intercultural development that occurs in the film, and a scene at the conclusion of the narrative indicates how his intercultural sensitivity has further increased. After the group has saved Barlow from torture and realised that the best option for their Iraqi friends is to head into Iran, they are stopped by the American army at the Iran-Iraq border. The army know about the gold and what the group has been up to, and they are all to be arrested. Gates’s superior is livid with the group and does not allow the Iraqis to pass, and the newly arrived soldiers believe that everything is about the gold, some of which Gates buried earlier to return to. Yet, Gates now chooses to appeal to his superior’s greed and narcissism, saying that he will disclose the location of the hidden gold if the Iraqis are allowed to cross the border, and suggesting that the Colonel may even receive a medal for this act. Thus, the Iraqis are allowed to cross, and a clear difference between those who went on the journey and the regular American soldier is shown here. Through his choice to forgo material gain to help the Iraqis, Gates’s newly amplified sense of shared humanity triumphs and is an effective counterbalance to the ethnocentric transgressions of the American government and army.

Agents Connelly (*Traitor*) and Freeman (*Rendition*) are also examples of already-interculturally-competent Western agents who represent a humane point of view to counter the negative representations of American governance in each text. For example, Connelly counters the ethnocentric government agents who suspect Samir of being a terrorist with a more ethnorelative perspective, as in the following dialogue with Samir at the end of *Traitor*. While pondering the deaths of a number of innocents that he inadvertently caused, Samir expresses his conflicted emotions:
Samir Horn: You know that the Qu’ran says that if you kill an innocent person it’s as if you’ve killed all mankind?

Roy Clayton: It also says that if you save a life it’s like you’ve saved all mankind... You’re a hero, Samir.52

These are some of the last lines of dialogue in the film, and they are significant as they provide an effective insight into Islam while also reinforcing Agent Connelly’s knowledge of Muslim culture, and further, positioning him as mentor and advisor – and thus superior – to Samir. In this way, despite Samir showing evidence of being the more thoroughly integrated of the two, the narrative centres and privileges the intercultural competency of the white male over that of his Muslim colleague. Similarly, Agent Freeman’s choice to stand up against the rendition of Anwar in Rendition counters the morally corrupt actions of CIA head Corrine Whitman in the film. His choice to echo the sentiments of Avner from Munich – that the torture of one enemy does nothing but create hundreds or thousands of new enemies – indicates his worldview. Like Gates, Freeman makes the self-sacrificing choice to remove Anwar from his cell and get him out of North Africa, which ultimately costs him his own position in the agency, but also centres his heroism, once again rendering the white male as the most desirable representation of integration; a transformation that is achieved at the expense of Anwar, who is now a tortured and broken man. Overall, the compliant agents’ transformations are not especially costly to themselves, and they do not ultimately suffer internal ambivalence or guilt or trauma from their experiences. It seems that their privileged socio-cultural positioning makes integration easier, and as a result they readily embody and benefit from a heroic identity in the respective texts.

The final category of intercultural development that can be witnessed in the films considered in this chapter is that of the ‘exotic on the periphery’. In contrast to the ‘family man’ and the ‘compliant agent’, these characters – Chief Elgin from Three Kings and Samir from Traitor – are

52 Traitor, dir. Jeffrey Nachmanoff, USA, Overture Films, 2008, [DVD].
dark skinned. As has already been suggested, Chief Elgin’s integrating journey in *Three Kings* is never tracked in the manner that the journeys of Barlow or Gates are tracked within the film. Elgin immediately accepts Gates’s idea to change the plan and shows prowess in executing the strategy and helping rescue Barlow after he is kidnapped, but he is not given an opportunity to express intercultural development openly. Rather, his intercultural skills and behaviour are based on an assumed ‘natural’ quality, his blackness and faith giving him an intuitive closeness to the Muslims that the other white soldiers in the group are not afforded. This is highlighted at the end of the film when the lives of the group are considered post-Iraq; Major Gates organises a job for Elgin on their return to America, working as an advisor to stuntmen in Hollywood, and in contrast, Barlow is seen establishing his own business. In this way, Elgin is subtly associated with ‘body’ (stunts work) while Gates and Barlow are associated with ‘mind’ (arranging a job for Elgin in the case of Gates, starting a business in the case of Barlow); such representations follow in the tradition of dark-skinned men being seen as naturally gifted athletes or as magical characters that provide spiritual inspiration for the growth of white protagonists, but who do not grow or change themselves. These cultural associations between body and naturalness and between mind and culture or learning inflect the entire narrative, whereby Gates and Barlow embark on an intercultural learning journey whereas Elgin simply ‘is’ interculturally competent. He does not undergo transformation but is instead problematically positioned as closer to Muslim culture on Orientalist grounds.

The final character to be considered as an ‘exotic on the periphery’ is Samir, in *Traitor*. As has already been suggested, Samir is continually torn between two cultures, making it very difficult for him to be accepted in either, or to be easily comprehended by the audience. His intercultural skills are shaped by both of the cultures that he has been brought up in; his technical know-how

---

and ability to function effectively as an operative is a result of his American upbringing, while his moral imperatives are shaped by his Muslim background. Yet for all of his ability and the success of his mission, he is left a torn man, with the death of innocents by his hand on his mind. Although Deardorff argues that a combination of interculturally aware knowledge, attitude, skills and behaviour should lead to a desirable state of being, Samir remains deeply troubled, alienated by his ancestral homeland for his Western integration, and turning his back on the Western world which forced him to compromise his religious values as an operational requirement. One commentator feels that the film is caught between sustaining a level of ambiguity about Samir for the sake of suspense, and genuinely examining this tragically torn figure; in other words, a requisite element of the thriller genre militates against his fuller characterisation. Certainly, even the director of the film agrees that Samir’s motivations often seem opaque or conflicted, and thus Samir remains ‘an exotic on the periphery’. In keeping with this trope, his greatest value is arguably his embodiment of Islam. Ranging from his role in dispelling the myths used by extremists to justify their violence to the way he is shown praying correctly and not just in a visually gratifying manner, he is one of the most accurate representations of a Muslim that has been featured in a Western film to date. And yet, these features are seen in a man who is working as a terrorist, even if he is undercover, and this can reinforce the notion posited by Alsultany, that Islam and extremism are inextricably linked.

Overall, the ‘family man’ faces the greatest amount of intercultural interaction and thus encounters the most scope for intercultural learning. This category provides the most powerful representation of developing intercultural competence, but it is worth noting that this development is enabled by the family man’s cultural capital and resources, something that is

57Nachmanoff, ‘Writers on Writing’, p. 35.
58Amongst the many films that have depicted images of Muslims praying or reciting verses, only a tiny percentage tend to show this accurately. Most films jump from edit to edit, and mix recited verses or place characters praying in awkward situations.
highlighted through contrast with the ‘hazard in need of containment’, whose lifelong access to resources has been more limited. The intercultural competence and sensitivity of the ‘compliant agent’ is less thoroughly explored because it is taken as already well advanced; this character type thus provides important intercultural knowledge, context or guidance, legitimising the journey towards intercultural competence through wisdom. Yet, the extent to which this character type’s authority is cemented by whiteness becomes evident through contrast with the intercultural competence of the ‘exotic on the periphery’, who exhibits ‘natural’ intercultural understanding grounded in identity rather than experience or application. Collectively, these characters demonstrate how the intersectional dynamics of class, race and ethnicity affect how acculturation is represented and experienced.

**Succeeding in the Development of Intercultural Sensitivity**

Xun Lo argues that evaluating intercultural competence should incorporate some consideration of success, to understand whether acculturation has led to a desired outcome. In keeping with this idea, it is worth considering how the films under consideration conclude. *Three Kings* is the film with the most positive ending of all the texts considered here; as the only film that was produced before September 11, it allows for an exploration of the First Gulf War that is not shaped by the immense sociopolitical changes between the Middle East and the West that occurred with the destruction of the World Trade Centre and subsequent invasion of Iraq, and as such, it does not come loaded with the ambivalence that characterises the other films. The Iraqis are successfully escorted across the border and Barlow, Gates and Elgin return to America with a belief that they made a genuine difference to the country that they fought in. Ultimately, the intercultural growth of the characters leads to a more positive outcome for all of the significant parties, except for the ‘hazard in need of containment’, Conrad Vig. Vig does not have

---

the knowledge and skills to allow him to develop interculturally, and he dies during Barlow’s rescue mission, shot by a conniving Iraqi soldier who was playing dead; a senseless death. He is buried in a local shrine, which affords him some level of intercultural identity, as he is buried according to the customs of the host nation that he never really comprehended. The local Muslims acknowledge his courage, and yet the subtext is that citizens who aren’t educated and interculturally sensitive will have trouble existing in the modern world, a trope that is elaborated in other films and shows considered in this thesis.

From a plot perspective, *Munich* seems to conclude somewhat positively, with Avner being reunited with his family while beginning a new life in America. Yet thematically, the film foregrounds the continued cycle of violence in the Middle East that is fostered by those in power, and Avner’s choice to choose family over national interests is a kind of retreatism born of despair. As a text, *Munich* can be regarded as a successful attempt at identifying how violence in the Middle East is not only the work of Muslims; rather, it is a complex global issue. In this regard, the film does much to explore the challenges for individuals navigating East/West acculturation and is a valuable attempt at articulating an ethnorelative worldview, where different cultures are placed on a level pegging in preference to swearing allegiance to just one. The film makes a strong point that ethnocentric mindsets and a lack of dialogue cause many problems in relations between the Muslim governments and the West, yet the final moments of Avner show a serious, sad man who is relieved rather than happy to be in America.

*Traitor* and *Rendition* deal with the inner workings of intelligence and Western relations with the Muslim nations in the Middle East and Africa, and even though the major characters display intercultural sensitivity, the fraught nature of the world that the films explore makes it naïve to expect successful representations of East/West acculturation or happy endings amidst such a turbulent environment of infiltration, torture and manipulation. Ultimately, the Muslim characters in particular are irreversibly scarred by their experiences, and the films end with little
closure; both Anwar and Samir remain ensnared by their positioning between two warring cultures, despite their best efforts to integrate the two. Nevertheless, from the broader perspective of East-West acculturation, *Rendition* enables the audience to clearly comprehend how interculturally competent Muslims can exist and be harmed by the actions of misguided government policy. Similarly, *Traitor’s* Samir is a strong representation of an integrated Muslim, particularly in terms of disseminating a more nuanced understanding of the Islamic faith. However, the final terrorist attack that Samir aims to stop features members of the public who appear to be everyday Americans from all walks of life; black, white, covered, uncovered, they lie in wait, waiting for instructions to bomb certain targets. Unlike *Rendition*, where the terrorists are readily identifiable and driven by hatred, *Traitor* creates the image that anybody, anywhere in the Western world could be a Muslim willing to kill others. This lasting and disturbing image counters much of the positivity that comes from the film; all of the stereotypes that Samir strives to challenge are to some extent overshadowed by this scene, and Alsultany might feel vindicated in her conviction that modern positive representations of Muslims continue to shroud racism and stereotypes. Ultimately, although both *Rendition* and *Traitor* feature more deeply developed Muslim characters, they do not demonstrate the same intercultural sensitivity that can be attributed to *Three Kings* and to some extent *Munich*. Thus, at least with regards to this cluster of films, it would seem that the representation of intercultural sensitivity becomes increasingly difficult as the depth and extent of the dialogue across difference is increased.

Briefly considering the casting practices in this chapter, in *Three Kings* and *Munich* Muslim characters have little dialogue and focused screen time, functioning as support and background characters. The Iraqi citizens and soldiers in *Three Kings* are presented as Arabs, generally dressed in modern but worn out clothing, while the soldiers are in uniforms, and range from more sympathetic characters such as the torturer Said Taghmaoui to snivelling sunglass wearing Saddam loyalists who fight against the protagonists. The woman who is executed in the scene
which changes the protagonists’ minds is quite light skinned and attractive, seeming to reinforce Western ideals of beauty; indeed, it seems that in order for the group to affected by a death, the person to suffer must be light-skinned and attractive by Western standards. The film does little to challenge stereotypes of the physical representation of Muslims. In contrast, the Muslim characterisations in *Munich* are varied.

*Rendition* reinforces the idea that integrated Muslims should look lighter skinned, with the light skinned Anwar suffering at the hands of swarthy Fawal. In *Traitor* Don Cheadle’s Samir is the only Muslim character in this group of films who does not sport a Middle Eastern sounding accent; he is eloquent and well-dressed when not in espionage gear. Said Taghmaoui reprises a role similar to his role in *Three Kings*, as the accented Moroccan who is once again eloquent in discussing controversial issues around faith and extremism. In all, the casting practices across these texts at times complicate and challenge established norms around the physical representation of Muslims, but not on a tangible or powerful level.

Overall, the films that have been considered here clearly show that some recent productions of military/political thrillers set in Muslim locales are sincere attempts to explore the complexities of modern relations between Muslim nations and the West, and the challenges of acculturation between these two worlds. The development of intercultural sensitivity is central to the construction of these texts, and they are varying successful in portraying intercultural integration. Although there remain deeply ingrained stereotypes and Orientalist trends in all of the films that have been considered here, they also counter Orientalist discourse by exploring the role that Western governments have had in establishing and facilitating chaos in modern Muslim countries, and the extent to which the West aids and facilitates the spread of hatred, extremism and violence through polices and other vested interests. These elements of empathetic and interculturally sensitive portrayals and themes are testament to a movement towards more varied interpretations of the Muslim nations and their inhabitants in Western
screen culture in the early part of the twenty-first century. Although framing these dialogues as a process in which white men are most successful at becoming more culturally aware and sensitive does rob the genre of some of its power and significance, the subsequent chapters in this thesis will examine texts that are arguably more effective in unsettling the hegemonic normative position that white men continue to enjoy.
Chapter Three: Canadian and Australian Multiculturalism and the Representation of Muslims

This chapter concentrates on two television shows that originate from Australia and Canada, which constitutes a movement away from texts originating in the U.S. and Britain that have been the focus of this thesis until this point. Understanding how Muslim representations are shaped in these two Commonwealth nations requires an understanding of how the policy of multiculturalism has impacted the experience of Muslim immigrants and its depiction on the television screens of each country. Since the medium of television has long been associated with the domestic sphere and particularly women’s experience, this chapter also entails a turn towards themes of intimacy and femininity. It looks specifically at the comedy *Little Mosque on the Prairie* (2007 – 2012), aired on the Canadian public broadcaster CBC across seven seasons, and the Australian police drama *East West 101* (2007 – 2011), which was broadcast on the SBS network for three seasons. Both shows are centred on the lives of Muslims in the West.

*Multiculturalism, Before and After 9/11*

The implementation of multicultural policy in Australia and Canada has been a response to global movements of people and labour after World War II. As part of their post-World War II growth strategy, both nations embraced large scale immigration programs that brought with them different religions and cultures. Instead of pursuing policies of assimilation, which encourage migrants to adopt the culture and language of the host nation, multiculturalist policies allowed for migrants to maintain and celebrate their own culture, language and traditions while becoming members of their new nation; essentially, it was a way to accommodate and manage diversity.1 After multiculturalism became official government policy

---

in both nations, legislation and government bodies were introduced to help its implementation including media organisations such as the SBS (Special Broadcasting Service) in Australia and the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) in Canada. These television channels’ function was to enrich the lives of migrants and to develop the cultural sensitivity of all citizens, through broadcasts in migrant languages, and screening of foreign films and domestically produced migrant content. Especially in Australia, the SBS is regarded as one of the primary institutions of governmental multiculturalist policy.

Nevertheless, theorists and critics of the policy argue that beneath the rhetoric, multiculturalism maintains Western cultural hegemony and aims to obscure the dominance of whiteness. Ien Ang and John Stratton believe that it creates a fantasy of collective diversity when actually some cultures, especially those that are seen as unruly or unpredictable, are accorded less acceptance than others. Elke Winter and Catherine Frost argue that it is a sinister form of social containment, reinforcing the political and cultural policies of Western nations. Mehal Krayem also questions the effectiveness of the manner in which broadcasters such as the SBS use multicultural harmony to fight intolerance, arguing that they adopt an apolitical approach that doesn’t consider and contest privilege and power. Further, Ghassan Hage argues that those in power manage the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion while ‘celebrating’ or prohibiting cultural diversity in line with how much it conforms to the institutions of the dominant Anglo-Celtic culture, while those from supposedly non-liberal religious frameworks are perceived as

---

‘passive objects to be governed by those who have given themselves the national governmental right to “worry” about the nation.’ In these ways, multiculturalism is thus racialised by hegemonic white culture.

To a significant extent, these weaknesses of multiculturalism have been amplified since September 11. For Muslims living in Australia and Canada, the events of September 11 2001 were a turning point in how they were perceived and treated in the public sphere. Although various ethnic groups in the West have faced moral panics about their adaptability to their new homes and challenges such as racism until their time in the spotlight passed, after September 11 Muslim communities became something more than just another group of immigrants waiting their turn to be accepted. Indeed, in Australia and Canada, September 11 led to a weakening of multiculturalism, where social and political perception became dominated by security concerns. Some scholars have gone so far as to claim that a ‘retreat from multiculturalism’ has been occurring in different nations across the globe in the twenty first century; certainly, the positioning of Muslims in the subsequent political and cultural world plays a central role in scholarship trying to make sense of this.

Since September 11, commentators in the media and the political sphere in various Western nations have drawn more often on narratives of the crisis of multiculturalism to interpret political and social developments and to defend political decisions in relation to immigration, security and integration. This has then allowed multifaceted societal problems and economic crises to be attributed to migrants, placing a greater onus on the individual (in this case migrants and minorities) rather than the government.

---

7Hage, White Nation, p. 17.
8Hage, p. 17.
10Busbridge, ‘It’s Just Your Turn’, p. 463.
11Busbridge, p. 463.
13Lentin and Titley, The Crises of Multiculturalism, p. 2.
and wider society.\textsuperscript{14} Other commentators observe that in places like Europe ‘civic integration’ has replaced multiculturalism; this approach stresses the ‘active integration’ of immigrants into the economic social and political mainstream, reflected in new requirements for migrants to learn host nations’ languages, undertake written citizenship tests and take loyalty oaths.\textsuperscript{15} Another perspective is that multiculturalism hasn’t failed or retreated but that rather, politicians do not use the language of multiculturalism anymore, despite the fact that governmental policies adopted under multiculturalism remain firmly in place; only Demark, Italy and the Netherlands have made sweeping changes to their admission policies and access to social benefits.\textsuperscript{16}

From a personal perspective, as the child of migrant Muslim parents living in Australia, until September 11 I was an ethnic, at times a wog; a tolerable member of the large population of migrants in the country. After September 11, I became identified with my religious affiliation before any other identifier, a labelling that persists for all Muslims in my country. September 11 thus imbibed in me a desire to learn and propagate knowledge about my faith, to dispel the myths surrounding Islam and its relation to terrorism, and Baljit Nagra’s research into Muslim identity in Canadian youth after September 11 confirms and reflects my experience. She theorises that the discrimination faced by Canadian Muslims in the post September 11 world led to ‘reactive identity formation’ or resistance to adopting mainstream ideologies about their faith and culture by Muslim youth. This in turn led many Muslim individuals to more self-directed learning about Islam, a deeper connection to their faith and deepening ties to their own ethnic community.\textsuperscript{17} Others also chose to don the hijab, wanting to portray a positive image of Islam, using this visual identifier to form an identity of resistance, while others tried to reclaim their

\textsuperscript{14}Lentin and Titley, \textit{The Crises of Multiculturalism}, p. 3.
faith by becoming more politically active. Such experiences suggest how the experience of multiculturalism has been – and continues to be – negotiated and changed by the events of September 11 2001, and accordingly, this chapter explores two television texts that address these issues directly, since both *East West 101* and *Little Mosque on the Prairie* were made during an uneasy period for multiculturalism.

It is also instructive to compare these two texts which, while both products of multicultural policy, also reflect differing interpretations of multiculturalism that reflect their different nations of origin. Indeed, some light is shed upon these differences by Naser Ghobadzadeh, who compares the manner in which legal requests for Sharia law implementation in each nation were evaluated by the political and social structures of Canada and Australia. In 2005, requests by Muslim community groups to allow for the introduction of Sharia based legal rulings in relation to family law such as inheritance occurred in both Canada and Australia, independently of each other. Both applications were ultimately unsuccessful, but the manner in which they were considered by the political establishment and media in each nation was starkly different. The Canadian government treated the proposal in the framework of a legal application, remaining open to considering its viability under Canadian law, and openly asking for input from various Canadian Muslim community groups during the proposal stage. By framing the proposal and debate in this way, Canada did not allow the issue to become politicised. Ghobadzadeh argues that while the application may have been unsuccessful, it ultimately empowered Muslim women in Canada, who played an important role in the application process. In contrast, in Australia, politicians including the foreign minister evaluated the application as an attempt to take over Australian law and society, a view which was sensationalised by the media and which persists to

---

this day.\textsuperscript{21} Other incidents have highlighted this commodification of religion by those in political power in Australia, with Australian Muslim leaders and communities feeling forced to apologise for the actions of a small group of violent and misguided Muslims and their illegal activities.\textsuperscript{22} Such activities by Muslims on the fringes of their own faith is regarded as evidence of Muslim refusal to integrate, which ‘push[es] the limits of tolerable diversity’.\textsuperscript{23} For one scholar, this suggests that ‘Australian multiculturalism is tenuous, not multiculturalist in its normative ethos but, rather, monoculturalist in its ethos’.\textsuperscript{24} Such analyses are indicative of the frailty of neo-liberal multiculturalism, in its inability to provide a healthy environment for inherently peaceful faiths such as Islam and its associated cultural frameworks, and requiring constant apology for Muslims in order for their loyalty to be accepted.\textsuperscript{25}

Such controversies in the respective nations of Canada and Australia help to frame the two television series under consideration in this chapter. Similarly to the Canadian government’s response to the question of implementing Sharia law, in \textit{Little Mosque on the Prairie}, the tiny fictional town of Mercy in the middle of the Canadian prairie is a site in which the differences between the Muslim population and local inhabitants are explored through an ethos of openness. On the other hand, and just as the Australian government represented the prospect of implementing Sharia, \textit{East West 101} constructs the city of Sydney as a clash of cultures – where racial tensions in society and the police force are portrayed and examined through violent social and political conflict. Both shows consider the multicultural experience and the challenges that Muslims face to become accepted members of their world in varied ways, and both also explore intercultural relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims and the process of

\textsuperscript{21}Ghobadzadeh, ‘A Multiculturalism-Feminism Dispute’, p. 313.
\textsuperscript{24}Parekh, \textit{Rethinking Multiculturalism’}, pp. 6-7.
\textsuperscript{25}S. Dagistanli et al., ‘The Limits of Multiculturalism in Australia?’, p. 1273.
acculturation. Read together, they offer a useful means of evaluating the possibilities for developing intercultural sensitivity through screen culture in post 9/11 multicultural nations.

**Television, Gender, Race, and Multiculturalism**

My focus on television in this chapter invites further consideration of the role that gender plays in shaping representations in Western media, including multicultural representations. This is because television as a medium has long been associated with the realm of the feminine and has been explored by feminist scholars due to its domestic status, its associations with low culture, and the supposedly passive and perpetually distracted viewing habits (often negatively associated with women) that have been linked with mass cultural reception. For example, the work of Tania Modleski on daytime television and particularly soap opera identifies tropes that are unique to the format and steeped in concepts of the private sphere, domestic life and intimacy. Modleski proposed that daytime television is about intimate connections rather than action and narrative progression; events in soaps are occasions for characters to interact and have emotional discussions with each other. Meaningful interactions are thus made through relationships; romances, families, births, engagement, marriages, divorces and deaths. Production techniques such as close-ups on faces (in contrast to the male gaze’s focus on the female body) and deep silences are used to convey emotion and allow the audience to empathise with what the characters are experiencing. Modleski also argued that television’s diffused style of narrative – one with multiple plot lines and events progressing gradually –

---

allowed women busy in the domestic sphere to maintain interest in the show despite the interruptions of children. For Modleski, these shows are not so much about narrative excitement, but rather construct ‘moral consensus about the conduct of personal life’.29 Similarly, Ien Ang’s work on the globally exported soap opera Dallas (1978-1991) understood popular television as a feminised form.30 She saw soaps as reviving around the day to day ordinariness of personal and family relationships, or the private and intimate sphere commonly associated with women’s modern lives.31

By consistently constructing males as unreliable, devious, immoral or physically aggressive, soaps have also often represented men as poorly equipped to negotiate private concerns or manage their emotions effectively, and these portrayals have cumulatively challenged how men are perceived in popular culture.32 In the 1990s, the increasingly popular genre of sitcoms became a site for exploring gender roles, which included challenging established understandings of masculinity in screen representations. After shows such as Rosanne (1988–97) and Married with Children (1986–97) had challenged the sentimentalised idea of the traditional family unit in the late 1980s, immensely popular 1990s sitcoms such as Seinfeld (1989-98) and Friends (1994-04) concentrated on friendships. These 1990s sitcoms were able to construct male characters who could show vulnerability, using humour to smuggle these issues into prime time television.33 Through the depiction of male friends sharing intimacies, hugging, and exchanging gifts, ideas about male relations as detached in popular culture were challenged.34 Sitcoms also allowed for the exploration of gay male experiences in conventional spaces, to some extent

29Brundson, ‘Crossroads: Notes on Soap Opera’, p. 78.
33Feasley, Masculinity and Popular Television, p. 22.
legitimising their place in wider society, and once again by challenging established assumptions about gender and relationships through comedy.\textsuperscript{35}

Television has thus played a role in allowing those on the periphery of patriarchal society (particularly women) to be afforded a voice,\textsuperscript{36} because television dramas have tended to privilege the ‘personal’ over the ‘political’ while also asserting the link between the two. As a growing feature of domestic space after World War II,\textsuperscript{37} television also became closely identified with family and everyday life.\textsuperscript{38} Focused on family dramas and micropolitics, television shows were well-positioned to explore identity politics,\textsuperscript{39} and the values of authenticity and intimacy that it supported also became ‘symbolic spaces in which the injuries of modern living can be healed’.\textsuperscript{40} Overall, this medium became an alternative space in screen culture that differed from traditional cinema,\textsuperscript{41} allowing for the voices of women and those on the periphery to be heard.\textsuperscript{42}

From the middle of the 1970s, representations of the other, including the migrant experience, also became increasingly available on television, allowing viewers to identify and connect with cultures different from their own.\textsuperscript{43} In this regard, television was an early disseminator of a multicultural ethos and understanding; and by giving life and depth to people whose humanity and existence has been marginalised, television drama has become a vehicle through which the

\textsuperscript{36}C. Brundson, Television Studies, [website], \url{http://www.museum.tv/eotv/televisionst.htm} (accessed 23 July 2018).
\textsuperscript{38}C. Pullen, Straight Girls and Queer Guys: The Hetero Media Gaze in Film and Television, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2016, p. 91.
\textsuperscript{42}As it was explored in Chapter One, the very first production with a positive integrating Muslim characterisation was the television show Robin of Sherwood (1984). Television thus moved before cinema in constructing a positive Muslim characterisation.
politics and history of many different cultural groups has been explored.\textsuperscript{44} Attempts at such inclusiveness on television began with historical serials such as \textit{Roots} (1977) and \textit{Holocaust} (1978). \textit{Holocaust}’s examination of genocide through the lens of everyday personal life was met with significant criticism; its human drama was seen as trivialising one of the darkest periods of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{45} Giving voice to and exploring the everyday lives of Nazis was also seen as an attempt to humanise an enemy. Yet, by normalising the Jews involved in the Holocaust, this serial allowed audiences to see the event through the eyes of Jewish people and thus identify with them. In the same manner, by normalising the Nazis, the serial allowed audiences to realise that evil can occur in all people at all times.\textsuperscript{46}

By the beginning of the 1980s, with the global reception of the American soap opera \textit{Dallas}, fundamental changes in the local broadcasting cultures of many nations had occurred. According to Ang, \textit{Dallas} was not only a vehicle of American cultural imperialism, it also opened up national television cultures to become more cosmopolitan, leading to the acceptance of plurality and diversity outside of the USA.\textsuperscript{47} Indeed, Ang argues that \textit{Dallas}’s success played a role in the success of the SBS in Australia, and that the forces of diversification and pluralisation caused it and similar channels to appear in other countries across the globe.\textsuperscript{48} Certainly, it was in the context of this globalising shift in television that the pioneering characterisation of Nasir appeared in the British television series \textit{Robin of Sherwood} (1984), discussed in Chapter One of this thesis. Australian screen culture had begun challenging traditional conservative values by including non-Anglo characterisations in the late 1960s through films and shows such as \textit{They’re Creeber}, ‘Taking our Personal Lives Seriously’, p. 449.\textsuperscript{44} See J. Herf, ‘The \textit{Holocaust} Reception in West Germany: Right Centre and Left’, \textit{New German Critique}, vol. 19, 1980, p. 37 and E. Wisel, ‘Trivialising the Holocaust: Semi Fact and Semi Fiction’, \textit{New York Times}, 16 April 1975.\textsuperscript{45} Creeber, ‘Taking our Personal Lives Seriously’, p. 448.\textsuperscript{46} I. Ang, ‘Henry Mayer Lecture 2009 from Dallas to SBS: The Popular, the Global and the Diverse on Television’ \textit{Media International Australia}, no. 131, 2009, p. 7.\textsuperscript{47} Ang, ‘From Dallas to SBS’, p. 7.
a Weird Mob (1966) and Number 96 (1972-77), and by the late 1980s this inclusiveness included the successful but polarising Acropolis Now (1989-92) and sketch comedy representations such as ‘Con the Fruiterer’ in the prime time The Comedy Company (1988-90). In a parallel process that was less reliant on comedy, Canadian television introduced non-Anglo characterisations in shows such as The Beachcombers (1972) and moved towards issues pertaining to multicultural experiences through shows such as Degrassi High (1987-91).

Although television in Australia and Canada adopted a perspective of inclusiveness and recognised the multicultural experience early on, it must be noted that many representations were nevertheless problematic, especially in the case of popular shows such as Acropolis Now and Degrassi High. Acropolis Now was inspired by a stage play called ‘Wogs out of Work’ created by young Australian migrants, which provided insight into the cultural pressures they faced from their parents and the dominant trends of Anglo-Australian culture, and how they dealt with them. Yet the television adaptation concentrated on the migrant or wog trope to such an extent that it tended to reinforce stereotypes of working class Greek males as offensive sexist buffoons. Writers of the show justified this racism and sexism by stating that keeping the show on the air with desirable audience ratings keeps ethnics on television. It is also important to note that Australia’s Channel 7, which broadcast Acropolis Now, chose to program it right before Allo Allo (1982) and Fast Forward (1989), two other comedy programs that were based around crude stereotypes of migrants in Britain and Australia.

These caricatures persist today, with shows such as Pizza (2000-07), Summer Heights High (2007) and Housos (2011-13) shoehorning Muslims and Pacific Islander migrants into similarly crude portrayals, while Here Come the Habibs! (2016-17) is an attempt to make a family of

---

Lebanese Australians modern Beverly Hillbillies, transporting them from Sydney’s west to cause comedic chaos in an affluent white neighbourhood after striking it rich through the lottery. All of these shows continue to reinforce crude stereotypes of migrants as sexist, uneducated, social welfare scamming people who can be laughed at in the name of celebrating the cultural diversity of the nation. The inclusiveness celebrated by multiculturalism has thus not always translated into desirable screen representations of migrants in Australia. At the same time, rare Muslim celebrities such as Nazeem Hussain have been successful in finding their way onto SBS and ABC television as extensions of their stand-up careers. Hussain has been able to use comedic skits to critique and subvert popular stereotypes of Muslims in programming such as *Legally Brown* (2013-14) and *Orange is the New Brown* (2018), but these have never become hugely popular or successful.

Canadian television has tried to address the anxieties of multiculturalism through education and positivity, with less focus on comedy. However, this approach has often led to the reinforcement of concerns and negative statements about minorities and inclusiveness.⁵² Canadian youth television, for example, has combined realistic storylines, visual diversity and relevant didacticism when portraying adolescent angst.⁵³ To differentiate itself from US television, whose private and commercially successful content was accessed easily in Canada, Canadian television was driven by objectives of documentary and educational realism.⁵⁴ So, on the surface, series such as *Degrassi High* and its iterations *Degrassi: The Next Generation* (2001-15) and other adolescent programs such as *Ready or Not* (1993-97), *Edgemont* (2000-05), and *Instant Star* (2000-05) are inclusive, interracial programs in which friendships, relationships and tensions are tools for representing tolerance; yet in almost every case diversity leads to problems.⁵⁵ Nafissa

---

⁵³Thompson-Spires, ‘Tolerated but not Preferred’, p. 293.
⁵⁴Thompson-Spires, p. 295.
⁵⁵Thompson-Spires, p. 298.
Thompson Spires argues that interracial relationships are explored, aiming to demonstrate that racism is undesirable, yet it is the ethnic characters who are inevitably constructed as the ones causing the racial tension; the relationships generally fail and plots mark white characters as the ones championing diversity. In most cases the Greek, Italian and Asian characters are more racist than whites, and racism is seen as an internal dynamic of Muslim culture; such representations subconsciously state that migrants are not able to break from their old world prejudices and thus challenge the ethos of multiculturalism. In one episode of Ready or Not, an Italian father doesn’t tolerate his son’s relationship with a black girl, whereas his visually white Mum is more accepting and understanding of the relationship. These attempts at representing multiculturalism and diversity have thus played a role in reinforcing that diversity is distinct from authentic (white) Canadianness.

Through exploring interracial relationships these shows also bring to light another symptom of multicultural screen representations – the culture of intolerance that interracial intimacy still faces, even after decades of inclusiveness on the screen. Inter-ethnic relationships and intimacy have rarely worked on Australian screens; the relationships are generally short and away from the centre of narrative arcs, with true love only occurring between people from the same race, or alternatively ending with tragic consequences. Interracial incompatibility is also seen in both East West 101 and Little Mosque on the Prairie, and as has been indicated here, the relationships are generally unhealthy ones (this phenomenon also plays a prominent role in the texts considered in Chapter Four).

By the turn of the century, programmers such as HBO had begun to distance themselves from traditional popular television genres such as soap operas and sitcoms, with the effect of

---

56 Thompson-Spires, p. 300.
58 Thompson-Spires, p. 303.
masculinising the medium.\textsuperscript{60} By using big budgets and high production values, channels such as HBO have also repositioned their audiences as consumers of high art (traditionally associated with the more masculine realm of the cinema).\textsuperscript{61} As Geraldine Harris argues, widely popular and critically acclaimed twenty-first-century shows such as \textit{The Sopranos} (1999-07), \textit{The Wire} (2002–08) and \textit{Mad Men} (2007–15) are all tragedies of the common man, a genre which is the traditional terrain of the male, and in different ways look back to a golden age of masculinity in cinematic representation while also coming layered with a sense of irony about the worlds they recreate.\textsuperscript{62} Some commentators argue this turn towards the masculine in television was a response to the emasculating attacks of September 11, and in keeping with the hypermasculine military response that the US embraced after the destruction of the Twin Towers.\textsuperscript{63} Yet, in the face of such trends, \textit{Little Mosque on the Prairie} attempted to hark back to soaps and sitcoms with 1990s sensibilities; some commentators have called it old school Canadian television.\textsuperscript{64} As will be explored, this approach enables the series to challenge a significant Orientalist stereotype common to Muslim screen representations, namely the oppression of Muslim women by their patriarchal religion and society. On the other hand, \textit{East West 101} shares more in common with other masculinised police and counter-terrorism dramas, and constructs a darker, more conflicted multicultural world. Both shows labour to deal with the modern multicultural world in unique ways.

\textsuperscript{60} G. Harris, ‘A Return to Form? Postmasculinist Television Drama and Tragic Heroes in the Wake of \textit{The Sopranos}’, \textit{New Review of Film and Television Studies}, vol. 10, no. 4, 2013, p. 447.


\textsuperscript{62} G. Harris, ‘A Return to Form?’, p. 448.


Happy Multiculturalism in Little Mosque on the Prairie

*Little Mosque on the Prairie* is set in a fictional small town in the Canadian Prairies called Mercy. It looks at the lives of the Muslim community in the town, with the focal point being the local mosque, which is actually a hall inside the town’s church. The premise, placing two seemingly conflicting communities and religions into the same space and using comedy to explore their interactions, is an attempt at constructing a post-September 11 multicultural Canadian world in which Muslims and their neighbours must learn how to co-exist, develop intercultural competence and acculturate to one another. The show was created by Muslim woman Zarqa Nawaz, and has the unique status of being the first example of a western production where a Muslim has had the primary creative control of the text (generally, Muslims are not involved in production processes at all, and rarely act as advisors to provide credibility to stories). The show primarily revolves around young doctor Rayyan Hamoudi (Sitara Hewitt), her father Yasir (Carlo Rota) and mother Sarah (Sheila McCarthy) who is a convert to Islam, Ammar Rashid (Zaib Shaikh) who comes to Mercy as the new youthful Imam of the mosque, and a supporting cast of Muslim and non-Muslim townsfolk. The show explores how these Muslim characters negotiate living in modern multicultural Canada, including the tensions that flow within their post September 11 world, both within their town and also within wider society. The challenges that come with generational gaps between older and younger Muslims and their understanding of their religion and culture and everyday domesticity and intimacy are also explored. The show’s negotiation of these tensions allows for myths about Islam and Muslims to be dispelled, while also challenging the intersection of these myths with patriarchal norms. Overall, the show is an extended look at domestic Muslim life in a multicultural nation, depicting integrated and liberal modern Muslims.

---

The opening credits introduce the cast while a female voice sings in Arabic to a slow electro beat, a welcoming, happy fusion of Eastern and Western sounds. Episodes are generally centred on the life of the Hamoudi family and the Imam Ammar, and the evolution of the mosque, the Muslim community and its interactions with the locals of Mercy. The first episode of the show sets the tone and many of the plot devices that are common across the six seasons of viewing. The episode introduces Yasir, builder and contractor who has leased office space in the local Anglican Church for his business, while also secretly using the area as a praying space for local Muslims. When an unsuspecting client of Yasir’s wanders into the mosque during Friday congregation prayers and hears firebrand Baber’s (Manooj Sood) sermon on how ‘wine gums, rye bread and liquorice’ are sneakily promoting Muslims to consume alcohol and how all idols (in this case Canadian and American) should be destroyed, he immediately contacts local shock jock Fred Tupper (Neil Crone) who symbolises the media and its mistrust of Muslims, who is more than ready to let the people of Mercy know about the threatening Muslim cell in their town on the radio.

At the same time, new Imam Ammar is travelling from Toronto to Mercy to join his congregation and is arrested at the airport after passengers overhear him talking to his mother over the phone about the social suicide he committed and the bomb he dropped on his family by choosing to give up his career in law. During the interrogation Ammar asks whether he is being charged for flying while Muslim, and whether he will be deported to Syria, to which the policeman says that Ammar does not get to choose where he will be deported to. The scene is aimed to poke fun at the silliness and futility of the whole process. Ammar’s sarcasm is received seriously by the buffoonish police, and it is a funny scene, while also being slightly unnerving, especially for a Muslim viewer. Indeed, Ozlem Sensoy has read the scene as minimising the challenges Muslim

---

67‘Little Mosque’, *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, Season 1 Episode 1, CBC, 2007, [TV program]
men and women face in public spaces, while also framing detention and questioning as trivial nuisances, which risks delegitimising the real suffering that Muslim citizens have faced and continue to face in public areas.\textsuperscript{68}

Once Ammar arrives in Mercy, he is immediately expected to expertly deal with the paranoia stoked by the local media and the far-fetched expectations of the local Muslim congregation. He handles both very badly as an interview with Fred sees him mock the small-town sensibilities of the people of Mercy and his ability to negotiate with the more conservative members of his flock led by Baber immediately breaks down. His tenure as Imam almost ends in the first episode, as he intends to cut and run after these controversies, and it is only Rayyan who is able to persuade him to stay on. In a scene that confirms their attraction and forms the beginning of their long-winded courtship, Rayyan states that she dreamed about Ammar, a progressive Imam who would bring the Muslims of Mercy into the current world, or at least the 11\textsuperscript{th} century. This scene convinces him to stay on, and the Muslims of Mercy have a dinner in their mosque to celebrate the beginning of Ramadan with landlord Reverend McGee (Derek McGrath) from the church and the local Mayor joining in.

Rayyan’s dreams of a progressive Imam who will strive to free Islam of its backwardness introduces one primary aspect of the show; the way it insists upon the modernity and liberalism of Islam and Muslims in multicultural Canada in the twenty-first century. In trying to understand the manner in which one can be regarded as an integrated Muslim in modern Canada, Krista Riley argues that the only way this is possible is through accumulating national capital by espousing certain beliefs and conducting actions that express loyalty and allegiance to the dominant and accepted ways of being a citizen.\textsuperscript{69} According to Riley, as a response to September


11 Canada witnessed a shift in the manner in which identity was defined, where it was increasingly evaluated along civilisational lines in which Muslims were framed as outsiders. By expressing their allegiance and loyalty visibly and explicitly, Muslims can accumulate certain forms of national capital and then claim more belonging than those less civilised. This view is borne out in Rayyan’s dream of a progressive Imam, and permeates across the six seasons of *Little Mosque on the Prairie* in a number of ways.

According to Riley, the first mechanism by which patriotic Canadian Muslims may acquire national capital is by expressing their loyalty and allegiance to the state and dominant culture and celebrating their citizenship, but with less freedom to be critical of the institutions of government than their non-Muslim (and especially white) counterparts. This unevenness is an integral part of being a moderate Muslim, because critiquing dominant institutions or discourses for anti-Islamic bias always risks positioning one as an Islamist. Secondly, ‘good’ Muslims are those that see their own communities as posing a threat to modern multicultural Canada yet are also vulnerable to this threat themselves. Riley argues that media coverage of progressive Muslims criticised by those regarded as Islamists, or of those who receive fatwas, constructs those that challenge modern, liberal Muslims as less integrated and a threat to the nation; in this way, Muslims who express allegiance with liberalism and modernity are seen as ‘good’ and on the right side. Lastly, the contested issue of how Muslim women are perceived is another site where Canadian Muslims can distinguish themselves from their less integrated counterparts. As Muslim women are widely seen in the West as part of a religion that is patriarchal and limits their life choices, ‘good’ Canadian Muslims must reject the patriarchal traditions seen as widespread in Islam, in effect rescuing Muslim women from barbaric cultures.

---

70 Riley, ‘How to Accumulate National Capital’, p. 58.
71 Riley, p. 60.
72 Riley, p. 62.
73 Riley, p. 64.
and practices such as the niqab. All these views can be seen as influencing the discourses about Islam that govern Little Mosque on the Prairie. As Riley would categorise them, the Canadian Muslims of Mercy adopt identities as “patriotic Canadians, objects of threat from Muslims and protectors of oppressed women”.

Across its 91 episodes, the show uses many scenarios and opportunities to explore the challenges Muslims face in modern multicultural Canada, and one of the primary manners in which this occurs is by pitting the less integrated against those who have modernised. Indeed, the show is constructed almost like an ethnocentric versus ethnorelative worldview showdown. Generally, the less integrated are shown to be those who lack the knowledge and positive or requisite attitudes required to comprehend another culture. These characterisations are composed of those who are recent migrants – Baber the ultra-conservative lecturer, the Nigerian born Café owner Fatima (Arlene Duncan) and even at times Rayyan’s father Yasir – as well as intolerant non-Muslim townspeople such as radio presenter Fred, Canadian redneck Joe (Boyd Banks) and in later seasons Reverend Thorne (Brandon Firla). These less integrated characterisations are generally juxtaposed against those who have more liberal sensibilities, or ethnorelative core skills and behaviour – namely Rayyan, Imam Ammar and Reverend McGee.

One of the more complex of these characterisations is Rayyan’s mother Sarah, a convert who throughout the series battles with her Western heritage and the requirements of her faith. An early episode of the show revolving around Halloween and Muslim female public bathing effectively pits these characteristics against each other. It exemplifies how the show informs its audience about everyday Muslim sensibilities and how they effectively negotiate life in modern

---

75 Riley, ‘How to Accumulate National Capital’, p. 66.
76 Riley, p. 58.
multicultural Canada. The episode begins at Fatima’s café, when Fatima slips over and hurts her knee in the kitchen. Shock Jock Fred, who is having breakfast, offers to help her, but Fatima wants Rayyan, the doctor, to help her. Fred insists on helping and receives a punch from Fatima for laying his hands on her. Fatima’s knee is twisted and she needs to attend swimming classes to strengthen it.

Rayyan and Fatima head to the women’s swimming class at the local pool and see that the instructor is a gay man. The women cover up and leave the session as they are not dressed appropriately to be in the company of a man, even if the instructor is a ‘friend of Dorothy’, a joke that Fatima does not understand. Fatima is angry and says that she wants to sell the café and go live in a cave, but Rayyan sees an opportunity for some social justice activism and begins a campaign to get a female instructor to lead the swimming classes. Rayyan’s mother Sarah works as the Mayor’s assistant and Rayyan hopes that her mother can pull some strings to get a new instructor, but the Mayor says that the only way that can happen is if Sarah sacrifices the budget for her upcoming business trip to China. Rayyan sets off to find the required 150 signatures to secure the instructor, but Sarah is now conflicted. She initially supported her daughter’s initiative as a mother and a Muslim but doesn’t want to sacrifice her trip to China. She then lets Fred know of the campaign. Initially, Fred is happy because he thinks this will be an opportunity for him to ogle and receive mouth-to-mouth resuscitation from a Baywatch babe lifesaver, but after Sarah drops the hint that it will allow Muslim women to swim comfortably, Fred sees it as Muslims dictating town hiring practices and immediately carries it into his radio segment. The Mayor (Debra McGrath) fears the whole thing is about optics and kowtowing to the Muslims and the initiative is shut down.

Meanwhile, Baber and Fatima argue over their children wanting to take part in Halloween. Baber does not want his daughter Layla (Aliza Vellani) involved in it at all, while Fatima thinks it is okay

---

78 ‘Swimming Up Stream’, Little Mosque on the Prairie, Season 1 Episode 4, CBC, 2007, [TV program]
as it does not involve any drinking or dancing. During a scene when they are arguing in the mosque hall while carving pumpkins, Fatima gets angry and waves a large pointy knife at Baber for claiming that the children could become Satan worshippers by taking part in Halloween. Imam Ammar, who has been looking for some peace and quiet to replenish his spirit, feels obliged to intervene. After stating that it is his mosque and his rules, Imam Ammar says that it is not appropriate for them to be carving pumpkins but the Muslim kids can take part in Halloween, in which they can trick or treat with a chaperone, in this case Baber, and must make costumes inspired by non-human figures from the Quran. Dressed as an olive and a fig the children trick or treat, with Baber, dressed in regular Pakistani clothing, accompanying them. Baber ends up getting all the attention and candy for his cool yet topical Bin Laden costume and the children end up hating the experience while Baber enjoys himself immensely and exclaims that he finally fits in with the godless Western society around him. Ammar has a brief conversation with Reverend McGee about not being left alone long enough to get spiritual, to which the Reverend says everything that men of God do is spiritual. The two share each other’s pain and gain comfort from each other.
Meanwhile, Rayyan realises that it was her mother who sabotaged the petition for the female swimming instructor and confronts her. During the confrontation, Yasir chooses not to take sides, fearing reprisals from both wife and daughter, and ultimately Sarah concedes that she chose herself over the good of the Muslims of Mercy. Rayyan is also conflicted, fearing that her protest and struggle has mainly been about satisfying her ego. She meets with Ammar and besides their growing attraction, Ammar makes her realise her errors and that she needs to pray. The scene ends with Rayyan praying by herself in the mosque, with soft mystical music in the background. It is a simple yet beautifully filmed scene. The next day, Fatima appears at the pool dressed in bulky Muslim swimwear, and gets the approval of the gay instructor, who says she is rocking that outfit, as well as the other female bathers who wish they had the same clothing to hide their cellulite. It also seems that some of the other female bathers support the petition, as they would feel more comfortable with a female instructor. Ultimately, Fatima dances her way into the pool [Figure 3.1]. In a healthy dose of karma, the pool’s pump gets damaged, and a replacement one is ordered, with the money for the pump coming out of the budget for Sarah’s
ill-fated trip to China. The episode ends with Sarah, Rayyan and Yasir sitting at home, eating the Chinese food that Rayyan has ordered to apologise to her mother for being so righteous.

Analysis of this episode makes clear how the characters are grouped. In general, Baber and Fred are the least understanding and tolerant of the cast; their fears and interpretations of events show their ignorance and are used as a basis for comedy or to dispel myths. Fatima, Yasir, and Sarah are afforded more ability to negotiate cultural difference, but it is disconcerting to see Fatima’s portrayal moving from the sassy African woman to the stereotype of a violent one, through hitting Fred and then waving a large knife around. While Fatima, Sarah and Yasir have knowledge of cultural differences, their attitudes of empathy, curiosity and respect are not as refined as the attitudes of others in the cast. This leaves Rayyan, Ammar and Reverend McGee as the integrated characters. Rayyan spends much of the show explaining Islamic practices to the townspeople. The Reverend, a non-Muslim who understands the challenges of having faith in modern multicultural Canada, has spent years dealing with a congregation of his own and provides a great source of sagacity for Ammar; the two men develop a spirit of interfaith universality, continually reinforcing what is common between the two faiths. Using this approach, the show explores many issues with a gentle, loving yet mocking tone.

The show comes up with a huge variety of scenarios through which to dispel myths about Islam, insisting that Canadian Muslims must negotiate the mundane like anybody else, and promoting intercultural sensitivity. Episodes about Baber’s daughter wanting to have a party with her non-Muslim friends from school, the Mercy Muslim curling club, Ammar wanting a wage for being Imam, Yasir wanting to join the men’s only prairie lodge club, Rayyan wanting to move out to her own place, Ammar’s boxing tournament, fasting competitions, and Muslims being invited to

---

Christmas dinner are all opportunities to explore intercultural and interreligious exchange in everyday life. While episodes in the latter seasons do get a little dry and lose some of their humour, the primary message that reverberates throughout the series is that Muslims are like everyone else, and that integrated Islam, though at times different, is comfortably compatible with modern multicultural Canada.

At the same time, this domesticity reinforces the tropes that define ‘acceptable’ Canadian Muslims, posed by Riley. The Muslim characters regularly show their patriotism by celebrating and taking part in the various rituals of their society. Apart from the ranting of Baber, there is no questioning of the wider political or social forces that challenge the Muslims of Mercy; rather, difficulties are generally attributed to the personal choices of individuals, and their lack of integration. Thus, the ‘desirable’ Muslims of Little Mosque on the Prairie embrace Canadian nationalism, though modified with Halal food or no dancing to match the requirements of Islam. Rayyan and Ammar also satisfy the second requirement of being ‘good’ Canadian Muslims, by drawing the ire of the more conservative members of their congregation; from the very beginning of the show, Rayyan and Ammar are treated with suspicion by Baber and the old guard of the mosque. Rayyan’s attempts at being active in the mosque, wanting to speak at Friday congregation prayers, fighting for a female voice on the mosque board and even her relationship with the daughters of the congregation are always points of friction, and Rayyan is always seen as a threat to the established way of things in the Mosque. At the same time, Ammar’s role as Imam is almost never accepted by the less integrated, and he always struggles to be recognised by this group. By season five, a group called the Rahaloons invade the mosque (an unfunny attempt at depicting a group of traditional dress wearing, goat hoarding Muslims) and Ammar chooses to leave the mosque behind and begins preaching and praying in the mountains outside of Mercy, attracting worshippers from all walks of life. So, through their ostracization by less
integrated members of the Muslim community, the main protagonists of Little Mosque on the Prairie move further towards being regarded as ‘good’ Canadian Muslims.

The evolution of the protagonists both confirms and is at odds with the work of Baljit Nagra and her research into the experiences of younger Muslims and their ‘reactive identity formation’. One the one hand we see the protagonist Muslims trying to teach the non-Muslim townsfolk of Mercy about Islam, striving to become good examples in reaction to the sociopolitical world they inhabit. But their ostracisation at the hands of conservative Muslims actually leads them to knowingly subvert and separate from the less integrated Muslims, which is at odds with Nagra’s research on younger Muslim generations, who have demonstrated increased allegiance to their faith, political activism and a refusal to conform to the broader expectations of Canadian society.\textsuperscript{81} This may be a reflection of the challenges of multiculturalism that have been already been described. The show concentrates on celebrating diversity and promoting inclusiveness and tolerance at the expense of connecting with the more complex and ambiguous experiences of Muslims at this time, idealising the way in which Muslims should act as ideal citizens and represent acceptable versions of themselves. This disconnect reflects the complexities of life for Muslims in the multicultural West today,

\textit{Gender in Little Mosque on the Prairie}

Finally, when it comes to challenging and rejecting the patriarchal traditions seen as widespread in Islam, the show does much to challenge the dominance of men and reinforce the significance of women in Muslim society. The niqab itself is considered in an early episode in Season 2, when a woman in a niqab visits Mercy,\textsuperscript{82} drawing the attention of Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Baber and Joe are both drawn to her; Baber because of her perceived piety in comparison to


\textsuperscript{82}‘Ban the Burka’, \textit{Little Mosque on the Prairie}, Season 2 Episode 3, CBC, 2008, [TV program]
other women in the town, and redneck Joe because of her hypnotic eyes. Sarah sees the niqab as repressive and sexist and finds an outdated law that bans it in the town. Imam Ammar labels the lady as a ninja and Rayyan, who opposes the Niqab ban, ends up in jail for protesting the law her mother revived. Yasir spends the episode trying to give Baber advice on approaching the niqab wearer and Fatima respects why the lady wears it but says she would beat any man who tried to make her wear it. Ultimately, the law is overturned and Rayyan is freed, but the episode does not conclude in a coherent manner. The audience hears nothing from the lady in the niqab herself – who she is, or why she is in the town – reinforcing the Orientalist trope that these Muslim women are oppressed. Further, the niqab itself is barely discussed, and why it is worn is not considered, which is strange for a show that delves into varied topics about Islam over its six seasons. It is as if the producers wanted to tackle the issue but could not figure out the most effective way to do so while remaining true to the show’s determination to depict multiculturally integrated Muslims, as well as avoiding offence to both Muslim and Western sensibilities.

The text’s attempt to tackle women and their role in Islam is matched by its exploration of dominant understandings of men in Islam. The characters of Baber, Yasir and Fred are played for laughs, as emasculated and challenged in the intimate personal spheres of their lives. Baber is divorced and has great challenges raising his daughter Layla, who with the help of Rayyan, turns into a confident young Muslim woman. Baber constantly fears losing her to the West and its base tendencies, but generally ends up exasperating his daughter rather than teaching her anything moral or Islamic. He is framed as a jealous and weak man; at one point a plotline sees him get himself onto a no-fly list, and the audience thinks it is because of his extreme views, but it is then revealed that he got himself onto the list on purpose because he is afraid of flying. His obnoxiousness is seen as the reason for the failure of his marriage. In one scene, Layla is attracted to a youth who works in a local vegan shop, and Baber wants to boycott the store and the youth, but he loves the vegan lollies that the store sells. In these ways, his extreme stances
are trivialised, and he is made into a buffoon. Yet, he is shown to be successful in the public sphere as a lecturer at a local college. A similar disconnect between public and private life is evidenced by Fred the radio announcer, who is brilliant at preying on retrograde Canadian sensibilities, with his racism and sexism making him a great shock jock, but he is constructed as being lonely in his private life, with no partner or real friends, and Fatima the café owner his primary source of culinary nourishment.

Yasir’s public and private spheres are explored in more detail; as a wily and semi-successful builder, he is always looking for the easiest way to make a deal and turn a profit. He tries to act similarly in the private realm, aiming to appease his outspoken daughter Rayyan and wife Sarah, striving to stay out of arguments and getting backed into corners. In an early episode Yasir’s mother comes to stay in Mercy from Lebanon, and is adamant about arranging a second wife for him. To Sarah’s shock, Yasir is never able to oppose his mother, fearing he will disappoint her. Ultimately, Yasir is written out of the show, most probably as a result of casting commitments. Yet the manner in which this occurs—with Yasir choosing to abandon Rayyan and Sarah to look after his ailing mother in Lebanon— is a critique of Muslim masculinity and represents Sarah and Yasir’s interracial marriage as dysfunctional.

Imam Ammar’s masculinity is also important to consider. From the very beginning of the show, Ammar is constructed in contrast to the likes of Baber and Yasir. From his choice to forgo a lucrative career in law to pursue a religious life, to his role in striving to reconcile the less integrated in his community with modern Canada, Ammar is constructed as unique. He is urban, nerdy and awkward at times, more bookish than physically commanding, and in this sense he is

---

83 ‘Mother In Law’, Little Mosque on the Prairie, Season 1 Episode 7, CBC, 2007, [TV program]
84 This leaves Sarah quite alone. She tries to run Yasir’s construction business by herself, and also goes through a difficult time with her faith; at one point she stops identifying as a Muslim, as she believes she converted for the sake of Yasir. It is during this period, while questioning her faith, that Sarah accidentally burns down the Mercy Church, which is primarily used for plot advancement (leaving Mercy’s Christians with no place to worship except the newly completed mosque).
reminiscent of the feminised Ibn Fadlan from the 13th *Warrior* (1999). In Season 4 these characteristics are explored openly, with the arrival of Reverend Thorne in place of the outgoing McGee. The new Reverend is a confronting figure, tall and powerful and virile, in contrast to the slight Ammar, and he sets out to challenge the balance that Ammar had with McGee. Thorne spends most of the following seasons trying to challenge the Muslims and their Mosque, setting up competitions to see which religion is superior. From fundraising to playing bridge, Thorne tries to get Ammar into the spirit of rivalry, but Ammar does not succumb to this temptation, except in one instance when he unknowingly signs up for a fundraising boxing match against Thorne. Ammar spends the episode trying to avoid the build-up to the fight and doesn’t want to create the impression that the Muslim and Christian congregations are at odds with each other. Nevertheless, Thorne calls out Ammar as ‘yella’ on Fred’s radio show, labelling him as the Imam’s boy, and challenging any of Muhammad’s minions to face the Reverend in the ring. Baber shies away from the challenge and Ammar is left to face Thorne. Rayyan is the only influence on Ammar’s stance and challenges him to take up the fight. She takes up coaching duty and quickly realises that Ammar is no match for the Reverend, and they make plans to avoid Thorne’s punches for three rounds. Ammar genuinely does not want to fight and does not strike out at Thorne during the fight, yet after being goaded by Muslims and non-Muslims alike his rage takes over and he swiftly knocks out the Reverend. Ultimately, Ammar says his anger got the best of him, and Rayyan says that for once Ammar acted like a human. It is one of the rare moments in which Ammar is afforded the chance of showing off some bravado, instead of thinking of the ramifications of his actions on the image of the Muslim community.

Unlike Zayn from *East West 101*, who exemplifies a virile and competitive masculinity, Ammar’s masculinity is softened in an attempt to dispel stereotypes about the complicity of Muslim men with patriarchy. In a later season, after Ammar and Rayyan settle down together, the issue of

---

Ammar staying at home and Rayyan being the bread winner is explored. Ammar is more useful in the kitchen than his wife, and the audience finds out that Rayyan snores, elements that challenge romanticised Orientalist depictions of Muslim women. Ammar chooses to remain at home while Rayyan continues her medical practice. Nevertheless, with the exception of Ammar, the masculinity of the Muslim males in Little Mosque on the Prairie is consistently represented as problematic; Baber tries to undermine Ammar at every turn, Ali (who briefly appears as Rayyan’s love interest) leaves her at the altar once he realises she may be too much for him, and Yasir is an unreliable partner and father.

Ultimately, it is the character of Rayyan who is the most enduring of the whole series; indeed, producer Zarqa Nawab says that Rayyan became a Muslim sex symbol.86 In the series, her character is the only Muslim who was born in Mercy; all the others have migrated there from interstate or international locations. The audience sees her both wearing her hijab and without it, witnesses her sadness as her first potential marriage fails and watches as her budding romance with Ammar grows and is fulfilled. She challenges patriarchal traditions and misconceptions about her religion constantly and is neither repressed or hyper-sexualised in the tradition of Orientalist stereotypes. She is afforded the ability to contest both patriarchal and Orientalist power structures,87 allowing her to evolve and expand on the characterisation of Djaq witnessed in Chapter One. Overall, although she adheres to her faith, her modern, liberal qualities reassure that Muslims who have overcome the burden of tradition can be desirable, successful members of modern multicultural Canada.

86Full Interview [video], (Strombo, 23 Mar 2012), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ZQSRmM6K_s, (accessed 23 July 2018).
The final two episodes of the show are primarily about consolidating the various characters and
plotlines that have come and gone throughout the show’s multiple seasons. After losing his job

as Imam, Ammar has been able to construct a new mosque, which he names after his wife. With
the destruction of Mercy Anglican by fire, the Muslims and Christians have no other place of
worship, so Rayyan Mosque becomes the new home for both, reversing the scenario featured
at the commencement of the series. In a scene before the official opening of the mosque,\textsuperscript{88} Ammar explains to a group of worshippers why he chose to leave one wall of the mosque black, unrendered and unpainted [Figure 3.2]. He says that the wall is Baber, it is tradition, it should be
honoured and kept without letting it hold us back, to which one of the Muslims says that if the
wall is Baber, then it should be painted over. Ammar spends all of the last episode trying to get
Baber to join the new mosque, and Baber resists.\textsuperscript{89} Ammar says that a prayer barrier will not
exist in this new mosque,\textsuperscript{90} that it has been Ammar who has compromised for five years, and

\textsuperscript{88} ‘The Worst of Times’, \textit{Little Mosque on the Prairie}, Season 6 Episode 10, CBC, 2012, [TV program]
\textsuperscript{89} ‘The Best of Times, Little Mosque on the Prairie, Season 6 Episode 11, CBC, 2012, [TV program]
\textsuperscript{90} One of the first episodes of the series explored gender segregation at the mosque, centered on a
prayer barrier that was used to keep the male and female congregations separate. The episode allowed
that it is now Baber’s turn to do so. Baber loses support of the old congregation, who all abscond to the new mosque, and his daughter Layla defies him to join the new mosque, warning him that if doesn’t change he will become a silly old irrelevant man who will be left alone. He is left with no option but to join the congregation. Ammar gives the position of mosque president to Baber to appease him, and so Baber plays ball and joins the integrated. Fred is impressed by the mosque made by the shabby Muslims, and Mercy looks forward to a future with its Christians sharing a Muslim place of worship, the plot having come full circle. The show ends by giving the integrated Muslims of Mercy the power to lead their community in the future, one in which good Muslims as espoused by Riley are the ones that are most desirable and important for a successful existence in modern multicultural Canada.

Conflicted Multiculturalism in East West 101

In stark contrast to the domesticity and everyday contestations of life, faith and gender in Little Mosque on the Prairie, Australian police drama East West 101 looks at the lives of Muslims in a very different and conflicting manner. The show was broadcast on the SBS network for three seasons. It was created by Kris Wyld and Steve Knapman, who previously made the acclaimed police drama Wildside (1997-99) and Australia’s equivalent of Degrassi High, called Heartbreak High (1994-99), and was directed by Peter Andrikidis, who in the past directed episodes of Acropolis Now. The creative crew behind the show were thus experienced in representing the multicultural experience in Australia. Wyld and Knapman did not want to create a show with two dimensional, politically correct characters; rather, they wanted to develop a unique and complex Muslim character.91

91Krayem, Heroes, Villains, and the Muslim Exception, p. 44.
Though traditionally seen as a site for reinforcing socially conservative agendas by focusing on the ‘essential wisdom’ of those who enforce the law, police dramas have always also represented changing social conditions, often spurred by new political manifestations and sensibilities. Over time, the genre has spawned a multiplicity of shows and representations, with some reinforcing notions of good prevailing over evil while others explore the moral uncertainty of law enforcement, corruption, troubled protagonists and the messiness of bureaucracy in obstructing police work.\textsuperscript{92} Jonathan Nichols-Perthick claims that the hugely diverse and popular genre of police drama is fundamentally interested in questions of ‘crime, community and citizenship’, and that tensions between rights and responsibilities are particularly central.\textsuperscript{93} As such, social and political discourses around these themes are embedded into narratives about policing,\textsuperscript{94} with storylines exploring how people are held accountable for their actions, how definitions of crime can be manipulated to account for moral ambiguity, and how ideas of ‘good citizenship’ are used to force citizens and communities into taking action.\textsuperscript{95} \textit{East West 101} explores these ideas deeply, considering them through the lens of contemporary Australian Muslims’ proximity to crime, their ideas of community, how they act as citizens, and how their citizenship is interpreted by the wider Australian community.

Accordingly, the show centres around Detective Zayn Malik (Don Hany), a Muslim detective in Sydney, and the way he negotiates crime fighting, his family and his identity within the tense multicultural world of Australia. The audience witnesses Zayn’s progression through the police force and into the realm of counter terrorism, and as his job gets more demanding, the toll on his family, his values and his patriotism is explored. To understand the tensions that exist in the show, comprehending the atmosphere of a post- September 11 multicultural Australia is

\footnotesize

\textsuperscript{93}Nichols-Perthick, \textit{TV Cops}, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{94}Nichols-Perthick, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{95}Nichols-Perthick, p. 19.
important, as it shapes the issues and pressures that migrant Muslim communities have experienced in contemporary Australia.

There are a number of events that occurred in Australia in the first few years of the twenty-first century that, combined with the ramifications of the destruction of the World Trade Centre, brought Australia’s Muslims into serious tension with wider Australian society in a manner never witnessed previously. A number of these events are openly alluded to throughout *East West 101*. In the middle of the year 2000, a series of gang rapes occurred in the South Western suburbs of Sydney, the location in which many of the events in the show unfold. The rapes were committed by young Lebanese Muslims and evidence showed that the youths were purposefully targeting white females. This was a scenario in which the ethnicity of the perpetrators was considered as significant as the crimes themselves, and spurred a cultural reimagining of Muslims as a group impossible to integrate into Australian society.

One month after the attack on the World Trade Centre, Australia then experienced an unpleasant political and media event known as the Children Overboard Affair, in which the lead up to the 2001 Federal Election was dominated by public allegations by ministers of the ruling government that asylum seekers trying to enter Australia by boat threw their children overboard in order to get rescued and secure passage into Australia. The shocking claims that asylum seekers would be willing to sacrifice their own children lead to a media frenzy and allowed the ruling government to win popularity by reinforcing that its strong stance on immigration was exactly what Australia needed. After the election victory it was revealed that there were no such attempts at throwing children overboard – rather, the asylum seekers entered the water as their boat sank – but the Prime Minister of the time defended his statements, saying that he had been

---

given incorrect intelligence.\textsuperscript{97} This systematic dehumanising of asylum seekers for political gain formed the basis of increasing hysteria about immigration into Australia and contributed to an image of inhuman Muslim refugees whose values are so different that they will never learn to share the ideals of wider Australian culture.

Subsequently, in October 2002, a series of bombs were detonated in the districts of Kuta and Denpasar on the island of Bali in Indonesia. Eighty-eight Australians were killed in the attack, which was committed by the Islamist Jema Islamiya organisation. The Bali Bombings brought the threat of terror to Australia’s backyard,\textsuperscript{98} and the massive scope of the terror attack legitimised beliefs that terror could strike the nation at any time. It was a watershed moment in the securitisation of Australian society. A greater movement towards surveillance and profiling became a primary consideration of government and law enforcement, much like the approach adopted in the USA after the World Trade Centre attack. Muslim communities in Australia to this day assert that most of these surveillance efforts have been directed at them, driven by the trope that all Muslims are potential terrorist threats.\textsuperscript{99} Certainly, the Australian government began framing its relationships with Muslims through the lens of security concerns at this time. The detention and torture of innocent people such as Mamdouh Habib through surveillance justify the extent of Muslim fears about the increased culture of surveillance and security that has appeared in society, and Australia’s continued role in the War on Terror in the Middle East has only exacerbated these tensions.\textsuperscript{100} Since the invasion of Iraq in 2003 with the intention to find weapons of mass destruction that never materialised, followed by Australian operations in

Afghanistan and Syria, the nation’s military involvement in the Middle East is a contentious topic amongst Muslims, and many see Australia’s presence in the region as being about power rather than stability, with this perception an active barrier in allowing people from the Middle East to feel at ease about the Australia that they live in.

Many of the tensions that began to develop after September 11 culminated and became public with the Cronulla Riots of 2005. After a fight broke out between Lebanese youths and volunteer life savers at a Sydney beach one weekend, the Australian media spent the following week sensationalising the event, creating hysteria that Middle Easterners were challenging the values of Australia and taking over the nation. The culmination of this hysteria came in the form of close to five thousand people, many drunk and draped in Australian flags, attacking people of Middle Eastern appearance and clashing with police. The event brought to the fore the worst of the underlying racism and violence that permeates Australian society, and reflected the shifts in how Muslims are perceived, considered and treated by wider Australian society, and the role that the media has in reinforcing dangerous stereotypes and inciting violence.

Against the backdrop of these events, East West 101 constructs the city of Sydney as a symbol of modern multicultural Australia. Even the opening credits, which begin with the sound of the Muslim call to prayer followed by police sirens and Middle Eastern music with an intense electronic beat, signal the show’s intention to depict a different aspect of the renowned harbour city. In the first season, episodes centre on a murder that occurs in a different ethnic ghetto of the city, and the major crime detectives’ attempts to solve the crimes. Arabs, Aboriginals, Pacific Islanders, Serbians and Bosnians, Vietnamese, Jewish and Indian communities are some of those explored. Having to conform to the tropes of the police detective genre, episodes generally centre on the investigation of crime, probing the dark side of the communities, but also

---

considering and exploring the challenges faced by everyday migrant and marginalised communities, with a lot of time dedicated to Muslims. As the series progresses and Zayn is promoted, investigations into organised crime activity occur, and in seasons two and three, the role that government policy and intelligence plays in the propagation of extremism and violence is also explored. Unlike *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, the Muslims and migrants in *East West 101* are seen to be negotiating a much tenser relationship with the wider population.¹⁰²

The very first episode is a clear example of the multicultural Australia the show aims to construct.¹⁰³ The episode centres on the murder of a policeman during the attempted arrest of two Lebanese youths in South Western Sydney, the unofficial home of the Middle Eastern community in the city. The immediate acceptance of the youths’ guilt by the police and the swift crackdown on any Arab-looking people after the murder is depicted, with Zayn trying to act as the bridge between the police force he believes is trying to keep people safe, and members of the Muslim community who feel they are being unfairly targeted. The episode also hints at real life events that have occurred in the city, such as the arrest of a sheik for driving an unregistered vehicle during the crackdown, which actually occurred when a well-known religious leader was arrested after arguing with police over driving such a vehicle in 2003.¹⁰⁴ The show then depicts the sheik working together with Zayn in his capacity as a community leader, to locate the two youths who are allegedly behind the murder, suggesting that dialogue with the community is more effective than cracking down.

The episode also depicts the human costs of Draconian law enforcement, with a scene in which a young child panics and runs into the street while his father is being arrested on suspicion of being involved with the murder and is run over by a car. This family is then found to be on an

---

¹⁰³ ‘The Enemy Within’, *East West 101*, Season 1 Episode 1, SBS, 2007, [TV program]
expired visa and is subsequently forced to leave the country. Further, when Zayn talks to an old Lebanese woman who witnessed the crime, he almost has to blackmail the lady into talking, saying that if the murder is not solved the whole Muslim community will suffer – a scene which clearly indicates the real and potential costs of seeing Muslims primarily as a security threat. Because of his knowledge of both Australian society and Muslim culture, it is Zayn’s job to negotiate between these cultures in the face of marginalisation,105 and make the community a more harmonious place. In doing so, the show places responsibility for countering the racism that Muslims face squarely on Zayn and other Muslims, instead of suggesting that non-Muslim people and institutions should play a role in the process as well.106

The experience of Muslim youths is also considered. As the detectives manage to track down the two Lebanese boys, it becomes clear that they were not involved in the murder – rather, one of the policemen shot the other during a scuffle. Both the boys’ words to Zayn are very similar. Both complain of the manner in which the police have assumed their guilt before anything has been investigated, with Talal (Firass Dirani) saying ‘I didn’t fly a plane into the World Trade Centre, but I may have, because I am an Arab, and Arabs are terrorists’. Both tell Zayn that no matter what he does as a good policeman and citizen, he will never be accepted as an Australian, and that the same will happen to him. Zayn counters this by saying that they must fight to earn respect, very much in line with his character, and foreshadowing the challenges that he will go through in the series himself. The exchange with Talal is a particularly emotional one, as Talal has armed himself and intends to face off with the police, but Zayn is able to connect with him and calm him down, convincing him to hand over the gun. However, the boy is then shot by a police sniper, and Zayn ultimately believes that he failed the family and the community. This short and powerful sequence of events is overlayed with images of Arab youths

standing in front of burning cars and being photographed by the media, another reference made to an actual event in which it is alleged that a reporter from a Sydney newspaper convinced a group of Arab youths to adopt a gangster pose for a picture which was then used in an article about Muslim youth and crime in Western Sydney. Overall, the episode is an exploration of the manner in which different demographics of multicultural Australia – those on the periphery and those in the centre – clash, and how Zayn hopes to negotiate between these groups. In another episode, bomb making equipment is found in Zayn’s garage, and though the possibility of him being a terrorist is quickly quashed, the choice to include this as an ‘easy’ way to set up a Muslim is a way of critiquing the way modern Muslims are perceived in Western society.

Other episodes look at different ethnic groups through similar lenses, with a few episodes looking at Zayn’s Samoan colleague Sonny Koa’s challenges with his own community, and how a lack of education leaves Islander youth with the choice to either play Rugby League or pursue a life of crime, with many ending up as hired muscle for criminal gangs. Another episode looks at how regional events can influence Australian society, with a Muslim Bosnian woman charged with the murder of an ex-Serbian soldier who raped her during the Balkan conflict of the 90s, an episode which explores how people who migrate to Australia are often living with past traumas. Intercultural relationships are also explored: on two occasions an immigrant parent of a child in an interethnic relationship is murdered, and the nature of the child’s interethnic relationship is considered as a motivation for the murder due to the parents being displeased with their child’s relationship choices. As mentioned earlier, interracial and intercultural relationships have a tendency to be depicted as unsuccessful in Western cinema and television.

---

109 ‘Islander Sacrifice’, East West 101, Season 1 Episode 3, SBS, 2007, [TV program]
110 ‘Haunted by the Past’, East West 101, Season 1 Episode 5, SBS, 2007, [TV program]
and Australia is no exception in this regard, with Asian/Australian and Aboriginal/Anglo relationships traditionally featured as unsuccessful ventures.\textsuperscript{111}

In the first episode of season two, a young Muslim boy is abducted by white supremacists while waiting to be picked up after school, and while Zayn strives to find him, his mother’s predicament as an Australian Muslim convert married to a migrant is explored.\textsuperscript{112} Her husband was supposed to pick up the child but was unnecessarily arrested by law enforcement, which led to the abduction; another attempt by the series to critique Australia’s heavy-handed security policies. Her own parents do not come to support her because of her choice to change faiths, and while her husband is devastated by their child’s abduction, he also shows his lack of integration by telling off the lesbian detective who has come to speak to them, who empathised and bonded well with the mother. The episode ends with a very tense scene, as Zayn and his partner Sonny try to track down the abducted child. They make their way to a rural looking property on the shoreline; the kidnappers’ house is in a swampy locale reminiscent of the deep south of America, and the kidnappers’ clothing and sweat furthers the visual connection with familiar representations of racist rednecks. Clearly, a link to those behind the Cronulla riots is alluded to here. The father of the racists who kidnapped the boy asks them what they have done while they are being arrested, and Zayn’s partner Sonny (Aaron Fa’aoso) asks the same question of the father in a rhetorical manner, alluding to the idea that the father has a role in the nurturing of the hate that has manifested through the actions of the children, and that racism part of Australian society. The episode thus shows that intolerance can be part of any culture or religion.

The second and third seasons of the show are primarily focused on the effects that local and foreign policy have on multicultural Australia. Season two focuses on Australian intelligence services’ role in implementing the government’s staunch policy towards refugees and people

\textsuperscript{111}King, ‘Romance and Reconciliation’, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{112}‘The Lost Boy’, \textit{East West 101}, Season 2 Episode 2, SBS, 2009, [TV program]
smuggling, and how the actions of those in power can have considerable social ramifications. The season begins with an explosion in a photocopier store in Western Sydney. Agent Angleton (Phillip Sheedy), a government spy who had infiltrated an anti–Muslim white supremacist group, is the target of the attack. His death is treated as a jihadi attack, and Zayn is enlisted to infiltrate a group of Muslim criminals who are believed to be part of the crime. As the season unfolds, all those involved in the attack are linked back to one event: the sinking of a refugee vessel called the Sea Rose. Contextually, the sinking of the Sea Rose is a clear link to the children overboard event, and the deaths and attacks in the season are connected to government intelligence cleaning up the loose ends involved in the event. Angleton was killed for going rogue and trying to help other refugees get into Australia. The men behind the explosion that killed him were on the Sea Rose and traumatised by the event and were told by government agents that killing Angleton would be justice for those who died on the boat.

In one extremely powerful scene, a Muslim man who was on the boat recalls the sinking to Zayn with the audience witnessing how a government patrol boat simply watched the Sea Rose sink and the refugees drown. Images of people in the water, trying to stay afloat while government and military types watch from a patrol boat are shown, and it is the most dramatic scene of the show. Most of the refugees drown. Agent Angleton was on the patrol boat and his guilt motivated him to aid other refugees. Ultimately, the truth behind the event is brought to light and taken to the courts, and the government’s policy of disrupting refugee boats in this manner comes to light. Through this plot line, the series clearly criticises Australian government policy that sanctions inhumane treatment of asylum seekers and suggests how this policy has complex ramifications in shaping multicultural Australian society.

In the third season, the War on Terror and its consequences in Australia are explored. The season begins with an extremely professional and violent robbery and the detectives are charged with

---

113 The Lost Boy, East West 101, Season 2 Episode 1, SBS, 2007, [TV program]
finding the perpetrators. As the season progresses, Zayn’s new partner Travis, an ex-soldier, seems to know some of the suspects involved in the robbery, who all seem to be ex-military. Those behind the robbery were Australian private military soldiers who had previously stolen drugs in Afghanistan. They are shown executing all the workers in a drug plant and shockingly, in another scene, an Afghani woman is raped by an Australian soldier and killed during the attack. Her Afghan family is then slaughtered and confronting images of innocents being killed are shown, with Travis murdering a young girl. The soldiers are suffering from the trauma and guilt of what happened overseas, but their experience manifests in crime and destruction being brought to Australia. Overall, the show continually and critically evaluates the social ramifications of Australian interactions with the Middle East and Afghanistan.

While the aforementioned examples are critical of government policy, the show does not shy away from looking at Muslims involved in criminality and extremism as well. In Season 2 a major plotline is Zayn trying to thwart a planned terrorist attack on ANZAC day, with a group of young radicalised Muslim boys preparing the attack with the help of a radical Imam and a violent member of the Sea Rose people smuggling operation. The group plan to attack the ANZAC bridge in Sydney on the national holiday, and the episodes look at the role of religious leaders in inciting hate and how young disillusioned youth can end up being involved in radicalism. Confronting images of a group of young men with trendy haircuts completing their prayers and then loading weapons leads into a scene where the group steals a truck full of chemicals.

While Zayn is tracking down those involved, he visits a mosque and has an exchange with the Imam of a mosque that the boys used to frequent. Zayn says that the Imam does nothing but teach his congregation to hate the society they live in, that Muslims are being persecuted in Australia and that he teaches an incorrect understanding of jihad. The Imam chooses to look down at Zayn, stating that he knows nothing about these issues. This exploration of ideology also continues as Zayn tracks down the family of one of the boys involved in the planned attack,
with the boy’s sister providing insight into the minds of the vulnerable youth that are attracted to radicalism. She states that her brother Lateef (Osamah Sami) is an ‘idiot with no balance in his life’, rapidly swinging from a life of drugs, girls and obsessing over his hair to one of issuing fatwas and telling her how to act as a Muslim. After Lateef is arrested Zayn interviews him. Zayn states that Lateef has no reason to harbour hatred to the world he lives in, stating that he was born in Australia and had every opportunity to succeed; he is free to practice his religion and that his parents migrated and successfully became members of the nation. Lateef says that his parents are slaves to a mortgage and that prayer and religious rites are not enough – that the fight needs to be taken to them.

Zayn cannot comprehend Lateef’s belief that the reward for killing innocent people is paradise, and once again comments on the disturbed understanding that radicals have of the concept of jihad, reiterating similar comments that he had for the Imam: that jihad is a struggle one has with one’s own soul and self. Lateef cannot counter these arguments, yet the scene gives him a chance to clearly state how the role of Western military activity in Muslim countries, beginning with the ANZAC campaign and then followed by recent campaigns, is the reason for his actions. Unlike his parents whose primary concern was to make a living after immigrating, Lateef has had the opportunity to reflect on the world around him, and the lack of balance in his life combined with extremist ideology influences him to justify horrendous actions.

Overall, *East West 101* considers how the challenges for Muslims have been distinct from the challenges experienced by others in the post September 11 world. Further, as Mehal Krayem argues, the Muslim men that are featured in the series are constructed as problematic in some way, placing the onus of dismantling these negative representations on Zayn, while also further isolating Zayn as a unique example of an integrated Muslim.¹¹⁴

---

Gender in East West 101

Outside of the show’s exploration of multiculturalism in Australia in the twenty-first century, the show considers in some depth the personal life of Zayn and his attempts to negotiate life as a husband, father and son while attempting to deal with the demands of being a policeman. Much like Little Mosque on the Prairie, the show allows audiences into a Muslim home environment and effectively constructs intimate, positive characterisations that openly challenge how the private lives of Muslims have usually been constructed on screen. Through the exploration of Zayn’s respectful relationship with his friends, colleagues and family over three seasons, regular viewers are given a unique perspective into the private life of a Muslim and his interactions with his wife and children are explored in detail.  

Zayn’s wife Amina (Tasneem Roc) plays a significant role and provides insight into the challenges Muslim women face in a modern multicultural nation, while effectively challenging the established stereotypes that Muslim women have traditionally faced in the media. Amina’s patience in juggling the demands of looking after two children and Zayn’s elderly parents, one of whom is disabled, while her husband is always at work is explored. Amina’s ability to challenge Zayn’s decisions relating to his work and her responses to the racism that she faces while outside her home are depicted. On several occasions the husband and wife debate Zayn’s belief in multicultural Australia, primarily his belief that Muslims may have it harder than others but that with hard work they can still play a positive role in wider society and make things better for themselves. At times Amina even challenges Zayn’s effectiveness as a policeman, questioning the value of his work fighting crime while his own children are bullied and his wife faces racism. At other times, when Zayn questions his actions and role as a Muslim in the public space, such as when he kills a radicalised Muslim boy leading the attack on the ANZAC bridge, his wife

---

115 Krayem, Heroes, Villains, and the Muslim Exception, p. 52.
justifies his actions by saying that taking a life may save the lives of many—echoing the dialogue between Samir and Agent Clayton at the conclusion of *Traitor*. Overall, Amina is given a strong voice and the ability to debate with her husband, and he shows respect for her opinions.

The show also does not neglect the intimacy that Zayn and Amina share [Figure 3.3], with several scenes depicting them making love and one in which Amina shops for lingerie — evidence of open affection between the two. Also, in season two, a subplot explores Zayn’s attraction to a witness he is working with to solve the Sea Rose case. Zayn is attracted to her but never acts on his feelings, yet when Amina hears of their relationship she is quick to confront and exclude Zayn from her life and family. Zayn is mature enough to admit that he is working with the witness and that they may share feelings for each other. Ultimately Zayn’s relationship with his wife is stronger than this challenge, but their relationship is also greatly affected by the death of their son in season three after the car that he is travelling in is hit by a vehicle fleeing a crime scene. This event has a huge impact on Zayn and his family and shakes his allegiance to his job, faith and life. Much of the third season deals with Zayn trying to reaffirm his beliefs and question
whether the sacrifices he makes amount to anything. Amina deals with the loss differently, making peace with herself, and wants to move forward. Zayn, on the other hand cannot resolve his feelings as easily, especially when he comes face to face with the man who crashed into the car which killed his son. However, he does not satisfy his desire for revenge and also makes peace with the death of his child, with his wife being an important source of strength for him.

Such representations of domestic intimacy are rarely afforded to Muslim characters on Western screens, where stereotyped images of women hidden behind a veil and patriarchal, oversexed, erratic or violent Muslim men have been the norm. The depiction of healthy relationships, different perspectives and responses to familial and social issues and everyday intimacy within a Muslim household is a strong point of the series. The construction of the challenges that everyday Muslims face in multicultural Australia and the realistic way that Zayn and Amina try to deal with them is important to witness, since these are scenes that have not been seen in any of the texts that been previously considered here.\(^\text{116}\)

Considering that the show is a police drama, it is also important to analyse the way Zayn’s masculinity compares to established tropes of masculinity within this genre traditionally dominated by white men.\(^\text{117}\) This can be explored through attention to Zayn’s interactions with the detective he works with in season one, named Ray Crowley (William McInness). In season one, Zayn and Crowley are framed as binary opposites; Crowley represents the old-school hard-boiled policeman, estranged from his family, with no affiliation to a religion, married to the badge and willing to do anything to get results, even if this means breaking the law.\(^\text{118}\) Zayn on the other hand is a detective and a religious family man who attends the mosque, does not drink and has a compassionate gaze. Crowley and Zayn butt heads often, but Zayn’s adherence to


\(^{118}\)Nicholls, ‘East West 101 as Edgy Text’, p. 576.
procedure and his choice to shy away from hard-handed tactics, instead using dialogue and cultural affinity to solve crimes, is shown to be more effective than Crowley’s approach. Yet, by the end of the first season Crowley and Zayn overcome their mutual distrust and enmity to work effectively together, and it transpires that Crowley’s racism and hatred of Arabs comes from the fact that his drug addicted son overdosed on a product sold by Arab dealers. Zayn empathises with Crowley’s choice to hunt the dealers down. At the same time, Crowley begins to comprehend Zayn’s desire to hunt down the man who shot his dad. Crowley may not initially have the requisite attitudes required for intercultural sensitivity, but through his intercultural dialogue with Zayn he can see Zayn’s value and place in the police force, and their unlikely union leads to trust between the men [Figure 3.4].¹¹⁹

![Figure 3.4](image)

Figure 3.4. In season 1 Zayn and Ray Crowley butt heads often; they represent different eras and cultures of Australia. Ultimately, they figure out a way to work together, and Crowley plays a role in teaching Zayn authentic Australian masculinity.

However, ultimately, Crowley’s indiscretions are too serious, and after a shootout he is left clinging to Zayn’s hand off a ledge and tells Zayn to ‘let go you silly bloody Arab’. Brett Nicholls suggests that this line is proof of Zayn’s initiation into Australian male culture in which proof of bonding is often evidenced through an ability to curse each other.¹²⁰ Crowley chooses to die, but

¹¹⁹Krayem, Heroes, Villains, and the Muslim Exception, p. 49.
leaves Zayn with a letter of recommendation for promotion. Thus Zayn is validated through his endorsement by this icon of Australian masculinity, while Crowley’s death on his own terms as a policeman in the line of service reinforces his place as a white hero, his final defiant act.121 This harkens back to the end of The Thirteenth Warrior (1998) covered in Chapter Two; just as Antonio Banderas’ character has been masculinised by the Viking warriors he fought together with, Zayn is taught the unwritten rules of white heroism by Crowley. While the archaic mentality of Crowley is shown to be inappropriate in multicultural Australia, his identity as a white male still enables him to confer cultural capital upon a migrant such as Zayn, despite Crowley’s many indiscretions.

It is also valuable to compare Zayn to modern heroes in other law enforcement shows that have appeared in the twenty first century. In the post-September 11 world the popularity of policing shows has been superseded by immensely popular counter-terrorism field agent thrillers that would have influenced how East West 101 was made. Traditionally police and crime shows have shown male constables sacrificing their personal life for wider society; success in the public sphere thus required the hero to sacrifice the private realm, and these representations supply some of the most troubled and tormented images of the male on contemporary television.122 In the case of 24 (2001-2010), which was released one month after the attack on the World Trade Centre, protagonist Jack Bauer’s private affairs are also a source of difficulty for him as the women in his life are passive victims who can be kidnapped or killed, compromising him, or turncoats who betray him. Bauer would rather face death than deal with the emotional aftermath of traumatic family events, and he thus adheres to the hegemonic model of masculinity where autonomous self-sufficiency trumps domestic relationality.123 When it comes to dedication to the cause, no matter what Bauer faces, no matter whether betrayal occurs from

121Nicholls, ‘East West 101 as Edgy Text’ p. 578.
122Feasley, Masculinity and Popular Television, p. 84.
123Feasley, p. 89.
within his organisation or government, he does not question his commitment to his unit and cause. This attitude can also be seen in the British counter terrorism thriller Spooks (2002 – 2011).  

As has been explored, Zayn does face challenges in his personal life; his injured father, his attraction to a woman who is part of an investigation, the death of his son, and the demands of the job expose his family to difficulties, but Zayn chooses to negotiate these with his family much more directly than Bauer. Zayn is also troubled and tormented, and though his personal issues do play a role in his bitterness, his primary burden is being a Muslim in the public sphere, striving to make things better for the Muslim community and witnessing the conflict between his ancestral world and the West in its various manifestations. All of this weighs on him immensely, and the bitterness that Zayn expresses can also be seen in other recent Muslim characterisations that have appeared in popular culture, in films such as The Kite Runner (2007) and The Reluctant Fundamentalist (2012) (covered in Chapter Four), where similar characters must also negotiate their place as Muslims in a Western world. In this regard, Zayn’s characterisation departs from established patterns in this genre. Krayem considers Zayn’s unique masculinity as a sign of emasculation, describing Zayn as a ‘SNAG’ policeman. Certainly, his choice not to kill the man who murdered his father in season one, the manner in which he respects women across the whole show and his generally non-threatening form contrasts with portrayals of white detectives. Similar to Ammar from Little Mosque on the Prairie, it seems that Zayn’s masculinity needs to be calibrated to counter established stereotypes about Muslim men as

---

124 Feasley, Masculinity and Popular Television, p. 92.  
either emasculated or pathologically violent; and in this context his masculinity is unique, never normative.\textsuperscript{128}

\textit{Negotiating Multiculturalism}

Both shows discussed in this chapter seek to construct images of Muslims in modern multicultural nations. They strive to dispel myths, alleviate white fears and humanise Muslims through the depiction of their lives in each nation.\textsuperscript{129} Both productions were highly praised; \textit{East West 101} for its casting, realistic action scenes and high production values,\textsuperscript{130} and \textit{Little Mosque on the Prairie} for its innovation and genuine popularity – it attracted 2 million viewers per episode in early seasons, a huge number for a public broadcaster.\textsuperscript{131} Indeed, producer Zarqa Nawaz believes that the show proved that Canadian programs could be commercially successful, and that \textit{Little Mosque on the Prairie} changed the future of the network that produced it.\textsuperscript{132}

Both shows also depict integrated Muslims but go about this task in different ways. \textit{Little Mosque on the Prairie} ostensibly looks forward to a future full of promise and unity between Muslims and non-Muslims but is arguably nostalgic; given its inception after the war on terror, it can be read as idealising a simpler world of intimate and micro relations that support tolerance, acceptance and unity. Yet, for all its comforting warmth and popularity, the show in fact suggests that it is largely Muslims who must change. For example, it is only conservative Baber who needs to abandon his lack of integration and become more acculturated. Across the show’s six seasons, there is very little intercultural development or growth in the non-Muslim characterisations such as local shock-jock Fred Tupper, who remains a comedic caricature and

\textsuperscript{128}Krayem, \textit{Heroes, Villains, and the Muslim Exception}, p. 113.
\textsuperscript{129}Nicholls, ‘\textit{East West 101} as Edgy Text’, p. 580.
\textsuperscript{131}Full Interview [video], (Strombo,23 Mar 2012), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ZQSRmM6K_s, (accessed 23 July 2018).
does not progress towards ethnorelativism. At the series’ conclusion, the Westerners in the show still regard the Muslims as friendly yet quaint and strange; the only real change is in the location of the interactions as the church goers now have to use the Muslim place of worship for their own services. As a result, instead of depicting a shift in broader Canadian society, the series ultimately depicts a shift only in the Muslim community, where the less integrated such as Baber become more acculturated or disappear (such as Yasir). Looking at things from a casting perspective, it can also be seen that the division between the integrated and less integrated occurs across physical lines as well. The second generation Muslims are constructed as more modern and desirable, through their appearance, accent and clothing. Light skinned Rayyan is beautiful with and without her hijab, Ammar is brown skinned, yet easily slips between religious clothing and plain clothes in and outside of the Mosque, whereas brown skinned Baber is constantly dressed in ethnic clothes, though eloquent has a thick accent, and his friends from the mosque are similarly dressed and cast as brown and identified with their religious garb to complement their less integrated world views. The same is evoked with Fatima, the accented, overweight and traditionally-dressed African woman. She is at times lampooned, not as often as Babur, and is constructed as less desirable than the more integrated Muslims. None of the Muslims look unattractive – they are all well presented – but it is clear that casting and costume choices construct a certain view of how integrated characters look, and as in East West 101, this is only afforded to a small group of characters.

For a show so invested in depicting dialogue and harmony, it is problematic that the only acceptable typology of a Muslim is a liberal, integrated one, and that so little is expected of non-Muslims in terms of the acculturation process. The onus of successful integration into a multicultural society falls disproportionately on the shoulders of the town’s Muslims, while the other folks can simply continue to exist, racist or otherwise. Moreover, the show does not
ultimately reflect the diverse practises of Muslims across society. Thus, although the intercultural exchanges depicted in *Little Mosque on the Prairie* are often accessible, informative, humanising and generous-hearted, they unfold with the caveat that the Muslim community reforms or sheds its backward and less integrated members. In many ways this evokes scholarship that critiques multiculturalism. The Muslims of Mercy bearing the workload of integrating reflects the claim that ‘complex social problems and political economic disjunctures can be blamed on “migrants”, and the solution, in a neoliberal era, is located in an increased individual responsibility to become compatible and integrate’. Instead of exploring and challenging the racism, securitisation and other political manifestations that have occurred in the post-September 11 world, *Little Mosque on the Prairie* places the onus of change on the Muslim individual. This not only reflects the shows proximity to domesticity, and its consequent valuing of personal over public concerns; it is also a reflection of implicit interpretations of multiculturalism that place primary responsibility for integration with Muslims.

*East West 101* goes through a similar process of making it clear that Muslims strive against terrorism and that they are interested in being members of multicultural Australia, yet it does not obsess whether every aspect of the Muslim community gels with wider society. Nicholls regards this as the show articulating what ‘particular qualities of Muslim-ness can be translated into the universally accepted imaginary of multiculturalism in Australia’, while still depicting sharp-edged ethnic and cultural differences. While this approach allows for greater articulation of difference than *Little Mosque on the Prairie* manages, it is problematic in other ways. Unlike *Little Mosque on the Prairie* where a community of integrated Muslims exists, Zayn’s experience of integration is a much lonelier affair. Even the choice of Don Hany as the actor who plays Zayn – an actor who plays non-Muslim characters regularly and isn’t easily identifiable as a Muslim

---

133 Hijri, ‘Through the Looking Glass’, p. 45.
– reinforces the concept that he is distinct from other Muslims who are backward and less integrated. Similarly, his wife Amira is also very light skinned and also plays non-Muslim characters regularly. Both are attractive, and are dressed well throughout the series and project very desirable images. Neither have accents, sounding very Australian, and this contrasts to the other less regular Muslim characters that they interact with. This separation of Zayn and his spouse from the rest of his community can be regarded as problematic because he is not in fact a lone Muslim stuck in Sherwood Forest as some of the Muslims in Chapter One were; he is part of his community, yet consistently depicted as distinct and alone nonetheless. This quality is most accentuated at the end of East West 101 when Zayn realises that even through all his efforts to bring justice to criminals, to work hard and elevate the standing of his community, he must turn a blind eye to the crimes of his partner to keep the reputation of the department intact, and to remain respected. He therefore chooses to quit, rejecting the notion that everything can be sacrificed for the good of the nation, unlike the character of Jack Bauer in 24. Ultimately, Zayn decides that his efforts may elevate the standing of his community, but the system is corrupt and will remain so unless dominant structures are changed. He walks away just as Avner did in Munich (2005), realising that what is required of him compromises his beliefs, ethics and worldview. All of Zayn’s sacrifices in taking on the burden of the Muslim community and rising to power in the police force do little for both the wider community and Muslims themselves; his efforts have led to no lasting change.\textsuperscript{137} Indeed, it seems the greatest role that Zayn has played is to alleviate white anxiety, and his taking on the burden of his community has only reinforced perceptions that many of the problems in multicultural Australia stem from migrants, in this case Muslims,\textsuperscript{138} and that minorities need to work to overcome their otherness, freeing Anglo-Australia from taking a role in this process. Indeed, as Joshua Roose and Shahram Akbarzadeh claim, SBS viewers are predominantly educated and wealthy Australians who

\textsuperscript{137}Krayem, Heroes, Villains, and the Muslim Exception, pp. 117-123.  
\textsuperscript{138}Krayem, p. 141.
consume ethnic cultures while maintaining hegemony, and shows such as *East West 101* enable a superficial engagement with other cultures from a safe distance. Viewed in this way, *East West 101* offers many viewers a chance to explore the emotionally charged clash of minority cultures and racism, but without truly feeling a burden of responsibility as a member of wider Australian society. Once again, as in the case of *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, the work of acculturation falls disproportionately on the minority group.

Ultimately, multiculturalism is usefully seen as an ongoing process, a perpetually incomplete project in which cultures intermingle and produce new forms of identity. In theory, it is a framework that allows a nation’s culture to be open and permanently unfinished, always evolving as new cultures are introduced. To the casual observer, contemporary multicultural Australia is problematic, characterised by political conflict and open social tension, whereas Canadian multiculturalism, especially in the current Trudeau era, is seemingly more tolerant and attractive. Yet both nations constrain the limits of ‘acceptable Muslim-ness’ and unfairly burden Muslim migrant communities (rather than non-Muslim communities) with responsibility for the work of acculturation. The final chapter of this thesis turns to big budget Hollywood films and popular prime time television featuring Muslim men in leading roles, to undertake a deeper exploration of how these limits and burdens intersect with the performance of masculinity.

---

Chapter Four: Modern Marginalised Muslim Males in Leading Roles

This final chapter will consider three relatable or ‘acceptable’ Muslim protagonists from the current decade, a period that legendary Muslim basketballer and cultural commentator Kareem Abdul Jabbar regards as a ‘Muslim American Renaissance’ of popular culture.¹ Kareem is referring to the emergence of Netflix comedies about Muslims such as Master of None (2015-), the appearance of Muslim women on shows such as Quantico (2015-18), and the production of Emmy Award winning series The Night Of (2016) and popular films such as The Big Sick (2017), all of which depict nuanced, complex and endearing Muslim characters. He also observes how Muslim superheroes have made their way into comic books, for example, through the appearance of Ms. Marvel as a Muslim female superhero. Kareem responds to allegations by some politicians that these Muslim representations are meant to indoctrinate, by arguing that nobody becomes Jewish or Amish by watching representations of those faiths; rather, these representations of Muslims illuminate their right to ‘breathe free’ like all other Americans.² His statements are optimistic,³ yet his comments, aimed at shutting down the arguments of divisive politicians, also shed light on the continued and uniquely vilified place that Muslims have in the global imaginary.

The films and television shows considered in this chapter look at the lives of Muslims in a world that is moving on from September 11. Some of their impetus derives from the election of Barack

²Abdul Jabbar, ‘The Big Sick and Hollywood’s Muslim-American Renaissance’.
³Scholars such as Kerem Bayraktaroglu have also noted the increase in the proliferation and quality of positive Muslim characterisations across the screenscape over the past few years. Yet most are wary of celebrating this moment, including the pioneering scholar Jack Shaheen who, while recognising that there has been a change, nevertheless saw these as individual ‘exceptional’ characterisations rather than signifying a movement towards acceptance of Muslim culture as a whole. See K. Bayraktaroglu, ‘The Muslim Male Character Typology in American Cinema Post-9/11’, Digest of Middle East Studies, vol. 23, no. 2, 2014, pp. 345-359 and Jack Shaheen’s comment in H. Allam, ‘Muslim Stereotyping in Pop Culture is Worse than Ever’, McClatchy, 26 April 2016, https://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/national/article73969887.html, (accessed 29 Oct 2018).
Obama, which symbolised a movement away from the conservatism of the Republican period and the emergence of more positive Muslim representations in the media, with the appearance of ‘a diverse commonality of ideas that form the basis in which the character of the “other” and “self” share a more profound understanding of and respect for one another’. The Reluctant Fundamentalist (2012) appeared in this time frame and is primarily focused on moving past the September 11 period, encouraging dialogue between Muslims and America as a form of reconciliation. The Night Of and The Big Sick coincided with the arrival of Donald Trump into contemporary politics, whose campaign and election forced another reimagining of the relationship between America and many Muslim nations. Dedicating a large portion of his election campaign to polarising views of immigrants and coloured people, which was followed by the implementation of flight bans for people from various nations with Muslim populations, Trump once again exacerbated tensions between East and West, with the support of a large portion of the American population. Though none of these texts directly refer to these contexts, their exploration of the manner in which Muslims are defined, interpreted and addressed constitutes an oblique assessment of how their lives are impacted by the sociopolitical environment.

The identified texts in this chapter are disparate stories in genre and narrative, but all three focus on young Muslim males’ attempts to fit into an American way of life, while also being shaped by their parents’ culture, reflecting research into the experiences of second and third generation Muslim youth living in the West in a post-September 11 world. The Reluctant

*Fundamentalist* is a film adaptation of an international best-selling novel, a story of a successful young Muslim’s life in America before and after September 11. The novel challenges Western perceptions of the relationship between the West and the people from Muslim nations, including what extremism is, and the film adaptation also tries to do this while simultaneously looking for ways to bridge the gap between the two worlds. HBO’s Emmy Award winning *The Night Of* is an eight-part television series what traces what happens to a young Muslim male who is convicted of murdering a white girl he spends a night with. And, *The Big Sick* a feel-good romantic comedy based on the real-life romance of a struggling Pakistani comedian and his girlfriend, who falls seriously ill during their relationship. The three texts are diverse in genre – a political thriller, crime mystery and romantic comedy – yet they all address the underlying issues of being a young, first-generation Muslim male, navigating the expectations of Islamic culture, the pathways to acceptance in the West, and the challenges of performing masculinity, including sharing love and intimacy across cultural borders.

**Understanding Contemporary Muslim Masculinities**

Muslim males in the West have borne the brunt of the stigma associated with Muslims in the post 9/11 period. They may be less visually identifiable than Muslim females, especially those women who dress according to Islamic tradition, and they may also share the same skin colour and socioeconomic standing as other immigrants and minorities from different cultural backgrounds, yet Muslim males’ assumed association with extremism and violence has singled them out. Further, and as has been indicated in Chapter Three, many Westerners perceive Muslim women to be captives of a patriarchal culture, yearning to be liberated from a backward and oppressed society. This can evoke sympathy for their supposed plight, which is not extended to Muslim men, who are rather perceived as difficult to ‘integrate’ and on the whole susceptible
to radicalisation.\(^8\) A clear example of this is the lack of universal condemnation of the torture and humiliation that Muslim males faced at Abu Ghraib in the early days of the War on Terror, suggesting that the dehumanisation of these captives was tolerated by and acceptable to a broad cross-section of society.\(^9\)

Often, narratives of Muslim male identity formation are thus framed in terms of a binary choice between allegiance to the government of a Western nation of residence, or to a Muslim religious affiliation and cultural background, with the latter seen as risking radicalisation.\(^10\) In particular, the challenges faced by young Muslim men are seen not as a normal exploration of identity including intergenerational conflict between parents and children,\(^11\) but in terms of a stark choice to be either more Western or more politically religious than their parents, with the latter depicted as fraught with the danger of radicalisation.\(^12\) Such binaries are reflected across the screenscape\(^13\) through constant use of images and narratives that ‘essentialise diverse Muslim cultures and communities’,\(^14\) with Muslim males being particularly susceptible to binarised representations.

The previous chapters in this thesis have touched upon the manner in which Muslim males have been emasculated in their on-screen portrayals. Some commentators link this emasculation to September 11 itself, believing that the destruction of the towers was a symbolic attack on the

\(^8\)O. Lynch, ‘British Muslim Youth: Radicalisation, Terrorism and the Construction of the “Other”’, *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2013, p. 242.
\(^12\)Lynch, p. 250.
\(^13\)P. Cherry, ‘I’d Rather my Brother was a Bomber than a Homo: British Muslim Masculinities and Homonalionalism in Sally El Hosaini’s *My Brother the Devil*,’ *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 2017, p. 7.
masculine myth of America,\textsuperscript{15} leading to a ‘justified hyper masculinist and militarist response’\textsuperscript{16} by the nation. The horrible images of people plunging to their deaths as the towers burned around them were quickly censored from the media;\textsuperscript{17} after the attacks, the weakness generated by September 11 was transmogrified into an attitude of resolve, order and power.\textsuperscript{18}

This masculinisation was so profound that it has been noted that women disappeared off newspaper pages and TV screens soon after the towers fell, appearing only as victims, leaving men to organise a response to the attacks.\textsuperscript{19} This re-emergence of masculinity, invoking narratives of white men taking charge and leading America to safety and protecting the American way of life from other (Muslim) men\textsuperscript{20} lead to these other men being portrayed as irrational, insecure or immoral enemies, and this conflation of history, politics and masculinity into a triumphant masculinist narrative since September 11 has had an immense influence on the lives and representations of Muslim men.

Yet, although Muslim men are broadly recognised as occupying the ‘vanguard of patriarchal and homophobic repression representing “pre-modern” values in contrast to the enlightened West’,\textsuperscript{21} very little has been written on Muslim men as gendered subjects. In general, as with other minorities and socioeconomic groups, Muslim men do not fit the mould of western hegemonic masculinity as defined by Raewyn Connell. For Connell, hegemonic masculinity is a relation of power which emphasizes dominance over women and other subordinated masculinities, which is primarily demarcated through heterosexuality and its link to notions of


\textsuperscript{20}Bjerre, p. 243.

corporate and state power, supported by idealised and fantasised images of men, which in western screen culture are overwhelmingly white, heterosexual protagonists.\textsuperscript{22} This normative form of masculinity, which is also constructed as desirable, typically expects men to display ‘emotional restraint, violence and aggression, toughness, risk taking, power and dominance, achievement and success and heterosexuality’.\textsuperscript{23} These notions of manhood are also defined negatively, against what isn’t masculine, through oppositional references to racial and sexual minorities and ‘above all, women’.\textsuperscript{24} In this sense, any masculinity that diverges from hegemonic masculinity is deprived of legitimacy.\textsuperscript{25} Not being able to meet the expectations of hegemonic masculinity because of their distance from normative whiteness, Muslim men in the west are thus obliged to constantly negotiate their masculinity against these norms.\textsuperscript{26}

Bethany Coston and Michael Kimmel consider such marginalised masculinities and posit that men who face oppression in certain aspects of their lives, or are considered ‘not-men’ (such as homosexuals and the disabled, and in this case Muslims) will engage in certain behaviours to deal with and maximise their level of privilege in the face of these challenges. These groups tend either to overconform to the dominant view of masculinity to show they have access to it, or to develop masculinities of resistance.\textsuperscript{27} Coston and Kimmel interviewed a range of marginalised men and tracked the manner in which they engaged in such behaviours to acquire and maximise their masculinity and resist their marginalisation, noting that men with marginalised masculinities can engage in:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24}Labidi, ‘Terrorism, Violence and the Collision of Masculinities’, p. 416.
\item \textsuperscript{26}Roose, \textit{Political Islam and Masculinity}, p. 1.
\end{itemize}
1. **Minstrelisation** – Overconforming to the stereotypes that others have is one way that a man who has little power can deal with marginalisation. By exaggerating the differences between the stigmatised and the dominant, such men can laugh at what those in power think about them. An example is the manner in which gay men engage in ‘camping it up’.

2. **Normification** – A process of minimising the differences between the stigmatised group and the dominant is a process of normification (similar to ‘passing’). By exaggerating similarities and downplaying differences, power is gained for the marginalised. An example is gay men arguing for same-sex marriage.

3. **Militant Chauvinism** – Maximising difference from the dominant group is another way for marginalised men to reclaim power. It involves claiming superiority over the dominant group, aiming to turn the tables. Examples include the ideas of groups such as the Nation of Islam and their negative perception of white people and the west.²⁸

Aspects of all these behaviours are evident amongst the Muslim male characters in the texts considered in this chapter; behaviours that are further shaped by their particular status as Muslim men. Joshua Roose identifies various forms of masculinity that Muslim men adopt depending on their social standing. He firstly characterises the ‘protest masculinities’ often adopted by Muslim men of low social standing who experience racism and hostility, who react through displays of hypermasculinity and exaggerated toughness to deal with such marginalisation.²⁹ For other Muslim men, Roose notes that through upward mobility, those with greater social capital through education will often seek to emulate hegemonic masculinity. Arguably, this strategy allows for some integration into Western frameworks of Muslim codes

---

of ‘honour, recognition and respect’\textsuperscript{30}, through which many Muslim men find masculine pride.\textsuperscript{31} Yet because Muslim men are also very often at the forefront of ‘contesting the cultural, political and intellectual dimensions of Islam through their actions, very often with international implications’,\textsuperscript{32} there is a fine line to tread between performing hegemonic masculinity with reference to Islamic values, and being perceived as a ‘militant chauvinist’ along the lines described by Coston and Kimmel above.

As was explored in Chapter Two, the obligation of Muslim men to negotiate such complexities has led to the emergence of Muslim characters who are neither the antagonists that audiences had been taught to recognise in the past nor relatable enough to be protagonists who are beyond suspicion.\textsuperscript{33} Over time, the commitment of some screen professionals to the creation of more complex Muslim characterisations has particularly amplified depictions of upwardly mobile and ‘acceptable’ Muslim men, characterised by Kerem Bayraktaroglu as ‘educated, well dressed, well-spoken and good family [men] with high moral values’.\textsuperscript{34} In an attempt to separate Muslims from their much maligned faith, screen culture has thus increasingly explored the Muslim male in terms of his racial and economic positioning rather than in terms of his faith, and that shift has also accompanied the increasing incidence of Muslim males as protagonists.\textsuperscript{35} All of the texts considered in this chapter feature male Muslim protagonists (all of Pakistani origin), who are characterised with closer reference to their racial and economic positioning than the content and intensity of their faith.

\textsuperscript{32}Roose, \textit{Political Islam and Masculinity}, pp. 1-3.
\textsuperscript{33}Bayraktaroglu, ‘The Muslim Male Character’, p. 351.
\textsuperscript{34}Bayraktaroglu, p. 351.
\textsuperscript{35}Bayraktaroglu, p. 351.
The Dynamics of Interracial Romance

The three texts also share another commonality; they all feature the male Muslim lead engaging in a relationship with a white American woman. Interracial romance has been explored in the films and shows that have been considered in this thesis thus far, but has generally been experienced by secondary characters or, as in the case of Djaq discussed in Chapter One, has not been given sufficient screen time for the relationship to be explored in any depth. Interracial relationships can be considered as a barometer of the acceptability of faiths or cultures on the screen, nowhere more so than in the case of Muslims, whose culture and faith has traditionally branded them as ‘difficult to civilise’. Interracial relationships have traditionally been sites fraught with tension, especially on American screens. Between 1927 – 1956 the Motion Picture and Distributors of America banned ‘miscegnation’ (depictions of sex relationships between the white and black races) in Hollywood.\(^1\) When interracial affection was depicted, the relationships were infused with ‘patterns of deviancy in line with tenets of sexual racism’\(^2\) and most of the relationships ended prematurely within the narratives;\(^3\) the consistent failure of these relationships is seen by Thomas Wartenberg as ‘restoring order to social hierarchy’.\(^4\) In particular, there were taboos against the depiction of white women’s relationships with men of colour on screen; as Nadia Ramoutar argues, this is because white women, as potential bearers of children, are of crucial importance to the continuation of white dominance.\(^5\)

---


\(^3\)One of the major relationships in *Little Mosque on the Prairie* which was analysed in Chapter Three was an interracial one that also ended prematurely with the Muslim male choosing to stay with his overbearing mother in Lebanon rather than committing to his Canadian Muslim wife.


Statistically, interracial romances now make up a tiny proportion of relationships depicted on the screen, and of these relationships only a tiny proportion feature white women with coloured men. A study of 540 films with intercultural romances over a period between 1967 to 2005 found that only 11 of these films featured white women and coloured men – 2% of the total.\textsuperscript{41} And when films do feature this pairing, the white women are constructed as having deep-seated problems, socially, morally or personally.\textsuperscript{42} They are fragile, flawed, or less important than other characters that they share the screen with. They may seem to appear pretty, successful, and sexually liberated, yet they are dependent on other characters and cannot take care of themselves. Often, they are also victims of abuse, addicted to drugs, sexually promiscuous, socially inept and naive, narcissistic, or obsessed by a desire to be taken care of by a male.\textsuperscript{43} These presumptions seem to frame the belief that it is only a certain type of white woman who would be interested in coloured men. At the same time, these women are objectified, because to have sexual relations with a white woman is depicted as a thrill for a migrant male, the ultimate fantasy and proof of success and acceptance into masculine hegemony and white mainstream society.\textsuperscript{44} It is even regarded as a form of revenge by the colonised; by sleeping with the women of the coloniser, the colonised man dominates the private sphere of his oppressor’s existence.\textsuperscript{45} Examples of films with interracial relationships that frame white women in such a manner include: \textit{Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner} (1967), \textit{Scarface} (1980), \textit{Rising Sun} (1993), \textit{Pulp Fiction} (1994), \textit{Far From Heaven} (2002) and \textit{O} (2002).

According to Carole Bell, the majority of contemporary texts that include interracial relationships also suffer from ideological ambivalence, which is expressed through the framing

\textsuperscript{42}Ramoutar, ‘The Colour of Love on the Big Screen’, p. 54.
\textsuperscript{43}Ramoutar, pp. 53-54.
\textsuperscript{44}G. Bergner, ‘Who is that Masked Woman? Or the Role of Gender in Fanon’s \textit{Black Skin, White Masks}, PMLA, vol. 110, no. 1, 1995, p. 81.
of the relationships as both complicated and contradictory,\textsuperscript{46} with no coherent perspective on whether reconciliation and the promotion of multicultural values of tolerance is the way forward, or whether the pessimism of a separatist world view is preferable. Overall, Bell argues that texts featuring interracial romance primarily concentrate on exploring the experiences and emotions of those in the romance, so individual fulfilment and personal autonomy are valued over the exploration of wider problems in society such as racism and injustice.\textsuperscript{47} Such texts, which could enable consideration of broad social inequalities, are therefore sometimes limited in their capacity to do this and that is certainly true of \textit{The Big Sick}, as elaborated below.

\textbf{From Upward Mobility to Marginalisation: A Muslim Man in the Post 9/11 World}

\textit{The Reluctant Fundamentalist} is Mira Nair’s film adaptation of Pakistani Mohsin Hamid’s novel of the same name. The book was lauded by critics as a serious attempt at challenging the racism that Muslims encounter, and as a criticism of the current global capitalist economic system. Written as a dramatic monologue between a Pakistani narrator and an American who acts as his audience, the novel gives the power of storytelling to the traditional ‘other’ and attempts to challenge established preconceptions that Western readers will have.\textsuperscript{48} Overall, by reversing the gaze of the West back upon itself, through the eyes of the other, Hamid forces the reader to look at America’s reaction to September 11 from the migrant perspective.\textsuperscript{49} Mira Nair’s film adaptation of the novel is an attempt at turning its monologue into a dialogue. It attempts to build on the novel’s exploration of the ‘mutual suspicion that two men and two countries,
America and Pakistan, have for each other, to bring forth the ‘latent content of an audience’s Orientalist assumptions’, and to include consideration of ‘contemporary Pakistan but also a dialogue with America’. So, the film attempts to bridge the two worlds, constructing ‘a conversation between two cultures that goes beyond the prejudices that contaminate us’. While the novel and film both aim to deal with prejudice, the novel does so by subverting and challenging views of the west, while the film is more inclined to search for commonalities and universal ideals.

The film intertwines two narratives. The first visualises a dialogue between Changez, a professor of finance at Lahore university (played by Riz Ahmed), and Bobby Lincoln, a journalist turned American CIA agent (Liev Schrieber). Their meeting occurs in the context of the recent abduction of an American professor who works at the same university as Changez. Bobby believes that Changez was involved in the abduction, that he has allegiance to a local group of extremists, and that is he using his charisma and influence to preach hate and destruction of the West. The second narrative is a series of flashbacks of Changez as he tells his story: how he grew up in a cultured family, the son of a poet whose wealth was slowly waning in the high society of Lahore, and how he journeyed to America to reverse his family’s fortunes by studying at Princeton and working for financial consultancy firm Underwood Samson. He also tells of his relationship with an American woman, Erica, of how his world was transformed after the destruction of the World Trade Centre in 2001, and of the subsequent manner in which he began to reimagine his relationship with and understanding of the West. These recollections are the main focus of the

---


Bennett and Mendes, p. 117.

While the limited number of Muslim actors in Hollywood is slowly expanding, Riz Ahmed, who is probably the most famous and proven Muslim actor in the world at the moment, plays two of the protagonists in the texts considered here: Changez in The Reluctant Fundamentalist and Naz in The Night Of.
interaction between Bobby and Changez, with the film drifting back and forth between their dialogue in the present and scenes from Changez’s past.

In this way, the early part of the film traces Changez’s early, upwardly mobile experience of America, commencing with his time at Princeton followed by a quick rise into the upper echelons of Underwood Samson. Throughout this segment, Changez is constructed as embodying traits associated with hegemonic masculinity. His conviction that he can reverse the fortunes of his family’s wealth in ‘the land of opportunity’, his positive impression on his boss Jim (Kiefer Sutherland), his intelligent and ruthless decisions to restructure businesses and improve profit margins for his clients, and his commencement of a relationship with a white woman all confirm him as an example of successful hegemonic masculinity. As such, this part of the narrative encourages Bobby and the audience to appreciate and develop sympathy for Changez, because one way in which people on the periphery of society such as Muslims can gain acceptance and cultural capital is to embrace and profit from Western culture. Changez’s success at Princeton and quick rise to associate at Underwood Samson parallels plots that audiences have witnessed in many films that celebrate the success of an American man on account of his intelligence, quick wits and ability to succeed in the public sphere. Changez’s commercial success thus allows him to transcend the ‘faith based signifiers’ that his brown skin would normally signify, enabling him to acquire key markers of hegemonic masculinity. Even in this early part of the film, however, it is made clear that there are limits to Changez’s capacity to ‘normify’ or ‘pass’ in this way. This aspect of his experience is tracked primarily through his relationship with his boss, Jim. Jim says that Changez has a gift for the job because he is an outsider, and the audience later finds out that Jim is gay, and thus also a kind of outsider. This parallel between gay and Muslim identifies the limits of both men’s access to the cultural and social capital of hegemonic masculinity, even if it also positions these limits as a potential strength.
The tenuousness of Changez’s claim to hegemonic masculinity is also made evident through his relationship with Erica. The film juxtaposes Changez and Erica as opposites socially and culturally; Changez’s father is a poet but he loves corporate America, while she hates the corporate world and is more interested in poetry. Their attraction is apparent, yet Erica is afraid to take the relationship further, because of her high school sweetheart’s death only 23 weeks ago; she is in mourning. Changez, ever the cultural appropriator, jokes that women in Pakistan are only allowed to mourn for 23 weeks, and tells her to take off the veil of mourning; she finds herself attracted to him. When they meet again Erica states that she kept hearing his voice, his stories of Lahore, to which Changez replies by saying his voice sounds tinny and fake, as if he is someone who comes from nowhere. In the next scene, after making out, the pair want to have sex, but Erica stops, saying that she is not yet over Chris, and that it feels as though she is cheating. Changez then asks her to imagine that he ‘is’ Chris, and they consummate their relationship. All of these scenes with Erica suggest the extent to which Changez’s identity is insecure; at a deep level, it seems that despite his upward mobility, he knows he does not fit into American society, and is willing to slip into the role of Chris to satisfy both his and Erica’s needs. According to the framework of Coston and Kimmel, he arguably ‘minstrelises’ his exoticness, using culture to flirt with Erica, seducing her with his cultural knowledge of his father’s poetry and the beauty of Urdu, even teaching her how to say ‘love’ in Urdu. He also engages in a strange form of ‘normification’ or ‘passing’ in the case of adopting Chris’ role during sex – a desperate means to claim a white woman, the ultimate prize for a brown man.
The destruction of the World Trade Centre in the second act of the film radically changes Changez’s status, amplifying his insecurities, undermining his relatability to Westerners and exposing the ways in which his performance of hegemonic masculinity had depended upon him ‘passing’ as white. This shift is ushered in through a scene in which, right after he is offered partnership in Underwood Samson, Changez cries from happiness in his hotel room. This moment of weakness is then immediately followed by the scene of him watching the destruction of the World Trade Centre in horror [Figure 4.1], and his return to America then continues these themes of emasculation and trauma.

In particular, his reception at the airport upon their return quickly pulls away the façade of economic and social success and masculinity that Changez has accumulated. He is stopped by security, Jim’s attempts at vouching for him falling on deaf ears, and is ushered into a room with FBI agents. He tries to talk tough to the agents, but their questioning of his travels and sour demeanour quickly force him to play ball, and he is then asked to strip for an examination. In a symbolic scene, the camera looks up from face level as Changez is made to bend forward for a rectal examination, with the security guard standing upright behind, positioned as if he is entering Changez anally. The juggernaut of American masculinist nationalism roused by the destruction of the Twin Towers has appeared, and quickly puts Changez in his place.
Following this scene, Changez is bombarded by instances of racism in this new America and the audience witnesses him losing his hard-won status. He is wrongly arrested on the street, feels the eyes of suspicion on him as a Muslim and listens to colleagues expressing vitriol and hatred towards Muslims. These tensions find their way into his work life as well. In a scene where he is tasked to evaluate a business in Atlanta, he faces fierce resistance from the workers. Changez loses his cool as well, shouting and threatening them, thus risking the reputation for level-headedness that has, until now, set him apart and allowed him real social capital. The scene that follows shows Changez trudging alone to his car outside the business at night, only to see the vehicle vandalised. He is then approached by a man in a car who drives aggressively towards him and says ‘Fuck you Osama’ while spitting in front of him. Changez relates this event to Bobby, saying that a ‘tiny slice of violence had wormed its way into my life, and I did not know how to remove it’. Certainly, these scenes articulate the kinds of prejudice Muslims faced in America in the days and months after September 11.

The destruction of the World Trade Centre also places stress on Changez’s relationship with Erica. At first, she is supportive as Changez faces the racism and trauma of an America healing after the attack; she is even seen learning Urdu. But Changez then asks Erica about kids, at which she breaks down; she reveals that she feels guilty because she killed Chris while drink-driving and wishes that she could take a break from being herself. This is something Changez understands, but it is now clear that – true to the trope of the intercultural romance – she is a troubled and conflicted woman. She then goes missing for a while, working on an art project, and is not available when Changez really needs her. The emasculating scenes of him calling her, begging her to answer or call back, contrast markedly with the charismatic flirting that he engaged in earlier in the film. He is nevertheless invited to the opening of her exhibition, which is a memorable moment in the film. The whole exhibition is based on their own intimate moments, with their words such as ‘pretend I’m him’ plastered across the artworks. As Ingrid
Piller observes, intercultural couples will use ‘similarity and deconstructed difference’ during their relationships to minimise the difference between their own cultures and backgrounds,55 but unbeknownst to him, Erica has taken this dimension of cultural exchange in their relationship and placed it front and centre, at a moment when Changez is extraordinarily vulnerable.

To Changez, this is the ultimate betrayal, and leads to some of the most interesting dialogue in the film. He confronts her, claiming she used him as ‘edgy’ subject matter, a pet artistic project; he tells her that she fucked the twentieth terrorist (19 terrorists destroyed the Twin Towers), and that dating a Pakistani after September 11 is ‘so topical’. She is clearly wounded and says she did it for them – she thinks it’s an expression of love – but he does not accept her explanation. Instead, he retaliates, saying that she is so reckless that she could drive drunk with the man she loved and kill him. He leaves in pain, crying, but further events soon consolidate the more aggressive stance that he adopted with Erica. He visits his parents in Pakistan for his sister’s wedding, and manages to sour his relations with his father, who questions the ethics of his employer preying on the weak for profit, perhaps stirring up Changez’s own growing misgivings. Seeing his family and revisiting the beauty of his old home affects him, and he returns to America with a beard, which raises eyebrows at work. An African American colleague and friend56 comments that it is freaking people out, and Changez responds that it reminds him of where he comes from, to which his colleague replies that that is the problem. As Roose notes, in contexts where Muslim men struggle with racial vilification, they may adopt a form of protest masculinity, ‘a form of gender practice and performativity that has become a collective

56The inclusion of this African American friend called Wainwright is evidence of the heaping together of those with dark skin as culturally compatible. Wainwright is Changez’s colleague at Underwood Sampson and acts as something like a cultural confidant and friend, the guy who he can talk to – they ‘get’ each other. For all of his success at work, he can be truly open only with a man of colour.
masculinity of the Muslim population, both in and outside of the Muslim world’.\textsuperscript{57} Certainly, Changez’s initial reactions to the hatred that he sees around him – choosing to grow a beard almost to spite those around him, increasing aggressiveness – seem to be a manifestation of protest masculinity, and this is reinforced through further behaviours that he exhibits during one final trip for work, to Istanbul. He is tasked with evaluating a Turkish printing company, and Nazmi, the Turkish owner of the firm, tells Changez that his business is a keeper of culture in his part of the world. The firm has actually translated some of Changez’s father’s poetry into Turkish, and Changez begins to feel conflicted about the job that he must do. This visit to Istanbul becomes a turning point for him; he visits the Blue Mosque, seems to absorb the air of the city, sees fathers visiting mosques with their sons, and decides to pray himself. (Until this point in the film, Changez is not a practicing or even religious person; in one scene he was asked by the owner of Underwood Samson whether he drinks alcohol, to which he responded in the affirmative, with no hesitation; in another scene, he celebrated a Muslim religious holiday with a beer.) Changez also gets invited to eat dinner with Nazmi, where the charismatic printing company owner tells him a story about Ottoman Janissaries, Christian boys who were captured by Ottoman soldiers to become soldiers themselves, and then one day sent to kill their former families on behalf of the Ottoman empire. Nazmi adds that young men do not make good mercenaries – they need a cause to fight – and that once Changez figures out where he stands, colour will return to his world. This allegory, which strikes a parallel with Changez’s current servitude to imperial masters of global hegemony, is his tipping point.\textsuperscript{58} Changez refuses to complete the valuation that would bankrupt the printing company, protesting that capitalism is in this case trying to destroy the culture he has reembraced in Istanbul. He calmly parts ways


\textsuperscript{58}At one point, Changez’s boss Jim calls Underwood and Sampson, the ‘Navy Seals’ of finance. In other scenes, the film tries to parallel notions of fundamentalism, suggesting that global capitalism is as destructive a force as any other fundamentalism; this is explored with greater emphasis in the novel.
with Jim, who screams at him, and returns to America to try to salvage his relationship with Erica.

At this point, the transformation of Changez’s masculinity is complete. Having experienced the incapacity of an upwardly mobile masculine identity to protect him from vilification and emasculation, Changez has demonstrated a variety of behaviours consonant with the ‘protest masculinity’ identified by Roose, followed by an adoption of aspects of the ‘militant chauvinistic’ masculinity posited by Coston and Kimmel. A militant chauvinism is particularly evident in his dialogue with Bobby, through his assertion that Muslim culture is in many ways superior to Western culture, and his dominance during their interaction. And yet, Changez’s careful characterisation also ensures that aspects of the ‘acceptable’ hegemonic masculinity that he embodied early in the film continue to shape his persona. Arguably, by making his journey of reclaiming masculine strength and pride through embrace of his culture relatable, the film thus expands possibilities for the performance of ‘acceptable’ masculinity.

The film’s orchestration of the intercultural dialogue between Changez and Bobby provides some support for this interpretation, since Changez’s contribution to the dialogue continually characterises him as rational, intelligent, and assertive. Although the narrative initially constructs Changez through Bobby’s eyes, as ethnocentric and hateful, Bobby also comes into the exchange with an ethnocentric worldview. His assumptions about Changez are representative of a western worldview, and for much of their interaction, both Bobby and the audience do not know where Changez’s allegiances lie: was he actually involved in the kidnapping of the American professor? Did he make a deal with a group of mujahideen fighters in the area and agree to work with them? Is he actually part of a ‘Pakistani Militant Academia’ that Bobby is researching and wants to write an article about? Although Changez begins his engagement with Bobby by observing that looks can be deceiving and that he is a ‘lover of America’, his description of witnessing the destruction of the World Trade Center on television
initially seems to confirm Bobby’s suspicions. Changez explains that he didn’t feel anger or sorrow, but rather found himself marvelling at the audacity of the action; while not celebrating the death of three thousand innocents, he could not stop himself from feeling pleasure at the sight of ‘arrogance being brought low’. Bobby cannot believe what he hears, and for him this provides evidence that Changez is an enemy of the west. He immediately accuses Changez of teaching violence for social change and clandestinely working with the local mujahedeen group. But, Changez counters this by agreeing that he is against American intervention in Pakistan, but so are many American generals. He also insists that he does not teach hate, pointing out that revolution classes are also taught at American universities, and asking if all those professors are also teaching hate. Further, he observes that people who are hunted will hide, and he is aware that Pakistani intelligence, coerced by U.S. power, are also following him.

This scene is a powerful dialogue between the two characters, and invites the perspective that someone who doesn’t agree with every Western policy can still be rational and motivated by reasonable intentions. It also suggests the extent to which the destruction of the Twin Towers compromised and undermined the capacity for interculturally sensitive dialogue between East and West. Indeed, just as September 11 led to the unravelling of Changez’s status in America, it was also a turning point for Bobby. Changez extracts from Bobby a confession that he works for the CIA, and Bobby admits that he once wrote passionately for the freedom of Afghans and was against foreign intervention in Afghanistan; but after September 11 was approached by the CIA and chose to work for them.59 Thus, both Changez and Bobby had more positive understandings of the West and East respectively before September 11, when the destruction of the Twin Towers prompted both characters to truncate their intercultural sensitivity.

59Interestingly, one reviewer was scathingly critical of the film’s choice to construct Bobby as a reporter and CIA agent, stating that many oppressive governments in certain parts of the world use similar rhetoric to persecute and pressure foreign journalists. See E. Alterman, ’The Reluctant Fundamentalist (and the Journalist Spy), The Nation, 24 April 2013, https://www.thenation.com/article/reluctant-fundamentalist-and-journalist-spy/, (accessed 28 October 2018).
Changez then adds an important point, saying that he did not have the chance ‘to choose a side’; his was automatically chosen for him. In this way, he refers to the binary logic that presses Muslims – and perhaps especially Muslim men, in the face of so much distrust and suspicion – into making impossible choices. Changez’s resistance to such binary logic is highlighted further at the end of the film, when Bobby realises that Changez had nothing to do with the abducted professor’s death. Bobby now needs to find a way out, prompting the CIA unit waiting for him to begin their move to extract him, and in their final moments of dialogue, Changez reaffirms who he is: that he is Pakistani, Muslim and is against America’s actions in Pakistan, but that he is also more than this; that these labels are a problem, and that he hopes that their dialogue has been an attempt at overcoming this. Their interaction finishes with a tense stand-off when the CIA unit enter the university grounds to collect Bobby, who produces a gun in an attempt to protect himself. As he walks through the mass of students now surrounding him he is pushed to the ground and accidentally shoots one of Changez’s students; a tragic ending to the film that is described as a ‘tacit denouncement of the injustices resulting from racial and religious profiling through a terrible cultural misunderstanding’.  

Director Nair hoped that the extended interaction between the two men would make ‘each of us see ourselves in what we had regarded as “the other”.’ However, it is interesting to note her choice to modify the setting of Changez’s embrace of his culture from the novel’s location of Valpariso, Chile, to Istanbul. The choice of Istanbul, a historical and current capital of the Muslim world, is perhaps appropriate for the film’s emphasis on cross-cultural dialogue, especially as Turkey was, for a time, the foremost example of a modern Muslim nation that could exist in harmony with the West (something that is changing since the making of this film).  

---

61 Kaplan, ‘Crossing Dangerous Borders: Mira Nair on The Reluctant Fundamentalist’.  
62 For analysis of Turkey’s movement towards authoritarianism see S.A. Cook, ‘How Erdogan Made Turkey Authoritarian Again’, The Atlantic, 21 Jul 2016,
Nevertheless, most commentators who compare the book and film have expressed concern about the modification of this sequence, which moves away from the critical analysis of class and economic divisions within society that are explored in the novel, to focus more on cultural differences. Most of these commentators, who argue that the critique of modern capitalism and its apparatus is one of the novel’s strong points, contend that this has been sacrificed in the name of ‘a civilizational discourse that identifies both tolerance and the tolerable with the West, making non-liberal societies and practices as candidates for an intolerable barbarism that is itself signalled by the putative intolerance ruling these societies’. Indeed, when comparing the novel to the film, Eric Smith and Hannah Ross state that all of the novel’s efforts to subvert Western perceptions of September 11 are devalued through the calls for tolerance within the film.

While it is true that the change of location dilutes the complexity of the novel and arguably reinstates the East/West binary that the novel complicates, by exposing the audience to the beauty of the Muslim culture through the intellectual and spiritual experiences that Changez has in Istanbul, his reclamation of masculine pride in his faith and culture is arguably made more relatable, softening the perception that he is merely a ‘militant chauvinist’ and paving the way for greater intercultural understanding. From a casting perspective, Riz Ahmed constructs an attractive leading man as Changez; dark skinned, impeccably dressed, and sporting a slight accent, he is deeply eloquent and charismatic across the film, and his family in Pakistan is also constructed as wealthy and cultured. He slips easily between Pakistani and American culture, in

---

65. Ross and Smith, p. 320.
stark contrast to the characterisations of extremists in Pakistan. He evokes the image of a slightly exoticised, charismatic and cultured Muslim, a modern variant of Saladin.

Ultimately, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* strives to capture the trauma of the post September 11 world through the lens of a Muslim male, and also represents this relationship between the East and the West on a micro level through a romance. It does much to challenge and provide new perspectives on how we collectively remember the September 11 attack, and its ambitious dialogue and complex characterisation of Changez significantly push the boundaries of what makes an ‘acceptable’ Muslim. The film’s exploration of how Changez tries to overcome his maligned status is important in understanding how Muslims have understood relations between the West and Muslim nations after September 11, and it offers important insight into how frank and real intercultural dialogue and interaction can be beneficial. The next text considered here, *The Night Of*, explores the post- September 11 experience of another Muslim male, with fewer socioeconomic advantages than those enjoyed by Changez.

**A Muslim Man in the Ghetto**

HBO’s 8 part television mini-series *The Night Of* is a procedural crime drama that looks at how a young Muslim male fares in the modern American justice system. In the tradition of HBO’s successful and genre defining shows such as prison drama *Oz* (1999) and police crime drama *The Wire* (2002) and more recently the morally ambiguous and philosophically challenging *True Detective* (2014), *The Night Of* borrows from real life events such as the story of Adnan Syed, a young Pakistani American whose murder of his girlfriend was explored on the popular podcast ‘Serial’.66 Themes of prejudice and post- September 11 Islamophobia, class and socioeconomic

---

struggles, the juggernaut of the judicial process, and disconnects between generations govern the show, which is ambiguous about right and wrong, and the difference between protagonist and antagonist. Critically acclaimed and an Emmy Award Winner, the show places Nasir ‘Naz’ Khan, the American born son of Pakistani migrants (once again played by Riz Ahmed), at the mercy of a multitude of forces of crime and punishment after one night of pleasure with a white woman that ends in murder. Many commentators have lauded the manner in which Ahmed was able to portray and transform Naz from a docile, socially awkward geek to a drug-taking and hardened thug by the end of the mini-series.67

Unlike many of the shows that centre on a Muslim character that have been explored across this thesis, the opening credits of The Night Of do not begin with eastern sounding music or token images of Muslim culture. Rather, the audience is offered a standard sequence of noir style images involving close ups of evidence and dark doors over a tense violin-dominant instrumental track. The choice not to feature any overt references to the Muslims here is indicative of how the show treats its Muslim characterisations, not making their faith or culture central to the show’s exploration of their world. Rather, race and socioeconomic standing are most important. The first episode begins with college student Naz and a friend getting invited to a party by some popular black students.68 Naz is so excited to be invited; to him it seems to be a chance for a skinny brown guy to step into the circle of the cool kids. The cultural enclave of Naz’s suburb in Queens is then introduced, a low socioeconomic borough full of hijab wearing women, men in turbans and sounds that range from Indian bhangra music to the call to prayer. As an attempt to show the disconnect between the lives of migrants in the suburbs of New York, it is the only instance where the filmmakers delve into some Orientalist tropes – an impulse that apparently continues to be tempting for makers of film and television. Naz commandeers his father’s taxi

68‘The Beach’, The Night Of, Season 1 Episode 1, HBO, 2016, [TV program]
without his knowledge and hits the town in search of the party. As he drives, the show begins to document the evidence of the night that will be used in his prosecution, through CCTV images of his various stops. While Naz is trying to determine the address of the party, a girl enters the taxi. Naz is immediately smitten by this passenger that he didn’t really want, and thus begins their night, which includes them stopping off to buy beer, taking drugs by the seaside and then returning to Andrea’s expensive home in upper Manhattan. At Andrea’s place they have more drugs and alcohol, and while high they then play with knives before having sex.

Naz wakes up to find Andrea has been violently stabbed, and in his panic he grabs the knife they were playing with earlier and flees the scene in his taxi. He is arrested nearby for driving drunk, and eventually, after some tense detective and police work, he is arrested for the crime. While being held in the precinct, he meets petty criminal lawyer John Stone, whose career revolves around finding poor criminals to represent and in most cases quickly coerce into plea bargains. Stone convinces Naz that he will represent him, and is excited at the prospect of taking up a real case. And thus begins the next seven episodes of the show, that track Naz’s struggle to prove his innocence through the justice system, the investigation of lead Detective Box, the machinations of prosecutor Helen Weiss and the culmination of the investigation in court. The show looks at the lives of Naz and Stone in most detail – two marginalised males whose identities are intimately shaped by their responses to various forms of humiliation, dismissal and emasculation. Beginning with Naz’s interactions with Andrea, and using the frameworks

---

69 While the focus of this chapter is Naz’s characterisation, the masculinity of another key character, lawyer John Stone, is similarly important to the show. Just as Naz is trapped behind the walls of a prison, Stone is trapped in the prison of his own body, ravaged by a severe strain of eczema that leaves him looking like he has the plague. He cannot wear shoes and uses a chopstick to itch his disgusting feet through his sandals. His skin disease affects how people see him, and the drugs he uses to cure it also affects his performance in the bedroom. He is no longer attractive to women, and in a number of scenes his inability to get an erection is discussed by a pharmacist in front of attractive women, who smirk. Thus, although Stone is white, and thus has access to that cultural capital, this is compromised by his illness and his socioeconomic standing as a lawyer for petty criminals. The show documents his many tragicomic attempts at trying to assert his masculinity; for example, he throws himself at Naz’s case, striving to prove himself in the public realm when he cannot do so in his personal life. Yet, he is made fun of in the court room as well, where his skills as a criminal lawyer are questioned and ridiculed by his colleagues. At one
developed by Roose and Coston and Kimmel, it is possible to track how forms of protest masculinity, minstrelisation, normification and militant chauvinism inform his character development in the show.

From the moment Andrea enters Naz’s off-duty cab, she is the opposite of this passive and inexperienced young man. She immediately challenges him, asking him whether he is going to kick her out of the cab, but Naz cannot do it. For most of the drive, he does little more than peer intently into the rear view mirror, mesmerised and almost shocked that he has a beautiful young woman in this car, who is talking to him. Andrea is vague, impulsive, yet perceptive. She demands that he stop and get her a drink as she is thirsty, so Naz stops at a petrol station and (perhaps showing some intent to seduce the white woman) buys her a beer to get her relaxed. Andrea dominates the verbal exchange, and in response to her questions Naz timidly says he is good with his dad and family, admitting that he mostly does what everyone around him wants him to do, but tonight is different for him, it is about himself. They take drugs, and Andrea relays how she wishes she could transport herself to somewhere else, to be away from bad things. She then says she can’t be alone tonight, and Naz, emboldened by hearing this, drives her to her place.

Inside her home, the talk turns to girlfriends, and when asked if he has one, Naz says no and accidentally asks if she has one, to which she asks if would he be turned on if she did? This brash innuendo leaves Naz speechless. Andrea forces more alcohol and drugs into them both, and then produces a knife which she swings fearlessly between her fingers in a game of stabscotch.

point the show builds him up: he finds a Chinese remedy for his eczema that begins to work, and he gets hold of Viagra, planning to prove to his prostitute client (it seems she pays him with visits after he helps her avoid criminal charges) that he can perform between the sheets. Cruelly, neither become a reality; the prostitute chooses a rich client over spending time with him, and the day before his closing argument in Naz’s case, he wakes up with a severe allergy and delivers his closing remarks looking like a zombie. Thus, at the very point where Stone has managed to ‘normify’ his masculinity, and plans to make a showing of it, he is humiliated.
and forces Naz to do the same. She then turns her hand palm up, and coerces Naz to stab down at it. Naz, intoxicated and almost hypnotised by her, swings down, and stabs Andrea clean through the palm. Naz is shocked, speechless, fearful, whereas for Andrea this is the tipping point; aroused, she frantically begins kissing him, and they shed their clothes and have sex. During the sex, the audience can only hear Naz’s moans; she remains silent and more dominant, pleasuring him, and symbolising his emasculation across their whole interaction. Throughout, he is passive, inexperienced, unsure and smitten. The scene is also quite different to Changez’s approach in attracting Erica; Naz does not employ any minstrelisation or promote his exoticness to improve his chances with Andrea, but rather speaks little about himself in an attempt to ‘normify’ his masculinity.

Subsequent to his arrest, Naz experiences a sequence of events that further foreground his innocence. From trusting the detective who is trying to find evidence to charge him with murder, to accepting advice from various people about his case, to being presented with a plea deal by a celebrity lawyer, to wearing the inappropriate shirt that his mother finds him for the day in court, Naz’s naiveté costs him. Gradually, he realises that he must be more wary of who he trusts and listens to, even amongst his loved ones, and he begins to become more confident and aggressive. His choice to reject what appears at the time to be a generous plea deal, because he knows he did not commit the crime, is one example of this transformation. But Rikers Jail, the place he is forced to stay in because he is not given bail, is a deeply traumatic place that forces him to change his attitudes and behaviours even further in order to survive. As soon as he enters the prison, Naz is labelled a murderer/rapist and becomes a target. At the same time, he is quickly noticed by the kingpin of the gaol, boxing legend and ruthless killer Freddy (the calm and charismatic Michael Kenneth Williams). Freddy reaches out, but Naz is wary of contact,

---

70 Coston and Kimmel, ‘Seeing Privilege Where it Isn’t’, p. 98.
hoping to remain free of allegiances. But after being threatened and attacked, he is left with no option but to ask for Freddy’s help. Freddy and one of his gang respond by holding Naz’s attacker down in the showers as Naz approaches, and he is told to exact his revenge. Naz is wary, but he is challenged: ‘Osama, this man burned your ass, it’s your turn’. Naz kicks the attacker weakly, in response to which the man on the ground calls him a faggot. Naz then snaps, violently attacking the man; he has to be pulled off.\textsuperscript{72} His actions seem to be a combination of his pent up frustration at his situation, an attempt at demonstrating violence to instil fear in the other inmates and gain respect and a response to slur that challenged his masculinity. Thus begins Naz’s immersion in a culture of violent masculinity. In the world of Rikers, a place full of maligned, damaged men, those who are strong and ruthless, such as Freddy, are in power. Indeed, Freddy is depicted having sex with a female prison guard, making her scream with pleasure (in contrast to Naz’s sexual experience in the first episode); he has everything he wishes inside and places fear in the hearts of his enemies.

Freddy is drawn to Naz, who he sees as a ‘care package’ for his brain, claiming that unlike the others in the gaol who think the Gaza strip is in Las Vegas, he graduated from school. Even though Freddy forces Naz to sneak balls of drugs into the prison from the visiting room, and even to swallow bags that have been smuggled into the prison in the vagina of an old lady, then drink castor oil and shit them out as Freddy and his friends laugh, the two men nevertheless begin to share real moments of friendship in the prison. Freddy’s advice becomes as important to Naz as his lawyer’s, and by the end Naz has shaved his delicate locks, tattooed his fists and is smoking meth just like his friend. The day before his final sentencing, Freddy and Naz even share a homoerotic moment; Freddy tells Naz that everyone else in the prison has a smell about them, a stink, while Naz smells of innocence and that is why he had to protect him. Their heads come

\textsuperscript{72}The Season of the Witch’, \textit{The Night Of}, Season 1 Episode 5, HBO, 2016, [TV program]
close, almost as if to kiss, as they light their drugs and smoke together one last time. This scene of tenderness is the only one across the whole series.

To protect himself, Naz has adopted Freddy’s mindset; he embraces the label of ‘Osama’, capitalises on the threat that he is a rapist and killer, and increasingly enacts a form of masculine militant chauvinism to cover his weaknesses. Indeed, he begins to look down upon other inmates who are not as ruthless and well-connected as he is. By the time Naz leaves the prison he has transformed; he is muscular, the doe eyes are gone, and he is contrasted with the new, innocent inmates entering. He comfortably lies to his parents and lawyer, seduces and makes the girl working on his case smuggle drugs into the prison for him, and generally does whatever he needs to survive. His transformation, a consequence of a justice system which does not rehabilitate but rather creates new criminals, is the most powerful aspect of the series, and to experience this through the perspective of a Muslim male makes his story accessible without any need to exoticise or frame his plight as an issue unique to Muslims or Pakistanis.

Nevertheless, The Night Of is also sensitive to the specificities of Muslim experience, especially those of low socioeconomic status. From the moment Naz is arrested, his parents are vulnerable, constantly one step behind in comprehending what is happening in the world around them. They are hit financially, because the taxi that Naz was driving on the night is impounded as evidence, and Naz’s father, one of three partners who own the taxi, is gradually rejected by the other partners who want their taxi back. They force him to sell his portion of the taxi for a fraction of its value, and when he says they should be ashamed for this action, the partners say it is Naz who has brought shame upon them all, and produce a newspaper showing another taxi driver who has been attacked in retaliation for Naz’s alleged crime. In another scene, a woman wearing a niqab strolls past Naz’s father, saying ‘are you happy now?’ in reference to Naz’s shame. Naz’s mother loses her job because of the case and is forced to work long hours cleaning for little money, and in one scene it is seen that his parents have put the house up for sale to
support his legal fund. In another scene, his parents are shown in the principal’s office with his younger brother, a bright student whose face is bruised from fighting; Naz’s case has also affected him, because he has been bullied by other students and yet the school chooses to relocate him rather than deal with the offenders. Later, his brother vandalises lockers with spray paint. Further, as the notoriety of the case escalates, televisions and radios playing in the background during various scenes feature reports of cab drivers being beaten and mosques being firebombed in retaliation against the alleged murder of a white woman by a Muslim. In another scene, a huge graffiti of ‘Muslims go home’ with a Nazi insignia is on a wall that Naz’s father walks past on his way home.

The show also looks specifically at how Muslims face casual racism, a language that has become part of daily life in post- September 11 America. From policemen to people on the street, Islamophobic statements are used comically and as slurs. ‘Osama’ and ‘towelhead’ are examples, and before Stone gets to meet Naz, he refers to him as ‘Gungadin’, a reference to a classic Orientalist movie. Also, Naz’s possible links to extremism are not neglected, with Detective Box, the media and the prosecution all asking about his links to overseas organisations when interacting with him. Box even asks him to name two Yankee players who are going to the Hall of Fame, trying to assure himself of Naz’s Westernness through reference to baseball. His religion and culture feature as important in setting his bail terms as well; in both cases the prosecution insinuates that he is a flight risk because he is from Pakistan. Naz was actually born in America and has never been overseas, yet this is not enough for the judge. In yet another scene, Stone is interrogating a man. Stone asks why this man always uses Islamophobic taunts when describing Naz, observing that after September 11 two things happened, ‘you started calling people Abdool Fazool and homeland security started putting up cameras everywhere’ – an accurate snapshot of life in post- September 11 America.
Yet, as much as *The Night Of* does to give nuance to Muslim experience, it still manages to construct African Americans as little more than racist stereotypes. All of the criminals in Rikers are black, the huge majority of criminals in the holding tanks at the precinct are black, and the people who use Islamophobic language towards Naz are also black.\(^{73}\) While this in itself may be a sadly accurate reflection of American prison populations, the show goes further: black prisoners are seen killing and raping each other, the men who torment Naz in gaol are black, black mothers are seen smuggling drugs into the prison system in their vaginas, black men are shown expressing misogyny towards women. Freddy is the most complex of these black characters, and he is a frightening killer. Even Stone is constructed in relation to black women; his ex-wife is black, the prostitute he frequents is black and even the women who snicker at his erection problems are black. Indeed, the fetishisation of the black body goes to an extreme in the episode in which Stone is unable to get an erection.\(^{74}\) In one scene, Prosecutor Weiss takes a picture of evidence to a coroner in the morgue, who is working on a deceased black man. Weiss is hoping to convince the coroner to testify about the picture, and while they chat about it, she places the picture right next to the exposed penis of the dead black man. The shot lingers for a while, and the audience is forced to view the member. Although a key theme of the episode is Stone’s flaccid penis, the inclusion of this scene is grossly objectifying, emblematising the othering of black bodies that is so common on the show. Thus, even as *The Night Of* works hard to present a sympathetic view of Muslim Americans, it cannot detach itself from its racist characterisations of black people, something that is not uncommon to HBO programming.\(^{75}\) Similarly, Andrea is a stereotyped manifestation of the troubled white woman that is so common in intercultural romances\(^{76}\) – financially privileged, from a troubled family,

---


\(^{74}\) The Season of the Witch’, *The Night Of*, Season 1 Episode 5, HBO, 2016, [TV program]


\(^{76}\) Ramoutar, ‘The Colour of Love on the Big Screen’, pp. 53-54.
self-absorbed, emotionally detached, drug-fuelled and sexually promiscuous. Indeed, for much of the series, her use of drugs, family problems and many boyfriends are used as arguments for the defence and seen as weaknesses for the prosecution. In one scene, Prosecutor Weiss and her legal team are discussing the case, and there is a chalk board in the background of the office which has information on the case; under the section labelled ‘Andrea’ there is a list of pros and cons listing the strengths and weaknesses of her character for the case [Figure 4.2] – a neat summary of the profile of the troubled white woman that is common in intercultural romances (and many other contexts). Indeed, one commentator notes that although The Night Of is a complex and multifaceted show, its deployment of the common trope of the ‘beautiful but troubled girl in her twenties’, presented dead and in various states of undress, her value to the
narrative nothing more than the sad details of her short life,\textsuperscript{77} is disappointing. Yet, at the end of the series, when Naz is acquitted and her killer still remains at large, Naz takes the trouble to return to the waterside spot where they spent some time on their one night together. He lights his drug pipe and remembers her, a forever changed man who seems to have nothing better in his life than the memory of one evening with her.

From a casting perspective, Riz Ahmed’s Naz is very different from his portrayal of Changez. Interestingly, whether it is the lighting or makeup, Naz looks lighter skinned in \textit{The Night Of}, has no accent, and sports none of the upper class charisma of Changez. Keeping to the working class nature of the show, Naz and his family are all portrayed as day to day lower income citizens, struggling to make ends meet, especially with the financial burden of the court case. Unlike many of the texts across this thesis, \textit{The Night Of} does not ascribe anything uniquely Muslim to its main character physically; he is a second generation migrant in New York, like many in his community. He dresses plainly, as his family does, and no exoticising tactics are deployed in relation to their characterisation.

\textit{The Night Of} is an important piece of television. It features a Muslim protagonist in an Emmy award winning program, and moves well beyond aiming to dispel myths or trying to construct a ‘good’ Muslim character through its construction of Naz as a complex, flawed, and understandable human being. Steering clear of identity politics\textsuperscript{78} as much it can, it does not simply feign outrage at racism or prejudice, or hope that it can be resolved through having dinner together and learning about tolerance; rather, it honestly explores the institutional and structural effects of both racism and socioeconomic disadvantage, taking an intersectional look at the prejudices that Muslims face today. Although it does not overtly promote intercultural


\textsuperscript{Okeowo, ‘Riz Ahmed’s Tragic Transformation on \textit{The Night Of}.\textsuperscript{78}}
sensitivity or dialogue, by placing a Muslim at the centre of a narrative that is ambivalent about distinctions between good and evil or right and wrong, which asks hard questions about various forms of social inequality, and which remains unresolved (the murder mystery is not solved), it prompts its audience to accept the ‘wholeness’ of the characters and world that it represents, and to question the reductive distinctions between East and West that have circulated since September 11. Its exploration of a maligned masculinity is also important, because it clearly demonstrates how the future of a young Muslim male is significantly determined by the prejudicial and socioeconomically disadvantaged environments in which he must survive.

**What Does it Take for a Muslim to be a Leading Man in Hollywood?**

The final text to be considered in this chapter, *The Big Sick*, is a romantic comedy that explores how a Pakistani man falls for a white American woman. Based on a true story, the independent production was an unexpected hit of 2017, well received by audiences. The film appeared at a time when two other popular television shows featuring South Asian Muslim men were also popular: *Master of None* (2015) starring Aziz Ansari, and comedian Hasan Minhaj’s stand up special *Homecoming King* (2017). All three use comedy to explore life in America as the child of an immigrant family, and all three have been well received by American audiences at a time when questions of Muslim citizenship and belonging in American society have featured in

---

79 It is interesting to note that the three leading men in the texts considered in this chapter are Pakistani. Similarly other recent high profile Muslim males on Western screens are almost exclusively from the Indian Subcontinent. Riz Ahmed, Kumail Nanjiani, Hasan Minhaj and Aziz Ansari are all young Muslim men who have recently developed high profiles on Western screens. I wonder if men from the subcontinent are deemed ‘less Muslim looking’ than their Arabian and African counterparts which has allowed them to have important places in Western cinema and television. Even Rami Malek who recently came rose to stardom for his role in the hit *Bohemian Rhapsody* (2018) is a very fair skinned Egyptian Christian Arab. Mehal Krayem in her analysis of Australian Films and television explains how leading men in these texts are chosen to in relation to their fairer skin and proximity to whiteness. See M. Krayem, *Heroes, Villains, and the Muslim Exception: Muslim and Arab men in Australian Crime Drama*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Publishing, 2017, p. 63.

80 Ansaris’ name surfaced during the wave of reporting regarding sexual consent and abuse during the highly publicised #MeToo movement in 2018. Though the characters he has played are positioned as allies of feminism, this contrasts starkly with his personal life in 2014. See S. Hindes and B. Fileborn, ‘Girl Power Gone Wrong’: #MeToo, Aziz Ansari, and Media Reporting of (Grey Area) Sexual Violence’, *Feminist Media Studies*, 2019, [https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2019.1606843](https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2019.1606843).
divisive election campaigns. *The Big Sick* was written by comedian Kumail Nanjaini and his wife Emily Gordon; Kumail also plays himself in the film, while Zoe Kazan plays the role of his on-screen love interest. The romance is based on the screenwriters’ own story, centring on the budding relationship between Kumail and Emily, and what happens to it after she falls sick and enters a coma. The film also distinguishes itself by placing a Muslim male as the lead character in a Hollywood romantic comedy, something that has never been seen before. Because *The Big Sick* is a romantic comedy, the intercultural romance is also more central to this text than to the other narratives that have been explored here.

The plot revolves around Kumail, aspiring stand-up comedian and Uber driver who arrived in America with his family from Pakistan. The credits begin with his stand-up comedy routine, accompanied by old and grainy images of Pakistan from the 70’s. Kumail shares his sarcastic and nerdy recollections: how Pakistan wasn’t really different from America, except they played cricket, the spicy version of baseball; prayed only a little (sarcasm implied); and married people that their parents chose for them. He then makes fun of how Pakistan is only airing episodes of the original *Knight Rider* (1982), today. Kumail aspires to be a successful stand-up comedian, while his family, especially his mother, hopes that he will abandon this folly, study law, and marry one of the Pakistani girls that she introduces him to in a series of ‘rishta’ visits interspersed throughout the film, each of which end with Kumail receiving a picture of the potential suitor which he stores in a cigar box. Kumail is not interested in these women, especially after he meets Emily.

Emily and Kumail meet up after one of Kumail’s shows and end up sleeping together in his dirt-poor apartment. True to the romantic comedy genre, their on-screen interactions capture the

---

awkwardness and angst of courtship and love. Their relationship slowly blossoms, yet Emily has her reservations about Kumail; she knows little about his family and he does not seem to be interested in getting her to meet them. When Emily stumbles across the box of pictures, she cannot cope any longer and breaks up with him. Soon after, Kumail finds out that Emily has fallen ill and visits her at the hospital; her condition deteriorates, she is placed into a coma, and while Kumail is by her side Emily’s parents arrive. The next section of the film is Kumail’s interaction with Emily’s parents Terry (Ray Romano) and Beth (Holly Hunter). They initially disapprove of Kumail, but gradually accept him into their fold. During this time Kumail’s resolve to reconcile with Emily grows, so he tells the truth to his parents and strives to try to win back Emily while not being exiled from his own family. When Emily wakes up she initially dismisses Kumail, but she begins to see how he has changed and when he moves to New York to further pursue his stand-up career, she appears at one of his shows and heckles him, reigniting their relationship.

Throughout the film, Kumail’s flawed masculinity, played for laughs through self-denigration, can be paralleled with the persona Woody Allen developed in his romantic comedies, in which he championed an alternate Jewish masculinity, minstrelised as cowardly, feminised and flawed, yet still attractive to the white girl. Kumail’s characterisation works along very similar lines, and throughout the film he comically minstrelises his own culture while simultaneously normifying himself to win over Emily. Yet, while humour is a powerful tool of subversion and commentary, and at times it is well used to explore some of the more difficult topics in the film, overwhelmingly, it is Kumail’s parents’ culture that is mocked. Indeed, Kumail also enacts a form of protest masculinity towards his family and upbringing, in combination with the minstrelising

and normifying of his masculinity that govern his interactions with Emily. In many of the other cultural exchanges and dialogues that have been considered in this thesis, certain events in each narrative shape the main characters’ understanding, moving them from ethnocentric to more ethnorelative world views. Yet, in *The Big Sick* – despite its popularity and the presence of a Muslim hero in the lead – very little cultural exchange or dialogue actually occurs between Kumail and Emily, and Kumail grows ever more critical of his Pakistani and Muslim culture. For example, in one scene, Emily asks about the pockmark he has on his arm while they are sleeping together, and Kumal says it is a smallpox injection. Emily remarks that only old people have them, and Kumail retorts that Pakistan is still dealing with issues that America solved many years ago. At another time, when they are breaking up after Emily has found the pictures of the Pakistani girls, Emily questions Kumail about why he doesn’t open up to her, why he thinks she cannot fathom his life, to which Kumail says ‘You think you can understand me? I am fighting a 1400 year old culture (Islam) while your biggest problem is that you were ugly in high school’. Meaningful and respectful cultural exchange between Kumail and Emily thus occurs rarely, and when it does, he mocks his culture and faith.

However, more genuine intercultural dialogue does occur between Kumail, Terry and Beth during Emily’s coma. When Terry and Beth arrive at the hospital, they are initially surprised to see Kumail present, as Emily has told them that they had broken up. Initially, he is ignored, but when he persists in staying around, they begin to interact. Over lunch, Terry awkwardly says that he always wanted to have a conversation with ‘people’ (he can’t bring himself to say the word ‘Muslim’, perhaps for fear of causing offence) about September 11, and wants to know what Kumail’s thoughts are. Kumail begins seriously, saying that it was a tragedy, then pauses and says ‘we lost 19 of our best guys that day’. It is an awkward joke, yet Terry and Beth do not react as Bobby did in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*; they realise that Kumail is trying to make a joke, perhaps as a coping mechanism.
Soon after, Terry and Beth attend Kumail’s stand-up routine. During his set, a white youth dressed in a hat and Hawaiian shirt shouts out ‘Go back to ISIS!’ to Kumail. Kumail tries to ignore the comment, but Beth steps up to confront the youth, telling him ‘that’s like saying all white frat boys wearing hats and Hawaiian shirts have shrivelled up dicks!’ Beth and the young man exchange profanities, and then she attacks him and needs to pulled away by security. In this moment, Beth becomes Kumail’s white saviour. White saviours or ‘anti-racist white heroes’ propagate an ideology of innocence, aiming to promote the notion that American society should and can be colour blind, with scholars such as Stuart Hall arguing that it is a form of ‘inferential racism’; a covert attempt at representing racist power structures without being overtly racist or bigoted. In one of the most confrontational moments in the film, when Kumail’s lack of masculinity and social power is on display, he does not speak for himself, even though he has the microphone and stage; rather, a white woman speaks for him. Yet, this is also the moment when Beth accepts Kumail into the fold of her family. Kumail’s acceptance by Emily’s parents thus happens only after he is saved by them, which also foreshadows the eventual balance of power in Kumail and Emily’s relationship.

The scenes after this one explore Beth and Terry’s own relationship, and are used to parallel the relationship between Kumail and Emily. Beth and Terry’s families also dealt with difference, Beth being the daughter of a wild southern military family while Terry was a bookish teacher. Beth explains that the only way their families’ clash of cultures reconciled was through many ‘fucked up dinners’ until everyone accepted the pairing. Other scenes explore Terry and Beth’s own relationship challenges, using comedy to explore their difficulties in remaining together. Kumail experiences genuine cultural exchange here, grounded in shared appreciation of the universality

of relationships and their challenges, regardless of culture and religion. Yet the opposite of this
never really happens; Emily never even meets Kumail’s parents in the film, and Kumail’s parents’
relationship is never teased out, either in negatives or positives. Cultural exchange is thus a one
way street here, with Kumail receiving serious exposure to the American way, while his parents’
culture is played for laughs.

Further, Kumail genuinely rebels against his family, eventually antagonising his parents in an
emotional scene. His continued lack of interest in the girls his mother introduces him to leads
his parents to confront him in a scene right after his cultural and familial bonding with Emily’s
family. His parents begin by making him feel guilty, letting him know of all the sacrifices that
they made for him coming to America – being away from their own families, and having to
reboot their careers. Kumail says that he appreciates it all, everything they did. His mother
continues that she no longer cares whether or not he pursues his comedy career but she does
want him to be a good Muslim and marry a Pakistani girl. Kumail then asks valid questions: why
did his parents bring him to America if they did not want an American life? Why do they pretend
to be in Pakistan even though they are in America? He says they don’t care what he thinks, and
only want him to follow their rules. In relation to his faith, he says that he isn’t sure whether he
believes or not, and does not pray when his parents send him to do so – he plays video games.
Also, he cannot marry someone they find for him because he is in love with Emily and she is very
sick and it saddens him that he could not share this information with them before.

Kumail’s parents say he is being selfish, and his father adds that the American Dream is not just
about doing what you want. It is a messy and emotional scene, and asks important questions,
yet it frames the argument in very black and white terms. There seems to be no middle ground,
no possibility of existing in between an American and Pakistani identity. Yet when one analyses
Kumail’s parents’ actions, they are not that backward or repressive. His parent’s home is quite
Westernised, and his mother’s attempts at trying to find her son beautiful and educated women.
to meet are not oppressively orchestrated (in a traditional arranged marriage, the children do not see each other as Kumail and his suitors do, let alone get a chance to talk or – as is the case in one scene from the film – go for a drive and talk by themselves). Indeed, one commentator sees Kumail’s line of questioning as the ‘apex of othering, for the minoritised person to see their own people as the other’.

Such processes of othering one’s own are also evident through the film’s framing of Muslim women. From a post-colonial perspective, the desire of a coloured man to be with a white woman is regarded as a colonised person’s response to experiencing racism, a way in which to reclaim self-esteem through a sexual relationship with the woman of the coloniser. To this end, the woman takes on a symbolic cultural value in the contest between colonised and coloniser, and when a coloured man earns white love, he gains acceptance into a society that has thwarted him through a simultaneous act of love and revenge. However, this leads to brown women being othered and made the butt of many jokes. In addition to framing Kumail’s mother as an overbearing, controlling and emotional woman who wishes to destroy all of his dreams, the film does not give any brown women a chance to be taken seriously, explored in any depth, or empathised with. Indeed, Kumail’s sister-in-law, who came into their family through an arranged marriage, is played as a buffoon, and the majority of the Pakistani girls that Kumail’s mother arranges for him to meet are caricatures. Although on the surface of things they are desirable, attractive, and Westernised, they are also heavily accented, marriage hungry women whose only desire in life is to be a wife. In no instance are the backgrounds, motivations or desires of these

---

women – who so rarely get a chance to be portrayed in Hollywood – explored.91 Only one girl
named Khadija (who is played by a black rather than south-east Asian actress, echoing casting
patterns observed earlier in this thesis) gets a little screen time, and briefly mentions the
pressure of being forced to marry so as not to be a burden. From a casting perspective, with the
exception of his brother Kumail’s family have thick accents, though these are not lampooned as
mercilessly as the rishta girls’ accents. His family is well presented and gives off a middle class
sensibility.

The marginalisation of brown women is even further elaborated when Kumail comes to visit
Emily while she is recovering from the coma with a ‘bag of devotion’ – a collection of all his
hospital visitor passes and a jar of ashes, the burnt remains of all the pictures of Pakistani women
that he has been keeping in the cigar box. He declares that he was a terrible boyfriend, and that
he is ready to ‘be the person you need me to be’ [Figure 4.3].

Figure 4.3. Kumail presenting Emily a jar of ashes from his ‘bag of devotion’, an attempt at reconciling their
relationship by letting her know how bad a boyfriend he was.

This scene is both cringeworthy and strange, and is reminiscent of Changez telling Erica to
pretend that he is her dead ex-boyfriend or Naz trying to get Andrea drunk. While it is no doubt
intended to be romantic, it risks coming off as a creepy and emasculating attempt to ‘win the

91Kini, ‘I’m Tired of Watching Brown Men Fall in Love with White Women Onscreen’.
white woman’; certainly, Kumail’s desperation for Emily seems as much about validation and upwardly mobile masculinity as it is about love. Overall, Kumail is willing to aggressively protest and rebel against his own culture, yet he is also willing to be shamed and emasculated in order to win the white woman of his dreams, a stance which the film seemingly endorses. This is most clearly evidenced in a scene of Emily watching viral videos of one of his stand-up routines while she was in the coma. During the routines, Kumail is beside himself with grief over Emily, he cries and is almost incoherent on stage. Yet she watches the videos with a smile on her face, and later tells him that she liked what she saw.

To Kumail, Emily’s value is greater than Kumail’s family, and by the film’s end he has moved to New York, away from his parents, where Emily joins him, delivering the ‘happy ending’ that is generally a requirement of the romantic comedy genre. And thus, while The Big Sick is funny and tender, and significant in featuring a Muslim protagonist in a popular, feel-good, mainstream American film, it would seem that this comes at the cost of nuanced intercultural dialogue, as well as Kumail’s autonomy and integrity. Also, and in keeping with other intercultural romance films discussed by Bell, the value placed within the film on individual fulfilment and personal autonomy lessens its capacity to explore the impacts of social inequality in the way showcased by The Reluctant Fundamentalist and The Night Of.92 Nevertheless, through Kumail’s embrace of an upwardly mobile masculinity that entails a rejection of his parents’ culture, the film still obliquely tracks the stresses and challenges of negotiating masculinity for a Muslim male in the west. Like the other two texts considered in this chapter, it also shifts focus from faith towards issues of racism and socioeconomic standing. Kumail’s challenges are primarily centred on managing his encounters with racism (for example, through his stand-up routines which can be read as attempts to connect with his detractors, Emily’s parents’ initial suspicions, and the scene where Beth ‘saves’ him from the heckler) and ‘getting

---

92Bell, ‘Women, Film and Racial Thinking’, p. 354.
ahead’ (through defending and pursuing his ambitions to be a successful and rewarded stand-up comedian). Issues of faith are not foregrounded, with the exception of one sequence in which Kumail seems to grapple with the difficulty (but desirability?) of disentangling culture and faith.

This sequence features Kumail’s ‘one man show’ – a solo performance of serious drama that he does on the side. The solo performance begins with him as his 12-year-old self in Pakistan, and is an awkward and extended history and culture lesson, featuring Kumail talking about cricket, Pakistan’s exports and the food that is served during religious holidays. The performance seems to be Kumail’s attempt to value the culture that he is otherwise conflicted about and seemingly ashamed of. It is also strangely reminiscent of Erica’s art show, in which she botched her attempt to show her love for Changez through her art. Both artistic outputs are negatively received. But, in later scenes of The Big Sick, after Emily has awoken from the coma, a short snippet of the solo performance is shown again. It is now called Kumail Nanjiani: Citizen, and unlike the previous performance when the theatre was nearly empty, there are more people watching this time. Yet, in this performance, Kumail recollects how at religious school they would be given graphic descriptions of people killed 1400 years ago (implying the time of the Prophet Muhammed and the beginning of the spread of Islam) and that everyone would cry when hearing these descriptions except Kumail himself. This foregrounding of his dissonances of faith in the context of trying to affirm his culture perhaps reveals Kumail’s difficulty in resolving the ‘binary’ question of allegiance that plagues Muslims, especially young male Muslims. Anxious to affirm his citizenship as an American, Kumail is seemingly compelled to reassure that his faith is weak.

**Muslim Men as Cultural Hybrids**

Despite the ‘happy ending’ delivered by The Big Sick, the three protagonists in these texts are shown to inhabit an uncomfortable or in-between place. As Ien Ang observes, they are each
cultural hybrids, and this has been observed in this chapter through close reference to the ways in which each character navigates the dynamics of masculinity. All three protagonists face the seemingly insurmountable task of navigating a stark binary, being forced to choose between Western or Muslim/Islamist affiliations. In response to the trauma that he faces, Changez compensates for the loss of his success and idealised masculinity by embracing his religious background and identity. Yet, he also retains elements of the dominant Western masculinity that he acquired at Princeton and Underwood Samson, and in this sense he is the character who is most at home with his cultural hybridity. In contrast, Kumail sees his own family, faith and culture as oppressive and dives willingly into Western culture, symbolised through winning a white partner and the normative masculinity that she confers upon him; in this sense, dispensing with his cultural hybridity is the cost of his success in making a life with Emily in the modern West. In Naz’s case, he has less opportunity to choose than Changez and Kumail, due to his inferior economic status; rather, a whole series of events happen out of his control. Yet part of the reason that he suffers is arguably that he does not make a choice – he never embraces either side of the East/West binary, and is thus never embraced by those around him, Western or Muslim. This makes him vulnerable and Naz is thus forced to do what he must to survive, embracing a violent protest masculinity. Although this allows him a kind of freedom, he is profoundly scarred and changed by his quest to survive. Overall, the comfort and happiness of all three protagonists is constrained and challenged by the demand that falls particularly on Muslim men, to make stark choices between allegiance to their cultural roots or Western norms.

Conclusion: Keeping the Conversation Going

The Integrating Process

This thesis has demonstrated that a variety of different film and television shows across genres and Western nations have played important roles in the development of more complex and integrated representations of Muslims on Western screens. It has argued that Medievalist films and shows allowed for contemporary issues to be reflected on a historical canvas, acting as a testing ground for the reception of integrated representations of Muslims, and beginning a process of addressing cultural differences between the West and East and exploring possibilities for greater acculturation on screen and more complex representations. It has demonstrated how certain political/military thrillers set in the Middle East built on the work of the Medievalist texts, complicating the relationship between the West and Muslim geographies and peoples, exploring and humanising the suffering of Muslims (often at the hands of the West) through dialogue, and striving to counter the decades of Orientalist and racist stereotyping that this genre has typically fostered. It has also considered texts about the lives of Muslims living in the modern West, arguing that for all of the positivity that comes with the development of intercultural sensitivity, the onus is on Muslims to change to meet idealised standards of what an integrated Muslim should be as defined by Western norms; and if they do not do this, they risk remaining as outsiders or possible threats to the West. This thesis has also argued that while these texts are engaging in acculturation and the positive representation of Muslims, they may also reinforce Orientalist stereotypes or create new ones, while re-centring the power of white men and idealising Western notions of gender. This indicates the continued centrality of Western power in the texts, despite their attempts to subvert and challenge. The thesis has also argued that the burden of responsibility to dispel myths and stereotypes of Muslims leads to
texts that are less impactful than those that simply narrate the everyday stories and struggles of Muslims in all their complexity and ambiguity; and that there has been a gradual movement towards the latter form of storytelling. In this way, increasingly integrated representations of Muslims are now more central in Western popular culture than they have ever been.

This thesis has also undertaken analysis of how and why ‘integrated’ Muslims have been represented in mainstream film and television. There has been a steady increase in the representation of integrated Muslims in both film and television, including a growing number of instances where Muslim characters have been leading protagonists in texts. As has been explored across this thesis using the framework of Milton Bennett, representations of Muslims have moved through a process of acculturation, from Orientalist and racist depictions grounded in ethnocentrism through to increasingly ethnorelativist explorations of how people try to exist between cultures, negotiating and embracing difference. As the thesis has demonstrated, Western screen culture is now beginning to depict nuanced Muslims who are truly flawed and complex characters, and with increased awareness of the ways in which race and faith intersect with other markers of identity such as gender and class. Tracing this development from Nasir in Robin of Sherwood (1984-86) in Chapter 1 – a side character who never uttered a line of dialogue in an obscure British television show – to Changez or Kumail in Chapter 4 – leading Muslim characters exploring their sociopolitical and domestic lives as leading men in well-known Hollywood productions – shows a continuum of growth and increased appreciation of Muslims’ positioning in Western popular culture.

Nowhere is this trajectory clearer than in the films of Ridley Scott. From the turn of the century, Scott directed three films set in the East and directly related to Muslims and the West, with some commentators seeing this as evidence of the director’s fascination with the ‘West vs Arab’
conflict. The films are \textit{Black Hawk Down} (2001), \textit{Kingdom of Heaven} (2005) and \textit{Body of Lies} (2008). All deal with Western military forces and their experiences in the Muslim geographies. Two are based, even if loosely, on history (\textit{Black Hawk Down} and \textit{Kingdom of Heaven}), and \textit{Body of Lies} is based on a novel; all are mass market Hollywood productions. \textit{Black Hawk Down} is based on the events during the Battle of Mogadishu, a military raid by American Special Forces units to capture a Somalian war lord’s senior men in 1996. After the loss of a number of Black Hawk helicopters to rockets, a group of Special Forces soldiers are stuck in a hostile city surrounded by thousands of armed and angry Somali Muslims. American soldiers are sent to save their stranded comrades; the majority of the movie shows Americans gunning down hordes of Somali militia with deadly accuracy and technological adeptness. It is an ethnocentric field day; the Somalis are portrayed as screaming, bloodthirsty savages who want nothing but to exterminate the Americans, they are bad shots with their weapons, and even with huge numerical advantages, cannot match the expertise of the American soldiers, who efficiently rescue their stranded friends while killing hundreds of militiamen. The film has been criticised not only for its portrayal of the Somalis, but also because it excludes much of the background into America’s operations in Somalia, thus not giving any explanation for their hatred of the American soldiers; apparently, they simply hate the Americans because they are American.\textsuperscript{2} It omits the US government’s role in backing opposing Somalian warlords, which aided in pushing the nation towards civil war, as well as the fact that when the warlords were interested in signing a peace agreement, the Americans accidentally bombed the building in which they were meeting with members of the UN.\textsuperscript{3} Indeed, \textit{Black Hawk Down} is mentioned by Jack Shaheen, especially in relation to the influence that the American Department of Defence had in the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{3}Monbiot, ‘Both Saviour and Victim’.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
funding and filming of the movie. The DOD had an agreement with the filmmakers to allow for access to US Army weaponry in return for creative input, including access to a final screening of the film before it was released to the general public. It is easy to see how any scholar or cinema-going patron knowledgeable about the portrayal of Muslims in cinema would conclude that *Black Hawk Down* is a clear example of ethnocentric hate mongering, and reinforces well-established stereotypes of Muslims, with input from the American government to boot. Yet, a few years after this film was released, Scott filmed *Kingdom of Heaven*, a film explored in this thesis as an example of an emergent ethnorelativist approach. Based on Scott’s treatment of Muslims and history in *Black Hawk Down*, one might have expected similarly anti-Muslim sentiments to surface in *Kingdom of Heaven* – especially as it was filmed at a time when the US government had launched a crusade of its own in Iraq and the Middle East. Yet instead, *Kingdom of Heaven* offers a reversal of the representational economy of *Black Hawk Down*. Here, European Christians are the aggressive and bloodthirsty ones; they are shown slaughtering Muslim pilgrims, killing innocent women and generally being bloodthirsty nuisances for the film’s protagonists. In contrast, as explored in Chapter One, the Muslim characters are quite sophisticated and in some cases admirable, so much so that Shaheen uses this film as the major example of a positive representation of a Muslim in his documentary *Reel Bad Arabs*. A few years after this, Scott directed *Body of Lies*, a military/political thriller in which a CIA agent is trying to identify a terrorist cell in Jordan and Syria which brings an ethnorelativist sensitivity to the complexities of the modern world. Much like the military/political thrillers considered in Chapter Two, the film places Muslim characters around an American protagonist or ‘good

---

government agent’ to aid the American in making the world a safer place, while exploring and
critiquing Western involvement in the region and its effects on Muslim people. Like Munich
(2005) and Rendition (2007) the hero becomes disillusioned with his role, and after completing
his task, leaves this life behind to begin a romance with a Muslim girl he meets. The film once
again associates Muslims with extremism, and positions other Muslims as patriotic assistants of
the Western hero. But building on the ideas of Kingdom of Heaven and in stark contrast to Black
Hawk Down, it engages with Muslims sympathetically, at the adaptation/integration end of
Bennett’s continuum.

Although all the films are inflected with Orientalism, understanding how the same director could
take such different approaches is challenging. It might be tempting to conclude that he was
pursuing the historical facts in each case, but such an argument would be spurious given that all
the films use considerable creative licence in their portrayal of historical events. How else might
the divergence between the films be explained? Possibly, Scott is primarily motivated by the
opportunity to make visually engaging and interesting films, regardless of their meaning and
effect. As a big name director, he can pick and choose scripts and stories that he finds
aesthetically exciting, and in this sense an apparent fascination with the East may be simply a
by-product of his successive interest in making a military movie, a crusade movie and a spy
movie. As a rich, successful white man, Scott is not burdened with the representational
responsibility that directors with less cultural capital may feel they need to exercise, so in this
sense it may be overly hopeful to imagine that there is a conscious representational agenda at
work in his oeuvre.

Socio-political contextualisation of the films does, however, impose a certain logic upon their
sequence; in effect, the broader culture speaks through them. Throughout this thesis, each text
has been contextualised against the social, cultural and political conditions that shaped its
production because, as Jane Mills argues, the production of a film is the result of a multitude of
different ideas, economic influences and creative inputs, and this complexity parallels the flows and scapes described in Arjun Appadurai’s idea of globalisation and the literature on transnational film and television. Ridley Scott’s sequence of films confirms the role of divergent political, cultural, economic and financial flows that contribute to screen production, and also the evolving approaches to representing interactions between Muslims and Westerners that has been the overall focus of this thesis. *Black Hawk Down* was filmed and released before September 11, before East/West tensions peaked and demanded more careful attention. *Kingdom of Heaven* and *Body of Lies* appeared in the aftermath of the attacks, at a time when Muslims were facing violence and discrimination so the need to myth bust and humanise them was important. Undoubtedly, an intense period of intercultural cultural dialogue occurred after September 11, resulting in representations of growing complexity and nuance with regard to Muslims. The continuum seen across Scott’s films thus reflects a broader movement in regards to the texts and issues that has been considered across this thesis; a movement from blatantly Orientalist and racist stereotypes of Muslims towards more complex characterisations, the contestation of the superiority of the West over the East, and dialogue between characters from East and West which suggests how future relationships between Muslims and the West might unfold.

Yet to impose or assume the development of integrated characterisations as an uninterrupted linear progression is not entirely feasible. The multitude of factors and flows that can shape the production of a film or television show are highly dynamic, and so to hope that over time there will simply be more and more such narratives is naïve. As an example, Scott’s 2010 iteration of *Robin Hood*, released at the conclusion of Scott’s decade-long engagement with the East,

---

contained no Muslim characters. Further, as briefly mentioned in Chapter One, representations of integrated medieval Muslims seem to have all but died off; a further Robin Hood text since the BBC’s 2006 iteration – Otto Bathurst’s *Robin Hood* (2018) – includes a Muslim characterisation that does little to advance the intercultural dialogue considered in Chapter One.

**A Tenuous Visibility**

One then wonders about the extent to which current trends towards representing integrated Muslims will continue into the future. As Evelyn Al-Sultany posits, spaces won for difference, where those who are invisible are finally represented, are ‘very carefully regulated and segregated’;¹⁰ and it is therefore very possible that they will remain relevant only for a certain period of time, and will then disappear from the screenscape, as in the medieval case. So, a remaining question to consider is the extent to which Muslim communities are positioned to ensure that their stories continue to be told.

Across this thesis I have briefly touched upon the roles that some Muslims have played as consultants or creatives in screen production processes. While this thesis enhances understanding of the ways in which long standing stereotypes and biases have been challenged within certain film and television texts, further change may only be possible with the integral involvement of Muslims in screen production. Outside of television channels such as Australia’s SBS or Canada’s CBC, which have explicit targets for representing diversity and reinforcing tolerance, the capacity of Muslims to play an active role in the production of programming demands further attention. Indeed, as discussed in Chapters Three and Four, multiculturalism has tended to maintain whiteness as the dominant culture, in part through limiting the access

---

of migrants to positions of power in production processes. Yet, some developments counter this; for example, in early 2017 a Muslim was appointed chairman of SBS, the leading provider of diverse content on Australian television and the broadcaster of *East West 101* (2007-10). To imagine that the appointment of a single individual will dismantle the structural inequalities that Muslims and other minorities face in the media in Western nations would be naïve, but this development invites optimism that the coming years may be a time in which representations produced by Muslims themselves can move further away from stereotypes towards humanised and relatable characterisations that appeal to audiences without being preachy, and which perhaps offer a source of inspiration and celebration for Western Muslims themselves. This has already begun to occur, with the increased popularity of online streaming services such as Netflix and content on YouTube fundamentally shifting patterns of producing and consuming screen content. The emergence of such technology is allowing for different forms of content, which aspiring Muslim filmmakers have begun to create. One such example is the comedy *American Sharia* (2015), a film made by Muslim stand-up comedians and YouTube celebrities. Harnessing their popularity on social media, they made an action comedy film aimed at dispelling stereotypes about Muslims and constructing positive characterisations. After completing this film, the same group of actors and personalities formed an online streaming service called ‘Halalywood’, an attempt to deliver content specifically made for Western Muslims. Another group of Muslims from the UK produced and filmed an online streamed television series called *Unfair and Ugly* that explores the experiences of Muslim South Asians living in the west, using online crowd funding for finance. One of the filmmakers behind the project, Nida Chowdry, states that a primary motivation for the production of the *Unfair and Ugly* was growing up hearing that Muslims needed more and better representation in the media, and wanting to

make the change herself.\textsuperscript{12} Overall, as Mehal Krayem argues, more Muslims need to be active and present in media production contexts to facilitate the appearance of more genuine, complex and less marginalised representations,\textsuperscript{13} so recent attempts by Muslims to create their own productions and self-representations is a positive movement in this direction.

Yet even having Muslims directing or producing texts is not necessarily the answer to all representational challenges. As a recent example, Muslim filmmaker Minhal Baig directed her first feature film, \textit{Hala} (2019). It is a teen romance that explores the difficulties that a young, hijabbed Pakistani girl has with her family’s controlling behaviour, and depicts her trying to escape this through her budding romance with a young white boy. It confirms well established Orientalist stereotypes of the repressed Muslim girl who can only be happy if she breaks away from her repressive home culture and Westernises. Yet, it was directed by a Muslim woman, which brings with it an expectation that the director would be aware of the stigma surrounding such representations. It therefore received much criticism from some Muslims for perpetuating Orientalist stereotypes,\textsuperscript{14} but Baig argues that her film was never meant to represent all Muslims; it is representative of her own experiences.\textsuperscript{15} Similar sentiments have been raised in relation to successful Muslim comedians and actors Aziz Ansari and Ramy Youssef, and also Kumal Nanjiani, the lead actor from \textit{The Big Sick} (2017) who have received similar criticism regarding the reinforcement of established stereotypes in their narratives, and in response they have argued – like Baig – that they are telling their own stories, not representing Western

\textsuperscript{12}See N. Chowdry, [twitter], 14 December 2017, \url{https://twitter.com/nidachowdhry/status/941380365708492800}, (accessed 8 April 2019).


Muslims in general. Considering the fall out around a short lived reality television show in America called *All American Muslim* (2011) brings these issues into even sharper focus.

In November 2011, the American cable television network TLC (The Learning Channel) produced and aired an 8-part reality television show called *All-American Muslim* (2011) – a window into the lives of Lebanese American working-class families in Dearborn, Michigan. The show aimed to both normalise Muslim Americans by looking at their everyday lives while also striving to explore more controversial topics that are part and parcel of living as Muslims in America. The show started off with strong audience numbers, but soon faced a profound backlash from right-wing pundits and Muslims alike. Right wingers saw the show as a deceptive attempt at hiding the true nature of Muslims and their links to terrorism, forcing Americans to accept the hijab and normalising a faith that desires world domination and the inferiority of women. A campaign to stop the show and influence its advertisers was then run, causing retail chain Lowe’s to pull its sponsorship of the channel. Muslims were also quick to comment that while the show aimed to explore the lives of all American Muslims, all the characters were Lebanese Shia Muslim. In this sense, there was no attempt to represent the diversity of America’s rich and varied Muslim populations, including African American Muslims, who can be regarded as the first Muslims of the continent, predating the arrival of twentieth-century Muslim migrants. Ultimately the show ended at the end of the first season, with TLC claiming that it had not bowed to pressure, but rather, that audience numbers had plummeted. In his analysis of the uproar

---

16 Giorgis, ‘One way to be a Muslim Girl in America’.
20 Ali, ‘The Reality of the All American Muslim’.
surrounding *All-American Muslim*, Muslim commentator Wajahat Ali explores the Muslim critique of the show and argues that:

representing Muslims and Islam in the mainstream is an utterly thankless job. The term ‘Muslim’ is itself so politically and culturally loaded that it is impossible to escape controversy, no matter how trivial or manufactured. Since Muslims are a marginalised community with very few positive mainstream representations, audiences unfairly project onto these five families all their own insecurities, assumptions, fears, political ideologies, religious opinions, personal stories and other gratuitous baggage. So, if the characters do not 100% reflect the reality of certain audience members, then they cease to be authentic or valid.\(^{22}\)

This comment is a clear articulation of the burden of representation, describing how Muslims suffer from a heightened awareness of others’ perceptions, that results in acute sensitivity to the representational economy surrounding Muslims. This is a symptom of existing on the periphery of hegemonic Western society as a vilified and scorned group, and although more complex and rounded representations are a likely ‘cure’, the resulting focus on representation also has a way of exacerbating the condition. Although Muslims come into these representative spaces as a maligned group understandably looking for acceptance, insisting that certain types of representation are ‘unacceptable’ – even those created by Muslims about Muslims – is against the diversity of representation that is wished for.

**From Representation to Dialogue**

As has been demonstrated across this thesis, integrated representations often create contradictions; that is, while such texts may challenge certain stereotypes or create integrated

\(^{22}\)Ali, ‘The Reality of the All American Muslim’.
characterisations of Muslims, they often reinforce other stereotypes or create new ones that are as problematic as they ones they are trying to challenge. So is this a problem? Or as Muslims who consume these texts, do we need to be more accepting that the diverse representations and narratives that we desire, the ones that go beyond the ‘burden of representation’, will not always accord with a dominant accepted view or definition of how Muslims should be represented within the Muslim community? I think that if we wish to see more everyday stories of Muslims, we must be ready accept contradictory narratives, ones that we may not always subscribe to in totality.

This once again points to the importance of continuing dialogue, which is robustly fostered through screen representations, especially those that go beyond simply debunking myths, instead pushing viewers to feel uncomfortable at times, and to continually reevaluate their positions. Screen culture can and does raise important questions about the blind spots of multiculturalism in a transnational context, prompting audiences to think more deeply about the shortcomings of Western concepts of diversity, to feel sympathy for those who have experienced trauma and even to explore the social, economic and historical roots of issues such as terror and extremism. Such dialogue supports people from different backgrounds to learn more about each other, and to participate in ongoing negotiations of difference. It is also a core skill of acculturation. Fostering such dialogic interactions also goes beyond the binary categories of East/West, good/bad, or right/wrong that so often govern East-West relations. The more the acculturating process continues, the more it will yield new knowledge about others, and through this new negotiations and perspectives will arise.

Yet, recent developments in Western nations, especially movements towards politically influential and aggressive right-wing perspectives, consistently threaten to compromise the positive influence of integrating processes. The growth of populism and subsequent inclinations towards nationalism and xenophobia in the US and parts of Europe are shaped, in part, by the
increased flow of refugees from the Middle East and Asia. The election of leaders such as Donald Trump have made these tensions very open and contested in the American context, with hostile rhetoric championed by the ‘alt right’ public leading to increased racist attacks on Muslims and other traditionally vilified groups in society such as Jews and African Americans. This has spread across American society, into classrooms in the form of bullying and intimidation, and onto the streets in the form of protests and violence in places such as Charlottesville. In Australia, xenophobic political commentary circulates more freely, with many Australian politicians using language associating Muslims and extremism, and there has been a marked increase in Islamophobic attacks occurring in Australia over the past few years, which culminated with the inhuman terror attack on a mosque in Christchurch this year by an Australian white supremacist terrorist, leading to the death of 51 Muslims. Populist rhetoric has thus cultivated the nascent racism that persists in certain segments of Western society, rendering it disturbingly ubiquitous and tolerable. And, as global politics becomes more politically, socially and culturally polarised, screen culture often follows suit, appealing to different social and ideological segments of the market.


27Iner, ‘Islamophobia in Australia’, pg. 5.


sides of the cultural and political spectrum try to throw their economic and political weight around, trying to influence what is being said through economic and social boycotts. As these examples suggest, those trying to challenging Western dominance and power are now being energetically countered.

My personal experience as an Australian Muslim in this context has been that since September 11, Muslims in the West and especially in my country of Australia have worked hard to transcend the ‘extremist or good Muslim’ binary that the West has imposed on them. We have opened up our places of worship, striven to connect with different segments of society, engaged in interfaith and intercultural dialogue, and argued with fellow Muslims who foster further conflict or polarisation within our communities. Yet for all of these efforts to model an ethnorelative or integrated sensibility, Muslims have continued to be vilified in the news media and featured in xenophobic political campaigns, which have nourished and legitimised the extremism of white supremacist terrorists such as Brenton Tarrant who killed 51 Muslims at a Christchurch mosque in 2019. The massive trauma that Muslim communities in places like Australia are experiencing in the wake of Christchurch can very easily bring with it a sense of disillusionment and the risk of abandoning the process of dialogue or integration, as it may be felt that such efforts have not afforded Muslims the social capital of being regarded as equal citizens or even human, and it hasn’t made us any safer, as our bodies and places of worship are today more vulnerable than they ever have been. Indeed, as has been touched upon in this thesis, second and third generation Muslims in Western nations are aware of the political forces that press upon them, and attacks such as Christchurch will continue to unsettle their sense of belonging in modern Western societies, which in turn impacts how they perceive themselves as citizens. Such

---

sensitivities and traumas will inevitably be carefully considered by those creating representations of Muslims for Western screens in the future, providing further nuance to the intercultural negotiation involving complex themes of trauma, terror, grief and loss that has been explored across this thesis.

As the Christchurch tragedy underlines, the capacity for dialogue across difference has never been more vital. However unrewarding and futile this process may sometimes feel, it is preferable to the polarising logics of conflict and war. This thesis ultimately argues that screen culture provides a valuable space in support of dialogue, and that Muslims therefore need to evaluate representations of ourselves across the screenscape based primarily on whether they prompt productive intercultural dialogue and understanding, instead of based on whether they are a ‘desirable’ or ‘accurate’ reflection of a diverse faith and culture. My analysis of texts undertaken throughout this thesis attempts to demonstrate how such an approach can be accomplished.
Bibliography


Beale, L., ‘Hollywood Has Long Shown Discomfort with Interracial Couples, But Change is Happening’, Los Angeles Times, 10 November 2016,


Burt, R., Medieval and Early Modern Film and Media, New York, Palgrave Macmillian, 2008.


Cilano, C., From Solidarity to Schisms: 9/11 and After in Fiction and Film Outside the US, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2009.


*Full Interview: Little Mosque on the Prairie*, [online video], 2012, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ZQSRmM6K_s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ZQSRmM6K_s) (accessed 30 June 2018).


Razack, S., Casting out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2008.


Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Toleration, [website]  


Filmography

24, dir. Robert Cochran and Joel Surnow R., USA, Imagine Entertainment, 2001-10, [DVD].
Acropolis Now, dir. Pino Amenta, AUS, Crawford Productions, 1989-92, [videocassette].
Aladdin, dir. Ron Clements and John Musker, USA, Walt Disney Pictures, 1992, [DVD].
Allo Allo, dir. David Croft, UK, BBC, 1982-92, [videocassette].
Alex and Eve, dir. Peter Andrikidis, AUS, Magic Box Entertainment, 2016, [DVD].
American Sharia, dir. Omar Regan, USA, Boot Strapped Films, 2015, [DVD].
The Big Sick, dir. Michael Showalter, USA, Apatow Films, 2017, [DVD].
Black Hawk Down, dir. Ridley Scott, USA, Jerry Bruckheimer Films, 2001, [DVD].
Black Panther, dir. Ryan Coogler, USA, Marvel, 2018, [DVD].
Citizen Khan, dir. Anil Gupta and Richard Pinto, UK, BBC, 2012-, [streaming].
The Comedy Company, dir. Jo Lane, AUS, 10 Network, 1988-90, [videocassette].
The Crusades, dir. Cecil B. DeMille, USA, Paramount, 1936, [DVD].
Dallas, dir. David Jacobs, USA, Lorimar, 1978-91, [DVD].
The Dark Tower, dir. Nikolaj Arcel, USA, Columbia Pictures, 2017, [DVD].
Dracula Untold, dir. Gary Shore, USA, Universal Pictures, 2014, [DVD].
East West 101, dir. Peter Andrikidis, AUS, Knapman Wyld, 2007-11 [DVD].
Full Frontal, dir. Ted Emery, AUS, 7 Network, 1993-97, [videocassette].
Friends, dir. Gary Halvorson, USA, Warner Bros, 1994-04, [DVD].
Game of Thrones, dir. David Benioff and D.B Weiss, USA, HBO, 2011- [DVD].

Ghost in the Shell, dir. Rupert Sanders, USA, Paramount Pictures, 2017, [DVD].

Go Back to Where You Came From, dir. Ivan O’Mahoney, AUS, SBS, 2011-15, [streaming].

The Great Wall, dir. Yimou Zhang, CHI, Legendary East, 2016, [DVD].

Green Zone, dir. Paul Greengrass, USA, Universal Pictures, 2010, [DVD].

Heartbreak High, dir. Andrew Prowse, AUS, Gannon Television, 1994-99, [DVD].

Here come the Habibs!, dir. Darren Ashton, AUS, Jungle FTV, 2016-17, [streaming].


Hasan Minhaj: Homecoming King, dir. Christopher Storer, USA, Art & Industry, 2017, [streaming].

Housos, dir. Paul Fenech, AUS, SBS, 2011-13, [streaming].

Instant Star, dir. Graeme Campbell, CAN, Epitome Pictures, 2004-08, [DVD].

Kingdom of Heaven, dir. Ridley Scott, USA, Twentieth Century Fox, 2005, [DVD].

The Kite Runner, dir. Marc Forster, USA, Dreamworks, 2007, [DVD].

The Last Airbender, dir. M. Night Shymalan, USA, Paramount Pictures, 2010, [DVD].

Law and Order, dir. Dick Wolf, USA, NBC, 1990-2010, [streaming].

Lawrence of Arabia, dir. David Lean, UK, Horizon Pictures, 1962, [DVD].


Lost, dir. Jack Bender et al, USA, Bad Robot, 2004-10, [DVD].


Mad Men, dir. Phil Abraham, USA, Lionsgate, 2007-15, [streaming].


Master of None, dir. Aziz Ansari, USA, Universal, 2015–, [streaming].

Midnight Express, dir. Alan Parker, USA, Columbia Pictures, 1978, [DVD].

The Mosque Next Door, AUS, SBS/Southern Pictures, 2017, [streaming].

Munich, dir. Steven Spielberg, USA, DreamWorks, 2005, [DVD].

Number 96, dir. Brian Phillis, AUS, Network Ten, 1972-77, [DVD].

The Night Of, dir. Steve Zaillian and James March, USA, HBO, 2016, [streaming].

Oz, dir. Tom Fontana, USA, Levinson Fontana, 1997-03, [DVD].

Pizza, dir. Paul Fenech, AUS, Antichocko Productions, 2000-07, [DVD].

Quantico, dir. Joshua Safran, USA, Mark Gordon Company, 2015-18, [streaming].

Ready or Not, dir. Alyse Rosenberg, CAN, Insight Production, 1993-97, [videocassette].


Robin Hood, dir. Otto Bathurst, USA, Summit Entertainment, 2018, [streaming].

Robin and Marian, dir. Richard Lester, USA, Columbia Pictures, 1976, [DVD].


BBC’s Robin Hood, dir. Matthew Evans, UK, BBC, 2006-09, [DVD].

The Reluctant Fundamentalist, dir. Mira Nair, USA, Mirabai Films, 2012, [DVD].

They’re a Weird Mob, dir. Michael Powell, AUS, Williamson/Powell, 1966, [DVD].

True Detective, dir. Cary Joji Fukunaga, USA, Anonymous Content, 2014-, [streaming].


Seinfeld, dir. Andy Ackerman and Tom Cherones, USA, Castle Rock, 1989-98, [videocassette].

The Sopranos, dir. David Chase, USA, HBO, 1999-2007, [DVD].

Summer Heights High, dir. Stuart McDonald, AUS, Princess Pictures, 2007, [DVD].


The 13th Warrior, dir. John McTiernan, USA, Touchstone Pictures, 1999, [DVD].


Traitor, dir. Jeffrey Nachmanoff, USA, Overture Films, 2008, [DVD].

Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen, dir. Michael Bay, USA, Paramount Pictures, 2009, [DVD].

True Lies, dir. James Cameron, USA, 20th Century Fox, 1994, [DVD].

The Wire, dir. Joe Chapelle et al., USA, HBO, 2002-08, [DVD].

Wildside, dir. Andrew Prowse et al., AUS, 1997-1999, [DVD].

You See Monsters, dir. Tony Jackson, AUS, ABC, 2017, [streaming].