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Islamophobia in Early and Contemporary America: Reproducing Myths in *Slaves in Algiers* (1794) and *Argo* (2012)

Abstract

This paper examines the representational practices in Susanna Haswell Rowson's melo-dramatic comedy *Slaves of Algiers, or, A struggle for Freedom* (1794) and Ben Affleck's thriller movie *Argo* (2012) claiming that both works, although historically distant, employ a similar repertoire of representations which repeat myths and stereotypes about the Islamic culture and people. Deploying Stuart Hall's theory of representation and drawing on the historical and cultural contexts of the two works, the paper puts forward the argument that Islamophobia is a media-made myth which comes to the foreground in times of western-Islamic conflicts and which is regenerated through western xenophobic language and images that reiterate established cultural presuppositions.

In his classical treatise *De Anima* [*On the Soul*], Aristotle argues that people depend on their imagination to make sense of the world because "the soul never thinks (*noein*) without an image" (Gendlin 6–7). This understanding of the image and its role in shaping humans' thoughts is very timely in the modern age, as the world is increasingly represented through a discourse of aural-visual forms that constitute sign systems and saturate peoples' relationships . It is through images that meaning is constructed and representation is maintained. This paper investigates the representational practices and reproduction of Islamophobia in early and contemporary America as reflected in Susanna Haswell Rowson's melodrama *Slaves in Algiers, or, A struggle for Freedom* (1794) and Ben Affleck's thriller movie *Argo* (2012). I put forward the claim that Islamophobia, although a recently coined term, was a phenomenon encountered in early America. The phenomenon is recurrently circulated through a representational regime that is more mythical than real. The two works selected for analysis share many elements despite their historical distance. Both take place in transatlantic Muslim lands and follow the experiences of American citizens seized by Muslim captors. The representations in both cases are given from the American slaves' points of view. The two works project similar images of

Muslims that help construct and sustain American cultural and political imperialism in the Islamic world. Furthermore, the genres of writing to which both works belong (*Slaves in Algiers* is melodramatic comedy and *Argo* is a political thriller) provide a room for exaggerating, stereotyping, and inciting sensational emotions. My analysis will depend primarily on Stuart Hall's theory of representation and the cultural and historical contexts of the two works.

1. Islamophobia: Recycling a Myth

Islamophobia is defined as a "dislike of or prejudice against Islam or Muslims, especially as a political force" ("Islamophobia"). Robin Richardson states that the first appearance of the term was in French in a 1910 article titled *La Politique Musulmane dans L'Afrique Occidentale Française* by Alain Quellien, and the second-recorded usage of the word goes to an article published in the American journal *Insight* on February 4, 1991, that referred to the hostility of the Soviet Union to its Muslim citizens. The coinage of the term, however, remains a vexed question. Claire Berlinski, echoing the views of a considerable number of western scholars, claims that the term is a neologism that was deliberately coined by a Muslim Brotherhood organization called the International Institute for Islam in order to "dismiss your concerns about what are obviously very real pathologies in the Islamic world." Berlinski's interpretation of the neologistic nature of Islamophobia is in itself Islamophobic. She ascribes atrocities and abomination to the Islamic world and ignores all possibilities of western anti-Islamism. Countering Berlinski's definition, Said Gull states that Islamophobia is "unnecessary and groundless culture and fear against Muslims and Islam." Gull traces this anti-Islamic anxiety back to the crusades and Andalusia collapse times when most of the infighting between Muslim and Christian inhabitants were based on fear and mutual distrust. Apart from this intellectual controversy over the origin of the term, it is obvious that Islamophobia is a reality today. In practice, Islam is often represented in western media as a source of terrorism and chaos and a threat to western civilization. In an article entitled "Islamophobia," Dalal Alshammari lists a number of "unquestioned perceptions" (177) about Islam that are predominantly popular in western culture and media. She writes:

- The Islam Religion portrays a monolithic culture and it is relentless to accept emerging realities in the society.
- Islamic religion has completely different values in comparison with other faiths and cultures.
- Islam is considered inferior as perceived by the west. It is deemed to have barbarism traits, archaic, and relatively irrational.
- Islam religion supports various acts of terrorism and general violence in the society.
- Islamic religion is a violent ideology in the political arena. (177)

The reproduction and absorption of these incontrovertible perceptions of Islam raised by Alshammari falls within what Stuart Hall terms as "conceptual maps" (1997d, 10). To paraphrase Hall, conceptual maps are presuppositions inculcated in a particular culture and make people think, behave, feel, and interpret the world in similar ways. Conceptual maps construct chains of equivalences between things (people, objects, thoughts, other cultures, etc.) and meanings, which are encoded into sets of signs that are expressed and interpreted through language. The word language for Hall is not restricted only to the language we write and speak, it is expanded to include various cultural objects. Hall elaborates:

> By language […] I mean a very wide range of things – I mean the language that we speak and the language that we write, I mean electronic languages, digital languages, languages communicated by musical instrument, languages communicated by facial gesture, languages communicated by facial expression, the use of the body to communicate meaning, the use of clothes to express meaning – anything in the sense in which I'm talking about can be a language. (1997d, 11)

Hall's reading of signs depends on two approaches: the traditional semiotic approach of Saussure and Barthes, who viewed signs as "vehicles of meaning in culture" and Foucault's discursive approach which puts emphasis on "the *effects* and *consequences* of representation – its 'politics'" (1997a, 6). Meaning, for Hall, is not fixed. It is contextual, changeable, and "connected in more intimate ways with social practices and questions of power" (1997c, 42). The only way to fix meaning is to have power over representation and to manipulate the production of language in the cultural sense of the word. Power, Hall insists, is intended to "close language, close meaning, to stop the flow" (1997c, 19).

The construction and reproduction of Islamophobia is an exercise of social power and a practice of meaning sustenance. In the United States, the practice is as old as the early beginnings of the nation. America inherited the old western anti-Islamism and presented it in sets of images and through representational practices that often arise in times of political and ideological conflict with the Islamic world. One of the earliest encounters between America and the Islamic world was between 1801 and 1805 when America had its first overseas war with Tripoli, historically known as the Tripolitan War. By the turn of the eighteenth century, what was called "the Barbary States" of Algiers, Tunis, Morocco, and Tripoli had the tradition of receiving annual tributes from the neighbouring European countries in order to allow them to safely pass the Mediterranean waters. After the American Revolution, America also had to pay the tribute to guarantee American sailors a peaceful voyage across the Mediterranean Sea. In order to enforce the newly formed country to follow the tradition of the Europeans, the Barbary States' corsairs regularly kidnapped American sailors for ransom and annual tributes. This practice caused outrage against the transatlantic Muslims and aroused a sense of zealous nationalism

in sympathy for the imprisoned countrymen. Early American literary and artistic arenas reflected this public concern with the hostage crisis. Michel Paul Baepler explains:

> The Barbary conflict became part of the American public spectacle: wax museums exhibited Barbary scenes, circuses held benefit performances for ransomed captives, the 'machinery in transparency' – an early form of American film − projected Barbary displays. In addition to the published historical accounts of slavery in North Africa, the Barbary captivity topos appeared in at least four early American novels, nine early plays, ten dime novels, and almost a dozen Hollywood movies. (220–221)

Theatre was an ideal arena for staging anti-Islamic sentiments and raising patriotic consciousness for the war cause because of its dependence on performance and images. *Slaves in Algiers* was first performed in 1794 on the Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia shortly before the Tripolitan war and with the background of the hostage crises of the 1790s when more than 100 American sailors were captured by the Barbary States. It was one of the earliest works that reproduced Islamophobia in early America through xenophobic language encoded into sets of signs and images. The play was Rowson's "first successful effort as a dramatist" (Richards 143) after her American first best-selling novel *Charlotte, A Tale of Truth* (1791).

When we first encounter Muslims in *Slaves in Algiers*, we see them stereotypically turbaned or head-covered, whiskered, and robed. They are also presented as ruthless and anti-democratic. Muley Moloc, the dey of Algiers, is a cruel and lascivious ruler who imprisons honest American men and harasses virtuous American women. He is an embodiment of the autocratic Muslim ruler with lecherous desires and vengeful spirit. Moloc appears in few scenes in the play, but he makes a strong presence through the indirect speeches and descriptions of him given by his victims. His repulsive personality is established from the very beginning of the play by one of his harem, Fetnah, who feels agony and distress at being his favourite woman: "He is old and ugly; then he wears such tremendous whiskers; and when he makes love, he looks so grave and stately, that I declare, if it was not for fear of his huge seymetar, I shou'd burst out a laughing in his face" (Rowson 14). Moloc is ridiculed and reduced to a stupid ruler who often draws his sword against his concubines when they refuse his love and sensual moves. Fredrick, an American slave in the play, calls him "Mr. Whisker" (43) and Henry, another American slave, refers to him as the "impotent vain boaster" (64). The dey's right-hand man, Mustapha, looks no less ugly and cruel than the dey. Mustapha is described as an "ugly thing" who, when bowing, "his long, hooked nose" almost touches the toe of his slipper (14). Ben Hassan, one of the dey's men, is a renegade who betrays his captives and the dey himself and always speaks in a comic accent.

The derogating stereotypes of Muslims portrayed by Rowson and performed in front of ardent American audiences in 1794 were not invented by the playwright

herself. Rowson drew on a long history of representation and a rich repository of stereotypes that have been "familiar and formulaic" (Richards 144) to her audiences. It was not difficult for Rowson to arouse antipathy against the Muslim captors in North Africa. All she had to do was to recall historical concepts and images of vicious Muslims and to present them through an anti-Islamic rhetoric. Tracing the literary and theatrical resources of *Slaves in Algiers*, Richards notes that the play borrows more from earlier plays with stock Islamic characters than from events during the eighteenth century. He refers to British playwright Aaron Hill's *Zara*, among others, to be one of the strongest influences on the depiction of the Muslim stereotypes in Rowson's play. *Zara*, a translation of French playwright Voltaire's *Zaire,* was written almost six decades before *Slaves in Algiers* and deals with a similar theme of western captivity in the exotic Islamic world (144–145). This interrelation between British, French, and American texts generated a complex network of intertextual meanings and conceptual maps that mystified Islamic culture and people.

Argo is part of another cycle in the history of Islamophobia. The movie recaptures Islamophobia in a contemporary social and political context. It is based on the true life story (though there are many historical inaccuracies in the movie) of the hostage crisis of the 1979 when about 52 Americans were held captives at the American embassy in Tehran for 444 days after Iranian students took over the embassy during the Iranian Revolution. The movie follows the story of six American diplomats, who managed to escape the embassy and hide in the Canadian ambassador's house for three months before a CIA officer devised a plan of directing a fake movie entitled *Argo* in order to release the hidden diplomats under the cover of a Canadian film crew. *Argo* was produced in 2012 in the context of political tensions between the U.S. and Iran. By 2012, American-Iranian conflict over the Iranian nuclear program reached its peak as America continued its cyberwar through developing viruses that attacked computers in Iranian nuclear labs. David Sanger reported the following in his 2012 article for the *New York Times*: "From his first months in office, President Obama secretly ordered increasingly sophisticated attacks on the computer systems that run Iran's main nuclear enrichment facilities, significantly expanding America's first sustained use of cyberweapons, according to participants in the program." The U.S. also imposed economic and military sanctions against Iran, and threats of waging war against the Muslim country frequently appeared in the news. Within such a complicated political context, a long history of Islamophobia was recalled and reproduced in *Argo* in order to mark Iran as an enemy. The images of Iranians presented in the movie are decoded by viewers with "conceptual maps" in mind and through old representational practices similar to those employed in *Slaves in Algiers*.

According to the meanings foregrounded in *Argo* and communicated through anti-Islamic language, Iran is a country of religious fanatics, vicious militants, and ruthless politicians. The rioting Iranians in front of the American embassy

displayed at the very beginning of the movie look similar to the dey and Mustapha in Rowson's play. The rioters are either men with long whiskers carrying guns, knives, and photos of turbaned long-bearded Ayatollah Khomeini, or women veiled in black. In the movie the American television repeatedly broadcasts shocking scenes of American hostages sleeping in dungeon-like rooms in Iran, while armoured revolutionary guards pose their guns at their heads. Radio channels speak the news that Iranian rioters at the embassy "will kill them [the hostages] all and blow up the embassy" (*Argo*). American CIA officers express their fear that the six American employees who escape the embassy could be subject to 74 leashes by the revolutionary guards if they are caught. One officer mentions that the American diplomats are "standing room only for beheading in the square" (*Argo*).When CIA agent Mendez arrives in Iran to rescue the six escapees, he is shocked by the inhumanity of Iranian Muslims at Mehrabad airport, where guards and turbaned bearded men drag people around for investigation. In Tehran streets, malicious Iranian mobs are everywhere, women draped in black clothes tour the city in Jeep cars holding gun machines, and bodies of traitors are hung on construction cranes in public as if it is a daily ritual. Iranians in the movie are reduced and simplified to look homogeneously mindless, vile, and fanatical. Their Farsi chanting is purposefully given without subtitles to stress their distance from western culture and conformity to a despotic Islamic ideology. In his review of the movie, Fouad Pervez points out that *Argo* "falls into the common Hollywood trap of making Muslims into a monolithic Green Menace" when it ignores the liberal and secular elements that were parts of the Iranian revolutionary coalition against the Shah regime.

The representation of the Islamic world in *Argo* and *Slaves in Algiers* is a product of powerful racist rhetoric. Islamic cultural objects are given a political significance that goes beyond their literal meaning. This anti-Islamic representation could be read within the context of Roland Barthes' semiotics, which emphasizes the idea of secondary significance. Departing from Saussure's signification process system that interprets signs linguistically, Barthes links signs to myths stressing that the relationship between the signifier and the signified conceals reality and creates myths-based ideology. Barthes reads the sign as signifying the feelings, concepts, and thoughts of a certain group. He explains:

> Our press, our films, our theatre, our pulp literature, our rituals, our justice, our diplomacy, our conversations, our remarks about the weather, a murder trial, a touching wedding, the cooking we dream of, the garments we wear, everything, in everyday life, is dependent on the representation which the bourgeoisie *has and makes us have* of the relations between man and the world. (139)

Based on Barthes' semiotics theory, Islamic cultural objects are sometimes given mythic attributes beyond their actual signification. When relationships and mean-

ings are drawn through narratives of dominance and cultural extremism, a cultural object like a headscarf transforms its signification from piety, when donned by a nun for example, into phobia when worn by a Muslim. The same object acquires two different meanings that blur the boundaries between reality and myth.

2. Islamophobia and the Representation of Difference

The vilification of Islam in *Slaves in Algiers* and *Argo* encapsulates a verification of American culture and politics. Rowson and Affleck similarly accentuate difference between intolerant Muslims and liberal Americans in their works in order to entice public support for America's political ventures in the Islamic world. In his article "The Spectacle of the Other," Hall stresses that the representation of difference is a very complicated business since it "engages feelings, attitudes and emotions and it mobilizes fears and anxieties in the viewer, at deeper levels than we can explain in a simple, common sense way" (226). Hall refers to Jacque Derrida's argument that "there is always a relation of power between the poles of a binary opposition" (235). The ideological polarization of the Islamic system and American democracy could be evidently seen in the genres to which *Slaves in Algiers* and *Argo* belong. *Slaves in Algiers* is a melodramatic comedy that aroused the Americans' hostility against North African Muslim corsairs in the late eighteenth century, and *Argo* is a political thriller that patriotically served the Americans' anger against Iran in 2012. I would agree with film scholar Linda Williams who argues that melodrama "has been the norm, rather than the exception, of American cinema" (qtd. in Kelleter 8). Williams' argument is more accurate when applied to political thrillers, which borrow from the classical American melodrama the tendency to depict struggles between good and evil and to give dominance to the American ideology over the depicted other, especially in times of conflict. Hollywood is known for its various productions that berated Russians during the Cold War era and vilified Muslims in moments of political crises or cultural clashes (Jack Shahin's *Reel Bad Arabs* is an engaging book on this topic). Such melodramas and political thrillers inevitably end with the good American overcoming the vile 'Other.'

In his book *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism*, Timothy Marr argues that Islam was politically used in colonial and early America as an antithesis to the emerging political system in the country. Islamic religion and government were both put in contrast to American Christianity and Republican government in order to establish the superiority of American values. Marr adds:

> The Islamic orient was conceived by many Americans as a vicious realm of human bondage, unstable tyranny, illicit sensuality, and selfish luxury that symbolized the dangerous forces that threatened their fledgling political rights and freedoms. The

orientalist construction of Islam as a cultural enemy maligned as both antidemocratic and antichristian, served as an important oppositional icon in terms of which Americans of diverse dimensional, ethnic, and partisan persuasions united in defining Republican identities from the nation's founding through the Jacksonian era. (21)

This religious and political opposition serves two main goals in early America: the exclusion of Muslims in the formation of American national and political identity, and the justification of America's rising imperialist ambitions in the Islamic world. Muslims, along with Jews and Catholics, were not welcome in the emerging United States of America which insisted on maintaining a WASP identity. Claims for embracing other religions and races in the cultural and political fabric of the country were often met with rejection. When President Thomas Jefferson, for instance, called for the inclusion of Muslims and Jews in the American national identity, he was publicly accused of secretly being Muslim (Milani). Ironically, the Republicans' attempt to establish a liberal country was not liberal. To form a white Christian national identity and still claim democracy, the Republicans diverted the peoples' attention to North Africa where the different and threatening Muslim lived. Locating oppressive Muslims in North Africa defined a non-American transatlantic Muslim identity and justified the Republicans' politics of exclusion.

The American slaves in Rowson's play define their democratic values in opposition to the selfishness and absolutism of their Moorish captors. Muley Moloc's sensual desires towards Olivia are set against the virtuousness of the American captive. When Olivia refuses to be one of his concubines and tries to help the captives escape his bondage, he becomes very intolerant and orders to "devise each means of torture; let them linger – months, years, ages, in their misery" (64). In contrast to this revengeful spirit, the American captives show forgiveness and mercy when they finally take the dey into custody. They refuse to enslave or torture him because they are "free men" (73). Ben Hassan, a Jew who converted to Islam, is subject to two forms of racial and religious intolerance: Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. He was a Jew cheating the British in London's streets by selling rosin instead of wax. When stalked by the British, he converted to Islam to captivate and sell white slaves. Hassan's deceitfulness originating from his religious backgrounds evinces lack of virtue and morality and distances him from the American Christian virtues. Though doubly paid by Rebecca's relatives and friends to grant her freedom, he keeps Rebecca in slavery claiming he still awaits her ransom money. Ben Hassan approaches Rebecca for marriage because "our law gives us great many wives. […] our law gives us liberty in love; you are an American and you must love liberty" (21). Ben Hassan's subversion of the word "liberty" establishes an anti-American figure and legitimizes the repudiation of non-Christians, whether Muslims or Jews, from American national and political structure. For Rebecca, Ben Hassan's anti-Republican polygamous rhetoric denigrates the very meaning of the word liberty as an American concept: "Hold, Hassan; prostitute not the sacred word by applying

it to licentiousness; the sons and daughters of liberty, take justice, truth, and mercy, for their leaders, when they list under her glorious banners" (21). Discovering that Ben Hassan lies about the ransom, Rebecca offers forgiveness rather than seeks revenge because of her American liberal ideals: "Hassan, you have dealt unjustly by me, but I forgive you – for while my own heart o'erflows with gratitude for this unexpected blessing, I will wish every human being as happy as I am this moment" (59). The failure of Moloc-Oliva and Ben Hassan-Rebecca's marriages confirms the incompatibility of Muslims, Jews, and American democratic ideals. Together, Moloc and Ben Hassan serve both as male figures against whom white women claim the right for inclusion in American political identity, and racial figures whose difference establishes "the fixed whiteness of American identity" (Dillon 417). Rowson tries to reframe the 'male white free' identity of the nation to include females and to concurrently exclude non-Christians.

America's emerging imperialist ambitions in the Islamic world are central references in *Slaves in Algiers*. The dominance of Christian values and the melodramatic reinstatement of order by the end of the play can be explained with reference to what Marr terms as "imperialism of virtue" (35). The play ends with the reunion of the western characters and the overthrow of Muslims. The Muslim masters turn into captives and the American slaves turn into masters. Like in a typical melodrama, the good characters reunite after overcoming evil. Olivia finds her imprisoned father, her lover Henry, and her son Augustus. Rebecca and her imprisoned husband Constant are finally together after discovering that Rebecca is their daughter. The dey and Ben Hassan end up captives in the hands of the Americans. More significantly, the American republican ideals defeat the Islamic ideology. The dey, desirous to redeem himself, pleads them to teach him how to do right: "I fear from following the steps of my ancestors, I have greatly erred: teach me then, you who so well know how to practice what is right, how to amend my faults" (74). The last speech given by Olivia echoes the play's premise that American values will spread all over the world: "Long, long, may that prosperity continue – may Freedom spread her benign influence thro' every nation, till the bright Eagle, united with the dove and olive-branch, waves high, the acknowledged standard of the world" (75). Henry shares the same prospect that "the warlike Eagle extends his glittering pinions in the sunshine of prosperity" (74). The defeat of the Islamic despotic system and the colonization of the Islamic world are presented to be crucial to the vitalization of American democracy.

In *Argo*, a similar representation of difference is deployed to reproduce the dichotomy of tyrant Muslims and democratic Americans. The images of Muslims, indistinguishable from each other, rioting in front of the American embassy in Tehran are contrasted with decent-looking Americans inside the embassy. While the outraged rioters are trying to capture the American diplomats in the embassy, a Marine sergeant at the visa section asks everybody to evacuate but he stresses that Iranian applicants must leave first to save their lives. A Marine captain reminds

his soldiers not to shoot at the protesters and to use tear gas as their last resort. Insisting on saving the lives of the Americans and calming down the protesters, the captain decides to go out and talk to the angry Iranians who get him harshly blindfolded. The chaos in Iran reflected in the sound of gunshots and the incomprehensible Farsi chanting is put in contrast to the beautiful scenes of Washington DC. In the first scenes of the movie, the camera displays narrow Iranian streets packed with angry fanatics. When the action moves to the U.S., a bird's-eye view of Washington DC shows its beautiful streets coloured with yellow ribbons made by American citizens wishing for the safe return of the captives in Iran. This contrast creates feelings of fear over the loss of American liberty, beauty, and humanity at the hands of barbaric Muslims in the Middle East. These Islamophobic sentiments incite Lester, the famous American producer in the movie, to accept the mission of producing a CIA fake movie. It is very ironic that the CIA agent had the idea of a fake science fiction movie that takes place in a bizarre exotic setting after he had watched the 1981 *Planet of the Apes* movie. By analogy, Iran is such a bizarre place which could serve as an ape city inhabited by savage Muslims.

The predominance of American values over Islamic ideologies is also melodramatically stressed by the end of *Argo*. The sophistication and efficiency of the American agent and the escapees overcome the primitive violence of the Iranian revolutionary guards. At Tehran Mehrabad airport, the American diplomats are stopped by the Iranian militant guards for more investigation. The diplomats manage to deceive the Iranians and walk safely to the plane while the guards are ironically shown reading the sketch of the fake movie left behind by the Americans. The desperate defeat of the guards is highlighted near the end of the film when they realize their fault and try in vain to reach the plane before its taking off. This final chase is entirely fictional. Writing the original story for *Wired* magazine, Joshuah Bearman confirms that the flight was in the early morning and there was little military presence at Mehrabad airport. The American diplomats and the CIA agent found their way out of Tehran very smoothly. Adding a fictional chase scene to the movie helps to rejuvenate the film's main premise of the Americans' inevitable victory over vicious Muslims, and to restore the order of American masters and Muslim losers. Like Olivia, the American sacrificial heroine in *Slaves in Algiers* who unites with her family by the end of the play, Tony Mendez returns to his wife and son after successfully accomplishing his mission in Iran. In a very emotional scene, his wife forgives him and meets him with tears and a hug of reunion while the waving American flag makes the background of the scene. The American family unity is finally restored after the anti-American danger is overwhelmed. American values eventually prevail. *Argo*, as Larry Durkay concludes, is more than an entertaining story. When awarded Oscars for Best Motion Picture of the Year, Best Writing, Adapted Screenplay, and Best Achievement in Film Editing, the prize was actually given to "Islamophobia" (Durkay).

3. Islamophobic Muslims: One of Their Own Bore Witness

Islamophobia is given more validity in *Slaves in Algiers* and *Argo* through the portrayal of Islamophobic Muslims who are introduced to be intimidated by their own faith. Islamophobic Muslims show bias against Islamic ideologies and preference for American values and, thereby, they sanction the western representation of Islam. In the aftermath of 9/11, President George W. Bush divided the Islamic world into two categories: The good Muslims who supported the American war on terror, and the bad Muslims who defied America and criticized its transnational wars against terrorism. In his provocative book *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim,* Mahmoud Mamdani delves deep into the history of this categorization and argues that "judgments of 'good' and 'bad' refer to Islamic political identities, not to cultural or religious ones" (15). While both Bush and Mamdani give a political nature to Muslims' profiling, a close scrutiny of the depiction of Muslim characters in *Slaves in Algiers* and *Argo* reveals that the cultural, the religious, and the political are all merged when the Muslim identity is concerned. It also reveals that the categorization is as old as the beginning of America. It is striking, for example, to observe that there are no anti-American good Muslims or pro-American bad Muslims in *Slaves in Algiers* and *Argo*. To be good is to adopt American values and support American causes. To be bad is to do otherwise. This categorization of good and bad Muslims falls within the binary nature of the stereotype which is elaborated by Hall, who writes:

> People who are in any way significantly different from the majority – 'them' rather that 'us' – are frequently exposed to this *binary* form of representation. They seem to be represented through sharply opposed, polarized, binary extremes – good/bad, civilized/primitive, ugly/excessively attractive, repelling-because-different/compelling-because-strange-and-exotic. And they are often required to be *both things at the same time!* (1997b, 229)

In *Slaves in Algiers,* the pro-American good Muslims are given human faces and made overly appealing because they embrace Christian values. The good Muslims are in political alliance with the Christian captives and express antipathy to/towards their fellow Muslims. Zoriana, the dey's daughter, detests her father and tries to help the captives escape their bondage because she is "a Christian in […] heart" (28). Fetnah, Ben Hassan's daughter, is another Islamophobic good Muslim, who has an aversion to the manners of the "Moorish religion" (16), which encourages having "a great many wives at a time" (16). Unlike her father who speaks in heavily accented English, Fetnah is presented to be speaking in sound American English, which makes her look more human than her evil Muslim father. Fetnah was taught by an American captive woman who "came from that land, where virtue in either sex is the only mark of superiority. – She was an American" (17). She wishes to leave the Muslims' "land of captivity" to "the regions of peace and liberty" (47)

because she is fed up with her life at the dey's palace which is inhabited by abhorrent Muslim creatures. The only hope left for Fetnah is to escape to America after marrying a Christian lover. While wandering in the dey's palace garden, she muses:

> If I am forced to remain here much longer, I shall fret myself as old and as ugly as Mustapha. That's no matter, there's nobody here to look at one, but great, black, goggle-ey'd creatures, that are posted here and there to watch us. And when one speaks to them, they shake their frightful heads, and make such a horrid noise – lord, I wish I could run away, but that's impossible; there is no getting over these nasty high walls. I do wish some dear, sweet, Christian man, would fall in love with me, break open the garden gates, and carry me off. […] And take me to that charming place, where there are no bolts and bars; no mutes and guards; no bowstrings and seymetars. (38)

In *Argo*, there is a similar example of the good Muslim stereotype represented in Sahar, the Canadian ambassador's housemaid. Unlike other Muslims in the movie, Sahar is given a name, a character, and a western look. She wears western clothes without a headscarf inside the Canadian ambassador's house and colourful clothes in public (all other Iranian women are presented cloaked in black). Also, her Persian language is subtitled and made comprehensible to western audiences. In one scene, Sahar hides frightened behind her windows in order to escape the sight of revolutionary guards in an alley shooting an Iranian civilian who seems to be anti-Khomeini. When Sahar is approached by the revolutionary guards at the gate of the Canadian house and asked about the ambassadors' guests, she deceives the guards claiming the guests arrived only two days ago and that "everyone in this house is a friend of Iran" (*Argo*). Before the CIA agent Mendez and the American diplomats leave for the airport to escape from Iran, he looks very worried about Sahar and feels relieved only when he knows that she is now on a bus and will be safe. By the end of the movie, Sahar appears at the airport safely leaving Iran to go to another safer place; ironically the neighbouring Republic of Iraq which was an American ally at that time. Evelyn Alsultany terms the depiction of good Muslims in anti-Islamist movies as "simplified complex representations." She argues:

> For example, if a television show or movie is focused on terrorism perpetrated by Arabs or Muslims, then to defuse the stereotype, the production team typically includes some kind of positive representation of an Arab or Muslim, usually a patriotic U.S. citizen or innocent victim of hate crimes. I argue that while this is certainly an improvement over past representations of one-dimensional villains, it is far from ideal since such representations often seem gratuitous, thrown in to appease Arab and Muslim watchdog groups such as CAIR and MPAC as well as those of us who are sick and tired of the same old stereotypes.

Alsultany's argument seems erroneous as the representation of the good Muslim is not meant to defuse the stereotype and to avoid Muslims' criticism. Conversely, the good Muslims are presented as witnesses from within, who prove that Islamophobia is a reality since they bore witness to it. The good Muslims often unite with western powers to eradicate an Islamic danger. In *Slaves in Algiers*, Zoriana and Fetnah unite with Sebastian, a Spanish captive, to rescue the American prisoners. In *Argo*, the American escapees are assisted by Sahar and the Canadian ambassador who helps issue them Canadian passports so that they can escape from Iran. The good Muslim in both *Slaves in Algiers* and *Argo* is integral to the making of the stereotype and the reproduction of Islamophobia. Interestingly, a good Muslim housemaid in *Argo* is historically inaccurate. Comparing the movie to the original story published in *Wired, New Yorker* reviewer Nicholas Thompson notes that "there wasn't a housekeeper tempted to turn the refugees in, though the guests did worry about a gardener." Thompson calls these alterations "historical embroidery," but they are segments of the stereotype which keep it alive, unchanged, simplified, and fixed.

Conclusion

Slaves in Algiers and *Argo* reflect parallel images of Muslims, which could be read within the context of intertextuality. Although *Argo* was produced almost 200 years after *Slaves in Algiers*, the signs, language, and representational practices employed in both works are very similar and serve to stir a sense of fear and denigration of the spatially different Muslim. These Islamophobic attitudes are constructed through anti-Islamic rhetoric that exaggerates Muslims' violence, especially in times of conflict in the Middle East. Islamophobia is a type of racism that divides the world into civilized people and savages, and provides moral and ethical veneers for cultural, political, and military interference in the Islamic world. Based on Aristotle's argument that people think in images, and Hall's theory that the media is responsible for encoding meanings within signs, western viewers are left with fewer other options than consuming Islamophobia as a reality. People like Muley Moloc and the revolutionary guards become sole representatives of Muslims, while tolerant moderate Muslims who constitute the majority of the Islamic world are often neglected by the western media . These representations have many repercussions in the contemporary world, as the media frames Muslims in images of Al Qaeda and ISIS terrorists and reproduces a stock of tyrannous Muslim stereotypes. Ironically enough, ISIS terrorists themselves make use of the Hollywoodish stereotypical images of Muslims to spread fear around the world. Wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and Libya are rationalized as parts of the white man's burden to colonize the savages in order to civilize them. Islamophobia has always been a tool for imperialist expansion and will continue to exist as long as the world is defined and represented through power, authority, dominance, and cultural extremism.

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