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The Representations of Arab-Muslims through the Language Lens

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Abstract

The article examines the use of Arabic as a sociolinguistic marker in American films that were released around the time of the events of 9/11/01 and investigates the extent to which stereotypical factors have been continuing in the same vein as in the past. Specifically, this study is a textual analysis of the application of Arabic in five recent films: *Three Kings* (dir. David O. Russell, 1999), *Hidalgo* (dir. Joe Johnston, 2004), *Kingdom of Heaven* (dir. Ridley Scott, 2005), *Syriana* (dir. Stephen Gaghan, 2005), and *Body of Lies* (dir. Ridley Scott, 2008). The article demonstrates that the manner in which Arabic is employed in these movies points to efforts towards a better understanding of the political and social complexities of Arabs and their culture and raises awareness of the Other.

Keywords

Arabic, Hollywood Films, Sociolinguistics, Other-oriental, Discourse

Cover Page Footnote

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The Representations of Arab-Muslims through the Language Lens

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1. Introduction:

Films, in general, constitute a valuable touchstone for assessing how certain cultures view others politically, socially, and religiously. This is the case with representations of Arabs and Muslims in American films which can be characterized on the whole as demeaning and inhuman. These images perpetuate fictional or imagined representations of the Other in early European literature and art that can be traced as far back as the Middle Ages. This orientation continued in many portrayals of Arab-Islamic themes in the early Western film industry. The correlation between the past and the present is well illustrated in the 2012 documentary *Valentino's Ghost*¹ which provides a helpful example of how American films emphasize, overtly or subtly, Western self-image and civilizational superiority by employing stereotypes, generalizations, and prejudice. This study examines the sociolinguistic and linguistic use of Arabic in American films that were released around the time of the events of 9/11/01 and investigates the extent to which demeaning factors have been continuing in the same vein as in the past.

Representations of Arabs and Muslims in American movies and media have been the subject of a number of noteworthy studies, particularly those of Edward Said, Jack Shaheen, and Tim Semmerling (El-Aswad, 2013, pp. 36-55; Said, 1997, pp. 3-68; Semmelring, 2006, pp. 1-29; Shaheen, 1997, pp. 11-28; 2009, pp. 7-43). No doubt, these inquiries are in many ways an offshoot of the cultural and literary investigations established by oriental studies based on Edward Said's influential book, *Orientalism*, which first appeared in 1978 (Kalmar, 2012, pp. 18-29; Lockman, 2010, pp. 183-273; Massad, 2010, pp. 23-49; Shaban, 1991). These studies are essential in forming an explanation of how the film industry's stereotypical depictions significantly influence or perpetuate American perceptions of Arabs and Muslims. This dynamic demonstrates that Arabs and Muslims continue to be perceived as the Other, remaining on the other side of the psychosocial border that has been created over the centuries.

2. Theoretical Base:

Previous studies on this topic have focused on cinematic elements such as costuming, characterization, and dialogue in English. In contrast, this study applies discourse analysis to selected scenes in which Arabic is used and investigates the sociolinguistic and political implications of dialogue. These analyses provide insights into the socio-religious and ethnic identities and political intricacies of the Arab world. Two major methodological frameworks elucidate the use of Arabic and its functions in these films: Critical discourse analysis and sociolinguistic approach.

Critical discourse analysis has drawn heavily on Michel Foucault's discourse theory work, which is founded upon the imbrication of power and knowledge (Mills,

1997, pp. 48-104). Critical discourse analysis examines language behaviors and features associated with social practices and meanings. Hence, it investigates the relation of social power and hegemony among dominant and dominated groups through different dimensions of text and talk (such as language variants, lexical styles, speech acts, and politeness forms). The application of critical discourse analysis, therefore, helps us understand power relations and social problems associated with any forms of injustices caused, directly or indirectly, by abusive powers such as colonialism, racism, and sexism (Wodak, 2009, 409-415, 442). In doing so, this method aids in identifying the negative actions of power abuse and enhances our perception of the ideologies that inform the discourse of resistance against them (Van Dijk, 1997, 17-27; 2009; 62-86; Wodak & Meyer, 2009; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, pp. 258-284; Fairclough, 1992).

Combined with critical discourse analysis, sociolinguistic analysis aids in better understanding the interrelationship between linguistic variations and social functions through a textual analysis of pivotal phrases and dialogues in the selected movies. Arabic sociolinguistic theory is considerably influenced by Ferguson's model of diglossia, according to which there are two levels of Arabic. Each fulfills two different functions: high (standard) and low (colloquial). The use of standard Arabic in a situation implies that there are high social expectations—such as in formal, religious, and literary contexts. The use of colloquial variations indicates low and simple functions of the language in contexts such as at home, between friends, and daily routine (Bassiouney, 2009, pp. 10-19; Owens, 2001, pp. 419-469).

However, other scholars do not stop at considerations of diglossia; rather they look for other parameters that define language variations. Such as is the case with Blanc who defines five levels of speech: Plain colloquial, koineized colloquial, semi-literary, modified classical, and standard classical. Or, Mitchell developed the concept of Educated Spoken Arabic, which is a combination of classical and colloquial forms of the language (Owens, 2001, pp. 425-427).

3. Methodology:

High and low Arabic are the two major types of Arabic to appear in cinematic dialogues, and each represents certain sociolinguistic functions and social identities. In applying these theoretical models *chronologically*, this inquiry revolves around the sociolinguistic analysis of selected American movies made in since the late 1990s and the first decade of the century with an emphasis on the impact of the tragic events of September, 11, 2001. Specifically, these five films are: *Three Kings* (dir. David O. Russell, 1999), *Hidalgo* (dir. Joe Johnston, 2004), *Kingdom of Heaven* (dir. Ridley Scott, 2005), *Syriana* (dir. Stephen Gaghan, 2005), and *Body of Lies* (dir. Ridley Scott, 2008).

A number of reasons prompted the selection of these five movies. First, all of them were made around the date of September, 11, 2001; hence, they constitute a useful touchstone to see the extent to which this event may have either affected or reflected changes in the portrayal of Arabs and Muslims. Second, more than other movies made during the same time period, these films seem to challenge some forms of misconceptions and prejudice about Arabs and Muslims. To this end, the use of Arabic with its different variations in these films functions as an attempt toward a better understanding of prejudice, social inequalities, and political injustices. Third, these

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selected films provide an in-depth discussion of themes and issues that characterize the discursive relations between the West and Arab-Muslims. Finally, more than other films made around the same time, the selected movies represent a closer and more realistic look at the historical, political, and the cultural complexities of the Arab-Islamic world. Of course, other movies employ Arabic language, but these five movies illustrate applications of the language that help to demonstrate how misconceptions and stereotypical portrayals of Arabs and Muslims have changed.

4. The Applications of Arabic in Early Hollywood Films:

The occurrence of Arabic culture and language in early American films was influenced by European imagined and skewed perceptions of Arabs and Muslims. In other words, these portrayals of the Orient are, as Said put it, “a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment” (1995, p. 6). We can see this Eurocentric depiction of Arabs is inaccurate and paternalistic. For example, in the early translations of *Arabian Nights (Alf Layla wa Layla)* into European languages (Sironval, 2006, pp. 219-244). No wonder that the image of Arabs and Muslims in early Hollywood movies comes across as Oriental Other—hateful, inept, threatening, and lecherous, and surrounded by harem women wearing see-through pantaloons (Shaheen, 2009, pp., 1-19). This fictional perception is strongly exemplified in Rudolph Valentino’s *The Sheikh* (1921) and sets the tone for this fictional perception of Arabs (Shaheen, 2009, p. 553). The use of Arabic in early Western movies, therefore, can be characterized as a minimal, unintelligible, vulgar, and an intimidating volley of sounds. These features appear, for example, in such movies as *Harum Scarum* (1965), *The Sheltering Sky* (1990), and *The English Patient* (1996). This employment of the language serves two functions. First, it emphasizes European civilizational superiority by contrasting it with the primitive, original, and exotic Orient that serves as the backdrop of Western fantasies and desires (Said, 1995, pp. 202-203; Cheng, 1995, pp. 77-86). The appearance of Arabic in these films is reduced to a few incomprehensible and unattractive utterances aiming to give validity to the untamed desert scenes that combine intimidation, primitiveness, and exoticism.

Even when Arabic is heard, there is inaccurate use of dialect. Specifically, we often see that a certain dialect is employed that is different from the spoken dialect in the Arab country where the story is taking place. Such is the case with *The Mummy* (1999), in which we hear Moroccan Arabic, even though the film was shot in Egypt (Elouardaoui, 2011, p. 4). These scenic and linguistic disconnects seem to convey bewilderment and intimidation and mark the dichotomy between the hegemonic West and oriental “uncivilized” settings. Other examples appear in such movies as *Harum Scarum* (1965), *The Sheltering Sky* (1990), and *The English Patient* (1996) (Shaheen, 2009, pp. 204, 458-459).

A second function of Arabic in Hollywood films is to contrast and compare the present-day “uncivilized” Arabs and the “sophisticated” oriental past for which the West romantically yearns (Shohat & Stam, 1994). This is the case with the Western role in movies such as *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), *The Mummy* (1999), and *The Mummy Returns* (2001). Although the story line of these movies supposedly takes place in Arab countries, Arabic is used minimally or functions merely as acoustic background. In most cases it is incomprehensible and full of growl-like utterances. Many of the Arab-

speaking characters in these movies share the same menacing look that includes images of violent bearded men with bad teeth dressed in nomadic or peasant clothing (*abaya*), except for a few “friendly” individuals that meet European expectations.

The representation of Arabs or Muslims in more recent American films, however, shows, a greater understanding of the political and social complexities of Arabs and their culture and

raises awareness of the Other. The investigation of the way Arabic is applied in these movies illustrates this orientation. To test out these conjectures, this article examines the use of Arabic in the five previously mentioned films [*Three Kings* (1999), *Hidalgo* (2004), *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005), *Syriana* (2005), and *Body of Lies* (2008)].

5. Religious-historical Discourse Revisited and Unpacked:

Kingdom of Heaven represents an important and positive stage in the representation of Arab-Islamic themes in the American film industry. This film objectively reconsiders and revisits controversial historical and religious issues that have colored Europeans stereotypical perceptions of the Orient since the Middle Ages (Siberry, 2000, pp.1-38). This film, and its director introduced new ideas and themes to the film industry. Hence, Scott’s cinematic works represent in many ways a break from the mainstream film industry because he brings to the screen nonconformist views regarding minority issues and feminism. Such is the case with the films *Alien* (1979) and *Thelma & Louise* (1991) (Carter, 1991; Vaughan, 1995). Ridley Scott’s movies that deal with Arab-Islamic issues (particularly *Black Hawk Down*, *Kingdom of Heaven*, and *Body of Lies*) evince the intention to present fairly the intricate realities of Arabs and Muslims not through Western lenses, but rather the way they see their culture.

Kingdom of Heaven, set in the 12th century during the Crusades, revolves around Jerusalem and its religious and political significance in the minds and hearts of both Christians and Muslims. The protagonist Balian of Ibelin, is presented as the son of Godfrey of Bouillon, and plays a major role in the last days of Jerusalem under the Crusades² (Runciman, 1995, pp. 145-152; 229; 289-314). Unlike previous films on this contested topic, such as *The Crusades* (1935), *King Richard and the Crusades* (1954), and *Lionheart* (1987), *Kingdom of Heaven* attempts to offer an objective and open-minded discussion of the Crusades and its religio-political repercussions. First, *Kingdom of Heaven* provides, on the whole, a balanced portrayal of the different views and behavior of Crusaders and Muslims. It frankly portrays Christian fanaticism and intolerance that was predominant during the Crusades (Jones & Ereira, 1975, pp. 71-75). It is no wonder, therefore, that even at the beginning of the movie we encounter a Christian religious figure saying “To kill an infidel is not a murder. It is the path to heaven,” to religiously motivate people to participate in the Crusades. The immoral and belligerent behavior of Reynald of Châtillon is another example of this fanatical conduct. At the same time, the movie gives voice for moderate stances among the Crusaders.

Unlike the Western stereotypical presentations of Islam and the Orient that “shape language, perception, and the form of encounter between East and West” (Said, 1995, p. 58), *Kingdom of Heaven* makes noticeable efforts toward a fair depiction of the Islamic side of the story. The objectivity in the portrayal of Islam can be seen in applying the Arabic name, Ṣalāh al-Dīn, rather than using the Anglicized name “Saladin” that figures prominently in Western literature (Siberry, 2000, pp, 150-160). Additionally,

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Scott rightly chose to assign this role to the Arab actor Ghassan Masoud. Finally, the use of Arabic language in the movie to express the Islamic-Arab stance and shed some light on Islamic culture provides a further step towards an objective presentation of the Other.

Kingdom of Heaven employs literary (particularly classical) Arabic almost exclusively, illustrating the importance of Arabic as the language of Islamic practices and history. The use of this form of the language points, according to Ferguson, to high functions of Arabic, such as the religious and literary variants (Owens, 2001, 423). Selecting the literary form of Arabic adds an authentic and realistic depiction of the Islamic narrative of the Crusades. The first encounter with Arabic takes place when Balian of Ibelin, the main character, arrives in Messina, Italy, and hears Muslims praying. Balian asks the English sergeant about this and is told that these Muslims are saying “*subhān rabbī al-‘azīm* (Praise to my Lord the Great).” Reacting to this encounter with Islamic prayer, Balian says that this phrase “sounds like our prayer.” This phrase serves as an example of the effort to minimize differences and emphasize religious similarities between Islam and Christianity as two monotheistic religions.

As the language of Islamic religious practices, Arabic figures in this film in the forms of the *adhān* (call for prayer) and *ṣalāt* (prayer). *Kingdom of Heaven* also refers to *al-Fātiḥa* (the opening of the Qur’ān), which has many religious and cultural functions in Arab-Islamic societies. We hear *al-Fātiḥa* when Muslim soldiers were brought to burial during their siege on Jerusalem. The phrase “*lā naṣr illā bi-allāh, allāh ma’nā* (Victory comes only from God and God is with us),” uttered by one of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s scouts, falls under religious and political legitimacy provided, in Muslims’ eyes, by God. These uses of the language, which give some insight into the social life and beliefs of the dominated culture, provide more objective image and avoid the prejudiced historical-discourse (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 266).

The Arabic associated with religious practices in *Kingdom of Heaven* is not limited to Muslims, but it is also spoken by Christians. A good example is Princess Sibylla, who says, while eating, “*yubārīk al-rabb al-quḍs* (May God bless Jerusalem).” The greetings “*al-salām ‘alaykum* (Peace be upon you),” “*sabāḥ al-khayr* (Good morning),” and “*marḥban bika* (Welcome)” are frequently used in the movie and serve as a medium of communication between both sides and gives insight into the characters’ daily routine.

Colloquial Arabic, which appears very minimally in *Kingdom of Heaven*, is basically the Levantine dialect. Most of the dialogues in spoken Arabic, which reflect low functions of the language, take place at his estate in Ibelin and are between Balian and his servants who are Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Digging for water, a child approaches Balian and offers him water, saying, “*sīdī khudh may* (Master, have some water).” The same child also uses colloquial Arabic informing Balian of the arrival of Princess Sibylla, by asking him to come with him, saying, “*sīdī ta’āl ma’āy* (Master come with me).” To sum up, *Kingdom of Heaven* represents a positive effort in American films to objectively portray the Crusades narrative from the dominated group’s viewpoint. In doing so, this film presents a historical discourse with linguistic features that “has an impact on the present and also determines the future” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 266) between East and West.

6. Real and Imagined Paradigm of the Horse Culture:

Hidalgo directed by Joe Johnston and stars Viggo Mortensen, Zuleikha Robinson, and Omar Sharif. The film provides an interesting cross-cultural journey that supposedly occurs during the 19th century and tells the story of a horse whose owner, Frank Hopkins, decided to participate in the great Arabian horse race. Whether this story is authentic or fictitious a debatable matter (Harrigan, 2003; O'Reilly; 2003). *Hidalgo*'s main theme revolves around the horse culture, which reflects chivalrous virtues, purity, originality, and nobility. The film also demonstrates that these values can be universal and cross-cultural, shared by two geographically remote tribal societies—Native Americans and Arab Bedouins. The application of critical discourse analysis here helps us see through *Hidalgo* examples of power relations and forms of injustices and resistance. These social interactions among dominant and dominated groups and individuals are exemplified through class, gender, age, and cultural variations. (Van Dijk, 1997).

The movie's storyline centers around a horse named *Hidalgo*, whose name evokes noble descent and some even claim that it may be derived from Arabic origin (<http://www.ancestry.com/name-origin?surname=hidalgo>). From the film we know that *Hidalgo*'s owner (Frank Hopkins) who is half Native American, witnesses the murder by Americans of his tribe's members (Lakota Sioux) in the Wounded Knee Massacre. The story of Hopkins captures the power abuse that Native Americans experienced at the hands of the dominant White majority who structured the image of Other. (Van Dijk *et al*, 1997). This traumatic event will haunt Hopkins for the rest of his life. He works for awhile in Buffalo Bill's Wild West show and then decides to travel to Arabia to participate in the prestigious long-distance horse race, a competition among the finest pure Arabian horses. Among these horses is a famous stallion named al-Ḥattāl, whose name seems to be associated with generosity and nobility (Al-Fayrūzabādī, 2009, p. 836). The horse is owned by Sheikh Riyād, a prominent tribal leader in Najd. Being the custodian of al-Ḥattāl and the tribe's leader, Sheikh Riyād is entrusted with protecting his tribe's tradition, pride, and honor. Besides English and Lakota, Arabic figures prominently in the movie, particularly in its literary form.

The choice of literary Arabic in *Hidalgo* complements the films' attempt to provide a classical setting where originality, nobility, and purity prevail. Hence, the form of Arabic employed here aims to fulfill high functions of the language. Such is the case with expressing important cultural themes, such as noble descent, honor, hospitality, trustworthiness and betrayal, and the safeguarding of noble tribal traditions. Applying the intercultural discourse that focuses on the functions of language (Van Dijk, 1997, pp. 156-164; Van Dijk, 2001), one can learn about cultural values and power control in Arab tribal society. The following dialogue between Sheikh Riyād and his daughter, Jazīra, exemplifies some of these themes:

Sheikh Riyād: *innahu rajul rafī' al-mustawā min aṣl malakī muta'allim wa dhū thaqāfa 'āliya, fa-ikhtart ibn al-rīḥ li-ya'khudh al-ḥattāl. Lā aṭlub min allāh ta'ālā illā sa'ādataka* (Indeed he is a man of high status and royal descent, learned and well-educated. I, therefore, selected Ibn al-Rīḥ to participate [in the race] riding al-Ḥattāl. I am not asking from God Almighty anything except for your happiness).

Jazīra: *kunn ḥadhir idhan yā ‘abī. La’anī akūn ‘alā qimat sa‘ādātī ‘alā ḥisān, arkab al-khayl ḥaythu al-nisā’ muḥarramāt* (So be careful my father, what you wish for, because I am the happiest when I am on horseback when other women are forbidden to do so).

Sheikh Riyād: *fī khaymatī ‘āsifa jā’at bi-shakl ibnatī al-‘azīza. Hall turīdīn an takūnī sabab fī taffīr marāratī al-fāshila* (In my tent there is a tempest in the shape of my beloved daughter. Do you want to be the cause of bursting my malfunctioning gallbladder)?

The father, who is also the tribe’s leader, wishes for Jazīra to marry a noble man, like prince Ibn al-Rīḥ, but she defies this request. Unlike other women, Jazīra even wants to be able to ride horses and compete with other men in the great race. Jazīra emerges here as having a strong personality and self-confidence. Hence, the name Jazīra, meaning “island,” presumably connotes her distinction from other women. This dialogue also shows the power relation in terms of gender, age, and class (West, Lazar, & Kramarae, 1997). Another example of the strong and defiant nature of Jazīra can be seen in the scene when she secretly visits Hopkins’ tent to give him some advice on how to win the race. When her father learns about this visit, he reproaches her, saying, “*ibnatī al-waḥīda alḥaqat al-‘ār bi-hadhā al-bayt* (My only daughter brought shame on this house).” This sentence touches upon an intricate issue in Arab tribal society—how women’s honor affects the reputation of the tribe and how male relatives have a duty to protect them.

The film then moves to another dialogue in Arabic between Sheikh Riyād and his failing nephew, Kātib. This conversation communicates the importance of honorable descent and safeguarding the noble tradition:

Kātib: *al-salām ‘alykum* (Peace be upon you).

Sheikh Riyād: *wa ‘alykum al-salām* (And peace be upon you)

Kātib: *jazāk allāh khayr ya shaykh al-shuyūkh* (May God bless you, the greatest of sheikhs)!

Sheikh Riyād: *ijlis ya kātib wa istariḥ* (Sit Katib and rest)!

Kātib: *bi-‘awn allāh lam yafutnī yawm al-sibāq al-‘azīm yā ‘amī, law kunt amluk qaṭī’ akthar la-rahint biha kullaha. Inni ji’tu mutawassil ilayka wa li-ākīr marra, sāmihnī wa ba’d idhnika an ushārika fī al-sibāq bi-milkiyat aḥsinat ajdādī* (God willing, I never missed the great race; if only I owned more flocks I would have bet them all. Please, Uncle, with your permission let me participate in this race using the best of my ancestors’ horses).

Sheikh Riyād: *innaka lā tamlīk al-quḍra li-tuḥāfīz ‘alā milkiyat aḥsinat ajdādīk wa khuṣūsan al-ḥattāl fa-huwa mithl waladī. Idhhab wa isriq al-hajājīn fa-tilka ṣan’atuka* (You do not have the ability to protect [the reputation of] the best of your ancestors’ horses, especially al-Ḥattāl because he is like a son to me. You can rob the pilgrims, indeed it is your profession).

Kātib: *hatta al-rasūl al-karīm kāna fāris fī waqtihi* (Even the blessed messenger was a knight in his time)

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Sheikh Riyād: *hadhā kufr! Kayafa wajadta al-qahwa.* (This is a blasphemy! How did you find the coffee)?

Kātib: *jayyida. Tunshītunī* (The coffee is good; it revives me).

Again we see in this dialogue the power relations particularly with regard to age and social class. Hence this scene sheds light on a number of important Arab cultural values and ethical codes. This conversation contrasts the noble status of Sheikh Riyād as the respected leader of the tribe with Kātib's base status and behavior. While Sheikh Riyād represents honorable tribal pride that al-Ḥattāl embodies, Kātib is depicted as selfish, greedy, one who places his personal desire above the interest of the tribe. The reference to the Prophet Muḥammad is an indication to the religious beliefs of Sheikh Riyād's community as an Islamic one. The dialogue also refers to coffee, a cultural marker of hospitality in Arab tribal society.

Sheikh Riyād's refusal to permit Kātib to participate in the great race riding al-Ḥattāl leads the latter to betray his uncle and kidnap Jazīra with the help of one of her father's close advisors. He makes her release conditional on the handing over of al-Ḥattāl. Even as a prisoner Jazīra shows again that she is a courageous, strong-willed, and defiant woman. These qualities can be seen in the following dialogue between Jazīra and Kātib:

Jazīra: *anta ta'rifu jayyidan bi-ann abī la yussalim al-Ḥattāl* (You know very well that my father will not hand over al-Ḥattāl).

Kātib: *da'īmī aqūl laki shay' 'an abīki ya jazīra. Innahu ka-ḥākim yada' al-'awāṭif taḥkumuḥu wa anā khahyr min dhālīka.* (Jazīra! Let me tell you something about your father. He is a failure at being a ruler because he is governed by emotions and I am better than that).

Jazīra: *lākinḥu shaykh al-shuyūkh wa anta mujarrad liṣṣ* (However, he is the greatest among sheikhs and you are merely a thief).

Kātib: *anā 'azam fāris fī al-qabīla aṣṭatī' an ahzim ayy rākib 'alā al-khayl fī al-sibāq al-kabīr idhā samaḥ lī bi-al-ḥattāl. Fa-limādhā?* (I am the greatest warrior in the tribe and I can defeat any horse rider if he were to give me al- Ḥattāl. So why not)?

Jazīra: *li-anna al-muqaddas laysa lil-bay', wa lākin anta lil-bay'.* (Because the sacred one is not for sale, yet you are).

Kātib: *idhā lam yazhar al-ḥattāl 'alā rimāl al-ḥammād hattā muntaṣaf al-layl sawf ursil bi-ra'siki ilā abīk malfūf bi-ḥarīr baghdādī.* (If al-Ḥattāl does not appear on the sands of al-Ḥammād at midnight I will send your head to your father wrapped in Baghdadi silk).

Jazīra: *waṣalanī al-indhār* (I hear your warning)!

The conversation between Jazīra and Kātib reflects the discourse of power relation within the same tribe that is based on gender and social status. Blinded by his greed and selfishness, Kātib believes he can serve the tribe's interests better than Jazīra's father. The dialogue, therefore, consists of a number of contradictory cultural discursive values, such as betrayal and trust, noble descent and debased characters. Jazīra and her father enjoy legitimacy as they represent dignity and nobility, whereas Kātib characterizes dishonor and disgrace. Again, al-Ḥattāl is the yardstick by which

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nobility, originality and honorable descent are measured. This dialogue serves as another indication of the powerful personality of Jazīra whose gender roles go beyond the expected in Arab tribal society.

In sum, *Hidalgo* represents a constructive attempt to communicate certain aspects of Arab tribal culture fairly. The long dialogues in classical Arabic play a significant role in achieving this positive effect. Nevertheless, the movie is at times reminiscent of the classical European perception of Arabs. For example, the film's storyline satisfies Western expectations even at the expense of exaggeration and imagination. Hence, the film ends with Hidalgo winning the great race against all odds, seemingly to maintain Western superiority.

7. Realpolitik and Religio-Social Complexities:

This section is dedicated to the discussion of three American films that represent a new cinematic vector in the depiction of Arabs and Muslims in the Hollywood movie industry. The discussion centers on the analysis of three movies: *Three Kings*, *Syriana*, and *Body of Lies*. Two central themes figure prominently in these films; the first involves criticizing American foreign policy in the Arab-Islamic world in general and the Middle East in particular. Second, these movies demonstrate an effort toward a better understanding of the sociopolitical and religious realities of Arabs and Muslims. This is in line with Shaheen's view that most post 9/11 Hollywood films offer a more realistic depiction of Arabs (2008, pp. 54-72).

The employment of Arabic in these films serves as a sociolinguistic marker of ethnic, religious, and social identities. The examination of the use of Arabic in these films, therefore, enhances our understanding of the power relations between the West and East and gives insights into the current socio-political and religious realities in the Arab world. The analysis of the political discourse with its full-fledged components of "enactment, reproduction, and legitimization of power and dominations" (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 360) illuminates socio-political interactions present in these movies. This preliminary assessment of the language puts the analysis of text and talk to the test.

7.1. *Three Kings*:

Directed by David O. Russell and starring George Clooney, Ice Cube, Mark Wahlberg, and Spike Jonze, *Three Kings* takes place in Iraq near the conclusion of the First Gulf War, which ended in March 1991, by forcing Saddam Hussein to withdraw from Kuwait. The movie was the subject of scholarly analyses by Shaheen and by Semmerling. Shaheen, who served as a consultant for *Three Kings*, contends that it represents a positive step in the depiction of Arabs in the American film industry. Semmerling believes, however, that the movie perpetuates the vilification of Arabs and their culture and represents a continuation of the traditional American war movie, which emphasizes a victorious and masculine American culture (Shaheen, 2009, pp. 519-523; Semmerling, 2006, pp. 124-162; Elouardaoui, 2011). At any rate, one can say that *Three Kings* is uncharacteristic in its depiction of Arabs and Muslims and is also critical of American foreign policy in the Middle East and the American media's failure to communicate the real political and social complexities of Iraq.

The plot concerns the search by four American soldiers (Major Archie Gates, Sergeant First Class Troy Barlow, Staff Sergeant Chief Elgin, and Private First Class

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Conrad Vig) for gold bars that Iraqi forces took from Kuwait. Following a map that shows the location, these soldiers embark on a journey behind the back of their superiors. As their mission nears completion, they come face to face with the complicated political reality of Iraq, when they find Iraqi civilians (most of whom are Shi'ites) being held as prisoners, supposedly because of their involvement in the failed uprising against Saddam. Amir 'Abdallah (played by Cliff Curtis) is one of the leaders of that uprising. While pleading with the American soldiers not to leave, Amir's wife is publically executed. This horrific incident provokes the intervention of the American soldiers, and Major Archie Gates decides not to leave without freeing these prisoners. This situation makes a military confrontation between the two sides inevitable, and the Iraqi soldiers have the upper hand. Nevertheless, the Iraqi civilians, along with the American soldiers (except for one that the Iraqi soldiers took as a prisoner) are saved. Both sides reach a reciprocal agreement according to which the American soldiers will help the Iraqi civilians cross the Iraqi border to safety in Iran. On their part, the Iraqis agree to help release the American prisoner and carry out the gold. Despite many difficulties, the two groups manage eventually to fulfill their part of the agreement.

As for the use of Arabic, colloquial language mostly in the Iraqi dialect figures prominently in *Three Kings*, primarily to create authentic and realistic discourse of the movie's political and social settings. Thus, the use of Arabic can minimize what Van Dijk calls "discursive injustice" (2009, pp. 63-65) and provide a platform for people (women, children, and men) to express their sufferings, concerns, and aspirations. Dialogue, phrases, and words in Arabic enhance our understanding of the political and religious intricacies in Iraq in the aftermath of the First Gulf war. Yet, the portrayal of these complexities in the film is still in some cases insufficient to convey the whole image. Modern Standard Arabic also appears occasionally in the movie, but it is only applied realistically to religious functions, such as prayers and Qur'anic recitations.

Colloquial (Iraqi) Arabic appears in other scenes. Arriving at the bunker, the four American soldiers are welcomed joyfully by the Iraqi prisoners saying to each other: *jāyin yisā'dūnā, jāyin yikhalsūnā min saddām* (They came to help and rescue us from Saddam)." The Arabic used in *Three Kings* also gives insights into the discourse power relation and domination among Iraqis according to political rankings or religious inclinations. So, too, with the case of the hierarchical relations among the Iraqi Republican Guards. Addressing their superiors, Iraqi soldiers use the word *sīdī*, which in this case means chief or lord. One Iraqi officer commands his soldiers to hold the Iraqi rebels by saying, "*khudhūhum barra, hadhūla al-sujana la tikhalihim yirūhūn* (Take the prisoners outside; do not let them leave)"! In turn, the commanded Iraqi soldier addresses the Iraqi prisoners this way: "*ma had minkum yitrik* (Not one of you leave)!" The register and semantics reflect the hierarchy of authority.

During one scene, the Iraqi civilians, hiding in the cave, praying in Arabic, we can discern a rag with Arabic writing hanging on the wall. This is the famous Qur'anic verse of the Throne (*al-kursī*) that has profound religious effects on the hearts of Muslims as it is believed to have special religious qualities associated with divine safety and protection. Literary Arabic as religious expression appears again when the Iraqi women and men read *al-Fātiha*, the opening chapter of the Qur'ān, which plays a central role in the religious discourse and in the social interaction among Muslims.

Walking together through the desert, the Iraqi civilians and the American soldiers have interesting conversations while trying to learn about each other. In other

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words, the scenes afford the opportunity to compare two different discourses of knowledge and power interactions between dominant and dominated sides. An American soldier, out of ignorance, asks the Iraqis in English: “You all think America is Satan?” One Iraqi answers simply that “*kull mā nitmanā innu yukūn ‘indna šālūn hilāqa* (All we wish is to have a barber shop).” This answer shows that Iraqis, like other people, want to have ordinary lives and make a decent living. The Iraqi in turn asks the soldiers, “*shū ya’nī tiridūn taqtilū kull al-‘arab* (So you want to kill all Arabs)?” The American soldier replies immediately saying, “This is what I was trained to do.” His friends try to reduce this tension indicating that the soldier is not an educated person and emphasizing that the United States even has Arab allies.

On their way to release the American soldier from the Iraqi prison, the Americans and the rebels are joined by Iraqi deserters. One of these deserters is entrusted with duping the Republican Guards in order to cause them to leave their post. Disguised as a ranking officer, he says, “*saddām jāyikum, raḥ yuqtlnā kullnā la’īnu ikhasirtū al-ma’raka. Raḥ an hazim yalla kulku inhizmū wa ayyaya* (Saddam is coming and he is going to kill us all because you lost the war. I am going to flee, and all of you run away with me).” This ruse causes many Iraqi soldiers to flee the bunker. This incident provides another example of the discourse of power relations regarding political status. In sum, *Three Kings* constitutes a constructive platform to present some of the social and political intricacies in Iraq. Indeed, the use of Arabic further enhances our understanding of these complexities. However, employment of mere phrases and words in Arabic is insufficient to portray complete awareness of these realities.

7.2. *Syriana*:

Syriana represents a step forward in understanding the discourse of social power and hegemony among dominant and dominated groups that are based primarily on political and economic interests. In so doing, the film is critical of American foreign policy in the Middle East and gives voice to subjugated groups that try to resist power abuse. The film is directed by Stephen Gaghan and stars George Clooney, Matt Damon, Jeffrey Wright, Amanda Peet, and Alexander Siddig. The movie’s theme revolves around the petroleum industry in the Middle East and its influential role in global politics and economy where the United States is the dominant player. The storyline involves three parallel narratives. The first story shows the involvement of the CIA in the region in the name of safeguarding American political and economic interests. The second focuses on the constant efforts of American oil companies to control the petroleum industry in the Middle East. Finally, the movie reflects on forms of reaction of the controlled groups and their resistance to American power in shaping internal politics in the Middle East in a manner that best serves its own interests. *Syriana*, therefore, communicates how American political and economic intervention in the region affects daily life and inspires the emergence of certain forms of radical Islamic groups. These features of *Syriana* are reflective of “power abuse of one group over others ... and how dominated groups may discursively resist such abuse” (Van Dijk, 2009, p. 63).

Arabic, in both its literary and colloquial forms, occurs frequently throughout *Syriana*. A closer examination of these two types reveals that colloquial Arabic appears most often, whereas literary Arabic performs high functions, such as official situations or religious occasions. The colloquial Arabic used in the film is primarily the dialect of the Gulf. This form of Arabic, which is based on Bedouin vernacular, reveals many

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Arabic social codes and cultural symbols. Hence, the application of colloquial Arabic in *Syriana* enhances our understanding of internal political and social intricacies in certain parts of the Middle East.

One of the central themes in *Syriana* concerns foreign Muslim workers, particularly from Pakistan and India, in the Gulf region. The story of Wasim Khan and his friend, Faruq, demonstrates how power abuse, economic exploitation, and social frustration lead to certain forms of resistance where dominated groups are religiously and politically radicalized. From the film we learn that Wasim Khan and a number of his friends live in miserable conditions. The merging of two American oil companies resulted in the layoff of Wasim and many other immigrant workers. Wasim, who speaks Arabic poorly, then begins to look frantically for any job to maintain his legal status in the country. Wasim's urgent need for a work is demonstrated in the following conversation between him and an Arab business man from the Gulf:

Arab man: *ithnān min 'iyāl ḥurumtī ab'adūhum min hadhā al-balad, ta'rīf lish? Lainnu mā 'indhum shughul* (Two of my wife's relatives were deported from this country. Do you know why? Because they have no job).

Wasim: *mā lāzim tidfa' lī hal-ḥīn, 'itīnī ishī assawī wa ba'dīn inti tishūf* (You do need to pay me now. Let me do something for you and then you can decide).

Arab man: *ma'dhira! 'indī lista tawīla min nāss yabghūn yiqadimūn li hādhi al-wazīfa* (I am sorry, but I have a long list of people who want to apply for this job).

This dialogue shows Wasim's utmost efforts to find a job in order to avoid deportation, but he failed to do so. This interaction is representative of the discourse of social domination of a privileged group in terms of resources over the difficulties of foreign immigrants. Another example of the miserable conditions that foreign workers endure in the Gulf is the scene when Wasim and his other foreign friends are waiting in line at the Department of Immigration. First, we hear an announcer saying: *jahhizū al-hawiya, illī wāqfin fī the dūr mamnū' al-kalām* (Prepare your personal identity. Those who stand in line do not talk). Since Wasim does not understand Arabic well, he begins talking to one of his friends, and this leads to a confrontation with the security officers, who beat both of them harshly. This incident exemplifies the relations between discourse and power where the dominant group exercises different forms of control over the dominated group (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 355). Hence, the content of this dialogue provides a good example of how "one group holds more power, has more privileges or more resources and uses the 'difference'... as a legitimization to dominate and marginalize the other" (Van Dijk *et al*, 1997, p. 144).

Another important function of colloquial Arabic (the Gulf dialect) in *Syriana* is to convey intricate social interactions and power relations within Arab society. This form of Arabic, which has low function, helps us better understand some Arab cultural values, such as benevolence, hospitality, and honor. This orientation occurs in the dialogue between an Arab man and Prince Nāsir, who is also the foreign minister:

Karmkum akbar min al-jabal illī yihmīnā min al-shams al-ḥārqa. Lākin al-bait sār ishghīr 'alīnā. Law takaramtū 'alīnā wa a'tatūnā qī'at arḍ, yimkin waladī yibnī bait 'alīha (Your generosity is bigger than the mountain that shades us from the burning sun. My house, however, has grown too small for us. If you could

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show your generous side by giving us a piece of land, my son can use it to build a house).

This citation provides an example of everyday conversation between an ordinary man and a powerful man, who enjoys control over political and social discourses. The man, who is member of the less privileged group, is asking Prince Nāsir for a favor that involves the acquisition of land belonging to the former. Addressing the Prince, the man makes culturally wise choices of strategies of text and talk that can convey persuasive cultural discourse based on the employment of politeness and tribal codes of ethics. This form of cultural discourse falls under “ethnography of communication” and aims to explain “norms of Interpretations” (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 1997, pp.232-233). The use of the word *karam* (generosity), which has constituted a cornerstone in tribal Arab society since pre-Islamic times, is a good example of this orientation. As a member of the ruling family, Prince Nāsir emerges as a benevolent and attentive leader whom others seek for help. When Prince Nāsir agrees to give the piece of land to the man, the latter says thankfully: *Jazākum allāh khayran* (May God bless you for it). Originating in a religious discourse, this phrase is in literary Arabic, but it is commonly used in different social situations to add legitimacy and weightiness.

The colloquial Arabic used in the film serves as a pointer of internal political complexities and the power discourse within the ruling family. The following conversation between Amīr Ḥāmid al-Subā’ī and his two sons illustrates this function of the language:

Amīr Ḥāmid: *Itfadḍal. Anā ta’bān yā wilidī.* (Please sit down. I am tired my son).

Prince Nāsir : *tāl ‘umrak! Min bidū yikūn al-amīr?* (May you live longer! Who is going to be the emir)?

Amīr Ḥāmid: *akhūk* (Your brother).

Prince Mash‘al: *alḥamdulillah. Baṭlub minak tistamir ka wazīr al-khārijīyya* (Thanks God. I would like to ask you to continue in your position as the foreign minister.)

Prince Nāsir : *mā yiṣīr tisawwi chidi. Huwwi mā yigdar yidīr makhūr mā balak dawla* (You cannot do this. He is barely qualified to run a brothel much less a country).

Amīr Ḥāmid: *anā aḥibb urūba wa aqadar a’ish fihā sa’id. Qarārī nihā’ī wa baṭlub minak itsānid akhūk* (I like Europe and I can live there happy. My decision is final and I ask you to support your brother).

Prince Nāsir : *mā aqdar asawwī chidi* (I cannot do that).

This dialogue exemplifies multi-layered structures of discourse demonstrating forms of dominance that results in social injustice and inequality. As part of the internal power discourse, we see that Prince Nāsir defies his father’s authority by virtue of age and power control to appoint his brother as the country’s next ruler. Prince Nāsir expresses here the injustice and power abuse on three levels. First, as the oldest son, he is supposed to be the legitimate successor after his father. Second, his brother is not

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qualified for this position because of his weak personality and an inclination to comply with the dictates of the American administration at the expense of harming the political and economic interests of his country. Finally, Prince Nāṣir also protests the pressure that the Americans exert on his father to appoint his brother. As an act of resistance and to prevent the implementation of this decision, Prince Nāṣir resolves to turn to military means, but first he has to convince tribal leaders to support his political cause. He meets, therefore, with a group of Bedouin leaders to talk about his socio-economic reforms and political agenda:

Prince Nāṣir: *al-‘arab min qurūn yuḥkumūhum nass ma yaḥtrmūn al-qanūn. ya‘tūn ba‘d nāss iḥtikārāt li-ashyā’ yusā‘idūn al-a‘māl al-tijāriyya wa yisabibūn bi al-bītāla wa illī yintaqidūnhum yihdhifūhum fī al-sujūn aww yaqtūlum. Wa al- niswān yi‘āmilūn mu‘āmala ka-inhum muwaṭināt min al-daraja al-thāniyya* (For centuries Arabs have been ruled by people with no respect for the law. Monopolies control the things that people want, commerce is stifled, young people are unable to find jobs, and critics are jailed or put to death. Women are treated as second class citizens).

Bedouin leader: *bukra yutawijūn akhūk. Al-wilāwāt al-mutaḥidda al-amrikiyya yu‘ayidūnahu. Wa ‘indahum ashrat alāf jundī fī bilādīnā* Tomorrow is the coronation. Your brother has the support of the United States. 10,000 of their troops are stationed in our country).

Prince Nāṣir: *ṣaḥḥ. Abūy marīd wa mā yibgha yihārib al-amricān lākin hunāk man yibghūn. balad sukānu khamas bi-al-mi’a min sukān al-‘alām wa yiṣrif khamsīn bi-al-mi’a min al-taṣrif ‘ala duwwal al-‘alām bi-tasliḥ. Hadhā ma’nāh innu qudrātu ‘alā al-iqnā’ da’ifa* (This is true. My father is ill and weak and unwilling to fight the Americans. But others are willing. And when a country has five percent of the world’s population, but spends fifty percent of its income on military, then the persuasive ability of that country is weak).

The citation above comprises examples of political discourse analysis that exemplifies

different forms of power dominance and social injustices. As part of the ruling family, Prince Nāṣir enjoys a higher political status than the group that he addresses here. However, he is under the power control of his father, who complies with the demands of a politically and economically more powerful player—the Americans. Against this background, Prince Nāṣir tries to rectify injustice by resorting to resistance. He first shares his vision as a leader trying to persuade his subjects that he is capable of making positive changes. He then applies forms of speech acts (Chilton & Schäffner, 1997, pp. 216-217) to explain how his political and economic reforms will eventually lead to a democratic country completely independent of American political and economic influence in the region. Prince Nāṣir’s resistance, though peaceful, led the CIA to consider him an obstacle to American interests. In fact, towards the end of *Syriana* we see Prince Nāṣir *assassinated*, along with CIA operative, Bob Barnes, who tries to abort this attack.

The use of literary Arabic in *Syriana* fulfills high functions, such as religious contexts and official situations. A good example of the employment of literary Arabic in

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official occasions is the welcoming speech of Sheikh Ḥamad al-Subā'ī to the guests whom he invites to a summer party in Marbella, Spain:

yasurrunī an uraḥibb bikum fard fard fī casa de las Palmas, wāhat al-nakhil, al-khāssa binā fī janūb isbānyā ... atmanā an yaqdī kull wāḥid minkum yawm rā'ī'... arjūkum an tatanāwalū al-ta'ām wa an tastamti'ū bi waqtikum ma'anā (It is my pleasure to welcome each one of you to our Casa de Las Palmas, Oasis of Palms, in southern Spain... I hope that everyone among you has a good time with us).

This speech can be analyzed as part of the cultural discourse that gives insights into values and norms that represent a society and bring pride to it. This text shows that, as the emir, Sheikh Ḥamad al-Subā'ī highlights certain customs of Arab culture that constitute a source of pride. He, therefore, wants to appear hospitable, befitting a generous Arab ruler. Furthermore, he also emphasizes certain symbols of Arab culture, such as *wāhat al-nakhil* (oasis of palms) and good Arabic food. At the same time we have to bear in mind that in so doing, Sheikh Ḥamad al-Subā'ī's behavior is in certain ways reflective of the Western image of Arab culture.

The employment of literary Arabic in religious contexts constitutes a significant aspect of *Syriana*. Such is the case with the reading of *al-fātiḥa* during the prayer and the *adhān* (call for prayer) with which *Syriana* opens. Within the religio-political discourse, the film looks into the agenda of Islamist leaders as part of their resistance strategies. Of great importance here is the following sermon of the religious cleric, delivered in front of many Muslim immigrants:

Sa-yuhāwilūn tams al-ikhtilāf ḥatta yaj'alū al-muslimīn alladhīn yataḥdathūn bi-al-dīn yabdūn ka-muta'asībīn aww mutakhallifīn. Sa-yaqūlūn lanā inna al-khilāf huwa 'lā al-mawārid al-iqtisādiyya aww al-haymana al-'askariyya. Wa law ṣaddaqnā dhālik fa-lā nalūmanna illā anfansanā. Wa lā yumkin abdan sadd al-fajwa bayn al-ṭabī'a al-bashariyya wa al-ḥadītha 'an tariq al-tijāra al-ḥurra. Lā yumkin. Al-dīn huwa al-dawla malhūmsh ghīr mafhūm wāḥid--al-qur'ān....ālām al-ḥayā al-'aṣriyya lā tu'ālaj bi-ilghā' al-qawānīn aww al-khaṣṣkhaṣa aww al-īnfitāḥ aww khafḍ al-ḍarā'i, wa lā yumkin an naqdī 'alā ālām al-'aysh fī al-'ālam al-ḥadīth 'an tariq al-mujtama'āt al-libraliyya (They will try to obliterate the difference [between Islam and the West] in order to make Muslims who talk about religion appear as fanatics or backward people. They will claim that the dispute is about economic resources or military hegemony. If we were to believe that then we play right into their hands. Then we have only ourselves to blame. It is absolutely impossible to bridge the gap between human nature and modernity through free trade. Religion and state are inseparable and rather they have a single concept – the Qur'ān. The strains of modern life cannot be dealt with through deregulation, privatization, economic opening up, or lowering taxes. It is also impossible to solve the pressures of living in the modern world by liberal societies).

In this speech Arabic plays an important marker of the religio-political discourse and intricate realities of the Middle East. Most of the speech, except for the phrase *malhūmsh ghīr mafhūm wāḥid--al-qur'ān* which is in Egyptian dialect, is delivered in literary Arabic. The language, which deals with significant religious issues, denotes high functions aiming to legitimize his religious and political agenda. In this sermon, the

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cleric presents an Islamic religious and political discourse based on his interpretation of Islam. He claims that the Islamic religio-political platform proves to be more relevant and pragmatic than Western alternatives and, hence all Muslims should adhere to it. In his analysis, therefore, he emphasizes the distinctions between Islamic teachings and Western economic and political systems. He believes the West has a hidden political and economic agenda aiming to manipulate Muslims' minds and exploit their natural resources. He warns Muslims not to go astray after deceptive Western propaganda. By following the teaching of the Qur'ān, Muslims can find adequate solutions to the problems they face, and thus they are not in need of Western political or socio-economic ways of life. The viewer must remain mindful, however, that these ideas represent only certain Islamic groups, since Islamic religious sources are, like other scriptural religions, open to many interpretations.

7.3. *Body of Lies*:

Efforts such as those in *Three Kings* and *Syriana* towards a better understanding of the political, religious, and cultural complexities in the Middle East are more evident in *Body of Lies*. This movie is directed by Ridley Scott, whose recent movies have sensitively examined complex issues. It stars Leonardo DiCaprio, Russell Crowe, Mark Strong, and Golshifteh Farahani. The movie does a good job of offering constructive discussion of American pursuits to achieve political and economic hegemony in the Middle East even without understanding the intricate realities of the people living in that region. The events of the movie take place in the Middle East, the United States, and Europe. Its storyline revolves around a CIA operative (Roger Ferris) working in the Middle East in an attempt to track down a Jihadi group led by a Muslim leader whose nickname is Al-Salīm. Ferris is portrayed in the film as having a better understanding of political and cultural realities of the Middle East than his superiors. This is evident in his ability to speak Arabic, knowledge of Arab norms and customs, and his direct interactions with the locals. Hence, throughout the movie he finds himself in constant conflict with his superior, Edward Hoffman, whose role embodies the American interests in the region. *Body of Lies*. The film, therefore, provides many examples of socio-political discourse and power relation between controlling and controlled groups; and how this discourse influences the mind of its recipients (Van Dijk, 2001, pp. 357-358). In doing so, it gives insights of the daily life of ordinary citizens and socio-political problems they face.

The use of Arabic in *Body of Lies* shows how text and talk are involved in the reproduction of forms of domination, power abuse, and resistance. Both literary and colloquial Arabic occur in this film to show high and low functions of the language. Yet, colloquial Arabic, which is mostly in the Palestinian dialect, is the dominant form of the language to reflect daily life and straightforward social situations. Literary Arabic (specifically with its classical Qur'ānic form) figures, as we saw previously in the case of *Syriana*, primarily in certain scenes that deal with religious authenticity (for example the language of the Qur'ān) and legitimization. Such is the case with religious statements and Qur'ānic citations that indicate jihadist's perspective. In fact, *Body of Lies* begins with a message sent by Al-Salīm, the head of the Jihadist group:

Wa kamā fajjarnā nāqilat al-rukāb fī ḥayy Sheffield al-usbū' al-mādī sanakūn jāhizin li-'amaliyya biritaniyya. Sawf nantaqim min ḥarb americā allatī tashunnuaha 'alā al-islām. sanakūn lahum bi-al-mirṣād.

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Wa sayakūn 'iqābuna li-urūbā wa amricā 'ashwā'ī. dimā'unā nazafat wa ḥāna waqtuhum (As we blew up the bus in a Sheffield neighborhood last week, we will be ready for an operation in Britain. We will avenge America's war on Islam. We will lie in ambush for them anywhere. Our punishment to Europe and America will be random. We bled and it is time for them to bleed).

In this message Al-Salīm takes credit for an attack that took place in a Sheffield, England, and informs his followers to be ready for a new attack in Britain. He perceives these attacks as retaliation against what he calls “America's war on Islam.” As a result of this war many Muslims have been killed and, hence, Muslims are justified in protecting themselves against the US and its allies – the Europeans. Al-Salīm's speech reflects political discourse of power relations between two groups where he considers his side the dominated one that needs to defend itself.

Literary Arabic appears in Qur'ānic citations that play an important role in the Jihadi political agenda. Such is the case with the well-known Qur'ānic verse that reads: *wa man watawallahum minkum fa innahu minhum* ... (if any of you take them as allies, then surely he is one of them) (Qur'ān, 5:51). This verse comes up in a conversation between the head of the Jordanian intelligence, Hani Salam, and Roger Ferris about Jihadi religious agenda. This verse is associated with the classical Islamic term *Dār al-ḥarb* (house of war), a term used, as Ferris points out, during the early Islamic Caliphate to distinguish it from *Dar al-Islām*, which signifies basically areas where Islamic law was applied in its entirety. However, this term underwent a number of interpretive transformations (Hashimi, 2011, pp, 33-34, 120-126). Another significant Qur'ānic citation that appears in the movie is the verse *Wa lā taḥsabanna alladhīn qutulū fī sabīl allah amwāt bal aḥyā'ind rabbihim yurzaqūn* (Do not reckon those who were killed in God's way as dead. Rather they are alive and provided with the means of sustenance by their Lord) (Qur'ān, 3: 169). Al-Salīm cites this verse to provide religious justification for the attacks he carries against American and European targets and motivation for his followers to pursue martyrdom.

Regarding colloquial Arabic, *Body of Lies* incorporates a number of dialects, including Iraqi, Palestinian-Jordanian, and Syrian. Yet the Palestinian-Jordanian dialect is most evident. Informal Arabic in these scenes serves as a cultural conduit through which the audience can have a better understanding of daily life, social interactions, and customs. To begin with certain social codes of conduct, the phrases *inshallah* (God willing), *furṣa sa'ida* (nice meeting you), *law samaht* (could you please) are some examples of proper social behaviors. For example, the phrase *inshallah*, which has also religious connotations, implies that everything should be done with God's will to be successfully completed. When Ferris meets Aisha, the nurse, at the hospital we hear her saying that she will see him *inshallah* next week. Interested in knowing her better, he replies saying “I was wondering if we can have a conversation sooner than next week, maybe *inshallah* later this afternoon.” Ferris also shows a good understanding of Arab culture, especially when it comes to dating and the way Arab men should respect women in relationships between genders. We hear, therefore, Ferris saying to her, “*imtā mā bidik wa bi- amrik* (When you wish and by your permission).” Further showing his understanding of Arabic social customs, he soon goes to meet her

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family to demonstrate his good intentions, as would be expected from an honorable man.

Another important word that is used in the movie is *insā*, which literally means “forget about it.” Hani Salam employs this word during his heated conversation with Edward Hoffman, who asks Hani to hand over Muṣṭafā Karāmī (a member of Al-Salīm’s group that Hani recruited) to him. To Hoffman’s repeated requests, Hani refuses to do so explaining, how such a move would jeopardize effective intelligence. The word *insa*, therefore, reflects Hani’s complete refusal to comply with this request and conveys a sense of shame and pity for Hoffman’s lack of understanding and desire to be in control of things. The analysis of these phrases and words is indicative of language variations and certain cultural meanings that might be misunderstood “if we view them through the prism of our culture specific practices and concepts” (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 1997, p. 231).

Colloquial Arabic also serves as a medium of daily communication by Jihadis, who often incorporate key terms borrowed from literary (classical) Arabic that better serve their religio-political discourse. This orientation occurs, for example, in the dialogue between one of Al-Salīm’s lieutenants and a man named ‘Umar Ṣaddīqī. This man was framed by the CIA for the staged attack on an American base in Incirlik, Turkey:

The lieutenant: *allah yibārkak ‘alā ‘amalak wa al-shīkh yibārkak kamān. Bayt al-Islām yabtahij ‘alā al-ta’na illī darabtha didd bayt al-ḥarb* (God bless you for your work as well as the sheikh praises you. The House of Islam rejoices at the strike you have made against the House of War.)

Ṣaddīqī: *lahza. Anā mish fāhim ayy shī ‘an ish inta btitkalam? Ana muhandis mi’mārī* (Wait a moment. I do not understand anything. What are you talking about? I am an architect).

The lieutenant: *lā itakhāf min ayy shī. Sayyid ṣaddīqī qara’nā taqārīr ‘anak wa ‘an taṣrīhāt ‘an al-‘amal illi qumt bih fi injirik. Lā itkhabī ayy shī ‘anā. Iḥnā inhanik ‘lā al-‘amal illi qumt bih* (Do not be afraid [to share] anything. Mr. Ṣaddīqī we read reports about you as well as your statements about the operation that you carried out in Incirlik. Do not hide anything from us. We congratulate you for the attack you carried out).

Ṣiddīqī: *fī shakhs thānī qām bi hadhā al-‘amal la ilī... ana mish qādir afham. Al-amrīkānī āh al- amrīkānī! Al-amrīkānī talab minī innī aṣamim ilu bank a’lā al-tirāz al-islāmī. Anā musta’id aḥkilkū ayy shī tiṭlubū* (There is another person who carried out this action in my name... I am unable to comprehend. The American man, oh the American! He asked me to design a bank for him on the Islamic model. I am willing to tell you anything you want).

The lieutenant: *inta rajul mutadayyin wa amīn iḥnā ilnā thiqa fik. Iḥkīnā ‘an hadhā al- amrīkānī* (You are a pious man and we trust you. Tell us more about this American).

This conversation is between Al- Salīm’s followers and Ṣaddīqī. First, Al- Salīm’s emissaries, who assume that he carried out the attack on the American base in Injcirlik, congratulate Ṣaddīqī. In doing so, they apply the Islamic concepts: *Bayt al-Islām* (House of Islam) and *Bayt al-ḥarb* (House of War). Originating in early Islamic religio-political discourse, these two contrasting phrases reflect a borderland between areas

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under Islamic rule and those outside its control. These two notions, therefore, play a vital role in Islamic historical and religious discourses and have a fundamental resonance in the political discourse of Jihadist movements. The use of these terms here illustrates Jihadis' application of early Islamic religio-political notions into their ideology and political agenda.

Once Al- Salīm's emissaries realize that Ṣaddīqī was not involved in the Incirlik attack, they killed him, fearing that he was working for the CIA. *Body of Lies* shows that innocent people, such as Ṣaddīqī, can pay for their lives because of these operations. The film is replete with examples of victims and victimizers, duped and dupers. This trend is exemplified in the role and personality of the CIA operative, Ferris. To end the circle of mistrust and uncertainty, Ferris decided at the conclusion of the film to quit his job and start a new life in the Middle East. *Body of Lies*, therefore, concludes with the camera zooming out as Ferris talks with shopkeepers in one of Amman's markets, seemingly to show a new beginning, a new phase in life, that he has willingly chosen, and to emphasize commonalities and similarities in different cultural and political discourses.

8. Conclusion:

Viewing cultural concepts and practices of others from their perspectives will avoid prejudice and bias and help us understand their socio-political and cultural discourses. Language analysis is an important marker that can provide a better perspective of these discourses. The examination of the application of the Arabic language in the selected American films (*Kingdom of Heaven*, *Hidalgo*, *Three Kings*, *Syriana*, and *Body of Lies*) serves as a constructive yardstick by which to test out shifts in the perception of Arabs and Muslims and their culture in these movies. This study showed that due to political and economic circumstances there has been an increasing use of Arabic in American movies since the late nineties. The tragic events of September of 2001 have propelled the inclusion of Arabic, as well as the appearance of more Arab actors and actresses in American films. In comparison with earlier movies concerned with Arab settings, recent films provide a clearer picture of the religious, political, and economic intricacies of Arabs and their culture. The increased use of Arabic language helps achieve a more objective representation of Arabs and Muslims. As a result, recent films provide a better platform for critical discussion of American foreign policy and the economic and political interests in the Arab world.

There are two main forms of the Arabic language used in the above-mentioned films: literary (classical) and colloquial (with different dialects). The choice of language variations aims to reflect certain social, political, and religious purposes that can enhance our perception of the way Arab-Muslims understand cultural intricacies or historical meanings. Literary (classical) Arabic used in *Kingdom of Heaven* adds authenticity and religiosity to the Islamic view of the Crusades narrative. However, literary Arabic in *Hidalgo* functions as a signifier of originality, nobility, and honorable values that represent the tribal horse culture.

In *Three Kings*, *Syriana*, and *Body of Lies* colloquial Arabic gives insights into the social and political interactions and local customs in the Middle East. Literary Arabic in these movies adds legitimacy to religious contexts and official occasions. Despite the positive approach that these films represent regarding the realities and

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complexities of the Middle East and the Arab world, much work still needs to be done in this direction to present a more objective representation of the Other.

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Endnotes

¹ *Valentino's Ghost* is a documentary by Michael Sigh that discusses how American foreign policy is largely influenced by portrayals of Arabs and Muslims in mainstream media. The title of the documentary was carefully selected to reflect the films of Rudolph Valentino, particularly *The Sheikh* (1920).

² It may be noted that some aspects of the film story, such as the presentation of Balian as Godfrey's son, are historically incorrect.

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