

**SPEAKING BACK: EXPANDING PARADIGMS IN MIDDLE EAST FILM**

**by**

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**submitted in accordance with the requirements for  
the degree of**

**Doctor of Literature and Philosophy**

**in the subject**

**English**

**at the**

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**SUPERVISOR: Prof Deirdre Byrne**

**February 2017**

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

A special thank you is due to my supervisor, Prof Deirdre Byrne, for her unwavering support during the course of many emails and drafts between South Africa and Dubai. Her expertise and meticulous attention to detail have helped me bring my observations of the new culture that I am living in onto paper. She has been my mentor and guide.

I dedicate my doctorate to Ian, who shares with me the love of film and the belief that popular culture has the power to create perceptions, and whose encouragement led me to undertake this project.

## **Abstract:**

This thesis undertakes a study of four films, directed by Arab directors from Palestine, Lebanon, America and the United Arab Emirates, and argues that these works speak back to the negative representation of Arabs in mainstream Hollywood films. It examines the methods these directors have deployed to contribute to a consciousness on a cultural level. These include the films *Amreeka* (dir. Dabis, 2009: USA, National Geographic Entertainment), *Paradise Now* (dir. Abu-Assad, 2005: USA, Warner Bros), *West Beirut* (dir. Doueiri, 1998: Belgium, France, Norway, Lebanon: 38 Production) and *City of Life* (dir. Mostafa, 2009: UAE: Filmworks). I argue that these films speak back to the representation of Arabs created by Hollywood. In all the films I analyse the representation of the characters, which allows viewers into their frames of reference and makes them relatable. The characters are ordinary people facing the situations of everyday life in various settings. Whether it is the limitation of their geographical location while living under occupation in Palestine as in *Amreeka* and *Paradise Now*, emigrating to America and coping with xenophobia as in *Amreeka*, living in a country exploding as civil war breaks out as in *West Beirut*, or adjusting to multiculturalism as in *City of Life*, filmmakers are allowing viewers into the lives of Arabs, representing them in terms of all their successes, failures, vulnerabilities and excesses. They are human beings with the same concerns as all humanity, for peace in their countries, the stability of their societies and the safety of their families. My investigation analyses the films through the theoretical lenses of Stuart Hall's theory of representation (2012), Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1997), and decoloniality as advocated by

Maldonado-Torres (2014) and Mignolo (2011). A postmodern reading of *City of Life* is made within Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality (2010), Lyotard's concept of the grand narrative (1986) and Žižek's concept of the dematerialisation of real life. A close reading of the films, using the research methods of semiotics and narratology, enables a deconstruction of some obscure elements, such as the embedded meaning in dialogue or the messages implicit in the *mise en scène*. In the process, cultural contradictions and similarities are explored and uncovered.

#### KEY TERMS:

Representation, stereotyping, Islamophobia, Middle East film, Arab Film, post colonialism, Orientalism, decoloniality, postmodernism, semiotics, narratology

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

The representation of Arabs in Hollywood films has been largely stereotypical and does injustice to Arabs. Previous researchers have identified this phenomenon and explored its occurrence in detailed content analyses. For instance, in his analysis of Hollywood films entitled *Reel Bad Arabs*, Jack Shaheen (2008) identifies over 1,000 films in which negative representations occur, and John Cones (2012) identifies Arabs as falling within a racial group blatantly stereotyped in Hollywood. For those who do not have any connection with Arabs, these representations might be the only ones that they see and the significations become established with constant repetition. In my thesis I will explore four films directed by Arabs and examine the methods the directors have deployed to contribute to a more nuanced approach to the representation of Arabs on a cultural level. These include the films *Amreeka* (dir. Dabis, 2009: USA, National Geographic Entertainment), *Paradise Now* (dir. Abu-Assad, 2005: USA, Warner), *West Beirut* (dir. Doueiri, 1998: Belgium, France, Norway, Lebanon: 38 Production) and *City of Life* (dir. Mostafa, 2009: UAE: Filmworks). My investigation positions the films within the theoretical paradigms of Stuart Hall's representation, Edward Said's Orientalism, Nelson Maldonado-Torres and Walter Mignolo's decoloniality, Jean Baudrillard's hyperreality and Jean-François Lyotard's grand narratives in a narrative and semiotic analysis of the films.

More stereotypical representations include depictions of Arabs as fundamentalists and terrorists, whose missions are to destroy America. Often depicted as greedy, murderous, rich and fanatical, they are responsible for hijackings, beheadings and destruction of the symbols of American culture. These representations, delivered via the powerful medium of film, enable wide circulation of the stereotype. Shaheen (2008:xix) points out, for instance, that blockbusters, such as *True Lies* (1994), *Courage under Fire* (1996), *Executive Decision* (1996) and *Rules of Engagement* (2000), show "GIs, civilians, secret agents, the American president, Israeli troops, even cowboys, terminating reel barbaric Arabs." In his study of patterns of bias in Hollywood films, John Cones (2012:13) explains that Hollywood's most blatant patterns of bias fall within the categories of race, ethnicity and/or national origin. He includes Arabs and Arab-Americans in this group. I argue that, post-9/11, this representation has escalated to the extent that the conflation of the equation "Arab" = "Muslim" and "Muslim" = "terrorist" has been established in the discourse of Hollywood.

The activity of Muslim terrorists, such as the Paris attacks<sup>1</sup> on 13 November 2015, serves to magnify and confirm this discourse. Political debate further inflames and ignites opinion, with President Donald Trump's xenophobic comment during his election campaign on keeping all Muslims out of America, for instance, gaining great media attention. CNN (Diamond 2015) made this announcement:

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<sup>1</sup> "There were seven coordinated terror attacks in Paris carried out by militants, killing at least 130 people. The first attacks were launched virtually simultaneously, with two explosions close to the Stade de France at just after 9.20pm local time, four miles apart" (Steafel et al 2015).

Republican presidential front-runner Donald Trump called Monday for barring all Muslims from entering the United States. "Donald J. Trump is calling for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country's representatives can figure out what is going on," a campaign press release said.

In his response, Trump twice specifically mentions "World Trade Centre 1 and World Trade Centre 2" as well the Paris attacks. His random comments about "people chopping off heads" throughout the Middle East leads his interviewer to make the comment, "You can't throw out notions without any checking of them." However, it is this type of assumption about barbarism in the Middle East that leads to xenophobic intolerance of the Arabs in the region as the evil Other.

A study by Bakalian and Bozorgmehr (2009) finds that immediately after the horrific attacks of 9/11, "individuals who appeared Middle Eastern or had Arabic- or Islamic-sounding names became the scapegoats of Americans' anger and vengeance" (2009:1). They give examples of the people who were murdered in reprisals for the 9/11 attacks: Balbir Singh Sodhi was the first murder victim in the backlash and Bakalian and Bozorgmehr claim that this was because his traditional Sikh looks, consisting of a *dastar* (turban) and *kesh* (unshorn hair), were confused with Osama Bin Laden's *kaffiyeh* (male headdress) and beard. Ironically, Sikhs are neither Arab nor Muslim.<sup>2</sup> Hate crimes and incidents of bias spiked immediately. According to an organization called South Asian American Leaders of Tomorrow

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<sup>2</sup> In 2001 the *New York Times* was quick to report this case of mistaken identity: "The nation's Sikhs, conspicuous in turbans that resemble the head wrap of suspected terrorist Osama bin Laden, have suddenly found themselves particularly vulnerable. By yesterday afternoon, more than 200 Sikhs had reported incidents to a Sikh anti-defamation group" (Goodstein and Lewin cited in Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009:1).

(SAALT 2001), 645 incidents of bias were reported in metropolitan newspapers across the country in the week after 9/11 (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr, 2009:1). The *New York Times* put it most succinctly: "Since the attacks, people who look Middle Eastern and Muslim, whatever their religion or nation of origin, have been singled out for harassment, threats and assaults" (Cited in Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009:2).

My central argument is that the demonisation of the Other is rife in all societies, not least to South Africa during apartheid. Unlike the case of South Africa, however, Arabs are not seen in terms of national identity, but as a homogenous group, inhabiting the whole of the Middle East, irrespective of country, creed or local culture. The grand narrative of religion overpowers much of their representation.

My thesis will argue that Arab filmmakers from numerous countries in the Middle East and America are speaking back to Hollywood's negative representation in various cinematic ways. By making films about Arabs in Palestine, Lebanon, America and the United Arab Emirates who have to face the problems of identity, who struggle against colonisation, who face racial profiling when they emigrate, who resort to suicide bombing as a means of protest against colonisation and who face the challenges of cultural diversity, I argue that Arabs are personalised in the films under discussion, so that audiences can relate to them and understand their stories. It is, nevertheless, necessary to explain that I do not suggest that suicide

bombing is a valid means of protest, but will analyse the suicide bombers and their situations in an attempt to understand their motivations.

## **THEORETICAL APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY**

It is necessary, at the outset, to explain that I am not an Arab and do not presume to have insider knowledge of Arab cultures and societies, but am writing as a Western expatriate in the Middle East. I will adopt a qualitative approach to my research since I am focusing on the films as texts that have a bearing on the representation of Arabs, Arab identities and Muslim ethnicities. My theoretical approach will draw primarily on Stuart Hall's theory of representation, Edward Said's theory of Orientalism and Roland Barthes's theory of semiotics. In addition I will refer to the theory of decoloniality as proposed by Nelson Maldonado-Torres and Walter D. Mignolo in my analysis of *West Beirut* and will employ a fourth theoretical approach within a postmodern reading of the final film I will be analysing, namely *City of Life*. In addition to the use of Hall's representation and Said's Orientalism, I will apply Jean Baudrillard's concept of "simulacra" (2010:1) to identify the "hyperreal" elements of the film and Jean-François Lyotard's concept of narratives to identify grand narratives in the film.

I have chosen to draw on Hall's theory of representation because he sees representation as a signifying practice that produces the shared meanings that create culture. As cultural understanding — and misunderstanding — is at the heart of the action of the films that I analyse, this is an appropriate and helpful way of

viewing the films. Hall draws distinctions between three different theories: “the reflective, the intentional and the constructionist approaches to representation” (2012:15). In clarifying these approaches, Hall asks the question whether language simply reflects a meaning that is already in existence; whether it expresses the author’s intention only; or whether meaning is constructed through language. The conclusion he reaches is that the constructionist approach has had “the most significant impact on cultural studies in recent years” (2012:15). This approach includes the semiotic method largely shaped by De Saussure, and the discursive approach, associated with Michel Foucault (1989). Hall’s theory of Otherness is applied to four accounts. The first comes from linguistics, “from the approach associated with De Saussure” (2012:234-235). The second explanation comes from constructed meaning through a dialogue with the Other (2012:235); and the third is anthropological, where culture depends on “giving things meaning within a classificatory system” (2012:236). The fourth account is psychoanalytic and relates to the role of “difference” in our psychic lives (2012:237). All of these approaches will be shown to be relevant to the analysis of the four films selected for analysis.

Regarding Hall’s first account, I will analyse the linguistic function in terms of relevant signifiers and signifieds in the films. For instance, the signifier “checkpoint” will be discussed in some detail in relation to *Amreeka* and *Paradise Now* as it has the signified meaning of oppression and occupation for the citizens of Palestine. There are numerous examples of Hall's second account, "constructed meaning through dialogue with the Other", within the dialogues in the films. For instance, in

*Amreeka*, when the main character, Muna Farah (Nisreen Faour) is questioned by the immigration officer, she misunderstands the term “occupation” and replies, “Yes, for 40 years”. The resultant irritation and eye rolling of the officer foreshadows many similar dialogues with the Other to follow in the film. A pervasive example of Hall's “anthropological” account is the classificatory system of religion in all the films under discussion. The assumption that all Muslims are Arabs and that all Arabs are Muslims is frequently encountered in Hollywood films and is discussed in some detail in my literature review with reference to the studies made by Shaheen (2008) and Cones (2012). The further conflation of the terms “Muslim” and “terrorist” has led to the profiling of all Muslims as possible subversives in various scenes in *Amreeka*. In the film *West Beirut*, the Christian girl, May (Rola Al Amim), who lives in a Muslim neighbourhood, experiences similar marginalisation due to the heightened anthropological categorisation of religion when the civil war breaks out in Lebanon in 1975. This insertion of a Christian character is a device used by both Dabis in *Amreeka* and Abu-Assad in *Paradise Now*. Finally, Hall's fourth account, the psychoanalytic element, is reflected in the film *Amreeka*, where the main character, Muna, is both corporeally and geographically alienated, which impacts on her psychological wellbeing.

Mindful of Edward Said's profound question related to knowledge and power, “how does one interpret another culture unless prior circumstances have made that culture available for interpretation in the first place?” (1997:139), I will not presume to have insider knowledge of Arab culture, but will rely on qualitative research using

Said's theories, as well as observations by Jack Shaheen (2009), to underpin my findings about the representations of Arabs in the films under discussion. Said's *Orientalism* (1997) discusses the generalisation of the label, "Islam", and points out that the assumption that church and state form a single, coherent entity is an "unacceptable generalization of the most irresponsible sort". It is his contention (1997:xv-xvi) that:

What we expect from the serious study of Western societies, with its complex theories, enormously variegated analyses of social structures, histories, cultural formations, and sophisticated languages of investigation, we should also expect from the study and discussion of Islamic societies in the West.

I will attempt in this thesis to undertake such a serious study of selected films, by viewing them through Said's theoretical lens, thereby using variegated analyses of social structures, histories and cultural formations.

The naturalisation of Muslims as terrorists, in Said's view, has reached "a startling prominence at a time when racial or religious misrepresentations of every other cultural group are no longer circulated with such impunity" (1997:xii). I will argue that this has been further conflated to naturalise all Arabs as Muslims, whereas not all Arabs are, in fact, Muslims, as Said points out (1994:45). He explains that since the 1860s, as a result of "the imperial competition for converts" (1994:45), there has been a Protestant community scattered principally in Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. This is a minority group and is mentioned here as it presents another community Othered within its cultural milieu and is particularly relevant to the study of the film

*Amreeka* where the main character Muna, a Christian, faces the stereotyping directed at her Muslim compatriots. The Muslim/terrorist conflation is particularly upsetting to her when she is job hunting and a potential employer responds, "don't blow the place up", when he hears that she is an Arab.

Dissenting voices in contradiction of Said's scholarship include those of Muravchik (2013) and Zarnett (2007): the latter names the most recent additions to this literature as being Warraq (2007) and Varisco (2008). Ashcroft and Ahluwalia (1999:71) detail many of the dissenting voices, including those of Edward Alexander (1989:49), which Ashcroft sees as being "more interesting for its revelation of the level of hostility possible between Said and his critics than for any incisive critique of Said's position"(cited in Ashcroft and Ahluwalia (1999:71). Such hostility is also evident in the works of Dennis Porter and Bernard Lewis cited in Ashcroft and Ahluwalia (1999:72), as well as Daniel Pipes cited in Ashcroft and Ahluwalia (1999:73). Bernard Lewis' criticism is personal, as he says: "The whole passage is not merely false but absurd. It reveals a disquieting lack of knowledge of what scholars do and what scholarship is about" (1993:108). In spite of this type of personal attack, to this day Said commands great respect for his scholarship. For example, Muravchik (2013) points out, "According to a 2005 search on the utility 'Syllabus finder,' Said's books were assigned as reading in eight hundred and sixty-eight courses in American colleges and universities (counting only courses whose syllabi were available online)." These ranged across subjects including literary criticism, politics, anthropology, Middle East studies, and other disciplines including

postcolonial studies, a field which he explains as being widely credited with having grown out of Said's work. In addition, Muravchik explains, "More than forty books have been published about him, including even a few critical ones, but mostly adulatory, such as *The Cambridge Introduction to Edward Said*, published seven years after his death from leukemia in 2003. Georgetown University, UCLA, and other schools offer courses about him. A 2001 review for the *Guardian* called him 'arguably the most influential intellectual of our time.'"

In my opinion the evidence is overwhelming that there is a stereotypical view of the people of the Orient emanating from the West. This is borne out in the popular culture research of Jack Shaheen (2005, 2008, 2009) and Cones (2012), to which I will refer throughout this thesis. It also reaches a head in the debate about decoloniality. I agree with Said's argument that Orientalism represents a particular view of the world, and that viewing the world through an Orientalist lens distorts perceptions, a view that is relevant to my study of films of the Middle East. My argument is that the study of these films uncovers a three-dimensional view of Arabs, portrayed in terms of universal struggles and achievements. Said points out: "the term Orientalism is less preferred by specialists today, both because it is too vague and general and because it connotes the high-handed executive attitude of nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century European colonialism" (1978:112). He is of the opinion that even if Orientalism does not survive as it once did, it lives on academically through its doctrines and theses about the Orient and the Oriental, a viewpoint that I endorse and use as a framework for my analysis.

I will also refer to the significant emerging theory of decoloniality, which, in its broadest form, advocates dethroning Western-centric ideas about culture and power and replacing them with indigenous ideas. Two of its main exponents are Walter Mignolo and Nelson Maldonado-Torres. This theory is of particular relevance to my analysis of *West Beirut* (dir. Doueiri, 1998: Belgium, France, Norway, Lebanon: 38 Production) (discussed in detail in Chapter Five) where the schoolboy Tarek (Rami Doueiri) attempts to subvert the culture of France, represented here by the singing of *La Marseillaise*, the French national anthem, and replacing it with the Lebanese one, *Koullouna Lil Watan*. Mignolo (2011) explains, “Decoloniality has its historical grounding in the Bandung Conference of 1955 in which 29 countries from Asia and Africa gathered.”<sup>3</sup> The main goal of the conference was to find a common ground and vision for the future that was neither capitalism nor communism. That way was “decolonization”, a delinking from major Western macro-narratives.

Maldonado-Torres (2014:691) argues that religion and race have played a central role in the way peoples and societies have been “depicted, conceived, approached, and organized in the West for the last several centuries”. In the process, religion and race have come to define entire groups of people across nations. I believe this

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<sup>3</sup> The Bandung Conference was a meeting of Asian and African states organized by Indonesia, Myanmar (Burma), Ceylon (Sri Lanka), India, and Pakistan, which took place on 18-24 April 1955, in Bandung, Indonesia. In all, 29 countries representing more than half the world’s population sent delegates. The conference reflected the five sponsors’ dissatisfaction with what they regarded as a reluctance by the Western powers to consult with them on decisions affecting Asia; their concern over tension between the People’s Republic of China and the United States; their desire to lay firmer foundations for China’s peaceful relations with themselves and the West; their opposition to colonialism, especially French influence in North Africa; and Indonesia’s desire to promote its case (Mignolo, 2011).

argument is central to the depiction of the disintegration of the city in *West Beirut*, where the divisive nature of religion and race is highly evident in the danger that May faces when she, a Christian, heads into the Muslim sector, and in the racist epithets and actions of the school principal. Maldonado-Torres points out that a modern understanding of race and religion play a crucial role in the construction of subjectivity and human otherness. In addition, he posits (2014:694): “If colonization was central in the making of the modern world, then decolonization can be equally central in the effort to transcend its limits.” In his view, this is essential for any attempt to produce a form of discourse or practice that undermines the problematic aspects of Western modernity. Decolonisation has to involve, not simply independence, but the effort to create a new form of valuation altogether. “In this effort,” he believes, “every single element of Western modernity must be interrogated, which is not to say that the entire stock of ideas produced in modernity has to be rejected.” In my opinion, the latter phrase is highly significant as it calls for a more mediated approach to decoloniality, rather than the militant approach of Tareq, who wishes to obliterate France and all it stands for in *West Beirut*. In Tareq’s case, as the war invades every aspect of his life, he returns to a more nostalgic view of the colonial education he was receiving at the time of the outbreak of war, thereby choosing not to reject it in its entirety.

In an earlier paper, Maldonado-Torres uses the following rubric to give context to his postcontinental philosophy (2010:40):

It is no accident that the global geographical framework in use today is essentially a cartographic celebration of European power. After centuries of imperialism, the presumptions of a worldview of a once-dominant metropole have become part of the intellectual furniture of the world.... Metageography matters, and the attempt to engage it critically has only begun.

He explains that his concept of postcontinental philosophy also advances decolonial conceptions of history, subjectivity, and spatiality. He believes that the intellectual production of “third world” people is often presented as “an appendix to European philosophy” or “as a variety of continental philosophy” (2010:41) and, therefore, he reflects on some of the pitfalls of continental philosophy. He believes that the skewed sense of geo-political temporality and spatiality needs to be radically critiqued, or, more aptly put, decolonised. Without this kind of rapprochement between continental and analytic philosophies, the current problems of intellectual inequality are bound to be repeated.

Mignolo (2006), on the other hand, postulates that “the imperial imaginary” constructs phobias in the mind of civil society, but at the same time is aware that, on the other side of the imperial/colonial phobias, potent decolonial forces are at work. He specifically mentions these forces as operating among “Moslems (sic)<sup>4</sup> and Hispanics in the U.S., and Indians and Afros in South America” and asserts that the proletariat will not provide one single solution for “the wretched of the earth” (2006:13). In his opinion, Islamophobia and Hispanophobia are entrenched in “the

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<sup>4</sup> I use the spelling Muslim throughout this thesis: “**Muslim** is preferred by scholars and by English-speaking adherents of Islam.” Now, almost everybody uses **Muslim**. According to the Center for Nonproliferation Studies, “**Moslem** and **Muslim** are basically two different spellings for the same word” (Chen, Yii-Ann. 2002).

colonial horizon of modernity.” However, he believes that decolonial projects are at work, all over the world, “decolonizing (and denaturalizing)” what imperial rationality convinced us to be real, since in imperial logic, the real is accountable by only one rationality. He believes, “The racial matrix holding together the modern/colonial worldmatrix is unfolding and updated in what we are witnessing today as Islamophobia and Hispanophobia.” Obviously the concept of Islamophobia is most relevant to my thesis: however, the binary concept, mentioned here by Mignolo, points to the proliferation of “imperial/colonial phobias”. It is my contention that popular culture is a powerful instrument for the transmission of such phobias, as illustrated by the power of Hollywood’s Othering of “impure blood”,<sup>5</sup> as mentioned in my analysis of *West Beirut*, for instance.

In accordance with Mignolo’s view on the global reach of the decolonial project, the rise of decolonial attitudes in South Africa are evident in the youth of the country. Maldonado-Torres, speaking at the University of South Africa’s Summer School on Decoloniality (2017) explained, “the country’s (South Africa’s) youth were bound to take on the struggle to decolonise various institutions across South Africa because they have experienced democracy to be a myth.” Maldonado-Torres explained further that, although South African youth grew up with the rhetoric of democracy, this rhetoric did not meet the reality of existence in the country: “The youth are the spear of decolonial time and space.... That is why the youth created an earthquake in South Africa.” In *West Beirut* Tareq, a high school student, makes, maybe not an

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<sup>5</sup> A phrase from *La Marseillaise*.

earthquake, but definitely a tremor, in his attempt to decolonise the education system.

Said's theory of Orientalism is essentially a subversion of the East as it is constructed by the Western gaze, which is also at the core of colonial visions of Africa. Taking an even more forceful stance against colonialism, Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni's views are relevant for the Arab populations I am discussing. He proposes (2013:10): "What Africans must be vigilant against is the trap of ending up normalising and universalising coloniality as a natural state of the world. It must be unmasked, resisted and destroyed because it produced a world order that can only be sustained through a combination of violence, deceit, hypocrisy and lies." He points out further that coloniality must not be confused with colonialism, as coloniality survived the end of "direct colonialism". He refers to "postcolonies", which continue to affect lives in spite of the dethroning of "direct colonialism" and "administrative apartheid". Coloniality affects modern subjects in Africa and the entire global South to this day. Ndlovu-Gatsheni's writing reflects the emerging trend of decoloniality in critical theory, which advocates dethroning Western-centric ideas about culture and power and replacing them with indigenous ideas. Two of the main exponents in this emerging field are Walter D. Mignolo and Nelson Maldonado-Torres, whose theories support my argument in my analysis of *West Beirut*. Within the scope of my analysis of the film, decolonial practices are exemplified in the schoolyard where Tareq rails against the colonial attitudes so vividly depicted in the attitude and offensive words of the French headmistress.

I will adopt a fourth theoretical approach to the final film I will be analysing, *City of Life* (dir. Mostafa, 2009: UAE: Filmworks). In addition to the use of Hall's representation, I will apply Jean Baudrillard's concept of "simulacra" (2010:1) to identify the "hyperreal" elements of the film and Jean-François Lyotard's (1986) study of narratives to identify the grand narratives in the film. Set in Dubai, this film lends itself to a postmodern investigation of its cultural diversity, manufactured realities such as snow ski slopes, its mini- narratives and its replication of the New York skyline with not one, but two Chrysler Buildings standing side by side.

Baudrillard's view of the simulacrum can be integrated with De Saussure's theory of the sign and its postmodern transformation in *City of Life* in the following ways. The signifiers of hyperreality in the film, such as Peter Patel lookalike Basu, who seeks a career in Bollywood based on his appearance, and Guy Berger's comment, "I own this city", when all he has is a working visa to reside in Dubai, will be analysed in the chapters that follow. In my argument, I focus on Baudrillard's identification of the *simulacrum* and its relevance in the postmodern world. Within this context, *simulacra* in *City of Life* will be analysed within Baudrillard's description of the successive phases of the image in a four-step process:

it is the reflection of a profound reality;  
it masks and denatures a profound reality;  
it masks the absence of a profound reality;  
it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum.  
(Baudrillard 2010:6)

In the extreme Baudrillardian form described in the final step, the loss of the real seems to legitimise a callous indifference to suffering, such as that displayed by Guy Berger towards his former girlfriend.

The postmodern condition evident in *City of Life* will also be analysed within Lyotard's concept of the grand narrative. He argues that, in modern societies, totality is maintained by means of "grand narratives", which signify the practices and beliefs of those societies. In each belief system or ideology there is at least one grand narrative. All aspects of modern societies depend on these grand narratives. Storey explains Lyotard's view of metanarratives as operating "through inclusion and exclusion, as homogenizing forces, marshalling heterogeneity into ordered realms; silencing and excluding other discourses, other voices in the name of universal principles and general goals" (2006:132). However, "The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation" (Lyotard 1986:37). I argue that these "grand narratives" are similar to what Althusser calls ideological state apparatuses (2006). Although Lyotard does not write about religion, his definition of postmodernity as an "incredulity toward metanarratives" and "the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation" (1986:xxiv) is seen by Storey as referring to "the supposed contemporary collapse or widespread rejection of all overarching and totalizing frameworks which seek to tell universalist stories ("metanarratives"): Marxism, liberalism, Christianity, for example" (2006:132). The metanarrative of the Christian religion has given great power to the

church for two millennia and does indeed tell 'a universalist story'. Similarly, I argue, the *mise en scène* of *City of Life* conveys or points to the universalism of Islam in a particular city by foregrounding certain visual motifs.

To uncover the cultural assumptions at play in the filmic representation of Arabs and the Middle East, I will undertake a syntagmatic and narrative analysis of relevant syntagms and *mise-en-scènes* in four films by Arab filmmakers. A combination of the various methods of research enables what Jane Stokes calls "a more textured understanding" (2008:27) of the films under discussion. A close reading from a semiotic point of view facilitates a deconstruction of some obscure elements, such as the embedded meaning in dialogue or the messages implicit in the *mise en scène*. The concept of *mise en scène*, as described by Susan Hayward (2013:239), was originally a theatre term meaning staging, which crossed over to signify the film production practices involved in the framing of shots. She mentions that, first, it connotes setting, costume and lighting and, second, movement within the frame: "The concept became endowed with a more specific meaning by the *Cahiers du cinéma* group (established in 1951) who used it to justify their appellation of certain American filmmakers as auteurs" (2013:239-240). She further explains that given that these directors were working under the aegis of Hollywood, they had no control over the script but they could stage their shots and so be deemed to have a discernible style. *Mise en scène* then is the expressive tool at the filmmaker's disposal, which a viewer can read to determine the style of the filmmaker. Bignell (2001:195) sees one of the pleasures of narrative as its putting

into play and resolution of cultural contradictions and problems. Narrative analyses of various filmic syntagms will examine the cultural problems that are “put into play” when Dabis, in the film *Amreeka*, for instance, portrays the plight of Muna, whose excellent academic qualifications and work experience as a banker in Palestine count for nothing in Illinois.

Beck has written a study of three films about “immigrant struggles”: *Yoo-Hoo Mrs. Goldberg*, *District 9* and *Amreeka*. He acknowledges that these representations can be disturbing and points to the serious message of *Amreeka*, which he sees as the most unsettling of the three films (2010:87):

A third movie, ‘Amreeka,’ deals with an ethnic immigrant drama of the present, neither sentimental about past ethnic struggles nor frightening about future disasters. It is, therefore, the most unsettling and least amusing of the three, in spite of its conventional upbeat ending.

It is indeed unsettling as the anti-Arab sentiment is heightened during the plot development of the film, which is set during the outbreak of the Iraqi war. The racist reactions of the pupils when Fadi (Melkar Muallem) joins their school, and their bullying of his mother, Muna, raises issues of xenophobia that are not only unsettling but dangerous as the plot unfolds.

My exploration of the selected films will be conducted according to a syntagmatic, and, more generally, semiotic analysis. This field has been problematised on the grounds that it produces subjective evaluations. Gunning, for instance, refers to Metz’s attempt to think past the limited perspective of semiological analysis of the

film text and asserts that such analysis is “certainly not dismissible” (cited in Bennett and Frow 2008:192). I agree that such subjectivity is inevitable in semiotic analyses, and that cultural proclivities might influence the selection of signs for analysis, in the first place, as well as the attempt to arrive at final connotative meanings. I will therefore supplement my empirical analysis with theoretical perspectives to arrive at a more objective position in my thesis. For instance, the signifier “checkpoint” in *Amreeka* and *West Beirut* is loaded with political and militaristic connotations. I analyse this within the framework of the disruptive influence that the checkpoint has on the lives of the protagonists in the film. I will support my reading of the connotations of disruption and militaristic bullying with theoretical viewpoints of representation and postcoloniality as well as secondary readings, such as the newspaper articles written in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* by Israeli journalist, Amira Hass. Her experiences of living in Gaza among the Palestinians have been published in her book, *Reporting from Ramallah: An Israeli Journalist in an Occupied Land* (2003).

In my semiotic analyses of the films, I will apply the theories of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce. In Chandler’s view, theirs are the two leading models of what constitutes a sign (2002:17). Chandler describes the Saussurian module as a “dyadic” model. Focusing on linguistic signs, such as words, Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics* (1916) defines a sign as being composed of a “signifier” and a “signified”. Contemporary commentators tend to describe the signifier as the form that the sign takes and the signified as the

concept to which it refers: “For Saussure, both the signifier (the “sound pattern”) and the signified (the concept) were purely “psychological”. Both were “*form* rather than *substance*” (Chandler 2002:18, original emphasis). Chandler sees Saussure’s model as being adapted in a more materialistic way in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The signifier is now interpreted as the material or physical form of the sign; the sign is the whole that results from the association of the signifier with the signified and this relationship is referred to as “signification” (Chandler 2002:19). Chandler’s three examples of signification (the word “open” on a shop window, on a button inside a lift and on a box with a flap) give worthwhile examples of this signification system in context. Chandler reiterates the point that “the Saussurean (linguistic) sign is a feature which tends to be neglected in many popular commentaries” (2002:20).

Clearly, this explanation only touches on the Saussurean sign system, and Chandler addresses many issues, including the “arbitrariness” (later modified into the “relative arbitrariness”) of the sign.<sup>6</sup> However, for the purposes of this thesis, the definition of signification in the previous paragraph will be used as a model. It

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<sup>6</sup> Duan (2012:55) explains the arbitrariness of the sign in the following terms, “We say that the signal and the signification are arbitrary in that there is no one-to-one relationship between them within one language or across different languages. More specifically, different sound patterns or signals can be used to symbolize the same signification; different concepts or significations can be symbolized by the same signal.” He offers the examples, “elevator” and “lift”, “fall” and “autumn”. On the other hand, Saussure admits, “A language is not completely arbitrary, for the system has a certain rationality” (Saussure 1983, 73; Saussure 1974, 73 cited in Chandler 2007:26). For instance, signifiers must conform to existing patterns of language to constitute well-formed combinations of sounds. Chandler offers the example of the word “screwdriver”, which is not wholly arbitrary since it is a meaningful combination of two existing signs.

should be mentioned, that, at the same time as De Saussure, Charles Peirce was working on a model of the sign, “semiology” and taxonomies of the sign in the United States. According to Chandler, in contrast with Saussure’s dyadic model, Peirce offered a triadic model. This consisted of the *representamen* or form, an *interpretant* or the sense made of the sign, and an *object*, to which the sign refers (Chandler 2002:30).

The interaction between the *representamen*, *interpretant* and *object* constitutes what Peirce calls “semiosis”. Chandler points out that Peirce’s model includes an object or referent which is not included in Saussure’s model. The *representamen* and *interpretant* have a similar meaning to Saussure’s *signifier* and *signified* (Chandler 2002:33) and, in the analysis of the films, Saussure’s terms “signifier” and “signified” will be used with the understanding that Peirce’s insights are also taken into account. A signified can itself play the role of a signifier, as is familiar to anyone who uses a dictionary to go beyond the original definition to look up yet another word which it employs. This concept can be seen as going beyond Saussure's emphasis on the value of a sign in relation to other signs.

Peirce also classifies signs in terms of differing “modes of relationship” between signs and referents. These, as described by Chandler (2002:36), are:

*symbolic*, a mode in which the signifier does *not* resemble the signified but which is fundamentally *arbitrary*; *iconic*, a mode in which the signifier is perceived as *resembling* or imitating the signified; *indexical*, a mode in which the signifier is not arbitrary but is directly connected in some way (physically or causally).

The work of De Saussure, Peirce and Chandler are all relevant to my research. De Saussure inaugurated an understanding of a split between 'the sign' and 'what it means'. His work has been given more depth by subsequent theorists, especially Peirce and Chandler. Although I use De Saussure's terms, they are applied here in a more nuanced way than his usage, in the light of subsequent research by Peirce and Chandler. For example, it is argued in Chapter Three that the “checkpoint” signifier in the opening scene of *Amreeka* falls within Peirce’s symbolic mode, and is “fundamentally arbitrary” as it does not resemble the signified, which, I argue, is the disempowerment and dehumanisation of the citizens in Ramallah.

The syntagmatic analysis of the films will employ these Peircean distinctions within a broadly Saussurean framework, as identified and clarified by Chandler (2002). In addition, I will analyse the four films within the theoretical framework of Hall’s three functions of representation mentioned earlier. Hall is a Jamaican theorist who is especially interested in representations of marginalised groups. He sees the emphasis on cultural practices as important, as the participants in a culture give meaning to people, objects and events (2012:3).

Roland Barthes has written extensively about the role of myth in the process of signification and identifies it as a “second-order semiological system” (1993:114). His uncovering of the myths underlying the artefacts of popular culture, including wrestling, food, cars, travel and striptease, are models for my analysis of the films in this thesis. I find his comment, “everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by

a discourse” (1993:107), particularly compelling in the context of the representation of Arabs in the discourse of Western media and popular culture. Furthermore, Barthes expresses his “impatience at the sight of the ‘naturalness’ with which newspapers, art and common sense constantly dress up a reality” (1993:11) and this is highly relevant to my thesis. He deconstructs the opposition between denotation and connotation, where denotation is usually held to be “true” and “objective” while connotation is “subjective”. Barthes posits that denotations carry ideological weight, and following his insights, I see the denotation of the word “Arab” as being highly politicised. Significantly, Barthes does not only refer to the media but also to “art and common sense”. I find his reference to the loss of “common sense”, in responses to Othering, particularly insightful in his comment. The role of stereotyping in culture is one that I will explore in the context of the films that I have chosen to analyse.

There is one myth that has great prominence in the discourse of the Western media as “Islam’s role in hijackings and terrorism” (Said 1997:xi). I will be employing Barthesian methodology to uncover such myths, which I find in the films under discussion. One example in the film *Amreeka* is Muna’s fruitless search for employment in spite of her excellent qualifications. The perception of Arabs as inveterate terrorists is highlighted when Fadi’s school friends ask Muna, “How is Osama?” a clear reference to the orchestrator of the 9/11 attacks, and their instruction to Muna: “Go back to where you came from!” This scene, in its

exaggeration of the West's automatic response to Arabs, cautions against such overgeneralisations.

“Narratology”, first introduced by Tzvetan Todorov, is a key element of my analysis. Stam points out that it has recently become the formal name for narrative analysis (Stam *et al* 1992:70). The analysis of narrative encompasses elements such as "the story outline and plot structure, the spheres of action commanded by different characters, the way narrative information is channelled and controlled through point-of-view, and the relationship of the narrator to the inhabitants and events of the story-world" (1992:70). These specific elements of narrative analysis are relevant to my thesis as I am attempting to present the point of view of Arabs and the events that affect their lives. In three of the films that I am studying, the story-world bears a close relationship to real world events that impact people living in the Middle East, such as war, emigration and terrorism. For some writers, as Stam points out, narratology is more specifically related to structuralist studies of the sub-categories of tense, mood and voice (1992:70). I will not take into account this structuralist view of the linguistic aspects of narratology in my research, but will apply only the elements mentioned above and specifically the element of viewpoint.

Horst Ruthrof (2016) refers to “the presented world”, which is closely related to diegesis and Stam’s “story-world”. Ruthrof is of the opinion that film can create a “presented world” according to the director’s vision, and which may not reflect “reality”. In my methodology I draw comparisons between the diegetic world and the

non-diegetic world and find that the vision of the directors in all four films does, in fact, reflect reality. In my opinion, the power of film lies in its ability to create awareness of real world issues through the creation of a believable and authentic “story-world”. Popular culture then plays an educational as well as an entertainment role.

One of the important meanings of film narratology is “the semiotics of narrative” (Stam 1992:69). He describes the narrative analysis of film as being the most recent branch of semiotic inquiry to emerge from the critical initiatives that redefined film theory in the 1970s. He explains that, although it has developed its own terminology and modes of investigation, its roots clearly lie in the major semiotic movements of our time. The foremost narratologist of the visual, Mieke Bal, explains: “Narratology is the theory of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events; cultural artefacts that ‘tell a story’” (2007:3). The basic concepts of film narrative theory are drawn from two sources of semiotic thought, namely structuralism and Russian Formalism. Vladimir Propp, an adherent of the Russian Formalist School, uses his morphology for a textual reading within the context of folktales, a method that I have employed in *West Beirut*. In line with this dual influence, film narrative theory attempts to designate the basic structures of story processes and to define the aesthetic languages unique to film narrative discourse. In the words of Stam *et al* (1992:69):

Like all semiotic inquiry, narrative analysis seeks to peel away the seemingly “motivated” and “natural” relationship between the signifier and the story-world in order to reveal the deeper system of cultural associations and relationships that are expressed through narrative form.

Using semiotic methodology, the conventional elements of narrative structure, namely characters, plot patterning, setting, point-of-view and temporality, mentioned above, can be regarded as systems of signs that are structured and organised according to different codes. These signs communicate precise messages which relate to the story-world in various ways.

Another important element in narrative analysis is what Victor Shklovsky calls the *fabula*, or the "pattern of relationships between characters and the pattern of actions as they unfold in chronological order" (Eagle 1981:17 cited in Stam *et al* (1992:71). Stam explains that later writers have expanded on this definition to emphasise the events of the *fabula* as a cause-and-effect chain, occurring in time and space. Stam suggests that *fabula* is usually understood as the raw material or basic outline of the story before it has been organised artistically. Bordwell concurs that most film theorists recognise the difference between the narrative material of film (the events or action, the basic story) and the manner in which that material is represented in film (1988:12). He uses the *fabula* (story) and *syuzhet* (plot) distinction "in a sense akin to that of the Formalists" (Bordwell *et al* 1988:12). He explains that *fabula* could be viewed as an imaginary construct, which the viewer creates from the evidence provided by the narrative. In his writing, 'story' refers to "the events of the narrative in their presumed spatial, temporal, and causal relations. 'Plot' will refer to the totality of formal and stylistic materials in the film" (1988:12). These would include lighting, cutting and camera movement. In summary Bordwell *et al* view the plot as "in effect, the film before us" which includes

all the systems of time, space, and causality actually manifested in the film. This would include flashback structures and subjective points-of-view (Bordwell et al 1988:12). The difference between *fabula* and *syuzhet* is that the latter has perspective added. These distinctions will be applied in a stylistic analysis of the films included in my thesis. All the films use linear plots with no attempt to disrupt the chronological order of the events. However, in *Paradise Now*, there is a scene where the pattern of causality is disrupted when Khaled delivers his testimony ahead of being sent on his suicide mission. I will argue that this disruption allows for a comedic break in the sombre storyline and also illustrates the callousness of the handlers of the suicide bombers. The subjective points-of-view in the plots will be of particular relevance, reflecting as they do the experiences, opinions and emotions of an underrepresented group.

My study of the narrative of film would be incomplete without the inclusion of psychoanalytic theory and the canonical work of Christian Metz, entitled "The Imaginary Signifier" (1975), which also appears in an anthology in the section "Apparatus Theory" (Stam and Miller 2000:403-436). Although Metz's work may seem to belong within psychoanalysis, the essay deals with film theory, where "the apparatus" is defined as "the interaction between spectators, texts, and technology", which Miller sees as being concerned with "the material circumstances of viewing: the nature of filmic projection, the darkness of the theatre ..., the textual componentry of what is screened and the psychic mechanisms engaged" (2000:403). In this regard, psychoanalytic theory finds a natural pathway into the

study of spectator reaction in film studies. Metz asks: "among the specific features of the cinematic signifier that distinguish the cinema from literature, painting, etc., which ones by nature call most directly on the type of knowledge that psychoanalysis alone can provide?" (2000:408) and describes cinematic signifiers as "perceptual" as it is both visual and auditory. Metz uses a combination of Freudian, Kleinian and Lacanian theory to account for what he sees as the strange fascination that the spectator has for film as "the medium most appropriate for the luring of the gaze, and more successful in evading the Symbolic than other arts" (Wright 1998:110). I argue that it requires the will of the spectator to uncover the Symbolic, and Abu-Assad shows us a concrete example of this in the testimony scene, when Khaled's handlers would rather eat snacks than engage in the enormity of the symbolic act of martyrdom, for which he is giving testimony. I would argue that the power of Hollywood's hegemony in popular culture provides audiences with a viewpoint confirmed by repetition that has conflated the terms "terrorist" and "Muslim" and, by association, "Muslim" and "Arab" resulting in the Arab-terrorist conflation. As a result of this repetition the spectator's "will" to uncover the Symbolic is dulled and requires a more balanced representation to become sharpened. I will provide examples of the more balanced representations of Arabs in Palestine, Lebanon and Dubai as they form part of the films analysed in Chapters Three to Six.

A similar reading of Metz's work is made by Miller (in Stam et al 1992), who believes that "The Imaginary Signifier" is a landmark essay that crystallises

psychoanalytic thinking about the cinema (Stam et al 1992:139). He explains that cinema engages processes of the unconscious more than any other artistic medium as the signifiers, which are the mode of meaning-production in film, are activated in the viewing. Once again, my argument about the “will” in the unconscious processes of the audience to produce meaning that destabilises the Arab-terrorist conflation corresponds with Metz's view and will be analysed within the films under discussion.

The discourse of the cinema is too often part of the institution, whereas Metz believes that writers should be studying it and not just pretending that they are doing so (1975:25). He defines this discourse as the “third machine” which props up the machine that “manufactures the films and the one that consumes them” (1975:25). This incestuous relationship would therefore mean that the discourse of the ruling elite is continually reinforced. However, in terms of Metz’s analysis, most Hollywood films form part of “the institution”, which we could equate with “the power elite”. I argue that the Arab directors of the four selected films undermine this discourse by offering an alternate dialogue, one that audiences of mainstream Hollywood films might not be exposed to.

In a response to his own question: “What contribution can Freudian psychoanalysis make to the knowledge of the cinematic signifier?” (1975:28), Metz replies by illustrating the way cinema mobilises techniques of the imaginary to ensure the functioning of the cinematic apparatus, create the conditions of reception specific to

the film spectator and to generate the "peculiarly fantasmatic quality of cinematic signification" (Miller in Stam et al 1992:139). This fantasmatic quality, I argue, is the creator of representations which reinforce ideologies with which the spectator can identify. The word "fantasmatic" has to do with "fantasy" and the fulfilment of the viewer's fantasies through film. So in the fantasy world of a film such as *True Lies*, for example, the Othering of the Arab finds a good fit with the three "machines" represented by the scriptwriter, the spectator and the film critic, whose endorsement leads to the blockbuster status that the film enjoys.

Yet at the heart of every film is a story that will be consumed by audiences who want to be entertained and a business enterprise that must make a profit to survive. Although many different financial resources exist for supporting filmmaking within the private sector, Davis et al point out that the size of the production and its potential for penetrating multiple markets dictate where it might appeal for support. *Amreeka*, set largely in Illinois, USA, was actually shot in Winnipeg, in the Canadian province of Manitoba, because, as Dabis explains, "the tax incentives combined with the fact that Manitoba offered us provincial equity for shooting the film ... enabled us to close our financing and go into production sooner rather than later" (cited in Davis et al 2015:172). As Dabis' statement attests, indirect sponsorship exists across the world in the form of tax breaks. There are also instances where deliberate tax benefits are in place, designed to stimulate local economies. A method of financing evident in *West Beirut*, where Belgium, France, Norway and Lebanon were involved, is co-production, which Davis et al define as "the name for

any kind of official collaboration across borders in the making of a movie” (2015:175). Co-production swells the benefits available from any one country to two or more: “The nations involved treat the project as if it were (at least partially) home grown, meaning that the film can take advantage of supplementary subsidies, tax breaks and film commission support.” However, there are certain disadvantages in co-production, an example of which Davis et al (2015) outline in terms of *Amreeka*. (2015:176), where the White Castle fast food restaurant set had to be built as the chain did not exist in Winnipeg. They also mention an example of large crews having to be replaced when locations changed, which can be disruptive to the production.

Naturally, ideology is also at work in the creation of any film. Metz (1982:91) asks: “Should the audience have the same ideology as the films that are provided for them, they fill the cinemas, and that is how the machine keeps turning?” He answers his own question, “Of course”. However, he points out that it is also a question of desire, “and hence of symbolic positioning” (1982:91). I argue that there is a problem with the symbolic positioning of Arabic films, presenting a humanised Other to an audience that might not share the film’s ideology. Yet, the power of film lies in its ability to “obliterate all traces of the enunciation, and masquerade as story” (1982:91) and I believe that the four films under discussion tell stories that position their characters as believable human beings, caught up in situations that are universal to the human experience. These include the love of family, the love of the land and the cultural importance of food and hospitality. Nevertheless, my

discussion is not only about the portrayal of characters in the films. It is also about the ideas behind the films and the narrative perspectives adopted by the film-makers. Each chapter in my thesis deals with one of the selected films.

Negative representations of Arabs in Hollywood films have a long history. Stretching as far back as 1936, Jack Shaheen identifies the first of these as appearing in *The Black Coin* when the first Arab skyjacker threatened to blow up a plane (2009:16). The hegemony of Hollywood makes such representations plausible when they are repeated enough times and Shaheen gives over 1000 examples of such repetitious practices in films targeted at children and adults. It is not only Hollywood that creates these negative representations, though. Almost 50 years later, the documentary, *Death of a Princess* (1980: England, ATV), appeared, covering the true story of a young Saudi princess and her lover who were executed for committing adultery. Due to its sensitive nature, the producers decided to present it as a docudrama, using actors as well as witnesses of the event. Edward Said points out that the film was not made by a Muslim: it was likely to be the only film about Muslims the average viewer would see and that discussions of the film rarely touched on questions of "context, power and representation" (1997:71). The power he speaks of refers to the cultural power of the West. He cites *The Economist* (April 1980) as saying: "Islamic law to most Westerners means Islamic punishment: a simplified myth that this film will have fostered" (1997:71). In support of this viewpoint, I argue that these one-dimensional representations of Arabs by the West negate the identities of Arabs and fail to personalise or humanise them.

The four films that I have identified speak back to these representations in significant ways. They achieve this by identifying questions of identity, politics, displacement and multiculturalism faced by Arabs inhabiting various countries in the Middle East.

In case readers have not seen all four of the films in question, it might be helpful to provide a summary of them. The four films selected for analysis are all directed by Arabs from various parts of the world and tell stories of the Middle East or about people from the Middle East. The director of *Amreeka*, Cherien Dabis, a Palestinian American, reflects on some of her personal experiences in acculturation in America in the persona of the main protagonist in the film. Hany Abu-Assad, a Palestinian director, also tells a story of life in Palestine in his film *Paradise Now*, but his protagonists, two suicide bombers, are less immediately relatable<sup>7</sup> characters. However, their points of view and ambivalence towards the quest with which they have been tasked presents a more sympathetic perspective of the perpetrators instructed by their organisation to put into practice this grim and extreme measure of protest. The next film analysed in the thesis moves to Lebanon, where Ziad Doueiri chooses to view the Lebanese War from the viewpoint of three teenagers, thereby presenting a light-hearted approach to the dire subject of civil war in *West Beirut*. The human stories depicted in the film are familiar from films about World War II in London and from accounts of people living through the blitz of London by

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<sup>7</sup> Relatable: “enabling a person to feel that they can relate to someone or something” (Concise Oxford English Dictionary 2011)

Germany. The dissertation then moves to Dubai, where Emirati director, Ali Mostafa, presents a story of life in a cosmopolitan, postmodern city in his debut film *City of Life*. This provides a contrast to the other films in its presentation of a globalised city, comparable with any capital city in the Global North in terms of lifestyle, consumerism and employment opportunities for its large expatriate community. Within this postmodern city, the traditions of the local citizens are often at odds with the hedonistic, alcohol-fuelled representations of expatriate life. To deconstruct the binary opposition us/them it is necessary to find areas of similarity rather than difference on either side of the binary. Abu-Assad's inspired reconstruction of the last supper in *Paradise Now* does so in the pivotal moment of the film where the universality of religion becomes evident in the screenshot that I analyse using the method of semiotics (see Appendix 1). Dabis creates an equally key moment in *Amreeka* in the conversation between Muna and the headmaster, when it is revealed that she is an Arab Christian and he is a Polish Jew. Their friendship and affection for each other dispel the stereotypes each holds of the other's ethnicity and the binary opposition loses its validity. In the early stages of *West Beirut*, Doueiri allows his young protagonist to perform a subversion of French colonialism when Tareq leads the school in singing the Lebanese anthem and drowning out the singing of the French one. This rebellion would be familiar to colonised communities and makes Tareq's situation relatable, thereby deconstructing the binary us/them. Mostafa's story of different lives in *City of Life* gives insight into the diversity of Dubai. The privilege of certain expatriates is on a par with those of local Emirati Arabs, whereas the poor are evident among

expatriates and locals alike. The binary opposition in this film relates to class rather than ethnicity and exposes a view of the world that is recognisable to those living in capitalist societies. Through close reading of the four selected films, I argue that the different representations of Arabs and Muslims evident in the films provide a textured view of life in the Middle East and provide a way of looking at Arabs and Muslims as Selves, rather than Others. This is why I believe Arab directors present a new paradigm of film-making and speak back to the negative representations so familiar to viewers of Hollywood blockbusters.

## Chapter Two

### Literature Review

This literature review examines the work of scholars who have written on the topics related to my project. It touches on many different areas of scholarship, theory and expertise. These areas include the representation of Arabs, Islamophobia, film studies, geographical studies of the delineation of space, suicide bombing, narrative analysis methodology and postmodernism. They do not include the primary works of the key theorists that underpin the theoretical framework, which are outlined in the introduction. I have included here the works of theorists Vladimir Propp, Jean Baudrillard and Jean-François Lyotard as I have applied their theoretical frameworks only to one film, namely, Propp to *West Beirut* and Baudrillard and Lyotard to *City of Life*.

In the process of analysing the manifestation of masculinity in the film *West Beirut*, I became aware of the shift in power relations between the two young male protagonists, Tareq (Rami Doueiri) and Omar (Mohamad Chamas) and it became evident that, as the film progressed, Tareq lost his heroic status, and was exposed as a villain, much like a character in a fairy tale. Within the field of narrative analysis, Russian Formalist Vladimir Propp (1968) has made a lasting contribution with his analysis of Russian folktales (which we would call fairy tales) and his morphology is therefore an appropriate method of narrative analysis. In the Author's Foreword Propp explains the meaning of the word "morphology" as "the study of

forms” and points out that his morphology relates to “so-called fairy tales”. In seeking to define the characteristics that a particular corpus of tales, which he called the wondertales, has in common, Propp discovered that the “actions” or “events” of the tales he studied could be distilled into a table of thirty-one functions, which were constant and recurred throughout the genre. Moreover, these events, such as “An interdiction is addressed to the Hero,” and “The Villain attempts to deceive his victim,” occurred in exactly the same sequence in each tale, although some might be omitted: “The sequence of functions is always identical ... an action cannot be defined apart from its place in the course of narration”. Not only were the functions found to be constant, but the characters who triggered the events were also found to be consistent. In dividing his analysis of tales into “functions”, he formulates them into, first, “functions of characters serve as stable, constant elements in a tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled. They constitute the fundamental components of a tale. Secondly, the number of functions known to the fairy tale is limited (1968:21). Thirdly, he explains that the sequence of functions is always identical and that finally all fairy tales are of one type in regard to their structure (1968:22-23). However, his morphology of the functions of dramatis personae is particularly relevant to my analysis of the representation of masculinity in the militia scene in *West Beirut* (Chapter Five) as these dramatis personae and their actions reflect the characteristics of Propp’s morphology very clearly.

The model Propp developed to account for the structure of the Russian wondertale was applied to works as diverse as *North by Northwest*, *Sunset Boulevard* and *Kiss Me Deadly*, which, Stam et al (1992:80) believe, suggests a pattern of plot events that all narratives have in common. While Propp himself restricted his findings to the Russian wondertale, writers in film and television applied his model more widely to the analysis of popular forms, such as Hollywood genre films and television programs. Stam et al (1992:80) explain further that there are several ingredients to the Proppian model, most of which have been adapted in whole or in part by later theorists. I have adapted Propp's model to a narrative analysis of *West Beirut* to analyse the representation of masculinity, in the form of Propp's hero and villain, which play out in several scenes.

In discussion of my fourth film, *City of Life*, I move away from structuralism to find support for its premise in postmodern theory. In my opinion, Dubai, the location for the film, is a postmodern city with its "hyperreal" artefacts greatly in evidence in the film. Postmodern theorist, Jean Baudrillard, defines the "hyperreal" within the context of a Borges fable entitled "On Exactitude in Science", about a map that was so detailed that it replicated the territory it represented and eventually covered it totally. As the map rotted away, it was a desert that lay underneath, the "desert of the real", not the simulation that remained. To Baudrillard, this is "the most beautiful allegory of simulation" (2010:1). However, Baudrillard's theory is that, unlike the Borges map, models today are generated without "origin or reality: a hyperreal" (2010:1). Hyperreality is essentially a copy without an original, and Baudrillard calls

these *simulacra*. In consumer-driven societies, such as Dubai, *simulacra* are everyday sights, from the hyperreal snow ski slopes in the desert to the hyperreal man-made islands in the sea. A universal version of a *simulacrum* created by consumerism is the brand name, where the designer label becomes the reality, with its functionality a secondary consideration.

The evolution of the *simulacrum* in terms of the Borges fable of the map of the Empire is described by Baudrillard in terms of “hyperreality” (2010:7):

Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a ‘hyperreal’.

In other words, the signifier has no signified. Merrin (2005:29) takes issue with this view of the simulacrum as postmodern, and argues that “The simulacrum is an ancient concept but its force appears or is discoverable within the philosophical, theological and aesthetic tradition of every culture, centring on the concept of the image and its efficacy.” Baudrillard’s opening rubric is in agreement with such a sentiment: “The simulacrum is never what hides the truth – it is truth that hides the fact that there is none. The simulacrum is true. – Ecclesiastes” (Baudrillard 2010:1). Merrin also argues that “Baudrillard himself appeals to the real as a critical force against the simulacrum” (Merrin 2005:30). He offers this latter comment in defence of Baudrillard against his critics, who, he says, naively believe him to be nihilistic.

Not all theorists see the “simulacrum” as a postmodern concept. Nelson and Shiff (1996), for example, point out that the Latin term "simulacrum" has its crucial beginnings in Plato's Greek dialogues, where it appears as the term we would translate as "phantasm" or "semblance." Plato sought to distinguish essence from appearance, intelligible from sensible, and idea from image. Baudrillard built his post-1970s theory of media effects and culture around his own notion of the simulacrum. In a similar view of the concept of simulacra, Doug Mann (N.D.) elucidates Baudrillard's argument as follows: in a postmodern culture dominated by TV, films, news media, and the Internet, the whole idea of a true or a false copy of something has been destroyed: all we have now are *simulations* of reality, which are no more or less "real" than the reality they simulate.

Fredric Jameson (1991) is in accord with Baudrillard about his concept of hypereality and the creation of simulacra in the postmodern world. Like Baudrillard, he criticises our current historical situation and views the present through a dystopic lens in his work on postmodernism and the cultural logic of late capitalism. He points out that the last few years have been marked by (1991:5):

an inverted millenarianism in which premonitions of the future, catastrophic or redemptive, have been replaced by senses of the end of this or that (the end of ideology, art, or social class; the “crisis” of Leninism, social democracy, or the welfare state, etc., etc.); taken together, all of these perhaps constitute what is increasingly called postmodernism.

According to Jameson, postmodernity has transformed the historical past into a series of emptied-out stylizations (what Jameson terms pastiche) that can then be

commodified and consumed (1991:17): "Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language." The result is the threatened victory of capitalist thinking over all other forms of thought. This situation is evident in Mostafa's *City of Life*, where capitalism dictates the lives of locals and expatriates who deviate between struggling to survive and living life to excess, either end of the spectrum resulting in catastrophic consequences. In comparison, whereas "modernism was still minimally and tendentially the critique of the commodity and the effort to make it transcend itself," postmodernism "is the consumption of sheer commodification as a process" (1991:x). That apparent victory of commodification over all spheres of life marks postmodernity's reliance on the "cultural logic of late capitalism." Here the empty signification referred to by Baudrillard in his analysis of the four successive phases of the image in a four-step process, mentioned in my theoretical framework, reaches fruition. Reality is then compromised and, in Jameson's opinion, postmodernity is "an immense dilation of [culture's] sphere (the sphere of commodities), an immense and historically original acculturation of the Real" (1991:x).

On the question of the transparency of reality, Mary Klages is of the view that, in postmodern society, language is transparent and thus words serve only as representations without functionality (2006:169). She argues that modern societies depend on the idea that signifiers always point to signifieds, and that reality resides in signifieds. In a postmodern view of reality, however, there are only signifiers. The

idea of any stable or permanent reality disappears, and with it the signifieds, which are indicated by signifiers in a 'realist' epistemology. Rather, in postmodern societies, there are only surfaces, without depth; only signifiers with no signifieds. Baudrillard calls this separation of signifier from signified a 'simulacrum' (Klages 2006:170). I explore the semiotic situation of empty signifiers, which Baudrillard identifies as 'simulacra' (2010.1).

On the question of "the real" that I investigate in Chapter Six, Catherine Belsey (2005:3) makes the distinction between the real and the imagined in cinema. Her argument is relevant to my discussion of hyperreality in *City of Life*. She argues, "The cinema screen that divides the brightly lit world of the fiction decisively from the audience in the darkened movie theatre marks that common-sense distinction between fact and fiction. *Fiction isn't real* (sic)" (2005:3). As obvious as this may sound, she points out further that our postmodern condition has made reality into an issue: "What, we now ask, is real, and what a culturally induced illusion? Is there a difference between the two? Or is reality itself a product of our minds, either a subjective construct or the effect of culture?"(2005:3). She explains that recent cultural theory has contested the view that human behaviour is predominantly natural, and that Western capitalist society is the supreme realisation of nature. I agree with her assertion that "Cultural criticism has successfully challenged the common-sense assumption that our social arrangements and values constitute the expression of a universal, foundational humanity" (2005:3). She then goes on to discuss Baudrillard in this context and refers to the question that he asks about

America: Can we be sure where Disneyland ends and the “real” America begins? Belsey interprets this to mean that Disneyland is part of American culture — but so is America — and she sums this up with Baudrillard’s conclusion, “it is Disneyland that is authentic here.” Baudrillard’s theory, discussed in his chapter on the precession of simulacra, relates to this discussion on Disneyland and is discussed in detail in my analysis of the artefacts of Dubai in the film *City of Life*.

Postmodernism is discussed by Lyotard as the undermining of the grand narrative or “metanarrative” (1986:xxiv). Lyotard’s own examples of grand narratives are “the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth” (1986:xxiii). According to Lyotard, grand narratives exist in every belief system or ideology: for instance, Marxism’s grand narrative involves the belief that capitalism will implode, resulting in the evolution of a utopian socialist world. Lyotard sees all aspects of modern society as dependent on grand narratives, including science as the primary form of knowledge. Despite this, Lyotard posits that in postmodern culture, “The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation” (1986:37). He argues that this is the result of “the blossoming of techniques and technologies since the Second World War, which has shifted emphasis from the ends of action to its means” (Lyotard 1986:37).

The idea of the grand narrative is interpreted in various ways by philosophers and theorists. For instance, Lyotard identifies two key types of modern metanarrative, namely the speculative narrative and the narrative of emancipation. Simon Malpas has elucidated the difference between Lyotard's two types of metanarratives and can shed some light on them as well as on their relevance for my argument. He argues, "The central idea of the speculative grand narrative is that human life, or 'Spirit' as Hegel calls it, progresses by increasing its knowledge" (2002:26). Malpas explains that this account of the speculative narrative materialises from Hegel's argument that "the True is the whole" (Hegel 1977:11 cited in Malpas 2002:26), which means that the truth or falsity of any statement or language game is determined by its relation to the whole of knowledge. It is thus concluded that this "whole of knowledge" is the speculative grand narrative (Malpas 2002:26). The grand narrative of emancipation has taken various forms over the past few centuries. During the Enlightenment, with its emphasis on "reason, logic, criticism and freedom of thought over dogma, blind faith and superstition" (Wilde 2001:2), the grand narrative focused on the idea of the freedom of people from religious superstition that curtailed their lives and placed power in the priests. The Marxist version focused on the freedom of workers from exploitation by their masters and the development of their ability to control their own lives. The aim of this type of grand narrative is the emancipation of an enlightened humanity from dogma, mysticism, exploitation and suffering (Malpas 2002:27).

Lyotard's analysis of the change in the legitimation of knowledge in the twentieth century begins with the working hypothesis that "the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the post-industrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age" (Lyotard 1986:1). In a historical perspective, Lyotard finds it justifiable to refer to present history as "the postmodern age" because, since at least the 1950s, a "crisis" of "legitimation" has come about with regard to all forms of knowledge, making it impossible for discourses to be legitimated by "an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth" (Lyotard 1986:xxiii). Hence, Lyotard calls discourses of self-legitimation "modern" and defines "the postmodern condition" as the *crisis* of legitimation (Lucy 1997:129). This crisis of legitimation is very evident in the *City of Life* where grand narratives possess universal relevance but also find local expression in the importance of family, religion and the creation of wealth. This is balanced with the expatriate community's splintering of these grand narratives into *les petits récits* (small stories) as the opposite of "grand narratives", such as migrant workers without families and expatriate workers with further "small stories" of secularisation replacing the more pervasive Islam in the region. This secularisation does indeed bring about a crisis of legitimation for those traditional parents who find the bars and nightclubs, which grant easy access to alcohol, a threat to the grand narrative.

My study of *West Beirut* includes an examination of the increased religious observance of the rules of Islam as the civil war progresses by the family of one of the main protagonists in the film. The study by Mark Tessler (2015) entitled *Islam and Politics in the Middle East: Explaining the Views of Ordinary Citizens*, is relevant to this question as he investigates ordinary citizens' views of Islam as a political force. He draws on data from surveys conducted in 15 countries between 1988 and 2011, representing the opinions of more than 60,000 men and women. His study investigates the reasons that some individuals support a central role for Islam in government, while others favour a separation of religion and politics. His findings indicate that the views of ordinary citizens of the role that Islam should play in government and political affairs are not monolithic (2015:147). On the contrary, his research indicates that many men and women in the Muslim-majority countries of the Middle East and North Africa believe that Islam should occupy a place of importance in the political life of their society. Many others disagree, believing that religion is an essentially private matter and should be separated from politics; and still others hold views that place them at some point between these two poles of opinion.

It is pertinent to mention here some of the Hollywood films identified by Shaheen which have stereotyped Arabs as the Other: this will illustrate that there are a number of theoretical and visual representations of Arabs as Other and that these indicate the vitality of my topic. In his book *Guilty: Hollywood's Verdict on Arabs after 9/11*, Shaheen suggests: "Long before the United States launched real

expeditionary operations against Iraq in March 2003, Hollywood was already launching a reel war against reel Arabs" (2008:xix). In this connection he mentions the following films: *Adventure in Iraq* (1943); *The Human Shield* (1992); *Courage under Fire* (1996); and *Deterrence* (1999), all of which are set in Iraq (2008:xix). *Los Angeles Times* critic, Kenneth Turan's questions, cited by Shaheen: "Did pre-9/11 films help incite xenophobia and war fever? Did the Arab fiendish enemy 'other' stereotype help feed the unusual haste with which we became involved in Iraq?" (2008:xix) are relevant to my topic in that they indicate the pervasive influence of film on the perceptions of viewers. Shaheen goes on to mention several young moviemakers, among them Cherien Dabis (*Amreeka*, 2009) who, he believes, are making their presence felt in the industry and says: "Thanks to them and their fellow image makers, the day is coming when Hollywood will project Arabs and Muslims in all their complexity, no better and no worse than they portray others" (2009:6). I argue, in the same way, that the Arab filmmakers discussed in this thesis represent their characters with this type of complexity.

Along similar lines, John Cones studies patterns of bias in Hollywood films and finds (2012:13):

Several of Hollywood's most blatant patterns of bias fall within the categories of race, ethnicity and/or national origin. Included in this group are negative and/ or stereotypical portrayals of Arabs and Arab-Americans, Asians and Asian-Americans, Hispanics and Latinos, African-Americans, along with Native Americans.

As an example of what he calls “Arab-bashing” (2012:13), Cones cites the changing of two lines of lyrics in the film *Aladdin* (Walt Disney Studios) following protests from the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee. The lyrics, sung by the villain Jafar, describe Aladdin's hometown as a place “Where they cut off your ear/ If they don't like your face/ It's barbaric, but hey, it's home” (2012:13). His study of the representation of religion in Hollywood films also explores many examples of negative representations of Christianity. It is important that the complexity of the issue of religion is acknowledged as it is clearly not only Muslims who are stereotyped in film. Cones sees it as a basic issue of fairness and access to equal opportunities in a so-called free and democratic society, such as America, that no single group be given the power to prevent important messages about Others from being circulated through a significant communications medium such as film (2012:59). In his survey of several thousand feature films, “there were also very few, if any, positive portrayals of the Muslim, Buddhist or Hindu religions in U.S. made films” (2012:59). With this in mind, it must be clarified that the Arab-Muslim equation tends towards conflating nationality and religion to an extent where Muslim fundamentalism and militancy is seen as a trait common to not only all Muslims, be they pacifist or secular, but by association to all Arabs as well.

In a similar vein, Semmerling makes a study of “evil” Arabs in American popular film and comes to the conclusion (2006:1) that: “The “evil” Arabs of American film are illusions.” He compares these illusions with the paintings of Arcimboldo and drawings in optical puzzle books that are developed for entertainment and

“perception analysis” (2006:1). He comes to the conclusion that Tolansky’s (1964:141) term for these illusions, “oscillating attention”, is a useful term for the illusions of the “evil” Arabs as well. He then cites authors Rainey, Block and Yucker (cited in Semmerling 2006:1), who see the driving force of “oscillating attention” as perception. Rainey explains (cited in Semmerling 2006:1): “Differences in religion, ideology, political beliefs, and even prejudice can be explained in terms of how people perceive. Thus knowledge of perception will give an understanding of human beings.” With this in mind, Semmerling observes that many of the portrayals of Arabs give the impression of cultural and ethnic traits that are harmful to the West, and then asks the question (2006:1-2): “Are not ‘evil’ Arabs actually fictional characters that we have devised and, as such, not at all about the real Arabs and their multidimensional and deeply contoured cultures or ethnicity?” Within the context of popular culture and my thesis, this is of particular interest, as I believe that the power of film supports and affirms stereotypical beliefs about Arabs. Semmerling’s point of view also concurs with that of Edward Said, who more specifically focusses on Muslims in his discussion of perceptions, which he calls “ideas”, here: (1997:xi):

There also seems to have been a strange revival of canonical, though previously discredited, Orientalist ideas about Muslim, generally non-white people — ideas which have achieved a startling prominence at a time when racial or religious misrepresentations of every other cultural group are no longer circulated with such impunity.

It also resonates with the work of Jack Shaheen who believes that Hollywood has used repetition as a teaching tool, “tutoring movie audiences by repeating over and over, in film after film, insidious images of the Arab people” (2003:172).

In the context of film and the controversy over representations of Others, Stuart Hall’s theory of representation is crucially relevant. He explores representational practices used to mark racial difference and signify the “racialized ‘Other’” within three major historical moments when the “‘West’ encountered black people” (2012:239). Firstly, he refers to slavery in the sixteenth century; secondly, the European colonisation of Africa; and, thirdly, “the post-World War II migrations from the ‘Third World’ into Europe and North America” (2012:239), and sees this “racialized regime of representation” as persisting into the late twentieth century (2012:249). I argue that 9/11 is a historical encounter of similar weight, where the already racialised representation of Arabs is propelled to an intensified level of Otherness to reflect the ideology of the West. The manifestation of this ideology in popular culture ensures that the perception of Arabs as a dangerous cultural group is spread to a wide audience. Susan Hayward (2013) also speaks of issues of representation in a wider context and points out that during times of war, cinema has created propagandist films to support the war effort, which routinely represent the enemy as the evil Other. She explains that the West has known two world wars since the birth of cinema and has also been involved in combats related to decolonization (2013:399). She further mentions the Cold War waged between the United States and the former Soviet Union; and more recent wars in Iraq and

Bosnia. In Europe during the First World War, the propagandist nature of films only lasted for the early part of the hostilities, however, the patriotic melodramas also attempted to assist with enlistment. Films such as *England Expects* (1914), *The Fatherland Calls* (*Das Vaterland ruf*, 1914) and *French Mothers* (*Mère Françaises*, 1916) are just a sample of the titles that were intended to encourage men into battle and women to support their patriotic sons, lovers and husbands in the war. In a similar vein, the British documentary, commissioned by the government, *The Battle of the Somme* (1916), with its graphic depiction of trench warfare, was intended as part of the propaganda to muster support for the war. These films “demonized the enemy or glorified the sacrificial spirit of the ordinary indigenous people” (Hayward 1916:400). This demonisation of the enemy in cinema is then not a 21<sup>st</sup>-century construct. What is new, however, is the pervasive Othering of a group based not only on its ethnicity but on its religion as well and the dangers that this equation presents to the West.

At the same time, the concept of “the West” is a complex one. Hall explains the concept in a chapter with the compelling title “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power” (2000) and explains that generalisations like “West” and “western” have no simple or single meaning: “At first sight, these words may seem to be about matters of geography and location. But even this, on inspection, is not straightforward since we also use the same words to refer to a type of society, a level of development, and so on” (2000:185). He goes on to explain that “the West”

is no longer only in Europe, and not all of Europe is in “the West.” He quotes the historian John Roberts (2000:185):

Europeans have long been unsure about where Europe ‘ends’ in the east. In the west and to the south, the sea provides a splendid marker; but to the east the plains roll on and on and the horizon is awfully remote.

Furthermore, Hall does not believe that Eastern Europe belongs properly to “the West”, whereas the United States, which is not in Europe, definitely does. He includes Japan as “western” because of its technology, with the proviso that, “in our mental map it is about as far “East” as you can get. By comparison, much of Latin America, which is in the western hemisphere, belongs economically to the Third World, which is struggling — not very successfully — to catch up with “the West” (2000:185). Apart from these geographical qualifications, Hall argues that “the West” is a historical, not a geographical construct: “By ‘western’ we mean ... a society that is developed, industrialized, urbanized, capitalist, secular, and modern” (Hall 2000:186). I argue that this idea of the West is another boundary, allowing the Othering of non-western countries. This can be equated, if I may, with Hall’s formula “western = urban = developed; or non-western = non-industrial = under-developed.” He sees this as providing criteria of evaluation against which other societies are ranked and around which powerful positive and negative feelings cluster e.g. the developed west is desirable and the under-developed non-west is undesirable (2000:186). Representations of Arab countries and societies often show them as underdeveloped.

This examination of geography in our understanding of the world is not isolated. Other theorists use geographical metaphors and concepts in making meaning of our superficially separated spaces, and this is worth further reflection. President Trump's executive order on immigration, called "Protection Of The Nation From Foreign Terrorist Entry Into The United States"<sup>8</sup> and signed on Friday 27<sup>th</sup> January, illustrates the nebulous meaning of space. The Middle East is clearly defined by Trump — and by Hollywood mainstream films — as a site containing "radical Islamic terrorists". Yet, the exclusion of certain countries in the Middle East from Trump's executive order indicates that this view of the region is not seen as pervasive, even by him. In this context, the study of space made by Crang and Thrift (2000) is relevant. Their analysis of the contributions made to their study by various writers in the 'Thinking Space' area of research and theory indicates: "What is very clear is that space is not considered by any of these writers to be outside of the realm of social practice" (2000:2). In their view, geography is also moving away "from a sense of space as a practico-inert container of action towards space as a socially produced set of manifolds" (2000:2). The effect of the restriction of space on society in the occupied territories of Palestine is evident in two of the films under review, namely, *Paradise Now* and *Amreeka*. A concrete manifestation of the delineation of space in these films is the "checkpoints" — or arbitrarily constructed borders by the Israelis — to contain the Palestinians. Crang and Thrift's intention in their analysis of space is to indicate "the main passage points in current writing on

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<sup>8</sup> "Marking a draconian shift in US policy, Donald Trump on Friday issued an executive order that will deny refugees and immigrants from certain Muslim-majority countries entry to the United States" (*Sadique*, 2017).

space, all of which in one sense or the other move away from the Kantian perspective on space – as an absolute category – towards *space as process and in process*” (2000:3). The space depicted in both the previously mentioned films, and in *West Beirut*, indicate a view of space “as process and in process” both in terms of colonisation and war. I would argue that the conception of space “as a socially produced set of manifolds” is ominously illustrated in the changing ideology under a new presidency in the United States of America as well.

Concern over historically developed, socially embedded interpretations of identity and space are at the heart of Michael Shapiro’s book (1997), which investigates America’s imperial geographies and their footprint in the modern world. He explains the purpose of his research as follows (1997:ix): “(B)ecause my focus is on ontological commitments rather than strategic aims, I examine the ways that enmity-related global geographies and ethnoscapas emerge as collectivities try to achieve, stabilize and reproduce their unity and coherence.” Geographic imaginaries are central to his analyses as he attempts to unread one that is particularly dominant. His investigations seek to counter a preoccupation with international enmities and he points out that an emphasis on international violence presupposes the institutionalisation of the dominant nation-state geographic imaginary. Such a view coincides with the geographic imaginary of Israel, in its imperialistic motivations in Palestine, the topic of the films *Amreeka* and *Paradise Now*. Shapiro further explains that he turns to geography not to provide an explanation of state-level decision making (1997:xi). He prefers to effect a political

and ethical resistance to the enmities on which war feeds. In order to achieve this he emphasises an approach to maps that provides distance from the geopolitical frames of strategic thinkers and security analysts. His contention is, “Geography is inextricable linked to the architecture of enmity” (1997:xi) a contention that is powerfully conveyed at the checkpoints in both *Amreeka* and *Paradise Now* where the coloniser asserts its power and control by annexing more and more land and making it impossible for the Palestinians to traverse their own country without being hampered with impunity. Shapiro’s chilling recounting of the annihilation of the Native American Pequot tribe on the site where he spent his holidays (1997:1) in Niantic, near New London and the perceived bravery of the “settlers” at that time serves the purpose of positioning his loss of innocence within the geographical setting (1997:3):

The leisure-oriented cartography of my childhood summer idylls lost its grip, and a place of enjoyment, whose names had simply indicated the English origins of the early settlers, had become a place of violence and erasure.

In Shapiro’s final chapter, entitled “The Ethics of Encounter: Unreading, Unmapping the Imperium” he provides an anecdote of an encounter between “alternative spatial imaginaries” to situate an alternative ethical frame (1997:177). It is provided by the reflections of the writer Carlos Fuentes after an encounter with a Mexican peasant, while lost, he asks the old man the name of his village, to which he replies, “Well, that depends, we call it Santa Maria in times of peace. We call it Zapata in times of war”. Fuentes’s reflection on this answer discloses the historical depth of forms of Otherness existing relatively unrecognised in modernity. Shapiro points out, “He

(Fuentes) recognizes that the peasant has existed within a narrative trace that tends to be uncoded in the contemporary institutionalized discourses on space” (1997:178). Fuentes’s experience and the conclusions he draws are prescribed in the writings of Levinas (cited in Shapiro 1997:179) “for whom the face-to-face encounter and the experience of the Other as a historical trace are crucial dimensions of an ethical responsibility.” However, he believes that the violent encounters associated with the initial European contacts with the New World were not merely the result of philosophical conceptualisations. “They emerged from a “said” that had existed in narratives on peoples such as the discourse on savagery and world-constructing cartographies” (Shapiro 1997:181). Within the context of my thesis, it is useful to mention Shapiro’s analysis of Levinas’s ethical thinking that morality is not an experience of value, but a recognition of and vulnerability to alterity. This is played out in Levinas’s response to a question on Israel’s relationship with Palestine to which he responds that Palestinians are aggressors and enemies. This is ironic in the light of Levinas’s theoretical stance to space and alterity but illustrates to Shapiro the “blind spots” that exist in respect of the Other.

Trump’s overt positioning of Muslims in nominated countries as Other in his executive order, mentioned above, is of concern as “a robust literature on ingroup versus outgroup conflict suggests that perceived discrimination may be an important factor in intergroup aggression” (Victoroff et al 2012:791). Victoroff et al (2012) examine the psychological factors associated with support for suicide bombing and explain that no studies have tested the hypothesis that experiencing

anti-Muslim discrimination could lead to support for anti-Western political violence. They undertake such a study by analysing surveys of adult Muslim residents of Great Britain, France, Germany and Spain in 2006; and a survey of adult Muslim residents in the United States in 2007. This study is of particular interest to the analysis of *Paradise Now*, as its findings confirm that experienced discrimination is associated with suicide bombing among both European and American Muslims.

My research into *Amreeka* and *Paradise Now* centres on the territories of Bethlehem, Ramallah and Nablus in the West Bank. However, the specifics of the geography are not crucial to the narrative, so these are only referred to obliquely in the films. There are indications, such as a road sign to Nablus in *Paradise Now*; and the interrogation of Muna in *Amreeka* at the checkpoint where she tells the guard that she lives in Bethlehem. She also mentions in another scene that the 15-minute trip between her workplace in Ramallah and her home in Bethlehem takes two hours because of the checkpoints. A map of the region shows that Jerusalem lies between Ramallah and Bethlehem, so Abowd's study into the gendered politics of residential life in contemporary Jerusalem is relevant to the areas of Palestine where our protagonists are situated. I also believe that Abowd's findings have universal relevance for Palestinians in his research into the colonial quest of Israel. He cites Scott (Abowd 2007:997), who describes colonialism as being fundamentally about "disabling old forms of life by systematically breaking down their conditions, and with constructing in their place new conditions so as to enable

— indeed to oblige — new forms of life to come into being". Abowd explains further (2007:997):

The Israeli authorities' institution of exclusionary land and housing policies have become crucial elements in the "new conditions" and "new forms of life" to which both national communities have been compelled to relate. Central to the concerns of this article, these strategies have engendered a tightly policed - and legally sanctioned - order of separation between Palestinians and Israelis.

Palestinians have been precluded from living in most areas under Israeli control, including most neighbourhoods in contemporary Jerusalem. Abowd explains that colonial authorities have constructed prodigious settlements and vast housing estates for Israeli-Jews only. These settlements are generally constructed on land taken from displaced Palestinians. The impact of these land-grabs on the lives of ordinary Palestinians is at the heart of both the Palestinian films discussed in this thesis, namely the people of Nablus in *Paradise Now* and those of Ramallah and Bethlehem in *Amreeka*, where Israeli colonial aspirations invade everyday life as people must travel through the occupied territories to reach their homes.

The Othering of Palestinians by the Israeli guards is very evident in both films. I argue that the Israelis' behaviour is racist and Palestinians are Othered to the same extent as black South Africans were in Apartheid South Africa. This is most obvious at the checkpoints, where documents — much like the *dompas*<sup>9</sup> — have to be shown to disrespectful Israeli guards, who treat the Palestinians in very much the same way as the South African Police treated black people in the townships during

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<sup>9</sup> "in South Africa in the past) the official document that black people had to carry with them to prove their identity and where they could live or work." *Oxford Learners' Dictionaries* 2017. Oxford: OUP.

the apartheid era. Ramon Grosfoguel (2012) supports my view with his argument that Islamophobia is a cultural racism. This form of racism, where the word "race" is never mentioned, focuses on the cultural inferiority of a group of people. Grosfoguel goes on to explain the framing of cultural racism (2002:13):

Usually it is framed in terms of the inferior habits, beliefs, behavior, or values of a group of people. It is close to biological racism in the sense that cultural racism naturalizes/essentializes the culture of the racialized/inferiorized people. The latter are represented as fixed in a timeless space.

I argue that Palestinians are viewed in terms of this cultural racism in both *Amreeka* and *Paradise Now*.

Nevertheless, within the dystopian world of cultural racism in Palestine, there is some hope in the work of Israeli journalist, Amira Hass, who, with extreme bravery, compassion and concern, reports on the plight of Palestinians living in Ramallah. Her book, *Reporting from Ramallah: An Israeli Journalist in an Occupied Land* (2003), is an account of the time that she served as chief West Bank and Gaza correspondent for the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* between 1997 and 2002. The book consists of some 500 articles and op-ed columns that she wrote at the time. She says, "I'm called 'a correspondent on Palestinian affairs', but it's more accurate to say that I'm an expert in Israeli occupation" (2003:7). She writes extensively about the checkpoints in Palestine, a topic of particular relevance to my study of *Amreeka* and *Paradise Now*. The back cover of her book describes her as "the only Jewish Israeli correspondent on Palestinian affairs to have lived among the people she writes about." It also describes Palestinian perceptions of Israelis in the

following terms: “The only Israelis this generation of Palestinians knows are soldiers and settlers. For them, Israel is no more than a subsidiary of an army that knows no limits and settlements that know no borders” (2003). Today, fourteen years later, these words are as relevant as they were then. Hass’s descriptions of the bullying tactics of the soldiers and the endless waiting at the checkpoints (which have sometimes ended in death for people requiring urgent medical attention) are a reflection on the callousness of the guards manning these barriers.

One of Hass’s entries describes the circuitous, official requirements of the Israeli government in stamping their authority over the Palestinians (2003:164):

May 19, 2002

According to representatives of donor countries and international organizations operating in the territories, the Israeli army has begun demanding that Palestinians obtain special permits from their local Civil Administration offices to move between one West Bank town or village and another. A senior Israeli security source has confirmed the new policy. According to the Palestinian Authority (PA), it is an institutionalization of Israel’s policy of encirclement and cantonization.

She reports further that in response to the concerns expressed by the PA, Israel’s coordinator of Operations in the Territories replied, “it is not a political plan in the guise of a humanitarian gesture” (2003:164). However, her report illustrates that there is no implication of any humanitarian gesture at all. Palestinians transporting goods would be required to transport them from one Palestinian territory to another using the “back-to-back” system, whereby one truck unloads goods that are then reloaded onto another truck in designated areas on the outskirts of major towns. Pedestrians and drivers would have to obtain “movement permits” in each territory.

According to Hass, the donor country representatives said that the new measure divided the West Bank into eight isolated regions, with movement between them controlled by the Israeli Defence Force (IDF). The system meant that organisations such as the Red Cross, who employ many Palestinians, would have to apply to the Civil Administration to request movement permits for their employees. The power of officialdom in controlling the lives of the Palestinians is obvious in this report, and I argue that directors Dabis and Abu-Assad, by portraying officialdom like this — in fictional terms — create awareness of the disempowerment inherent in the Palestinian situation.

In a newspaper article Hass reports further on the inhumanity prevalent at these checkpoints, where private security firms, who have taken over checkpoint duties from the soldiers, confiscate food and large bottles of water from labourers, which they declare go beyond the daily dietary needs allowed by the Modi'in Ezrahi security firm (Ha'aretz 2009). This means that the energy needs of labourers working a 12-hour day are not met. This is just one more example of the disrespect and cruelty of officialdom placed in control over the disempowered Palestinian population, who are clearly treated as Other. These real-life outrages are reflected in my analyses of the two fictional Palestinian films *Amreeka* and *Paradise Now* and serve to provide a human face to what might otherwise be general suffering.

A different view of *Paradise Now* is offered by Gertz and Khleifi (2008:192) in the epilogue to their book, added after publication, so as to include a review of the

award-winning film, which had been released after their book had gone to print. Although the film won a Golden Globe award, and widespread acclaim as a work advocating peace, they explain that its controversial subject matter (suicide bombers) resulted in no Israeli distributor agreeing to show it in Israel. They argue that this reaction was not justified as the real topic of the film is not the "Paradise" but the "Now" and go on to explain the emptiness of the timeline signified by waiting (2008:192). In their view — and I agree — the film does not deal with the eternal life promised to the suicide bombers, but rather with the present. Unlike Gertz and Khleifi, however, I do understand why Israel distributors were reticent about screening the film, as it illustrates the effects of Israel's policies on the freedom of Palestinians, which results in empathy for the suicide bombers. My analysis of this film will illustrate that the young men's actions are ideological rather than religious. This is shown by examining their lives under occupation and the frustration they feel over the restrictions placed upon them and the freedoms that they do not enjoy. One of the curtailments of freedom is the previously-mentioned checkpoints, which hinder even the simplest of journeys.

Although it is impossible to summarise everything that has been said about either Arab History or Arabs in film, I have found certain critics especially helpful, and their work forms the focus of the section that follows.

Wail Hassan's compilation of *Immigrant Narratives* (2011), for instance, in which he views the writing of Arab American and Arab British literature through the lens of

Orientalism, is of particular interest to the study of *Amreeka*. It also resonates with the situation that has arisen since the Syrian war caused a humanitarian crisis that, according to BBC News (cited in Rodgers et al, 2016), has caused over 4.5 million people to flee from Syria since the start of the conflict. About 10% of these have sought safety in Europe. The BBC article labels this as “one of the largest refugee exoduses in recent history”. Hassan shows great sensitivity to the situation of those who have been displaced geographically. In his introduction to his compilation of Arab immigrant writers, he points out that despite the diversity of the writers in his collection, “Arab immigrant writers since the late nineteenth century have all had to contend with Orientalist stereotypes and prejudices that surface in step with changes in domestic climate and political developments abroad” (2011:4). In his view, what those writers have in common is the existential fact of being immigrants who write in English, and their relationship to their readers is therefore mediated by what Hassan sees as “the dominant discourse of Orientalism that defines them in their adoptive countries” (2011:4). He explains further that their position as immigrants imposes limits on what they can say and how they say it, but, on the other hand, he points out that this also affords them a unique opportunity to act as “cultural translators”. He explains that those three concepts — immigrant minority, Orientalism, and cultural translation — guide his reading of the tradition. These concepts also guide my analysis of *Amreeka*, where Muna and her family are a part of the immigrant minority group mentioned, where Orientalist motivation drives patients away from Nabeel’s medical practice and where Raghda tries to raise her American-born children within a Palestinian paradigm. Hassan argues, “Immigrant

writing is a minor literature, or a subset of minor literature, as defined by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*” (2011:4). According to him, Deleuze and Guattari argue that “a minor literature does not come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language” (Deleuze and Guattari 16, cited in Hassan 2011:4). Such a literature has three characteristics: “the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation” (18, cited in Hassan 2011:4). As I understand it, the first characteristic, deterritorialization, refers to the breaking of habits. In this context, it is seen in authors finding a voice within a language that is not their own, but with which they are familiar. This may apply to non-native speakers writing in a tongue alien to theirs. This is relevant to *Amreeka*, where Dabis uses English and Arabic in the dialogue to make a strong point about both deterritorialization and political immediacy. The dialogue in the O’Hare International Airport scene is particularly relevant, where the airport customs officer and Muna are at odds with each other over the use of the word “occupation” as both employment and the action of being occupied by a military force.

Within the milieu of Otherness, Othering and the Other, the assumptions about Arab culture which are endemic to misguided Western thinking on Arab people finds a voice in Samuel Huntington’s seminal essay *Clash of Civilisations* (1993). His hypothesis is, “the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind

and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural” (2002:22). He goes on to argue that the principal clash will be between Western and non-Western civilisations. Principal among these, he identifies the West on the one hand and Islamic and Confucian civilisations on the other. The book of the same title that followed his essay (1997) lists several world events, which, he believes, vindicate his hypothesis as they illustrate the danger posed to world order brought about by the growing fault lines between these civilisations. Although a few of the events are not directly related to the Muslim world, he points out that of all the possible global war scenarios, the most likely would be the result of “the escalation of a fault line war between groups from different civilizations, most likely involving Muslims on one side and non-Muslims on the other” (Huntington, 2002:312). In a review of the impact of Huntington’s work, journalist Nicolas Richter posits, “His essay was to become a classic — but it would also be abused to stir up hatred against Muslims” (2013). He further makes the point that the culture clash between Huntington’s rival blocs has failed to materialise. “The bloodiest battles take place within civilisations, not between them – Africans kill Africans in the Congo, Muslims murder Muslims in Egypt, and the civil war in Syria has claimed more victims than the US invasion of Iraq” (Richter 2013). While scholar Corinna Mullin (2014) also finds the validity of Huntington’s theories debatable, she is of the opinion that his success at bringing discussion of culture and religion from the margins of political science scholarship to the mainstream is undisputable. I would argue that it is this populist reception of his work that is the most dangerous aspect of this work, creating as it does, the Otherness of Muslims and presenting it to a wide audience.

A more embracing stance towards the Other is evident in the work of Elsaesser (2005) with his observation of double occupancy individuals. He explains that the cinema of double occupancy has emerged in response to the crisis of the nation-state and the growing significance of multiple and often conflicting allegiances which hyphenated members of [a] nation's experience (Elsaesser 2005:118). One such "hyphenated member" would be Cherien Dabis, director of *Amreeka*, (Chapter 3) who, although born in America, defines herself as a Palestinian-American. In Elsaesser's opinion, in modern Europe, the idea of nation and state are drifting apart. "Instead we can observe the formation of other groupings (or senses of belonging) that are either sub-state or supra-state, i.e. that articulate themselves above or below, or next to the nation state" (Elsaesser 2005:116). Those hyphenated identities at sub-nation level include immigrants, refugees or asylum seekers, "who live within their own diasporic communities and closed family or faith circles, cut off from the social fabric at large through lack of familiarity with either language or culture or both" (Elsaesser 2005:118). Elsaesser further describes a category of those individuals, also sub-nation in their allegiance, who are sections of the second-generation diaspora. People in this category, while sharing the language and possessing the skills to navigate their society, nonetheless do not feel they have a stake in maintaining the social fabric, sensing themselves to be excluded or knowing themselves to be discriminated against, while also having become estranged from the nation of their parents. I would place Cherien Dabis within this group: she is American born and defines herself as a Palestinian-American. Her personal situation is poignantly, if comically, evident in *Amreeka*

where Raghda insists that her American-born children live in Palestine once they set foot in their home, even though it happens to be in Illinois. Elsaesser sums up his concept with great empathy for the predicament of double occupancy individuals in the following terms (2005:110-111):

I want the term to be understood as at once tragic, comic and utopian. Tragic, because the reality of feeling oneself invaded, imposed upon, deprived of the space and security one thinks one needs, is — whatever one's race, creed or gender, but also whatever one's objective reason or justification — a state of pathos, disempowerment and self-torment.

In a similar vein, the crucial work of Hamid Naficy (2001) takes into account exilic, accented and diasporic cinema and is relevant to my thesis for his emphasis on work by filmmakers living away from their place of birth. His discussion of the filmmaking of postcolonial, Third World, and other displaced individuals living in the West, takes into account their personal experiences of exile (2001:10). Within this milieu, he defines “accented filmmakers” as operating independently, outside the studio system or mainstream film industries, using modes of production that critique those entities. This status makes them more prone to “the tensions of marginality and difference” (2001:10). Their situation then prevents them from forming a homogenous group, but there is commonality in their “liminal subjectivity and interstitial location in society” (2001:10). When mapping the accented cinema, Naficy finds it helpful to differentiate three types of films that constitute it: exilic, diasporic and ethnic. He uses the term “exile” as referring to external exiles: “individuals or groups who voluntarily or involuntarily have left their country of origin and who maintain an ambivalent relationship with their previous and current places

and cultures” (2001:12). It is helpful to bear this in mind in the work of my chosen filmmakers, Cherien Dabis, Hany Abu-Assad and Ziad Doueri. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, Dabis is Palestinian-American and, although she lives in America, grew up with an awareness of her own Otherness, which she returns to in her film *Amreeka*. Hany Abu-Assad is a Dutch-Palestinian director whose film, *Paradise Now*, addresses life in Palestine under occupation. His next film, *The Idol* (2015), returns to address the theme of life in Palestine, but this time the location is Gaza, which presented the challenges of dealing with the “Israeli military, the Palestinian Authority and Hamas” (LA Times 2016). Also conforming to Naficy’s concept of exilic cinema is *West Beirut*. Director Ziad Doueiri is Lebanese, has an American passport and lives in France and his film reflects his own experiences recounted in his IMDb profile, (Ziad Doueiri Biography N.D.) of living in Lebanon, being educated in a French school and moving to the United States at the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975. The topic of emigration is a repetitive theme of *West Beirut*, illustrating his own life experience. In short, Naficy explains (2001:12):

The exiles’ primary relationship, in short, is with their countries and cultures of origin and with the sight, sound, taste and feel of an originary experience, of an elsewhere at other times.

However, it should be mentioned that Asuman Suner (2006:363) takes issue with Naficy’s theorisation of accented cinema, believing that the cinematic styles and thematic preoccupations associated with exilic/diasporic films consistently appear also in wide-ranging examples of “world” cinema that are often classified under the rubric of “national cinemas”. She analyses three films, by a Kurdish-Iranian director, a Hong Kong director and a Turkish director to support his thesis. I noted a

similar anomaly where the three directors I have chosen for my analysis fall into the category of both Elsaesser's observation of "double occupancy" individuals and Naficy's theorisation of "exilic individuals" and in this latest case that Suner mentions, as makers of films within the "world" cinema genre. I do not find the genre ambivalence problematic or that there are limitations on accented cinema reaching its critical potential as posited by Suner, as Naficy's argument about this particular group of makers of accented cinema has a clear definition, as I understand it, falling within an independent group of filmmakers that critiques the established film production apparatus. If there are situations where there is an overlap of genres, it allows for a more textured reading of the filmmakers' style.

Of further relevance to my study of the Other is a study of the historical roots of xenophobic reactions to Syrians, poignantly evident in the writing of Elizabeth Boosahda, a third-generation Arab American, who draws on 200 personal interviews as well as photographs and historical documents, in her account of more than 100 years of the Arab-American community. She shares the following anecdote of xenophobic treatment of children of Syrian descent (2003:134):

I still remember the day when Cousin Amelia's daughter Alma came home from Grafton Street School for lunch. She was crying as though her heart would break. ... Between sobs, Alma said that her teacher, Miss Morin, told the whole class that President Wilson [1913–21] was going to deport all the Syrians after the war because they were not doing their share toward the war.

To her credit, Miss Moran apologised after receiving a note from Alma's mother describing her daughter's distress, but such attitudes are not unfamiliar. Ziad

Doueiri illustrates similar behaviour in *West Beirut*, where the school principal's racism and colonial attitude towards the pupils provokes a response that is far more strident than that of the young Alma.

Although my thesis concentrates on negative representation of Arabs in the media, it must be said that there are some positive representations of Arabs in popular culture. Editors Anan Ameri and Holly Arida (2012), for instance, document positive Arab-American contributions to American life and culture, especially in the last decade, debunking myths and common negative perceptions that were exacerbated by the 9/11 attacks and the War on Terror. In their edited volume, *Daily Life of Arab Americans in the 21st Century*, Marvin Wingfield writes about Arab Americans in relation to 9/11, painting them as both heroes and victims in his chapter on the impact of 9/11 titled "Middle East conflicts and anti-Arab discrimination". I mention the chapter title as it resonates with the situation experienced by the protagonists of *Amreeka* in both their natal land of Palestine and their adopted home of Illinois. To give context to the role of Arab Americans in America, Wingfield tells stories of Arab Americans who lost their lives on Flight 11 out of Boston and those working on the 104<sup>th</sup> floor of the North Tower, as well as the Arab American heroes who rushed to the World Trade Center to help. He mentions three by name: Peter Hashem (2012:29), Jude Safi (2012:29) and Ahmed Nasser (2012:30). Wingfield sums up (cited in Ameri and Arida 2012:30-31):

Whether a passenger on one of the doomed planes, a worker in one of the World Trade Center towers, or a heroic rescuer, these men all shared in the typical pattern of Arab American life — immigrant success, integration into their neighborhoods, and closeness to family — characteristics that

should be kept in mind when exploring the anti-Arab discrimination that followed 9/11.

He continues: “Across the country on 9/11 Arab Americans and Muslims were as shocked and horrified as their fellow citizens.” He goes on to say that they donated blood, held candlelight vigils, conducted prayer services, and offered their skills as translators (cited in Ameri and Arida 2012:31). In addition:

In four days Arab Americans in Orlando, Florida, raised \$50,000 for the Red Cross. Restaurant owners donated profits to relief funds and the families of those who died. Arab American and Muslim organizations issued public statements condemning the attacks as a “barbaric act of terrorism” and called on their communities to cooperate with law enforcement authorities in apprehending those who were responsible and in preventing any future attacks.

It was widely reported that the 19 men who hijacked the airliners and killed nearly three thousand people on 9/11 were Arabs who were motivated by an extreme, politicized version of Islam. The heroic rescue efforts of police, firefighters, and medical personnel also received widespread coverage. However, in Wingfield’s account, Arabs also emerge as heroes and victims: “an underreported tragedy of 9/11 is that Arab Americans, Arab nationals, and Muslims were also among the victims, though they served as rescuers as well” (Wingfield cited in Ameri and Arida 2012:31). I believe that the anti-Arab discourse that has been increasingly prevalent since 9/11 obviates any representation of this ethnicity as anything but Other, and Wingfield’s observation is therefore not surprising.

The tendency to represent Arabs and, more particularly, Palestinians as “terrorists” is investigated in a study eliciting the memories of Palestinians. Based on extensive

interviews with members of the "intifada generation," those who were between 10 and 18 years old when the intifada<sup>10</sup> began in 1987, John Collins (2004) researches intifada memories of ordinary Palestinians. He explains that by the end of 2001, "the notion of 'terror' was occupying a very different place in global political discourse, and long-standing Israeli attempts to tar Palestinians with the brush of 'terrorism' — attempts that had been partially undermined during the years of the intifada and the 'peace process' — were again receiving a sympathetic hearing from many in the United States."<sup>11</sup> Collins explains (2004:4) that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon pursued his own policy of colonial brutality, which, he asserts, was under the cover of George W. Bush's "war on terrorism". In his opinion, the human suffering endured by the Palestinians and the violence and oppression against them was unseen, even at the height of the intifada. When Sharon launched a massive assault on Palestinian communities in early 2002 (which, Collins posits, was the largest Israeli military operation since the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, a war over which Sharon presided as Defense Minister), refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza were the primary targets (2004:4). Collins explains the "house-to-house" search at Balata Refugee Camp earlier that year as having been executed in a particularly devastating way: fearful of being exposed in the camp's

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<sup>10</sup> "In its most basic sense, *intifada* is a variant of the Arabic verb 'to shake'. In modern times it is associated with a popular uprising: *intifada* was first used this way in 1952, to describe Iraqis protesting against their king. The term has remained popular throughout the Middle East, from Western Sahara to semi-autonomous Kurdistan. But the word is most closely linked to the Palestinian cause. Palestinians have already fought two full *intifadas*, chiefly against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza" (A. V. 2017).

<sup>11</sup> As Collins has argued elsewhere (Collins 2002), the discourse of "terrorism" that seemed to arise out of nowhere in the post-9/11 period has a much longer genealogy. He explains, "While the concept itself dates to the late eighteenth century, the current notion of 'terrorism' was an invention of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when it was constituted as an object of study and policy through the work of individuals working in and between major institutions in the United States. Since that time "terrorism" has been the ultimate floating signifier, applied selectively and with devastating effect to a host of movements across the globe, even as the concept remains perpetually undefined" (Collins 2004:235).

narrow alleyways, the Israelis had used a technique they called “walking through walls,” methodically using explosives and special saws to cut through the walls separating one home from the next and damaging roughly five hundred dwellings in the process. Collins explains that the “operation” ended after three days, but the people of Balata knew better than to treat it as an endpoint. “The Israelis will not leave the camp like this,” predicted one resident. “There will be a massacre here.” Less than a month later, Sharon launched his all-out war against Palestinians throughout the West Bank, killing hundreds and systematically destroying the infrastructure of the nascent Palestinian state. Collins relates this story, not only to give some sense of the place that is home to the Palestinians he interviewed, but also to underscore a larger point about his own relationship to “the question of Palestine” (2004:5). Since 1987 Collins has gradually come to see the situation in Palestine not, in the manner of the mainstream U.S. media, as a series of “rounds of violence,” but rather as violence itself. He cites the following passage, written by cultural theorist Walter Benjamin just months before Benjamin took his own life in 1940 while trying to flee from Nazi-occupied France to Spain (cited in Collins 2004:5-6):

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the “state of emergency” in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. ... The current amazement that the things we are experiencing are “still” possible in the twentieth century is *not* philosophical. This amazement is not the beginning of knowledge — unless it is the knowledge that the view of history which gives rise to it is untenable.

The analogous situations of the German occupation of France in the Second World War and the Israeli occupation of Palestine must be drawn here. Muna, the

protagonist in *Amreeka*, is so overwhelmed by the brutality and oppression of the “state of emergency” in Palestine that she gives up her life there in favour of pursuing the American Dream, which, as we know, is an illusion. However, the reality versus the illusion is one that she and her son, Fadi, are yet to face as the narrative of the film unfolds.

On the topic of suicide bombing, which is relevant to the analysis of *Paradise Now*, Christoph Reuter’s (2002) study of the types of people who become suicide bombers provides some useful insights. His research begins in the mid-1990s, when suicide bombers were a rare phenomenon (2002:1) and only occurred in what he calls “more remote areas – in Lebanon, in Israel” (2002:2). He points out, “We barely noticed that the explosions of these human bombs had reached epidemic proportions, and that the tactic had made its way to Sri Lanka in 1987 (long before it reached Israel), or that, by the 1990s, it had arrived in Turkey, Kashmir and Chechnya” (2002:2). He discusses the role that September 11, 2001 played in bringing about what he sees as the “end of history” rather than the usually hailed Cold War (2002:2):

On September 11, 2001, four attacks by nineteen suicide bombers, armed with nothing more lethal than a couple of box-cutters, suddenly forced America to start waging a new type of world war. ... To this date, the real enemy – the followers of Osama bin Laden, trained in suicide and murder, and embodying his nihilistic version of the ideology of a jihad bent on destroying everything – remains undefeated, as we see by the unending string of new attacks in such places as Casablanca, Riyadh, Mombasa, Karachi, Indonesia, Tunisia.

This view is in line with my own understanding of the increased Islamophobia after 9/11. Reuter’s chapter entitled “Israel and Palestine” is of particular relevance to my

research, discussing “the culture of death” in this flammable area of the Middle East. Reuter takes what appears to be a partisan view of the Israelis’ experience with the uncritical assumption of ownership rather than occupier of Palestine in his comment, “Israel’s citizens have become besieged in their own country” (2002:82), thereby ignoring the fact that they are living in occupied land. However, the value of Reuter’s work lies in the *vox pops*, with both Israelis and Palestinians giving expression to both sides of the argument. One such interview is with Aqeel, acting mayor of Khan Yunis, a city in the southern Gaza Strip, whom, Reuter feels, could pass for a company CEO (2002:84), the implication being that he is presentable. This comment in itself exhibits the underlying assumption that this is unusual and this is the type of stereotyping that — as I argue throughout my thesis — is commonplace in the West. Reuter explains further that Aqeel spent years in Israeli prisons and, in the mid-1990s, was one of the leading peace activists in the Gaza Strip. Reuter claims that his is a typical Palestinian biography, which he allows Aqeel to describe in the first person (2002:84):

In 1996, practically all of us were still against the martyr operations. Not any longer. I was against it we were in the middle of the peace process and thought: Let’s give peace a chance. Society was against it then, and the *sulta*<sup>12</sup> really tried to destroy the groups and arrest their men. Now the whole situation is different. Now people are just longing for the next operation! We all feel that we can no longer bear the situation as it is; we feel that we’d simply explode under all this pressure of humiliation. They’re doing it for us.

This viewpoint supports my argument that suicide attacks have less to do with religious fundamentalism and have more to do with resistance to the political occupation of the land by a foreign power.

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<sup>12</sup> The “power,” a term typically used here to refer to Yasser Arafat’s Palestinian Authority.

In *Paradise Now*, Suha (Lubna Azabal) sees negotiation as the means to a peaceful resolution in Palestine, rather than terrorism and the martyrdom of suicide bombers. She speaks out against terrorism, which she sees as giving the enemy, Israel, an excuse for retaliatory attacks on Palestine. Whether Abu-Assad intentionally genders the role of the negotiator is unclear, but I argue that her viewpoint does not necessarily reflect the views of all women, even though the bearded male Arab has come to epitomise suicide bombers. In support of my view, Nicole Detraz (2012) examines the role of gender in international security and includes a chapter on a gendered understanding of terrorism. She points out, “An important piece of the examination of terrorism through gender lenses is to dispute the assumption that terrorists are men” (2012:101). She quotes Jean Bethke Elshtain’s “foundational discussion of beautiful souls and just warriors” (cited in Detraz 2012:101) as an important step in this process. She explains further that women are typecast as peaceful, beautiful souls, while men are seen as violent, either eagerly, or reluctantly. On the other hand, in her chapter on peacekeeping and peacebuilding she observes (2012:87):

Women often enter discussions of peacebuilding through considerations of the fact that large numbers of them are often represented among the marginalized segments of a population, so it is understood that peacebuilding efforts and humanitarian relief efforts that address their welfare is a necessary phase of post-conflict reconstruction.

Detraz further points out that the UN has recognised the need to mainstream gender in the process of peacebuilding. In January 2011, Ambassador Peter Wittig,

the head of the PBC,<sup>13</sup> discussed issues of justice in peacebuilding efforts by increasing the participation of marginalized groups, including women, in societies where their participation was limited before (2012:87). Although the PBC only covers African countries, the observations about the role of women conveys a universal message and are appropriate to a study of *Paradise Now*, as Abu-Assad has positioned Suha in the role of activist and negotiator in Palestine, which is perceived as a country where women are marginalised.

In his film, director Abu-Assad has also brought to the viewer's attention the use of the body as a weapon in modern day warfare. In this regard Robert Burgoyne's (2012) study of embodiment in the war films *Paradise Now* and *The Hurt Locker* views the subject of the body from opposing perspectives, the first being the Palestinian resistance fighter and the second a United States soldier, the leader of a bomb disposal squad in Iraq. He explains that *Paradise Now* follows the last three days of the life of a suicide bomber in the West Bank and his depiction transforms from "a shy young man" to a "ritualized killer" (2012:9). It is Burgoyne's contention that the new imagery of war and resistance is "crystallized here in a new symbolic iteration of the body at risk," that is no longer defined by the ideology of "total war" that "shaped the grand narratives of twentieth century combat" (2012:7). He further mentions that, of all the cinematic forms that can be described as body genres, the film is a defining example. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri describe the suicide

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<sup>13</sup> In 2005 the Security Council and the General Assembly created the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). The commission was inaugurated in July 2006 with a mandate to help countries who have recently experienced conflict and are in a transition to peace. The countries currently on the agenda for the PBC are exclusively African states (Detraz 2012:86).

terrorist as the “dark opposite, the gory doppelganger of the safe, bodiless soldier”, and emphasise the contradiction the suicide bomber poses to the strategy of bodiless war: “Just when the body seems to have disappeared from the battlefield, it comes back in all its gruesome, tragic reality” (cited in Burgoyne 2012:8). What Burgoyne emphasises in pairing these two films is “the uncanny mirroring, the doubling of one combatant by the other.” He explains that the suicide terrorist blends into his environment without a uniform whereas the armoured shielded soldier of the bomb disposal unit is protected as much as possible by his uniform. Burgoyne takes his argument about the uniform further and makes a compelling argument for the defiance and threat evident in the video-making process that occurs before the suicide bombers go on their mission (2012:11). He argues that here, in striking contrast with the concealment that is critical to the success of the human bomber, the visibility of the performance is emphasised. In this process, he argues, the video celebrates and even exaggerates the visibility of the threat. In my opinion, however, Abu-Assad undermines this reading of the scene by introducing the comedic elements of the battery running out, which forces Khaled to repeat his testimony, as well as Khaled’s advice to his mother to buy water filters that are on special offer. Furthermore, the disrespectful and detached nature of his audience during his recital is in opposition to the threatening representation referred to by Burgoyne.

With reference to *West Beirut*, the third film in my analysis, Khatib (cited in Gugler 2010:134) discusses Lebanese cinema and the representation of war and points

out that Lebanese cinema “has come into its own over the past thirty years as it acted as a commentator on the development of sectarian conflict in Lebanon, on the normalization of war, on reconstruction in the postwar period, and on the way the war still lurks in every corner of today’s Lebanon.” She explains that, since the start of the civil war in 1975, it has become “a central theme for Lebanese filmmakers across generations.” She goes on to explain, “This does not simply apply to films representing the civil war; it also applies to films in which the war inhabits their stylistic elements” (cited in Gugler 2010:134). She also believes that the war films focus on issues of social fragmentation, sectarian animosities, class divisions, and individual devastation. In her opinion, it is only *West Beirut* and *In the Battlefields (Ma’arik hubb, Danielle Arbid, 2004)* that represent another side to the war, namely the possibility of having fun under difficult conditions. The other films about the civil war, whether made during the war or afterwards, are more concerned with revealing its dark side. I would argue that, in spite of Khatib’s refreshing take on the teenagers’ adventurous pursuits, the ominous, dark cloud of war is ever-present in *West Beirut* as reflected in the day-to-day curtailment of the children’s activities and the sectarian bullying that impacts the lives of children and adults alike.

On the other hand, Aseel Sawalha (2010) examines the reconstruction of Beirut as a postwar Arab city. She undertakes an ethnographic study of time, place, and memory in the aftermath of the civil war that ravaged Beirut from 1975 to 1991. She explains that her study focuses on efforts to rebuild the city and describes how the

residents of Beirut used individual and collective memories of their celebrated architectural past to compete and negotiate for the reinstatement of municipal services and the reconstruction of their urban environment (2010:1). Her ethnographic study includes observations of how the 16-year Lebanese civil war, “much of which was fought within Beirut’s boundaries, drastically transformed the physical landscape of the city and destroyed much of its downtown area” (2010:1). She recounts the way Beirut’s city centre was transformed from its former elegance into a “ghost town.” She points out that the physical devastation caused a “massive demographic upheaval” (2010:2), as half of the population was uprooted and relocated. This demographic upheaval takes the form of one family’s conflict around the decision of whether to relocate in the film *West Beirut*, which is discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

There is considerable sensitivity in the construction of masculinity in the film *West Beirut*, where the young self-appointed militiamen wield their power with varying degrees of brutality and machismo — on the one hand — and the exploration of the avenues open to family men who must yield to the pressures of increased militarisation of their homeland, yet keep the family safe, on the other. In this regard, Beynon (2002) asks questions about the representation of masculinity and discusses the ways in which these masculinities are socially, culturally and historically shaped. He debates how particular masculinities are created, enacted and represented in specific settings. He goes on to explore how “masculinities”, or ways of “being a man”, are anchored in time and place; the products of socio-

historical and cultural circumstances. Beynon's examination of the emergence of a brand of masculinity fit for Empire in the mid- to late nineteenth century (2002:26) still resonates in the French influence at young Tareq's school, where he must sing the French anthem and stand under the French flag. The author considers some of the media discourses shaping masculinities today, and the formation of specific masculinities in specific settings (such as prisons, hospitals and schools) which both define and in turn are defined by, strongly held conceptions of acceptable masculine behaviour. He concludes by reviewing a range of ways in which masculinities might be researched, from fieldwork and auto/biographical and life history approaches through to semiotics and the use of both film and literary texts. By using the film text as of site for such exploration, I uncover the diversity of masculine representation in *West Beirut*.

My literature review has only focused on those sources that have most strongly influenced my analysis of the films, and is not exhaustive.

## Chapter Three

### ***AMREEKA*: Immigration and Cultural Racism**

In this chapter I analyse the film *Amreeka* (dir. Dabis, 2009: USA, National Geographic Entertainment) directed by Cherien Dabis, a newcomer to the field of filmmaking. Her film lends itself to cultural analysis as it contains many assumptions related to heritage, including notions of the Other (Hall 2012:223), but more particularly in this case the racial Other. Her intention of creating “so much more than the stereotype”, described in an interview with Kristen McCracken (2009, Tribeka Film Festival), plays out in the humanising of the film’s main characters, Muna Farah (played by Nisreen Faour) and her son Fadi Farah (Melkar Muallem), who leave Palestine to join Muna’s sister in Illinois, in search of the American Dream. Dabis is an independent Palestinian-American filmmaker, which positions her within the context of Naficy’s (2001) work on exilic, accented and diasporic cinema mentioned in my literature review. To give further context to her situation, a brief historical overview of the four phases of Palestinian film positions her work in the fourth phase.

The starting point of Palestinian cinema is seen by Gertz and Khleifi (2008:11) to be in 1935, when Ibrahim Hassan Sirhan filmed a 20 minute-long film that documents the visit of Prince Saud to Jerusalem and Jaffa. They explain that the history of Palestinian cinema is divided into four periods echoing the stages of the Palestinian struggle, “the topic on which Palestinian cinematic creation has fed and focused”

(Gertz and Khleifi 2008:11). The periods are not clear-cut, however. The first period, between 1935 and 1948, is referred to as the *Naqba* (disaster), following which most Palestinians were compelled to leave their homeland. Historians who have researched this period of film history have relied exclusively on testimonies of people who participated in the cinematic undertaking of the era, together with contemporary newspapers and registration documents of production institutions. Gertz and Khleifi further explain that the second period (1948-1967), is dubbed the “Epoch of Silence,” when almost no Palestinian films were produced. The beginning of the third period (1968-1982) is marked by the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza strip and the strengthening status of the Palestine Liberation Organisation and other Palestinian institutions. During this period Palestinian cinema was created in exile, mostly in Beirut where filmmakers found refuge. Only a few groups continued to function, “including the PLO’s Department of Culture, which produced some of the more mature movies of the period (Gertz and Khleifi 2008:12). The films produced during this period are referred to as the “Cinema of the Palestinian Revolution” or the “Cinema of the Palestinian Organizations”.

Of relevance to the discussion of *Amreeka* in this chapter and *Paradise Now* in the next, is the fourth period, starting in 1980 and continuing to the present day and characterised by cinema that is the product of several artists’ individual initiatives. In the course of this period, the Palestinian struggle intensified with two waves of uprisings, known as the first and second *Intifadas*, determining the agenda of

Palestinian society and the Palestinian Authority that was established as a consequence of the Oslo Accord or the peace process, which I also mention in the following chapter. During this fourth phase, Gertz and Khleifi point out, Palestinian film directors, whether in exile or in the homeland, have been compelled to find their own funding. As a result of the absence of any institutional support, they have also enjoyed creative freedom from the pressing demands by the Palestinian Authority to align itself with the aims of the national struggle. However, Gertz and Khleifi (2008:12) point out that the Palestinian establishment was mostly occupied with the battle for its own existence rather than with “the cultural, political and artistic path of cinema.” The fourth period is, therefore, also defined by the adventurous creativity of individual filmmakers.

This quality of adventurous creativity is evident in *Amreeka*. Muna and Fadi’s wish to emigrate to America is revealed early on in the film after a particularly difficult day for Muna, who encounters her ex-husband and his new girlfriend at the market, has to deal with a surly guard at a checkpoint and comes home from work to her mother, who immediately starts bickering with her. It is later that night that she opens a letter that is presumably about a green card and wakes Fadi to give him the news (*Amreeka* 2009):

MUNA: Get up, look at this, you’re never going to believe it!

FADI: What is this? How did this happen?

MUNA: I don’t know, I applied for it ages ago. When I was with your father.

FADI: Mom, we have to go. Do you know how many people dream of this opportunity?

MUNA: I had forgotten about it entirely. This is from when I was with him.

FADI: Mom. Forget about it. You and I will go together. Plus we have Aunt Raghda and Uncle Nabeel. They’re in Illinois, right?

MUNA: We can't leave your grandmother.

FADI: She'd rather be with Uncle Samer than with us anyway.

MUNA: Enough.

As she stands up to leave his room, Fadi makes one more attempt to persuade her:

FADI: You're paying all this money to send me to a private school. But for what? What college will I go to here? What job will I get?

MUNA: What about your father?

FADI: He won't even notice we're gone.

MUNA: I saw him at the market today. He was with her of course.

FADI: Mom, my father did what he wanted. Why shouldn't we do the same?

MUNA: It's not that easy to pack all your things and move to a different country. We'd be like visitors.

FADI: It's better than being prisoners in our own country.

This scene gives context to the frustration felt by Muna and Fadi. Muna's fear of change is subverted by Fadi's wish for opportunity and escape. His last sentence illustrates the sense of despair felt by many Palestinians. The sense of being prisoners is caused by the Israeli occupation and the checkpoints that Palestinians must endure.

When I began my research, and at the time when *Amreeka* was made, the migration process had not reached its current scale and was not a news item. However, according to BBC reporters Rodgers et al (2016), since the Syrian uprising of March 2011 over 4.5 million people have fled Syria, most of them women and children, giving rise to one of the largest refugee exoduses in recent history. The UNHCR reports that the five-year Syrian conflict has fuelled the worst humanitarian crisis of our time, with 4.8 million Syrians forced to seek refuge in neighbouring countries and a further 6.6 million displaced inside the country

(UNHCR 2016). "On this day, the fifth anniversary of the Syria conflict, that is where I had hoped to be – in Syria, helping UNHCR with returns and watching the families I have come to know be able to go home. It is tragic and shameful that we seem still so far from that point," the Special UN Envoy, Angelina Jolie Pitt, told a news conference on 17 March 2016 (UNHCR 2016). She called on governments to find diplomatic solutions to the crisis, and to look at what more they themselves could do to provide safety to those fleeing persecution and war. These figures make emigration and immigration a prevalent theme in the Middle East. The significance of Pitt's call resonates in the film *Amreeka*, where the protagonists emigrate from Palestine to escape the occupation by Israel. Many attempts have been made at brokering a peace agreement, persuading Israel to end construction of the settlements and restoring the human rights of the Palestinians who occupy the West Bank and Ramallah.

The plight of Muna and Fadi, who make their way to America, represents the difficulties that immigrants face in acculturation, although they face less dire circumstances than the participants in the migration crisis currently underway. However, the fictional characters reflect the real life experiences of director Cherien Dabis and illustrate the xenophobia that besets migrants and immigrants alike.

To support Farah's decision to leave Ramallah, Dabis gives viewers further insight into the difficulties of life in Palestine for many. For instance, a client at the bank where Muna works is frustrated about not receiving his money transfer from Jordan (Amreeka 2009):

CLIENT: It's been two weeks — this is ridiculous!

TELLER: Please be patient.

Turning to Muna, she asks:

TELLER: Could you check on a pending wire transfer?

After checking on the name and amount, Muna replies:

MUNA: It's not here.

CLIENT: I swear to god I'm not leaving here until that money is in my pocket!

MUNA: Please Sir, calm down. I will look into it for you.

It is when she turns to make the phone call about his money that Dabis employs the denotation of the fan lifting Muna's papers to fly across her desk. This carries the connotation of disorder, things flying out of place, and the last straw.

The richly textured scene that immediately follows does not alleviate any of these connotations as Muna and Fadi arrive at one of the interminable checkpoints that they negotiate each day. Although the scene takes on the almost festive air of a market as peddlers sell their wares, the view is partially obscured by someone making use of the opportunity to wash Muna's car's windscreen. South Africans will identify with this scene, which is similar to those encountered by motorists at traffic lights every day. However, in this case the ominous presence of Israeli guards in the distance overshadows the activities as the cars creep towards the inevitable conflict ahead. The camera angle then changes from close up and mid shots to an extremely wide shot of the desert terrain with its concrete barriers to establish the next scene, which is loaded with menace (Amreeka 2009):

ISRAELI GUARD: Where do you live?

MUNA: Bethlehem.

ISRAELI GUARD: Where in Bethlehem? What's your house number?

MUNA: We don't have house numbers.

ISRAELI GUARD: What?

He turns to another guard and they smile at this perceived absurdity.

ISRAELI GUARD: I need to know your house number. Give me your house number.

This is all too much for Fadi who then interjects:

FADI: Why? Are you going to come visit us?

ISRAELI GUARD: Get out!

MUNA: He's kidding with you. He's just kidding.

ISRAELI GUARD: I said get out of the car.

MUNA: I swear he was just kidding.

A close-up of Muna reveals the panic that she is feeling at this threat to her son and the camera then moves to a point-of-view shot through the windscreen of Fadi standing with his back to the car. The guard makes him lift his shirt.

ISRAELI GUARD: You think you're clever? Turn around. I said lift your shirt!

The irrationality of the petty but threatening officialdom that they encounter at least twice a day is a constant source of concern and irritation.

Dabis chooses to leave the checkpoint scene at this juncture and the next scene is a long shot of the car travelling through the streets of Bethlehem. I would like to foreground two shots here that are of significance. The first is a huge graffiti representation of two bull-like animals, one black, one white, pulling in different

directions and another wall in a narrow street carrying the indexical signifier “BEEN THERE DONE THAT”. Although somewhat rudimentary representations of the event that the viewer has just witnessed, the first piece of graffiti represents the binary opposition of black and white, connoting good and evil as well as racial difference, which in this case relates to nationality and the Israeli Palestinian conflict. The indexical signifier BEEN THERE DONE THAT on the other hand signifies that Muna and Fadi have experienced the checkpoint incident before but, unlike the original meaning of the phrase, do not have a choice but to experience it again. Dabis’ use of irony here connotes the weariness of Palestinians faced with these daily encounters at the checkpoints under Israeli control.

The militarisation of the checkpoints represents a form of war carried on by other means, including an invasion of the space of Palestinians. This means that the journey to school and work, for instance, is an endurance test in the face of the sometimes belligerent soldiers who wield their power with varying degrees of aggression. Lefebvre’s question (1991:17) to what extent a space may be read or decoded is relevant to this type of delineation of space. In his view, it is possible to decode space and this implies signification. He posits further that even if there is no code of space, specific codes might have existed at specific historical periods. Following his line of reasoning, I would argue that Palestinians had a coded space called Palestine prior to 1948.<sup>14</sup> They called the period of history subsequent to 1948 *Al Nakba*, which translates as “the catastrophe”, indicating how calamitous

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<sup>14</sup> The first Arab-Israeli war and the establishment of the state of Israel occurred in 1948 (*Al Nakba Al Jazeera Online* 2013).

they perceived the establishment of the State of Israel to be with its concomitant invasion of their living space. This invaded living space, as illustrated above, is evident every day in Muna and Fadi's journeys to and from school and work.

In concordance with Lefebvre's view, Crang and Thrift see space as a representational strategy (2000:1). They cite Burgin, who is of the opinion that, "The world can no doubt be represented as a 'teleimagistic global collage, forever in movement, ... composed of fragments ripped from their contexts, their serrated boundaries advancing and receding in an unending deadly dance with their neighbors, their imbricated times violently clashing, diverging — only to collide again'" (cited in Crang and Thrift 1996:185). Their proviso, "But this representation itself requires the invention of particular theoretical spaces and times if it is to resonate" (1996:185) opens the opportunity for a rich analysis of the geographic space of Palestine, where Burgin's concept of the 'advancing boundaries' impose themselves into the lives of Muna and Fadi. Burgin's view of geographical space as "violently clashing, diverging — only to collide again" are particularly compelling in this context.

Lefebvre has a correspondingly bleak view in his discussion of the events in the second half of the twentieth century (1991:23):

The state is consolidating on a world scale. It weighs down on society in full force; it plans and organizes society 'rationally', with the help of knowledge and technology, imposing analogous, if not homologous, measures irrespective of political ideology, historical background, or the class origins of those in power.

However, in the same space Lefebvre sees “other forces on the boil” and these oppositional forces answer the violence of power with the violence of subversion (1991:23). Dabis does not explore these oppositional forces, which are so evident in *Paradise Now* (which will be analysed later), but rather gives her characters the power to leave the site of “confrontation and turbulence”.

As an illustration of this context of violence and collision, we can explore the signifier “checkpoint” within the Palestinian context to examine its layers of signified meaning. The iconic signifier of the military uniforms at the checkpoints carries a signification of war and implied violence. In this instance the guards, dressed in militaristic uniforms, are the enemy enforcing the power of the occupier and their instructive mode of address takes the representation further.

The checkpoints in Palestine have been described in great detail by Amira Hass, an Israeli journalist and the only Jewish Israeli correspondent on Palestinian affairs to have lived among the people she writes about. She describes Palestinian perceptions of Israelis in the following terms: “The only Israelis this generation of Palestinians knows are soldiers and settlers. For them, Israel is no more than a subsidiary of an army that knows no limits and settlements that know no borders” (2012). Within the film and seen from Muna’s and Fadi’s perspectives, the bullying tactics of the soldiers and the endless waiting at the checkpoints bear out Hass’s descriptions of many such cases at checkpoints, which have sometimes ended in death for people requiring urgent medical attention. In a newspaper article Hass

(Haaretz 2009) reports further on the inhumanity prevalent at these checkpoints where private security firms, who have taken over the checkpoint duties, confiscate food from labourers which goes beyond the daily dietary needs allowed by Modi'in Ezrahi.

For Muna and Fadi, the checkpoints cause disruption, not only of their movement through space, but of their time as well. As Muna later points out, what should be a 15-minute trip between Ramallah and Bethlehem takes two hours because of the checkpoints. The signification of the checkpoints thus moves beyond its arbitrary dictionary definition of a "barrier or manned entrance, typically at a border, where security checks are carried out on travellers" (*Concise Oxford English Dictionary* 2011). The irony is that Palestinians going about their daily business are not "travellers": they are Palestinian citizens of Israel. However, they are regarded as the "other" by the Israeli soldiers and do not enjoy any of the human rights that nationals in their own countries would normally take for granted.

Hall explains "otherness" in terms of four accounts within cultural studies in recent decades. These are: linguistics; constructed meaning through a dialogue with the "other"; anthropology; and psychoanalytic dialogue related to the role of "difference" in our psychic lives (2012:234-237). Regarding linguistics, this Saussurian approach argues that "'difference' matters because it is essential to meaning; without it, meaning could not exist" (Hall 2012:234). This understanding that meaning is relational holds for concepts of national characteristics. Hall's example

of what it means to be British points out that it does not only relate to British characteristics, but also its “‘difference’ from its ‘others’ – ‘Britishness’ is not-French...” (2012:235). Hall gives the following example to illustrate his point, “This enables Linford Christie to signify his ‘Britishness’ (by the flag) while contesting (by his black skin) that ‘Britishness’ must always mean ‘whiteness’” (2012:235). So meaning is a binary opposition citizen/alien. Derrida points out that there are seldom neutral binary oppositions and that there is always a relation of power between the poles of a binary opposition. “We must recognize that, within the familiar philosophical oppositions, there is always “a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms controls the other (axiologically , logically, etc), holds the superior position (Derrida 2016).” So the binary opposition white/black should be represented as **white**/black in order accurately to reflect the power relationship.

Within *Amreeka*, the binary opposition **Israel**/Palestine carries similar loading in terms of values, as powerfully illustrated at the checkpoints. In one of the checkpoint scenes, which I call the kite scene, the *mise en scène* includes a child flying a kite. As mentioned in my literature review, Hayward has defined the term *mise en scène* to encompass setting, costume and lighting as well as movement within the frame (2013:239). Analysed within this context, the kite is a rather obvious signifier of freedom, flying as it does high above the scene of congestion and militarism at the checkpoint below. The proxemics are significant as the low angle longshot features only the flying kite and a bystander dressed in a white

kandura<sup>15</sup> set against a backdrop of blue sky and white clouds. This is far removed from the sense of oppression below at the checkpoint. Another particular camera angle used at the checkpoint is significant when the Israeli soldier questions Muna. Viewed from the back seat of Muna's car, the viewer becomes a passenger in the car as a close up shot of the soldier's face peers in at the window. The animosity is then directed at the viewer, as much as it is at Muna, which creates a moment of cinematic realism that powerfully portrays the victimisation of the Palestinians forced to endure barriers at every turn. Before leaving this scene, it is important to mention that the kite also has an intertextual resonance with another film, *The Kite Runner* (dir. Forster, 2007: USA, DreamWorks Paramount Vantage). Based on the novel *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini, the narrative also has the theme of an adult and child escaping foreign occupation and ending up in America. Yet, as Will explains, *Amreeka* "avoids polemic political diatribes, rather the politics is intrinsic and built-in" (Kabobfest 2009), an observation with which I agree. I would argue further that to depict Arabs as complex subjectivities militates against generalizing or stereotyped views.

In keeping with Benjamin's fundamental insight, mentioned in my literature review, that "the state of emergency in which we live is not the exception but the rule", (cited in Collins 2004:5-6), Collins begins from the premise that for Palestinians living under Israeli domination, life is in a permanent state of emergency (Swedenburg 1995b; Taussig 1992, cited in Collins 2004:6). In his view, "Researchers working in Palestine have traditionally had a difficult time grappling

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<sup>15</sup> An ankle-length, loose-fitting robe worn by Arab men, usually white in colour.

with the nature of this permanence, choosing often to pursue work that is framed, at least implicitly, by the more optimistic, teleological narratives of state building, national liberation, and the ‘peace process.’” These political nuances are not surprising to Collins and he refers to Edward Said, who doggedly and eloquently points out that the Palestinian struggle for liberation from Israeli colonial domination is one of the great moral causes of our time (Collins 2004:6). Like many others, Collins chooses to take a position on this issue, for he believes that a permanent state of emergency requires a permanent ethical commitment to “speak truth to power.”<sup>16</sup> At times this imperative carries with it the need for a careful documentation of Israeli repression with an eye to making the details of this repression public. His scholarly approach allows him to access the voices of members of the “intifada generation” mentioned in the literature review as evidence of this repression.

I believe that Cherien Dabis, as a Palestinian Arab writer, speaks equal “truth to power” with her filmic representations of Israeli repression using the prevailing vehicle of popular culture. In Said’s view, “No one writing, thinking, or acting on the Orient could do so without taking account of the limitations on thought and action imposed by Orientalism. In brief, because of Orientalism the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action” (1978:113). Eminent postmodern theorist Ihab Hassan agrees that Orientalism has profoundly influenced immigrant Arab writers, how they have reacted to it, and how their position as cultural translators

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<sup>16</sup> This phrase, which is used so often in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, apparently originates with the Quakers (The Religious Society of Friends N.D.).

has shaped their discourses (2011:3). Hassan argues that Arab authors who write in English, “especially if they live in a country with a powerful tradition of Orientalist scholarship that serves imperial interests in the Arab world, could not ignore Orientalism, either” (2011:3).

I would like to recall here Wingfield’s telling observation (cited in Ameri and Arida 2012:31) (mentioned in the previous chapter), that the deaths of Arabs and Muslims in the airliner and in the World Trade Center were underreported and that the heroic deeds of Arab rescuers went equally unnoticed, as it requires further consideration. In my opinion this speaks to the wider ideology of the American and indeed the Western media as ideological state apparatuses. Althusser (2006:96) defines this term as follows: “I shall call Ideological State Apparatuses a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions.” He regards the following institutions as Ideological State Apparatuses: the religious ISA; the educational ISA, the family ISA, the legal ISA, the political ISA, the trade-union ISA, the communications ISA and the cultural ISA. The two latter ISAs are of interest in this research as Althusser gives, as examples of the communications ISA, the press, radio and television, while the cultural ISA includes Literature, the Arts and sports. Within the coverage of the tragedy of 9/11 the media ISA then precludes coverage of Arabs and Muslims as members of “us” and situates them firmly as the Others in the process identifying them with the terrorists. The cultural ISA then marginalises Arab American writers such as Susan Abulhawa, who has been silenced by critics in America refusing

even to review her published works, as she told an audience of students at Middlesex University Dubai during a visit on 9 March 2016.<sup>17</sup> So, it is not only State-controlled entities that serve as ISAs. Althusser explains that private institutions can ‘function’ as Ideological State Apparatuses. In this respect, media corporations and publishers fulfill the function of the ISA. In Althusser’s view, the ISAs are distinguished from the Repressive State Apparatuses by the following basic difference: the Repressive State Apparatuses function “by violence”, whereas the Ideological State Apparatuses function “by ideology” (2006:96). In my view this distinction aligns with the concepts of Marxist dominant ideology and Gramscian hegemony in that one depends on dominance and the other on acquiescence. I argue that popular culture as represented in Hollywood film has the power to act as an Ideological State Apparatus in presenting Arabs as dangerous, greedy, rich and manipulative. This obviates the need for repressive action as the stereotype distorts their representation and marginalises them. Dabis's film does not conform to the myth of Arab inferiority, but takes the side of Arabs in the film, and in so doing undoes this myth carefully and successfully.

Dabis reveals, for instance, the marginalisation of Arabs in America at the time of the Iraq war in a scene where the family becomes victimised and Muna’s brother-in-law Nabeel Halaby (Yussuf Abu-Warda), a physician, starts losing patients from his

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<sup>17</sup> Susan Abulhawa was born to refugees of the 1967 war when Israel captured what remained of Palestine, including Jerusalem. She currently lives in Pennsylvania with her daughter. Her essays and political commentaries have appeared in print and international news media and she is a contributing author to two anthologies, *Shattered Illusions* (Amal Press, 2002) and *Searching Jenin* (Cune Press, 2003). *Mornings in Jenin* (Bloomsbury, 2009) is her first novel. (Goodreads N.D.)

medical practice. Muna cannot sleep and finds Nabeel in the basement watching a story on television about the Iraq War with the title *Operation Iraq Freedom*

(Amreeka 2009):

MUNA: What's happening?

NABEEL: Thirty-one Iraqis were killed in their sleep. It was an accidental bombing.

Nabeel laughs and repeats the phrase "accidental bombing" :

NABEEL: The worst calamity is one that makes you laugh. Look at this. They demolished thirteen homes in Rafah. Three Palestinians were killed. And on the American stations they're not showing any of it. It's as if it never happened.

MUNA: Enough with all this news. It's so depressing.

NABEEL: You know that we finance all of this with our tax dollars?

MUNA: We have to live our lives Nabeel.

NABEEL: I start to believe Raghda was right. We should've gotten out of here a long time ago.

MUNA: To go where?

NABEEL: How should I know?

MUNA: You've been here fifteen years. And your practice is very successful.

NABEEL: It was successful. We can't even pay the mortgage now.

Nabeel refers here to the fact that the patients in his medical practice have stopped coming to see him after 9/11. It becomes evident that the stress caused by this xenophobia leads to problems in his relationship with Raghda and that he has moved out of their bedroom to sleep in the basement, hence the late-night conversation there (Amreeka 2009):

MUNA: Listen Nabeel don't worry I will help you with that.

NABEEL: No. It's not your responsibility.

MUNA: I went to the bank and made a payment. It's not a lot but it's better than nothing. But I need you to do something for me. Talk to Raghda.

NABEEL: Why?

MUNA: You can't live down here forever.

NABEEL: You want to know the truth? I never imagined you'd be successful here. I thought you'd end up working in some factory or restaurant. Sorry I thought that.

The irony in this last remark is that Muna is indeed working in a restaurant, and a fast food one at that. This tendency of immigrants to take any jobs, however menial they might be, is exacerbated of course by the Islamophobia sweeping America after 9/11. The fact that Dabis creates well-qualified, hardworking Arab characters bearing the brunt of racist attitudes creates an ameliorated perception that I argue speaks back to the stereotypical perceptions of "bad Arabs".

In his study of stereotypes, Stanley Cohen (2002, cited in Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009:127) makes an argument that aligns with my previous discussion of Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses. Cohen argues that stereotypes are social constructions by politically powerful people in the government, business, and media, that I point out are similar to Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses. In his opinion, the media (another of Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses) become a conduit in the process of vilification of the "enemy" and the crystallization of stereotypes. He explains that stereotyping entails the development of a stylized, one-dimensional caricature of the other. "The mold is often borrowed from a repertoire of suspect characters. This argument applies to the defamation of Arabs, Muslims, and Middle Easterners as long as the post-9/11 political/ideological crisis continues," he says (2002 cited in Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009:127-128). I argue that the stereotype then becomes embedded in ideology so that the bullies in *Amreeka* for instance, have no difficulty in attributing the characteristics of the ultimate evil Other, Osama Bin Laden, to Fadi, who has in common with Bin Laden

what they erroneously believe to be religion and nationality. In fact Fadi does not share either. He does not share nationality, since he is Palestinian and Bin Laden is Saudi; neither does he share Bin Laden's religion as Fadi is Christian and Bin Laden is Muslim. However, the caricature does not require such textured differentiations and the school bullies draw their own conclusions with impunity. In the case of Nabeel, anonymous people use the same process to draw similarities between him and Saddam Hussein, imbuing Nabeel with the characteristics of a brutal dictator.

Dabis, herself, was once committed to changing the world through public policy and the media (Baumgardner 2009), which (I argue) are ISAs. According to Baumgardner, Dabis worked in public relations in Washington, D.C. during the Monica Lewinsky scandal, but left feeling "there is no room for truth in politics. I realized that the only way I would be able to say what I wanted to say was through fiction — maybe then people would let their guard down and listen." This view is echoed in the writing of contributors to *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature* edited by Hassan.

Boosahda (2003) reiterates the view of Wingfield within a wider scope than 9/11 in her research into the origins of an Arab American immigrant community (2003:36):

The immigrant was at times looked upon adversely, with hostility and with certain condescension as a foreigner. Even though the immigrant served in the U.S. armed forces and was a U.S. citizen, that person was sometimes still looked upon negatively as a foreigner because of such characteristics as appearance, manner of speaking, and cultural traits.

Not only does this mirror the observations made by Wingfield in his discussion of the roles of Arabs as victims and heroes of 9/11, but such attitudes prevail in *Amreeka*, to the extent that Fadi's cousin advises him on the clothing to wear that will help him be less conspicuous as a FOB, which she translates for Muna as meaning "fresh off the boat". This requirement for acculturation is therefore evident at every level and age of the host country's citizens. His status as an Arab immigrant has not gone unnoticed by a group of bullies in his class who start calling him Osama, thereby identifying him with Osama Bin Laden.

As mentioned in my literature review, it is argued by Hassan that when immigrant writing is viewed as a minor literature, the second characteristic of minor literature is that, because of their marginal status, "everything in them is political" (2011:5). This means that individual concerns and the political status of the minority have little distance between them (Deleuze and Guattari 17, cited in Hassan 2011:5):

The cramped space (of a minor literature) forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics. The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story [the story of the minority group] is vibrating within it.

I agree with his view, despite Dabis' claim that she has not made a political film, mentioned above, with which I take issue. In fact the question should be asked whether one can avoid politics or whether politics, considered broadly as power relationships, is not just part of the human condition as social beings.

When Muna and Fadi emigrate to Illinois, the universal problem of acculturation is manifested in both their lives. Theirs is aggravated by the xenophobia they experience as Arabs moving to America at the time of the invasion of Iraq. Dabis creates these characters in all their humanity, struggling to fit in. Muna is an experienced, well-qualified banker, but ends up working in a White Castle fast food franchise as a cleaner and waiter. Fadi is a bright student with excellent grades, but the bullying in his classroom is difficult to endure. In this environment of Othering the temptation of drugs comes his way, and like all teenagers, he must make a choice and face the consequences. One scene gives an account of the growing enmity between Fadi and his xenophobic classmates. In the scene Fadi is seen leaving the school with his cousin Salma (Alia Shawkat) and her boyfriend who go to the same school. Someone has written the words “Al Kada” in the dust of the boyfriend’s car’s back window, which Fadi responds to by writing the words, “it’s Al Qaeda you idiot”. However, Salma and her boyfriend have a different response in mind (Amreeka 2009):

SALMA: You should kick his ass.

BOYFRIEND: Yeah we should definitely kick his ass. What do you say?

FADI: No, it won’t make him stop.

SALMA: Give him a taste of his own medicine, you know?

BOYFRIEND (handing Fadi a joint): You’ve got to stop being so nice.

Toughen up you know? Show those guys whose boss.

So Fadi finds himself in a further situation of Othering that not only occurs among his classmates but also extends to his cousin and boyfriend who, although not vindictive, try to acculturate him into what they view as more appropriate behaviour. However the lessons do not end there. They then proceed to give him lessons in

dress, confiscating his jacket and telling him to “untuck” his shirt. As they get high together, Salma’s boyfriend makes fun of the fact that Fadi shares a bed with his mother in the Halabys’ home.

BOYFRIEND: That shit will mess you up man.

In this single scene then Fadi experiences a loss of innocence about the appropriateness of sharing his bed with his mother, an awareness that he does not fit in sartorially and is laughed at for coughing when he smokes marijuana for the first time.

The trio spend the rest of the afternoon smoking a joint and getting high, with Fadi trying to pretend that he has smoked a joint before. It is night by the time they see Fadi’s arch-nemesis Mike (Daniel Boiteau) pull into the carpark where they are sitting. When Mike disappears into *White Castle*, Salma and her boyfriend let down the tires of his truck, much to Fadi’s disapproval (Amreeka 2009):

FADI: I don’t think this is a good idea. What if someone sees us?

SALMA (whispers as she lets down the tire): Who cares?

FADI (shouts): Hurry up someone’s coming. Go go go!

They beat a hasty retreat in their car, but not before being spotted by Mike and his friends thereby setting the scene for retaliation.

In spite of not being responsible for letting down the truck tyres, Fadi is guilty by association and bears the brunt of the retaliation. The retaliation scene occurs in

the school hallway where Fadi is accosted by Mike and three of his friends and beaten up. Muna is called to the headmaster's office where she finds Fadi with a black eye (Amreeka 2009):

MUNA: What happened?

HEADMASTER: Well he got into a fight. There's some bruising but I don't think it's too bad.

MUNA: Let me see. My god. Who did this to you?

FADI: Some asshole.

MUNA: Who beat you in?

FADI: Up mom! Who beat me up?

This interaction brings Dabis's use of comedy to the fore once again, which diffuses the tension.

MUNA: Up. It doesn't matter. Who did this to you?

FADI: Don't worry about it it's my problem.

MUNA: You are my problem.

FADI: I don't want to be your fucking problem.

MUNA: Fadi, have some respect. What's happening to you?

FADI: I just don't want to be here.

MUNA: Where do you want to be?

FADI: Just somewhere where people don't think I'm stupid enough to blow myself up.

MUNA: Who said this?

When Muna receives no reply from Fadi she turns to the headmaster and asks:

MUNA: Who said that?

FADI: Can I go to class now?

HEADMASTER: Yes, sure.

The scene shows the progressive disintegration of Fadi's childhood innocence and entrance into adulthood. The underlying threat to his wellbeing is evident in spite of the kindness and support of the headmaster, his relationship with his mother is tarnished and his resultant rudeness to her adds to the sense of alienation of the

experience of emigration that they now both must endure. I would like to make a distinction between this alienation, a feeling of estrangement within oneself, and the sense of being Othered by “the gaze” of the Americans who they encounter.

It must be mentioned here that Muna and her son are Christians, yet because of their nationality, the assumption is made that they are Muslims. This assumption makes social acceptance and job-hunting even more of a challenge, carrying as it does the negative connotations of terrorism. For Fadi this means being called Osama and being taunted about being a suicide bomber. For Muna it impacts on her ability to find a job. For Muna’s brother-in-law Nabeel, it means a loss of patients in his medical practice. In one of the interviews at a bank, the interviewer assumes Muna is Israeli. Muna’s response, “No, I am an Arab,” leads him to joke, “Don’t blow the place up.” These five words have a single signified, namely intercultural mistrust which Muna finds impossible to overcome.

As mentioned previously, Said sees this naturalisation of Muslims as terrorists as having reached “a startling prominence at a time when racial or religious misrepresentations of every other cultural group are no longer circulated with such impunity” (1997:xii). By creating Muna as a Christian, Dabis highlights the prejudice that sees all Arabs as Muslims. Said clarifies the point that not all Arabs are, in fact, Muslims (1994:45). He explains that since the 1860s, as a result of “the imperial competition for converts” (1994:45), there has been a Protestant community scattered principally in Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. This is a minority group and is

another community that is being Othered within its cultural milieu. So Muna's comment that she is not accepted in Palestine or America has a very pertinent cultural resonance.

In his decolonial work on race and religion, Maldonado-Torres (2014) sees the modern concepts of religion and race as mutually constituted and together becoming two of the most central categories “in drawing maps of subjectivity, alterity, and sub-alterity in the modern world. This makes the critical theory of religion highly relevant for the theory of race, and both of them crucial for ethics” (2014:691). He postulates further that “any ethics that seeks to take seriously the challenges created by modernity/coloniality has to be, at least to some extent, decolonial.” In concordance with Said, he is of the opinion that religion and race “have come to define how we imagine entire groups of people within societies and across nations in the modern age” (2014:691). This theory has obvious relevance to the stereotypical representations of Muslims in the Middle East.

Greer, Mignolo and Quilligan posit, “Modern western European practices of racialized discrimination developed in the late medieval and early modern periods, but the concept of “race” has a much longer history in the West” (2007:1). They are of the opinion that this history, while unique to Europe and its territories, is important to consider if only because the West has been the self-appointed culture of “modernity”. I argue that this racialised discrimination remains a legacy of the periods of history described by Greer et al and endures in western perceptions of

Other races. In this case the Othering of Arabs is so naturalised that it has become a part of the discourse of the West that is not questioned by the mainstream media.

Dabis' film introduces new themes of Arab life not seen in mainstream Hollywood films and therefore creates a new paradigm in which to view Arabs as one of us rather than as Others. Although the political subtext is established with Muna and her son's arrival in the America of 2012, during the invasion of Iraq and its resultant widespread anti-Arab public sentiment, Dabis concentrates her story on the new immigrants' struggle to adapt. This universal theme plays out from domestic issues in her family's household such as Fadi sharing a bed with his mother, to his clothes being vetted by his cousin and the peer pressure he must negotiate at school to be accepted. Although Dabis said in an interview at the Tribeka Film Festival that her film does not have a political message, I argue that, right from the opening scene, the subtext of life in Palestine and the Israeli checkpoints that Muna and Fadi must endure day by day on their way to work and school opens up explorations into issues of political displacement. In an interview with Kristen McCracken (2009, Tribeka Film Festival), Dabis claims:

TRIBEKA: What do you want your film to say?

CHERIEN DABIS: It's the quintessential question, isn't it? It's really simple. I don't have a political message. I want people to walk away with a feeling of familiarity. I want them to leave knowing that we are so much more than the stereotype. So many people have the same immigration story in many ways, and I think *Amreeka* is very universal in that regard. But it's also so specific about this particular community, and that's the part of it that hasn't been done before.

Negotiation for acceptance begins when Muna and Fadi arrive at O'Hare airport in Illinois. Although Dabis brings comedic touches to the scene, there are strong resonances with the earlier checkpoint scenes in Palestine and also with the opening checkpoint scene in *Paradise Now*, discussed in Chapter Four. This signifier of the obstruction to her freedom previously signified by the soldiers at the checkpoints appears this time in the form of a stern US airport customs official (Will Woytowich), dressed in an appropriate uniform signifying authority. Muna is no stranger to negotiation with the signified Other so entrenched in Palestinian life, and adopts the required deferential role in the interaction (Amreeka 2009):

CUSTOMS OFFICIAL: Citizenship?

MUNA: We don't have.

CUSTOMS OFFICIAL: You don't have citizenship. In that you don't have a country.

MUNA: That's right.

CUSTOMS OFFICIAL: Where are you from? Israel?

MUNA: No, no, it is the Palestinian Territory.

CUSTOMS OFFICIAL: Your occupation?

MUNA: Yes. It is occupied. For forty years.

CUSTOMS OFFICIAL: No. What is your occupation? What do you do for a living ma'am?

This is amusing within the context of the film, however, this failure in communication can be explained in terms of Hall's analysis of why "difference" matters. As mentioned earlier, he explains this in terms of "theories of language, but from a somewhat different school to that represented by Saussure" (2012:235). The argument is that "we need 'difference' because we can only construct meaning through a dialogue with the 'Other'" (Hall 2012:235). Hall explains further that Bakhtin, the Russian linguist, studied language not in terms of an objective system as Saussure did, but in terms of dialogue between two or more speakers. It is,

therefore, dialogic rather than absolute. Meaning is established by the participants in the dialogue. We can apply Bakhtin's ideas to the dialogue in the airport scene and draw certain conclusions about negative aspects to dialogically constructed meaning. It could therefore be argued that Bakhtin's theory requires the will to enter a meaningful dialogue, which is missing in the type of bureaucratic questioning evident in the airport scene.

Other relevant signifiers in this airport scene include the confiscation of the food from the baggage that Fadi is responsible for. Unknown to him, one of the biscuit tins, intended for his Aunt Raghda (Hiam Abbass), also contains his mother's life savings, and he watches as it is confiscated by the intimidating customs officials. This cultural manifestation of food as comfort and as a gift, and in this instance as a valuable resource, relates directly to life in Palestine and at this point the signified meaning is one of loss of a cultural staple. The value of the resource is represented by the equation of money and food so that losing the biscuits is equated with losing their nest egg. At the narrative level, the viewer is the only party aware of the huge financial loss signified by the confiscation of the biscuits. This filmic device would tend to create sympathy for Muna and distance the viewer from the indifference of officialdom.

Food, as a signifier in Arab culture, as in many other cultures, connotes hospitality and there are many dishes of specifically Arab origin, such as the falafel, which feature in the film. The food signifier is important throughout the film, but most

notably when Muna has no option but to take a job at *White Castle*. It is here that Klein (2009) notices some standard farce elements, “as soon as Raghda drops her off at the bank where she claims to be working, Muna has to furtively dash over to the *White Castle* fast food outlet for her real job”. In these farcical episodes Dabis establishes a conspiratorial relationship with one of the women in the bank (Miriam Smith) who aids and abets Muna in this duplicity. Such moments of humanity and kindness occur throughout the film, signifying the possibility of acceptance and belying the more xenophobic moments in the film. The cultural signifier of fast food and the hamburger as America’s staple meal is undermined when Muna gives the burger an Arab context with the creation of the falafel burger, much to the delight of her coworker Matt (Brodie Sanderson). In a close up shot, the falafel bubbles in the traditional American deep fat fryer that Muna removes, drains and puts onto a bun. She then instructs Matt on how to eat it (Amreeka 2009):

MUNA: You put a bit of tahini. Next time I will put it with Arabic salad.

MATT: OK. Mmm.

MUNA: Tomato, cucumber.

MATT: Yup yup this is good stuff.

MUNA: I told you.

MATT: You could add something like this here. *White Castle’s* new falafel burger.

MUNA: (laughs) Yes, for vegetarians, why not.

MATT: So how do you say ‘delicious’ in Arabic?

The last line of the dialogue clearly indicates the role of food in creating an entrée into further cultural assimilation.

*White Castle* resonates intertextually with *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle* (dir. Leiner, 2004: USA, New Line Cinema) another film that deals with racial inequality and characters who make a symbolic journey to *White Castle*. This intertextuality serves to align and reinforce the genre of *Amreeka* as a comedy rather than a polemic. However, the signifier of the *White Castle* has a rather obvious signified of race and privilege, which reaches fruition in a xenophobic scene that plays out when Fadi's classmates enter the fast food outlet to buy burgers where they recognise Muna as Fadi's mother. The insulting way in which she is treated, based on her Otherness, leads her to chase the boys from the shop and in the process she slips on the drink that one of the boys has deliberately spilt on the floor, lands on her back and is seriously injured. This is rather heavy-handed symbolism on Dabis's part, showing Muna being wounded by xenophobia. Another level of meaning of the "Castle" signifier is "fortress", which signifies protection. When this protection is breached resulting in this physical injury to Muna, she can no longer maintain her deception and her family is called to rescue her. This cathartic moment in the narrative creates an opportunity for honest communication with her family.

As mentioned above, Fadi has endured similar intimidation from his classmates to that manifested against his mother by the same group of boys from the time he arrives at his new school. His fine intellect and excellent grades do not protect him from the xenophobia that he endures. The attitude of his classmates is manifested in an argument in the classroom over the invasion of Iraq, with the comment, "My

brother is over there trying to give them a chance of freedom.” The signifier “freedom” has adopted numerous signifieds after 9/11. It is ironic that the USA has described itself as the protector of human and political “freedom” when viewed in the aftermath of its sortie into Iraq, which has left the country close to a failed state (Parker 2012).

Pintak points out that the Bush administration used absolute terms to frame the struggle against terrorism (in Poole and Richardson 2006:188-9): “Freedom itself was attacked this morning by a faceless coward” the president told a shocked nation” (Bush 2001c), laying the rhetorical borders that would soon protect palaces of suspicion and hate.

Pintak explains further that terror itself became the enemy, instead of a weapon used by an enemy, thus shutting the door on discussion of causes or motivations. The administration and media created a series of myths upon which subsequent policies and actions were based. Pintak sees the myth of terror as central, sketched thus to a joint session of congress (Bush 2001a cited in Poole and Richardson 2006:189):

Americans are asking: why do they hate us? They hate what we see right here in this chamber – a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms – our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other.

Within this context, the use of “freedom” signifies America, Americans are “we” and Arabs are “they”, that is, the haters. Within this context of media representation, Fadi is then nicknamed “Osama” as a reference to Osama bin Laden, founder of Al Qaeda. The headmaster, Mr Novatski (Joseph Ziegler) explains to Muna (Amreeka 2009):

HEADMASTER: The kids hear of one Muslim extremist and suddenly all Muslims are extremists.

Edward Said (1997, 2001) and Jack Shaheen (2009) have expounded on this problem at length, but obviously the headmaster in a film is not going to give a lengthy discussion of this matter. However, it is mentioned and the revelation that Mr Novatski is a Jew, the ultimate “other” in Middle Eastern terms, is a pivotal moment in the film. By subverting the Israeli/Arab binary opposition in this way, Dabis makes a powerful statement of the kindness of strangers, the power of friendship over ideology and the possibility of integration into the US community. There is a further breaking of boundaries between them, when Muna confides, “I was married for 11 years, my husband had another woman, she made me look so fat.” Mr Novatski’s response, “You’re not at all fat”, further consolidates their understanding of each other and illustrates the fact that concerns over body image are universal and affect Arabs as well as Western subjects. The ostensibly superficial exchange between Muna and Mr Novatski about body shape and image is significant. Following a failed marriage, an Arab woman in the United States is validated and is freed from a particular guilt around her failed marriage by a Jewish man, whom I referred to as the ultimate Other above. Within the milieu of cultural

sensitivities around women in the Middle East, this frank and intimate discussion of the body between a man and a woman would be inappropriate, particularly when contrasted with the other interactions she has endured with Israeli men of the Jewish faith at the checkpoints. This scene is one of redemption for Muna on both a political and an intimate level, and serves as a resolution of the narrative of conflict.

A further family development indicates the effects of 9/11 and the resultant Iraqi War when Raghda's husband, Nabeel Halaby (Yussef Abu Warda), a medical doctor, finds his medical practice dwindling as patients leave him and he starts receiving anonymous threats. The role of stereotyping, so evident in this film, is evident in a further scene of intimidation aimed at the Halabys in hate mail received anonymously (Amreeka 2009):

RAGHDA: Look what we got in the mail today.

MUNA: What's this? Who's Saddam?

RAGHDA: Saddam Hussein.

MUNA: I don't understand, what does it mean?

RAGHDA: It means they'll kill him then they'll kill us.

MUNA: What do we have to do with Saddam Hussein? We're not even Iraqi.

RAGHDA: They don't care. They don't know the difference.

MUNA: Who wrote this?

RAGHDA: How should I know? Someone left it in our mailbox OK?

MUNA: It has to be a joke.

RAGHDA: Most of Nabeel's patients are walking out on him. Is that a joke too?

The political significance of this is touched upon, but not debated at length. Dabis prefers to look at the effects that the loss of earnings has on the relationship of Nabeel and Raghda, with Raghda wanting to go home to Palestine and Nabeel, who feels more integrated, wanting to remain in America. The tension results in

Nabeel moving into the basement. Such representations of family life are easy for audiences to relate to and the relationship drama indicates the human and relationship consequences of cross-cultural and inter-cultural tensions.

Dabis investigates the family relationships further by including the complications of first-generation American children living with parents who are still grounded in the nationhood of their homeland. The three Halaby children, Salma (Alia Shawkat), Rana (Jenna Kavar) and Lamis (Selena Haddad) are fully assimilated to the extent that they are able to look dispassionately at their cousin Fadi's wardrobe and advise him on fashion to ensure that he does not look like a "FOB". Muna is confused by this abbreviation and somewhat surprised to find that her son's clothes look as if he is "Fresh off the Boat", with pleated trousers being out of fashion in America. This clash of cultures between the adults and children is manifested further when Raghda admonishes her eldest daughter, "As long as you live in this house you live in Palestine!", a signifier that makes no sense in linguistic terms but carries a deep signified meaning of her own emotional sense of cultural displacement. Hall explains this linguistic function as "anthropological" (du Gay, Hall et al. 1997, cited in Hall 2012:236):

The argument here is that culture depends on giving things meaning by assigning them to different positions within a classificatory system. The marking of 'difference' is thus the basis of that symbolic order which we call culture.

Hall explains further that when cultures are stable, things stay in their appointed places. However, when the symbolic boundaries of culture are transgressed, and

the purity of the culture threatened, “the retreat of many cultures towards ‘closure’ against foreigners, intruders, aliens and ‘others’ is part of the same process of purification” (Kristeva, 1982, cited in Hall 2012:236). This “othering” is at work on both sides of the binary opposition divide, with Raghda maintaining her cultural “purity” within the geographical position of her home. We see similar situations arising in the other films discussed in this thesis. In *Paradise Now* Said and Khaled seek the extreme solution of suicide to maintain the purity of their culture as in Khaled’s view, “Under the occupation we’re already dead.” In *West Beirut* young Tareq expresses his disregard for the colonial Other by singing the Lebanese anthem at his school assembly instead of the French one, while in *City of Life* Faisal’s father sees the expatriate lifestyle, that his son is adopting as a threat to the purity of the Emirati way of life. He admonishes his son that he is an embarrassment to all Emiratis, thereby clearly trying to maintain the cultural purity of his nationality.

In concluding this chapter a biographical note makes interesting parallels between the film and Dabis’ life. In Baumgardner’s (2009) magazine article, she explains that Dabis once lived through her own version of *Amreeka*, which, she clarifies, is the Arabic word for America. “As a girl, she prayed that she’d ‘wake up with blue eyes and blond hair’ —anything to fit into small-town life in Celina, Ohio, where her Palestinian-born father had a thriving pediatrics practice,” says Baumgardner. On the level of appearance Dabis did not look particularly Middle Eastern and her Jordanian mother did not wear a veil. In addition, the family was Christian.

However, Baumgardner writes, in *Celina* they were dramatically foreign to their predominantly German and Lutheran neighbours. This experience is reflected in *Amreeka* in Dabis' real-life experience of her father losing patients as a result of the 1991 Operation Desert Storm. "The turmoil went from unbearable to ludicrous", Dabis says, when the Secret Service arrived at her high school when she was 14 years old to investigate a rumour that her 17-year-old sister, Faten, had threatened to kill the president. By that time, "I had awakened to the politics of the situation," she says. "I felt like a bridge growing up: I wasn't American enough for the Americans, I wasn't Arab enough for the Arabs. I was always having to explain to the other side who the other people were. Being caught between two worlds was very much my story" (Baumgardner 2009).

This story is personified in the role of Muna, whose characterisation illustrates a similar conflation. By allowing the viewer to participate in Muna's process of acculturation, Dabis presents a new view of Arabs and, I argue, creates a new paradigm in Arab cinema where Arabs are seen in all their humanity as Selves rather than Others.

In this chapter my analysis of the film *Amreeka* has incorporated an examination of the cultural aspects of heritage and how these are challenged in the face of immigration by Palestinians into America. I found that Cherien Dabis had created "so much more than the stereotype" as was her intention mentioned in an interview at the Tribeka Film Festival.

## Chapter Four

### ***PARADISE NOW: Suicide Bombers and their Motivations***

The role of suicide bombers in terrorist attacks is ever more prevalent and none has touched the human psyche more than 9/11, reported so prodigiously in the media.<sup>18</sup>

The event continues to be emotional, with coverage of the 15-year anniversary paying homage to the memories of those killed in the attacks.<sup>19</sup> In this chapter I argue that this inhumane event exacerbated the Arab-terrorist and Muslim-terrorist equation and further conflated the concept of all Arabs being Muslims and all Muslims Arabs. The activity of Muslim terrorists in the recent Paris attacks (Steafel et al 2015) has magnified Islamophobia and has fuelled political debate to the extent that demagogue President Donald Trump made political capital out of proposing that all Muslims should be kept out of America during his election campaign (Diamond 2015). This chapter engages a study of the film *Paradise Now* (dir. Abu-Assad, 2005), which debates the types of resistance available to protestors of the occupation of Palestine by Israel. I argue that in so doing the film speaks back to the negative representation of Arabs that has wide currency in the media and popular culture today.

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<sup>18</sup> “All the major networks were live with footage of the World Trade Center by 8:52 a.m., minutes after the first plane hit the North Tower. Matt Lauer cut an interview short to deliver the news with Katie Couric on “Today,” while Charlie Gibson and Diane Sawyer broke the news on “Good Morning America” (The Huffington Post, 2011). The New York Times carried the banner headline, US ATTACKED: HIJACKED JETS DESTROY TWIN TOWERS AND HIT PENTAGON IN DAY OF TERROR (Kleinfield N. 2012).

<sup>19</sup> “With the ringing of a bell, the thousands who gathered in Lower Manhattan fell silent on Sunday, and all that could be heard was the water cascading in the reflecting pools where the World Trade Center towers once stood” (Schmidt, 2016).

In this chapter I will explore and deconstruct the trope of the suicide bomber as insane Muslim fundamentalist by using Metz's theoretical framework with reference to "the apparatus" of the film, Hall's "conceptual maps" in his theory of representation and Fairclough's methodology of critical discourse analysis. I believe that *Paradise Now* deliberately sets out to give a human face to this inhumane and warlike role. In addition, I will examine the theme of religion as I believe Abu-Assad has a more transcultural view of the suicide missions than rooting them securely within Islam. The theme of masculinity is also an important trope in the film, with the protagonists, Khaled (Ali Suliman) and Said (Kais Nashif), carefully represented as men who do not subscribe to the heroic ideal of masculinity as violence and conquest. Finally, there is the stereotype of the trophy girlfriend, which Suha consciously deconstructs, and in the process also subverts Said's claims to hegemonic masculinity. Suha's interest in human rights is evident in her establishing an NGO for refugees, which leads me to examine the role of NGOs in Palestine as a vehicle for peace. The role of another woman is relevant to this research, namely, Said's mother (Hiam Abbass), who takes on a more stereotypical role as a housewife and mother, thereby exhibiting the traditional family life that has nurtured and sustained Said. By examining these themes, I will argue for the humanisation of suicide bombers in the film.

The two protestors in question are Said and Khaled, potential suicide bombers, thinking through their planned attack. This personalisation of suicide bombers and their cause is presented within a context that is not Islamist. *Paradise Now* does not

deal with the eternal life promised to the suicide bombers, but rather with the present. I agree with Abdullah's interpretation of this when he says (2013:52) "Abu-Assad does not deal with paradise as a reward, as the desired celestial haven, but as an illusion, an end point for a broken Palestinian spirit facing blocked horizons". The two young men are not pious Muslims and the militant faction that recruits them is not Islamist; I will argue that, in this process, the conflation of the terms "terrorist" and "Muslim" is undermined. My analysis of this film illustrates that the young men's actions are not driven by religious fundamentalism, but by their ideological conviction that they can make a difference to the status quo in Palestine. However, in Abdullah's view, this is not an ideological action, but rather motivated by hopelessness: "Said wants to cleanse himself not only from the shame of his collaborator father, but from the ignominy of an occupation that condemns him to life in a camp" (2013:52). I agree with Abdullah that Abu-Assad's introduction of Said's father into the plot suggests that he is driven by a sense of shame; however, he also feels he can make a difference by giving his life. As he says to Suha (Lubna Azabal), "There can be no freedom without struggle. As long as there is injustice, someone must make a sacrifice" (Paradise Now 2005). Khaled's conviction that he can make a difference is made in a rational frame of mind and stated unequivocally here. According to research conducted by Yom and Saleh, suicide bombers are not simply "the instruments of terrorist leaders" (Ehud Sprinzak, 2000), and neither are they innocent victims of brainwashing; they are, to borrow from Stanley Hoffman, "disturbingly normal" (1998 cited in Yom and Saleh, 2004). I believe that Abu-Assad normalises his characters in order to portray them as ordinary young men.

In opposition to the suicide bombers' convictions, Suha voices her resistance to suicide attacks. Allen (2006) sees her words as adhering closely to an open letter written by 55 Palestinian public figures and published in the June 19, 2002 edition of *al-Quds* newspaper:

We see that these bombings do not contribute toward achieving our national project, which calls for freedom and independence. On the contrary, they strengthen the enemies of peace on the Israeli side and give Israel's aggressive government under Sharon the excuse to continue its harsh war against our people.

Suha's reiteration of this call for other means of protest, rather than the militant road that her friends have chosen, is an example of the balance that Jack Shaheen calls for: that Arabs should be portrayed in all their complexity, no better and no worse than others are portrayed (2009:6). Suha's view illustrates the point that suicide bombing is not entrenched in Arab culture, but is strongly contested, as reflected in the following dialogue (Paradise Now 2005):

SUHA: Why are you doing this?

KHALED: If we can't live as equals, at least we'll die as equals.

SUHA: If you can kill and die for equality you should be able to find a way to be equal in life.

KHALED: How? Through your human rights group?

SUHA: For example! Then at least the Israelis don't have an alibi to keep on killing.

KHALED: Don't be so naive. There can be no freedom without struggle. As long as there is injustice, someone must make a sacrifice.

SUHA: That's no sacrifice. That's revenge. If you kill, there's no difference between victim and occupier.

KHALED: If we had airplanes we wouldn't need martyrs! That's the difference.

SUHA: The difference is that Israeli military is still stronger.

KHALED: Then let us be equal in death. We still have paradise.

SUHA: There is no paradise. It only exists in your head.

Suha's last sentence is crucial in relation to the title of the film. She proposes that paradise does not exist and is imaginary. However, Gertz and Khleifi (2008:193) suggest that *Paradise Now* deals with the present time in which they are living, the "Now" in the title, rather than with the eternal life promised to the suicide bombers. In my view, "Now" is strongly reflected in the trivialities of everyday life, such as ensuring that the car bumper is straight to satisfy the client, chatting in cafés and — in the words of Gertz and Khleifi — "the time of people sitting in their house during curfew, waiting in line, at roadblocks" (2008:194). The conversation between Khaled and Suha illustrates further that Suha's call for negotiation instead of violence is rooted in her fear of Israel's ruthless retaliation against the suicide bombings that, according to Gertz and Khleifi (2008:194) reached their height in 2002. Khaled seems to disregard the murder that is committed during the process of suicide bombing and concentrates instead on the martyrdom involved in the act. Khaled's disparaging reference to Suha's NGO, which she sees as a means of creating equality, reveals his disillusionment with any negotiation for peace. Noble as her observation is, however, my rudimentary research into evidence of the success of NGOs in Palestine does not reveal a positive outcome, particularly for women living in the refugee camps and rural areas. In 2001 Cheryl Rubenberg conducted a study into patriarchy and resistance in the West Bank, involving interviews with Palestinian women in refugee camps and villages (2001:20). She explains, "Fully three-fifths of Palestinian women in the West Bank live in refugee camps and rural villages" (2001:1), yet her findings indicate that the majority of

studies on Palestinian women have concentrated on the “narrow band of urban, politically active, middle-, upper, and upper-middle-class women who socially and demographically represent only a fraction of the whole” (2001:1-2). Before engaging her target group in the camps and villages, however, she interviewed 19 urban women, including professional activists, the progressive leaders of women’s institutions, research centres and legal aid organisations in Ramallah, East Jerusalem, Hebron and, relevantly enough, Nablus. However, after subsequent interviews with the rural and refugee camp women, she came to understand that the policy agendas advocated by the urban organisations that consisted mainly of US or internationally funded NGOs “bore little or no resemblance to what village and camp women articulated as their problems or how to resolve them” (Rubenberg 2001:21): “Furthermore, not more than a handful of the 175 women I worked with in the camps and villages had ever heard of the urban women’s organizations (excepting the now largely inactive women’s committees), and fewer still had made use of their services.”

The sense of hopelessness about the situation in the region, depicted by Rubenberg, bears out Said’s assessment rather than Suha’s more optimistic view. However, that is not to denigrate Suha’s attempt at bringing about change, but rather to point out that her human rights group might not meet the needs of a large sector of the female community. Although she does not discuss her activities in any detail, this reality should be borne in mind when considering attitudes towards the

futility of existence in the region, a paradigm that might not be accessible to audiences of Hollywood representations of Arabs.

In analysing the above conversation between Suha and Khaled, Fairclough's model of critical discourse analysis (2001) offers a framework by which to discuss the lexical dimension of the dialogue. His three-part analytic model consists of three inter-related processes of analysis tied to three inter-related dimensions of discourse: the object of analysis; the processes by means of which the object is produced and received by human subjects; and, thirdly, the socio-cultural conditions which govern these processes. Fairclough sees each of these dimensions requiring a different kind of analysis so that multiple points of analytic entry are facilitated: namely, text analysis (description), processing analysis (interpretation) and social analysis (explanation). Within the framework of his "text analysis", the lexis in the conversation between Suha and Khaled identifies "equality", "human rights", "struggle," "freedom" and "injustice" as relevant to Fairclough's "processing analysis" as they point to the discourse of liberation. The "social analysis" of this discourse then offers the alternative of situating Khaled and Said as freedom fighters rather than terrorists. The audience is not aware at this stage that the young men belong to a Palestinian terrorist cell in Nablus. This is revealed in a later scene where the cell's leaders appear. However, the discourse foreshadows the revelation of this eventuality by bringing liberatory concepts to the fore.

Within this milieu of resistance, mediation and everyday events, a picture of Palestinian life emerges that is not likely to be familiar to consumers of representations of Arabs in Hollywood film. I argue that this representation speaks back to the stereotypical representation of Arabs in Hollywood blockbusters such as *True Lies* (1994), where the terrorist Aziz (Art Malik) speaks Arabic and slaps a woman, Juno (Tia Carrera), in an illustration of a one-dimensional evil Other. This stereotyping of the evil Arab villain illustrates Hall's "conceptual maps" (2012:21). Hall provides a fruitful method of thinking about culture, which is relevant to this context. He sees one way of thinking about "culture" in terms of "shared conceptual maps, shared language systems and the codes which govern the relationships of translation between them" (2012:21). I argue that these filmic representations, when viewed without a solid conceptual map in place, will create what Hall calls "codes", which will fix the relationship between the filmic signs and the concepts that these engender. I argue further that director Abu-Assad speaks back to these negative representations of Muslims by presenting viewers with a new conceptual map and cultural code.

An example of a systematic reinforcement of the Islamophobic cultural code unfolded in America during the 2016 electioneering, with Republican presidential front-runner, Donald Trump, calling for the United States to bar all Muslims from entering the country: "Donald J. Trump is calling for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country's representatives can figure out what is going on," a campaign press release said (Diamond 2015). In a

televised interview with CNN, Trump twice specifically mentions “World Trade Centre 1 and World Trade Centre 2” as well as the Paris attacks, thereby attempting to incite an emotional anti-Arab response. A study by Victoroff et al into the psychological factors associated with support for suicide bombing in the Muslim diaspora (2012:791) indicates that “experienced discrimination was associated with justification of suicide bombing among American Muslims”. Victoroff et al (2012:794) also cite numerous studies which find: “It is perhaps no surprise that expressions of anti-Muslim and/or anti-Arab discrimination in both Europe and the United States reportedly increased significantly after 9/11” (Argyrides & Downey, 2004; Byng, 2008; Echebarria-Echabe & Fernández-Guede, 2006; Maira, 2004; Sheridan, 2006; Sirin & Fine, 2007).

Trump’s random assertions, which I quoted in the Introduction, about “people chopping off heads” throughout the Middle East leads his interviewer to make the comment, “You can’t throw out notions without any checking of them” (Diamond 2015). However, this type of assumption, when repeated often enough, becomes a cultural code. Trump’s authority among his followers — when added to the anti-Muslim rhetoric found in popular culture references — reinforces the cultural code that assumes all Muslims to be terrorists. In short, to accept Trump’s view uncritically would be to reinforce xenophobic paranoia.

The comments of Trump and the findings cited by Victoroff et al reinforce my hypothesis that 9/11 heightened the association between Muslims and terrorism.

Furthermore, this naturalisation of Muslims as evil Others incites xenophobic intolerance, which in this instance plays into the ideological framework of the Republican party. Chandler (2002:145) explains that myths naturalise the cultural, in other words, they make dominant cultural and historical values, attitudes and beliefs seem entirely natural, normal, self-evident, timeless, obvious common-sense — and thus objective and “true” reflections of the way things are. In *Paradise Now* the perceived injustice of the occupation of Palestine by the Israelis, resulting in geographical restrictions, is evident throughout the film in the form of roadblocks and informal references to roadblocks in different locations. This restriction of space and time is equally problematic in *Amreeka*, where the characters are delayed and their mobility reduced by roadblocks.

The political structuring of space is an area of concern for Sturken and Cartwright (2009:279), who indicate the importance of social institutions and structures in their definition of ideology as “The shared set of values and beliefs that exist within a given society and through which individuals live out their relations to social institutions and structures.” *Paradise Now* takes into account a few of these social structures, with illustrations of the importance of the family (which include scenes of meals and hospitality); of the strong sense of community in the discussions that occur in cafés; and the role of the media, which results in discussions of political events and activities around television sets and radios in homes and cafés. However, there is little indication of religious, academic and governmental institutions, with no *mise en scène* featuring mosques or schools in evidence. The

shortage of jobs is evident in the car workshop scene and reflected in the comment by Said's mother that he is lucky to have a job as a car mechanic.

I argue that religion as a motivation of the suicide bombers is not evident in the film other than in the obligatory video that they must make before going on their suicide mission. Yet, there is a supper, which is screened for no more than 30 seconds after the young men have been readied for their mission, that is highly reminiscent of Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*, depicting the last supper of Jesus Christ before his betrayal and subsequent crucifixion. A comparative semiotic analysis of the painting and the screenshot (Appendix 1) illustrates the similarity of the denotations in the two representations. Both have 13 men sitting at a trestle table that is too small to accommodate them all. The men in the centre are highlighted, by a window in the *Last Supper* and by a fluorescent tube hanging overhead in *Paradise Now*. There is bread and drink on both tables. There is some similarity in the architecture, as both backgrounds contain recesses. The crux of both of these representations is, of course, the people sitting in the centre, who will die, one through betrayal and two by their own hands, together with their supporters (the disciples of Jesus and the members of the terror cell who prepare the suicide bombers for their mission). The religious connotations are undeniable and it is interesting that Abu-Assad chooses to represent a transcultural and trans-religious view of the suicide mission, rather than to root it securely within Islam.

The opening scene of the film, as in *Amreeka* (Chapter Three), highlights the restrictions that the checkpoints impose on the lives of Palestinians. Once again, the *mise en scène* is militaristic, with heavily armed soldiers and barriers blocking the progress of Suha (Lubna Azabal) as she makes her way towards Nablus, a village in Palestine. No words are uttered as she hands over her suitcase to the Israeli guard. The understatement of this encounter is in marked contrast to the hostile exchange witnessed in *Amreeka*. However, the scene is no less powerful, loaded as it is with implied violation as the guard slowly unzips Suha's bag and intimately places his hands on her clothing, delving ever deeper into the recesses of her luggage to display his authority. The intimacy is intensified by his eye contact with her, which does not waver. Suha, in return, maintains the eye contact, refusing to submit to this symbolic rape. When he is done, the soldier slowly zips up her bag and with a final connotation of power, hands over her passport but then retracts it, briefly, before finally placing it in her hand. Without words but with a mere flick of his head, he indicates that she must go. This, in turn, implies that she is not worth his spending words on her. As Suha walks away, with her back straight and her head held high, she walks towards a scene representing the relative normality of village life and hails a taxi. We learn later that she is the daughter of a renowned leader of the Palestinian resistance movement, who has grown up outside Palestine and is returning to devote herself to human rights work in her homeland. The violation and misogynistic undertones of this scene indicate the gender politics at work in these daily confrontations endured by women in Palestine.

Abu-Assad positions the women in the film within two realms, namely activism and domesticity. Suha falls into the activist pole of the dichotomy, whereas Said's mother (Hiam Abbass) is firmly situated in the domestic realm. Her deliberate, painstaking preparation of food, such as cutting up tomatoes and cucumbers, is filmed in great detail, even though she is involved in the most mundane of tasks. Her part is very small, which is an anomaly as Abbass is a well-known and acclaimed actress. I believe that Abu-Assad deliberately creates this tension in her role to indicate the gender politics at work in Palestine. Supporting this viewpoint, Rubenberg's research indicates, "In all Arab countries, the family is still considered the axis of society — in political, economic, social, and religious terms" and "access to institutions, jobs, and government services is often mediated through family connections" (2001:71). She explains further that Palestine is unique in the Arab world for never having achieved national independence and therefore many of the reforms that have taken place in neighbouring countries have not occurred there. Moreover, in the absence of a state, there are no public programmes that could support women, such as "unemployment compensation, daycare centres, old age benefits, welfare programs, adult living facilities, or centers for the special needs of handicapped children" (Rubenberg 2001:71). The lack of these types of facilities indicates that there is a need for NGOs, such as the one Suha represents, to provide programmes like these.

The oppression of Said's mother in the film and her confinement to the domestic space is reminiscent of Carole Pateman's tracking of the historical "sexual contract"

(1997), which indicates, “To be a slave or a wife was, so to speak, to be in a perpetual nonage that wives have not yet entirely cast off” (1997:121). In a discussion of feminism and the marriage contract, she argues that the contract is the medium through which patriarchal right is created and upheld (1997:187). She argues (1997:187-188):

Heterosexual relations do not inevitably take the form of mastery and subjection, but free relations are impossible within the patriarchal opposition between contract and status, masculinity and femininity. The feminist dream is continuously subverted by entanglement with contract.

The problem with patriarchal marriage is not the contract, but the fact that it is a contract between unequal parties. If it were a contract between equals, that would be helpful. From a personal point of view, I have experienced the difference in mobility provided by a business visa as opposed to a spousal visa. Said’s mother does not have this option: however, she is perceived as a “wife”, which is a lower status than a person on a business visa and is indeed indicative of women’s “universal” second-class status.

Nevertheless, she shares her love for her son with all women. The poignant scene where he prunes the tree, with the connotations of death and regrowth, and then sits on the porch to have his last chat with her reveals this and she says how much he looks like his father. In response to his question about his father, she replies that he did what he did in their best interests. This is an ironic statement as his behaviour had a causative effect on her son, which she will only discover later when the suicide mission is complete. She is therefore powerless, through ignorance, to

do anything about it. The scene concludes with the arrival of Jamal, causing Said's mother hurriedly to cover her head with her *hijab*,<sup>20</sup> and with characteristic hospitality to offer him a cup of coffee.

In addition to the powerlessness of women living in the domestic realm, the representation of the discriminatory practices of the occupier in the opening scene lends itself to an examination of the responses open to young women living under occupation. Victoroff et al's findings that "younger age and perceived discrimination are both associated with support of suicide bombing in these Muslim diaspora populations" (2012:791) could have led Abu-Assad to cast Suha in the role of sympathiser to Said and Khaled's cause, which he chose not to do. Victoroff et al explore two Pew Global Attitudes Surveys: firstly a survey of 1,627 adult Muslim residents of Great Britain, France, Germany and Spain and, secondly, 1,050 adult Muslim residents of the United States. The study finds that Muslims who have been discriminated against tend to support anti-Western violent acts (2012:791).

However, Abu-Assad does not choose to characterise Suha within this framework and in so doing brings to light a less stereotypical representation of the Arab-Terrorist equation. Suha brings to the film the oppositional view, where she advocates peace, in contrast to the militaristic views represented by Said and Khaled, whose choices do indeed support the findings of Victoroff et al.

The scene that follows Suha's arrival in Nablus introduces us to Said and Khaled, at work as motor mechanics. This scene illustrates the lifestyle of working-class

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<sup>20</sup> The traditional headscarf worn by some Muslim women.

Palestinians labouring in a diminishing economy and is analysed within that context. What I call “the car bumper scene” involves an argument that motor mechanics Khaled and Said have with a customer, who maintains that his bumper is crooked. In spite of the evidence of the spirit level, the customer insists that it is not straight. The lack of power of the friends is exemplified in the customer’s instruction to “fetch Abu Salim” (their boss). This instruction coincides with a relevant semiotic signification of the coffee pot boiling over in the foreground, which parallels Khaled’s outburst and grabbing a hammer to pound the bumper off the car. The significance of a comment made by the customer during the argument, “It’s crooked just like your father” is important as it relates to Said’s sense of disgrace and subsequent recruitment by a terror cell. It becomes evident that Said’s father was a collaborator with the Israelis and was executed for that reason when Said was 10 years old. This shame motivates Said to restore honour to his family’s name by becoming a martyr for the Palestinian cause. This is a significant scene as it highlights the friends’ powerlessness and catalyses the chain of events to follow. Suha’s arrival at the garage to fetch her car at this critical juncture serves as a distraction and the action decelerates as she and Said stroll away together.

As the plot unfolds it is revealed that these young men, living in the "Now", have been recruited for a "martyrdom operation". By the time this is revealed, their characterisation has been developed to the extent that they are humanised and the audience has had the opportunity to see them within a milieu of normality. I do not suggest that the "diminishing economy", mentioned in the previous paragraph, or poverty, is a motivation for their suicide bombing as this stereotype has been

abandoned since the profiling of the 9/11 attackers, who "were not poor and uneducated youths, brainwashed into giving up their lives by promises of sexual ecstasy in a martyr's paradise and a demonization of those they call their oppressors" (Reuters, 2011). Instead I wish to examine the political motivation that inspires them and their identification with martyrs who died for the cause. The young men have been chosen to work together as a team as it had been their childhood dream to die together as martyrs. Victoroff et al cite an earlier study (2010), which found (2012:792):

among 14-year-old boys in Gaza, anxiety and reported wounding or death of a family member by the Israeli Defense Forces were both associated with support for religio-political aggression. Stated more broadly, it seems reasonable to hypothesize that emotional and/or experiential factors might influence a person's degree of support for political violence.

Victoroff's study supports the veracity of Abu-Assad's storytelling as Khaled and Said had, during childhood, formed an alliance to die together as martyrs. This creates another interesting resonance – people tend not to take children's life plans (or death pacts) seriously. Obviously Khaled and Said take their childhood promises very seriously. Their motives are not religious, but based on their childhood experiences and observations.

As the plot unfolds, the cell leader, Jamal (Amer Hlehel), informs them that they have been chosen to mount a suicide attack in Israel and they are given permission to spend the last night of their lives at home with their families. Such short notice for the suicide bombers to prepare themselves has become the norm, according to Wardan (cited in Reuter 2002:87). He explains:

Earlier it took a long time to prepare a martyr, and their families weren't allowed to know anything about it. Nowadays, on the contrary, it all happens much faster. The more hopeless the situation becomes, and the larger the number of people who have gone before, the more quickly the next lot are ready.

I believe that Khaled and Said regard the situation in Palestine as hopeless. Said's almost daily confrontation with random people expressing their disgust at collaborators is a constant reminder of his father's shame:

CAFÉ OWNER: It would be better to kill them all. Drag them into the street and shoot them.

CUSTOMER: Who?

CAFÉ OWNER: The collaborators. Of course. Their families, their neighbours and anyone who gives them money.

CUSTOMER: You would kill them all? Why the friends and their family too?

A further source of hopelessness is the ongoing conflict with Israel:

HANDLER: Listen, Khaled, why does your father limp?

KHALED: During the first intifada, they came into the house. The Israelis let him choose which leg he wanted to keep.

HANDLER: I would have let them break both of mine before I would let them humiliate me.

The hastiness of their departure allows Khaled and Said only one night to take leave of their families, albeit without the families' knowledge of the eventuality that awaits their loved ones.

In depicting the preparations for the mission, and prior to the recruitment scene, Abu-Assad introduces an amusing scene when Said is photographed for his permit to work in Israel. His deadpan response to the photographer's incessant instructions creates an entertaining break in the narrative (Paradise Now 2005):

PHOTOGRAPHER: Move back a bit, three centimetres to the left. Exactly! Perfect! Head a little higher, no a little lower. Another step back. Exactly! Don't move! And now smile, go on! Smile I said. Or I won't take the picture.

SAID: I don't want to smile.

PHOTOGRAPHER: Then I won't take the picture!

The instructions are absurd in the context of the forthcoming terror event, but normal in the everyday. By bringing these two significations into play, Abu-Assad creates a stark contrast that heightens awareness of the abnormality of the event to come. The photographer, positioned as a *voyeur*, manipulates the scene to his satisfaction. I argue that the cameraman is the harbinger of the events to follow when Khaled finds himself presenting a final speech in front of a video camera in a later scene. The use of both the still camera and the video camera create an awareness of the "apparatus" of the film and possibly the staging of the suicide bombing. Metz sees the technical equipment as "the objective precondition of the whole institution" (1982:51). He compares the process of vision with the process of the camera and explains that the spectator is part of the apparatus. As spectators we need our eyes to give the film meaning by opening and closing them, much as the aperture of a camera does. Abu-Assad creates a parallel tension when Khaled is filmed outlining his reasons for the suicide bombing. The scene reflects a typical representation of a suicide mission as outlined by Reuter (2002:87):

The suicide assassin typically records a video testament in advance of the bombing. Flanked by a Kalashnikov and the Qur'an, and with the organization's banner behind him, he reads out his testament and talks about the motives behind his actions: we hear about Palestine, freedom, the Paradise where he will see the other martyrs again – and that it's God's will.

Abu-Assad subverts the traditional delivery of the message by injecting two farcical elements, namely a problematic camera and a group of onlookers requiring a snack. The speech that Khaled reads during the first shoot closely adheres to Reuter's description of the structure and it is transcribed in full below to illustrate the film's verisimilitude. The religious affirmation is given at the start of the scene (Paradise Now 2005):

If you receive a wound, the people have received a similar one  
Times like these come to pass so that God can recognize the believers  
and choose martyrs  
God does not love the unjust God loves the truth.

The religious motif is not a powerful one in the film and is not represented as playing a part in the motivation of the suicide bombers. Here it appears as a part of the format of the video presentation and is one of the few times that the mission is discussed within this context. This part of the affirmation can be fruitfully compared with the official version of suicide bomber, Ismail Masawabi's testament, one of the *istishhaadis*<sup>21</sup> from Khan Yunis, who blew himself up on 22 June, 2001 (Reuter 2004:90), it is clear that Abu-Assad has created a secularised version in Khaled's testimony. Masawabi's section on the Israeli occupation has multiple religious references (Reuter 2004:91):

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<sup>21</sup> Such people weren't suicide bombers, he explained patiently, but *shahids*, martyrs. Even more than that: they're *istishhaadis*, the very essence of a martyr – a "top *shaheed*" is someone worth even more than a soldier shot dead in battle. And what, I ask, would you think of someone who just does away with himself in his private home out of sheer desperation – in other words, someone who commits suicide? I get an uncomprehending look in response. "Pff ... you don't do that. That would be haram, an action that goes against God's commandments" (Reuter, 2002:86).

I have decided to become a shining light, illuminating the way for all Muslims – and a blazing fire to burn to death the enemy of God. Just standing there and watching our Muslim people being slaughtered [by the Jews] and not taking any action to change the situation is a dirty game that I will not tolerate .... Therefore, in the name of Jerusalem and the Al Aqsa Mosque, in the name of God on earth, I prefer to meet God and leave humankind behind. Therefore I have told myself that I will be with the Prophet Muhammad and his followers tomorrow ....

Israel's occupation is a powerful signifier in the next section of this crucial scene of *Paradise Now*. The signifiers in the first three lines relate directly to the occupation, namely, "injustice", "crimes" and their antithesis: "martyr". The word "martyr" replaces the word "suicide bomber", so that, firstly, it reflects Khaled's view of the act that he is about to perform as an act of dying for his beliefs and, secondly, so that the signifier "suicide" can be used in another context in the next section of the scene (Paradise Now 2005):

As an answer to the injustice, the occupation and its crimes and in order to further the resistance  
I have decided to carry out a martyr operation; we have no other way to fight.

In the next section, Khaled's disillusionment with attempted negotiations between Israel and Palestine are evident. He equates Israel's view of "partnerships" with Palestine with signifiers of distrust: "suicide", "not fair", "disappear", and the "occupation", which equates to "disappear(ance)" for Palestine (Paradise Now 2005):

Israel views partnerships with and equality for the Palestinians under the same democratic system as suicide for the Jewish state  
Nor will they accept a two-state compromise even though that is not fair to the Palestinians  
We are either to accept the occupation forever, or disappear

We've tried with all possible means, to end the occupation with political and peaceful means

The final section of his speech is at the heart of his martyrdom and points clearly to his conviction that he has only one option available to him to triumph over the enemy. The signifiers here are pugnacious, aggressive and confrontational: "confiscate", "ethnic cleansing", "war machine", "force", "inferiority", "killed", "martyr", "death", "threats", "military force". It is evident that for him, his "martyrdom" is a military action and not a religious one (Paradise Now 2005):

Despite it all Israel continues to build settlements, confiscate land, judaize Jerusalem and carry out ethnic cleansing  
They use their war machine and their political and economic might to force us to accept their solution that either we accept inferiority or we will be killed.  
As a martyr, I am not afraid of death  
This is how I will overcome their threats and emerge victorious over their political and military force, let me die as a martyr

Finally, Khaled says farewell to the family (Paradise Now 2005):

Dear Mother, dear Father, I apologize for saying goodbye in this way but we will soon be reunited. I bid you farewell.

In stark contrast to Khaled's brief farewell, Masawabi's religious fervour is reflected in this extract from his testament (Reuter 2004:91): "Greetings from a martyr who wishes to see you all again one day in the Paradise of God, the creator of heaven and earth. Greetings to everyone who knew and loved me, and who loves the way of the jihad<sup>22</sup> and the mujahideen."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Jihad*, like other words taken from a religious context, has a long history and a complex set of meanings. Conventionally it is translated as "holy war," but this definition, associated with the medieval Crusades, is usually

Masawabi's mother explains that her son won first prize at his university for his testament (Reuter 2002:89). Reuter describes the situation further, "Apparently the Islamic universities in Gaza have so many martyr alumni in their classes that one of the lecturers established a competition for the best written testament" (2002:89). Although this is anecdotal evidence, it does suggest a culture of suicide bombing. According to Bloom, (2005:25), this was not the case during the Oslo<sup>24</sup> process, with opinion polls consistently showing the majority of Palestinians opposed to "martyrdom operations." Hoffman explains (cited in Bloom 2005:25):

In November 1998, 75 percent ceased to support suicide operations altogether. In 1999 when over 70 percent of Palestinians had faith in the peace process, support for suicide bombings fell to 20 percent and support for Hamas was at its lowest point ever (below 12 percent). When it appeared that the peace process would yield positive results, the bombings did not resonate for the majority of Palestinians who preferred statehood and peace to violence and continued occupation.

Such a culture can be confirmed using the research of Luca Ricolfi (cited in Gambetta 2005:81). Ricolfi explains that although no precise figures can be given for suicide missions (SMs) that occur in the Middle East (ME), because of incomplete and sometimes contradictory sources, as well as the lack of a clear and

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rejected by Muslims as too narrowly Christian. In Arabic, the word's literal meaning is "striving" or "exerting oneself," with the implication, on the basis of its usage in the Qur'an, "with regard to one's religion" (Cook 2005:1).

<sup>23</sup> Islamic guerrilla fighters especially in the Middle East. Merriam Webster Online Dictionary.

<sup>24</sup> The peace process began with the Oslo accord of 1993. It ended with the last negotiating sessions at Taba, Egypt, in 2001. Over seven years, Palestinian and Israeli negotiators struggled to reach an agreement that could end the 100-year Middle East conflict. In the many carefully negotiated agreements there were positive developments, but also severe setbacks. (PBS Frontline. 1993).

shared definition of suicide missions, there is nonetheless sufficient empirical evidence to estimate as follows: “All sources agree that over the last two decades over 80 per cent of suicide attacks have been concentrated in two tiny plots of land: the island of Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon) and the areas of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.” She estimates that, since the early 1980s, at least 224 missions have been launched in the Middle East. These are attributed mainly to eight organisations, “The Shiite groups Hezbollah and Amal, the Sunni groups Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), PFLP, SSNP, Lebanese Baath Party (Baath-Leb), and al-Aqsa Martyr Brigades (all secular, Marxist, nationalist, or pan-Arab organizations)” (cited in Gambetta 2005:81). She also states (cited in Gambetta 2005:83):

At the same time, however, if no individuals were willing to sacrifice their lives in these missions, terrorist and guerrilla organizations would lack the raw material to put their strategies into practice. In fact, this raw material appears to be so abundant in the ME area that organizations face a serious problem in selecting and choosing the agents.

Although it is a very unusual way to end one’s life, the suicide missions of Said and Khaled are not unusual, according to this research.

In his seminal article on embodiment of the war film, Burgoyne (2012:10) sees the scene of the videotaping of the martyr speeches by Said and Khaled and the ritual that surrounds it as an embodied form of violence: “*Paradise Now* articulates themes of war as embodied performance, depicting the transformation of the characters into agents of an imagined national redemption.” He believes that by combining the disparate iconographies of political revolution and religious sacrifice,

“the martyr ritual in *Paradise Now* centres on the body, mapping it onto different symbolic systems, transforming it into a figural expression of the history and imagined community of Palestine” (2012:10). As K.M. Fierke writes (cited in Burgoyne 2012:10):

The ritual surrounding the act, from videotapes recording a last will and testament, to headbands and banners, are symbols of the empowered individual making a free choice to self-sacrifice for the cause [...] these rituals turn the act into performative traditions and redemptive actions through which the faithful express their devotion.

At the end of Khaled’s testament (Abu-Assad, 2005), the cameraman explains that the camera is not working, thus consciously creating awareness of the previously mentioned “apparatus” (Metz 1982:51) of the film. After a brief pause Khaled recommences and the situation reaches farcical proportions when one of the henchmen offers Jamal a piece of Arabic pita bread, much as a modern day Metzian “perceiver” (Metz 1982:54) would eat popcorn in a cinema, and then offers a piece of pita bread to Said, who refuses. This action causes a break in Khaled’s concentration and he stops reading from the script so that he can share a piece of practical advice with his mother instead, thereby heightening the farcical elements and undermining the grand narrative of the speech. The speech participates in a Lyotardian “grand narrative” of the dramatic farewell. But the farce of its recording makes a mockery of the drama and almost causes the audience to expect that the suicide bombing will not take place, thus, paradoxically, heightening the drama when it does (Paradise Now 2005):

KHALED: Mother, before I forget, I saw some good water filters at Al Mokhtar much cheaper than at Kanaze. Buy them there next time.

This comic break in a serious scene brings some levity, a device that also humanises the suicide bomber. It also brings into stark evidence the similarity of the roles of viewers both onscreen and off screen, as both are engaged in the same occupation, namely watching the action. Seen in terms of Metz's sub-codes of identification (1982:54), "the spectator is absent from the screen as perceived, but also (the two things inevitably go together) present there and even 'all-present' as perceiver." The film's spectators see the event as entertainment, but there are implications beyond the farce that we are witnessing. Metz observes further that there is a type of subjective image that "expresses the viewpoint of the film-maker" (1982:54). In my opinion Abu-Assad, the film-maker, is making the point that the handlers are callous about sending the suicide bombers to their deaths to the extent that they disrespect the solemnity of their testimony.

Characters who are temporarily out-of-frame are similar to spectators. In this regard, Metz (1982:55) discusses the way characters cease to exist when they are no longer part of the action (1982:55). In the scene under discussion, the out-of-frame spectator is Jamal, the handler who has recruited Khaled and Said. He and his henchmen watch the events that occur before them while chewing their pita bread, in the same way that we, the spectators, do with our boxes of popcorn, as their warriors commit themselves to using their lives as weapons. For Khaled and Said this is to "answer the assassination of Abu Hazem and Um Jaber's son who

died in the bombing” as requested by Jamal (Abu-Assad, 2005). It is important for films to express an ideology that their audiences can relate to in order for the film industry to be successful. In this regard Metz mentions two kinds of voyeurism in film. He explains (1982:95):

The film knows that it is being watched, and yet does not know. Here we must be a little more precise. Because, in fact, the one who knows and the one who doesn't know are not completely indistinguishable (all disavows, by their very nature, are also split into two). The one who knows is the cinema, the *institution* (and its presence in every film, in the shape of the discourse which is behind the fiction); the one who doesn't want to know is the film, the *text* (in its final version): the story.

In my view, by consciously injecting the “apparatus” of the camera into the two scenes, Abu-Assad obviates “the one who doesn't know”. A similar self-reflexive situation exists in the scene when Said delivers Suha's keys to her at 4am and finds her awake. This scene is worth close attention, as it brings to light not only the director's self-reflexivity but also the differing ideological views of the two protagonists. While Suha makes tea, they make small talk, which includes a comment from Suha that people from Nablus have a lot of sugar in their tea. With this triviality she distances herself from the Nablus people by stereotyping them. Said then demonstrates a willingness to appease her implied criticism by taking only three teaspoons of sugar in his tea. This attempt at amelioration could be regarded as a wish to impress her by modelling her behaviour or simply a matter of avoiding confrontation over a triviality. He certainly does not recognise it as flirtation. Suha's next question confuses him further, “What do you do when you're not delivering keys at 4 o'clock in the morning?”, and he has some difficulty in

answering, “I don’t know! Nothing. I don’t know what you mean.” When she prompts him, “Do you go to cafés?” he is able to respond, “Sometimes, to smoke shisha<sup>25</sup>.” She questions further, “What about sports or reading?”, to which he does not respond at all. This leads her to start talking about the cinema. This scene also identifies the way that the the relationship between Suha and Said is established and brings to mind Chrisman’s observation (cited in Ansell-Pearson et al 1996:29), “Something which is underrecognised in feminist criticism of imperial and colonial cultures is the difference between the representational politics of the land and those of human subjects”. Despite the representations of intimacy in the night visit scene, it is clear that Suha is inviting closeness with questions about Said’s personal life, while he constantly steers the discussion towards politics. The very *mise en scène* here conveys the intimacy of the situation — there is no chaperone, as required in many Middle East societies when a young man and a young woman get together; it is night and they sit together on a couch. Whether Said’s reticence to respond to Suha’s overtures is due to the restrictive gender relations of the region or concern over the forthcoming suicide attack planned for him is unclear. However, what is clear is that Abu-Assad does not explore the possibility of intimacy here, but only hints at it. In my opinion, the implications about gender and symbols of reproductivity can only safely be made in the more offensive significations of the checkpoints manned by Israeli guards. It is at the checkpoint where the more direct signification of reproductive violation is made. From a cultural point of view, however, although the conversation is stilted and rather one-sided, it serves to give

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<sup>25</sup> *Shisha* is a water-pipe, popular in many Arab countries, in which fruit-scented tobacco is burnt using coal, passed through an ornate water vessel and inhaled through a hose (MacMillan Dictionary 2009-2016).

the spectator information about the types of activity available to people living in Palestine – cafés, smoking shisha, sports, reading and cinema. In this way, Abu-Assad reveals, not only the everyday activities of Palestinians, but the ideological differences between Suha and Said that reflect the diverse attitudes of Palestinians. As the conversation progresses it becomes clear that cinema is no longer a recreational option in Nablus (Paradise Now 2005):

SAID: No! There's no cinema in Nablus anyway.  
SUHA: I know! Have you ever been to a cinema before?  
SAID: Yes, once, ten years ago, when we burnt down the "Revolv" cinema  
SUHA: You did that?  
SAID: Yes but I was not alone, there were lots of us.  
SUHA: Why? What did the cinema do to you?  
SAID: Not the cinema ... Israel! When Israel decided not to employ any workers from the West Bank we demonstrated ... then we ended up in the cinema and set it on fire.  
SUHA: But why the cinema?  
SAID: I don't know. You can watch movies on video too.  
SUHA: So you do watch movies?  
SAID: Sometimes.  
SUHA: What's your favourite type?  
SAID: "What's your favourite type?"  
SUHA: Don't make fun of me! *Type* ... Type? There are action films, science fiction, documentaries ... films that make you cry.  
SAID: Is there a boring genre?  
SUHA: Boring? Like what?  
SAID: Like life.  
SUHA: I don't believe you! I'm sure your life isn't boring. You know what? I think your life is more like a minimalist Japanese film.  
SAID: God bless you.

Once again, the reflexive strategies of the cinema, evoking Metz's "apparatus" (1982:51) arises, inviting viewers to become aware of their voyeurism. The intimacy of the interaction of the characters becomes evident, sitting side by side on Suha's couch and looking into each other's eyes. However, Suha keeps steering the conversation to a personal level, teasing him with comments like, "What did the

cinema do to you?” while Said veers towards the political, ignoring her attempt at levity. This discourse indicates his dominance in not allowing the relationship to enter the romantic genre, a genre which is intentionally left out of their discussion of film texts. She is represented as a liberated woman; but Abu-Assad draws the line at overt sexual liberation, thereby avoiding the connotations of the romance genre where the heroic warrior gets an attractive girl as a love object. Her comment about his life reflecting a minimalist Japanese film steers the conversation back to the Metzian “apparatus” aspect of film when she asserts that his life is not boring, but more like a minimalist Japanese film. The irony is that Asian minimalism, in fact, incorporates the mundanity of existence.<sup>26</sup> She, therefore, once again, teases him gently and Abu-Assad maintains the playfulness between them.

In my opinion this scene is authentic to audiences who consume Hollywood films as it reflects romantic fiction and unrequited love, as both protagonists are young and attractive, with common interests, and are gazing into each other’s eyes. Metz discusses the impression of reality in the cinema in terms of a “filmic mode”, which is “the mode of presence, and to a great extent it is believable” (1991:4). Metz argues further, “More than the latest play or novel, a film, with its “impression of reality,” its very direct hold on perception, has the power to draw crowds” (1991:4). I

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<sup>26</sup> “By the mid-1990s, one stream of Asian art cinema shared many aesthetic features with specialist films from other countries. The prototype is now familiar. The story traces the lives of relatively few characters, with a focus on mundane activities. In place of the earth-shattering conflicts we see in more mainstream entertainments, these films present everyday and intimate human dramas, often embedded in routine activities - riding a train or bus, walking through a neighborhood, eating and drinking with friends and family. While the situations may recall the problems of love and duty we associate with melodrama, the characters tend not to burst into grand emotional displays. Instead, their feelings tend to be muted or stifled, repressed rather than expressed.” (Unspoken Cinema Blogspot. 2012).

agree with this observation and argue further that this “impression of reality” intimates that there is universality in the behaviour of the two protagonists at this point. Their need to get to know each other and the dismantling of barriers between them is evident in Suha’s probing questions. However, Said’s religious invocation, “God bless you,” acts as a foreclosure of any possibility of intimacy and the possibility of life-affirming love, and he resumes the path of death that he has chosen with his next question, which puts a lid on romance and forcefully introduces the topic of martyrdom: “Is it true that you’re Abu Assam’s daughter?” (Paradise Now 2005):

SAID: Is it true that you’re Abu Assam’s daughter? They say he was a hero: you must be very proud of him.

SUHA: I’d rather he were alive than be proud of him.

SAID: Thanks to him and his fight our cause is still alive today.

SUHA: There are always other ways to keep the cause alive.

This change in direction of the conversation moves it away from a generally acceptable topic to the more emotionally charged field of martyrdom: Abu Assam was a suicide bomber. I argue that the difference between the hero and villain statuses of Suha and Said’s fathers is a motivating factor in Said’s decision to bring honour to his family with his own death as a martyr. Metz divides the subject of films into the “realistic” and the “non-realistic”, but argues, “the filmic vehicle’s power to make real, to *realize*, is common to both genres, imparting to the first an impression of familiarity which flatters the emotions and to the second an ability to uproot, which is so nourishing for the imagination” (1991:5). In terms of the latter, I would be tempted to place the second half of the conversation between Suha and

Said in the field of Metz's "non-realistic" were it not for the preponderance of terror incidents reported in the media today, in locations around the world. In addition, Metz's "ability to uproot", mentioned here is undeniably part of my argument. However, it is difficult to position this as "nourishing for the imagination", as terror is the antithesis of nourishment and would more logically be likened to starvation of the soul instead. The first part of the conversation humanises the characters, whereas the second part is difficult to relate to. In the process of humanising the characters, viewers are given the opportunity of identifying with Suha's call for peaceful resolution as she is a credible character, humanised by her good deeds. Said, on the other hand, if viewed from a Western standpoint within Hall's concept of a "base-image"<sup>27</sup>, is positioned as the stereotypical murderous, barbaric "native", in terms of the "rich vocabulary and syntax of race on which the media have to draw. Racism has a long and distinguished history in British culture" (cited in Marris and Thornham 1999:274).

In response to Suha's comment, "There are always other ways to keep the cause alive" Said says, "That's not for us to decide! The occupation defines the resistance" (Paradise Now 2005). The occupation of Palestine by Israel is clearly referred to here as an unambiguous reason for Said's involvement in martyrdom and supports my thesis that his motivation is based on a political conviction and not a religious one. Their discussion ends with the following dialogue (Paradise Now 2005):

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<sup>27</sup> In the chapter on "Racist Ideologies and the Media" (cited in Marris and Thornham 1999) Stuart Hall identifies three colonial "base-images of the 'grammar of race'" in "the familiar slave-figure"; the "native" and the "clown" or "entertainer".

SUHA: Resistance can take on various forms but we must accept we have no military might in order to find alternatives.

SAID: And pay the price for our grandparents' defeat? Accept the injustice?

SUHA: This discussion is going nowhere.

Suha's comment brings an end to the discourse of occupation, violence and the solutions to violence and her final comment is true of many arguments related to this topic that have gone nowhere, between negotiators for peace in the region and between ideologues. Said takes his leave of her, replying to her question whether she will see him again with an ambiguous comment: "I hope so". Only he knows that he is referring to their reunification in the afterlife. Both have valid points; but, since they articulate different paradigms they are unable to resolve their differences, a situation reminiscent of the macro-political situation in which they find themselves.

Suha's final comment: "Goodbye my guest of the night" once again brings into sharp focus the intimacy of their encounter. Suha and Said have been alone in her home at night, a situation that might seem foreign to consumers of a more stereotypical representation of the conservatism of Muslim women.

Another "guest of the night" appears in a later scene when Khaled and Said are being prepared for the mission. He is Abu-Karem (Ashraf Barhom), a "legend" of the resistance. However, his appearance is more dramatic, protected as he is by armed bodyguards and carrying a pistol himself. Khaled is impressed and says to Said, "Wow, the legend himself!" It is evident by this time that Khaled is the less

emotionally mature of the two friends: this is demonstrated by his irresponsibility about his job, his desire for fame, his excitement about meeting a legend, and playing with the vest ripcord as if he were a cowboy. His immaturity foreshadows his lack of commitment to follow through with the mission.

Khaled and Said are shaved, washed, have haircuts and are dressed in black suits so that they look like Israeli settlers. They see the bomb maker who constructs their suicide vests and Abu-Assad uses the powerful signification of two prosthetic hands to illustrate the price that the bomb maker has paid for his expertise in the terrorist movement.

At the start of the mission Khaled is the one who reassures Said that they are doing the right thing (Paradise Now 2005):

KHALED: Of course! In one hour we'll be heroes, with God in heaven. We discussed this! You were the one who said we had no choice! Under the occupation we're already dead.

SAID: I know, I know. Is there no other way to stop them?

KHALED: Are you scared?

SAID: No not scared. I don't know.

KHALED: It won't be long then you'll know. The moment you do it. Is it true that before you die, you see your life pass by like on a video? Is that true?

However, the plans go awry, they get separated and have to abort the mission.

Said attempts to continue on his own, while Khaled returns to base with Jamal and finds himself having to defend Said's loyalty to the cause as Abu-Karem assumes that he is a traitor. The Israeli contact, who was meant to get them into Israel, is far more likely to be the guilty party, but this is negated by Abu-Karem and Said

becomes a wanted man. In the meantime Said is unable to complete the mission and returns to base in a taxi where he hears an advertisement on the car radio for the much denigrated Kanaze water filters, which, the advertisement claims, are “the best in town”. This intertextual reference to Khaled’s testament inspires the taxi driver to share the conspiracy theory that the settlers have contaminated the water to “decrease the quality of the sperm”, mediated by boasts of his own virility. This comedic break in the action once again gives the viewer some respite.

The situation at the base is much more serious as Abu-Karem fears retaliatory rocket attacks — so convinced is he of Said’s betrayal — and Khaled takes it upon himself to find Said or go on the suicide mission on his own. The reaction of the organisers of the mission is extreme and unsupportive and is consistent with their negative representation throughout the film. A study by three scholars attempting to make sense of suicide missions (Gambetta 2005:viii) points out that this is difficult to ascertain:

With respect to motivations, all chapters distinguish systematically between those of the organizers and those of the perpetrators, for it is one thing to have an interest in an SM to be carried out and quite another to be prepared to bear the extreme cost of carrying it out oneself. To believe that SMs are of value in achieving the goals of an organization is not a sufficient reason for an individual to carry one out. One may agree that SMs are a rational option, but still prefer if someone else carries them out.

Yet the organisers threaten Khaled and give chase when he leaves to find Said, who, he is convinced, is innocent in spite of their scepticism. When Khaled finally finds Said and brings him to face the organisers he pleads to resume the suicide mission and gives an unambiguous statement of intent (Paradise Now 2005):

SAID: I was born in a refugee camp. I was allowed to leave the West Bank only once. I was six at the time and needed surgery. Just that one time. Life here is like life imprisonment. The crimes of the occupation are countless. The worst crime is to exploit the people's weaknesses and turn them into collaborators. By doing that they not only kill the resistance: they also ruin families, ruin their dignity and ruin an entire people. When my father was executed I was ten years old. He was a good person but he grew weak. For that I hold the occupation responsible. They must understand that if they recruit collaborators they must pay the price for it. Life without dignity is worthless.

And the world watches, cowardly, indifferent. If you're all alone faced with oppression you have to find a way to fight the injustice. They must understand if there's no security for us there's none for them either.

Even worse, they've convinced the world and themselves, that they are the victims. How can that be? How can the occupier be the victim?

Finally, Said and Khaled are allowed to continue on their mission and are seen being driven through the streets of Tel Aviv. Here is a different world with connotations of luxury and privilege, denoted by tall buildings, well-kept gardens, wide roads, new cars and bikini clad women on packed beaches. Capitalistic billboard advertisements for luxury products hover over the city. This forms a marked contrast to the broken-down cars, shells of buildings, dirt roads and road blocks of Nablus and reinforces the binary opposition between "them" and "us".<sup>28</sup>

Said gives Khaled the slip and the closing scene shows Said on a bus packed with Israeli soldiers, the camera focuses on his eyes and the screen goes white. The closing scene leaves viewers to respond to this suicide bombing that has been the mission of the protagonists throughout most of the film. If there are degrees of abhorrence, it could be argued that the bus Said finally boards carries a far less

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<sup>28</sup> A study by Kipnis indicates that "the affluent, influential and professional tend to cluster in Tel Aviv, suggesting that Israel is becoming a highly polarized state and that Tel Aviv has passed the threshold of going global as a full-scale world city" (Kipnis 2012).

vulnerable load than that of the earlier scene with its family and children, which Said chooses not to board. The suicide bus on the other hand, carries Israeli soldiers with their connotations of war, the occupation and disenfranchisement and is a more appropriate target in the light of the political motives ascribed to Said. However, in the view of Suha and 55 Palestinian public figures mentioned above, this deed will undoubtedly end in retaliation. So, rather than presenting a picture of unadulterated violence on the part of the Arab Muslim, this has been ameliorated by the voices of his compatriots urging him not to get involved in violent protest. It is these resistant voices that, in my view, create a new paradigm in the representation of Arabs.

My argument that a new paradigm in Middle East film has been created, depends largely on the viewer's ability to identify with the characters and be aware of a reality far removed from the representation of murderous, greedy Arabs identified by Shaheen as being the staple of Hollywood representation. I have argued that Abu-Assad's characters are easy to relate to and that their everyday lives reflect a universal reality with their focus on family values, friendships and need for employment. The pursuits around food and coffee culture resonate further with the culture of the West, although a lack of overt alcohol consumption in Muslim countries precludes pub culture from this menu. In presenting this representation of Arabs and Muslims as Selves rather than Others, Abu Assad unconsciously lends support to Jack Shaheen in his invitation to view all Arabs as you do others.

Khaled's and Said's sense of hopelessness in the face of the political situation in Palestine is reflected in the views of others, be they the people in the cafés passing the time, taxi drivers or the terror cell's leaders. Viewers are invited to bear witness to this hopelessness and find a redemptive quality in Said's death and view him as a martyr rather than a terrorist. His despondency about the worldview of the Israeli-Palestinian question is one that I find highly relevant to my thesis: "Even worse, they've convinced the world and themselves, that they are the victims. How can that be? How can the occupier be the victim?" (Paradise Now 2005). This is indeed a conundrum in the light of Israel's aggressive colonisation. As in *Amreeka*, the prevalence of the restrictive roadblocks and daily contact with an offensive occupier is a recurring trope that has been discussed in this chapter. As I have argued, this creates an awareness of life in Palestine which viewers might not have witnessed in more mainstream Hollywood fare.

The tropes of heroism and martyrdom have been engaged by Abu-Assad in his depiction of two ordinary men, disempowered under Israeli colonial rule, who use the only power they have — their bodies — to register their grievance against the unjust and restrictive system imposed upon them. The "last supper" tableau is key to the film's subversion of the religious stereotyping that operates in mainstream culture's view of all Arabs as Muslim fundamentalists.

By consciously drawing the viewers' attention to areas of similarity rather than difference in patterns of worship, he purposefully attempts to neutralise flammable

*jihadi* rhetoric. In addition, by creating awareness of the humanity and inhumanity of Arabs in the scenes discussed in this chapter, Abu-Assad has indeed replied to the call by Jack Shaheen that Arabs should be portrayed in all their complexity, no better and no worse than others are portrayed (2009:6).

This chapter has engaged a study of the film *Paradise Now*, which debates the types of resistance available to protestors of the occupation of Palestine by Israel. I have argued that in so doing the film speaks back to the negative representation of Arabs that has wide currency in the media and popular culture today. I have explored and deconstructed the trope of the suicide bomber as insane Muslim fundamentalist. My research and reading of the film have led me to believe that *Paradise Now* deliberately sets out to give a human face to this inhumane act of terrorism. In addition, I examined the theme of religion and came to the conclusion that Abu-Assad has a more transcultural view of the suicide missions than rooting them securely within Islam. I engaged Hall's fruitful method of thinking about culture in terms of "shared conceptual maps" (2012:21) and I argued that filmic representations, when viewed without a solid conceptual map in place, create what Hall calls "codes", which fix the relationship between the filmic signs and the concepts that these engender. I argued further that director Abu-Assad speaks back to these negative representations of Muslims by presenting viewers with a new conceptual map and cultural code.

The following chapter examines the film *West Beirut* (dir. Doueiri, 1998: Belgium, France, Norway, Lebanon: 38 Production). The film is also situated within the framework of war, but this is more conventional warfare, with warring factions asserting their presence rather than using the element of terror as their modus operandi. Seen through the eyes of teenagers, the story includes adventure as one of its elements, which ameliorates the harshness of the storytelling. Nevertheless, no more and no less than war in any other parts of the world, this war in Lebanon disrupts lives and challenges relationships. By presenting the human face of war in the Middle East, I argue, the director speaks back to Hollywood's less nuanced representations of Arabs.

## Chapter Five

### ***WEST BEIRUT: Civil War and its Manifestations***

In this chapter I analyse the film *West Beirut* (dir. Doueiri, 1998: Belgium, France, Norway, Lebanon: 38 Production). As in *Paradise Now*, the film is situated within the framework of conflict, but this is a civil war, with warring factions asserting their presence rather than using suicide bombers to perform their desperate acts. Told from the viewpoint of teenagers, the story is often amusing, but the threat of the impending war is ever present, as militia groups start taking over the city.

Khatib (2008:21) points out that Lebanese cinema has been occupied with depicting the Lebanese Civil War over the past 30 years. In fact, war occupies a central role in all the country's artistic representations including poetry, paintings, music, theatre and novels. However, Khatib is also of the opinion that Lebanese films do not have the central role enjoyed by other cultural forms. Due to a lack of distribution, many films remain unseen. She also believes that the war had a destructive effect on the Lebanese film industry (2008:21):

Before the war, Lebanon was slowly building a reputation as a cinema center in the Arab World, rivalled only by Egypt. This privilege would end with the war, and Lebanese cinema was transformed from an industry to a collection of films made by disparate filmmakers working independently.

In addition, most Lebanese films have a short screening at International and Arab film festivals, but are not released in cinemas or on video and Khatib believes this is due to the lack of support from the government. She further refers to the brain drain which resulted in the loss of talent of young people leaving Lebanon to complete

their studies abroad. In this regard she specifically mentions Ziad Doueiri, the director of *West Beirut*, who left Lebanon in 1983 to study film, but who did not return to Lebanon until 13 years later when he made *West Beirut*. The combination of talent outside Lebanon and lack of resources within Lebanon has resulted in “the creation of a transnational Lebanese cinema whereby most Lebanese films made in the last 30 years are international co-productions, with the funding coming from countries like France, Belgium and Italy” (2008:22). This is evident in *West Beirut* where four countries — Belgium, France, Norway, Lebanon — are co-producers of the film.

In addition to the effect of war on the film industry, no more and no less than war in any other parts of the world, this war in Lebanon affects the lives of people. By presenting the human face of war in the Middle East, I argue, Doueiri gives a more nuanced representation of Arabs than those prevalent in Hollywood’s more stereotypical depiction of this ethnic group as the evil Other. I undertake a narrative analysis of a scene deploying Vladimir Propp’s morphology of the folk tale, even though the film pretends to be realistic, to uncover the mythic representations of masculinity underlying the narrative.

The narrative of *West Beirut* takes place in Beirut, Lebanon in 1975 at the time of the outbreak of war, when the country is split into East and West, controlled by Muslims and Christians respectively. The teenagers Tarek (Rami Doueiri), Omar (Mohamed Chamas) and May (Rola Al Amin) are the main characters. The film

portrays their everyday lives as they enjoy increasing freedom while the structures of society slowly start to crumble. The closing of the school is the first step in the process. However, the increasing power of the militia illustrate that such freedoms are superficial as May, a Christian, realises the danger she is exposing herself to by wearing a cross around her neck. The hiding of her cross, then, is a symbolic act that illustrates the growing invasion of her freedom. This device of inserting a Christian character into the narrative is reminiscent of a similar device used by Ridley Scott in *Blade Runner*. Silverman explains that within “our culture” (sic)<sup>29</sup> two primary forms of difference, which depend upon a visual and biological rationalisation, are the sexual and the racial. Both, she says, are the results of “a laborious and constantly repeated cultural construction” (1983:114). Scott subverts this cultural construct by giving the replicant hero, Roy Batty, what Silverman calls “hyperbolic whiteness” (1983:114). The replicants are in the disregarded position that is usually occupied by black people. However, Scott has reversed this binary opposition, which associates whiteness with power and blackness with disempowerment, by making Batty a typical Aryan male. In this way he forces the viewer to reconsider the binary opposition and to understand its contingent and constructed nature.

I argue that religion is also a social construct and that Doueiri uses a similar process of Othering where he denaturalises the category of “Christian” and, in doing so, points out the arbitrary nature of religion and its impact on freedom. I

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<sup>29</sup> In my opinion, in postmodern societies, with diverse cultures, it is difficult to read “our culture” uncritically.

argue that the secularisation of western society is reflected in various Hollywood films cited by Cones, who claims: “Contemporary Hollywood motion pictures also clearly portray a general anti-religious slant” (2012:49). However, although Christianity is a source of contention in the film, the role of Islam is seen as becoming more prevalent in the lives of the inhabitants of West Beirut as pointed out by the young character Omar, who finds his parents becoming ever more conservative in their behaviour and adopting symbols of their religious faith as the instability of Lebanon progresses.

Edward Said’s discussion of Lebanon’s “terrible civil war of 1975–1976” encompasses the view of a French journalist who wrote regretfully of the gutted downtown area that “it had once seemed to belong to ... the Orient of Chateaubriand and Nerval” (cited in Said 1978:111). Said sees his view as “right about the place, especially so far as a European was concerned” (1978:111) and continues:

The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences. Now it was disappearing; in a sense it had happened, its time was over. Perhaps it seemed irrelevant that Orientals themselves had something at stake in the process, that even in the time of Chateaubriand and Nerval Orientals had lived there, and that now it was they who were suffering.

The idea of the Orient — in this case Lebanon — and its compliance with European standards is very significant for my thesis as it is due to its European colonial past that it evokes such classical reminiscences by the French journalist mentioned above. Said points out that the important thing for the European visitor is a

European “representation of the Orient and its contemporary fate” (1978:111). Said sees this representation as distorting the way we see people, and seen through this distorted lens, the Orient stays the same: placid, still, eternal.

Doueiri paints a different view of the Orient in his film by seeing Lebanon through the lens of two typical teenagers with the feeling of omnipotence that teenagers around the world experience. They are highly relatable as they explore Beirut on their bicycles, film attractive women and make the most of their short-lived freedom. Underlying this freedom, however, is the threat of violence as the political factions start to assert themselves. For instance, increasing pressure on the neighbourhood baker to supply bread with diminishing resources erupts into a confrontation, an indication of things to come. These splintered representations of local neighbourhood squabbles are indicative of other war scenarios during World War II, where European residents were required to survive within a system of rationing, requiring queuing up for the most basic of provisions. Although the teenagers are the main protagonists of the film, their parents' concern for the future and ambivalence about whether to stay or leave a country on the brink of war are universal problems that are easy for the viewer to relate to. In this process the Orient is demystified, allowing viewers access to the realities of Arabs living in a time of war and facing the fears familiar to viewers of World War II films in the West, such as *Mrs Miniver* (1942).

The teenagers are on a mission, to have the 8mm film developed, that Tareq has shot so conscientiously. As their efforts meet with continual failure — whichever shop carrying the Kodak sign they might visit — their bicycle trips take them further and further afield, thereby giving the viewer the opportunity of viewing various parts of the vibrant city. In my opinion, Doueiri uses this device to take highlight the effect of the imminent civil war on the city. Khalaf (1993: 107) and Nasr (1983) (both cited in Gugler (2010:135), discuss the tendency of Lebanese cinema to foreground the representation of a wounded Beirut during the civil war. Most films depicting Beirut at this time were shot on location, and the destroyed city centre became “a natural backdrop that filmmakers were keen to exploit before the area is rebuilt” (Nasr cited in Gugler (2010:135). On the other hand, Gugler (2010) explains that a number of Lebanese films depict the fragmentation of Beirut during the civil war as symptomatic of the fragmentation of Lebanese society at large. Films like *West Beirut*, he explains, deal with the breakdown of Beirut from a whole city into exclusive, homogeneous, sectarian zones, a view with which I agree. I would add that it is crucial to the film that one of the sects belongs to the Christian phalangists, as this is an aspect of Lebanese history that belies the assumption that all Arabs are Muslims, a point that is made by Edward Said (1994:45) and mentioned previously in my discussion of *Amreeka* (Chapter Three).

*West Beirut* depicts the previously tranquil life of a Muslim middle-class family, the Noueris, and the way they cope with changed circumstances. It follows the disruption caused by an incident that started the war in Lebanon, namely an attack

in April 1975 by right-wing Christian militants on a bus carrying Palestinian passengers. The attack resulted in 31 deaths. The incident is baffling to the Noueris, Tareq's parents, who do not understand its causes or implications. In fact, Tareq's father's misunderstanding of the situation leads him to distance himself as a Lebanese from the incident, saying it is "between Palestinians and Israelis, nothing to do with us." This statement not only displays his ignorance of the event — and director Doueiri's artistry — but, Gugler explains, also echoes a sentiment that was prevalent throughout Lebanon, where the war was referred to as "the war of Others on our land" (2010:136). Gugler argues that *West Beirut* works to dispel this myth, forcing the Noueris to accept that the event of April 13 was not a mere "incident", but a massacre. I argue that the event indicates a stereotypical representation of the Middle East as war-torn and in eternal conflict, a representation that Doueiri circumvents and subverts with the spirited and often amusing antics of the young protagonists.

The opening sequence of the film, titled 13 April 1975 and set in a schoolyard, is focalised from the point of view of schoolboys Tareq Noueri (Rami Doueiri) and his friend Omar (Mohamad Chamas). With an 8mm video camera, they shoot a film of fighter jets overhead. From their point of view it seems entirely natural to be going to school while a war is waged overhead and this immediately introduces the context of war, even though from a distance, at this stage. They are soon called to order by the school principal (Aïda Sabra) and line up with the other students in the school quadrangle under the French flag and her watchful eye (Appendix 2) and in

this way, the colonial context of the film becomes apparent. The colonial aspect is emphasised further as the pupils swear further allegiance to France with the singing of *La Marseillaise*, the French national anthem. The students are not in uniform, but the uniformity of their poses and the orderliness of their rows are almost militaristic in their precision, while the demeanour of the headmistress, wearing a dustcoat in lieu of a military uniform, adds to the sense of ritual. With this emphasis on the French flag and national anthem, Doueiri makes a strong point about the colonialist emphasis of the Lebanese education system.

This representation is reminiscent of Roland Barthes' comments on his interpretation of the saluting black soldier on the *Paris-Match* cover (Appendix 3) (1984:4). He explains that he was offered a copy of *Paris-Match* while at the barber's shop and noticed the cover picture of a young "Negro" in a French uniform saluting the tricolour. He explains that he looked behind the signifier to see what the "meaning" was to him. Here Barthes is referring to the signifier and signified meaning and he goes on to explain the signified as being (1984:4):

that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors.

He continues: "I am therefore again faced with a greater semiological system: there is a signifier, itself already formed with a previous system (*a black soldier is giving the French salute*); there is a signified (it is here a purposeful mixture of Frenchness and militariness); finally, there is a presence of the signified through

the signifier.” Barthes’ uncovering of the myth underlying the representation is important, because myths are insidious and subtle. In fact, if they are obvious in their values, they will be discovered to be fallacious. So they have to be insidious. In this case Tareq has identified the myth that Frenchness is to be revered above local culture. This becomes evident when the homage to France is interrupted as he drowns out *La Marseillaise* by singing the Lebanese anthem, through a megaphone, much to the admiration of his classmates. All at once order turns to disorder; the methodical rows of pupils merge into a disorderly throng and the song changes to the Lebanese anthem. It is ironic that the French anthem would probably convey more accurately Tareq’s rebellious action.

Written in 1792, the anthem *La Marseillaise* is a call to arms and Marshall points out was written during the French Revolution and aimed to inspire people against an Austrian invasion (Marshall 2015). This meaning has waxed and waned over the years: the anthem enjoyed a resurgence during the First World War but has subsequently been booed repeatedly at sports gatherings. Marshall’s (2015) research reveals that people liked the stirring music of the anthem but found the words offensive. He explains that everyone from teenagers to old women would bring up the inappropriateness of the confrontational chorus and its climax: “Let’s water the fields with impure blood.” The use of the adjective “impure” obviously has ideological resonances. Marshall’s interviews revealed that all his respondents knew it was written during the French Revolution as a song of defiance against Austrian invaders looking to restore Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette to full power. However, they also knew it had been hijacked by its

colonial legacy and the far right (Marine Le Pen's National Front) – people who seemed to hear the words *sang impur* (impure blood) and take it as referring to the country's immigrants (Marshall 2015). The idea of impure blood clearly refers back to the colonial system of racial classification and the idea of racial purity. It must be stated that there is obviously no such thing as impure blood. Marshall believes that things have changed now: "This moment marks a genuine chance to take the song back from the far-right and make it a symbol of France today, united and defiant, combating tyranny within its own borders and without."

On the other hand, the Lebanese anthem was adopted on July 12, 1927, seven years after the proclamation of the state of Greater Lebanon during the French mandate. It speaks of the glory of the country and the willingness of its citizens to respond to their country's call, but it is not overtly revolutionary in the way that the French anthem is. It speaks of patriotism and supporting the country (Official World Lebanese Cultural Union, 2015):

All of us! For our Country, for our Glory and Flag!  
All of us! For our Country  
Our Elders and our children, they await our Country's call,  
And on the Day of Crisis they are as Lions of the Jungle.  
The heart of our East is ever Lebanon

Tareq's defiance in undermining the school principal and, by implication, the French empire, spills over into the classroom where his lack of concentration and inability to spell the simplest of French words is rewarded with a whipping on his hand by her with the exclamation, "You belong in the jungle!" This vicious insult carries

connotations of primitiveness (examined below), whereupon she sends him out of the classroom and adds insult to injury by explaining to his classmates in French (West Beirut 1998):

SCHOOL PRINCIPAL: Keep it in mind, ladies and gentlemen, that the Lycée Français of Beirut is the embodiment of the French mission. Let's not forget that it was France that created your country! And it was France who gave you your frontiers and it was we who created your civilization and your constitution. Let it be understood that it is French education that is your sole way out of your primitive habits.

The colonial vocabulary in this speech is not subtle. It speaks down to the colonised in a way that disempowers them and belittles their culture, their government and even their geography. This view is decidedly Orientalist and is the type of attitude that Edward Said acknowledges as being part of the colonialist attitude to the natives in the colonies. He differentiates between the French and British empires: "France's empire, though no less interested than Britain's in profit, plantations, and slaves, was energized by 'prestige'" (cited in Said 1994:204). Such an attitude of prestige and privilege, and I would add self-aggrandizement, is evident in the register of the teacher's speech and none is more disrespectful than the statement "You belong in the jungle," mentioned above. The epithet "jungle" is a particularly defamatory one. It has entered racist discourse and enflamed hate speech over the last five decades. It is also very interesting how Conrad uses the trope of the jungle (to signify brute energy without order) in *Heart of Darkness*. Cohen (1988:25) explains in his study on class, race and sex in popular culture:

Consider for a moment the derogatory epithets which have been applied to black people. Into the already overcrowded bestiary of racist insult (sambo, coon, wog, nignog, spade, and so on) there entered a new

creature around 1960: the jungle bunny. In countless streets and playgrounds this 'monster' sprang to linguistic life, and spread (or bred) until it became the most popular term of abuse directed by white working-class youth against black people.

Yet in the film we see this discourse entering the field of education, one of the Ideological State Apparatuses identified by Althusser (2006:96) and discussed in Chapter Three above in another context. The power of education and the ideology it engenders cannot be overstated. It is relevant here to mention Althusser's conviction that the institution of education is the dominant ideological state apparatus (2006:103-104):

Hence I believe I have good reasons for thinking that behind the scenes of its political Ideological State Apparatus, which occupies the front of the stage, what the bourgeoisie has installed as its number-one, i.e. as its dominant ideological State apparatus, is the educational apparatus, which has in fact replaced in its functions the previously dominant ideological State apparatus, the Church. One might even add: the School-Family couple has replaced the Church-Family couple.

Althusser discusses the School as "a universally reigning ideology" and explains further (2006:105-106):

it is one of the essential forms of the ruling bourgeois ideology: an ideology which represents the School as a neutral environment purged of ideology ... where teachers respectful of the 'conscience' and 'freedom' of the children who are entrusted to them (in complete confidence) by their 'parents'... open up the path to the freedom, morality and responsibility of adults by their own example, by knowledge, literature and their 'liberating virtues'.

By implication then, in this scene from the film it is the family too that is chastised and in need of liberation from its primitive habits. To confirm my argument that the

film presents education as an ideological state apparatus, the opening of the school day (discussed above) proves highly relevant.

Nevertheless, an understanding of the colonial culture's cultural code is necessary for the children studying in a foreign ethos to identify with it. Equally, their instructors or teachers should be able to read the cultural code of their students. Stuart Hall (2012:4) points out in a discussion of the first element in his "circuit of culture" concept that culture is about shared meanings: "Members of the same culture must share sets of concepts, images and ideas which enable them to think and feel about the world, and thus to interpret the world, in roughly similar ways." He argues that "thinking and feeling are themselves 'systems of representation', in which our concepts, images and emotions 'stand for' or represent, in our mental life, things which are or may be 'out there' in the world" (2012:4). In order to communicate, Hall believes participants must be able to understand linguistic codes as well as read visual images and body language in similar ways. In his view, "Meaning is a dialogue – always only partially understood, always an unequal exchange" (2012:4) and languages work through representation. Tareq and his school principal share the inability to read each other's cultural codes, which results in the clash of cultures illustrated so convincingly in the opening scene.

Tareq's insubordination to the school principal raises the question of what alternatives are open to him if he rejects the French cultural origins of the education he is receiving. Of course as a minor, he would not only have to contend with the

education system, but with his parents as well. On the face of it, he could either accept the situation as it stands and make the most of the education he is receiving, or alternatively, acknowledge his “inferiority” and work within that framework of disempowerment, or, if these are not viable options, leave the school and find a school that embraces a different pedagogical approach. It is interesting that Mignolo poses a similar question in his paper on “(de)coloniality, border thinking and epistemic disobedience” (2011) and comes to a similar conclusion:

What could a person who was not born speaking one of the privileged languages and who was not educated in privileged institutions do? Either accept his or her inferiority or make an effort to demonstrate that he or she was a human being equal to those who placed him or her as second-class. That is, two of the choices are to accept the humiliation of being inferior to those who decided that you are inferior, or to assimilate. And to assimilate means that you accept your inferiority and resign yourself to play the game that is not yours but that has been imposed upon you. Or, the third option, border thinking and border epistemology.

Mignolo points out further, that “modern/colonial racism, the logic of racialisation that emerged in the sixteenth century,” (2010) has one purpose: to rank all languages other than Greek, Latin and the six modern European languages as inferior from the domain of sustainable knowledge and to maintain the privilege of the Renaissance and Enlightenment European institutions, men and categories of thought. This ideology, which Mignolo explains, is “a fiction created to dominate you”, is, I believe, personified in the characterisation of the school principal. Mignolo explains further his concept of “delinking”:

So once you realize that your inferiority is a fiction created to dominate you, and you do not want to either assimilate or accept in resignation the bad lack of having been born equal to all human beings but losing your

equality shortly after being born because of the place you have been born, then you delink.

This process of “delinking” is evident in the behaviour of Tareq, who “lost his equality” living under colonialism in a part of the world, which, Said points out in the introduction to this chapter, “was almost a European invention”.

Maldonado-Torres (2014) is in agreement with Mignolo’s view and points out further, “The modern concepts of religion and race were mutually constituted and together became two of the most central categories in drawing maps of subjectivity, alterity, and sub-alterity in the modern world.” I find it interesting that Doueiri makes the themes of religion and race important features of his film by drawing attention to them specifically in the signifiers of the Christian sector and May’s cross on the one hand and the signifiers of blatant racial discrimination by the headmistress on the other.

I analyse the scene that follows Tareq’s banishment from the classroom using narratology, which encompasses the elements identified by Stam et al (1992:70) as including “the way narrative information is channelled and controlled through point-of-view, and the relationship of the narrator to the inhabitants and events of the story-world” (1992:70).

As the story-world in this film relies on information in the real world, it is helpful to understand the historical events of the Lebanese War, which Abraham (1996:1)

recounts in some detail. He explains the historical event, which involves the gathering of a large crowd near a church that was to be dedicated to Pierre Gemayel, the leader of the Lebanese Phalangist Party (1996:1). His account provides context to the Lebanese War and the roles of both Muslims and Christians in the conflict:

Sheikh Pierre, as he was called by his followers, came from an old, honorable, and distinguished Lebanese family. A man who always stood for Lebanese interests before all else, he was to be honored that Sunday, April 13, 1975. A proud Arab nationalist, Pierre Gemayel was known for his pro-Arab posture in world affairs and for his attachment to modern (Western) culture and institutions. As the group of well-wishers, friends, and family milled about the church in the predominantly Christian district of Ayn al-Rumanah, a car with masked license plates broke through Gemayel's security lines and what appeared to be Palestinian commandos opened fire on the group.

Later that same day, as the confusion subsided, a bus carrying Palestinian commandos returning from a rally organized by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) ran the Phalangist security net near the church and sparked a violent conflict. When the smoke of battle had cleared, twenty-two members of the PLO-left lay dead or dying in the burned-out hulk that had once served as their military vehicle. Although the Palestinians were heavily armed, the bus proved too confining for their mission and, thus, they forfeited their advantage to the Phalangist gunmen. This action signaled the beginning of a civil war that launched Lebanon on a countdown to destruction.

The recounting of history is never impartial, however, and it is therefore not unusual that Rienner (1998:2) portrays a different understanding of the events. Hayden White explains that history is a discourse much like literature – a fact that leads us to appreciate that there can be (and often are) multiple interpretations of the same event: “Theorists of historiography generally agree that all historical narratives contain an irreducible and inexpungible element of interpretation” (1978:51). Rienner explains that the conflict in Lebanon turned into civil war following two

apparently unconnected incidents in 1975: “The first occurred in March in the southern port city of Sidon, where the army clashed with an organized rally protesting the establishment of a fishing monopoly in Lebanon.” The second incident, of direct relevance to the film — since Tareq witnesses it from the second floor of the school building — was the massacre in Ain al-Rummani, a suburb in East Beirut on 13 April. Rienner explains the details (1998:2):

Christian Phalanges gunmen ambushed a bus and killed twenty-seven of its predominantly Palestinian passengers. This incident sparked heavy fighting between the Phalangists and the Palestinian resistance movement in Lebanon. The fighting developed into intercommunal clashes, spread like shock waves through Beirut, and gradually engulfed the whole country.

In the story-world of the film — which relates to Horst Ruthrof’s concept of “the presented world” mentioned in the theoretical approach section in my introduction — the audience is presented with information about the factions at play in the conflict with an announcement on Tareq’s mother’s<sup>30</sup> car radio: “A horrible incident has occurred this afternoon in Ain Al Remmaneh where masked gunmen of the Phalangist Party have attacked a bus” (*West Beirut* dir. Doueiri, 1998). This bears a close resemblance to Rienner’s account, albeit with a different spelling of the suburb’s name in the subtitles, and confirms that the story-world echoes the real world.

In the story-world, seemingly unresponsive to the tragic events that he witnesses and unaware of their political magnitude, Tareq’s response is initially one of

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<sup>30</sup> Hala Noueri is played by Carmen Lebbos.

excitement about the closure of the school. As the narrative develops, however, and Tareq's life experience results in his loss of innocence, he laments the closure of the school, a signifier of his entry into adulthood with its concomitant responsibilities and appreciation of education. On the other hand, Doueiri introduces the role of family life in Beirut with the affectionate relationship between Tareq's parents, who, we learn, were student activists when they were at university. Tareq's father, Riad Noueri (Joseph Bou Nassar) asks his wife whether she remembers (West Beirut 1998):

In 1963 we started a student revolution that spread from here all the way to Algeria! We almost brought the government down, but the army interfered! Today seeing all this stuff reminded me of those days.

This reminiscence serves the purpose of both informing the viewer of further historical facts and indicating the idealistic and militant nature of students throughout the world. It also resonates in Tareq's own militant behaviour at school. Khalaf (2002:211) points out that strikes were the second largest category of unrest in Lebanon in the sixties and that almost half of the recorded strikes were organised by students. He explains that the particular strike of 1963, referred to by Riad Noueri, relates to the 13 March 1983 protests by American University of Beirut students against violations of the sanctity of the Palestinian camps. This context of activism gives some insight into Riad's ideological view and his interpretation of the shooting, which is different from those expressed by the scholars above: "I think the Israelis retaliated against the Palestinians, after what happened in Tel Aviv, we've got nothing to do with it." Hala's reply is pertinent: "How can we have nothing to do

with it when it is happening on our soil?” She explains further, “Today at the courthouse I ran into a reporter from the European Agency. You know what he said to me? Lebanon is about to undergo drastic changes.” Riad’s amused response reveals the irony that is prevalent in Middle East humour: “That’s no surprise, for 100 years the Middle East has been in drastic changes!” We witnessed similar ironic amusement in *Amreeka*, when Nabeel laughs while watching the news that thirty-one Iraqis were killed in their sleep as a result of an accidental bombing and he repeats the phrase “accidental bombing”, while shaking his head.

The narrative continues in *West Beirut* with Riad expressing the opinion that the current events would soon be over and, “Next year, France.” Tareq’s retort is a humorous acknowledgement of his dislike of French education: “No thank you! Every day I go to France.” This predominance of French culture in Lebanon is reflected in the initial title “West Beyrouth” that has the first word in English, and the second word in French. According to IMDb (1998): “The director said that it’s an allegory to the trilingual culture existing in Lebanon: Arabic being the native language, and French and English being the 2 other quintessential languages spoken there.” Yet Arabic has been “written out” of the title, and substituted by European terms of place.

The scene ends with a barrage of gunfire and, as the family rushes to the balcony, they see the sky erupting. Riad explains that the explosions are “illuminating canisters”. The scene is then set for war, and illuminated on the balcony in the

adjoining building Tareq catches sight of Omar who has also been drawn outside by the explosions. In this way Doueiri creates a connection between Tareq and Omar, even in the context of conflict, with its inevitable destruction of connections.

In the next scene, the focus slips from war to comedy with the irrepressible neighbour, Mrs. Naheen (Liliane Nemri) shouting across the balconies for Abu Khodor to keep his rooster from crowing. “We live with apes here! May Allah spread pain all over you!” (West Beirut 1998). Once again a derogatory epithet is used, albeit from a different species, namely “apes”, echoing the French teacher’s earlier tirade against Tareq. However, here it loses its sting and racial connotation as the neighbour is of the same nationality as Abu Khodor. This flexibility of the impact of racial slurs is borne out by Kennedy In his study of the derogatory word “nigger”:

“For many people, saying or hearing the word *nigger* is easier in monoracial as opposed to multiracial settings” (Kennedy 2003). I argue that this crude, outspoken character, who not only interferes in the activities of her community, but also constantly requires sexual attention from her disinterested husband, provides comic relief and humanises the film. It is a complex move on the director’s part as Mrs. Naheen’s ridiculous behaviour shows up her ideas and ideology as ridiculous. Yet, at the same time, these universal tags identifying the Other as problematic would not be surprising to a western audience who encounter this type of overt racism in popular culture constantly be it in films (Sastry 2012), video games (Hester 2012) or songs (Coleman 2014). This representation of Arabs, viewed in comedic situations, serve to make the characters relatable and human and demonstrates that Arab

filmmakers speak back to the representations of Arabs as the evil Other through the language of popular culture.

Following on the haranguing of the neighbour about Abu Khodor's crowing rooster, Tareq's parents are insistent that he should go to school in spite of his reassurances that the school would be closed. Finally, Tareq gives up the fight with the sarcastic comment: "This is amazing, people are dying here and all you can think about is knowledge!" The trip to school allows the media once again to intercept their lives and inform the viewer of the story-world events with a newspaper seller on the street corner providing two newspapers. *L'Orient le Jour* (The Orient, the Day) carries the headline: "30 dead and wounded in a bus massacre at Ain Al Remmaneh." While Hala reads the newspaper to Riad, they run into a blockade across the entrance to East Beirut, now occupied by Christian militia, and are ordered to turn around. Finally they have to take Tareq's word for it that the school is closed and at this point the viewer has access to scenes of the neighbourhood of West Beirut. Finally Hala and Riad must acknowledge that the normality of life has been distorted and that, for now, schooling is no longer part of the structure of Lebanese society. This then begs the question, what happens to ideology when one of the Ideological State Apparatuses ceases to operate? Without the educational apparatus spreading its ideological messages, how does the ideology of colonialism survive? In my opinion, war has the power to dislocate ideology by breaking down the institutions of society that I regard as Ideological

State Apparatuses, and in so doing, open up the possibility of a new paradigm in the representation of Arabs in film.

Doueiri does not dwell solely on the war and, by seeing the film-world through the eyes of teenagers, allows the atmosphere to be alleviated as Tareq and Omar behave appropriately for their age. The universality of American popular culture becomes ever more evident as Doueiri's young characters listen to cheesy 1970s music that would not be out of place in a film directed by Tarantino, "the auteur of cheese" (Newitz 2000:59). Their choice of music includes American George McCrae's 1974 hit *Rock Your Baby*. The song is used diegetically when the boys smoke and dance to the record that Omar puts on his record player and non-diegetically when the soundtrack continues as the backdrop to their walk through the Lebanese flea market. Dettmar and Richey (1999:319) view the soundtracks to Tarantino's films, with their predilection for 1970s soundtracks, as "an aesthetic of pure cheese" and feel that "the director's fondness for bad music is unmistakable." Such "cheesy" aesthetics are seen by Newitz as a new kind of humour which is haunting U.S. popular culture and she explains that, although dubbed "cheese" by critics and consumers, there are no formal definitions of the term, only textual associations. Newitz defines both music and clothing from the 1970s as "cheesy" (2000:59) and she is of the opinion that, like camp, cheese describes both "a parodic practice and a parodic form of textual consumption" (2000:59). Cheese is also "a way of remembering history, a kind of snide nostalgia for serious culture of the past which now seem so alien and bizarre as to be funny" (Newitz 2000:59). It

could be argued that “cheese” is also a way of creating continuity between the present and the past, thus establishing historical validity.

The American popular culture of the 1970s is also found in the bellbottoms and platforms worn by Tareq and Omar, which are the focus of the camera as they groove through the streets of West Beirut, much as John Travolta would in *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), another 1970s piece which powerfully reflects the subculture of seventies’ disco dancing. The film sequence ends in a Lebanese flea market (Appendix 4),<sup>31</sup> which is reminiscent of flea markets throughout the world. Later in a more serious situation, where Hala tries to flee the city, Tareq implores her not to drive so fast: “Stop driving like Steve McQueen,” thereby once again illustrating the power of popular culture in building bridges between cultures. The fact that Arabs consume the same popular culture as Americans is important in combatting the constructed difference between “us” and “them”, those “Reel bad Arabs” so diligently researched by Shaheen (2009). The adulation of popular culture in the film is carried to an amusing level when Omar kisses an ABBA poster, reflecting the popularity of the Swedish pop group founded in 1972.

In stark contrast to this scene, which parallels the culture of Said’s Orient with that of the West, the following scene takes the viewer into a more stereotypical setting of traditional representations of the Middle East. No sooner has Riad assured Hala not to be concerned as Lebanon had been through similar threats of civil war in

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<sup>31</sup> This flea market scene is probably familiar to viewers from many parts of the world, including British viewers, whose popular culture is rich with flea markets such as Petticoat Lane.

1958, 1964 and 1973, and “knock on wood, the country is solid as rock, and I am going to prove it to you,” than gunfire and splintering glass is heard as a window in their flat is shattered. The family joins their neighbours in heading for the shelter in a panic. The scenes of people fleeing in the wake of bomb blasts are familiar to those who survived the bombing of London in World War II.<sup>32</sup> The blitz was a period of intense bombing of London that began on 7 September 1940 heralding a tactical shift in Hitler’s attempt to subdue Great Britain (The London Blitz 1940. 2001). It continued until the following May. “For the next consecutive 57 days, London was bombed either during the day or night. Fires consumed many portions of the city. Residents sought shelter wherever they could find it - many fleeing to the Underground stations that sheltered as many as 177,000 people during the night” (The London Blitz 1940. 2001). I argue that the scenario in *West Beirut* is therefore one that is relatable to people of the West, more so to those of the baby boomers generation, who would have heard tales of World War II, the aerial raids, bomb shelters and fires recounted by their parents.

The rationing of bread similarly is a universal problem encountered during war. However, the scene in Mr Hassan’s café is shocking as it represents the abuse of power by a local member of the community in the persona of militiaman Darwish (Fadi Abou Khalil), who enters the café while Tareq and his mother are queuing for provisions. Earlier we encountered Darwish in a more pleasant, albeit militaristic

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<sup>32</sup> To me personally this scene resonates with stories told to me by my mother-in-law, Ena Stubbs, of her experiences as a young mother in the London blitz of 1940.

setting as he cleaned his rifles, but he and Tareq shared jovial repartee. In that scene Tareq explains to May (West Beirut 1998):

Darwish was a hero of the Holiday Inn battle. One day they caught him and with a dagger they carved out that snake on his body. That's why we call him Papa Snake. They say he once caught four guys from the East side but didn't shoot them. You know what he did with them? He tossed them off the 15<sup>th</sup> floor, we asked him why, he said, 'I wanted to teach them how to fly.'

This highly questionable heroism as perceived through the eyes of a teenage boy gives way to pure bullying in the café scene, where Darwish insists on 30 pieces of Arabic bread, whereas Mr Hassan is rationing the bread to ensure that everyone in the community is fed. After attacking Mr Hassan, out of spite Darwish stabs the precious bag of flour, the staple of the community, thereby subverting his perceived heroic stature in the community. In my opinion, Doueiri is attempting to present the human side of the civil war in Lebanon with strong characterisations in his film. Darwish represents the hypermasculinity of the military, with its narcissism and ruthlessness, while Mr Hassan is the nurturer, protecting his community by keeping them fed with bread, the staff of life. They are therefore at opposite ends of the field of protection.

Beynon's study of masculinities and culture (2002) attempts to make sense of masculine aggression. He explores early childhood influences and relationships with parents. In this regard Chodorow (1978) explains that whereas girls are much more likely to identify with the mother's role, boys are much more likely to break with the mother and identify, instead, with the often distant father.

Tareq is also cast in the aggressive hypermasculine mode. He is not likeable and at times seems to attempt to emulate the male chauvinism of certain men in the neighbourhood. His merciless bullying of his classmate Azouri, both at school and at his home, points to his aggressive tendencies. This escalates in a scene where he is unnecessarily aggressive to a driver who nearly runs him over in the street. He is clearly at fault but proceeds to hurl a stream of abuse at the driver, to the extent that he attracts the attention of the militia who start shooting into the air. Unrepentant, he continues shouting and disrupting the traffic. By contrast, his friend Omar is a mediator and negotiator. After an initial distrust of Tareq's new neighbour, May, he is the one who takes care of her, urging her to hide the cross she wears around her neck, opposing Tareq's *laissez faire* attitude when she offers to go into the dangerous Christian-patrolled Olive Tree district on their behalf in a mission to find a shop that will develop their film, which they have shot with Omar's 8mm camera.

Nevertheless, behind the aggressive machismo, which is later subverted as analysed below, there are scenes that illustrate the wonderful Lebanese humour at play. One such scene is the teenagers' attempt to enter East Beirut, where they are bullied and intimidated by a roadblock militiaman, who pretends to be dangerous and threatening. I call this the roadblock militia scene. This scene is worth exploring for its representation of masculinity viewed within the framework of Vladimir Propp's morphology of the folktale (1968:26). A close reading provides interesting

reflections on masculinity. A narrative analysis in the style of Russian Formalist Vladimir Propp (1968) indicates a tale of heroes, villains and damsels in distress. Propp (1968:84) explains his method of analysis as follows, "Each category of characters has its own form of appearing. Each category employs certain means to introduce a character in the course of action." These include the villain, the donor and the magical helper. "The dispatcher, the hero, the false hero, as well as the princess are introduced into the initial situation." I should mention that Propp's research was into folktales which are, by definition, removed from reality, while *West Beirut* is clearly trying to achieve authenticity in terms of the reality it depicts.

In Proppian terms, the hero leaves home and an interdict is addressed to him. The unlikely hero is Omar, previously a helper in terms of Tareq's former heroic stature, but now a consummate negotiator who lays his life on the line for May, the damsel in distress, by standing in the line of fire when the villain threatens her with a rifle pointed at her chest. Propp makes allowances for the fact that the roles of the characters in folktale narratives could switch and it is interesting that Tareq, the rebel, previously seen undermining the French education system and showing the princess around the neighbourhood with a swagger, loses his nerve when confronted with a villain who is bigger, stronger, better armed and more aggressive than he is. He also becomes a false hero, who also needs saving and Omar, the hero, saves both Tareq and May. This then reflects back on his previous hypermasculinity and subverts it, showing it up to be a façade. The villain is clearly the roadblock militiaman. It is fruitful here to recall that the two previous chapters

also featured roadblocks as manifestations of the limitation of freedom of movement. In *Amreeka*, they are powerful symbols of the power of the coloniser and in *Paradise Now* serve the same purpose. Their effects however, are markedly different in that the protagonist in *Amreeka* chooses emigration above this violation of her freedom, whereas the lead characters in *Paradise Now* choose suicide bombing as their political answer to the damage done to their country and their personal freedom.

Propp (1968:26-65) analyses the functions of the *dramatis personae* of a folktale as follows. They begin with “One of the members of a family absents himself from home.” Propp points out that the younger generation “go visiting, fishing, for a walk, out to gather berries.” Within *West Beirut* the equivalence for the gathering of berries would be the youngsters’ expedition to find a shop that will develop their film.

Propp’s second function is “an interdiction is addressed to the hero” (1968:26). Propp gives several examples including “Do not venture forth from the courtyard,” an interdiction that clearly corresponds with the militiaman’s turnabout in his decision to allow Tareq access to the shop across the road. At this point Tareq is the hero and his initial contact with the militiaman is uneventful with Tareq politely enquiring for permission to cross his barrier: “Very quickly, sir,” to which the militiaman replies: “Yes, go right ahead. Allah’s with you.” Omar is less brave in this instance and implores Tareq not to go through the barrier, an instinct that turns out

to be correct because as soon as Tareq sets foot across the barrier the militiaman screams his Proppian “interdiction”: “Can’t you see the street is closed? Go back!” Tareq responds, pointing to the Kodak sign: “Sir—I want to go to that store, you see it? I’ll be back quick.” The conversation continues (West Beirut 1998):

MILITIAMAN: There and no back, asshole! Eight were shot and we can’t get them. Have you lost your mind?

TAREQ: Listen, I know Darwish ... you know Papa Snake, he’s my good friend.

OMAR: Have you lost your mind?

MILITIAMAN: Mohammed, Wafic, Abdallah, check this asshole out.

Tareq’s insistence corresponds with Propp’s third function, “The Interdiction is violated” (1968:27). Propp points out, “At this point a new personage, who can be termed the villain, enters the tale. His role is to disturb the peace of a happy family, to cause some form of misfortune, damage, or harm”. The militiaman certainly fulfils the role of the villain in this instance. Particularly as he now chooses to line the youngsters up against a wall as his cronies join him to witness his interrogation. Tareq’s tendency to swagger and namedrop does not impress this group and they manhandle him into submission.

At this point Propp’s (1968:28) fourth function comes into play, “The villain makes an attempt at reconnaissance.” The roadblock militiaman’s question aims to elicit important information: “How do I know you aren’t Christian spies? I see many scumbags these days?” This is threatening given May’s religious persuasion, which is concealed at this point as Omar has taken pains to hide her chain under her jumper. Omar is once again the negotiator and steps in to give answers, but not the

ones the roadblock militiaman and his cronies want to hear. With that the militiaman points his rifle at May, an action that galvanises Omar to step in front of the gun and ask the militiaman to calm down.” We’re all Muslims from West Beirut,” he explains.

This brings about a role change as Omar is now the hero who has laid down his life to save the Proppian “princess” May, and engages in the negotiations even though he had warned Tareq not to cross the boundary line and could easily have absented himself. The roadblock militiaman’s response, “Wafic, bring the jeep,” is a frightening one, implying as it does that the youngsters are about to be held hostage and taken somewhere. This corresponds with Propp’s (1968:29) sixth function “The villain attempts to deceive his victim in order to take possession of him or of his belongings.” In a last-ditch effort Omar, now being held by the neck, entreats the roadblock militiaman to calm down. “How dare you tell me to calm down?” is the response and once again Omar implores him to “Please just calm down, calm down. My friend Tareq over here, asshole! You try to tell him in plain Arabic. You want a smoke, do you want a smoke? Here you go, sir,” he says, lighting up a cigarette for him, and continues (West Beirut 1998):

OMAR: You told him that this place over there is closed but no ... it is open... I tell him ... they flattened it ... it disappeared from the Milky Way ... but no cuckoo head doesn’t listen sometimes ... sir, listen ... leave him to me. Sir, lighten up, leave him to me, because I swear I’m going to teach him a few things after school! I’ll teach you a lesson I swear we’ll never step into the Olive Tree district ...I hope you win the war! We’re with you gentlemen all the way!

Here the hero subverts the seventh of Propp's (1968:30) functions: "The victim submits to deception and thereby unwittingly helps his enemy", whereas in the film it is the militiaman who submits to Omar's deception of distracting and pacifying him sufficiently to attempt a getaway. Grabbing their bicycles, the three youngsters flee in terror, but not before the roadblock militiaman chases after them making a frightening crow-like sound. At this point his three cronies join him and they have a good laugh together, their camaraderie reminiscent of the relationships forged by soldiers in times of war. This humour is necessary to break the tension, but it also allows the viewer to see the human side of the militiamen and find them more relatable than the bullies they appeared to be.

Tareq tries to assert himself after the severe loss of face he has endured with the comment (West Beirut 1998): "I will process this film even if I have to go to Mars." Omar immediately quips, "To Mars? May your last breath go to Mars... you almost finished us back there!" Then turning to May he says, "And you Jesus Lover, if I see you one more time dragging this thing around your neck I'll hang you on it myself!" Blasphemous and disrespectful as this is to May's faith, she nevertheless seeks reconciliation with Omar by taking the cross from around her neck and putting it into his hand, thereby recognising his heroism in rescuing her.

The universal applicability of Propp's methodology serves to create an awareness of the universality of the tale of *West Beirut*. Here Arab *dramatis personae* have the same characteristics as those found in hundreds of folktales identified by Propp.

There are villains, but there are heroes as well, and princesses in need of salvation. Some villains remain, but others transform into victims or princesses who need to be saved.

Doueiri uses the device of the cross as a sign of the danger facing Christians caught in the West Beirut sector, a representation that is familiar to consumers of popular culture in the West. However, the protection that Omar offers May is that of a caring hero rescuing a princess, which diverges significantly from the vision of Arab men as misogynist and violent, and in this way Doueiri speaks back to negative representations of Arab men. The trio have managed to escape from the Proppian “enemy”, thereby obviating Propp’s (1968:30) eighth function, “The villain causes harm or injury to a member of a family.” Tareq, however, storms off at the end of the scene to continue his quest but returns a few minutes later having found out that the 8mm film can only be developed in East Beirut. In spite of his bravado in the statement he made about going to Mars, he now turns to May for help. “We’ll send a Christian. May, would you go to East Beirut? I will pay for your taxi.” However, Omar immediately vetoes this, “Only bombs go to East Beirut! Fool, taxis only get to the border, then she’ll have to cross on foot under sniper fire.” When May volunteers to go, Omar responds, “Virgin Mary, shut up!” Behind the insults and shouting, he is protective and sensible and shows far more moral fortitude than Tareq.

Following this scene, Omar reaches out to his trusted friend Tareq to share his concerns about the increasing religious fervour of his father (West Beirut 1998):

OMAR: Tareq listen to me, there is something I want to tell you. It's important. My father wants us to start praying, he wants us to go to the mosque with him every Friday. He says that since there is no school, religion would be good for us. He wants me to read the Koran. Do you read the Koran?

TAREQ: Not a word.

OMAR: Imagine, he wants us up at the butt crack of dawn to pray. We must fast during Ramadan and God knows what.

TAREQ: What does your mother say?

OMAR: Nothing, not a word. She bought herself a veil and now she says she doesn't want to wear short sleeves!

TAREQ: Are you serious?

OMAR: He said that theatre is forbidden, cinema is forbidden and rock-and-roll is obscene.

TAREQ: What does it mean – obscene?

OMAR: Sex! And the music of sex is the work of Satan, you believe it, man?

TAREQ: Is Paul Anka the work of Satan?

This dialogue carries important symbolism — highlighting the importance of Islam in the lives of the people of the Middle East — and even though Tareq asserts that he does not pray, he goes on to recite sections of the Koran, to the amazement of his friend. “Since when?” Omar asks. “From hearing it every goddam morning”, he responds, referring to the call to prayer broadcast from the mosques. Doueiri chooses to present viewers with an alternative representation of Muslims, who show varying degrees of religiosity in the same vein as Christians do. This might come as a surprise to viewers who have accepted the stereotypical Arab-Muslim conflation discussed in the introduction. The role of religion in the lives of Muslims is important and Omar's father's religious behaviour is not unusual. What is unusual is the fact that his behaviour has changed so suddenly, probably as a means of

conforming to societal pressure in Beirut. Mark Tessler, who researched the representation of religiosity among Muslims, posits (2015:66):

The degree to which people make religion a reference point in the conduct of their personal and collective affairs is not unchanging; it has been much more pronounced during some time periods and much less pronounced during others. Variation across and even within societies is no less important.

He finds that 36 percent of Muslim society is either undecided about religion or is actively not religious. I find this figure significant as it subverts the stereotype that all Muslims are religious fanatics.

I end this chapter with a discussion of relevant clips that foreshadow the ending of the film, which is ambiguous. In one of the scenes towards the end of the film Tareq tells Omar of the dire financial straits experienced by his parents (West Beirut 1998):

TAREQ: When the war started it was fun, you remember? Now every day I feel I'm going to lose my parents, then who's left? Has it ever happened to you? You see someone hit by a disaster and you say 'Thank God it's not me there.' Today I feel as if it's me there, and everyone is saying poor guy. Thank God we're not in his shoes. I wish school would come back. I wish Mrs Vieillard would come back.

In the light of Tareq's initial dislike of school and the discrimination he suffered there, this is a poignant reminder of his adolescent wish for a return to normality. Later, he asks his father, "Dad, why don't we emigrate?" to which his father responds, "Because I worked this land all my life. Do you want me to start all over? And what about your mother? What work can she do elsewhere?" Tareq replies,

“Mother said she could work as a typist.” Riad is outraged: “A typist! Your mother is a lawyer, not a typist!. Stop this nonsense, we’re staying here just like everyone else.” This implacability on his father’s part presages disaster. His male chauvinistic attitude, naturalised to the level of Barthian myth, allows him to assume his decision is final.

The aggressive scene in the bakery when the storekeeper is put upon by Darwish, also known as Papa Snake, is closely witnessed by both Hala and Tareq and both intervene to assist Mr Hassan (West Beirut 1998):

DARWISH: Twenty bags (of bread), Hassan.

HASSAN: Darwish stand in line. Everyone is waiting his turn.

DARWISH: I’m Papa Snake don’t argue with me. I said twenty bags. Hurry!

HASSAN: I have to feed everyone here. Your mother already came earlier. May God have pity on your mother. I protect this neighbourhood.

The incident brings tears to Hala’s eyes and she cries on the way home before arriving to confront her husband (West Beirut 1998):

HALA: Riad, Riad. No way! Impossible! Do you hear me? Go outside and see what’s happening.

RIAD: Calm yourself.

HALA: Calm myself is that all you can say? All you do is read books. Hala goes. Hala works. I can live poor, I can live hungry, I can even live without my son. But I will not live humiliated.

RIAD: Son leave us alone. What happened? I thought you wanted to fight imperialism?

HALA: Riad everyone is selling out, don’t you get it? Let’s leave.

RIAD: Leave where? Timbuktu who cares? You don’t know what you’re talking about, where do you want to go? To Jordan Greece or Paris? Do you know what they call us in Switzerland? Luxurious refugees! In London they send dogs to sniff us. In America they call us sand-niggers. We’re even begging the Communist to let us cross his borders. Today we’re on

every blacklist. All hasish dealers. We have become terrorists! What do you call this, not humiliation?

HALA: Riad, this country has become unliveable.

RIAD: Hala, you must understand something. I don't want to belong to any other country. I am staying, Hala, we will stay here.

HALA: If I die I'll be relieved but if I lose you two ...

At this point Tareq comes into the room and takes her in his arms to comfort her.

The passage once again brings forth racist epithets that illustrate the creativity of racists in pushing their agendas. Another issue that is highlighted is Riad's highhanded approach in asserting his own will. Jack Shaheen's (2005) assertion of the disempowerment of Arab Muslim women in Hollywood representations is relevant to this scene (West Beirut 1998):

In most Hollywood films, then, the portrayal of Arab Muslim women is as exotic, violent, and distinctly other. Arab women are seldom projected to look and behave like most of the viewers. Producers never show them at home with family, or functioning in the workplace as professionals. Instead of revealing a common humanity, Hollywood movies from the beginning have fostered xenophobia and prejudice by their assumption that women under Islam are in a pathetic state, thus helping alienate the Arab woman from her international sisters, and vice versa.

Shaheen's research into the perception of Arab Muslim women in popular culture is subverted in the case of Hala, however, who freely voices her opinion and makes various appeals to leave Lebanon. Her pleas always fall on deaf ears, though, and she later apologises to Riad for what she said and he replies that she is not the only one who is angry (West Beirut 1998):

RIAD: I want to scream at the world too. 100,000 dead and they still play with us like a chess game. They say war brings people together I wonder once this war is over, will we stay together, you and me?

His words are prophetic here, as is revealed in the final scene. However, in the penultimate scene that follows Hala's plea to leave Lebanon, Hala takes out Riad's lute<sup>33</sup> and hands it to him, asking him to play for her. He reluctantly plays it and she whispers, "I still love you." This endearment appears to reinforce Riad's earlier comment on war bringing people together, but his reflection on whether they will stay together remains unanswered and presages the sadness to follow.

In spite of Hala's independence as an educated woman with excellent career prospects, and her tendency to speak her mind in an informed manner, she still submits to her husband's inflexible decision and takes the initiative in settling their argument by deferring to him. In this way she conforms to the stereotypical norm of a woman as a peacemaker and a communicator. However, it must be remembered that the setting of the seventies was a time that has been categorised as the second wave of feminism, when women were still finding their way in the allocation of domestic responsibilities.<sup>34</sup> As a woman of the seventies, Hala still takes on all the domestic duties of cleaning and shopping as well as doing her work as a lawyer at the law courts.

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<sup>33</sup> "The word 'lute' is an English word which came from the Spanish laud, the laud which originally came from the Arabic word and instrument al-Oud (meaning the branch of wood). The lute is shaped like a half pear with a short fretted neck, it is a six courses of two-strings instrument played with a plectrum-regularly a trimmed eagle's feather. This instrument creates a deep and mellow sound." (Excerpt from Traditional Arabic Music 2010).

<sup>34</sup> Although Freedman does employ the concept of 'waves' as a method of classification, she is of the opinion that in seeking to describe feminism, she tends towards the position that feminism can claim to be a field with its own ideas, history and practice. In her opinion, however, these ideas, history and practice are far from unified, and are subject to continuing debate. She explains, "'Second-wave' feminism refers to the resurgence of feminist activity in the late 1960s and 1970s, when protest again centred around women's inequality, although this time not only in terms of women's lack of equal political rights. but in the areas of family, sexuality and work." Freedman, Jane. 2001. *Feminism*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Doueiri's decision to have two powerful women with very different styles in his characterisation, I argue, speaks back to Hollywood's representations of Arab women. Hala, on the one hand, is educated, intelligent, eloquent, respectful and a caring wife and mother, whereas Mrs. Naheen is a woman of a tougher fibre. She shouts for her rights, yelling at the teenagers and militiamen alike and is the sexual subject in trying to gain the attention of her husband. Her ultimate curse is to relegate her enemies to having roots in the "South", displaying her own propensity to stereotype a sector of society.

The film reaches its *denouement* in the final scene in the Noueri home, where Tareq is crying silently, while his father continues playing the lute in the background, without any words being spoken. It becomes apparent that Hala is not there. The viewer is left to make one of two assumptions: that Hala died in the war, or that she decided to leave Lebanon. After all there has been plenty of signification to suggest either eventuality. On the one hand, the viewer has witnessed her packing her bags, grabbing Tareq and driving off, until she has a collision and has to return home. She has pleaded with her husband to leave Lebanon. She has verbalised that the domestic load is too much for her and that she needs assistance from the males in her family. She has lost her job. She has mentioned that she can even live without her son, but she cannot live humiliated. The stark representation of her humiliation in the queuing for bread is a raw memory for her.

The foreshadowing of her possible death, on the other hand, is also evidenced by her comment that she is not afraid of death. In addition, the news clips of war and death indicate that people in Beirut are not safe. These news clips show well known political figures, including Yasser Arafat of Palestine, Moshe Dayan of Israel, as well as American troops and a crying woman dressed in an *abaya* in what looks like a war zone. The news clips can be analysed in terms of Stam's understanding of the diegesis of film. They have been filmed as a "displaced diegetic insert, i.e. a shot which is temporally or spatially displaced relative to the series of shots in which it is inserted" (Stam et al, 1992:41). These stereotypical scenes are ones that viewers would probably know well from news broadcasts of the Middle East, representations of this region being forever at war. Thereafter, the coda, which consists of the home movie made by Tareq, suggests a change in his mother's corporeal dimension. Once again, in this sequence, Stam's typology can illuminate our understanding of the film as Doueiri uses a syntagma in the order of a "subjective insert", defined by Stam et al (1992:40) as "an interpolated shot representing, within the diegesis, an image representing a memory, a dream, or hallucination clearly marked as subjective;" they explain memories or fears. In this case the subjective insert indicates a memory of filming his mother at the beach. It is clearly marked as subjective as it is filmed in black and white with Tareq's 8mm camera. Although I would prefer to read this scene as indicative of Hala's emancipation and free choice to leave, particularly given the earlier clues of her disenchantment with her personal situation, Doueiri has humanised his characters

within stereotypical gender roles and female agency is unlikely within that paradigm.

Whether the viewer chooses to read Hala's departure as voluntary or involuntary, I would argue that Doueiri has humanised his characters to the extent that they are highly relatable. Their fears and struggles over survival, family relations and choices are universal and their war experiences as civilians are a collective of the experiences of other civilians throughout the ages. By creating this universality Doueiri speaks back to stereotypical representations of Arabs and in the process creates a new paradigm in the understanding of this often maligned ethnic group.

There are many signifiers in the film that point to a shared culture between Lebanon and the West. The very fact of the French colonial heritage of Lebanon, represented in great detail at the beginning of the film, lends the Lebanese a strong European cultural tradition. Although Tareq's school is administered by a condescending headmistress who lacks the sensitivity and expertise to enhance the education system and provide an enriched, cultural environment, we are reminded that Lebanese students are immersed in French language and culture. In addition, the popular culture of the West is evident in the lives of the teenagers in the film, in the music they enjoy and the clothes they wear. I believe that Doueiri enables these similarities to resonate throughout the film so that he speaks back to the stereotyping that is evident in the Hollywood films mentioned in my introduction. In

the process of relating to his characters, the viewer is then invited to view them as self rather than other.

In this chapter I analysed the film *West Beirut* and found that its situation, within the framework of conflict, and impending war, created situations in which the characters were required to adapt to new extremely challenging situations. I identified clear patterns of colonial bias in the education system and gender bias in the assumption of family roles and the escalation of aggression in the militiamen.

This process of speaking back to negative stereotypes of Arabs continues in the next chapter, in which I discuss the film *City of Life* (dir. Mostafa, 2009: UAE: Filmworks), filmed on location in the cosmopolitan city of Dubai. This film forms an interesting contrast with those discussed previously in that it tells the stories of expatriates living among the local population in a postmodern city in the Middle East, where the emphasis is largely on capitalism, thereby challenging the view of decoloniality expressed by the Bandung Conference.

## Chapter Six

### ***CITY OF LIFE: Striding Two Worlds***

In this chapter I discuss the film *City of Life* (dir. Mostafa, 2009: UAE: Filmworks) from the theoretical perspective of postmodernism. The “city of life”, Dubai, straddles two worlds: the postmodern, fast paced world of hyperreal artefacts and the traditional world of conservative family values and religion. These domains are both evident in the film and are analysed within the framework of Baudrillard’s simulacra (2010), Lyotard’s grand narratives (1986) and Žižek’s concept of the dematerialisation of reality (2002).

Director Ali Mostafa is something of a pioneer in the United Arab Emirates having been the first Emirati to direct and produce a feature-length film in the region, *City of Life* (2009). More recently has made a second film, *The Worthy* (2016) under the local Government funded production company Imagenation. Since then, the Imagenation website (Image Nation Abu Dhabi N.D.) reports that it “produced its first Emirati film this year – the coming of age story “Sea Shadow”” in 2011.

Semantics aside this is a modest offering for the company in the light of Yunis and Picherit-Duthler’s announcement in their paper that “a huge unprecedented investment is being made into the film industry by a rapidly expanding number of government and private film production companies, such as the \$1bn-funded Imagenation (2011:119). The locally produced controversial film *Djinn* (2013) directed by Tobe Hooper and produced by Imagenation was panned by film critics

and was never distributed. A more prolific and successful output is revealed in Imagination's international film division, which maintains strategic partnerships with major producers that include Participant Media, National Geographic Films, Hyde Park Entertainment, Parkes /Macdonald Productions, Warner Bros., and Singapore's Media Development Authority (MDA). The website reports, "The division has co-produced a number of feature films, including the Bollywood hit "My Name is Khan", "Fair Game", "The Help", "Contagion" and "The Double"" (Image Nation Abu Dhabi). This emphasis on international films is the most likely explanation for the dearth of locally produced films in the United Arab Emirates.

The audience interest in locally made films with local themes is not, as yet, exploited and Emiratis are not sufficiently engaged. Yunis and Picherit-Duthler (2011:123) explain that most of the production work in the UAE is done by Arabs from other countries, particularly Syria, Lebanon and Egypt. In their view, the UAE needs to develop creative talent to support the UAE film industry. However, *City of Life's* box office results exceeded expectations. Yunis and Picherit-Duthler (2011:121) explain that initially Director Ali Mostafa was hoping for 25,000 viewers to ensure financial success, however, 80,000 viewed it in the UAE and it opened second in the box office in the first week and played in theatres for eight weeks. The film certainly reflects the realities of life in Dubai, which I believe accounts for its success.

In my discussion of these realities, I focus on the Baudrillardian *simulacrum* (2010:6) and its relevance in the postmodern world. *Simulacra* in *City of Life* are analysed within Baudrillard's description of the successive phases of the image in a four-step process. The postmodern condition evident in *City of Life* is also analysed within Lyotard's concept of the metanarrative. He postulates that, in modern societies, totality is maintained by means of "grand narratives", which signify the practices and beliefs of those societies. In each belief system or ideology there is at least one "grand narrative" and all aspects of modern societies depend on these "grand narratives". I argue that these "grand narratives" conform to Althusser's ideological state apparatuses (2006), one of which is religion. Although Lyotard does not specifically write about religion, I argue that Islam is a metanarrative, which is widespread within the *mise en scène* and narrative of *City of Life*. I also refer here to, Slavoj Žižek (2002) whose conceptualisation of postmodernism and the dematerialisation of real life is along the same lines as Baudrillard's postulation of the simulacrum. His article "Welcome to the Desert of the Real" (2002:386) refers to a comment made by Morpheus in the film *Matrix* (1999), which brought this logic to its climax. The film's message is that the material reality we all experience and see around us is a virtual one, controlled by "a gigantic megacomputer to which we are all attached; when the hero (played by Keanu Reeves) awakens into the "real reality," he sees a desolate landscape littered with burned ruins—what remained of Chicago after a global war" (2002:386). The resistance leader Morpheus utters the ironic greeting: "Welcome to the desert of the real." Žižek's view of this reality is that, "the ultimate truth of the capitalist utilitarian despiritualized universe is the

dematerialization of the “real life” itself, its reversal into a spectral show” (2002:386). This “spectral show” is then the equivalence of Baudrillard’s simulacrum.

Viewed from a postmodern perspective, Dubai as reflected in *City of Life* is therefore a city of contradictions and juxtapositions, which is, in my view, symptomatic of the playful signification evident in postmodernism. For Lyotard, the spread of capitalism has put an end to grand narratives. These days knowledge is valued in terms of its efficiency and profitability. Lyotard claims that in our postmodern culture, “The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation” (1986:37). He argues that this is the result of “the blossoming of techniques and technologies since the Second World War, which has shifted emphasis from the ends of action to its means” (Lyotard 1986:37). By contrast, my research on *City of Life* illustrates that some “grand narratives” are alive and well: the grand narrative of the conventional Hollywood film; that of religion; and of the family. Although these are susceptible to subversion, they remain powerful in the context of the film, as in other social contexts. In my opinion, the stability of these metanarratives illustrates the traditional nature of Dubai society as the tendency in postmodern societies is for the metanarrative to splinter. For example, postmodern family structures tend not to take for granted traditional gender and racially uniform units, evident in the Emirati families in the film. Yet Baudrillard’s postmodern concept of simulacra (the fourth stage of the sign) is

greatly in evidence in Dubai, thereby illustrating a rupture in the representation of postmodernity in the city.

Baudrillard (2010:6) proposes that simulation stems from “the radical negation of the sign as value, from the sign as the reversion and death sentence of every reference.” He explains the way that the sign loses its meaning in a four-step process:

- it is the reflection of a profound reality;
- it masks and denatures a profound reality;
- it masks the absence of a profound reality;
- it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum.

In my interpretation of Baudrillard’s model as it relates to Dubai and the locally produced film, *City of Life*, I argue that initially, the sign reflects a profound Baudrillardian reality of belief in God and the nomadic lifestyle that requires adherence to the rules of nature. Heard-Bay (N.D.) explains, “In the distant past the ancestors of the Bedouin, who made this region their home, discovered that they could find water in the dunes, which was adequately plentiful and often also relatively sweet. In many of the hollows between the dunes they created date gardens and built themselves houses using the branches of the date palm.” This close compliance to nature then proceeds to the second step, namely the first order of simulacra, where the sign “masks and denatures a profound reality”, represented by the construction of brick homes using wind-tunnel turrets for cooling to replace

tents. My visit to Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan's palace in Al Ain<sup>35</sup> made me aware of the innovation and simplicity of the era when nature was adhered to and constructions blended with the desert rather than competing with it. During this stage of the sign, the gardens continue to capitalise on the sustainability of date palms as shelter and shade as well as providing dietary supplementation with its hardy fruit (UAE Interact N.D.). As the society develops and moves on to the third step of Baudrillard's four-step process, the second order of simulacra is evident as the sign "masks the absence of a profound reality" in the construction of more elaborate structures that start changing the landscape along Sheikh Zayed Road, the now main arterial of Dubai. The first building of this nature is the World Trade Centre Dubai in 1978 (Appendix 5). Its architecture is Middle Eastern, with its small windows and thick walls, but it requires electrical air conditioning and the gardens are starting to depend on foreign flora and lawns that require an increase in irrigation. Tarmac has replaced camel tracks, the desert is less evident and the tap has replaced the innovative *falaj* system of irrigation (Visit Abu Dhabi, 2017). This masks the Baudrillardian absence of a profound reality, namely the state of living in harmony with nature, but the original is still apparent, with architecture reflecting the Middle East design, and there are no counterfeits in evidence. This link with reality is lost in the fourth stage of the sign, the present age where Dubai is dominated by simulations, constructions that have no original. Baudrillard demonstrates this fourth stage of the sign with the example of Disneyland. The Borges fable ("On Exactitude

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<sup>35</sup> "Known as the Al Ain Palace Museum, the former home of the late UAE founder, Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the Palace was once a political and social hub. Built in 1937 and then renovated in 1998, the building finally became a museum in 2001" (Visit Abu Dhabi, 2017).

in Science”), calls this stage “the desert of the real”<sup>36</sup> (cited in Baudrillard 2010:1). In Dubai, this stage is demonstrated by the construction of two islands, The Palm and The World, simulacra in the sea that have no relationship to reality whatsoever.

*City of Life* is a postmodern reflection on East meeting West in a heterogeneous society. The exploration of the microcosm of everyday life in the city shows the gaping distinction between the lives of the privileged and those living in abject poverty. Through the experiences of three Emirati characters: Faisal (Saoud Al Kaabi), his father (Habib Ghuloom) and his friend Khalfan (Yassin Alsalman), Mostafa exemplifies the distinction between the lifestyles of Emirati Arabs, where Faisal lives a life of great privilege, and the working class, exemplified by the streetwise Khalfan, who lives a modest, poor life with his mother and sister. Mostafa, however, undermines the stereotype of overindulged offspring of *nouveau riche* Arab parents by painting Faisal's father as a tough disciplinarian.

The diversity of Dubai is explored by contrasting the lifestyles of a few expatriates. These include British advertising executive, Guy Berger (Jason Fleming) with his ostentatious lifestyle of fast cars, power boats, commoditised, beautiful women, free-flowing alcohol and an upmarket villa; and Peter Patel lookalike, Basu (Sonu Sood), an impoverished Indian taxi driver who lives in a bedsit, works long minimum wage hours and dreams of becoming a Bollywood star. In this representation, set

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<sup>36</sup> The phrase, “Welcome to the desert of the real,” is uttered by Morpheus in the film, *The Matrix* (1999), foreshadowed in an earlier scene when Baudrillard’s book *Simulacra and Simulations* is seen on Neo’s bookshelf. The reference is also the title of a book by Slavoj Zizek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (2002), which examines ideological and political responses to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.

within a Muslim society, Guy Berger is the Other because of his sexual promiscuity, lifestyle of excess, overindulgence and greed: the very qualities ascribed to the characterisation of Arabs in Hollywood films identified by Shaheen (2009). By presenting Guy Berger as the Other, the binary opposition between “us” (the Westerners) and “them” (the Arabs) is destabilised. Berger uses his own brand of intimidation in the way he threatens the woman he impregnates to have an abortion or suffer the consequences. The irony of his warning to her, "This is my city!" lies in the country's tight citizenship rules, which do not allow citizenship to any foreigners, and only temporary residency for those with a working visa (usually renewable). The residency rules are clear (Globe Media Limited 2016): “There are different types of work visas for the UAE, depending on the duration of the employment contract. In order to obtain a work permit for Dubai, expatriates need a residency visa, which allows them to remain in the emirate for up to three years.”

I argue that Berger is a simulacrum of a ruler of a city and that his previously mentioned assumption of power is a mirage, as he is in fact disempowered in terms of citizenship within the United Arab Emirates and his value lies only in his importance as a businessman in the advertising industry. It is ironic that Mostafa chooses this particular industry for this character as it is as empty of signification, as is Berger's citizenship. Barthes, in his essay on the rhetoric of the image (1977b:33) posits that advertisements have clear, intentional meanings and offers a semiotic reading of the Panzani advertisement to illustrate his point:

We will start by making it considerably easier for ourselves: we will only study the advertising image. Why? Because in advertising the signification

of the image is undoubtedly intentional; the signifieds of the advertising message are formed a priori by certain attributes of the product and these signifieds have to be transmitted as clearly as possible. If the image contains signs, we can be sure that in advertising these signs are full, formed with a view to the optimum reading: the advertising image is frank or at least emphatic.

Although advertisements have a deliberate signification in order to sell a product, he uses this, by implication, more superficial type of sign system to illustrate the way messages are conveyed. The fact that Natalia (Alexandra Maria Lara) is chosen wearing an *abaya* as the face of Dubai in an advertising campaign created by Berger is an empty signifier as she is neither Muslim nor Arab and is therefore a simulacrum of an Arab woman.

In his analysis of *The Truman Show* (1998), Žižek explains that the underlying experience of the film is that the late capitalist consumerist Californian paradise is, “in its very hyper-reality, in a way unreal, substanceless, deprived of the material inertia. So it is not only that Hollywood stages a semblance of real life deprived of the weight and inertia of materiality — in the late capitalist consumerist society, “real social life” itself somehow acquires the features of a staged fake, with our neighbors behaving in “real” life as stage actors and extras (2002:386). I would argue that Guy Berger, the simulacrum of a ruler, is a prime example of such an “irreal” and “substanceless” character.

It is fitting that in his bid to impress Natalia, it is Guy Berger who chooses a visit to The World Islands, man-made landmasses off the coast of Dubai that I also identify as simulacra (City of Life 2009):

Natalia: Where are you taking me?

Guy Berger: Around the world. Trust me it won't take 80 days.

It is appropriate too that the developer, Kleindienst, compares The World to Disneyworld in an interview with *The National* (2014 cited in Weller 2016): "Just like Epcot in Disneyworld, visitors will only be a short boat ride from the country of their choosing. Our goal is to have from at least each European country one food and beverage outlet. This will allow you to have dinner in Germany, breakfast in France, and lunch in Italy." It is fitting that Kleindienst makes this analogy, echoing Baudrillard's view of Disneyland as a simulacrum. Baudrillard explores the simulation of Disneyland in depth (2010:12): "Disneyland is a perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulacra. It is first of all a play of illusions and phantasms: the Pirates, the Frontier, the Future World, etc." Baudrillard takes issue with the encapsulation of Disneyland as a fantasy and sees instead the "gadgets" necessary to create the concept of "phantasmagoria". From the realities of controlling the flow of the crowd from the car park to the exit, Disneyland is little more than a logistical exercise in crowd control to enable the visitor to leave from and return to another "gadget", namely the car. In between, "All its values are exalted by the miniature and the comic strip" (2010:12). Then Baudrillard draws the conclusion that, in my opinion, is at the heart of his concept of hyperreality (2010:12):

But this masks something else and this "ideological" blanket functions as a cover for a simulation of the third order: Disneyland exists in order to hide that it is the "real" country, all of "real" America that is Disneyland (a bit like prisons are there to hide that it is the social in its entirety, in its banal omnipresence, that is carceral). Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation. It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology) but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle.

In my opinion, the "reality" of Dubai works in a similar way. The manmade islands are constructed for human habitation and this reality is evidenced by the success of The Palm, another manmade island development. However, Guy Berger's boat trip around The World islands presents another reality. At The World, the islands are not inhabited and, like the map in the Borges fable, the sand is being blown away, and another "desert of the real" lies beneath, except here it is the "sea of the real" that lies exposed. Unless these islands are inhabited, there is no long term reality for The World islands. Richard Spencer of The Telegraph (2011) reports:

The islands were intended as the ultimate luxury possession, even for Dubai. But the World, the ambitiously-constructed archipelago of islands shaped like the countries of the globe, is sinking back into the sea, according to evidence cited before a property tribunal. ... Now their sands are eroding and the navigational channels between them are silting up, the British lawyer for a company bringing a case against the state-run developer, Nakheel, has told judges.

Within this milieu of the hyperreal, the privileged lifestyle Berger has enjoyed in a foreign land — thanks to the hospitality of the Arab government — is an interesting aspect, which I analyse further in terms of the representation of the United Arab Emirates as offering employment opportunities to expatriates. In spite of the fact

that all the characters are employed, the social inequality and career opportunities are racialised and the Othering of the disempowered labourers within this multicultural milieu indicates a "callous indifference" (Baudrillard 2010:7) to their situation by their employers. Caplin (2009) points out:

Dubai, with a population that is only 20 percent Emirati and 80 percent foreign born, with nearly 50 percent of the total population originating in South Asia, is a melange of nationalities. Indeed, it is estimated that 160 countries are represented in the city. In search of income to send back in the form of remittances, men primarily from India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan arrive in Dubai to join the construction industry. In 2005, there were 304,983 recorded migrant construction workers in the city.

One of the extreme conditions faced by outdoor workers involved in the construction of the hyperreal structures in Dubai is the 40-50 degree centigrade summer temperatures. These corporeal challenges in the summer heat result in heat exhaustion that in some cases require hospitalisation. This is particularly challenging when Ramadan falls during midsummer and fasting means that construction workers do not drink any water during daylight hours. According to *TimeOut Dubai* (2016), an attempt to alleviate this was introduced in 2007 when a ban on outdoor construction work during the hottest hours of the day came into force in the UAE. Around 500 companies, involving nearly 2,000 workers, were taken to court in 2015 after being caught violating the rules. *TimeOut* cites the *Gulf Daily News* report: "Labourers in the UAE will also be banned from working on construction sites in the UAE between 12.30 and 3pm until August 31 following a resolution issued by Labour Minister Saqr Gobash to cut working summer working hours" (TimeOut Dubai 2016). I mention this to point out that there are constitutional guidelines in place for the humane treatment of labourers and that it is the

employers from the 500 global construction companies with contracts in the region who transgress the guidelines.

A report by Ola Salem in *The National* (2013) confirms the seriousness of working outdoors during the summer: “Dr Ahmed Bahaa, an emergency physician at Abu Dhabi’s Burjeel Hospital, warned of the serious health implications of working during the hottest hours. Even mild heat-related illness results in muscle cramps, fatigue and sweating, while the moderate form can cause headaches, vomiting, nausea and fatigue. In its most severe form, known as heat stroke, a person can slip into a coma and die if not treated quickly and appropriately,” Dr Bahaa told *The National*. “It is very important, especially in this country because the weather is very hot, particularly from 12pm until 3pm or 4pm,” he added. The report goes on to say, “The only workers exempt from the ban are those whose work cannot be halted for technical reasons. In these cases, employers must have first-aid kits, rehydration solutions and cold water available.” The attention of the media — as an ideological state apparatus — to this issue illustrates the UAE Government’s stance on the protection of workers’ health and safety.

Mostafa pays homage to these workers with the solitary cyclist riding from sunrise to nightfall in the opening sequences of the film (Appendix Six). He takes up a third of the screen as he traverses Dubai from the desert to the Creek. Mostafa uses his journey as a backdrop to the scenes of the Dubai landscape, which ends with the rather unlikely winning of a million dirhams when the cyclist picks up a discarded

scratch card. This trite ending obviates the opportunity of tackling the issue of working conditions and poverty to a meaningful degree, and I believe Mostafa's film would have been more significant had he examined this elusive character and his difficult lifestyle in more depth.

He does, however, give the viewer greater insight into the lifestyle of taxi drivers in the persona of expatriate Indian taxi driver Basu (Sonu Sood), who aspires to Bollywood stardom by taking on singing and dancing jobs at night. His contemplation of suicide is a result of the climactic car accident that seals the fate of all the protagonists in the film. His own fate is that his face is disfigured in the accident, which he assumes will put an end to his dreams of stardom. A study of suicides in Dubai by Dervic et al (2012:652) illustrates the verisimilitude displayed by the film. The study finds that, although Dubai is a city with a large expatriate population, "total and gender-specific suicide rates for the national and expatriate populations are not known" (2012:652). Their study aims "to investigate total and gender-specific suicide rates in the national and expatriate population in Dubai and to elicit socio-demographic characteristics of suicide victims" (2012:652). To achieve this, they analysed all the registered suicides in Dubai from 2003 to 2009, and analysed the aggregated socio-demographic data of suicide victims. Suicide rates per 100,000 population were calculated. Their findings were that the suicide rate among expatriates (6.3/100,000) was seven times higher than the rate among the nationals (0.9/100,000). In addition, in both groups, the male suicide rate was more than three times higher than the female rate. Regarding nationality,

approximately three out of four expatriate suicides were committed by Indians. The majority of suicide victims were male, older than 30 years, expatriate, single and employed, with an education at secondary school level and below.

In the film world Basu falls within this demographic group. He is an over-30, single male and is employed. However, he is not stimulated by his employment as a taxi driver. He is inspired by celebrity culture in the form of Peter Patel, a successful Bollywood actor who looks like him. The similarity in their appearances has brought about some recognition among his acquaintances, which encourages Basu to seek an acting role in the hope of making his mark in Bollywood. The role of celebrity in postmodern culture has taken on a new dimension: fame has become accessible. Consumer interest in celebrity news fuels celebrity culture to the extent that Basu's ambition to attain celebrity status is not unusual at all. I would suggest that reality TV shows like *American Idol* have further driven the belief in accessibility to celebrity status. However, the reality is far less promising. Barry King (in Marshall 2010:244) points out that the economy of the labour market for actors is not in the actor's favour and has remained unchanged for decades: "Thus in 1979 roughly 90% of Hollywood's Screen Actors Guild membership of 23,000 earned less than a living wage and among the membership of Equity in the UK, 70% of members are unemployed in any one year." Although these statistics are outdated, his assertion that this situation has remained unchanged for decades gives some credibility to this ongoing situation of exploitation.

Basu experiences a similar lack of recognition and earnings in his portrayal as celebrity, Peter Patel, and burns the candle at both ends in his attempt to send money home to his family in India. His adulation of celebrity, and in particular of Peter Patel, is akin to fandom and the worship of celebrity. However, there is a dark side to celebrity. Daniel Boorstin explains that once the media publicity has “manufactured” the celebrity, the public does not like to believe that their esteem is invested in a basically synthetic product so: “we are tempted to believe that they are not synthetic at all, that they are somehow still God-made heroes who now abound with a marvellous modern prodigality” (in Marshall 2010:73). He explains that, while hero-worship remains, the heroes themselves dissolve. Marshall agrees that the media plays a role in perpetuating stories related to the entertainment industry (2010:319):

Celebrity status simplifies the determination of news value precisely because the level of fame of the person *a priori* establishes its newsworthiness. Whereas other news events may not produce the same effect of attracting readers, celebrity guarantees a certain high level of interest.

Basu is an interesting character as he too falls within the context of Baudrillardian simulacra. His first appearance in the film foreshadows the events to come as he is awoken from his dream of Bollywood to the reality of shattered glass in his bedsit as a result of a cricket ball missile launched through his window by children in the neighbourhood who are aspiring cricket players. One of these children alerts him to auditions for singers in a Bollywood-type club, enabling Basu to get part-time work, which he juggles with his taxi driving. His status in the club in which he sings is entirely reliant on the fact that he looks like Peter Patel, a celebrity in Bollywood.

His own talent as a singer and dancer is secondary to his appearance and therefore falls in the demographic of “the majority of actors”. This phenomenon is explained by Barry King (in Marshall 2006:245) in his discussion of oversupply of actors in the market: “there is a marked disparity between the earnings of leading players and stars, who are able to negotiate personal contracts and the majority of actors who earn at or slightly above the basic rate set by collective agreements; the magnitude of difference being in excess of fifty times, sometimes a hundred.” King explains further that under such circumstances criteria of selection are based on “discontinuous” as opposed to “continuous” variables. By “continuous variables” he means criteria based on skills such as those learned at particular drama schools for instance. On the other hand he explains that “discontinuous variables” refer to criteria based on the assessment of “physical and psychological traits that are accidentally combined or acquired by the individual as a member of the host culture. Such traits are susceptible to ordering on a continuous scale – degrees of bloneness, bust size, muscularity, height, etc.” King’s observations indicate the challenging situation in which Basu finds himself. He is a product of his “host culture”.

In addition, I argue that he is well on the way to becoming a simulacrum in the third order of Baudrillard’s “successive phases of the image” where the sign, Basu, “masks the absence of a profound reality” (Baudrillard 2010:6). Basu has his own “reality” as he is talented in his own right, but King’s “discontinuous variables”, mentioned above, have trapped him into the simulation from which he cannot

escape. More specifically, the requirements of his Indian host culture with its heightened interest in the dancing and singing culture of Bollywood have placed him in the situation of simulation. Ironically, a car accident releases him from entering the fourth phase of Baudrillardian simulation, where the sign “has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum” (2010:6), because as soon as his face is scarred he is no longer a viable simulacrum. His doctor’s words, “You’re lucky to be alive,” are prophetic as they indicate that he is no longer a simulation but is now alive, but first must survive the Baudrillardian (2010:1) “desert of the real itself” before he can progress. The reality is hard to bear and it is at this point that he becomes suicidal, as previously mentioned. However, he is saved by his own ability masked as disability, inspired though it might be by another Bollywood poster featuring the scarred face of Nishaan. Basu’s appearance now enables him to become a “character actor”. King explains (in Marshall 2006:245):

In film, the construction of a personal monopoly rests on shifting the emphasis in performance towards personification, but such a shift takes the radical form of carrying the implications of the actor’s persona into everyday life. Thus actors seeking to obtain stardom will begin to conduct themselves in public as though there is an unmediated existential connection between their persona and their image. Another way to put this is to say that the persona is in itself a character, but one that transcends placement or containment in a particular narrative and exists in cinematic rather than filmic time and space.

In my view, Basu has now moved away from being a mere persona, or mask, and has become a fully-rounded character in his own right.

Lyotard’s analysis of the change in the legitimation of knowledge in the twentieth century begins with the working hypothesis that “the status of knowledge is altered

as societies enter what is known as the post-industrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age” (Lyotard 1986:1). In a historical perspective, Lyotard finds it justifiable to refer to present history as “the postmodern age” because, since at least the 1950s, a “crisis” of “legitimation” has come about with regard to all forms of knowledge, making it impossible for discourses to be legitimated by “an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth” (Lyotard 1986:xxiii). Hence, Lyotard calls discourses of self-legitimation “modern” and defines “the postmodern condition” as the *crisis* of legitimation (Lucy 1997:129).

In the context of this crisis of legitimation, there is another character who, in my opinion, embodies a stereotypical representation of Emirati culture. This is Faisal’s father, who views the family and religion as grand narratives. He is not a postmodern father in that respect. However, there is evidence of postmodern resonances in his lifestyle. For instance, his conspicuous consumption, evidenced by the lavish home he lives in and a garage full of luxury cars, indicates that he cultivates a postmodern image of stability and wealth, the red Ferrari a giveaway to a more frivolous image of thrill-seeking. Yet, within this representation, there is a conservative father who is concerned for his son and for upholding the grand narratives of religion and the family by obeying Muslim traditions. Cultural concerns of respectability are also evident in his narrative (City of Life 2009):

FATHER: Do you think I grew up like this with ease? No Faisal, no! This is not the example I set for you. You are an embarrassment to all Emiratis!

Where, where is your sense of compassion and pride? If your mother, God rest her soul, were still alive she would be ashamed of your behaviour.

In a later scene Faisal's locked bedroom door seems to his father to be an indication of his alienation from him and he asks why the bedroom door is locked (City of Life 2009):

FATHER: It's Friday. if you have forgotten. Get ready for the mosque and stop this childish behaviour.

FAISAL: But father, I don't feel so good.

FATHER: Of course you won't feel good if you keep going to bed so late in the night. What happened to your face?

FAISAL. It's nothing.

FATHER: Been fighting?

FAISAL: No father, I was playing football and fell.

FATHER: Playing football eh? Good. You know, almost a year now and you've been saying you're looking for work. Till now we've seen nothing. Know this! Start of next week you're working in the real estate company.

FAISAL: But father ...

FATHER: No but or anything else. Be there! Or we'll see how tough you are without a car and a credit card!

Mostafa's narrative in this interaction between father and son illustrates that this is not an unusual narrative — the confrontation between a strict father and a work-shy son is fairly stereotypical in the family drama genre. Within the narrative of *City of Life*, Mostafa supports the pragmatics outlined by Lyotard by creating a dialogue that affirms the importance of family as an institution, and in so doing, upholds the grand narrative of film-making within the family drama genre. At the same time, he subverts the stereotype of Arab parents being overly indulgent.

I argue further that Mostafa inserts the scene into the film as a contrast to the hedonistic lifestyle of Guy Berger, and therefore makes a commentary on the

difference in the stability of the orders of postmodernism and tradition. He supports the rules, mentioned above, that define the pragmatics intrinsic to the transmission of popular narratives as outlined by Lyotard (1986:20). The father's support of religion, and specifically the Muslim religious metanarrative versus the secularisation of the West in the persona of Berger, creates a tension in the film that plays out in relation to various nationalities, religions, and social classes.

As I discussed in the introduction, Lyotard's view of the grand narrative can be applied to the major institutions of society. Mostafa pays homage to the family as a grand narrative in various scenes, including the one that follows the titles, where the scene is set for most of the film. Lyotard (1986:20) refers to the transmission of narratives as:

...usually obeying rules that define the pragmatics of their transmission. I do not mean to say that a given society institutionally assigns the role of narrator to certain categories on the basis of age, sex, or family or professional group. What I am getting at is a pragmatics of popular narratives that is, so to speak, intrinsic to them.

Lyotard refers to nostalgia in his discussion on the pragmatics of narrative knowledge in the story telling of the Cashinahua storyteller (1986:20) who, in the retelling of an old story, becomes the hero of a narrative, in the same way as the Ancestor was. It could be argued that this is in the same order of simulation as Baudrillard's fourth stage of the sign, as the Cashinahua storyteller does not have "real" experience of the tale he recounts, but assimilated knowledge from having been a "narratee" of the same story. Lyotard goes on:

(The Cashinahua) example clearly illustrates that a narrative tradition is also the tradition of the criteria defining a threefold competence – ‘know-how,’ ‘knowing how to speak,’ and ‘knowing how to hear’ [*savoir-faire, savoir-dire, savoir-entendre*] – through which the community’s relationship to itself and its environment is played out. What is transmitted through these narratives is the set of pragmatic rules that constitutes the social bond. (1986:21)

The narrative knowledge required by both the Cashinahua narrator and the *City of Life* scriptwriter is the “know-how” of relating tales of a bygone era, such as Emirati family life. However, the “speech acts relevant to this form of knowledge are performed not only by the speaker, but also by the listener” (Lyotard 2010:21). In this case “the listener” or audience is assumed to be aware of the cultural representations, in the form of popular culture, which are evident in this scene. The means of delivery is through signifiers of this culture, namely the importance of religion, of image in the community, of sex within marriage, of not drinking alcohol and having appropriate dress codes. The *savoir-faire* of the audience is necessary to make sense of the simulation happening in the scene. I argue that even viewers from the West — who do not have *savoir-faire* of Emirati cultural norms or of living in a Muslim country — would be able to relate to the importance of family life, discipline of offspring and concerns for their future. In this way, I argue that the film creates a new paradigm of film-making, removed from the one-dimensional representations of Arabs often portrayed in Hollywood films and identified by Shaheen (2009). The following scene shows a softer side to Faisal’s father as he commiserates with his son over the death of Khalfan, Faisal’s best friend, while at the same time trying to instil societal mores into his son (*City of Life* 2009):

FATHER: What is this? How dare you bring alcohol into this house?

FAISAL: But father, I killed him. If he weren't coming for me he would still be alive today. I wish it were me who died.

FATHER: No my son, no! Get these thoughts out of your head. It's not you who killed him, it was the lifestyle you both have been leading. This is what killed him. As I warned you. Sleep and try to forget. You have to deal with this like a man. You need to give your life some value. Or at least give Khalfan's memory some value. This time I'll forgive you (picking up bottle of alcohol) but I swear to God even though I shouldn't, if you ever bring this sin into my house again you will not be my son nor will I know you.

Faisal's father serves as an anchor to the traditions and cultural reality of Emiratis in the UAE. His principles are often subverted by the representations of the lifestyles of the Other, the heavy drinking in hotels and bars and the sexual promiscuity that is part of expatriates' life in Dubai, as seen in the lifestyle of Guy Berger and Natalia's colleague, air hostess Olga (Natalie Dormer). Yet here it is his own son who brings this "sin" into his home and he is not equipped to deal with the subversion of the rules of the religious metanarrative that has been his lodestone all his life. His "be a man" suggestion is cold comfort but illustrates the representation of masculinity as a lack of emotional vulnerability in his culture.

Lyotard describes the credulity of the people, or audience, as vital in the process of actualisation or making the narratives "real" (1986:23):

In a sense, the people are only that which actualises the narratives: once again, they do this not only by recounting them, but also by listening to them and recounting themselves through them; in other words, by putting them into "play" in their institutions – thus by assigning themselves the posts of narratee and diegesis as well as the post of narrator.

Within the fictional world created in *City of Life*, the fictional characters portray fictional situations, but they are narrated within the context of life in Dubai, so in the

instance of Faisal's father's pronouncement, the need to conform to the requirements of a Muslim society in the "real" world in which they exist.

Lyotard speaks of narration as "the quintessential form of customary knowledge, in more ways than one" (1986:19). He then goes on to describe the first way in which the popular stories recount the successes or failures greeting the hero's undertakings: "These successes or failures either bestow legitimacy upon social institutions (the functions of myths) or represent positive or negative models (the successful or unsuccessful hero) of integration into established institutions (legends and tales)" (Lyotard 1986:20).

With regard to the other characters in *City of Life*, using Propp's schema, we do see a change in the status of both Guy Berger, the hero turned villain, and Natalia, the princess undermined by the false hero. This type of analysis is reflected in Lyotard's view that: "Narration is the quintessential form of customary knowledge, in more ways than one" and that "popular stories themselves recount what could be called positive or negative apprenticeships" (1986:19-20). Furthermore, the myth has served to bestow legitimacy upon the social institution of marriage and the family. Mostafa has shown the grand narrative of the family (including marital fidelity) to be under threat.

Prior to the accident that ended his life, Faisal's friend Khalfan lived in less luxurious circumstances. His home was simple and during Faisal's last visit to his

friend's home he had noticed how Khalfan's sister had grown into a beautiful young woman, which he mentioned to Khalfan later, much to his friend's concern. "I see you are covering now," he had said to Khalfan's sister, referring to the *hijab* (head scarf) she was wearing. The irony of this is the fact that the *hijab* represents modesty and should have the opposite effect to the one that it elicited in Faisal. The courting behaviour of the young people in this scene is not very different from any other young people and serves to support my thesis that films such as *City of Life* portray Arabs as conducting ordinary lives and not in accordance with the one-dimensional representation of all Arabs as Muslim terrorists.

I argue that this film illustrates a more inclusive approach of a Middle East regime to Western lifestyles and mores than viewers might expect and that the hyperreal artefacts, such as the two Chrysler buildings standing side by side, are largely created within an American prototype. Paradoxically, Guy Berger gives voice to this disparity in lifestyles when he rebukes Natalia for refusing to have an abortion and gives her a warning with the *non sequitur*, "We're not in Eastern Europe." This statement is evidence that he understands the conservative culture that he lives in yet thwarts it at every turn with his playboy lifestyle, sexual promiscuity and the accessible alcohol at his parties. However, there is some ambivalence in the execution of the law in Dubai, which is another grand narrative founded on the idea of monogamous married life. On the one hand, unmarried couples live together as do their counterparts in the West, an indication that there is slippage in the grand narrative of the family. One might ask why then did the Government react so

unilaterally to the overtly sexual shenanigans of two British nationals, one an expatriate and the other a visitor, to what has become known as the “sex on the beach” case. According to a report in *The Guardian* (Stewart 2008):

A British man and woman were today jailed for three months after being convicted of having sex on a Dubai beach. Vince Acors, 34, of Bromley, south-east London, and Michelle Palmer, 36, of Oakham, Rutland, were arrested on Jumeirah beach in the early hours of July 5, having met that night at a £60 all-you-can-drink champagne brunch. As well as jailing the pair, the judge, Hamdi Abul Kharr, fined them 1,000 dirhams (£155) and ordered their deportation after they had completed their jail sentences.

Reports such as this give the Middle East the reputation of intolerance and repression that it has. However, the public indecency laws uphold the grand narrative of Sharia Law, which, in this case, has flagrantly been broken by having sex in a public place. This behaviour is unacceptable in most cultures. Another inarguable boundary to the tolerance shown towards expatriates' lifestyles is unlawful pregnancy: unmarried mothers are repatriated once their pregnancy is known by the authorities. I argue that this is due to the upholding of the grand narrative of the family, which requires sex to be conducted within marriage. Guy is in a quandary as he would either have to marry Natalia in order to conform to the grand narrative of the family or see her repatriated, which means losing her. So it seems that within Dubai the necessity to uphold the grand narratives of religion, the law and the family are paramount, whereas it is on the brink of postmodernity with its hyperreal artefacts discussed previously. I would argue that the lifestyles depicted in the film are realistic depictions of life in Dubai, which is paradoxical as it balances itself between its traditions and postmodern adaptation.

Although Dubai can be termed a postmodern city in some respects, postmodernism, in Lyotard's opinion, critiques grand narratives that are put in place to mask the instability of social orders. Such critiques are not evident in the film-making of *City of Life*: the film-maker's craft is not transgressed and the film is not experimental at all. It has a linear story line, does not subvert viewers' expectations of a coherent linear narrative and never ventures beyond the fourth wall, that imaginary wall also known as direct address. The legitimacy bestowed on certain narratives, in this particular case the classical paradigm of film-making, can be interpreted, in Lyotard's terms, as a language game: "Narratives, as we have seen, determine criteria of competence and/or illustrate how they are to be applied. They thus define what has the right to be said and done in the culture in question, and since they are themselves a part of that culture, they are legitimated by the simple fact that they do what they do" (Lyotard 1986:23). Such legitimacy has kept the "classical paradigm of film-making" (cited above) in place as a grand narrative, with film-makers "doing what they do", a phrase that is a form of mystification of the film-makers' artistry and contrivance that goes into making a film.

Shot on location, the film also showcases the city's other architectural feats in stark contrast to the far-less-opulent buildings in the areas of poverty. Bordered by the desert, viewers are reminded of the proximity of this vast impenetrable expanse of Dubai, with a camel shot alongside the enigmatic labourer on his bicycle in the opening scene. This cyclist appears at various times throughout the film, offering

some grounding to the hyperreality of this city in the sand. He seems to be homeless, for he appears in one scene foraging through the garbage bins in a quest for cardboard, which he folds and places on his bicycle, either for recycling or for shelter. This is in stark contrast to the Emirati character, Faisal, who at that precise moment is throwing away his blood-stained *kandura*.

I end this chapter with a discussion of a discredited story, "The Dark Side of Dubai," (Hari 2009) which offers a different portrayal of the city from that offered in *City of Life*. This story gives a negative representation of Dubai in the same vein as the Hollywood films cited by Shaheen (2009) do. However, because it claims to be a piece of journalism and not of fiction, the facts can be checked. Hari's article paints "a deeply unflattering portrait of Dubai as "a city built from nothing ... on credit and ecocide, suppression and slavery" (Gornall 2011) and won an award for Hari. The *National* journalist, Gornall, explains that Chris Saul, who had worked in the IT industry in Dubai since 2002, was indignant about what he had read and decided to conduct a forensic analysis of Hari's article. His analysis revealed that two anonymous and unidentifiable characters did not exist. Saul was soon joined by other critics such as Guy Walters, a British author and journalist with *The New Statesman*, who found: "Hari has committed three journalistic crimes. First, he has pretended that words spoken to other journalists were in fact said to him. That is plagiarism, pure and simple. Secondly, he makes things up. There is no doubt in my mind that many of the people he supposedly encounters - such as the girl in hot pants in Dubai - are figments of his imagination. Thirdly, he distorts the words of the

real people he does manage to interview." One such real person who Hari interviewed is Ahmed Al-Attar, a UAE blogger. Walters, who had spoken to Al-Attar, explains (Gornall 2011):

Al-Attar's blog, *An Emirati's Thoughts*, shows him to be a progressive, liberal thinker, keenly aware of the region's pressing social and political issues. But in Hari's article he emerges as a cartoonish, spoilt Emirati, with a "Panglossian" outlook, who is smugly content with the status quo in his "Santa Claus state". In addition, there are seven named and quoted characters in Hari's article who cannot be traced. This includes someone from a labour camp.

This critique of Hari's story is significant for my thesis, illustrating as it does the stereotyping that can occur due to popular perceptions of this region. Hari distorted the facts and the people involved in his gathering information for the purposes of presenting a particular perspective on Dubai. This type of distortion in the service of a particular ideological agenda is typical of Hollywood films such as those listed by Shaheen, in which Arab characters are portrayed stereotypically. *City of Life*, to a certain extent, "speaks back" to those representations by presenting images of "real" Arab life, but it does not go far enough in portraying Others and the poor.

Popular culture in the form of film, however, does not have these checks and balances and it is therefore possible to spread stereotypical representations with impunity. It is the job of Arab film-makers to tell stories that offer a different perspective. *City of Life* is a story simply told, a representation of the lives of citizens and expatriates living side by side without common metanarratives. This, in my opinion, is at the heart of postmodern society in a multicultural world. Mostafa speaks back to the negative representations of Dubai with a certain amount of

naiveté by presenting it as a land of opportunity for all, where every narrative has a fairytale ending. That is not the value of the film. The power of *City of Life* is that it allows viewers into the lives of various social groups. If it had been braver in the scope of its characters and had included more of the man behind the bicycle (for instance), it could have been a more socially significant film.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Conclusion**

The films discussed in my thesis pose a significant challenge to accepted views of Arabs in the popular imagination and open up the possibility for a new paradigm of cultural perception. Usually “the West” allocates to itself the right to speak “for” the Other, but Arab film takes back this right to speak, and speaks for its own ethnicity, thus undoing its Othering by Hollywood and other Western cultural discourses.

These Western-centric discourses are demeaning and stereotyped, and simply false; and, as I have argued, Arab film-makers can represent the Arab constituency with greater authenticity, humanity and compassion than Western discourse has allowed. In the process of presenting their authentic views, I believe, my thesis adds to our cultural understanding of relationships between the West and the global south. The theories of Hall’s representation and Said’s Orientalism have served as viable support for my argument that Arabs are represented as the Other and are viewed through the lens of Orientalism. The theory of decoloniality, espoused by Mignolo and Maldonado-Torres (among others), has supported the argument that an active delinking from coloniality is required, in order to avoid its ongoing normalisation.

My thesis attempts to comply with Edward Said’s request, mentioned in my introduction (1997:xv-xvi):

What we expect from the serious study of Western societies, with its complex theories, enormously variegated analyses of social structures,

histories, cultural formations, and sophisticated languages of investigation, we should also expect from the study and discussion of Islamic societies in the West.

I have undertaken a serious study of relevant films, using variegated analyses of social structures, histories and cultural formations and have considered Said's position in this analysis.

I have identified scenes of blatant stereotyping and xenophobia as well as Orientalist attitudes in the films that I have analysed. In *Amreeka*, for instance, there is the overt racism by the banker in Illinois in his comment, "Don't blow the place up" and the inferred racism of patients leaving Nabeel's practice after the outbreak of the Iraq War. The children in the film are no more immune to this Othering, with Fadi earning the nickname Osama, although he is a Christian Arab and not a Muslim Pakistani, thereby displaying ignorance of assumptions made in the process of stereotyping. In *Paradise Now* Said is Othered by his own community for being the son of a collaborator. His wish to bring honour to his family by giving his life as a suicide bomber is grounded in this reality, as he has found no other way of expunging the shame that his father has brought on his family. In *West Beirut* the Orientalist view of the French headmistress is evident in her categorising Tareq as "belonging in the jungle" and having "primitive habits", thereby displaying the postcolonial assumption of superiority by the coloniser. Tareq's active delinking from this discourse is evident in his defiance against the French flag and anthem. Finally, in the last film I analyse, the role of the lifestyles of expatriates in *City of Life* would no doubt come as some surprise to viewers, who might not be aware of the

similarity between the lifestyles of Dubai and the West. Mostafa makes the point that, although nightclubbing and drinking is anathema to conservative Emiratis, it is not curtailed among expatriate and Arabs from more liberal countries. This permissiveness towards Western lifestyles in a Muslim country is, I believe, a subversion of the grand narrative of violent, bloodthirsty and evil Arabs as reflected in many Hollywood films.

The Othering of Arabs takes a concrete form in the signifier of roadblocks or “checkpoints”. This is evident in the analysis of two of the films I have analysed. For instance, the roadblocks apparent in representations of Palestine in *Amreeka*, and *Paradise Now*, impose great restrictions on the geographical space and time of citizens. However, their impact has diverse dimensions. In *Amreeka*, the inconvenience of the functioning of everyday life is obstructed to the extent that, as Muna explains, a 15- minute trip between Ramallah and Bethlehem takes two hours because of the roadblocks. In addition, the erratic behaviour of the Israeli guards is threatening. They are so threatening to her quality of life and peace of mind that they are a deciding factor in her decision to emigrate from Palestine, whereas for Suha in *Paradise Now*, they carry the underlying threat of violation at the hands of condescending and controlling guards. In all instances they are militaristic, confrontational and restrictive. These situations draw me to the conclusion that the violation of space, through colonialism and war, has grave impacts on people living under occupation and in areas of conflict. There is also a roadblock featured in

*West Beirut*, which represents loss of innocence through fear for Tareq, Omar and May, as well as the end of their freedom to traverse the city.

Stuart Hall argues that “the West” is a historical, not a geographical construct, as mentioned in my introduction. “By ‘western’ we mean ... a society that is developed, industrialized, urbanized, capitalist, secular, and modern” (Hall 2000:186). This idea of the economy is a cultural signifier that is relatable to both the “West and the Rest”, and I have associated it, more specifically, to the question of employment. The serious life-event of job loss is evident in *Paradise Now* and *West Beirut* with both Khaled and Said, on the one hand, and Hala, on the other, losing their jobs as the economies shrink because of the occupation of Palestine by Israel, in the former, and as a result of civil war on the latter. I have argued that it is one of the motivations for Khaled and Said to get involved in the mission of suicide bombing as they see no way out of their situation, either politically or personally; and job loss is a source of great insecurity for Hala. The ambiguity of the ending of *West Beirut* gives the viewer the option of deciding whether Hala has died in the war or has left her husband and son, as foreshadowed in an earlier conversation in the film. In *Amreeka*, Muna’s working life in the USA is a continual source of anxiety for her as she tries, unsuccessfully, to enter the banking world for which she is eminently qualified, but faces stereotyping and xenophobia at every turn. The employment she is finally able to secure at a fast-food outlet, represents the fate of many immigrants in similar situations, who take on positions or which they are overqualified. It is evident too in *City of Life* that Basu, the taxi driver, is struggling

financially, however, within the society of Dubai this has less to do with the economy than with his class status from which he wishes to escape. He sees Bollywood as a way out of his lowly position in life. These universal situations, in which these fictional characters find themselves, are no different from those people in the real world who have lost jobs and tried unsuccessfully to find employment. In this way, I have argued, the directors make their characters relatable, which is not evident in representations of Arabs and Muslims in mainstream Hollywood.

Food is a powerful cultural signifier in all the films that I have analysed, as it encodes a great number of cultural values. But in *Amreeka*, Dabis vividly displays its importance by directly equating the loss of the food at the airport with the loss of Muna's nest egg. I found other representations of Dabis' use of food, such as the playful connotation of acceptance in the form of the White Castle Falafel Burger; and in her closing scene, food connotes acculturation, when the Jewish headmaster joins Muna and her family at their favourite Palestinian restaurant. The sharing of food with a Jew, the ultimate Other, I argued, has cultural connotations that run very deep in the feuding between Israel and the Middle East and the scene is therefore loaded with connotations of acceptance in this new country, far away from previous prejudices and stereotypes. In *West Beirut*, food signifies a changing society as war grips the city. Tareq jokes about the inevitable sardine meals that his mother makes for lack of an alternative. Food also becomes the central signifier in the argument that broke out in Mr Hassan's café, where the stabbing of the bags of flour, the country's staple, represents a vicious change in the local youths' behaviour. In

*Paradise Now*, I found, food serves two purposes: it celebrates family life and welcomes friends on the one hand, but on the other it carries a more sinister signification of the callous indifference of the orchestrators of terror towards the suicide bombers, during Khaled's testimony. I argued that Abu-Assad draws attention to the "apparatus" of the film, by having a camera in the *mise en scène* of the testimony scene, as discussed in Metz's sub-codes of identification (1982:54), "the spectator is absent from the screen as perceived, but also (the two things inevitably go together) present there and even 'all-present' as perceiver." I drew attention to Metz's observation that there is a type of subjective image that "expresses the viewpoint of the film-maker" (1982:54) and felt that Abu-Assad, the film-maker, made a point that the handlers of the suicide bombers are merely spectators and therefore disconnected from the events that they so callously orchestrate. In contrast, I found that food has a different signification in *City of Life* where it represents hedonistic pleasure and wealth. The staples of the earlier films give way to designer plates of sushi, partially eaten and forgotten, and overflowing champagne towers. The contrast with the representation of food in the other films could not be greater. Yet Dubai is also a country in the Middle East: it is postmodern, consumer-driven and international. In postmodern Dubai, the image is all. The point that I made here was that Arab communities are as similar and as dissimilar as are all ethnicities, and are not one homogeneous group.

The central argument of my thesis — that all the film directors under discussion speak back to stereotyping and xenophobia — is evident in the way that they have

personalised their characters as relatable. In *Amreeka*, for instance, Muna's problems are universal. Her concerns with her body weight, with her son's education and with not wanting to be a financial drain on her extended family are not foreign concepts. As with her sisters throughout the Western world, she too is influenced by the representation of women as slim and feels corporeally challenged by her more generous proportions. Her embarrassment at not finding employment in banking is also relatable and leads her to create a phantom banking job to keep up appearances while she dashes off to White Castle to a farcical degree. On the other hand she worries about her son, Fadi, who must endure unbearable bullying by his schoolmates based on their assumption that he is Muslim. His position is relatable to any parent who has witnessed the pain that bullying inflicts on their children, both physically and emotionally. In *Paradise Now*, Abu-Assad creates equally relatable characters where everyday situations reflect the frustrations of the protagonists who are stuck in menial jobs. Said is more equipped to control his temper than Khaled, for instance, as they listen to the haranguing of dissatisfied customers in the garage where they service cars. Signified by a coffee pot boiling over in the foreground, Khaled eventually loses his temper to the extent that he takes a hammer to the bumper of the customer's car, a violent act that gets him dismissed and exacerbates his situation. I argued that anyone who has had to deal with difficult customers could relate to Khaled's sense of frustration. Tempering the topic of suicide bombing as a vicious act of terrorism is the voice of reason from Suha. She believes that suicide bombing as a form of resistance alienates rather than garners support for the cause of Palestine, a viewpoint which illustrates the

idea that suicide bombing is not accepted as a legitimate form of protest by all Arabs. These opposing views of the protagonists in the film have been important to my argument as they illustrate that Arab directors are speaking back to the notion that all Arabs are terrorists. Turning to *West Beirut*, Doueiri's teenagers are as relatable as any teenagers in any society can be as they come of age with their concerns about the opposite sex, music and need for independence. On the other hand, Tareq's mother, Hala, is also a highly relatable character as she expresses her frustration about gender-related issues. Her sense of exploitation by the males in her family who do not help her with domestic duties for instance, her fear of the escalating violence in her community as the city moves towards civil war and her sense of disempowerment as her husband refuses to leave the city, are all indicative of her discontent. These are transcultural concerns and Doueiri uses them to humanise his characters, which makes them relatable as human beings, thereby speaking back to preconceptions about Arabs so evident in the Hollywood films discussed by Shaheen.

My aim has been to provide awareness of the role of independent film-makers with important stories to tell about Arab lives in the Middle East, and in the process, create a new understanding of Arabs and Muslims, who I have identified as a much-maligned ethnicity. I have relied strongly on the semiotic approach to uncover denotations, connotations and the role of myth in representation. The scene that I have found pivotal in this regard is the one that I have called "The Last Supper" in *Paradise Now*. The parallels between the suicide bombers' last supper and that of

Jesus are apparent (Appendix One). In drawing parallels between these symbolic events, Abu-Assad has subverted the doctrinaire approach to religious orders and shown faith to be universal, regardless of dogma. Similarly, a semiotic reading of the school assembly in *West Beirut* (Appendix Two) in comparison with Barthes' reading of the black soldier saluting the French flag in a show of patriotic affiliation (Appendix Two), have been key to uncovering the myth underlying postcolonial claims to nationalistic loyalty by colonised societies. Doueiri makes a direct subversion of such assumptions with the character of Tareq who undermines the singing of the *Marseillaise* when he sings the Lebanese anthem through a megaphone. In *Amreeka* a comparative semiotic analysis of the checkpoints and customs desk at O'Hare Airport reveals the similarity between different types of officials in charge of travellers, whether within Palestine or passing through borders. The irony is that in Palestine, people travelling through checkpoints are not aliens, yet are treated with the same amount of distrust and interrogation by officialdom.

Although semiotic analysis is helpful in reaching the level of myth and uncovering the naturalised meanings prevalent in society, the overarching methodology used in this dissertation has been narratology. A narrative analysis of the filmic scenes with a close reading has been helpful in making sense of the characterisation of protagonists. This has been important in establishing how relatable they are to their audience. The universality of Vladimir Propp's narrative analysis uncovered, among other interpretations, the representation of masculinity in *West Beirut*. The hero who arose from this reading is young Omar, Tareq's friend, who steps up to defend

the three young people against the aggressive militiaman by using his wits. He also rescues May, the Proppian princess, firstly, by hiding the cross that she wears on a chain around her neck when they encounter the Muslim militiaman, and secondly, by prohibiting Tareq from sending her to a dangerous part of the city in a taxi to get his film developed. These heroic gestures create awareness that Tareq has been a false hero all along. I believe that the universality of this tale resonates with an audience that identifies with heroes and villains and brings *West Beirut* into a new type of representation that I identify as a new paradigm of Arab filmmaking.

The limitations of this research are a result of its qualitative, theoretical nature. I have researched a limited number of films in order to ensure in-depth analysis, and therefore cannot generalise my findings. Future longitudinal studies could add an analysis of more recent films to assess whether the expanding paradigm of relatable characters in Arab films is continuing in a new global political climate.

The debate about representations of Arabs is obviously ongoing, but in this thesis I offer the analysis of four films by Arab film-makers as a counter-discourse to the stereotypical representation of Arabs in Hollywood films. My thesis has focused on various signifiers, e.g. food, roadblocks and especially the representation of characters as “relatable”. This subverts Hollywood stereotypes of Arabs as being incomprehensible and/or evil. Semiotic analysis and narratology have been my methodologies. In a study such as mine, where the emphasis is always on in-depth discussion, it is not possible to give an exhaustive survey, but in my discussion, I

hope to have pointed to a significant trend in film-making as a form of “speaking back” to Western-centred representations of Arabs.

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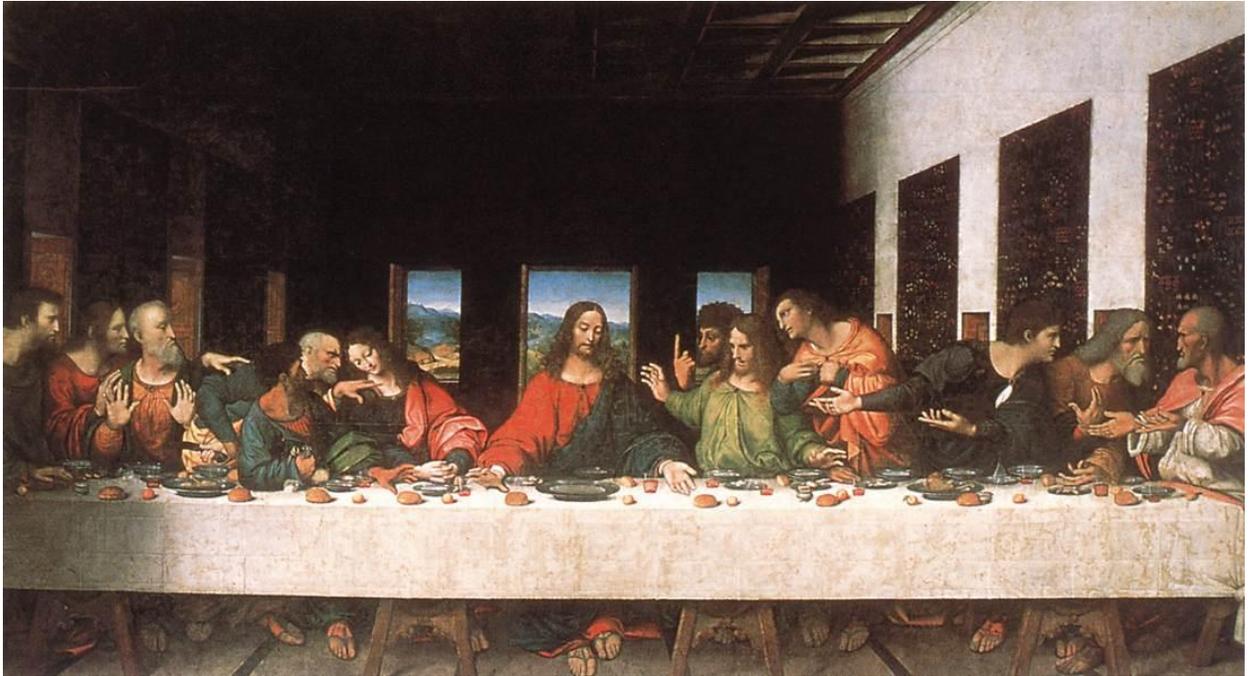
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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1



The Last supper, by Leonardo da Vinci. Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan, Italy



Screenshot *Paradise Now* The Last Supper

Appendix 2 (a)



Screenshot *West Beirut* School Assembly

Appendix 2 (b)



Roland Barthes' Analysis of Paris Match (1984:4).

Appendix 3



Screenshot *West Beirut* Walking to Flea Market

Appendix 4



Screenshot *West Beirut* Flea Market



Petticoat Lane Market 1971.

Appendix 5



World Trade Centre Dubai 1979



Screenshot *City of Life* 2009

Appendix 6



Screenshot *City of Life* 2009