

Discourses of Film Terrorism:

Hollywood representations of Arab terrorism and counter- terrorism, 1991–2011

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ABSTRACT

Terrorism by the modern definition has existed since the French Revolution and the academic study of terrorists has been in place for over thirty years, yet the subject is far from fully understood. The September 11, 2001 attacks (9/11), while not representing a new era of terrorism, ushered in a new chapter in the public's understanding of terrorism, and in the process elevated terrorism to a level of public and academic interest not previously seen. Given the power of mass media and entertainment platforms such as film to influence public opinion, it is important to consider the effects events such as 9/11 have on media objects such as Hollywood action films. Primarily utilising the Orientalist framework as outlined by Edward Said this thesis examines how discourses of Arab terrorism are created through the interplay between these media texts and how these representations respond to real world events. This paper will consider the onscreen representations of Arab terrorists and counter-terrorists in nine mainstream Hollywood action films released between 1991–2001 and 2001–2012, comparing and contrasting these two periods in order to determine the impact real world events such as 9/11 have on the screen mediations of Arab terrorism. In this study a number of discursive shifts can be observed; representations of Arab terrorists shift from comical pre-9/11 to serious post-9/11, with a framing of a personified Islam as the root cause motivation of terrorist attacks. Representations of female Arab terrorists only appear post-9/11, where their Arab upbringing and their femininity merge to establish them as a double threat to Western society. Finally, the figure of the Arab counter-terrorist is portrayed consistently pre- and post-9/11 and maintains strong Orientalist influences regardless of the time period, establishing these characters' Arab heritage and position in law enforcement as creating internal conflict. This thesis builds upon the existing understanding of Arab screen images, presenting new research outcomes which have previously not been considered in the field.

STATEMENT

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another author person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work embodied in this thesis has generated the following book reviews, conference presentations and invited talks:

Book Reviews

Reid, Jay (2013) “Review – Screening Torture: Media Representations of State Torture and Political Domination”. *Media International Australia* 147: 162-3.

Reid, Jay (2012) “Review – Soldiers’ Stories: Military Women in Cinema and Television since World War I by Yvonne Tasker. A ‘Toxic Genre’: The Iraq War Films by Martin Barker”. *Scope: An Online Journal of Film & TV Studies* 24.

Reid, Jay (2012) “Review – Hollywood 9/11: Superheroes, Supervillians, and Super Disasters”. *Media International Australia* 143: 182-3.

Conference Papers (Unrefereed)

“The Changing Face of Terrorism: Discourses of Representation of Middle Eastern Terrorists in Hollywood post-9/11”. *Australian and New Zealand Communications Association Conference*, University of South Australia, 4-6th July, 2012.

“Out With The Old; In With The New: Examining The Cinematic Arab Terrorist Before and After The September 11 Attacks”. *Cultural Studies Association of Australasia Conference*, University of South Australia, 23rd November, 2011.

“Yippee ki-yay, al-Qaeda! 9/11 and its effects on the Hollywood cinematic mediation of terrorism”. *Australian and New Zealand Communications Association Conference*, The University of Waikato, 7th July, 2011.

Invited Talks

“Terror Down Under: Hollywood Representatives and Discourses of Arab Terrorism, an Australian Perspective”. *Guest Lecture*, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 17th Sept, 2012.

“Orientalising Terror: Representations of onscreen Arab terrorists pre- and post-September 11, 2001”. *Media Discipline Seminar*, The University of Adelaide, 11th August, 2011.

“From Ivan to Osama: How Hollywood Cinematically Mediates and Represents the Changing Nature of Terrorism”. *Media Discipline Seminar*, The University of Adelaide, 9th February, 2011.

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“You want to know what the business world thinks of you? We think one hundred years ago you were living out here in tents in the desert, chopping each other's heads off, and that's exactly where you're going to be in another hundred.”

Bryan Woodman (Matt Damon) articulating Western views of the Arab world in Syriana (2005, dir. Stephen Gaghan).