

Views from the Other Side: Arabic Filmmakers on the War in the Middle East

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Abstract

The public fervor that swept the United States in the wake of the attacks on September 11th and led to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq began to waiver between 2004 and 2005 and would start to turn against the war in 2006. Cinema produced in the United States that appraised the war largely reflected the public mindset. Early cinema was decidedly pro-war. In 2004 and 2005, there was an increase in films debating the war. The number of domestic films that challenged the status quo during this period outnumbered those supporting the war by a 2:1 margin. If Arabic films released in the United States are included, those films challenging the status quo rose to a 3:1 margin. It is argued that the Arabic films played a significant role in inflaming the public's attitude toward the war in Iraq. Once Hollywood perceived a fictional market for films that challenged the ongoing war(s) and began to release fictive features in some number, there was no longer a need to import Arabic films. Arabic filmmakers played a key role at a critical juncture in offering a perspective that has now gained wider attention. The present analysis examines what these films contributed to the debate.

Americans were from the outset widely supportive of the incursion into Afghanistan because of bin Laden's culpability in the September 11th attacks, as well as the invasion of Iraq since the administration laid part of the blame for the September 11th attacks at the feet of Saddam Hussein: 85 percent of the American public supported military action against Afghanistan following the attack on the World Trade Center, and just shy of 80 percent felt sending troops into Iraq was justified (Rampton and Stanber, 2003).

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This did not change markedly in 2004 in the wake of the Abu Ghraib scandal or after the 9/11 Commission Report later that same year which concluded that there was no collaborative relationship between Iraq and al-Qaeda and that there was no evidence Iraq was in any way involved in the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center. Despite all this, the administration's "battle cry" clamor that followed in the wake of 9/11 remained consistently shrill throughout 2004-2005. Both the president and vice president relied on their symbolic capital to claim privileged insights. Symbolic capital, like economic capital, accumulates over time with privileged access to resources. The administration dismissed the Commission Report by bluntly stating commission members were not privy to the same inside information that they had access to and that the Abu Ghraib abuses were isolated incidents committed by errant individuals and were not sanctioned by either the administration or by upper-echelon military personnel.

The public appears to have accepted the administration's explanation, given Bush's sweeping 2004 reelection. The administration's symbolic capital remained strong at least until 2006, at which time support for the war began to turn as the body count mounted and the wars raged on with no end in sight. Public support for the war shifted in 2006 when for the first time more people (50 percent) were in favor of withdrawing troops from Iraq than supported (44 percent) keeping troops there (Pew, 2006). By 2010, support for the war had dramatically eroded: a *Newsweek* poll showed only 36 percent of Americans were in favor of the war in Iraq, while a *USA Today/Gallup Poll*, also conducted in 2010, appraised attitudes toward the war in Afghanistan and found that only 42 percent were in favor of the war.

For the most part, cinematic treatment of the war reflected the public's attitude toward the wars. The outpouring of early films, mostly documentaries, such as *Uncle Saddam* (2002), *Saddam's Bombmaker* (2003), and *The Hunt for Osama bin Laden* (2004), clearly cast the two leaders in an nefarious light, deserving to be removed from power.ⁱ Other films, such as *21 Days to Baghdad* (2003), glorified the spectacle of war and paraded America's military might in "taking" Baghdad and removing the Taliban from power.ⁱⁱ Still other films, such as *Gunner Palace* and *Operation: Dreamland*, tended to present the troops in a positive light: military personnel doing the best job they could in a climate that was overtly hostile to their presence. Dissenting voices were heard, of course. *Uncovered: The War in Iraq* (2003) was among the first to challenge the status quo by alleging the Bush administration misled the public about Saddam having Weapons of Mass Destruction.

This was followed by Michael Moore's vituperative attack on the war in *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004). As the debate intensified in the public arena, more films appeared that challenged the status quo.ⁱⁱⁱ One body of later films (2006-2010) revolved around the Abu Ghraib scandal,^{iv} while another group of films took a closer look at the toll the war had taken on those serving.^v Arabic filmmakers, quite understandably, looked at events in the Middle East much differently than the face that the American public was exposed to on the nightly news or in domestic cinema. As domestic films began to churn out films that attacked the war after 2006, Arabic films all but disappeared from the American market.^{vi}

The present analysis examines Arabic films released in the United States during this critical two year period (2004-2005) to ascertain how they informed the American public about facets of the war Americans had not to that point seen in domestic cinema. The contention is that exposure of American viewers to an alternative point of view at a crucial point in time helped inflame animosity toward the war in progress and served as a catalyst to changing attitudes toward the war that would subsequently be taken up by the domestic film industry once the shift in attitudes became entrenched.

Quasi Foreign Documentaries

Films about the Iraq invasion that are made by Arabic filmmakers residing in the Middle East, as will be shown in the next section, look at the war from a distinct perspective. There is, however, a group of films that are here labeled "quasi foreign" because they *seem* to be made from the Arabic perspective, but are interpreted through a distinctly Westernized frame. The first is *Voices of Iraq* (2004) that, while it purports to document the everyday events of Iraqis going about their business, and is filmed by Iraqis, is nevertheless edited with an American hand. The other three, *About Baghdad* (2004) and *Return to the Land of Wonders* (2004), are made by expatriate Iraqis whose films reflect their contemporary Western ties while simultaneously capturing their Iraqi roots. The most successful film to capture the Arabic perspective in the "quasi" category is *Control Room* (2004) which is accorded the rarified honor of being in the top ten grossing political documentaries released in the United States. It is made by the Egyptian-American director, Jehane Noujaim, who was also responsible for the successful documentary *Startup.com* (2001).

The viewer is emphatically told in the opening of *Voices of Iraq* that it is “filmed and directed” by the Iraqi people. It is certainly filmed by Iraqis. One hundred and fifty lightweight video cameras were dispensed to Iraqi civilians who passed them along to more than 2,000 Iraqis; this resulted in 450 hours of videotapes that were edited down to an 85 minute film. The preponderance of happy, smiling faces, however, jar with the devastation and anger that most other films, American and foreign, depict. The disgruntlement is there, just not the anger. One says, “The Americans did good things for us. They kicked Saddam out...but I didn’t know it was going to be like this. It’s a miserable situation;” another complains that there is “No stability, no safety [now]. Wish [we] had Saddam back.” Despite these sporadic “outbursts” that dot the film, the overall “feel” is appreciative of the U.S. presence, which recognizes that if the United States pulls out now, the future is bleak. Besides, one Iraqi says, “Americans have helped Iraqi children by rebuilding schools.” This is stated over the smiling countenance of school children; no reference is made to the fact that Americans are rebuilding schools they destroyed. The “they love us” depictions far outweigh the sporadic discontentment of a few isolated Iraqis. There are also a disproportionate number of Kurds in this movie, which gives it a positive turn since the Kurds were persecuted under Hussein’s regime and directly benefited from the American invasion.

The film, more than most in the foreign category, dwells on the nefarious rule of Saddam Hussein. This reinforces the reason for the invasion. Its success is clear. The viewer sees a television clip of Saddam being pulled from his hole, then an Iraqi male is asked how he reacted when he saw this on television; “I danced like this,” he says and then shows how wildly he danced at the news. Another is asked about the Abu Ghraib scandal. We’re told it is inconsequential: “I was personally tortured much worse,” one says; another comments that America’s torture, compared to what took place under the former regime, is a “nice kind of torture.”

There were charges when this film was released that it was covertly funded by the conservative right (Turvey, 2008). Turvey alludes to this but goes on to point out that these charges were never substantiated, because, he writes, there is no evidence “that the footage is in any way inauthentic.” Turvey is no doubt correct—the footage *is* authentic; however, this does not mean it was not skillfully edited to present a flattering face of a happy, free people. Turvey is also right that the film depicts a less triumphal celebratory mood and is more one of cautious optimism, but that is in keeping with the post-invasion depiction of Iraq fostered by the Bush administration.

It also reflects the mindset of an occupied people, for if one cannot hope that the future is going to be better, one can become terribly despondent. Cautious optimism is a classic response of the occupied to the occupier.

In the final analysis, *Voices* is of two worlds. It is the honest view of some Iraqis. It purports to be balanced by giving the negative along with the positive. But it is also the view that Americans want to see. In this sense, it is an American film, painstakingly edited to promote a point of view. Its ultimate goal is to show a variation of “mission accomplished.” The war is not over, but things are improving. American troops are still there, but it is necessary for them to be there, and most Iraqis, even though they might wish the Americans gone, are appreciative of that fact. This point is made clear by the multitude of smiling faces studded throughout this film. The mood is slightly darker in the other two films made by Iraqi expatriates returning home, but the sense of cautious optimism pervades them both.

Maysoon Pachachi follows her diplomatic Iraqi father, Adnan Muzahim Amin al-Pachachi, home in *Return to the Land of Wanders*. Adnan al-Pachachi spent most of his years under Baathist rule in exile. He returned home as part of the Iraqi Governing Council in July 2003 to help write the new Iraqi constitution. His daughter attempts to capture his journey on film. It is not particularly successful, despite Maysoon Pachachi’s cinematic credentials: she graduated from the London Film School and has numerous television credits.

The problem is not so much with the filmmaking as the subject matter. Filming a diplomat—unless he happens to be particularly colorful (see *Fidel*, 2002, 2009; *Che*, 2005, 2008; *Michael Collins*, 1996)—is a tad boring: we see him sitting at his desk staring off into space, thinking, sifting through papers, amiably chatting with other committee members. This is disappointing because her eighty-year-old father is a vociferous critic of United States policy and a key Iraqi insider in the emerging Iraqi government. None of this is truly captured on film. The director appears to realize that her subject is not particularly cinematic, so intersperses the “home video” segments with tours of Baghdad that often deteriorate into better-business-bureau outtakes and childhood remembrance sequences: the blue-doomed Iraqi monument to soldiers killed in the eight-year war with Iran is seen from a long-lens shot; the ancient

Persian palace outside Baghdad that was built in the third century and where she fondly remembers family picnics; the market where she once shopped as a little girl. She laments the changes that have taken place. However, the changes owe as much to the thirty-five years she has been away than the consequences of the American occupation. Her tour of Baghdad does show some of the more problematic aspects of the city: a man's story of his false imprisonment at Abu Ghraib by American troops; a woman's anguish over her husband who has been missing for fourteen years; a car backfire that resulted in a friend's death because American military personnel mistook the sound for a bomb and opened fire on the driver. These stories are inter-cut with the tedium of her father's diplomatic pondering and a better-business-bureau tour of the city so in the end, the "man on the street" stories do not come off as successful as they do in *About Baghdad*.

About Baghdad is a collage of interviews that took place three months after the fall of Saddam Hussein. It is produced and directed by InCounterProductions, which, it is learned at the film's conclusion, is comprised of Arabic expatriates, who are all affiliated with American Universities. The issue is not with the filmmakers' academic credentials but the fact that they are the "talking heads" that appear throughout the film. Since their identification is not made evident until the end of the film, the viewer watches the film under the impression that, when they appear on camera in the film, they are Iraqi nationals living and working in Iraq.

Unlike *Land*, this film focuses on how "the man on the street" in Iraq views current conditions. Its singular focus makes it more successful than *Land* in accomplishing its stated goal: "The structure of this film reflects the disquieting chaos and violent disorder that has engulfed the lives of Iraqis and fractured their space and psychic." The people who are interviewed generally perceive the removal of Saddam Hussein by the Americans in a positive light; they also largely agree that nothing has really changed. The American armed forces have simply replaced Saddam: it is they who are responsible for the bombing of the city, the looting of the Academy of Fine Arts (seen) and the Iraqi national museum (mentioned), as well as equipment shortages at the hospital and the high unemployment rate. These "issues" are all related to the central motif of the film—the widespread animosity toward the continued occupation and the everyday person's desire for Iraq to achieve self-rule: "Americans liberated us, and we thank them...but Saddam Hussein is gone. Now we want to rule ourselves." In this, the film deftly succeeds.

Iraqis want freedom in more than name only and their bitterness at their disempowerment ekes through: "This is occupation, not freedom," says one; another complains that George W. Bush "didn't bring security [as promised];" while still another complains, "Where is the democracy?" It's just been one endless series of events, says another: "sanctions, war, [now] occupation." Some of the fault is shared, however, with other Muslim countries: "Who's at fault?" ponders one old man, in a verbal sidebar, "Saddam [first and foremost] but also other Arab and Muslim countries that could at least have severed diplomatic ties with Saddam Hussein." Still, the "shock and awe" that destroyed sections of Iraq is exacerbated by America's post-invasion "cordon and sweep" policies: the indiscriminate arrests of Iraqi civilians without the due process Adnan al-Pachachi insisted be a vital part of the new Iraqi constitution in *Land*—he was talking as much about the tyrannical rule of Saddam as he was the Americans, a point made much more cogent in *About Baghdad*.

The Iraqi's view of the prevalent "cordon and sweep" policies is distinctly different from those films that depict the soldier's views of the night raids of private homes. Videos taken by military personnel inevitably show cordon and sweep tactics as a key means to stopping the insurrection and saving American lives. The Iraqi view of cordon and sweep goes a long way in explaining the strong sense of outrage many Iraqis feel toward the continued presence of coalition forces: kicking in doors, wresting unarmed men to the ground, hooding and removing people in the middle of the night for no apparent (or explained) reason. It is not just that Iraq is an occupied country, it is how the occupying coalition forces behave that raises the ire of Iraqis and stimulates their desire for self rule.

In the end, however, this anger is tempered because the film is framed in such a way that the destruction of Iraq that is frequently mentioned is offset by the camera tour of the city at the end of the film, which shows as many prosperous, thriving sections as there are destroyed ones. Indeed, the number of thriving sections is curious so soon after the war, and considering the lament of Iraqi citizens, tends to undercut their complaint of just how bad things are in Iraq under the American occupation. The way this is accomplished suggests the producers are aiming to please two markets.

Iraqis watching this film would have their views of self rule vindicated, while Americans watching the film would take their complaint with a grain of salt, sagely nodding in agreement with the American soldier who says, “[I’ve] never met anyone who complained [about our presence]. They always say thank you for being here. When you’re not [patrolling], they’re afraid.”

Control Room provides a unique journalistic perspective on the war in Iraq. It focuses on how Al Jazeera covered the war in Iraq from its onset until the fall of Baghdad. The Doha, Qatar, headquarters of the Arabic media outlet did not provide it any advantage. Like the legions of other media, the Arabic network was confined to the media compound at Central Command (CentCom) in Doha. In fact, the title does not refer as much to the room from which Al Jazeera reported on the war but to the control room at CentCom. In this, it is as much about the problem the media had gaining access to information as the problem Al Jazeera faced in reporting the war. This is shown clearly in the “house of cards” scene in the film, where the journalists at CentCom are shown the infamous deck of cards at a briefing but were not allowed to have access to and inspect the cards. Al Jazeera reports on the widespread media disgust at how journalists are being denied critical information and not allowed to do their job.

Control Room is not about the media, however; it is about how Al Jazeera, speaking from the Arabic perspective, reports events. This perspective is like nothing seen on American television. It still was not an acknowledged perspective a year after the war was declared over when the film was released in the United States, a few weeks prior to the debut of *Fahrenheit 9/11*. This is why numerous reviewers applauded the film. Ty Burr (2004) at the *Boston Globe*, for example, finds the film refreshing, and likens it to “an open window that sucks the smog out of the room.” This distinct perspective, and the generally positive reviews, helped nudge *Control Room* into the coveted “top 10” spot of political grossing documentaries, and is one of only of a small handful of films in the top ten to be inhabited by someone other than Michael Moore. Al Jazeera’s perspective, however, is anything but “impersonal,” as A.O. Scott (2004) reports in the *New York Times*. There is a definite “agenda” in the presentation of information at Al Jazeera. It may not be as overbearing or blatant as the news reported by some of the other networks; nevertheless, a strong undercurrent flows through the verbal reporting and pictorial depiction of events.

Al Jazeera's view of events was widely criticized by the President and members of his administration. Donald Rumsfeld is seen stating in *Control Room* that "Al Jazeera [is] pounding the people in the [Middle East] day after day with things that are not true, which is what they do." The clip then flits to a montage of American soldiers shoving "innocent" people to the ground. It might have been more provocative to insert, after Rumsfeld's self-serving statement, a clip of Fox News "pounding the people in the [United States] day after day with things that are not true, which is what they do."

Just as American news sees events from an American lens, Al Jazeera views events from an Arabic one. Like any news program, it must keep its audience in mind when reporting the news. This is clearly seen on Fox, which caters to a right-wing conservative audience, and thus cast the news in a similar format (see *Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalism*, 2004); this is also seen on CNN and BBC, which has a more liberal-leaning audience and so interprets events to "cater" to them (Kaplan, 2009). This does not mean that the news outlet overtly manipulates the news to kowtow to its audience. It is done much more subtly than this, as Herbert Gans (1979) showed some time ago in his landmark media study, *Deciding What's News*. Media organizations lean toward a liberal or conservative orientation. Journalists hired by the organizations are hired because they "fit," which means they have a conservative or liberal slant on how things unfold, so when they do a story, they tend to see things from their pre-existing perspective. The same holds for Al Jazeera: they cater to an Arabic audience but their journalists are also fellow Arabs who see things from the Arabic perspective and thus interpret events thorough an Arabic lens. Reporting on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is one instance of how this is done. Kaplan (2009: 56) finds that whenever Al Jazeera covers the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, its reports clearly side with the Palestinians, as is obvious from the "tear-jerking features about the suffering of the Palestinians [which is] not matched with equal coverage of the Israeli human terrain."

The Arabic slant should not be surprising. The network was born in 1996 after the Saudi government forced the closing of the BBC's World Service Arabic language television station because of censorship demands. This is the reason Al Jazeera, which means, appropriately, "the island," is located in Qatar's capital.

Its independent status is a driving force behind its phenomenal success: many Arabs see it as more trustworthy than other government controlled Middle East media outlets (see El-Nawawy, 2003). As an independent source of news for the “person on the street,” Al Jazeera sees its mission to present the plight of the “masses:” the weak and oppressed people throughout the Middle East (Kaplan, 2009; Rushing, 2007).

Despite its Arabic bias, Al Jazeera presents a view of the world that Westerners are seldom exposed to and goes to some length to report stories with some depth.^{vii} It also attempts to provide a balanced portrait. This is accomplished in *Control Room* in a scene where Samir Khader, a senior producer for Al Jazeera, berates a journalist for arranging an interview with an American academic critical of the war. “This is [a] news [program],” he snaps, “[we] want balance. [It’s] not an opinion show.”

Many reviewers cite this segment of the film to underscore its impartiality. Roger Ebert (2004a) says that *Control Room* is a film that for the most part is “just watching and listening” in the best cinéma vérité style of filmmaking (see also Stamets, 2004; Scott, 2004). The truth, however, is distinctly Arabic, which is one reason the film *is* refreshing—it’s a point of view that Westerners are seldom exposed to and *not* heard in the public domain in the United States until this film was released. It does not seem as pronounced or unique a decade later, but it was a stunning and refreshing perspective for liberals in 2004.

Control Room unfolds around three independent but interrelated stories. One, already noted, focuses on the media in general. Al Jazeera is in the same boat as American journalists. The American “connection” is strong but subtle. The key players are mostly Western educated and speak fluent English, Samir Khader, a senior producer at Al Jazeera, grabs the [American] audience’s attention when he admits that despite everything else, if he were offered a job in the United States, even if it were at Fox News, he’d take it without a moment’s hesitation. This jarring admission is one Americans would appreciate, but so too would many in less developed countries: America is, despite everything, the land of opportunity and the place the place many dream of living (see *Sin Nombre*, 2009; *Goodbye Solo*, 2008; *Brick Lane*, 2007; *Amreeka*, 2009). Khader is being hyperbolic, however. Fox is not going to hire him because he is so ideologically disparate and he knows that the ideological gulf is precisely why he will never be offered a job at Fox. This is very disingenuously done.

Another key player in the film is the journalist, Hassan Ibrahim. One of his roles is to dot the film with witticism. At the start of the war Ibrahim is in front of the television watching the war at Al Jazeera. The staff is stunned as they watch what is taking place and Ibrahim nicely, and quite succulently, sums up the perspective of those watching the start of the war: "Wow! Democracy!" he says, shaking his head in stunned near silence as bombs burst in the air over Baghdad. In another segment, while watching American troops patrolling the city and stopping to shake hands with the locals, he adapts the song "Yankee Doodle Dandy" to contemporary Iraqi exigencies: "Yankee Doodle went to town/Riding there on Sunday/Found some people living there/Killed them all by Monday." Later he laughs at a report shown on the BBC. "It was the funniest report ever," he says, referring to a reporter who was surrounded by a group of kids' chanting against Bush, "but he didn't know Arabic. He hears the name Bush [and reports], 'I'm surrounded by a bunch of children cheering President Bush'...They were [really] a bunch of kids cursing Bush."

The film is not really about what is taking place 700 miles away in Baghdad. It is how what was happening was debated in the offices of Al Jazeera in Doha. Ibrahim's sarcastic witticisms serve to underscore the film's second storyline—how Al Jazeera provides insights into events not covered by the mainstream media. In this, it was quite successful. We watch the fall of Saddam Hussein's statue on television in reel time^{viii} with Al Jazeera staffers, who are quick to notice that "It was a media show...[the people in the square] "weren't Iraqi; I can recognize an Iraqi accent." They were also quick to see that the camera angle was a tight shot and that there were not many people gathered to topple Saddam's statue. Later, staffers point out as they watch people looting the banks and burning money that they were not Iraqi but Kurds and that they were doing this because the "Kurds are using a completely different monetary system...[so what we're seeing: Kurds burning Iraqi money] is meaningless."

Ibrahim is also central to the third storyline in *Control Room*, the conversion of Lt. Josh Rushing. Rushing was the Marine press officer for CentCom at the time of the invasion of Iraq. As might be expected, Rushing is the idealist young Marine who believes 110 percent in the "party line." He has all the passionate naiveté of Harrison Carter MacWhite^{ix} (Marlon Brando) in *The Ugly American* (1963). In one early exchange, Ibrahim asks him, "When? When did Saddam Hussein threaten to use weapons of mass destruction?"

"He had the will," answers Rushing. In a subsequent exchange, Ibrahim accuses the Americans of "bombing the hell out of Baghdad." Rushing rejoins that "We have the most precision munitions in the world." Ibrahim persists: "You're killing civilians." "Nothing," rejoins Rushing with a metaphorical wave of the hand, "compared to the carpet bombing of Germany; the carpet bombing of Tokyo." Ibrahim trumps him: "[The] bombing of Dresden was before the days of television. Since Vietnam, the picture has changed. And now in [the] Arab world...see massacres in Palestine and how people are butchered [sic]...the idea of another Arab capital occupied is really fueling [a lot] of anger." By the end of the film, Rushing is often found siding with the Arabic perspective. He's come around. His cinematic conversion was not appreciated by his superiors who reassigned him and prohibited from talking to the press when the film was released in 2004, which is why, when his tour of duty was up, he resigned his commission. His conversion is now complete: he is presently working for Al Jazeera English.

Rushing's conversion is a parable for the film's intent: the conversion of the viewer. It is not, as many have reported, a neutral story where the camera simply records events. Jehane Noujaim, the film's skillful director, uses her lens quite incisively. Her camera shows certain events and not others. In doing this, she tells a story about the war that reflects the view toward the United States that is widespread, though by no mean ubiquitous, in the Middle East. This would make the film appealing to the Arabic market. She does this in such a way, however, so the film does not alienate American viewers. Marketing a film to tap two widely disparate audiences is no mean feat. The critical assessment of the attack by the United States is there—still thin in the public sphere in 2004—but the fault lies not with the "warmongering" American people, so much as it does the contrivances of the Bush administration, a point that was starting to "play" in the United States around this time (see *Uncovered*, 2003, 2004; *Why We Fight*, 2003; *Fahrenheit 9/11*, 2004). Noujaim further manages to promote Al Jazeera's view as "even handed" in two other ways. First, one storyline revolves around the media and how they (not just Al Jazeera) are being kept from accurately reporting on the war. The second way this is done is by showing Lt. Rushing slowly being won over as the "facts" are laid out for him in the best dialectical tradition. Rushing could have been excised from the film. He is there because he plays a pivotal role. Had the film only examined Al Jazeera's perspective, it could have been too easily dismissed as one-sided, which would open it up to Rumsfeld's charges that it is overly propagandistic.

Had it come off as less “even handed,” it would have not endeared itself to critics and mostly likely would not have achieved its top 10 grossing status.

Foreign Films

The purpose of a documentary is to inform the viewer about a slice of the world with which they might otherwise be unfamiliar. But if one is immersed in that world, documentaries are not likely to garner particular interest.^x This is why the quasi films released in the United States appealed to American viewers—they depict the unfamiliar. This explains why there are only two foreign documentaries—Iraqis know what is happening to them. One is *Boy of Baghdad*, the other is *Dream of Sparrows*. *Boy of Baghdad* falls flat while *Dream of Sparrows* is only somewhat more successful because of its meandering style. The foreign fictive features appear to have been more successful with a dual Arab/American audience.

While documentaries are meant to inform, feature fictional films are made to entertain. This does not preclude their heuristic value. It is simply a matter of emphasis: documentaries inform while they entertain; fictional films entertain while they inform.

The other films in this section are fictional films. Other than the fictive features that depict events revolving around the attacks that took place on American soil,^{xi} there have only been a handful of fictive feature films: *Osama* (2003),^{xii} the HBO special *House of Saddam* (2008), the low-budget, adventure yarn *Fire Over Afghanistan* (2004), and *The War Within* (2005), the first film to address the consequences of rendition. Here fictive features move to the foreground. They are particularly informative for Western eyes because, while the story entertains, it provides insights into the Arabic mind that the other, domestic films have failed to achieve. Their fictional framework also makes them less overtly didactic than the documentary format, and this tends to make them more palatable to an American audience.

Documentary Films

One documentary, *Boy of Baghdad* (2004), was never theatrically released in the United States but it is available on DVD and accessible at most film rental outlets.

The film lingers over the innocent, doe-eyed expression of a twelve-year-old boy, Kheer Allah, as he goes about his daily business. The film purports to show “the chaos of Najaf and Falluja;” it is not particularly successful for a number of reasons, but mainly because 1) the markets and places that are seen are in no way chaotic, and 2) the young man’s poverty is no worse than many in this part of the world who lack education and skills. In this, it is no more or less successful than any of the quasi films critiqued in the last section of this chapter. The other documentaries are more successful because they present a distinctly different perspective of the unfolding war in Iraq.

Dream of Sparrows is a first-time documentary by Iraqi filmmaker Hyder Mousa Daffar, who subsequently went on to make *Sadar City Soccer* (2007). Daffar prefaces the film by saying he is one man with one camera who is just looking for the truth (see *Man with a Movie Camera*, 1929). He tells us an opening story about a man whose wife is giving birth, and who, unable to find anyone to assist, delivers the baby himself. The child is held up crying; the mother dies in childbirth. Daffar explicates the connection: “This movie is what happened to the child...to the new Iraq.” The title suggests this with the use of sparrows. Birds are often revered in Islamic literature, and in Sufi tradition represent the soul’s journey to a better world (the heavenly kingdom). At least that’s the dream.

The main accomplishment of *Dream’s* otherwise hodgepodge of unrelated events is to present a fairly balanced portrait of the mixed emotions the Iraqi people have toward Saddam Hussein and America’s intervention. The first scene sets the tone. A number of people are seen gathered in a public area watching Saddam’s capture on television. Happiness is expressed by many; at the same time, others express their disbelief and laud Saddam as their savior. Shortly thereafter, a girl’s school is visited where one girl says, “I drew this [pleasant scene] because I feel safe now;” others, however, are drawing pictures of planes and bombs. In a later extended scene, the views of two former military men who served under Saddam are juxtaposed. One says Saddam was never a threat and deplors the number of innocent people killed by the Americans, “who invaded against all international laws,” while the other talks about how bad Saddam was and thanks the United States “for saving us from Saddam.” The tenuous balance the director has maintained throughout is film slips away toward the end.

After bemoaning the stupidity of the IEDs taking place throughout the city, which kills 14 Iraqi civilians for every American soldier who loses his life, the viewer is treated to a concluding scene that depicts the death of an Iraqi by Americans. Sa'ad Fakher, an associate producer for the film, was driving into "Area 55" when the Iraqi police (for some reason) opened fire on his vehicle; Sa'ad sped away in the opposite direction into the American sector where American troops, thinking the careening car might be a suicide bomber, opened fire. We are told he was hit "only" 15 to 20 times before he was taken to a hospital where he died, but his car, shown in a still shot, was riddled with 122 bullet holes. The director, looking slightly crazed in a sleeveless, ribbed undershirt, then launches into a long diatribe: "Baghdad! Baghdad is hell, really hell, and you in New York...a paradise, no Osama bin Laden, no Saddam Hussein...[everyone here] all happy Saddam Hussein gone [but] nothing new...more explosions. U.S. troops very hard hearted. Cowboys, like Clint Eastwood." Fade to black over the concluding crawl, "In loving memory of Sa'ad Fakher," who is shown in a still photograph, smiling at the camera, strumming the guitar that he loved to play.

Foreign Fictive Features

Turtles Can Fly is a fictional film made by the Kurdish director, Bahman Gholbadi, who also did *Marooned in Iraq* (2002)^{xiii} and *A Time for Drunken Horses* (2000). The film is much more effective in depicting events in Iraq than *Dream of Sparrows*, in part because Gholbadi is a more seasoned filmmaker, and in part because he is not foregrounded and lets the film speak for itself.

The main character is a thirteen-year-old boy whose given name is Soran, though everyone knows him as Satellite because he installs satellites for the villagers in northern Kurdistan. It is a few weeks before the American invasion of Iraq. Satellite is the go-to guy. The elders, on those occasions when they creep into the film, depend on him to set up their televisions and to organize his adoring band of boys to clear mines from their land. He is always charmingly boastful. Soon, Satellite tells an old man, the Americans will be coming. "Who are Americans?" asks the old man. "Have you seen the movie *Titanic*, Washington, San Francisco, Bruce Lee, Zinedine Zidane?" The old man retorts that Zinedine Zidane is not American. No, Satellite says, "he's French and a Muslim and I know him well."^{xiv}

In another scene, an elder asks him what George W. Bush, who appears on television, is saying. "Rain tomorrow," he says, flaunting his linguist (in)abilities, though, in a way, he is figuratively accurate.

The central motif of *Turtles Can Fly* is the landmines that litter the Kurdish countryside. These were obviously put there by Saddam Hussein but America is complicit, since they provided them. This point is subtly made when Satellite tells his ragged-tagged team to collect only the American mines, not the Italian ones, because American mines are "better," which is why they bring a bigger bounty. The landmines certainly are effective. Most of the boys are missing limbs from their efforts to collect them. Nevertheless, it is their only source of income so they eagerly volunteer for the dangerous tasks Satellite dispenses, even if, as one elder says of the boys Satellite assigns him, "half of them don't have hands."

To keep the endless tromping through the minefields from growing tedious, the director introduces three key characters that play off of Satellite. One is the young girl Turtle, whose given name, Agrin, is only mentioned in passing. She is shown in the opening of the film standing suicidally atop a cliff looking down into the mists below. Her face is not seen, so we don't immediately recognize her when she wanders into Satellite's sphere of influence. Satellite is immediately attracted to her youthful beauty: "I've been looking for a girl like you for years." She does not return his affection and remains distant throughout the film. Later, in a flashback, we understand her aloofness: she was gang raped by Saddam's soldiers who plundered and massacred those in her village. She is accompanied by her armless brother, Hangao. Despite his apparent handicap, Hangao is quiet competent: he is shown disarming mines with his teeth. He and Satellite are often at odds and in one scene after an argument, Hangao lowers his head and rams into Satellite, bleeding his nose. As Hangao wanders off, Satellite yells at him from the ground, "I'll cut off your legs [next time]." The third character is a rather large blind baby, Riega, that Turtle often carries on her back; he appears to be about two years of age and besides his physical handicap, appears to be mentally challenged. He is a bastard. Turtle is "responsible" for him because his parents have been killed in the massacre that took place in her village, though Roger Ebert (2009), reviewing the movie for the *Chicago Tribune*, suggests the baby might be her own, the product of her sexual molestation. In either case, Riega is a burden to Turtle, who ultimately abandons him. She ties him to a tree before going off to kill herself, wiping a tear from her eyes as she leaves him behind. His fate too is sealed: he breaks free of the rope and stomps around in a midfield.

Satellite futilely tries to rescue him. A bomb goes off and the screen goes dark, then we see Satellite being carried to an elders' tent for care, his foot wrapped in a bloody bandage. In a closing shot, Hangao goes to the top of the cliff and, using his teeth, picks the shoes his sister left behind when she jumped to her death. He gives the shoes to Pashow, Satellite's crippled friend, and we watch as the Satellite and Pashow gimp into the sunset.

Turtle is a very effective movie of the hardships, and resilience, children face in wartime, and the devastation Saddam reign had on the Kurds. It remains a moot point whether the war that is commencing as the film comes to a close will bring any changes. It is certainly a disturbing movie, and the director would be pleased it rocked the world of a number of viewers. One lay Netflix reviewer wrote that it "is one of the most upsetting films I've seen;" another commented that the "movie is heartbreaking, especially if you are a parent with young children...[And] although the film was very well done, it is a gut wrenching tale that leaves you with a very ugly feeling." It is too bad that in order to get the movie's taste out of one reviewer's mouth the couple had to cleanse their palate by watching "the movie *Ratatouille* in order to get to sleep due to the disturbing images [in *Turtle*]."

It is fitting to conclude this section with two films that assess the suicide bomber. One is *Paradise Now* (2005), written and directed by Hany Abu-Assad. This film is about two Palestinian young men who are recruited in the war against Israel. Typically, this movie would not be included since it does not specifically address the war in Iraq. But the topic does. It arises in most of the domestic films that address combat forces in Iraq. Just about every documentary that follows soldier's patrolling the streets of Iraq touches on the issue, as do most films that delineate the plight of journalists covering the war. It is raised by Benigni in *Tiger and the Snow* (2005) and is a subject that reoccurs in subsequent films, such as *The Kingdom* (2007). It was the central motif of *The War Within*. In *The War Within*, however, the motivation driving Hassan, the suicide bomber, is his anger at having been unjustly imprisoned and brutally tortured. This is an understandable motivation, but it is too simplistic. Many suicide bombers are never tortured. *Paradise Now* provides a closer, more nuanced look at the motivation for those recruited to be suicide bombers (see also *Gaza Strip*, 2002). The other film, *Making of* (2007), is made by the Tunisian filmmaker, Nouri Bouzi, and is one of the few foreign fictive features to appear in the United States after 2005. It too assesses the suicide bomber from an Arabic perspective.

This film, more than *Paradise Now*, relates to the central theme of this paper: how the Iraqi war is viewed by other Arabs.

The theme ties these two movies together. They also depict the suicide bomber in a similar vein. In *Paradise Now*, two young men, Said and Khaled, are just hanging around. They are young twenty-something car mechanics who don't really care about their job and go off and lounge about on a grassy knoll overlooking the city where they waste away their time listlessly sharing a hokum and listening to music.

As young men are

want to do, one teases the other about Suha, an attractive Palestine female who has recently returned to her homeland from France: “[I] think she likes you!” Bahta (Lofti Edbelli), the twenty-something central character in *Making of*, is a breakdancer by “profession;” at least that is how he looks at what he does when he is hanging out with his peers, which is most of the time (see *La Haine*, 1995). He too has limited goals and life chances. This is implicit in *Paradise Now*, but explicitly made in *Making of*. Bahta has dropped out of school and his only real goal is to get smuggled into France, where he seems to think the good life will somehow magically occur. The result is a lot of posturing, tough-guy stances, which underlies the central motif of his life: his struggle with his identity. In one scene, reminiscent of Rene Descartes famous philosophical dictum, *Cogito ergo sum* (“I think, therefore I am”), Bahta screams into the night, “Bahta exists, Bahta dances, [therefore] I’m a man.”

Poverty and the futility of existence for young men^{xv} with limited life opportunity is popularly believed to be the driving force behind their “conversion” to terrorist suicide networks and has been perpetuated in public addresses by such luminaries as the Dalai Lama, Bishop Desmond Tutu, Secretary of State Colin Powell, and Elie Wiesel when he accepted the Nobel Peace Prize in 2001. Both filmmakers perpetuate this spurious belief, which is challenged by a growing body of contemporary research.

The suicide bomber is much more likely to be an educated individual with some university training and twice as likely as the indigenous population to be established in a job that has some life-potential (Berrebi, 2007; Hassan, 2008).

In short, they are anything but the crazed religious fanatics that have nothing going for them. Indeed, their educational achievement vis-à-vis the wider popular explains their success. Berrebi (2007) offers a number of reasons why education is positively correlated with suicide bombers: 1) educated individuals are better equipped to understand moral and religious justifications invoked by terrorist groups; 2) educated individuals may be more aware of social barriers and restrictions that block their advancement in a closed society that poor individuals don't even know exist; and 3) poorer individuals are more likely to be preoccupied with daily matters and devote less attention to militant struggles. To Berrebi's list, we might add that they are more likely than less educated individuals to be capable of accomplishing their "mission."

People with limited education are not as likely to be versed in weaponry or have the skills necessary to carry through with their intentions. The failure rate of successful bombings in Afghanistan underscore the need for competent (i.e., educated) suicide bombers. In Afghanistan, at least through 2005 when Taliban insurgents relied on local recruits, the number of individuals killed by the suicide bomber was practically non-existent. This is because most were rural farmers with limited education who, in fact, were often severely mentally impaired or physically handicapped, and more often than not ended their lives by setting off their vest before they reached their target (Williams, 2008). This is not the case in many other areas of the Middle East and where suicide bombers are much more successful in accomplishing their nihilistic goals precisely because they are educated: Hassan's (2008) study of 250 terrorists found *none* were uneducated, desperately poor, or simple minded, while Russell and Miler's profile of the modern urban terrorist found two-thirds to have had some university training, or be university graduated or postgraduate students. Education seems to be necessary because suicide bombings are based on rationale, cost-benefit decisions. Hafez (2006, 2007) calculates that conventional military tactics in the Palestinian-occupied territories resulted in an average of one Israel causality for every twelve Palestinians killed, while suicide bombings within Israel's 1948 borders yielded nine Israeli deaths per martyr. "Outsiders" may look at the act as irrational, but it is clearly a rationale decision for those committed to the cause.

These flaws aside, the films generally paint a fairly accurate picture of the suicide bomber. They do tend to be younger, unmarried males who live in urban areas.

Both films also accurately rectify two popular misperceptions linked to the suicide bomber. All three protagonists are “normal” individuals and none are particularly religious. The anti-heroes in both films may be misguided and misunderstood youth, but they are clearly everyday people (see *Rebel Without a Cause*, 1955; *Easy Rider*, 1969; *Clerks*, 1994). Nor is religion a key motivating factor for joining the terrorist organization, just as it is *not* a major factor for most terrorists.^{xvi} Fundamentalist zealots may use religion as a motivating tool, but their hook is often the offer of an embracing sense of community for socially alienated individuals as a restorative for the humiliation they and their countrymen have suffered at the hands of the occupier. This is the “selling point” for the young recruits in both these films. In *Paradise Now* Said and Khaled are told that they need to stand up to Israel because it is “an answer to injustice...there is no other way to fight it.

Israel continues to confiscate [our] land, Judizing Jerusalem and carrying out ethnic cleansing.” America is complicit with Israel: “They use their war machine and their political and economic might to force us to accept their solution.” This same “pitch” is made to Bahta in *Making of*. He is given a tape to watch that depicts the massacres that “began in Sabra and Chatila.” He then sees bombs bursting over Baghdad, followed by the planes hitting the World Trade Center, as if, in the order it is presented, the WTC attack was in response to the attack on Baghdad. A picture of Osama bin Laden follows, saying, “The only way to rid ourselves is by Jihad...and suicide bombs. A free man refuses to be dominated.” The recruiter reinforces the taped message the next day when he sees Bahta: “[The West] imposes its point of view on us. They sacked our land and humiliate us....”

This focus on how these young men and their countrymen have been humiliated by the occupier is a quintessential feature of Arabic society that has been characterized as a shame society (Patai, 2009). Honor and shame are two sides of the same coin. Honor is connected to one’s public face (*wajh*) which, Patai (2009: 101-112) argues, a man will attempt to preserve even if he has committed a dishonorable act. This is because appearances are everything. Shame, not guilt—which is an internal state of consciousness—motivates Arabs to preserve one’s honor. The shame of being “conquered” pressures Arabs to act honorably, which in this case means that they must do something to preserve the shame of being subjugated.

One course of public face-saving is to “attack” the person (government) that has shamed them, even if it means taking their own life.

This is as important, if not more important, than obtaining some coveted benefit in the hereafter. Religion, then, might be used as a pretext to recruit individuals to “the cause,” be it Hamas or al-Quada, but the specific goal is secular: to coerce occupying forces to make significant political and territorial concessions. Westerners may dismiss this as an idealistic goal, but it does sometimes work. In 4 of 7 cases that culminated in 186 suicide attacks that took 5,587 lives that Pape studied, four (Lebanon, West Bank, Sri Lanka, and Turkey) resulted in partial or complete withdrawal of occupying forces with the remaining three (Chechnya, Kashmir, and Saudi Arabia) goals to force withdrawal still ongoing. Atran (2006) argues that converts to “the cause” will continue to take place not only because Iraq is occupied by a foreign power but because of the people’s moral outrage at what took place at Abu Ghraib prison, as well as the often apparent random search-and-seizure activities that regularly occur.^{xvii} At least one of the three protagonists in these two films accepts this honorific pretext and accomplishes what he sets out to do.

Both films are well made and equally deserving of viewing. They are solid dramatic stories that attempt to show how young men are recruited and why they might be “duped” into sacrificing their life in such a way. The directors of both films are Muslim Arabs. As such, they attempt to portray something that is too often fobbed off by Westerners as the antics of crazy people.

Despite their common theme, the directors tell different stories, in different ways, and with different endings. Bouzi’s film, *Meeting of*, is enhanced by a traditional narrative device that is seldom used in dramatic cinema, and this, in itself, makes it particularly effective—the narrative aside. Bahta, the central character in *Making of*, is being “seduced” by a fundamentalist who preys on the young man’s search for identity, his need to belong. During a “conversion” sequence well into the film, the lead character, Lofti Edbelli, suddenly stops in the middle of the scene and walks off the set. Cameras continue to roll and the viewer sees cameramen and crew standing around. Lofti demands to see the director. He will not tolerate the fundamentalist character demeaning his dancing. He admonishes the director: “He attacked dancing. I am a dancer [in real life]...Who are you [director] to forbid dancing?” “Calm down,” the director tells him...It’s [the character’s] opinion, not mine.” Others involved with the film encourage him to resume filming. “I’m gong home,” Lofti says. In the end, the director is able to convince him to return to the set, though not without resignedly murmuring, “I think this will be my last film.”

The film suddenly resumes where it was interrupted. A similar incident reoccurs slightly later in the film. Lofti storms off the set demanding to see the director: "I'm Muslim. You're using me in this film to attack the Muslims." This time we have a lengthy statement to Lofti made by the director that is important to quote at length because what he is doing is explaining his Muslim point of view to the audience in case they don't pick it up from the film itself.

"I read the Qur'an before doing this film," the director tells Lofti, "in Arabic and French. Sufi [another character] can find what he needs in it, peace and love. If someone wants war, he'll find the verses that suit him. In my opinion, Islam was useful in its time. Nowadays, we should be secular. Love the Qur'an as a belief, not a tool to resolve our daily problems...I want to show how a young person can be brainwashed. That's why I'm doing this film...I am not anti-Islam, I am anti-terrorism...I accept the struggle against occupation...Trust me!"

Part of the bonus material is an interview with the director, Nouri Bouzid. The interviewer asks him "what everyone wants to know" and that is whether this was done purposely. It is an unnecessary question since there was no "cut" when either of these scenes occurred and the cameraman followed the "asides" in a continuous take. Bouzid curiously prefaces his answers by first remarking that we need to appreciate that all Tunisian films receive 30 percent of their funding from the government. He then goes on to answer the question in the affirmative. This "link" to the Tunisian government would suggest that the government felt the film needed to somehow make the point clear that the film was not attacking the Muslim religion. It was no doubt left to the director as to how to do this and he was quick to accept this solution, which was offered by Lofti. The director himself later says in the interview that the film deals with this "hair trigger" issue rather subtly. The "asides," then, are a way to deflect any potential "misreading" of the film as an attack on the Qur'an or Tunisians religious beliefs.

In *Making of*, Bahta dies at the end. His conflict is obvious—to do or not to do. He has the vest and visits his mother one last time, telling her that "God has chosen me." The mother refutes the fundamentalist's earlier pitch that all mothers want their sons to die martyrs; she tries to stop him, saying, "You're crazy...You want to kill people." Bahta is then seen roaming the street with the armed vest strapped to his chest.

He sees one of his recruiters walking by and attacks him, throwing him to the ground and repeatedly striking him, screaming, "Don't you want to be a martyr with me?" The police arrive and Bahta flees. He is seen eluding the police at the docks, jumping from cargo container, to cargo container. In a long shot, we see him fall into (or between) one of the containers and the bomb explodes. Fin!

In *Paradise Now*, many of the same recruiting techniques take place. The ending is different, however, as is the camaraderie between the two protagonists. In *Making of*, the protagonist is clearly a conflicted, socially isolated individual. Such a person is obviously at risk of being induced to join an organization that promises a sense of belonging and identity: in an early scene, the fundamentalist recruiter gives Bahta some money, to which Bahta says, "No one has ever done that to me before."^{xviii} *Paradise Now* portrays a more common social characteristic: 68 to 75 percent of those who join a terrorist organization are prompted to do so because of friendship bonds with someone in the group or because of a family tie (Sageman, 2004).

Said and Khaled are long time friends who join the group together because they do things together and this seemed a good idea at the time. The strength of friendship bonds are made clear in a scene where they are separated after being fitted with their vests. The recruiters think Said might have been captured and betrayed them. Khaled emphatically denies this would happen and "has to find" him because he might accidentally discharge his vest. They remain together to the very end. At least until the final scene where Khaled, whose had a change of mind—"Suha is right. [We] won't win this way"—tries to talk Said out of finalizing his intentions. Knowing Khaled won't take no for an answer, Said agrees not to go forward, but after Khaled gets into the car that is going to return home after dropping them off to proceed to their target, Said tells to drive to "Go." As the car speeds away, Khaled looks back tearfully at his friend through the rearview window, knowing he'll never see him again. The movie concludes soon after with Said standing on a crowded bus, his hand on the trigger in his pocket. A close up shot of his face, then the crowded bus, then back to his face, and darkness!

Roger Ebert (2004b) made some positive comments about the movie but was wistful because he would like to finally see a movie about a suicide bomber who is not religiously motivated, factiously closing his column on the movie by saying, "When higher powers are evoked to justify death on both sides of a dispute, does heaven [really] send four [sic] angels?" The point is that the two young men are not particularly religious and even the scene that Ebert cites where one asks "What happens?" after you die, and is told "Two angels pick you up," misses the distinctly unreligious way this is conveyed as the dialogue continues: "Are you sure?" "Absolutely!" Matter resolved! Not really. It is not taken as a serious answer by the character in the film, nor was it meant to be a serious answer. Indeed, it is not religion that motivates Said to ultimately take his life and the lives of those around him; it was his humiliation. He completed his task, unlike Khaled who abandoned it, because, unlike Khaled, his father was unjustly killed as an Israeli collaborator when Said was 10, and Said has had to endure the shame and humiliating of this, he tells us repeatedly, his whole life.

Both films leave one big hole—the silence! The end result of their intended acts. By focusing on the bomber, the victims are forgotten. Even when Said touches the trigger in his pocket on the packed bus, we forget the innocent men and women who are about to lose their lives, and feel pity not for them but for Said. The focus in *Paradise Now* is on the tragedy of Said's lost life. It is important that the viewer appreciate that the suicide bombers are just ordinary people and not the stereotypically crazed fanatic. But the "humanism" of the bomber denies the horrors that are committed.

Conclusion

Arabic films released in the American market appear to have met a warm reception. *Control Room's* ranking clearly indicates its success, and while many of the other Arabic films may not be similarly ranked, sales figures and continued DVD rental access would support the contention that they had some appeal (see Box Office Mojo; The Numbers). Arabic documentaries were embraced by an American audience because they presented a face of the war that was not seen at the time in American films. Domestic documentaries began to turn a more critical lens on the war after 2005 subverting the need to import Arabic films to tell the story.^{xix} The same holds with Arabic fictional films. These films were particularly successful with the American public because the fictive format appeals to the American filmgoer.

Since there was a dearth of fictive features about the war at the time, Arabic movies filled a critical niche. Once Hollywood perceived a fictional market for films that challenged the ongoing war(s) and began to release fictive features in some number, there was no longer a need to import Arabic films.^{xx} Arabic filmmakers, however, played a key role at a critical juncture in offering a perspective that has now gained wider attention.

Notes

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1. Seven films appeared between 2002 and 2005 that focused on Saddam besides Uncle Saddam and Saddam's Bombmaker. The others were Marooned in Iraq (2002), We Got Him: Capturing Saddam (2004), Buried in the Sand (2004), WMD: Weapons of Mass Destruction (2004) and Ace in the Hole (2005); three more appeared after this period: Saddam's Secret Tunnels (2007), America at a Crossroads: The Trial of Saddam Hussein (2008), and the HBO fictive feature House of Saddam (2008). There were three early films about Osama bin Laden besides The Hunt for Osama bin Laden. The others two were Meeting Osama bin Laden (2004) and Osama bin Laden: In the Name of Allah (2004). After 2005 another six films appeared that directly or indirectly dealt with bin Laden: Our Own Private bin Laden (2006), Triple Cross: bin Laden's Spy in America (2006), The al-Qaeda File (2006), Targeted: Osama bin Laden (2007), The Search for Osama bin Laden (2008), and Where in the World is Osama bin Laden? (2008).
 2. Wings Over Afghanistan (2004) did much the same in critiquing the war in Afghanistan by appraising the marvels of American technological sophistication in routing the Taliban.
 3. There were nine films that challenged the status quo and five that supported the war effort. Films challenging the status quo outnumbered those supporting the war by a 2:1 margin.
 4. Films assailing the Abu Ghraib scandal include The Prisoner, or How I Planned to Kill Tony Blair (2006), My Country, My Country (2006), Ghosts of Abu Ghraib (2007), and Standard Operating Procedure (2007). Three other films assessed the prison situation in Guantanamo: Road to Guantanamo (2006), Taxi to the Dark Side (2007) and The Oath (2010). When these films are added to the mix of the others challenging the status quo, the margin of film challenging the status quo outnumbered those supporting the war by a 3:1 margin.
 5. Among the films in this category are Between Iraq and a Hard Place (2006), Home Front (2006), The Short Life of Jose Antino Gutierrez (2006), Operation Homecoming: Writing the Wartime Experience (2007), Soldiers of Consciousness (2007), and Body of War (2007).
 6. There were only a handful of fictive features before 2006. In 2006, 4 appeared: Home of the Brave, The Insurgents, Southland Tales, and Cavite. Over the next few years 23 fictive features would directly assail aspects of the war in Iraq.
 7. Al Jazeera often devotes 15-minutes or more to a story. An "in-depth" story on any of the nightly news in the United States runs about two minutes and seldom exceeds five.
 8. Reel time is used purposefully since the film, which depicts events in March 2003, was not released until 2004.

9. The name is even more telling today. The Mac (Mc) part of MacWhite[ness]'s name conveys a banalization and massification of consumer products—fast food—and services—education, religion, government—in American society that characterizes the growing preponderance of trite, low quality products and services that are enthusiastically embraced by the public. The “Mc”ification of society was evident, but nowhere near as prevalent, when Lederer and Berdick wrote the novel in 1958.

10. Films about American troops in Iraq were successful in the United States because while the war was regularly reported on in the news, the documentaries gave insight into aspects of the war people in the country had not been exposed to in any detail, so it was “interesting” to “learn” about things going on “over there.”

11. This would include films such as *United 93* and *Flight 93*, as well as Oliver Stone's *World Trade Center*.

12. It should be pointed out that this well-done Japanese film is not about Osama bin Laden but a young girl who, because there are no surviving males in the family, must pass for a boy in order to obtain work in Taliban controlled Afghanistan. She chooses the common name Osama.

13. *Marooned in Iraq* was released in 2002. Saddam's atrocities are recognized in the film but its main purpose, apparent in the cinematography but made explicit by the director in an interview, is to acquaint the viewer with the beauty of northern Iraq. “The story,” Ghodadi tells us, “is just an excuse to take the audience around and show them the different corners of Kurdistan.” The film is not critiqued in any detail because the body of the film is more of a travelogue than a critique of Saddam's treatment of the Kurds, even though this is raised quite explicitly near the end of the film.

14. Zidane was born in France (1972) of Algeria parents. He is a retired world-cup football player. The fact that *Satellite* feels it necessary to tell the old man (the audience) who Zidane is suggests the film is made with an American market in view since Americans do not closely follow soccer and are unlikely to know who Zidane is.

15. One of the “silences” in these films is the failure to depict the increase number of females who are joining the ranks of suicide bombers. This silence may simply be that the phenomena is fairly recent, but it is clear that not only are the numbers growing but that the motivation for becoming a suicide bomber is much different for women (Jacques and Taylor, 2008; Speckhard, 2008).

16. In Pape's (2005) study, the leading instigator of suicide attacks between 1990 and 2001 were committed by the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, a radical nationalist group whose members are from Hindu families but are adamantly opposed to religion.

17. Films depicting military personnel in Iraq, such as *Gunner Palace*, often show them raiding homes in the middle of the night and roughly handling the locals. The grunts do not appear to realize how “intrusive” this behavior is to Iraqis. Even General McChrystal, the top NATO commander in Afghanistan, was surprised to learn that bursting into people's homes in the middle of the night might not be appreciated by some. In 2009, he ordered that such raids be stopped: “We didn't understand what a cultural line it was.”

18. Shortly thereafter, and with this scene still fresh in the audience's mind, we learn that there are strings attached to the money. Bahta is informed that he has to do what he's told because “I gave you money.”

19. *Nice Bombs* (2006) is one of the few quasi-foreign films made after 2005. It was made by a young, inexperienced Iraqi-American filmmaker whose meandering style keeps the film from telling a coherent story. James Langley's *Iraq in Fragments* (2006) may be similarly "meandering" but its fragments are purposely shaped and the film succeeds in telling the story of Iraqi "issues" much more successfully than *Nice Bombs*.

20. This is called unsated demand and was found by Markert (1987, 1985) in his study of the romance publishing industry. It was widely believed prior to 1980 that Harlequin was THE publisher of romance novels and American publishers largely abandoned the field. But Harlequin never changed its rather chaste themes even as the sexual revolution swept across North America. Because Harlequin was still selling their chaste novels, the editors felt that this type of novel was what the reader wanted—since they were reading them. A demand was there for more "sensual" novels, however, and when tiny Dell Publishing released what have since been duped "bodice-rippers (so called because the heroine had her bodice ripped off by the hero) and profits soared, the demand for more sensual romances, previously unsated, took off and changed romance publishing forever.

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