



## **Fansubbing and the Perpetuation of Western Popular Culture's Gender and Racial Stereotypes in Arabic**

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### **Abstract**

Television, cinema, pop music, and comic books are great entertainment and educational apparatuses. However, these seemingly harmless mediums are often noxious conduits of destructive ideologies and reality distortion, as they perpetuate negative perceptions of the 'other' and are major sites for power contestation. This paper contributes to the existing works on popular culture by probing the importance of misrepresentation of racial and gender stereotypes in western popular culture and how they are perpetuated in Arabic fan subtitling. Drawing on multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA), compositional film analysis, as well as Roland Barthes' notion of myth, this research lays bare certain dichotomies such as Hollywood's soft power and how it moulds the opinions of its global audience. The focus is on the portrayal of Arab/Muslim men and women and how they are gendered in film and television, and more importantly, how the Arabic subtitled versions perpetuate this misrepresentation on screen.

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## 1. Introduction: The Spectacle of the Other

In the documentary *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, Shaheen (2006) describes the pop-cultural portrayal of Arabs as "a one-dimensional caricature, a cartoon cut-out, used by filmmakers as stick villains and as comic relief". Muslims in general and Arab men and women in particular, have been portrayed, for many decades, as the *Untermensch*. This demeaning stereotyping is deeply rooted in the imperialist mindset and Orientalist misrepresentation of the 'exotic' Middle East, where it is axiomatic that Arab men are seen as wealthy, lustful, decadent, and patriarchal half-wit denizens of the deserts surrounded by a harem of subservient women and belly dancers whose sole purpose in life is to satisfy the man's whims and desires.

In recent years, notably since 9/11, many western media outlets have escalated their accusatory rhetoric against Muslims and Arabs by adding more labels to their dehumanizing repertoire of unfounded allegations; terrorists, fundamentalists, and suicide bombers are but a few newly found maligning attributes. This could also arguably be ascribed to the element of fear of the 'alien other' whose cultural and moral values are in direct conflict with the mainstream worldview of the West; as Esposito (1995) asserts, "Fear of the Green Menace (green being the color of Islam) may well replace that of the Red Menace of world communism" (p. 5), and this was even before the events of 9/11 and the ensued distortion of the Muslim world socio-political realities. He goes on to say that western policymakers, like the media, "have too often proved surprisingly myopic, viewing the Muslim world and Islamic movements as a monolith and seeing them solely in terms of extremism and terrorism" (Esposito, 1995, p. 5). Misrepresentations of Muslim and Arab characters in western media texts are commonly guided by the distorted narrative of Orientalism, which permeates characters with a series of negative tropes and undertones. This lack of discernment and oversight of its broader implications is best carried through the 'entertainment' industry. Hollywood, as America's dynamic soft power, has been the main conduit of such narrative through its depiction of Muslims and Arabs to influence people's opinions and create a hyper-reality to justify the nation's political and/or

military action as and when deemed necessary (the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan and the embargo on certain Muslim countries' citizens to enter the US is a case in point).

Films play a pivotal role in shaping people's opinions and constructing their worldviews as they form a potent multimodal discourse. Foucault (1980) argues that representation becomes part of the recognized discourse and harvests new knowledge about the represented, which could be understood as an exhibition of power by one group over another. It follows that the fabric of the world and its gestalt are couched in a system so closely tied to social and political supremacy, and a basic understanding of this vast fabric requires recourse to history and the genealogy of war and battle. Foucault (1980) asserts that dialectics circumvents "the always open and hazardous reality of conflict by reducing it to a Hegelian skeleton", whereas semiology is but "a way of avoiding its violent, bloody and lethal character by reducing it to the calm Platonic form of language and dialogue" (pp. 114–115). Since power is the force that produces knowledge and discourse, it is crucial to critically examine Hollywood's stereotyping of Muslim and Arab men and women and how such misrepresentation has been perpetuated through audiovisual translation (AVT) into Arabic or through fan subtitling to be more precise, as such perpetuation is an example of how local perceptions of the self and gender relations in the Arab world are easily influenced and controlled.

## 2. One Thousand and One Stereotypes

Drawing on the Foucauldian notion of power and its regulation of discourse and knowledge, Hall (1997) postulates that representation is an inherent component in the constitution of things, seeing that it is what "connects meaning and language to culture" through difference (p. 15). When representations turn into a racialized regime that demarcates the privileged from the oppressed, the acceptable from the pathological, and the civilized from the 'other', that is when it enters the domain of symbolic violence because it is basically the exercise of symbolic power. The West's knowledge about the Arab fits into and is ingrained in the canon of orientalism, which Edward Said (1978/2003) describes as an imbalanced discourse that aims to control, manipulate, incorporate, and expand the fissure between the orient and occident by creating

simulacra that are politically, culturally, intellectually, and morally motivated. What filmic misrepresentations do is turn the exoticism into an aesthetic that mechanically disseminates reductive oriental policy about Arabs in relation to Islam. To this end, not only do Hollywood's narratives market and propagate stereotyping, they also institutionalize prejudice and Islamophobia by generating "misinformed perceptions that have the weight of established facts" (Lester, 2020, p. 109). In fact, Said (1997) confesses his inability "to discover any period in European or American history since the Middle Ages in which Islam was generally discussed or thought about *outside* a framework created by passion, prejudice, and political interests" (p. 24). This statement is hardly surprising since the whole gamut of the orientalist discourse relies on the glorification of western knowledge and forcing the 'third world' to abide by such an imperialistic legacy (Kothari, 1997).

### 3. Once upon a Translation

It is often the case that stock images can percolate through the translation of audiovisual texts and so "contribute greatly to perpetuating certain racial stereotypes, framing ethnic and gender prejudices, and presenting viewers with outdated role models and concepts of *good* and *bad* seen as rigid, diametrically opposed" (Díaz Cintas, 2012, pp. 281–282). For instance, Cortés (2003) posits that exoticism foregrounds untranslatability because the whole terrain of exoticist thought is installed in the etic perspective within which the other is visualized in terms of the familiar. In other words, the fascination with the uncanny "control[s] the metonymic gap between cultures" since it is associated with authoritative knowledge (Cortés, 2003, p. 157). In her study on stereotyping and linguistic variation in dubbing into Italian, Dore (2020) argues that using target-oriented strategies, such as localization, can foster negative stereotypes in the target culture when linguistic profiling is at play. Similarly, Di Giovanni (2007) illustrates how translation can easily turn into a hegemonic site for mediating 'otherness' when the "distorted cultural metonymies are [...] being drawn from a codified repertoire which is shared by the Western world" (p. 101). Hong's (2009) focus on rendering verbal images also corroborates the view of translation as "part of a larger

process of cross-cultural reproduction of images" that ultimately informs stereotyping and the regularisation of cross-cultural reproduction of images (p. 72). It is not untrue that capturing the spirit of the original is integral, but it is also valid to say that recreating the original ethos could feed into the stigma between the narrating self and narrated 'other'. When trying to conciliate cultural differences and mitigate xenophobic ideologies, it is plausible that normalizing strategies are an ideal option since they neutralize prejudices and racist stereotypes (Dore, 2020). Leonardi (2008) bolsters the truism of this claim by asserting that standardization should not be thought of only as nationalistic control, but as "a means of helping the 'others' fit in with the socio-cultural and linguistic community they come in contact with" (p. 170). Although her analysis is dub-focused, she briefly touches upon the foreignizing quality of subtitling, wherein the sense of otherness remains intact in translation by allowing it the freedom to express itself. Leonardi offers a way of rethinking dubbing and subtitling, but either way, it does not repudiate the fact that may it be domestication or foreignization, "any form of audiovisual translation [...] ultimately plays a unique role in developing both national identities and national stereotypes" (Baker & Hochel, 2001, p. 76).

#### 3.1. Fan Subtitling: When Amateurs Take on the Mantle

The foreignizing quality is most perceptible in fan subtitling or fansubbing, which is a pervasive practice in the Arab world. Khalaf et al. (2014) identify amateur subtitlers as "anonymous figures that [*sic*] use nicknames and normally do not adhere to common professional subtitling norms" in a sense, they "revolt against the professional and interventionist norms and conventions" (p. 39). Pérez-González (2014), however, looks at the fansubbers' formal approach from the opposite side of the lens, stipulating that providing the fans with an authentic spectatorial experience is *per se* an interventionist practice as it "seeks to redress the shortage and cultural insensitivity of commercial translations" (p. 17). In another study, Pérez-González (2020) stresses the importance of visual styling and materiality to mirror the aesthetical and pictorial fabric of the audiovisual text, even if it "does not allow for a

smooth reading experience" (p. 174). Nornes (1999) has had previously discussed fansubbing as a form of 'abusive subtitling' that "does not present a foreign divested of its otherness but strives to translate from and within the place of the other by an inventive approach to language use and the steady refusal of rules" (p. 29). On similar lines, Duguid and Thomas-Hunt (2015) suggest that resisting and raising awareness of stereotyping can paradoxically create a norm for stereotyping. In other words, the more a person is exposed to stereotypical behaviors, the more one is inclined to automatically engage with and activate analogous patterns. Accordingly, it is never far from possible that fansubbing can produce a similar effect based on its "daring formal tendencies" (Dwyer, 2012, p. 218).

Being cognizant of the fans' needs, fansubbers keep the foreign cultural references intact to bring the target audience closer to the source text; however, the studies of Eldalees et al. (2007) and Al-Yasin and Rabab'ah (2019) indicate that fansubbers resort to euphemistic equivalents when translating tabooed terms to align with Arab culture norms. Looking at the fan subtitling scene will show a galore of studies tackling English, French, Spanish, Chinese, Italian, and Iranian non-professional subtitling, but a paucity for the English-Arabic language pair. Moreover, scarce as it is, the existing Arabic literature appears to be limited to either delineating errors, comparing professional subtitling with its non-professional counterpart, or focusing on taboo and swear words. However, to my knowledge, no studies have been carried out to evaluate the role fansubs play in the perpetuation of racial and gender stereotypes. To overcome this blind spot, this study examines the portrayal of Arab/Muslim men and women and how they are gendered in film and television, and more importantly, how the Arabic fan-subbed versions perpetuate this misrepresentation on Arab screens and what are its effects on Arab audience. Therefore, the aim is not to delineate the motivations behind a particular choice but rather to probe into the impacts of maintaining the film's sense of otherness.

#### **4. "The Falsely Obvious": Myth Meets Multimodality**

This study leans on compositional film analysis and Roland Barthes' (1957/1991) understanding

of semiotics as elaborated in his *Mythologies*, which will be used to interpret what compositional film analysis finds. Furthermore, a multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) of racial and gender misrepresentation is employed to address how, in addition to the linguistic verbal component, images construe identity by deploying the semiotic features to attain certain discursive goals in a given context. Barthes's idea is that signs operate within a mythological system constructed and made natural by bourgeois ideology and mass culture. His book is crucial in unmasking the mechanics of this nebulous artifice "that creeps into the appearances of daily banalities and tends to define as 'natural' what is not natural at all" (Pezzini, 2017, p. 352). Thus, the notion of 'myth' is a value-bearing form of signification that is defined by the way a message is uttered rather than the object itself: it is a second-order semiological system and a metalanguage where signs are 'parasitically corrupted' by motivation and so are transformed into a new signifying function and meaning. In other words, mythical significations are formulated only after emptying the signs from their denoted properties and refilling them with connoted values, i.e., the cultural message is imprinted on the literal message, the latter which then matures into a supporting system of the symbolic message (Barthes, 1977). As Barthes (1957/1991) writes, "[m]yth hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion" (p. 128). In the cinematic plane, the whole thrust of the Barthesian myth provides an insightful means for mapping the latent semiotic nuances that guide a specific reading, especially since each signifying code is carefully planned within the filmic narrative.

Barthes's semiotic theory is completely in tune with MCDA in that the latter is also concerned with the dynamic interaction of multimodal codes and the unraveling of "buried ideologies in texts, to show how the powerful seek to re-contextualize social practice in their own interests and maintain control over ideology" (Machin, 2016, p. 323). By way of illustration, Machin (2013) introduces the image of a woman in a full Burkha who would, regardless of the impossibility for such an image to be representative of all Muslims, immediately represent 'Muslimness' and be placed within a frame of values, difference, and threat. But

what the image signifies transcends its meaning: Islam is a fundamentalist religion, and the Burkha symbolizes patriarchal oppression (the promotional poster for season four of Showtime's *Homeland* is an exemplary case). According to Chaume (2018), CDA is insightful for understanding how discourse reproduces or resists socio-political inequalities and power abuse, and more so in translation, given that it "can either legitimize or battle current political interpretations of violent conflicts, gender inequalities, power relations, and so on" (2018, p. 52). Therefore, CDA, in one way or another, is concerned with choice: "which information to include or to exclude, what to make explicit or leave implicit, what to foreground or background, what to thematize or unthematize, which categories to draw upon to represent events" (Schäffner & Bassnett, 2010, p. 8). However, what differentiates MCDA from its predecessor is its ability to demystify the distribution of visual cues into meaningful signs and how they participate in the reproduction or contestation of dominant truths, as well as unraveling issues of presence and absence (Jancsary et al., 2016).

### 5. Image and Language Intertwined

Films are orchestrated semiotic systems where the visual and the verbal are subject to ideological framing. What is complex about such cohesion is that the subtitles have to seamlessly become part of this system, interacting with and relying on the information transmitted visually and acoustically without sounding dramatically different (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2014). The fansubs under scrutiny follow a literal approach, but they simultaneously recreate the original stereotypes, which can influence the viewers' perception. Identifying

the type of influence the following fansubs exert can only be speculated for two reasons. First, fan subtitlers are part of tight-knit online communities that have hardly been penetrated. Therefore, subtitling methods and cultural and political dynamics are little known, not to mention their tendency to vary between groups and countries. Second, reception studies are more quality-focused, tending to measure the immersion of the audience using experimental designs (Di Giovanni, 2018; Orrego-Carmona, 2016) or the eye-tracking system (Massidda, 2015).

Dinsey's *Aladdin* (1992) can be taken as an example of how visioning the east is double marred by orientalist imagery and myth-making. The folkloric tale, as Bourenane (2020) clarifies, has no Arabic roots and was added by the French orientalist Antoine Galland in his translation of *One Thousand and One Nights*, which allowed the tale to be reinterpreted without a normative basis. Nonetheless, the 1992 version proved to be the main reference despite its radical and exploitative dimensions. For example, the film uses the oversaturated yellow tint to distinctly distinguish Agrabah as impoverished and unhygienic. Arabic accent is exclusively associated with the film's antagonists (Kazeem, the palace guards, Prince Ahmed, the shop owner who threatened to cut Jasmine's hand off for stealing an apple), which, in turn, pairs Middle East in general and Islam in particular with villainy and barbarism. Lastly, female figures are sexualized and objectified and seen as more likely to wear revealing outfits or the veil as "an erotic prop for American fantasy" (Addison, 1993, p. 10). Table 1 below illustrates how stereotypes are conveyed.

**Table 1**

*Arabs and Villainy in Aladdin (1992)*

Source text	Arabic fansub
1. Kazeem: I had to slit a few throats, but I got it. (00:03:31)	كظيم: اضطررت أن أشق عدة حناجر، لكنني أتيت بها.
2. Razoul: I'll have your hands for a trophy, street rat! Aladdin: All this for a loaf of bread? (00:06:50)	رازول: سوف أعلق بيدك على النصب التذكاري يا فأر الشارع! علاء الدين: كل هذا من أجل رغيف من الخبز؟
3. Guards: Riff raff, street rat, scoundrel! (00:07:54)	حرس السلطان: أرعن، فأر شوارع، وغدا!
4. Prince Ahmed: Out of my way you filthy brats! (00:10:51)	الأمير أحمد: ابتعدا عن طريقي أيها القذران

5. Jafar: I wish to rule as high as sultan! (1:11:00)	جعفر: أريد أن يكون لي سلطات نافذة كالسلطان!
6. Jafar: Well, pussycat, tell me more about myself. (1:16:65)	جعفر: الآن يا قطتي، حدثيني بالمزيد عن نفسي.

After the peddler is introduced, the viewer is immediately met with Jafar and his henchman of a thief, Kazeem, who "had to slit a few throats" to get half of a golden scarab. As example 1 shows, the word-for-word rendition (اضطرت أن أشق عدة حناجر، لكنني حصلت عليها) establishes the trope of the barbaric, evil Arab from the very beginning, and it is the reason why Kazeem was 'less than worthy' to enter the cave. Likewise, in example 2, the royal guards are depicted as fanatic zealots. In this scene, they are chasing after Aladdin for stealing a loaf of bread, and Razoul, the captain of the royal guards, shouts "I'll have your hands for a trophy, street rat!" (سوف أعلق يديك على النصب) (التنكاري يا فأر الشارع). The act of stealing, as per the Islamic jurisprudence, is punished by amputating the offender's hand, albeit applying the penalty is subject to strict conditions and is carried out only after meticulous assessment. However, Aladdin's dismayed response "all this for a loaf of bread?" and the intonation by which the utterance is delivered communicates feelings of censure for the apparent brutality. In addition, keeping the hands "for a trophy" insinuates the Razoul's boastful pride in spilling blood. These introductory scenes set the overall oppositional tones between the virtuous American-accented, clean-shaven Aladdin and the villainous hideous-looking Arabs, thus subliminally demarcating the off-balanced politics of western superiority and oriental inferiority. As examples 3 and 4 demonstrate, Arab characters are also characterised by their use of profane language to reflect their immorality and foul enmity. The guards call Aladdin a "riff raff, street rat, scoundrel" (أرعن، فأر شوارع، وغد) and prince Ahmed is seen

scolding two urchins for obstructing his parade and shouting "out of my way you filthy brats" (ابتعدا عن طريقي أيها الفذران) as he draws his whip. Moreover, Jafar's egoistic wish "to rule as high as sultan" and its translation (أريد أن يكون لي سلطات نافذة كالسلطان) in example 5 reflects the portrayal of the power-crazed, hook-nosed Arab. After being granted his first wish, Jafar enslaves Jasmine and threatens to beat her for refusing to wed him. Soon afterward, Jasmine seductively feigns interest in Jafar as a distraction, and the man thinking his second wish is granted, remarks, "well, pussycat, tell me more about myself" (الآن يا قطتي، حدثيني بالمزيد عن نفسي). Similar to prior examples, example 6 reveals how the synergies between the visual and the verbal are designed to accentuate the stereotypes and blur the viewer's perception using a mixture of myths and symbols; in this case, the objectification of women and the hegemony of masculinity.

Fast forward twenty-seven years later, Guy Ritchie's live-action adaptation has repackaged Disney's outmoded stereotypes anew when it comes to female representation and racial ethnicity, or as Islam and Akter (2020) called it, serving "the old rum in the new bottle" (p. 72). Princess Jasmine, like the rest of the females, is reduced to the passive sex object, a feminine sign representing women as 'not men' and signaling their absence as women (Islam & Akter, 2020). Moreover, Ritchie creates a scene where Jasmine gives a dance performance, and it is, in some sense, the only time she is given agency. This goes to show that women are only noticed and perceived through the body, as Table 2 demonstrates.

**Table 2**  
*The Oppressed Female Figure in Aladdin (2019)*

Source text	Arabic fansub
7. Jafar: Life will be kinder to you, princess, once you accept these traditions and understand it's better for you to be seen and not heard. (00:23:00)	جعفر: ستصبح الحياة أيسر عليك أيتها الأميرة فور أن تتقبلي هذه العادات، وتدركي أن المهم مظهرك لا رأيك.
8. Genie: Heard your princess was hot! Where is she? And that, good people, is why he got all cute and dropped by. (00:58:17)	المارد: سمعت بأن أميرتكم مثيرة، فأين هي؟ ولهذا يا أهل الخير تلتطف ومر بكم.

<p>9. Jasmine: It's a wheel!  Aladdin (as prince Ali): It's...very expensive.  Jasmine: And what do you hope to buy with this expensive?  Aladdin: You!  [...]  Jasmine: Are you suggesting I'm for sale?  Aladdin: Of course!  (01:01:07)</p>	<p>ياسمين: إنها عجلة!  علاء الدين (منتحلاً شخصية الأمير علي): إنها...باهظة الثمن.  ياسمين: وماذا تأمل بأن تشتري بهذا الشيء باهظ الثمن؟  علاء الدين: أنت!  [...]  ياسمين: هل تشير إلى أنني للبيع؟  علاء الدين: بالطبع!</p>
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In example 7, Jafar reminds Jasmine of her peripheral place as traditions entail and that it is "better for [her] to be seen and not heard" (المهم). (مظهرك لا رأيك). The placement of "traditions" in the dialogue implies the rigidity and backwardness of Arabs that it is an inherent part of Arab culture to subjugate and silence women. Examples 8 and 9 correspondingly display how male characters choose the female body over the mind. For example, Genie concludes the exquisite parade of Aladdin with the insulting "heard your princess was hot! where is she?" (سمعت بأن أميرتكم مثيرة، فأين هي؟) and follows it with "and that, good people, is why he got all cute and dropped by" (ولهذا يا أهل) (الخير تطف ومركم). Jasmine's prompt withdrawal from the palace balcony is a clear response to the phallic mentality that views women as a spectacle of and for pleasure: it is only because the princess is "hot" (مثيرة) that Aladdin came to visit. This is blatantly sexist humour disguised as "benign amusement", which can potentially "cultivate distress and harassment for women and to facilitate tolerance of sexism and discriminatory behavior among men" (Woodzicka & Ford, 2010, p. 174). In fact, Jasmine is insulted for the third time when the wooing Aladdin, disguised as prince Ali, presents a very expensive gift to buy her hand in marriage and explicitly confirming that she is, indeed, for sale. What concerns us here is that the subtitles, in trying to maintain the integrity of the original text, not only protracts Hollywood's gender stereotypes about women, but also identifies them as part of the mythical discourse that depicts Arabs as sex-obsessed. Admittedly, 2019 *Aladdin* metaphorically eternalises the myth of the old world instead of building a 'whole new world'. As O'Sullivan (2011) notes, linguistic stereotyping is emblematic of Hollywood's colonial discourse

since "the subtitled speakers appear to be offering confirmation in their 'own' voices of the existing practices that were being attributed to them all along" (p. 132), and because subtitles represent the source dialogue, they tend to reproduce these stereotypes. The result is ironically a self-perpetuating cycle of the antagonistic worlds of the East and the West, with the possibility for Arab viewers, mostly children, to consciously or unconsciously adopt or mimic such discourse. Also, it is important to note that the film falsely projects the idea that all Arabs are Muslims and all Muslims are Arabs. Specifically, the terms 'shah' and 'nabob' in the song "Friend Like Me" blur the cultural lines, and the characters barely speak Arabic, wear Turkish-inspired attire, and dance in an Indian-like style.

Television shows are also a platform where myths are a centripetal force. The Arab/Muslim terrorist stereotype is markedly overexpressed in shows such as *24*, *The West Wing*, *Jack Ryan*, *Homeland*, *Tyrant*, *Sleeper Cell*, and *Bodyguard*. The British drama series *Bodyguard* opens with a slow-burn narrative about a possible threat on a train. At first, terms such as 'Asian' (آسيوي) and 'suicide bomber' (مفجر انتحاري) are used before switching to a more anti-Islamic tone after knowing that the attacker is no other than Nadia, a Muslim woman wearing an explosives vest. Pears (2022) states that *Bodyguard* exploits the constitutive discourse of counter-terrorism and whiteness to devise a redemptive narrative to substantiate British whiteness through the 'war on terror' politics. Relevant to this analysis is Nadia's portrayal at the beginning of the show versus the climactic end, where it is revealed she is the true 'mastermind' behind the attacks. Table 3 displays how the stereotypes are dealt with in translation.

**Table 3***The Terrorist Arab in Bodyguard (2018)*

Source text	Arabic fansub
10. David: The man that was in here before? Is that your husband? [Nadia nods] And your husband wants you to die? You don't have to be a martyr, Nadia. We can deactivate this device, and we can protect you from your husband. (00:11:58)	دايفيد: هل الرجل الذي كان هنا زوجك؟ وزوجك يريدك أن تموتي؟ لا يجب عليك أن تكوني شهيدة. يمكننا إبطال مفعول هذا الجهاز. يمكننا حمايتك من زوجك.
11. David: why would someone you love want you to kill yourself you've been brainwashed. He has, you have, and I know. I was in Afghanistan. (00:13:29)	دايفيد: لم شخص يحبك يريدك أن تقتلي نفسك؟ لقد تم غسل دماغك. هو وأنت وأنا نعلم هذا. كنت في أفغانستان.
12. Female reporter (off-screen): Terrorists armed with a suicide vest boarded the London-bound train just before 9 pm last night. (00:23:43–00:23:56)	مراسلة إخبارية: إرهابيون مسلحون بسترة متفجرة ركبوا القطار قبل التاسعة مساءً الليلة الماضية.
13. Prime minister (off-screen): My government remains resolute in our determination to root out terrorism. (00:24:01)	رئيس الوزراء: حكومتي لا تزال صارمة في إصرارها على اجتزاز الإرهاب.

In the pilot episode, the traumatic ex-soldier and hero of the show, David Budd, encounters the hijab-wearing Nadia on the train and greets her with a perfect 'alsalāmu 'alaykum'. David would not have uttered the Islamic greeting were it not for the hijab, which, in the genre of counter-terrorism shows, amounts to the "construction of a conflated Arab/Muslim "look" in turn supports policies like racial profiling", as Alsultany argues (2012, p. 10). There is, therefore, an ever-present amplification of stereotypes via symbolic imagery, yet here, "the image no longer illustrates the words; it is now the words which, structurally, are parasitic on the image" (Barthes, 1977, p. 25; original emphasis). That is because David's response, "and your husband wants you to die? You don't have to be a martyr, Nadia" (زوجك يريدك أن تموتي؟ لا يجب عليك أن تكوني شهيدة) dialogically re-rationalizes the signs (the hijab and the explosives vest) in line with the clichéd rhetoric about Islam. When Nadia starts to panic, David retorts, "why would someone you love want you to kill yourself? You've been brainwashed". "He has, you have, and I know" (لم شخص يحبك يريدك أن تقتلي نفسك؟ لقد تم غسل دماغك). As examples 10 and 11 exhibit, David's language is revealing: Nadia's husband has manipulated her "to be a martyr" and that the British police, the white saviours, "can protect [her]" from her abusive husband. Moreover, using Afghanistan as the political backdrop to justify that both Nadia and her husband have been "brainwashed" invokes a

discourse on the righteousness of Britain vis-à-vis Muslim radicalism.

After this 20-minute first act, a number of news reports are heard, all of which interpret the failed attack as the work of a "terror cell" (خلية إرهابية) that represents "a new and devastating threat to national security" (تهديداً جديداً مدمراً للأمن) (الوطني). In example 12, Nadia and the husband become "Terrorists armed with a suicide vest" (إرهابيون مسلحون بسترة متفجرة), and in example 13, the prime minister assures that his "government remains resolute in [their] determination to root out terrorism" (حكومتي لا تزال صارمة في إصرارها) (على اجتزاز الإرهاب). The reportage is loaded with pejorative terms that further enact the binary framing between the hostile Muslims and innocent westerners. As far as translation goes, the fan subtitler(s) approach keeps intact the source messages with little to no changes, but at the same time, it could be argued that the faithful rendition is a manifestation of the subtitler(s) desire to shed light on the dialectical complexity of the show in relation to reality. For instance, rendering "to root out terrorism" as (اجتزاز الإرهاب) is indicative of the fan subtitler(s) engagement with the represented political status quo: (اجتزاز) connotes the reassertion of white superiority and innocence by evoking the subtle image of sheep that needs to be shorn. As Mansour (2014) states, amateur subtitlers will sometimes sharpen the semiotic ensemble of audiovisual material to bring to the fore the political multitudes underneath the rigid stereotypes. The emphasis is on educating

the public and allowing them the opportunity to negotiate the on-screen narrative with real-world narratives; to expose the strategies myth-makers use to create racialized images. The

need for this will be more pressing by the end of episode 6, where a reversal in gender roles takes place but with the usual set of stereotypes.

**Table 4**

*Reversal of Stereotypes via Stereotypes in Bodyguard (2018)*

Source text	Arabic fansub
14. Nadia: I built all the bombs. You all saw me as a poor, oppressed Muslim woman. I am an engineer. I am a Jihadi. (01:07:58)	ناديا: أنا صنعت كل المتفجرات، كلكم رأيتوني كامرأة مسكينة مسلمة مضطهدة. أنا مهندسة، أنا جهادية.
15. Nadia: I invented that story [that a man supplied the bomb to her husband] because police sergeant Budd was so eager to believe it. And so stupidly eager to believe me. (01:08:36)	ناديا: اخترعت تلك القصة لأن الرقيب "باد" كان يريد أن يصدقها، وكان سيصدقني بغياء.
16. Rayburn: Why did you conspire with nonbelievers? Nadia: For money. Money to build more bombs and buy more guns and spread the truth to our brothers and sisters throughout the world; so that the world could be convinced that we had put a sword through the heart of the British government. (01:09:16)	رايبرون: لم تتآمري مع غير المؤمنين؟ ناديا: من أجل المال. المال لصنع متفجرات أكثر وشراء أسلحة أكثر، ونشر الحقيقة لإخواننا وأخواتنا حول العالم. ليعلم العالم بأننا طعنا قلب الحكومة البريطانية.
17. Nadia: But look how I have atoned. I have helped the cause a thousand times more. (01:09:39)	ناديا: ولكن انظري كيف كثرت عن خطئي، ساعدت القضية بعشرات الأضعاف.

Table 4 contours the drastic reframing of Nadia as hyper-aggressive and hostile, which is another manipulative technique to indoctrinate misrepresentations. As seen in examples 14 and 15, the brazen Nadia finally 'drops the act' and confesses with an air of power, "I built all the bombs. You all saw me as a poor, oppressed Muslim woman. I am an engineer. I am a Jihadi" (أنا صنعت كل المتفجرات، كلكم رأيتوني كامرأة) (مسكينة مسلمة مضطهدة. أنا مهندسة، أنا جهادية). The fan subtitles succeed in projecting the authoritative transformation, but more notably, the underlying agenda of incriminating Islam and turning jihad into a synonym for terrorism and violence. In addition, she answers with "because police sergeant Budd was so eager to believe it. And so stupidly eager to believe me" (لأن الرقيب "باد" كان يريد أن يصدقها، وكان سيصدقني) (بغياء) when asked why she fabricated the story of the bomb supplier. Preserving the repetition of "eager to believe" in the target text highlights the polemical representation of Muslims as egoistic, arrogant, dishonest, and untrustworthy. The final revelation in example 16 comes as no surprise as it furthers the already established tropes. Nadia's ulterior motive behind conspiring with nonbelievers is "for money,

money to build more bombs and buy more guns and spread the truth to our brothers and sisters throughout the world. So that the world could be convinced that we had put a sword through the heart of the British government" (من أجل) (المال. المال لصنع متفجرات أكثر وشراء أسلحة أكثر، ونشر الحقيقة لإخواننا وأخواتنا حول العالم. ليعلم العالم بأننا طعنا قلب الحكومة البريطانية). The utterance joins a conglomerate of tropes to fuel political polarisation. Terms like "money", "guns", "bombs", "truth" and "sword" create a chain of negative associations that, at the core, aim to embellish the British self-image and reposition the white hero on the 'good side'. The subtitles reproduce the same binary ideologies, yet, using the verb "طعنا" (stabbed) in lieu of "put a sword" captures the emotive hostility the show is attempting to disseminate. This is also evident in example 17, in which "but look how I have atoned. I have helped the cause a thousand times more" has been subtitled as (ولكن انظري كيف كثرت عن خطئي، ساعدت القضية) (بعشرات الأضعاف). Interestingly, connecting Nadia's idea of atonement with "cause" (القضية) recalls Budd's story of redemption and reclamation. The translation preserved the opposition and contrast between the characters,

and indeed fan subtitling may be accused of perpetuating stereotypes; however, it is consequential also to consider the responsibility of the viewer and their willingness to critically digest or overlook the underlying sentiments of televised information.

## 6. Concluding Remarks: The Truth Lies in the Lies

Hollywood's depictions of Muslims and Arabs continue to repeat the formulaic thinking that reinforces feelings of stigma. The discussion revealed that Arab fan subtitlers would replicate the original language in translation to encompass the cultural and religio-political inferences in relation to the images in a step to uncover the interplay between visual and acoustic sign systems and to show how Hollywood truly represents the 'other'. It is fair to say that both channels carried equal weight in misrepresenting Muslims and Arabs, and because the written text has to match what is seen on screen to a certain degree, the subtitlers may have played a part in the promotion of western stereotypes. Nonetheless, in doing so, they were also able to direct the attention towards misrepresentations and world politics. Despite the exigent need for further research with larger corpora, this paper offered fruitful insights on the role of fansubbing in perpetuating racial and gender stereotypes, which could contribute to the existing works on popular culture and amateur subtitling.

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