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Hostile Relations: Representing Arabs and Muslims in Historically Based War Films

APPROVED BY
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:

Karin G. Wilkins

Blake R. Atwood
Hostile Relations: Representing Arabs and Muslims in Historically Based War Films

by

Samuel Ross Belcher, B.A.

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to all of the impactful teachers that have guided me throughout my education, the most important of which are my parents, who first challenged me to think critically, and who still challenge and inspire me today.
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Abstract

Hostile Relations: Representing Arabs and Muslims in Historically Based War Films

Samuel Ross Belcher, M.A.
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Supervisor: Karin G. Wilkins

This thesis seeks to expand previous research on representations of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood cinema by analyzing how recent historically based war films represent the aforementioned populations in their retelling of history. Drawing inspiration from Stuart Hall’s (1980) theory of encoding and decoding, as well as Marcia Landy’s (1996) writing on historically based film, this study inductively analyzes both the manner of retelling history and the encoding of Arabs and Muslims across multiple themes, namely: Space, Characterization, Violence, Language, and Civilians. In applying this lens to the films American Sniper (2014), 13 Hours (2016), Whiskey Tango Foxtrot (2016), and War Dogs (2016) a tendency to vilify, silence, and simplify Arabs and Muslims emerges. To provide context, the study utilizes work by scholars like Jack Shaheen (2001; 2008) and Evelyn Alsutany (2012) that previously documented representational methods for Arabs and Muslims. This thesis also places these films in conversation with the academic discourse on politics of fear and media framing to reveal a greater significance from their retelling of history, given the importance of politics of fear to the
political decisions surrounding the historical context of each film. By reanimating these stories with generally negative and reductive representations of Arabs and Muslims, and asserting the importance and necessity of US military action, these films validate the politics of fear process, further entrenching the xenophobia attributed to Arabs and Muslims. While War Dogs challenges these ideas, at times, significant trends develop across the films to justify this reading.
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Chapter 1: Politics of Fear and Representation

Few groups of people garner the level of antagonism in the United States, today, as Arabs and Muslims. United States actions post-9/11 in the War on Terror explain this to an extent, but the vilification does not start at the turn of the 21st century. Many monumental studies, like Edward Said’s Orientalism (1978) and Jack Shaheen’s Reel Bad Arabs (2001) illuminate the tradition of defining both Arabs and Muslims, even to the point of conflating the two identities. These two studies carry an important link surrounding their ideas of this manufactured antagonism. Mainly, that the understanding of Arab and Muslim identity in Western culture grows from a multifaceted alignment of representations across politics and cultural production.

The illogical conflation of Arabs and Muslims reflects the general misunderstanding of the two in Western, and more specifically, American society. 9/11 serves as a moment of change, where the dominant identity in the conflation transitioned from Arab to Muslims. Reporting on the Oklahoma City bombing quickly assumed a connection to Arab terrorism, just as the reporting on perpetrations of mass violence often assume Islamic terrorism. Attacks on mosques, Muslims, and unrelated groups, like Sikhs, after acts of domestic terrorism demonstrate the power of this historical vilification. Additionally, the protesting of Arabic classes in schools demonstrates action upon misinformed beliefs about the relation between Islamic fundamentalism and Arabs and Muslims as a whole. The mass media serve as a major actor in perpetrating this misconception through reiteration of language and ideas forwarded by political sources. Scholars define this echo chamber effect as politics of fear, which allows political actors, as a trusted news source, to shape the public opinion on Arabs and Muslims.
While news media carry significant weight, television shows and film offer similar opportunities to shape and perpetuate particular perspectives on Arabs and Muslims. The selling of the Iraq War, as a product, serves as a prime example of politics of fear in action. However, if popular culture productions based on true stories then encode a dominant meaning onto their events, they too can play into this echo chamber. Justifying the Iraq War by instilling fear of Arabs and Muslims, then representing the war in a historically based film that validates that fear, reinforces the prejudices developed by politics of fear. Therefore, this thesis analyzes the ways that films telling stories intricately connected to politics of fear act within the system of politics of fear.

Recently, a number of films set in moments that revolve around politics of fear discourses emerged. Among them, American Sniper (2014), 13 Hours: The Secret Soldiers of Benghazi (2016), Whiskey Tango Foxtrot (2016), and War Dogs (2016) are some of the most recent. By inhabiting the space between the factual version of their events and fictional narrative films of similar ilk, these films become important texts, and the meanings they develop through their representations of Arabs and Muslims require investigation. While only American Sniper achieved significant box office success, each draws its inspiration from and advertises itself as a true story. Their factuality allows for the corroboration of meanings between the dominant cultural understanding of Arabs and Muslims, constructed in politics of fear discourse, and the preferred meanings developed by the films. How, then, do these films represent the history on which they base themselves? How do the representations of Arabs and Muslims, and the meanings developed through them, reflect or contrast the previous research on representational study? Does the comedic focus of Whiskey Tango Foxtrot and War Dogs, or the combat focus of American Sniper and 13 Hours, alter the way they represent Arabs and Muslims? Answering these questions reveals any correlation between politics of fear and
these films, and may aid in illuminating why the conflation of Arabs and Muslims has endured.

**Literature Review**

Deconstructing the durability of the Arab and Muslim conflation, as a symptom of a larger lack of knowledge about these identities, requires explanation of the forces that work to perpetuate the misunderstanding. Dominant opinion in the United States has, historically, tended to advance a biased perception of Arabs and Muslims, based upon cross-platform harmonization of the cultural difference between these groups, from a self-defined, Western culture. As a result of the War on Terror, this conversation garnered additional attention, given that Arab and Muslim were two identities often targeted politically, journalistically, and socially. This framing began before the advent of the War on Terror, as Edward Said’s (1997) *Covering Islam* raises the issue before these Bush era policies. He argues, “that the mere use of the label “Islam,” either to explain or indiscriminately condemn “Islam,” actually ends up becoming a form of attack” (1997, p. xv-xvi). The way that the name “Islam” becomes interpreted then causes growing animosity between the “self-appointed spokespersons,” in Said’s (1997) words, for each side.

Vilification of the word Islam does not only affect dialogue, but stems from different spheres of influence. Susan Akram (2002), among others, highlights two of the major sources of this demonization: intentional misinformation and institutionalized racism in the government, and xenophobia fed by media and film. While these function as sources, they also influence the evolving prejudice towards Muslims. Akram argues that legislation like the Patriot Act not only lead to the unjust arrest or detaining of Arabs
and Muslims, but that through their application these government policies legitimize the assumed connection between Arabs and Muslims and terrorism (2002, p. 84).

Media’s role in this process amplifies and legitimates the abuses made possible by this kind of legislation. Scholars, like David Altheide, who study the relationship between fear, political policy, and the media, agree that a process called politics of fear exists, in which political decision making, media reporting, and audience perception of threat form an inter-related discourse (2006, p. 416). The process then allows for the previously stated harmonization to affect real political change based on the fear presented to the public by allowing Akram’s (2002) factors to work together to a similar goal. Traditional news media function as the dominant mechanism through which politics of fear operates. In addition, Jacqui Ewart et al. define this method of coverage as framing, which uses agenda setting to dictate the dominant image of Arabs and Muslims (2014, p. 6). However, entertainment media acts in concert with this selective coverage, as Evelyn Alsultany (2012a) argues. The filtering of “Islam,” through a Western cultural lens, creates boundaries of acceptable Arab and Muslim behavior within the United States that prohibits them from being accepted on their own terms (Alsultany, 2012b, p. 146).

Alsultany (2012b) argues the representations of Arabs and Muslims affect this change, but as Toby Miller (2001) argues in Global Hollywood, the apparatus of Hollywood aids in this as well. Through a promotion of what Miller calls the New International Division of Cultural Labor, the United States, through Hollywood and global capitalism, transfers “its dominant value system to others” (2001, p. 29-30). Through Alsultany’s (2012b) and Miller’s (2001) arguments, it becomes clear that this promotion of cultural norms, or value systems, operates both on the macro and micro levels, through the institution of Hollywood and individual representations of that reveal cultural difference. Grouped together with the effect of news media and government
policy, these intertwined and coordinated forces create a powerful apparatus, capable of constructing the particular bias associated with Said’s idea of “Islam.” Politics of fear functions as a tool in this apparatus.

While previous scholarship establishes a clear connection between reporting of the news media and this politics of fear process (Altheide, 2006), a somewhat less clear relationship between politics of fear and entertainment TV and film exists in current scholarship. Analyses of shows like *Homeland, Threshold*, and films centering on CIA operations show that these productions serve to condition their viewers to an America where larger, more opaque security apparatuses control and protect the American public for the greater good of the country (Boyd-Barrett et al., 2012; Castonguay, 2015; Takacs, 2009). These forms of entertainment media do not necessarily victimize a particular group of people, given their varying subject matter, but fear of others in general does serve to acclimatize the public to a world where personal freedoms are curtailed in an effort to feel more secure (Low, 2008, p. 252). Additionally, productions depicting Arabs and Muslims, the prime focus of the war on terror, do aid in shaping public perceptions of these groups (Alsultany, 2012a, p. 7). These perceptions then gain traction through government policy, with respect to Akram’s (2002) argument above, and become validated. Through this process, TV and movies aid in normalizing human rights abuses against Arabs and Muslims and justify increased securitization through this process of shaping audience assumptions. While previous scholarship delineates the role of entertainment media in politics of fear in this way, little research discusses how films telling true stories function within this discourse.
Defining Politics of Fear

Before proceeding any further into specific analyses of these processes, definitions for politics of fear, among other things, must be established. Politics of fear operates through “decision makers’ promotion and use of audience beliefs and assumptions about danger, risk, and fear, to achieve certain goals” (Altheide, 2006, p. 416). In the context of the war on terror, given the focus on Arabs and Muslims, this translates to a focus of politics of fear upon those populations. Michael Suleiman echoes this sentiment in his paper on the othering of Arabs and Muslims in America by arguing that the US government manipulates anti-Arab bias to make pro-Arab and anti-Israeli political stances taboo for political candidates (1999, p. 39). With Altheide’s (2006) aforementioned definition in mind, this example clearly illustrates one function of the politics of fear.

The simple definition offered by Altheide (2006) lays a strong foundation for analysis, but directly relating media and politics of fear requires some additions. Stacy Takacs explains that the term politics of fear inherently carries with it assumptions of the possibility for manipulation and conditioning of fear (2009, p. 1). A subjective definition of fear underscores the role of media in the discussion, and serves as a motivation and explanation for Alsultany’s understanding of “government and media discourses” together forming a “hegemonic field of meaning” (2012a, p. 7). By linking media production and government rhetoric together to serve a similar hegemonic purpose, politics of fear becomes a system spanning multiple aspects of American life.

Politics of fear as an instrument became particularly relevant in the lead up to the Iraq War, as Takacs (2009) explains. The Bush administration utilized fear to safeguard a specific national identity, which aided in presenting the war as an inevitable consequence of 9/11 (Takacs, 2009, p. 2). The administration did not shy away from language that...
articulated this goal, with White House Chief of Staff, Andrew Card, justifying the goal date for the Iraq invasion by saying, “You don't introduce new products in August” (Takacs, 2012, p. 4). The image of policies as products validates the idea that fear can be manipulated to aid in selling new policies to the American public. Therefore, the of the Iraq War, and the War on Terror in general, exemplify how politics of fear functions in within the United States.

The Characteristics and Importance of American Fear

Defining fear, especially in the American context, is integral to understanding how it functions to “selling” policies. Peter Stearns’s book, *American Fear*, lays out these defining characteristics, one of which being that a significant link between fear and racial others exists (2006, p. 63). Expanding upon the racial aspect of this definition of fear, Stearns argues that the strength of the connection between fear and racial others causes Americans to define non-inherently racial fears in racial terms (2006, p. 66). This functions as a major factor in the conflation of Arab and Muslim identities, which will be discussed in more detail below. Stearns also explains the American tendency to understand fear as an emotion of weakness, and therefore attribute that fear as resulting from someone else by blaming others for personal emotional distress, irrespective of the root cause (2006, p. 110). With these joint predispositions, American fear establishes itself as easily manipulated; simply assigning a racial other as the cause for the fear creates an opportunity for exploitation.

Reactions after fear inspiring events like 9/11 reflect this propensity to other people, and establish the primary approach policy makers can take to capitalize upon that fear. Setha Low (2008) highlights how post-9/11 fear affected residents in Battery Park City in New York, and residents of gated communities in the US and Mexico. She notes a
heightened awareness of “others” entering these communities, whether they be racial, socio-economic, etc., and a desire for increased security (2008, p. 251-2). This manifested itself through increased use of home security systems and movement to gated communities.

Low (2008) constructs her argument as a discussion of how perceptions of the home have changed in the American consciousness. In general, people are emotionally rewarded by a home in two ways: Proactive, which includes more inbuilt emotional reactions like love, warmth, trust, and relaxation, and Reactive, which includes more conscious emotional reactions, like the desire for protection (Low, 2006, p. 233). These Reactive responses manifest themselves through increased physical security, like moving to a gated community. The inherent paradox is that the reaction to the source of the fear reminds those reacting of their vulnerability. In other words, the gates in a gated community serve as a constant reminder of that fear. Due to this secure insecurity, resorting to these apparatuses leads to a reliance on them to protect “us” and police the “other” (Altheide, 2006, p. 420). Ultimately, this leads to encroachment of the civil rights of that other and a further legitimization of the initial fears (Low, 2006, p. 235).

Takacs explains how TV shows utilizing representations of terrorists “passing” in everyday life allows for government action by exploiting the increased awareness of others, despite these shows primarily intending to intensify their story line with these representations (2012, p. 81). This passing functions as a main factor in vilifying Muslims, or those who appear Muslim, in America because of the aforementioned inclination to racialize fear. Fear also tends to cause those experiencing it to define people by a group to which they visibly belong as a result of the possibility of passing (Altheide, 2006, p. 418). Through this process, a sense of mutual political interests and community creation occurs in populations of otherwise disconnected individuals (Takacs,
Altheide defines this as othering or, “a social process whereby a dominant group defines into existence an inferior group[, which] requires the establishment and “group sense” of symbolic boundaries of membership” (2006, p. 419). Of course, Islam is not a race and cannot be demarcated as such, however, the othering process functions as a form of cultural racism, which establishes overwhelming differences based on specific cultural signifiers (Ekman, 2015, p. 1988). This cultural racism forms an assumption that all Muslims exist in a world separate from the West, irrespective of their nationality or cultural identification (Afshar, 2013, p. 10). Fear aids in creating this divide between Muslim culture and American culture, and this divide supports the passage of exclusionary and harmful policies towards Muslims.

The reasoning for this stems from American understanding of “home,” which developed in the 17th and 18th centuries, shifting from associations with a native village or birthplace, to a more domestic and personal perception (Low, 2006, p. 234). This greater emphasis on the personal aspect of home, and the increased association of fear with ideas of home, help explain Stearns’s observation that 9/11 affected American’s personal sense of security (2006, p. 25). Additionally, Ewart et al. position terrorists as completely foreign, so that “home,” and its dominant cultural understanding, does not allow for the development of terrorism in that “home” (2014, p. 11). Contemporary TV shows, like 24 and Homeland, shift the focus of this fear of terrorists from an outside other to the possibility of that other living in your community undetected (Pless, 2015, p. 119), reflecting this personalization of fear. This shift in representations of terrorists bolsters Takacs’s assertion that significant fear derives from the inability to distinguish a terrorist based on how they look (2012, p. 75). This links back to the fears surrounding passing of the other within the community. By exploiting personal fears of threat within communities, politics of fear becomes a tool that decision makers utilize to justify action
against Muslims. The particular character of American fear allows for the construction of reductive representations of Arabs and Muslims because of the personal nature of the fear of racial, or perceived racial, others so salient in US society.

Utilizing American Fear and the Audience

This study focuses on content and text, but additional information on the role of the audience is necessary in order to fully understand the media’s role in politics of fear. The importance of audience beliefs and assumptions in the process of politics of fear creates a strong relationship between the ability of the news media to disseminate information and the goals of the decision makers. By establishing themselves as valid news sources, political actors affect the messages in news media reports in order to encourage support for proposed policies (Altheide, 2006, p. 417). This argument reflects the idea that the government sells their policies like products. News media becomes a conduit to promote these products by relying on policy makers as news sources and ultimately disseminating a message of fear tied to terrorism and victimization (Altheide, 2006, p. 418). By applying symbolic interaction theory, Altheide (2006) argues that news organizations assign fear and victimization as symbols with respect to reports on terrorism (2006, p. 419). Assigning fear in this manner constructs “public discourse that reflects symbolic relationships about order, danger, and threat that may be exploited by political decision makers” (Altheide, 2006, p. 416).

Media outlets present this fear in many ways, but Suleiman highlights the most overt form, through threatening headlines. By linking Islam to familiar past threats or generally portraying them as overwhelming, in headlines like, ‘The Muslims are Coming! The Muslims are Coming!’ and ‘Rising Islam May Overwhelm the West,’ these titles depict an imminent and valid threat (Suleiman, 1999, p. 37). A saturation of media
manipulation, like these aggressive titles, distinguishes the response to 9/11 from older historical responses to attacks on US soil like Pearl Harbor. Stearns argues this distinction as a significant factor in determining the greater role of fear in the response to 9/11 (2006, p. 58-9).

While the media do not solely shape the response to these events, they aid in the othering and racializing of the Muslim population. The Iran hostage crisis, and the coverage of the event, played a significant role in conflating Arabs and Muslims, despite Iranians not being Arab (Alsultany, 2012a, p. 9). Scholars overwhelmingly agree upon the existence of this conflation; Suleiman (1999) even uses its pervasiveness to justify using the two identifiers interchangeably in his work. This racializing of Muslims, in addition to the cultural racism previously discussed, foments a certain look for terrorists based upon an unfair conflation of race and religion and predefined, differing cultural signifiers.

The Arab and Muslim conflation is symptomatic of an American lack of knowledge and cultural understanding regarding Muslims. Suleiman argues that Arabs and Muslims do not occupy a place in the American consciousness “either as partners in world history and civilization or as an integral part of the American societal mosaic” (1999, p. 36). Without proper background information, this biased conflation propagates easily because little information presented through the media challenges it. A significant portion of the population seems to buy into the threatening and conflating discourse in the news. James Castonguay references that "47 percent of Americans believed the values of Islam are at odds with American values,” despite the fact that, “60 percent of respondents claimed to not know any Arab Americans or Muslims” (2015, p. 144).

Since Americans form their perceptions of these two groups from the information presented to them through the news, due to the lack of actual interaction with Arabs and
Muslims, the news outlets gain significant power. The ability of media to reach large portions of the population as the primary trustworthy source of information on things viewers do not directly interact with allows for a great amount of power to shape the image of the things reported (Ewart et al., 2014, p. 2). This media framing selectively picks its method of representing an event by “including facts, images, and sources or interviewees, and, as importantly, excluding other facts, images, and sources or interviewees” (Ewart et al., 2014, p. 6). Ewart et al. use the organized nature and anti-Western motives with which the media portray Muslim or Arab terror attacks, and the method of presenting domestic terror as unorganized and individual, to justify this.

**Expanding Outside of News Media**

Altheide’s (2006) analysis echoes this reliance on the news organizations for information on Muslims and their significant power to shape audience perception. However, meaning making and perception defining narratives exist outside of just news reports. Multiple scholars argue that TV in general aids in uniting people and defining a national identity, whether entertainment TV or news (Hall, 2013; Takacs, 2012). Entertainment TV, through dissemination of common unifying narratives, can code representations of terrorists similarly to how news stories symbolically associate fear with terrorism.

Hollywood films utilize this coding system as well, as evidenced by Stuart Hall’s (1980) ideas of encoding and decoding. He argues this method explains the way the visual medium makes representations intelligible through a specific process where meanings are encoded in a production, and then the audience decodes them as they process what they watch. Even news stories must become a “communicative event” in order to be processed by the viewing audience. This occurs because “reality exists outside
language, but it is constantly mediated by and through language” (Hall, 1980, p. 131). In this process, the producer of a representation must encode a particular meaning, and as the audience views that representation, they decode that meaning in a way that makes sense to them. The encoder cannot determine way the audience will decode the representation, so the two do not necessarily correspond. Therefore, in order to present or represent anything in a way that an audience will understand, it must be encoded with a similar meaning to the predominant meaning with which it will be decoded (Hall, 1980, p. 136).

Dominant cultural narratives emerge through what Hall (1980) refers to as “dominant or preferred meanings” that each culture develops. Any event that does not fit the “common-sense constructs” of that culture must be coded in a way that the audience understands, and in doing so, the dominant cultural narrative produces and reproduces itself through representations (Hall, 1980, p. 134-5). The signifiers that become encoded, to Hall (1980), have no “natural” representation. However, some codes become so dominant that the preferred reading equals the encoded dominant meaning (Hall, 1980, p. 132). As Michelle Aguayo (2009) analyzes in her study on The Kingdom, these naturalized codes exist in methods of representing Arab and Muslim culture. The presence of naturalized visual representations exists because, as Hall notes, visual codes, on the surface, appear more inherent than linguistic codes (Hall, 1980, p. 132).

These naturalized representational codes, in the process of decoding, function within the scope of Hall’s (1980) definition of hegemonic viewpoints. To Hall, a hegemonic viewpoint:

> Defines within its terms the mental horizon...of possible meanings, of a whole sector of relations in a society or culture; and...that it carries with it the stamp of legitimacy – it appears coterminous with what is ‘natural’, ‘inevitable’, ‘taken for granted’ about the social order (1980, p. 137).
Through the holistic nature of these hegemonic viewpoints, and their applicability to naturalized coding, the encoding and decoding process clearly can function to perpetuate a dominant cultural narrative.

With this in mind, the encoding and decoding process can play a pivotal role in perpetuating beliefs about Arabs and Muslims previously defined by government and media discourses. Takacs argues a convergence of interests between Hollywood and policy makers, because the government perceives films as recruitment tools and studios gain enhanced and more “authentic” final product through the additional funding (2012, p. 16-7). Despite the fictional nature of these productions, the convergence of interests between the government and producers, as well as the capability to create a common narrative, establishes these forms of media as instruments in the politics of fear.

Studies show these common narratives affect public perception in a variety of ways. According to work done by Karin Wilkins (2009), the Action-Adventure genre significantly contributes to the understanding of safe spaces. She showed that non-Arab focus groups and study participants consistently avoided the Middle East when mapping the locations to which they felt safe travelling. In contrast, Arab participants selected areas in the Middle East with much more nuance (Wilkins, 2009, p. 570-4). This reflects the argument by Pless of a direct correlation between positive feelings towards the United States and likelihood of having anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sympathies (Pless, 2015, p. 127).

These biases emerge in practical moments, as well as in underlying belief systems. Desmond King cites how in the Wounded Knee trial in 1971, many jurors referenced Western film as the primary source of knowledge on American Indians (2003, p. 177). In a more contemporary example, politicians used Jack Bauer, of 24, both as an exemplar of xenophobia and of the type of defense needed to combat American weakness.
The infiltration of fictional representations and characterizations into real world contexts shows the power of the common narrative that TV, film, and public policy can create. This narrative then affects the understanding of current events as well, as evidenced by the response of Americans to the publishing of images of Muhammad in European press. “61 per cent stated that the European newspapers that published and reprinted the cartoons had acted irresponsibly. However, 61 percent attributed the angry Muslim response to Muslim intolerance of difference of opinions,” while only 21 percent of people in the US thought that the response related to the lack of respect towards Islam in Western nations (Ewart et al., 2014, p. 147-8). This latter percentage, on average, in European nations, was higher. Clearly, a common narrative can allow for structuring of unconscious biases that affects not only the representations deemed factual, but also the response to real world events.

While news media remain a primary tool in the politics of fear, the capability of TV and film as similar tools reinforces the fear already inspired by the news. Popular culture and news associate fear and terrorism through symbolic interaction, creating a mass-mediated experience for citizens in both public and private life. By injecting fear into the common narrative ubiquitously across all platforms, fear affects the experiences and perceptions of the things consumers of the fearful rhetoric interact with (Altheide, 2006, p. 429). Jane Cramer and Trevor Thrall summarize this by arguing that, together news media, Hollywood and entertainment TV inflate the threat of terrorism by reiterating the same themes (2009, p. 8). Media inflate the threat of terrorism, after saturating popular culture with fear, by then defining terrorists as unreasonable, psychopathic, and in need of extermination (Takacs, 2009, p. 2). The increased threat conveyed through TV maintains a fearful and captivated audience (Alsultany, 2012a, p. 46). This allows shows like 24 and Homeland to inject urgent realism into their plot lines,
justifying the transgressions and civil rights violations perpetrated by the main characters, as necessary to the survival of the United States (Alsultany, 2012a, p. 40; Castonguay, 2015, p. 140). Presentation and justification of human rights violations, in the light of the possibilities for defining common narratives through TV, allow decision makers to exploit the fear inspired by a show’s representations.

The Role of Representations

Representations function as a form capable of creating and shaping a message of fear, as well as understanding of Muslims. Richard Dyer defines representations as, most simply, presentations and therefore they must, “use of the codes and conventions of the available cultural forms of presentation” (1993, p. 8-9). Representations inherently distill and simplify the reality they attempt to present (Dyer, 1993, p. 9-10). By operating within established codes and conventions, representations categorize the world, allowing greater understanding of the represented concept (Aguayo, 2009, p. 43). However, the previously mentioned limitations of knowledge of Muslims in America significantly limits their representation within an American cultural context, given the need to make the represented intelligible to the viewer.

These limitations become evident in the wake of 9/11, when Samuel Huntington’s (1997) *Clash of Civilizations* gained notoriety among the Western media to aid in explaining the attacks and the necessity for the war on terror. The language used to cover these events relied on broad generalizations and terminology obviously affected by Huntington (1997) and his new orientalism (Amin-Khan, 2012, p. 1602). Important distinctions exist between Edward Said’s (1979) conception of orientalism and the logic attributed to the tenets of new orientalist discourse. *Orientalism* argues that the Orient and Occident are not facts of nature, but instead exist in their current forms because of
power relationships. The Occident carried the power to define the Orient as it wished and therefore determined a dominant Western understanding of it (Said, 1979, p. 5-6). Said takes care to explain that orientalism does not function as an “imperialist plot to hold down the ‘Oriental’ world,” but instead it elaborates upon a geographic distinction through a multitude of political and cultural means (Said, p. 1979, 12).

New orientalism positions itself in a different vein from this, and it resides in the writing of Bernard Lewis (1990) and Huntington (1997), primarily. Simply put, new orientalist discourse posits not a distinction between two cultures, but an incompatibility. To Lewis (1990), Islam belongs to a cultural other, based on a difference of religious belief between Judeo-Christian and Islamic world views and different political frameworks of secularism versus theocracy (Ewart et al., 2014 p. 136). Lewis’s (1990) understanding of the history of relations between Islam and the West remains similarly reductionist, as he argues that a rivalry defines the relationship in all 1400 years of interaction (Ewart et al. 2014, p. 136-7). Many scholars, including John Tolan (2002), disagree with this argument, and provide evidence in their own studies of a more complicated historiography.

Huntington (1997) takes Lewis’s (1990) reductionism and uses it to justify a philosophy of opposing and inherently incompatible cultures by establishing, “the inhospitable nature of Islamic culture and society to Western liberal concepts” (1997, p. 114). He additionally cites Orientalism to say that its ideas of West versus East are too reductionist and that the phrase “the West and the rest” allows for a more complicated review of multiple dichotomous cultural relationships (1997, p. 39). While this does increase variety of culture, it also hinges upon the assumption of inherent difference that traditional orientalism lacks, positioning Huntington (1997) in the separate sphere of new orientalism.
By relying on Huntington (1997), and projecting characteristics of a small minority on the majority of Muslims in the framing of the War on Terror, the US media set an agenda that further develops a Western understanding of Islam. Terrorism’s central role in this media dialogue transforms it from a “violent and unlawful form of political resistance” to an irrational act (Ewart et al., 2014, p. 11). The rhetoric of good versus evil presented by the Bush administration when selling the War on Terror reflects this inherent difference presented in Huntington’s work, as well as promoting the generalization of Islam based on things like terrorism. By defining Islam as irrational and irreconcilable to Western ideals, politicians and media, working in concert, allow for the justification of increased security apparatus and exploitative anti-terror laws (Amin-Khan, 2012, p. 1606).

The principles of new orientalist thought add a layer of divisiveness to the cultural signifiers available for representation. Ewart et al. (2014) argue a level of cultural distinctness exists between commonly accepted values in Western countries and Muslim values. This does not mean any level of superiority exists, just that in general Muslim “values, combined with certain norms, beliefs and worldview, are central to the Muslim identity. Muslims are, in these respects, distinct from Westerners” (Ewart et al., 2014, p. 9). In order to present Arabs and Muslims in an intelligible way to a Western audience, some translation must be done of these values, which leads to a generally reductive representation. New orientalism uses this distinctness to position Western values as superior and, in effect, racialize Muslims through a process of othering, which leads to the promotion of increased securitization and opaque anti-terror legislation (Amin-Khan, 2012, p. 1596).

While politics of fear may function on an active and passive level, a presentation of cultural norms inherently exists in democracy through the utilization of integration
propaganda to define these superior Western values. Integration propaganda reinforces a specific set of cultural norms that exist as a necessity in the apparatus of a democracy. To this point, Tim Blackmore argues that films function as a major part of the way integration propaganda promotes these certain cultural norms (Blackmore, 2012, p. 294-5). The important role of films in this apparatus allows for filmic representations to shape ideas of cultural norms and their limits.

**Traditions of Representing Arabs and Muslims**

Shaheen’s (2001) study of nearly 1000 films, *Reel Bad Arabs*, chronicles the historical modes of representing Arabs throughout Hollywood films until 2001. In the same vain as Said’s (1997) ideas of media “Islam,” his analysis demonstrates an overwhelmingly negative tradition of representing Arabs, and, in the later years of the study, the Arab and Muslim conflation (Shaheen, 2001). In the aftermath of 9/11, these representations changed, a process that Alsultany (2012a) documents by categorizing the new modes of representation as simplified complex representations. These emerged to avoid controversies surrounding wholly negative and racist representations, however they still operate in a similarly simplistic manner. TV shows and films began offering more sympathetic portrayals, which aided in depicting US culture and political action as post-racist and benevolent, and through collective meaning making, increased toleration of war and racist policies (Alsultany, 2012a, p. 15-6). David Holloway echoes this sentiment in his study of literary, war-on-terror, espionage thrillers, drawing a connection between the depiction of the US as a “virtuous bringer of rights” and the legitimization of human rights abuses (2009, p. 20). Ultimately, simplified complex representations promote a post-racist America that justifies foreign policy as benevolent through this post-racist conception.
These ideas exist not only in representations of Arab and Muslim characters but also in the representations of Arab and Muslim spaces. Lina Khatib (2006) highlights the methods through which Hollywood presents these spaces in her book, *Filming the Modern Middle East*. Space becomes an instrument of power politics, and the particular methods through which Arab spaces appear affects public understanding of them. Often film and TV present Arab and Muslim spaces at a distance, with large shots that generalize and objectify, and in close-ups, spaces tend to be congested and intimidating (Khatib, 2006, p. 19-20, 24). Therefore, representations code both characters and spaces with fear, and justify the control over those spaces and characters that exist in the wide shots used to assert that control.

In the more recent conventions of representation, a tendency to offset a negative representation with a positive one emerged. The centrality of American benevolence remained, linking negative and positive representations, or bad and good Muslims, to their relationship to the US. Good Muslims supported American culture and defended the country, whereas bad Muslims desired the end of American culture and practiced terrorism (Alsultany, 2012a, p. 14-5). Takacs defines the relationship slightly differently, arguing terrorism in Muslim characters is determined by their level of devotion to Islam (2012, p. 78). Both of these understandings exist based on a framework that argues Arabs and Muslims must be made acceptable to American sensibilities in order to be normalized (Alsultany, 2012a, p. 2). When utilized together, the two definitions present the intelligible, non-antagonistic Muslim as a pro-American, unreligious body that loses its intelligibility if it transgresses outside these bounds.

While racial diversification opposing the Arab and Muslim conflation serves as a primary simplified complex representation, shows like *Homeland* still present all terrorists as Muslims (Castonguay, 2015, p. 143). These representations build upon a
previous trope of an antithetical relationship between Islam and America (Suleiman, 1999, p. 44), constructing Islam as a threat to the American way, defined by fear and terrorism (Afshar, 2013, p. 18). These representations reflect new orientalism’s similar, divisive effect. Due to this ideology of cultural incompatibility, presented across platforms, American conversion to Islam subsequently becomes illegitimate and a rejection of American identity (Castonguay, 2015, p. 143; Pless, 2015, p. 125). Portraying Islam as incompatible with American culture, through representations, legitimizes racist and Islamophobic policies by altering public perceptions, therefore creating an opportunity for the politics of fear to operate.

Terrorism functions as one of the main tools of this incompatibility discourse. Filmic representation of Arabs and Muslims reflect the irrationality attached to terrorism. King argues that often war movies construct the US’s adversary in “hazy and unsubtle terms,” in order to clearly demarcate them as evil and, often, portray them as incomprehensible (2003, p. 174). To Simon Philpott (2010), this process functions particularly strongly in war films presenting Muslims and Arabs as the enemy. Their representation justifies the violent actions against them because of their facelessness and/or lack of humanity in the narrative (Philpott, 2010, p. 333). This trope, when coupled with the prevalence of torture in narratives of this type, positions the US not only as justified, but righteous, in perpetrating violence against Arabs and Muslims. Productions methodize and legitimate torture by representing it so that it does not result in death, and so that it regularly yields productive information. In Lloyd Issac Vayo’s analysis of Zero Dark Thirty, he notes that a detainee, after torture, states “‘I have no wish to be tortured again. Ask me a question, and I will answer it’” (Vayo, 2015, p. 108). Vayo notes the rationality of that the response of the character here, which contrasts the dominant irrational portrayal of terrorism in films of this kind. When coupling this
representation of rationality after torture with the irrationality attributed to terrorism, the United States becomes a righteous liberator, able to bring Western thinking and logic to otherwise irrational Arabs and Muslims through violence against them.

**From Representation to Action**

Unfortunately, these representations also have legitimate consequences for Muslims. As Dyer argues, the ability of representations to limit identity, and participation in a culture, others those deemed outside of those limits (1993, p. 10). By representing Muslim men as senseless terrorists, and Muslim women as completely marginalized and helpless, both of which position Islam outside of American cultural norms, America then becomes benevolent guarantor of rights (Agauyo, 2009, p. 44). The centrality of American cultural norms in TV shows and movies representing Muslims creates a cultural narrative that reflects the theories of inherent cultural conflict forwarded by Lewis (1990) and Huntington (1997). Research by writers like Tariq Amin-Khan (2012) and Pless (2015), show this connection of representations, political rhetoric, and policy that prove policy makers clearly utilize this assumed dichotomy, through the politics of fear, to enact legislation that curtails personal freedoms within the US and justifies human rights violations overseas.

Methods of representation constantly evolve, and Alsultany (2012b) notes that some texts do not adhere to her simplified complex representations. In an article published after she finished researching *Arabs and Muslims in the Media*, she notes that the TV series *All American Muslims* does away with the direct connection between terrorism and Arab and Muslim identities that she cites in the book. It, at times, presents normal people without stances on terrorism, something for which her modes of representation do not account. However, this does not mean the interpretation of these
representations functions any differently, as evidenced by the outrage generated by the show. After the show aired, the Florida Family Association began petitioning Lowe’s to pull their advertising funding from the show because it represented Muslim “propaganda.” Eventually, Lowe’s acquiesced to this pressure and ultimately the show did not return for a second season (Allen, 2011). This right-wing backlash from the Florida Family Association centered around the removal of terrorism from the representations of Arabs and Muslims (Alsultany, 2012b, p. 147). Therefore, despite evolving representational standards, public perception, to an extent, stagnated.

As this controversy over All American Muslim demonstrates, certain expectations of how Arabs and Muslims should be represented exist. Through Hall’s (1980) process of encoding and decoding, Aguayo (2009) understands these as naturalized codes in American culture. Hall (1980) argues that a code’s efficacy relies upon “reciprocity between the encoder and decoder,” therefore, encoding a naturalized representation outside of the bounds of its dominant meaning and reading will result in the ineffectiveness of that representation (Hall, 1980, p. 135-6). In the production of All American Muslim, TLC encoded the image of an American Muslim outside of the context of terrorism, and the response of the Florida Family Association shows the naturalized nature, at least to some, of the coding of Muslims with terrorism.

Philpott’s (2010) analysis of war films critical of US action in the War on Terror yields a similar conclusion on the bias inherent in the official narrative through this type of naturalization. Some Iraq War films make an effort to think critically about the war, and occasionally characterize Arabs and Muslims in a sophisticated manner. These films highlight negative US actions in the war and, in response, pundits like Bill O’Reilly criticize the validity of the films. The backlash towards these films casts them as anywhere from unpatriotic to terrorist recruitment tools (Philpott, 2010, p. 326).
reflects the experience of John Martinkus, one of the co-authors in the Ewart et al. study, who found in his time as a reporter in Iraq that remaining an unbiased journalist, when the dominant political context and media discourse contradict the stories you publish, casts you as a terrorist sympathizer, or at least apologist (2014, p. 71-2). The dominant narrative and public perception of Arabs and Muslims used in politics of fear discourse shows that, through an echo chamber effect, the media can legitimize outrage against fair portrayals of these identities.

**Representing History**

One measure of importance of war films in these terms is the factual events they use as a basis for their stories. Marcia Landy (1996) argues in her book *Cinematic Uses of the Past* that historically based films must inherently simplify history in order to make them palatable to the broadest audiences, but this simplification serves to, at times, falsify or misrepresent the history. Gramsci’s idea of common sense portrays certain practices, belief systems, and other cultural signifiers as common sense. The representation of ideas in this way serves to presume a shared cultural experience (Landy, 1996, p. 1-2).

These common-sense representations of history are neither inherently true nor false, but function as a particular way of understanding the role and importance of that historical narrative in a particular culture. The historical narrative produced, however, exists in a fragmented state, given that it borrows from varied aspects of society and its past institutions (Landy, 1996, p. 4-5). Landy’s study focuses on historical representation in melodramatic films and their role in activating these concepts from past institutions to attribute certain meanings to the past, and to create a common-sense vision of the “official history” (1996, p. 24).
This understanding of historical representation applies to both older history, as well as more modern history, presented in film. Vayo’s analysis of *Zero Dark Thirty* shows how the movie creates an idea of post-bin Laden America, within which heroic narrativity takes precedence over narrative accuracy (2015, p. 115). As Philpott notes, the box office failures of movies that disrupt official narratives prove that when narrative accuracy gains precedence, their validity comes into question (2010, p. 336). Therefore, this common-sense approach to reading film applies to films on quite recent conflicts as well. Blackmore characterizes the disconnect between the official narrative presented through news media and film, and the actual situation, as creating a context where the War on Terror has “gone hugely filmed but largely unseen” (2012, p. 309). King presents an important caveat, that while historical narrative movies activate popular culture, that does not guarantee their political significance (2003, p. 178). This, however, can be assumed if they operate within the politics of fear.

**West vs. Islam: An Actual Dichotomy?**

These ideas of politics of fear hinge upon the separation and incompatibility of the West and the Middle East in dominant political and media discourse. However, Gabriel Faimau (2015) argues that studies based upon new orientalist models inherently propose a conflict between the cultures, even if these studies opposed the assumed dichotomy. Faimau (2015) believes a more productive method of study exists in a dialogic study based on Charles Taylor’s discourse of recognition. Through this type of analysis, a study can create a space of dialogue, conversations, and recognition, instead of a discourse of difference. This proves to be a positive method of analysis for future works, but it carries some flaws. For example, he cites his own work on British Christian publications and their representations of Islam to demonstrate the effectiveness of this
methodology (2015, p. 331). He argues that these publications show possibility for a space of dialogue and reciprocal recognition and analyzing it as such facilitates conversation.

His study carries promise, but also proves the inherent limitations of the methodology. If the representations in the analyzed text allow for a discourse of recognition, then this serves as a useful methodology. The films analyzed in this study, however, have representations that assume inherent conflict. To study these films looking for room for dialogue does not provide useful analysis or conclusions. Therefore, a more conflictual examination of these films based upon new orientalist discourse permits a much richer reading of the representations within, based upon the dichotomous assumption of the cultural relationship developed by the texts themselves.

**What are these Representations?**

Despite the significant literature outlining the interconnected nature of new orientalism, politics of fear, and media apparatuses in othering Muslims and Arabs, little of this work actually focuses on the representations of the Muslims and Arabs. Aguayo’s article on Muslim’s in *The Kingdom* focuses on gender and primarily analyzes the lead American female character to illuminate the differences in Western values and Saudi society (2009). Her analysis does include the consequences this has on perceptions of Muslims, but it neglects discussion of how the Arabs and Muslims in the film are represented. Deborah Pless’s (2015) article on *24* and *Homeland* also focuses primarily on the American characters. She discusses Nicholas Brody’s conversion to Islam and the importance behind it, but does not investigate how Islam and Arabness are mediated to create fear of Islam and Arabness.
With respect to historical war films, little research covers the full impact of the films’ historical representations, Arab and Muslim representation, and role in a dominant narrative aided by the politics of fear. Research by Blackmore (2012) and Philpott (2010) highlight the commercial failure of films on these wars, and the reasons behind that, but does not go into specific discussion of the representations in these films. Instead they discuss how representations of certain things in the films keeps them from gaining commercial success. Finally, King’s (2003) analysis highlights how Hollywood war films, in general, tend to simplify historical narratives, and shape public opinion. These studies do not distinguish between fictional films, and those based on a true story, which distinguishes this study. Landy’s (1996) framework can enable this analysis to connect the role of these historically based films to US political language, primarily politics of fear discourses.

Through the close reading of the representation of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood films on the War on Terror, a more substantive picture of how these films echo the fear mobilized in policy making develops. While the countries represented in these films, Jordan, Iraq, Libya, and Afghanistan, are all distinct, but the stories in these four films all relate directly to politics of fear and the War on Terror. Furthermore, by analyzing the manner with which these films represent history, this study delineates the position they take on the official narrative of the events they represent, based on the common-sense nature of the films. Combining these two angles of analysis establishes a connected process of meaning making and altering of cultural perception governed by new orientalist thinking, politics of fear, and common sense. The unique position of these films, based on true stories in moments intricately tied to politics of fear, allows them to speak this scholarship, and by studying them, this study can reveal a new role for media in politics of fear.
Methodology

This study seeks to investigate the role of historically based war films in constructing and/or perpetuating a dominant cultural narrative based upon assumptions of inherent differences between Western culture and Middle Eastern and Islamic culture. In this analysis, I determine how these films present history in ways that represent Arabs, Muslims, Arabic, Islam, and Arab or Muslim spaces. Through an analysis of these representations, this study seeks to answer how Hollywood films on the War on Terror construct particular meanings through representations and how these meanings contribute to greater cultural narratives.

Dominant cultural narratives operate in a variety of different texts, and given this variety, a multitude of methods to examine this process exist. With respect to films, given the literature covered previously, Hollywood may forward a cultural narrative either intentionally, such as through Defense Department funding, or passively, as in the infiltration of Jack Bauer into political rhetoric. This study investigates the role of films in creating and perpetuating cultural narratives, which becomes particularly important when focusing on films that are meant to depict real events. The focus of the analysis will be on the representations of Arab and Muslim cultures within the historical context of these film narratives.

War films based on recent events in the War on Terror act in concert with new orientalist thought and politics of fear to define cultural norms. This occurs through their reactivation of history in line with Landy’s (1996) ideas of historical representation. Additionally, when films violate these norms by including sympathetic portrayals of Arabs and Muslims, they garner significant protest that asserts that they aid an enemy by negatively presenting the US. These types of responses lend credence to the notion of a
naturalization of certain codes of representing Arabs and Muslims in Western media. Films on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are among the films drawing criticism about their sympathetic representations of Arabs and Muslims. Some of these films gained some commercial success, or at least did not inspire this kind of ire. Therefore, war films that present historical narratives of the War on Terror occupy a unique position, with opportunities for analysis from multiple angles.

The subjects of analysis include both traditional war films and more comedic films in order to gain perspective on the differences and similarities between representations across multiple genres. The films studied include *American Sniper* (2014), *13 Hours: The Secret Soldiers of Benghazi* (2016), *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* (2016), and *War Dogs* (2016). Each of these films represents history, given that they all retell a true story. This basis in real events is intended to give them particular credibility in terms of validity of representation. Their added validity merits serious consideration because of the possibilities for affecting meanings through processes of common sense and decoding. Additionally, they all focus on actions and events in the Middle East and Islamic world, and all deal with military conflict in these regions. In order to tell these stories, the films must represent both historical narratives and Arabs and Muslims. In doing so, they present certain cultural ideas as common sense, and code their images with certain meanings. This study hopes to determine the connections between these points of analysis and the meanings they present.

More specifically, *American Sniper* and *13 Hours* follow tropes of more traditional war films, which tend to present strong antagonistic relationships between the West and the Middle East. Shaheen’s (2001) work highlights this trend. The lack of controversy as to any demonization of America in these films suggests that they do not necessarily alter the dominant forms of representation. Together they represent retellings
of recent, impactful moments in the War on Terror, and provide important opportunities to reveal connections between media representations and official political narratives.

The other two films, *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* and *War Dogs*, exist outside the traditional war genre, but given their setting in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, respectively, they carry particular relevance to this study. While the two traditional war films likely follow established and expected representations, the existence of these comedic films outside these bounds means they may carry new conventions for representation, whether that be positive or negative. Ultimately, the differences and similarities between all four films determine the particular harmonization of cultural narrative, if one exists.

The process of encoding and decoding representations of Arabs and Muslims remains integral to the study, given the lack of this type of investigation in current literature. In analyzing the codes operating in these films, the study seeks to compare them with the meanings that emerge through their historical representation. The importance of these codes on their own allows for comparison between the two sets of films, to illuminate a possible, cross-genre alignment of meaning. These codes reveal a more general method of representation utilized by each film, which can then be compared to existing understanding of representation.

This study relies on Alsultany’s (2012a) modes of simplified complex representation to aid categorization of each film’s representations. This categorization illuminates the roles of these representations in perpetuating or challenging the naturalized codes of representing Arabs and Muslims, based on how well the representations fit Alsultany’s (2012a) framework. This framework serves as an effective basis for the state of representation at the time of this study, and as a starting point, it
allows for the possibility of redefining or altering the currently accepted conventions of representations in Hollywood films.

In order to analyze these codes, this study employed an exploratory, inductive approach. Through this type of analysis, the study reveals specifically what themes recur throughout the film, and how often they occur. The themes investigated in this study are Space, Characterization (by gender), Violence, Language, and Civilians. Coding sheets are included in the Appendices, so this process can be investigated closely, but an explanation is also provided here. By inductively investigating these films and documenting the types of representations within these themes, the study allows for the reiteration of particular representations to reveal a dominant meaning. This reduces the risk of a selective reading of the films.

Procedurally, for each category, a time stamp was taken at a moment of representation relevant to the particular theme. Then any important information associated with that time stamp was noted. Examples of this would be direct quotes, camera positioning, characters’ tones, and description of events. By then noting each instance of these themes, a specific number of references to a certain theme was provided, which allowed the study to reveal tendencies in meaning.

In terms of Space, I looked for the characters’ descriptions of Arab or Muslim spaces represented in the film, the exception to this being Albania in War Dogs, which the movie presents in a heavily Eastern European way, and without any reference to the fact that Albania is a majority Muslim country. In coding sheets, I noted the time of each instance, and then noted the quote or reference, as well as the space being described. By investigating this theme, certain vocabulary emerged, highlighting a dominant meaning associated with these spaces through the words of the characters.
The Characterization theme covered many different angles, but in general centralizes around the major Arab or Muslim characters in each film. The theme was broken into the sub-categorizations of Female Roles and Characteristics of Representation, Male Roles and Characteristics of Representation, Men Interacting with Women, Women Interacting with Each Other, and Men Interacting with Each Other. The roles noted for each gender are only for those characters with significant lines or plot importance. With regard to characteristics of representation, the study took note of important actions of the character and the results of those actions, as well as the physical and emotion portrayal of the characters. More specifically, what types of clothes they wore, their physical appearance, the way they were filmed, and the reactions they had to events. Additionally, the way other characters speak about a character was noted under this sub-category. The types of interactions noted in the last three sub-categories are explicit instances of words between two or more characters noted in the male and female roles section. This allowed for the noting of moments of explicit conversation, as opposed to suggested interaction not shown explicitly on screen. Certain codes of representation emerged through the presence, or absence, of instances in these sub-categories.

With regard to Violence, the study noted the moments of violence perpetrated by Arabs and Muslims, as well as the methods of representing the characters or groups responsible for this violence. Specifically, a note was taken each time a violent act occurred in the film caused by an Arab or Muslim. When an act resulted in a fire-fight, or was a fire-fight, the study recorded the act that started the fire-fight, and then significant acts of violence within it. As examples, these included a close up of a militant firing an RPG or a major character being killed or kidnapped. In the second sub-category of this theme, the study documents the Characteristics of Representation for Perpetrators of
Violence. Within this category, the characteristics of people directly seen committing acts of violence were noted in the same manner as to the characteristics of representation in the Characterization section. The coding sheets included references to appearances of those associated with violence as well, for example, militants that were not directly shown committing an act of violence, but who were members of the same group. Major characters who commit acts of violence, who would otherwise be in the Characterization section, were noted in that section and then have their characteristics of representation written in the Violence section. By noting both aspects, the study highlighted a method for depicting violence, as well as an existence of particular codes attached to those Arabs and Muslims enacting the violence.

The study breaks the Language theme into three sub-categories, Codified Phrases, Representation of non-English Languages as they are being Used, and Translators. In the Codified Phrases section, any time a phrase that might be recognizable to an American with no knowledge of that language was uttered, a note was taken. Examples of this were *Allah hu Akbar*, *As-Salamu Alaykum*, or Muslim prayer music over a loud speaker. The second section looked at all the instances of these non-English languages, in the case of this study Arabic, Dari, and Pashto. A note was take each time the language was spoken, who spoke it, and if a translation was provided. For the final sub-category, characterizations of translators were noted, in line with the method employed under the Characteristics section. As with perpetrators of violence, major characters who were also translators had notes taken under the Translator section and not the Characterization section. This section revealed any associations made by the films between the Arabic language and certain character traits or cultural signifiers.

In the Civilians section, the study records each instance where civilians appear in one sub-category, and in another it noted the relationship between the civilians and
violence. The coding sheet also logged important information about how the civilians were portrayed. This included, but was not limited to, how many men or women had some kind of head covering, the camera position, and the way they were dressed or physically depicted. In the second section, the position with respect to the kind of violence recorded in the Violence section was noted. Unless noted under a category like supporting or opposing, the relationship was neutral. Documenting civilians in this way exposed any traits coded to Arab and Muslim populations, in line with the types of characteristics noted in the coding sheets.

While this study did attempt to analyze how some Hollywood war films, more recent than those covered by Shaheen (2008) and Alsultany (2012a), represent Arabs and Muslims, it cannot speak about representations outside of these four films. This does not mean that the conclusions determined in this study do not reflect a trend in a certain direction, but the selective sample size limits any generalized conclusions. Any development from the simplified complex representations in Alsultany’s (2012a) study also cannot be said to be determinative of a major shift, because of the realistic aspect of this sample. The representations in this style of film may not reflect the representations in fictionalized story lines, such as those analyzed by Alsultany (2012a). However, because little work has been done looking at exclusively historically based films in this way, this study could present an addition or caveat to Alsultany’s (2012a) previous conclusions.

Additionally, this study does not, and cannot, speak to the accuracy of the representations in the film. The focus remains on the way these representations manifest and what meanings those representations impart. It may be objectively helpful to note if a representation is not truly representative of the people it represents, however, when considered in light of the writing on politics of fear that this study intends to build upon, it becomes clear that the perceived legitimacy of the source becomes much more
important than the accuracy of the representations. With that being said, this study also
cannot speak to specific instances of historical accuracy. The time and resources
necessary to fact check each film are outside this project, and ultimately do not meet the
goals of the project. Instead, it hopes to depict how each film casts the history through
specific instances, which inflect meaning onto the history.

Some of the decisions made in the process of analyzing the films might limit the
study as well. Given the thorough method of analysis in the Space section, it is not
feasible to note the way that Arab and Muslim spaces are presented visually throughout
the film, as three of the four films spend well over half of their time in Arab and Muslim
areas. Additionally, the decision to note only explicit interaction between major Arab or
Muslim characters limits the number of interactions found, to an extent, but also allows
for only interactions similar to typical interactions between Western characters to be
recorded.

Originally, in the Violence section, the study hoped to record all instances of
violence, but it became impractical to do so. Instead, to remain in concert with the other
themes, it just documented the violence of Arabs and Muslims. The Codified Language
section of the Language theme assumes a certain level of knowledge of the audience,
however, given the ubiquity of instances like *Allah hu Akbar* and Arabic in Muslim
prayer across media, the study deems phrases like this understandable to many viewers.
The decision to include these phrases, and especially the prayers, is not insignificant
either, and reflects an encoded meaning in them intended to be decoded by the viewer.

This study alone cannot determine a general development in representations of
Arabs and Muslims, in general, but it can provide a reference point through which further
study may determine a larger trend. Furthermore, this study does not represent the only
way to analyze these films, and the conclusions drawn are not the only ones possible. It
provides an analysis of these four films, and the way they encode certain aspects of Arabs and Muslims, in line with the themes noted above. This method of analyzing these codes can help to reveal particularly common meanings between the films, and illuminate a dominant cultural narrative that the films may portray through the decoding process.
Chapter 2: Perpetuating Incompatibility

United States military involvement in the Middle East allows for film to tell many powerful true stories. Their presentation of a historical moment can be educational for audiences, because they portray a perspective in their representations. Hollywood producers and directors do not follow the disciplines of a historian, but instead often spin and alter the history to tell a better story. All of these choices encode meanings in the film and affect how audiences decode the film. Both *American Sniper* (2014) and *13 Hours* (2016) offer narratives of the history they represent, which allows for these processes to operate. The chosen method of representation constructs a preferred meaning of the history. When the common-sense meanings constructed by these two films echo those of trusted news reports, they amplify politics of fear. While this may not be deliberate, or intended, it may become a consequence of intoned historical representations in these films.

Along with the history, the representations of characters manufacture and affect preferred meanings. While Evelyn Alsultany (2012a) theorizes the evolution of simplified complex representations in *Arabs and Muslims in the Media*, these films appear to fall back on staples of Jack Shaheen’s (2001) analysis from *Reel Bad Arabs*, with the Arab or Muslim man as dehumanized terrorist, and Arab or Muslim woman as subjugated and repressed. By predominantly removing the Arab and Muslim voice, *American Sniper* and *13 Hours* associate Arabs and Muslims, and all things attributed to them, as incompatible and hostile to an American world view. In encoding their representations with this preferred meaning, the two films construct a similar notion of good and evil, where familiarity to the US serves as the major barometer in assessing a subject’s position.
Of the four movies covered in this research, *American Sniper*, by far, garnered the most success, monetarily. It tells the story of US Navy SEAL, Chris Kyle, and his four tours in Iraq. During this time, he garnered the title of the deadliest sniper in US military history. Whether this fame, or the infamous manner in which he died, murdered by a former Marine with PTSD at a gun range, influenced the film’s success remains unclear. It did, however, gross $350,123,553 in its box office run, a number nearly seven times its budget.¹ As the most widely viewed and successful of these films, examining the manner in which *American Sniper* casts its history remains particularly important.

*American Sniper* opens with a scene of Chris Kyle playing the role of “overwatch” for a troop of Marines, who are patrolling a street in Fallujah. Kyle chats over the radio with an unseen command post about the things he sees through his scope, including a “military aged male on a cell phone,” and a woman and her child. As the latter pair exit a building, Chris sees the mother carrying a Russian grenade, which she gives to her son. The young boy begins running towards the Marines, grenade in hand, an action portrayed through the scope of Kyle’s rifle, before a gunshot echoes out the frame cuts to a deer dropping in the woods.

With this quick cut, the film moves us back to Kyle’s childhood, where it depicts a selection of scenes aiming to explicate Kyle’s world view. With the film’s basis in Chris Kyle’s memoir, and its focus on Kyle as the protagonist and driving force in the story line, these scenes not only offer context into Kyle’s values, but also the values of the film. These values then shape the meaning of the film, as they spin the history through their lens. The most important of these scenes occurs at the Kyle family dinner

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table, after Kyle’s brother Jeff has been bullied at school. Chris and Jeff’s father, Wayne, gives them a lecture on the role of violence, as it becomes clear that Chris stepped in to defend his brother. This lecture sets up some of the defining aspects of Kyle’s world view, and lays the foundation for the world view of the film:

There are three types of people in this world: sheep, wolves, and sheepdogs. Now some people prefer to believe that evil doesn’t exist in the world, and if it ever darkened their doorstep, they wouldn’t know how to protect themselves. Those are the sheep. And then you got predators. They use violence to prey on the weak. They’re the wolves. Then there are those who’ve been blessed with the gift of aggression, and the overpowering need to protect the flock. These men are the rare breed that live to confront the wolf. They are the sheepdog. Now, we’re not raising any sheep in this family, and I will whoop your ass if you turn into a wolf... but we protect our own. Now if someone tries to fight you, or bully your little brother, you have my permission to finish it... Did you finish it? (to Chris, who nods) Well, then you know who you are. You know your purpose.

Not only does this scene justify and contextualize Kyle’s violence, but through Wayne’s words, Kyle’s future in the SEALs becomes pre-ordained. Wayne simplifies the world, and violence in particular, down to three classifications, sheep, wolves, and sheepdogs. The film quickly casts the sheep as unimportant, and irrelevant to the plot, through the line, “Now, we’re not raising any sheep in this family.” Wayne’s disdain for the sheep highlights that inherent fallacy in the sheep’s world view.

The purposeless and aggressive violence of the wolf casts it as an evil force. By saying, “I will whoop your ass if you turn into a wolf,” Wayne limits Kyle’s possibilities for his violence, as unwarranted aggression will not be tolerated. Kyle’s acts of violence throughout the film subsequently become purposeful and necessary, as his father would not accept or tolerate him if he began to act out. In contrast, people willing to defend the ignorant sheep have “been blessed with the gift of aggression.” Referring to the aggression of the sheepdog as a gift highlights the purposefulness of warranted aggression, in juxtaposition with the needless aggression of the wolves. Wayne further
justifies the sheepdog by presenting its defensive aggression as a compulsion, and validates Kyle’s violence here and throughout the film. The film places Kyle in a position of inherent righteousness, despite the aggression in his actions, because his enemies, primarily Arabs and Muslims, commit acts of violence that paint them as wolves.

The film proceeds to affirm Kyle’s position as the defensive sheepdog, and establishes al-Qaeda as the wolf throughout its plot progression. The al-Qaeda attacks on the US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 inspire Kyle to join the Navy SEALs. As a news reporter informs Kyle of the attacks, and states, “It is still unclear at this hour who our enemy is,” Kyle responds, “Look what they did to us.” The nature of this scene as a catalyst defines the aggression as “them” against “us.” Kyle’s subsequent compulsion to enlist confirms his positioning as the sheepdog, whereas al-Qaeda’s role as “them” and the aggressor confirms their role as the wolf.

The film uses Kyle’s first tour to present the major antagonists, the Butcher, a member of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) who serves as the enforcer, and a Syrian sniper named Mustafa, known for his skill and the fact that he competed in the Olympics. Their positioning with respect to Kyle confirms their role as wolves. Upon returning for his second and third tours, Kyle and his fellow SEALs’ actions center around catching the Butcher, while Kyle’s rivalry with Mustafa grows. The obsession with killing the Butcher ends up mortally wounding fellow SEAL, Biggles, and leads to the death of another SEAL, Marc.

At Marc’s funeral, his mother reads a letter in which Marc questions their purpose in Iraq. In the letter, he doubts whether they truly act to defend the greater good, or if some other, less valiant, purpose drives them. As Kyle and his wife, Taya, drive home from the funeral, Taya asks Kyle’s opinion of the letter. In a rare moment of candidness, Kyle responds, “that letter killed Marc.” To Kyle, no complication exists between his
purpose defending the US and his purpose in Iraq. Any doubt or failure in the compulsion of the sheepdog to defend, therefore, results in death. By presenting a grey area between sheepdog and wolf as weakness, the film cements the sheepdog as the defender of freedom, and necessitates its action and devotion to that action to effectively carry out its purpose.

In order to justify his return home, Kyle must resolve his rivalry with Mustafa, which becomes the focus of his fourth tour. After successfully killing Mustafa with a 2,100-yard shot, Kyle gains closure and returns from Iraq, where the plot begins to address the effects of combat on Kyle’s psyche. By distilling violence down to two possibilities, aggression and defense, evil and good, American Sniper presents the history of Chris Kyle to justify both his violence and, consequently, US violence in Iraq, as for the greater good. The limited boundaries for discussion set the possible meanings attributed to this history to this simplified dichotomy. Complicating factors and other readings may exist, but the centrality of Wayne’s world view encodes this clear dominant meaning, through the justification of Kyle’s violence and the vilification of al-Qaeda’s violence.

13 Hours

While 13 Hours gained significantly less box office success than American Sniper, its controversial subject matter necessitates analysis of its spin on this history. The film depicts the attacks by Ansar al-Sharia on the US diplomatic outpost and covert CIA outpost (the Annex) in Benghazi on the night of September, 11 2012. Despite the contentiousness of the attacks in the US, it managed to barely recoup its $50,000,000 budget at the box office.² The film focuses mostly on the six CIA defense contractors

working for Global Response Staff (GRS), who fought to defend the Annex after a failed attempt to rescue the US Ambassador to Libya at the diplomatic outpost. Due to this focus on the men fighting, it avoids directly confronting the political battle that unfolded after the event.

*13 Hours* develops all six of its main characters, but the action primarily follows former Navy SEAL, Jack Silva. After an introduction that illuminates the political, military, and social situations in Libya after the fall of Gaddafi, the film switches to Silva’s arrival at Benghazi International Airport in the summer of 2012. Another former SEAL, Tyrone “Rone” Woods meets Silva at the airport, and they set out for the covert Annex. Silva and Rone confront an Ansar al-Sharia roadblock on their way, and the ensuing conflict foreshadows the primary conflict. Rone threatens the Cleric with a drone strike to save them, and as they drive out of the road block Silva asks, “We got air support?” Rone’s response to the question sets up the particular spin *13 Hours* places on the history: “We don’t have any fucking support.”

Rone immediately confronts the Base Chief, Bob, after they arrive at the Annex, about not sending aid to them. Bob’s main concern is the Annex’s anonymity, which Rone rebuts, given the type of people entering and exiting the base daily. Ultimately, Bob’s superior attitude and unwillingness to work with Rone, demonstrated when he slams a door on Rone midsentence, presents him as unwilling to help. This representation of Bob continues to build upon Rone’s previous idea about lack of aid these men have.

A secondary meaning emerges while the GRS team runs a security detail at a meet up between two operatives and a local businessman. Rone, who serves as the driver, becomes suspicious of men he sees watching them and breaks the Chief’s one rule, “Never leave the car,” in order to confirm the men might pose a threat. His judgment pays off, as the team escapes before any attack, starting a car chase through the city.
Rone’s insubordination positions his judgment as greater than the judgment of Bob, and consequently the US Government. The validation of Rone’s defiant action, in combination with the pre-established lack of aid from the government, portrays the GRS team’s judgment as more dependable.

Through the rest of the film, these two meanings amplify the meaning of each other through repeated acts of insubordination and failures of the US Government to offer aid. The GRS team’s incredulousness with Bob’s insistence that they remain at the Annex after the Ansar al-Sharia attack begins quashes Bob’s reasoning that they “have no jurisdiction” in Libya. Rone eventually disobeys Bob, an action already validated, when the compound radios them saying, “If you do not get here soon, we are all going to fucking die.” Again, this confrontation between Rone and Bob positions Rone’s judgment as wiser than that of the Chief. While the GRS team is subject to the same protocol as the Chief, the film depicts Rone’s decision as common sense, because American lives are at risk, despite the insubordination. The rejection of protocol further develops the juxtaposition of ineffective US Government judgment with the effective actions of GRS.

Difficulty differentiating February 17th Martyrs, the group coordinating with the US, from Ansar al-Sharia mires their attempt to rescue the Ambassador. After failing to locate him, due to the fire set by Ansar al-Sharia in the safe house, they determine that the Annex will be the next target and return there. Meanwhile, a drone mobilizes from a US base in Italy, and flies overhead for the rest of the film, but does very little to aid them. One of the GRS members, Kris “Tanto” Paranto highlights this when he reports groups of militants gathering at the Ansar al-Sharia compound just down the road. He asks the Chief to have the Hellfire on the drone prepped. After a short radio silence the Chief reports that the Intelligence, Service, and Reconnaissance (ISR) is reporting exactly
what Tanto just reported over the radio. Tanto responds, “Yeah, Chief, I just put that out over the radio about two minutes ago. Tell the ISR guys they are pretty much worthless.” Mirroring Rone’s confrontations with Bob, Tanto’s response reiterates the primacy of the GRS team’s judgment in lieu of effective support.

As the situation deteriorates, one of the team members, Mark “Oz” Geist, requests that Sona, one of the CIA operatives get a couple F-16s to perform a low fly-over. Sona calls to get this fly-over from a base in Italy a twenty-minute flight away, but the base calls her authority into question, to which she replies, “my authority is that if you don’t send, Americans are going to die, including the one talking to you right now.” The unwillingness to act from those not at risk starkly contrasts the precedent of productive insubordination set by characters like Rone. Through the final wave of attacks, initiated by Ansar al-Sharia mortar strikes, the film controverts the justification for the inaction and lack of aid. The mortar strikes reveal that Ansar al-Sharia knew of the Annex’s true purpose well before the attack. The revelation that Ansar al-Sharia knew the whereabouts of the secret outpost invalidates everything that Chief worried about in terms of secrecy, depicting the lack of immediate GRS action as needless. Additionally, these strikes kill Rone and the head of the Tripoli GRS team, Glen Dougherty, who had just arrived, proving Sona’s assessment correct. The film vindicates Rone, by validating his initial observation that the movement in and out of the CIA outpost revealed its purpose.

When considered together, these scenes reveal the dominant meaning attributed to the history of the Benghazi attack, that US Government and military inaction failed the Americans in Libya, and the judgment of the GRS team rightfully outweighed protocol. The common-sense manner of presenting this meaning justifies the defiant actions further. The lack of support justifies the insubordination, which, in turn, emphasizes the consequences caused by the failures of the US Government to supply aid. As with
This may not be the only meaning developed by representing this history, but the similarity in these occurrences suggests this reading.

**SPACE**

Space serves as a powerful arbiter of meaning in a film. *American Sniper* and *13 Hours* depict spaces in Iraq and Libya, respectively. The words that the characters used to describe these spaces can reveal certain similarities between verbal codes that construct a preferred meaning for the space. Given the limited exposure many of the viewers of these films have to either Libya or Iraq, reiteration and promotion of preferred meanings attributed to the space in the films may amplify politics of fear through resonance with similar meanings in news media.

The historical basis of these films differentiates them from how Alsultany (2012a) conceptualizes space in her simplified complex representations. The defining characteristic of these new forms of representation seek to avoid controversy by superficially diversifying representational styles. To ensure this, productions often fictionalize an Arab or Muslim country to avoid offending people of a factual nation (2012a, p. 26). This strategy does not account for films like *American Sniper* and *13 Hours*, where the plot draws legitimacy from its basis in factual events, namely significant military actions in Iraq and Libya. Therefore, the representation of space in these films serves as a place where this study can illuminate new representational modes.

*American Sniper* attempts to describe Iraq much less frequently than *13 Hours* does Libya, but the tone of description remains consistent between the two. Despite the

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3 Reflected in Karin Wilkin’s research on the tendency of American, non-Arab viewers of Action Adventure films. Viewers show a tendency to group the Middle East as one region when they were non-Arab, whereas Arab viewers more often differentiated between Middle Eastern countries. See: Karin Gwinn Wilkins, “Mapping Fear and Danger in Global Space Arab Americans’ and Others’ Engagement with Action-Adventure Film,” *International Communication Gazette* 71, no. 7 (November 1, 2009): 561–76, doi:10.1177/1748048509341888.
fewer references in American Sniper, both films construct a similar ethos surrounding their respective Middle Eastern nation. Making use of its preferred historical meaning, American Sniper already clouds the militarized spaces in the film with an evil connotation. Due to this, the few descriptions provided resonate with this historical spin. 13 Hours uses its methods of describing Libya to build a similar danger and evil nature, dependent on American distaste of Benghazi, as well as ambiguity and inhospitality.

The opening scenes of 13 Hours attempt to provide a level of political context for the events of the film. A green typeface explains the major occurrences in the Libyan revolution, while news reel and amateur footage of Gaddafi’s murder interrupt the writing. Despite President Barak Obama’s reassuring words that the revolution will allow for a new, “free and democratic” Libya, the images of a bloody Gaddafi, men raiding weapons depots, and the typed message, “Benghazi became one of the most dangerous places on Earth,” undermine this idea. Before any footage shot specifically for the film rolls, it already constructs an inhospitable country.

In some of the earliest descriptions presented in 13 Hours, this inhospitality arises again, through criticism of Libya’s heat. In an early conversation between Jack Silva and Rone, Silva says, “man, it’s hot!” and slightly later in the conversation, as the two discuss their discontent with their professions outside of GRS, Rone says, “Well, this place sucks, Jack. Not only is it hot as balls, but you can’t tell the good guys from the bad guys.” By casting the heat of Libya as oppressive, the film suggests an inability for Americans to survive in the country. The film reinforces this when Rone describes the Annex to Jack, “So it hasn’t rained since June, isn’t gonna rain again until September,” adding to the notion that the city does not support life easily. Rone ties negative attributes of the heat to the stress surrounding an inability to differentiate good and bad Libyans. His words cast a general suspicion on all Libyans. The juxtaposition of the righteous
Americans’ difficulty surviving in the harsh Libyan climate, with the suggestions that all Libyans can survive this weather, codes Libya as a space of stress, suspicion, and hidden evil.

The opening scene of *American Sniper* exposit a similar meaning in its description of the climate of Iraq. As Chris Kyle lies on a rooftop watching for suspicious activity, he chats with his lookout, Goat-Winston. In the first line of the film, as the camera pans up Kyle’s sniper rifle, he says, “It’s a fucking hotbox,” to which Goat-Winston replies, “Man, the fuckin’ dirt here tastes like dog shit.” The choice to open the film with these lines immediately codes Iraq as a place unwelcoming to Americans. With the heat already worthy of note, the addition that the earth itself tastes like feces depicts Iraq, of no control of its own, as a place both hostile to these US soldiers, and unfulfilling of their expectations of a habitable space.

The coding of these meanings into aspects of Libya and Iraq that the spaces themselves cannot control serves to amplify these implications. Inherency implied in these attributes justifies a simplistic view of the countries, as well as constructs incompatibility. Through this implied inability for Americans to exist in these countries, an additional irreconcilability between the US and each country emerges. If US troops, who in these films serve as the front line of defense of American values, find Libya and Iraq this unwelcoming, the countries become similarly unwelcoming to those American values.

The characterization of the diplomatic outpost in *13 Hours* amplifies the incompatibility of Americans and Arab and Muslim spaces. The green grass and trees significantly contrast against the brown backdrop of Benghazi. Upon entering the main building, Oz remarks, “It’s like the lobby at Caesar’s,” and with a smile, one of the DS agents, Scott, says, “Makes you forget you’re in Benghazi.” The juxtaposition of the
compound and the surrounding cityscape, in conjunction with this comment, reveals a bias towards US concepts of modernity. By encoding a dominant meaning of inhospitality towards Americans in the Libyan space, this compound becomes a refuge of comfort, only possible because of its Americanness. The CIA outpost, in comparison, occupies the former compound of a Libyan businessman, which Americans merely inhabit. The GRS team members’ envy highlights that even a Libyan space occupied by Americans cannot provide the adequate comfort that this American space in Libya can.

To reinforce this preferred meaning, 13 Hours associates Libyans with the inhospitable nature ascribed to the space through its description of the space. These references group the city with its inhabitants, highlighting the city’s and the people’s indifference to the violence directed against the Americans. In multiple instances, the Americans see Libyan men watching a soccer game on TV as the battle rages, and in one of these moments Silva remarks, “just another Tuesday night in Benghazi,” implying that this type of violence does not raise any alarm to the average citizen of Benghazi. The direction of this violence, against Americans, encodes this indifference as passive aggression against the US from these average Libyans. Encoding this inhospitality across the space and people associates the hot, smelly, brown, less modern areas with aggression towards Americans and American ideals.

The most general instance of this type of conflation occurs when Glen finally arrives from the airport, after being held up by both Libyan bureaucracy and city design that made the CIA outpost difficult to find. He gets out of the transport and both aggressively and sarcastically says, “The Middle East never lets you down. Personable, organized, easy to navigate.” In expressing this sentiment, Glen ties the countries and people of the Middle East to the negative experience he just faced in Libya, and paints it as typical of the entire region. His experience as a former US Military member, and head
of this GRS team, legitimizes his statement. Through the generalization presented here, and the legitimacy from which it originates, *13 Hours* suggests the inhospitality it created for Libya exists in the Middle East overall. When comparing the similar meaning encoded on Iraq through *American Sniper*, Glen’s statement gains even more credence.

The characters of *American Sniper* generally avoid directly describing Arab and Muslim spaces, but the few instances develop Iraq’s inhospitality. Of the seven references in the film, five are encoded with this dominant meaning. In contrast to the approach in *13 Hours*, *American Sniper* remains on a larger scale, associating the space itself with large ideological incompatibilities. The film commonly encodes these representations by connecting or comparing Iraqi space to more familiar, Western spaces and ideas.

Upon arriving in Fallujah, one of Chris Kyle’s fellow Navy SEALs, Marc, explains the situation by saying, “Welcome to Fallujah, the new Wild West of the old Middle East,” a statement he affirms by explaining that each US service member in the convoy has a price on their head within the city. Marc’s use of the Wild West conjures images of sheriffs and outlaws, yet the immediate comparison of American troops to outlaws violates the expectation of Americans as the virtuous bringers of rights. Given the film’s association of AQI with evil, this juxtaposition highlights the backwards nature of Iraqi space. Those characters that the film insists are sheepdogs have bounties on their heads in Fallujah, meaning that in the context of Iraq, those virtuous and privileged individuals deserve death.

The resounding consensus throughout the rest of the film promotes a dominant interpretation of Iraq as a place where evil is good. Kyle highlights this later in the film, when Marc begins to question the US purpose in Iraq by saying, “There’s evil here, we’ve seen it… We are protecting more than just this dirt.” In this statement, he reaffirms
the resoluteness of the good versus evil dichotomy in his world view, while implying that their presence in Iraq directly defends the United States from the spread of this backward view of good and evil. Based on his characterization of the space, Kyle believes he defends Iraq itself from the evil that makes the space inhospitable to him, which further suggests his inherent good and the inherent evil of those who would place a bounty on him.

The film further develops the incompatibility of Iraqi space to Americans by expanding the scope of the representation to the religious. When Kyle returns for his fourth and final tour, one of his fellow SEALs, Dandridge tells him, “We’ve been shot off position three nights in a row, man. Fallujah was bad. Ramadi was worse. This shit is fucking biblical, Chris.” The statement begins by setting up an escalation of inhospitality, despite the best efforts of the forces of good to rectify this situation. It culminates with the suggestion of holy war, echoing a Huntingtonian world view, where America and Islam stand in opposite and incompatible positions. Across these three examples, *American Sniper* encodes an inherent hostility to the nature of the Iraqi space that, despite the best efforts of American sheepdogs, continues to grow more hostile and evil until it reaches a state of incompatibility.

*13 Hours* and *American Sniper* use their characterizations of the space to assert intrinsic hostility towards the US in both Libya and Iraq. While Alsultany’s (2012a) simplified complex representations would suggest a superficially fairer representation of the space, as to avoid controversy, both films utilize their historical basis to justify the encoding of a negative, biased preferred meaning. *13 Hours* constructs this bias through its representations of the space, whereas *American Sniper* relies on the resonance of its bias with Kyle’s world view, to reinforce a similar message. In both cases, the historical nature of the films, coupled with the nature of encoding and decoding representations,
reveal that these historically based films contradict Alsultany (2012a). Instead of trying to avoid generalization and abasement, to avoid controversy, *American Sniper* and *13 Hours* use it as a tool to enhance the threat their respective Arab nations pose.

**CHARACTERIZATION**

Both *American Sniper* and *13 Hours* limit their representations of significant Muslim/Arab characters. Nearly all of these characters are male and perpetrators of violence. Only wives of these men defy the first generalization, and only translators and allies of the protagonists defy the second. In this way, the films employ strategies similar to those outlined in Alsultany’s writing, primarily the inclusion of positive Arab or Muslim characters, whose positivity directly correlates with their acceptance of American characters or US ideals (2012a, p. 21-2). *13 Hours* utilizes this method much more clearly than *American Sniper*, however. In the case of the latter, none of its Arab or Muslim characters truly garner a positive representation, and instead serve primarily as plot devices and/or victims. Instead of attempting to construct multi-dimensional characters, both films rarely depict audible dialogue between characters, and these rare examples almost always involve translators. Therefore, both films represent Arab and Muslim characters as tools or enemies of the United States.

In their use of translators, the two films differ. The translator in *13 Hours*, Amahl, becomes the primary positive Arab character in the film. His timid nature does not aid him in the violent conflict in which he becomes embroiled, and both his cluelessness with a gun and weeping after witnessing battle highlight this. Despite this generally weak portrayal, Amahl forms something of a bond with Tanto, a member of the GRS team, and through this relationship he grows. Amahl’s understanding of the plight of his country serves as a major point of character growth. Early in the film, the
Ambassador gives a speech at the CIA outpost where he speaks of his goal to usher in a “free, democratic, and prosperous Libya,” a sentiment for which only Amahl applauds. At the same moment, Tanto dozes off and the Base Chief confronts him. Defending his rude behavior, Tanto protests the criticism: “I’ve heard the rah-rah speech about politics and progress a hundred god damn times before.” Juxtaposing these two sentiments reveals Amahl’s naiveté, and despite Tanto’s insolence, his experience with the futility of this flowery language legitimizes his perspective. Amahl verifies his positive representation after he receives a text from his cousin telling him to leave the CIA compound “before it’s too late.” Tanto tells Amahl he should go, but Amahl refuses, his tone suggesting a kinship with the Americans. Though Tanto laughs off this action, it represents Amahl as sympathetic to the American cause, and, importantly, distinct from both the indifferent Libyan citizens and the militants attacking the outpost.

His full character growth becomes apparent as they leave the compound after the attacks end. Amahl apologizes to Tanto for what happened. He then informs Tanto he is going home, to which Tanto tells him: “Your country’s gotta figure this shit out, Amahl.” Amahl looks mournfully back at Tanto before walking off frame. The film uses this scene to show Amahl waking up to the reality that, despite his country’s victory in the revolution, the struggle for freedom and democracy may be out of Libya’s grasp. In losing his innocence, the film encodes Amahl’s character with the idea that, despite Libya’s emancipation from the rule of Gaddafi, the same characteristics that make Libya inhospitable to Americans makes it inhospitable to the ideals Amahl applauds at the beginning of the film.

Where Amahl serves as the predominant positive Arab character in 13 Hours, the two interpreters in American Sniper affect little in the way of meaning. Neither interpreter has a name, other than Terp #1 and Terp #2, and in each of their respective
roles, they serve solely as translators. The film gives them no lines of their own, which likens them to robots. The lack of individuality makes these two void of meaning with respect to their Arab or Muslim identity, outside of the usefulness they offer. Their representation reveals the primary difference between *American Sniper* and *13 Hours*; the former lacks the positive representation(s) that offset the negative ones, per Alsultany’s (2012a) conception of simplified complex representations.

Terp #1 and Terp #2 do translate the two closest approximations to positive representations present in *American Sniper*. Terp #1 appears early in the film, after the men break into a local sheikh’s home and begin questioning him about the whereabouts of AQI leader Abu-Musab al-Zarqawi. Throughout his single scene, he serves solely to translate between Chris Kyle and Sheikh al-Obodi, who enters the film rushing to the aid of his son. The interaction between the three takes place in the Sheikh’s living room. After an abrupt cut from the tense scene of the Marines entering the building, the three sit calmly in the living room as Kyle, through Terp #1, questions al-Obodi about Zarqawi. He reveals the existence of the Butcher, Zarqawi’s enforcer, but remains hesitant about talking to the Americans, given the threat of the Butcher. To reinforce this threat, the Sheikh calls in one of the three women who live with him. He briefly speaks to her in Arabic, and then exposes her severed arm to Kyle. He then asks for $100,000 dollars from the Marines before aggressive goading from Kyle prompts him to reveal the Butcher’s real name. The agent that Kyle and Marc go to speak with after the interview meets al-Obodi’s request with a mocking “figures,” which implies the Sheikh wishes to extort rich Americans, instead of helping for the greater good Kyle believes his mission represents. When they go for the drop, they become pinned down by sniper fire from Mustafa, who covers the Butcher while he murders al-Obodi’s son, before one of his men kills the Sheikh as he rushes to his son’s side.
The tragic ending, as well as the suspicious lens through which the film views al-Obodi, suppresses any positive characterization he may provide. Unlike Amahl, the Sheikh does not freely offer his allegiance to the Americans, and while Amahl serves as a supporting character, constant throughout the film, al-Obodi exists as a stepping stone towards catching the Butcher. While the film does mourn his death through long shots, zooming out slowly from above while one of the women weeps over his body, he becomes a victim. However, the film equally mourns the loss of the Butcher, as it follows his escape from the scene parallel to the mourning. Al-Obodi’s loss results in an investigation that grounds Kyle’s unit for the remainder of his first tour, keeping him from pursuing the Butcher further. Therefore, he becomes a hindrance to the plot, in addition to a victim.

In the scene involving Terp #2, Kyle and his Marines break into another family’s house, occupying it for a stake out of the Butcher’s hideout. The father in the household, originally treated with suspicion and handcuffed, offers them a seat at the family’s table for their Eid al-Adha dinner. The men join the father and his son, but little conversation occurs between them. Eventually, Kyle’s suspicion returns, given the red marks on the father’s elbows, and he wanders off, discovering a weapons cache. The men then use him to get entry into the Butcher’s hide out. While the father begins as a possibly positive character, given his generous offer, he dies a perpetrator of violence when he picks up a gun to try and shoot the Marines after he enters the hide out. His betrayal reinforces the distrust placed in seemingly positive Arabs or Muslims. He never truly declares allegiance to the Americans in the way Amahl does, keeping him on the level of suspicion throughout his brief appearance in the film.

*American Sniper* and *13 Hours* almost completely neglect spoken interactions between these few Arab and Muslim characters, which limits the level of depth in their
characterization. The lone interaction between an Arab and Muslim man and woman in *American Sniper* happens between the Sheikh and his wife, as described above. Similarly, *13 Hours* only presents an interaction between the Libyan businessman and his wife, which occurs in the meeting that goes awry at the beginning of the film. Both films limit interactions between Arab and Muslim men to those between Amahl, Terp #1, and Terp #2 as they execute their jobs as translators. No interactions between women occur. The films position the US at the center of the attention of these characters, through the lack of real interactions between Arab and Muslim characters, subsequently manufacturing a US-centric preferred meaning. With the positivity of representations hinging on an Arab’s or Muslim’s relationship to the US, and all significant Arab or Muslim dialogue occurring with Americans, little conception of an independent Arab or Muslim world develops.

In depicting characters like Amahl, Sheikh al-Obodi, and the father, both films develop a code of deference to the US used to represent their non-military characters. This mirrors Alsultany’s (2012a) argument, but more so in *13 Hours* than *American Sniper*. While both distribute trust through allegiance to the US, as shown above, *American Sniper*’s representations all remain too undeveloped or unpatriotic to truly be understood as positive. Therefore, while these war films do determine the good of an Arab or Muslim in accordance with Alsultany’s (2012a) work, only *13 Hours* utilizes her simplified complex representation system to characterize its Arabs and Muslims, due to the general lack of positive representations in *American Sniper*.

**Violence**

In films inherently centered around violence, the representation of that violence shapes the determinations of good and evil, as well as the humanity of those who utilize
it. In the context of *American Sniper*, if this violence originates with Kyle’s enemies, then it affirms their role as the wolf. Representations of the characters that perpetrate violence may humanize them, or do the opposite, by affirming evil in them. According to Alsultany’s simplified complex representations, narratives depicting Arabs or Muslims increasingly humanized terrorists after 9/11 (2012a, p. 24-5). Much like the discussion of space, these films reject this newer tendency, and instead return to the dehumanized and simplistic representations presented in Shaheen’s *Reel Bad Arabs* (2001, p. 41-2). During all major violent confrontations depicted in *American Sniper* and *13 Hours*, the militants that US soldiers fight initiate that violence. When not actively engaged in violence, these characters often remain silent, which literally dehumanizes them by removing their voice. Few exceptions to this silence exist, and the films use them to reinforce their dominant meanings.

Both films necessitate Arab or Muslim instigation of violence for different reasons. In *American Sniper*, for Kyle to remain the sheepdog, his violence must be justified by the wolf’s violence against the sheep. The film develops this on the micro and macro scales. Al-Qaeda’s attacks in Kenya and Tanzania motivate Kyle to join the SEALs, and the 9/11 attacks confirm that motivation. Additionally, Kyle must be justified in each shot he takes because, as his spotter, Goat-Winston says, “they send your ass to Leavenworth” if you kill without cause. Placing the burden on Kyle to justify his violence then requires primary aggression from Arabs or Muslims. The resonance of this with his world view strengthens the association of Arabs and Muslims with the wolf, further encoding this preferred meaning.

*13 Hours* similarly places the instigation necessarily on Arabs and Muslims, given the positioning of the GRS team. As defenders of the covert CIA base, they must remain hidden and avoid violence. Calling excess attention to themselves risks the safety of all.
The waves of Ansar al-Sharia attacks upon the outpost represent this, as before each one, the GRS team members wait until the militants throw a grenade over the wall or fire mortars into the outpost. This defensive nature of the violence perpetrated by American forces in each film forces aggression upon the Arab and Muslim militants. The decoding of this meaning, between the two films, emerges through a lack of defensive reasoning attributed to Arabs and Muslims and an abundance of such reasoning in Kyle and the GRS team. *American Sniper* positions the line a bit more vaguely, with suggestions of violence justifying Kyle’s actions, whereas Arab or Muslim explicit violence in *13 Hours* initiates all violent exchanges.

Differing contexts in the two films alter the kinds of Arabs and Muslims depicted perpetrating violence and their centrality in the plot. *American Sniper* only depicts violent Arabs and Muslims as villains and makes the Butcher and Mustafa major plot driving characters. In contrast, *13 Hours* develops both good and evil perpetrators of violence, but it avoids developing any specific villains, instead focusing on the anonymity of its villains. This becomes an important theme throughout the violence in *13 Hours*, as the GRS team frequently struggles to distinguish 17 Feb members from Ansar al-Sharia members.

Certain specific visual markers code good and evil into the perpetrators of violence across both films. The vast majority of militants in *American Sniper* wear kufiyahs with black on them. Black and white kufiyahs distinguish the nameless militants from the Butcher and Mustafa, who wear all black, and red and black kufiyahs, respectively. *13 Hours* uses the black and white kufiyah, as well as other black and white headdresses to distinguish Ansar al-Sharia members from 17 Feb members, who tend to wear more Western clothing. For example, before entering the Diplomatic outpost, half of the GRS team passes an undesignated group of militants, who through their actions are
revealed to be 17 Feb members. The eldest wears a beret, while the three younger men all wear baseball caps, and one wears a Coca-Cola t-shirt. The film develops this theme of dress through the recognizable Ansar al-Sharia characters, further connecting the color black, and Arab or Muslim clothing, to the villains. One of these recurring militants, who receives no lines but multiple close ups throughout the film, wears a loose black and white kufiyah tied around his head, and has a thick black beard. Another commonly seen militant wears a t-shirt with the flag of Turkey on it, a symbol commonly attributed to Islam in general. The use of black as a color, and relative Westernness of dress, to distinguish 17 Feb from Ansar al-Sharia, reflects the similar association of black kufiyahs and evil in *American Sniper*. The connection developed here functions as a clear method of encoding a visual representation with a character trait, so that evil becomes the preferred decoded meaning of the color black, especially with kufiyahs.

*American Sniper* centralizes the Butcher and Mustafa to drive the plot, and their antagonistic role increasingly associates them with evil. The film encodes the Butcher primarily through his brutal violence, both explicit and implied. In the scene where he murders the Sheikh’s son, he does not hesitate as he drills into the boy’s thigh and skull and aggressively yells “You talk to them. You die with them.” His anger throughout the scene amplifies his lack of humanity, implying these actions are second nature to him, a notion confirmed later in the film. After staking out the Butcher’s hideout, Kyle’s team breaks in and discovers his slaughterhouse, where he keeps the body parts of his victims, including a skull. In the center of the room, a man dangles from the ceiling, dead and bloodied. The lack of dialogue given to the Butcher presents these actions as complete barbarism, without any possible reason or logical motivation. He then becomes further justification for the film’s simplistic, dichotomous world view.
The cold and calculating representation of Mustafa portrays him as singularly focused on his purpose of killing Americans with a sniper rifle. In one of multiple similar occurrences, we see Mustafa sitting on a couch in his home with a woman and child in the background. He spins a sniper bullet on the table next to a phone, which begins ringing. He silently picks up the call from the scout that just witnessed the SEALs drive by their lookout. Mustafa picks up his rifle, staring at it purposefully, then leaves his apartment, and as he does he walks past a framed picture of himself on top of an Olympic medal podium. The abundance of these silent and purposeful representations of Mustafa encode him as a methodical and single minded character, devoted to killing Americans. His silence throughout the movie cannot challenge this, so he only serves as an evil rival for Kyle. The lack of dialogue simplifies both of these major characters and sets their preferred reading as wholly evil and dehumanized, given their inability to express their thoughts.

Alternatively, the ambiguity between 17 Feb and Ansar al-Sharia throughout *13 Hours* allows for detailed representations of both, but those of 17 Feb are more developed. The film presents Ansar al-Sharia characters as interchangeable, aside from the few distinguishable militants and the Cleric from the roadblock at the beginning of the film. Dress serves as the most notable aspect of the recognizable militants, like the bearded man with the black and white kufiyah, referenced above. Therefore, the Cleric’s representation, which has the most dialogue for an Ansar al-Sharia member, reflects much of Ansar al-Sharia’s depiction throughout the film. He first appears walking calmly through the panicked crowd at his roadblock, before he briefly hesitates while passing a man shot dead on the ground. After starting to confront Rone and Silva, he argues, “I earn right to decide the future of my country [sic],” as a response to the clearly American presence of the two GRS members. Rone intimidates the Cleric with the threat of a drone
strike and says, “How willing are you to die for your country. I’m ready to go right here, right now,” prompting the Cleric to let them pass. Through this depiction, 13 Hours represents him as indifferent to violence, operating on a misguided sense of nationalism, and cowardly, despite the military power he controls. This sets an expectation that all members of Ansar al-Sharia will be equally misguided and indifferent to violence, a characterization that reflects the representations in American Sniper.

The characterizations of 17 Feb, despite their role as allies, justify the general suspicion of Libyans throughout the film. 13 Hours affects this through the ambiguity between 17 Feb and Ansar al-Sharia. As the team approaches a roadblock on the way to the diplomatic compound, Tanto remarks, “50/50 these guys turn on us and end this now,” reflecting this ambiguity. These men turn out to be 17 Feb members, but the film intentionally perpetuates this haziness to increase tension. The film casts 17 Feb in greater doubt through the representations of its militants as well. Tanto meets with a 17 Feb commander, outside the back gate of the outpost, who decides to call a member of Ansar al-Sharia to negotiate surrender. Upon Tanto’s angry response to this, the commander replies, “I now a good guy, but I know bad guys [sic],” something Tanto cannot understand. Tanto’s reaction, as well as the general distrust of all militarized Libyans presented throughout the film, codes the commander as untrustworthy and incomprehensible. In the eyes of the film, an ally of GRS should not associate with Ansar al-Sharia in any way. Ultimately, 13 Hours reveals the commander’s incompetence when he leaves the back gate of the Diplomatic outpost open. This fully discredits him and further calls into question 17 Feb’s allegiance to the GRS team.

Not all 17 Feb members hinder the GRS team, as some even fight alongside them. A small group of 17 Feb militants join the GRS team as they approach the diplomatic outpost, but when they join the group, Boon greets them with wariness, incredulously
telling them not to shoot the Americans in the back. Subsequently, the film predominantly depicts these 17 Feb members as incompetent, with Tanto scolding one of them, “Jesus Christ, get your gun out of my face man. Fuckin’ amateur hour,” while Tanto helps him over a wall. The film does give these nameless militants a voice, as one joins Silva’s half of the GRS team and says, “Hello Captain America, I am fighting for my country,” yet his outburst results in the group getting shot at by Ansar al-Sharia, reinforcing their incompetence.

By combining ineffectiveness and incompetence with the suspicion and ambiguity attributed in the 17 Feb militants, 13 Hours highlights the need to question the allegiance of all Arabs and Muslims throughout the film. If the GRS team’s supposed allies either hinder their advance or cannot be distinguished from Ansar al-Sharia, then the GRS members have to distrust them. Their interest in monetary compensation as the only form of allegiance reinforces the need for skepticism. The first appearance of Feb 17 militants highlights this, as the film introduces them as unhappy with the wage they earn to defend the diplomatic outpost. Additionally, at the end of the film, the small group of 17 Feb members who fight alongside Tanto approaches him at the airport and asks for the keys to Gaddafi’s armored cars. Tanto tosses them to the young men and they run off celebrating. With little demonstrated allegiance to the US, the only difference encoded into the 17 Feb members is the direction of their gun barrels, an important but tenuous distinction.

Between the visual coding of the black kufiyah with evil Arabs and Muslim militants, and the limited voices given to the militants by each film, Arab and Muslim violence becomes delegitimized and dehumanizing. Both films present the negative perpetrators of violence as misguided and unjust. They equally associate these same characters with indifference to, or celebration of, the consequences of their violence,
further dehumanizing them. Despite the differing methods of representing these characters, *American Sniper* and *13 Hours* validate a general suspicion of Arab and Muslim men and justify violence against them.

**LANGUAGE**

Given the setting of these films in Arab countries, the way they portray the language itself reveals important aspects of preferred meanings in the text. Arabic, as with any other language, serves as a method of communication between human beings. However, if Arabic emerges as an important aspect of difference in both of these films, it can serve to emphasize many of the dominant meanings already discussed. In fact, *American Sniper* and *13 Hours* use the language to highlight unfamiliarity with the American characters. All characters that the films deem trust-worthy speak English to some extent, and an inability to speak English becomes a source of suspicion. Additionally, the films make use of distinctive phrases to elaborate on the strangeness and inhospitality already constructed in the characterization of the space. Each film presents the translators as trustworthy characters, but the way they portray their usefulness reveals some of the ways the films encode the greater usefulness of Arabic.

Most noticeably, the lack of translation when characters use Arabic away from translators serves as a literal manifestation of the distancing effect of Arabic. *American Sniper* translates for the Butcher once, and all of the other instances of Arabic go untranslated. Most of these come from militants, as when non-military characters speak in Arabic, the translators are present. Leaving these instances of Arabic untranslated encodes the language as not worthy of translation and the words of the militants as not worth hearing. The connection of these two ideas reflects the hostility of the space by making the language itself hostile. All the significant trustworthy characters, like the
Sheikh in *American Sniper* and the 17 Feb members and Amahl in *13 Hours*, speak some amount of English, even if they require a translator at times. Therefore, the lack of translation and the association of Arabic as a sole means of communication create the dominant meaning of the language as inherently hostile.

Both *American Sniper* and *13 Hours* make use of established codes, in the form of recognizable phrases, to construct a dominant meaning of the language and space. Muslim prayer music and the phrase *Allah hu Akbar* serve as the most impactful of these phrases. In *13 Hours*, some manifestation of this occurs four times, and each time the film associates the code with violence or strangeness. Militants shout *Allah hu Akbar* in the scenes depicting Gaddafi’s murder and right before attacking the diplomatic outpost. These scenes associate chanting of the phrase with imminent or successful violence. The use of prayer music additionally demonstrates strangeness more than violence, as it appears first after a black screen reading September, 11th 2012. Presumably, this highlights the strange place the GRS team finds itself on the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. The second instance happens after the second wave of attacks, as the militants and civilians practice their morning prayer. The sound prompts Tanto to call it “weird shit,” and the eerie stillness affects unease in the protagonists. The unfamiliarity coded onto the common occurrence of prayer music played from speakers atop a minaret compliments the inhospitality constructed in the characterization of the space. The two kinds of phrases depict both Arabic and Islam as hostile and unfamiliar.

The uses in *American Sniper* resemble this, however they combine *Allah hu Akbar* with the prayer music, as they only ever appear connected. While the film does not directly associate militants with the phrase in the way *13 Hours* does, it still constructs the same hostility associated with it. The opening scene of *American Sniper* begins with the call to prayer, before the visuals of the scene actually appear. This immediately
establishes setting, and the first image, Kyle’s gun barrel, associates it with violence. While, in this case, the violence is American, the scene reveals that Kyle’s violence must be justified, given the possibility of retribution from the Government, so any violence done by that gun barrel must result from violence of an Arab or Muslim. The call to prayer then becomes a signifier of the hostility of the space and the people. In the second occurrence, the call to prayer sounds as Mustafa appears for the first time, and kills his first American on screen. The combination of these two scenes directly connects violence with Arabic and Islam. Combining the two also associates Mustafa with the purpose for Kyle’s violence. Together, the two films code these phrases as hostile, adding to the construction of Arabic as a threat.

In representing translators, each film takes a stance on the language as well. The submissiveness and robotic quality of Terp #1 and Terp #2 in American Sniper rightly depicts the language as a tool, but 13 Hours uses Amahl to highlight the ineffectiveness of translation, as well as the dominance of Western culture. Amahl only translates twice in the film, and each time he fails. In his first appearance in the film, Amahl tries to translate for the Americans as they attempt to buy arms from a local militia leader. The buy begins to go south as the Arab contact draws his gun and points it at the Americans while yelling in Arabic. Amahl does his best to tell the man to calm down, but it isn’t until Tanto flashes the “Jambo” hand sign (otherwise known as hang loose or Shaka) that he calms down. He recognizes the Western, surf culture signifier. Amahl’s second attempt at translation ends equally ineffectually, as the man he attempts to speak with gets shot from off screen before Amahl can translate anything.

The ineffective nature of Amahl’s translation, especially in contrast with the effectiveness of Tanto’s use of the Jambo, portrays Arabic as a similarly ineffective method of communication. The representation of a paid translator unable to aid a
situation with his knowledge of Arabic codes the language as useless. The preeminence of Western culture and its forms of communication as a successful solutions, amplifies this same meaning. In this way, *13 Hours* not only makes Arabic a hostile language, but also a useless one that can be replaced by more effective Western methods of communication.

While *13 Hours* utilizes language in a more significant way in its encoding processes, providing a more negative preferred decoding of the language, *American Sniper* reflects this meaning. Together, the films represent the languages in this manner to emphasize what they already established through their encoding of the space, general hostility. The predominant American perspective throughout both films aids the centrality and usefulness of English, to the detriment of Arabic. While these films use actual Arabic throughout, an improvement from previous trends in representing the language, the meanings encoded into their use derive a similarly simplistic and negative understanding of the language.

**CIVILIANS**

While often overlooked, the background characters in a film can highlight many dominant meanings based on how the film represents them. Positive representations of Arabs and Muslims need to include them as regular people, decontextualized from plot themes like violence, in order to break the good/bad dichotomy (Alsultany, 2012a, p. 157; Shaheen, 2001, p. 64-5). While the implication here calls for major characters that accomplish this, neutral civilians can aid in a more subconscious coding of these meanings. This also means that if a *13 Hours’* and *American Sniper’s* representations of civilians echo their other meanings, they can reinforce negative encoding instead of
challenging it. They ultimately choose to treat them with great suspicion, amplifying the meaning already associated with Arabs and Muslims as perpetrators of violence.

*American Sniper* presents this suspicion as natural, given the context of the film. For Kyle’s first tour, his fellow SEAL, Marc, clarifies the military’s perspective of civilians in Fallujah following the city’s evacuation. He says, “Any military-age male who is still here is here to kill you,” because no non-militarized Iraqis would remain in the city, based on the logic of the military. The film expands this suspicion in its opening scene, which is repeated shortly after Marc’s statement. Given that a mother and her child serve as the primary threats, all remaining citizens become people wishing to kill the American soldiers. This justifies Kyle’s depiction of the mother and child as, “evil like I’ve never seen before.” *American Sniper* confirms its own subjective representation by introducing the first six instances of civilians exclusively through Kyle’s sniper scope. Literally positioning them under Kyle’s suspicion encodes them with the possibility of violence without any action of their own. In conjunction with the inherent association of Arabs and Muslims with wolves throughout the film, the suspicion of civilians only justifies this characterization as reflective of the entire population.

In *13 Hours*, the same general association exists, which in its case reflects the ambiguity already developed in the coding of its Arab and Muslim militants. This suspicion manifests itself most notably in the scene where the Ambassador gives a speech at the office of the mayor of Benghazi. After the press crash the event, members of the GRS team stress about the sudden risk posed by the event that they originally intended to be a private meeting. Silva remarks to Rone in an exasperated tone, “Any one of these people could clack off a vest.” Clearly a result of their stress, this expression of the point of view of the protagonists imposes a general suspicion upon the whole population.
The method of dress in representing crowds further signifies dominant meanings in both films. The civilians in the scene discussed in the previous paragraph largely dress in a traditional Muslim fashion, with the women all in the hijab and with most of the men wearing a taqiyah. This sampling of dress accurately reflects the representations throughout the film. Considered in the context of the strangeness associated with Islam through the prayer music, these expressions of faith through clothing add to the suspicion under which the public already finds itself. This suspicion becomes much more deserving in the depictions of civilians in *American Sniper*. The film uses the association of violence with the black kufiyah to cast doubt upon the one real crowd it shows. This occurs after the raid upon the Butcher’s hide out, with the crowd carrying the body of the father whom Kyle’s team had killed. The crowd consists mainly of men, with the wife and child being the two exceptions, and many of the men in the crowd wear black and white kufiyahs. Therefore, both films use method of dress to further encode suspicion upon the represented populations.

The one major exception which appears in either film occurs at the end of *13 Hours*, when it displays actual footage from a demonstration against the violence in the film. The text, “100,000 Libyans mourned the ambassador’s death” appears on the screen before wide shots of the demonstration, as well as a close up of one young man holding a sign reading, “Sorry people of America this is not the Behavior of our ISLAM and Profit [sic].” This can certainly be understood as a positive depiction of Libyan civilians. However, the juxtaposition with the general indifference encoded in representations of Libya and Libyans throughout the film, presents this as unrepresentative of the images appearing in the film itself. By contrasting with the dominant meaning of the film, this one truly positive representation loses its effectiveness and seems unbelievable.
While the films present civilians relatively often, their characterization inspires suspicion throughout, with few neutral representations, and no positive ones. This solidifies the failure of these films to fairly depict civilians in a manner reflective of the necessary representational style called for by Shaheen (2001) and Alsultany (2012a). Generally, the films use civilians to increase the tension in the scenes, connecting their appearance with the stress of the protagonists. Therefore, Arabs and Muslims only bolster the already established dominant meanings encoded in other aspects of the film, which further validates that meaning.

**CONCLUSION**

Through the careful consideration of the many themes developed by these films, *American Sniper* and *13 Hours* develop the dominant meanings of inhospitality, hostility, suspicion, evil, aggression, and ineffectiveness. In their methods of accomplishing this, they tend to spurn the trends presented by Alsultany (2012a) in her simplified complex representations, instead returning to the more simplistic representations highlighted in Shaheen’s (2001) *Reel Bad Arabs*. While the rejection of the evolution noted by Alsultany (2012a) does not necessarily represent a general shift, it may imply something about the nature of representing these true stories. *American Sniper* and *13 Hours* would suggest that historically based, blockbuster war films have begun to move away from more sensitive representations. This shift could imply the use of the historical basis as justification for these representations and preferred meanings. Similar analysis will need to be done of films meeting these criteria, both preceding and following *American Sniper* and *13 Hours* to determine any trends. The return to Shaheen suggests that these films use their historical basis to justify their overtly negative representations, because the imparted meanings reflect politics of fear discourses.
Chapter 3: Contrasting Cultures Through the Absurd

Whereas the topical similarities and generic commonalities between *American Sniper* (2014) and *13 Hours* (2016) may have aided in harmonizing their preferred cultural meanings, these connections between *War Dogs* (2016) and *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* (2016) are much more tenuous in nature. This primarily derives from the different natures of the two films, with *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* telling the story of Kim Baker’s various experiences in Afghanistan as a reporter, and *War Dogs* dramatizing the story of a small military contracting company that wins the bid on a massive contract in Afghanistan. Both films focus heavily on their characters, so the history does not play as significant a role, but each advertises itself as a true story, allowing for each narrative to affect a meaning. The comedic nature of the two films connects them as well, and might reveal any similarities in representational style tied to the generic style of the two films.

*War Dogs*’ comparative lack of story line occurring in Arab and Muslim spaces serves as the most distinctive of their differences, as it only represents a brief sequence in Jordan and Iraq. Additionally, *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*’s setting in Afghanistan means it is the only film analyzed that does not represent Arabs. However, Michael Suleiman’s (1999) research argues that the American-dominant cultural narrative of Arabs and Muslims conffates the two identities as one. The comedic spin that the two films offer does tie them together, and in creating these opportunities for humor, they may increasingly stereotype or complicate the simplistic dominant cultural understanding of Arabs and Muslims in the US.

Each film’s basis in factual events affects the previously mentioned processes of education and cultural narrative definition, but unlike the traditional war films, their methods of representations differ from each other greatly. *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* utilizes
Kim Baker’s position as a Western female in Afghanistan to highlight the differences between Western and Muslim treatment of women, positioning the former as inherently superior, and the relationship between the West and Islam as hostile and incompatible. It also tends to follow Evelyn Alsultany’s (2012a) representational framework relatively closely in many of the themes investigated here. In contrast, War Dogs’ representations contradict the Westcentric nature of Whiskey Tango Foxtrot by critiquing its protagonists’ American exceptionalism. This portrays Arabs and Muslims as neither negative nor positive with respect to the US. Therefore, War Dogs strays from previous representational models like Alsultany’s (2012a) and Jack Shaheen’s (2001). The comparison of the two films reveals a pattern of contrasting cultural differences for comedic purposes, but the two films affect this through differing methods of representation that have distinct consequences on the meanings attributed to Arabs and Muslims. Additionally, the less militarized nature of each film offers these films a different avenue to represent the space, the people, and the language.

**Whiskey Tango Foxtrot**

*Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* tells the story of Kim Baker, an American journalist who decides to go report in Afghanistan in 2003 because she feels stagnant. The film is based on the real Kim Barker’s memoir. It did not receive significant acclaim, failing to recoup its $35,000,000 budget. Despite this, the representation of its history still develops a preferred meaning worthy of analysis. *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* perpetuates a culturally relative, Westcentric narrative through promotion of Western perspectives at the expense of Afghan perspectives. It attributes this meaning to the history by casting the transition

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of power in Afghanistan, from Taliban to democracy, as flawed, due to its continued acceptance of Islamic principles in its law system. While sporadic mocking of its Western characters’ assumptions challenges this meaning, the ultimate positioning of Western values, especially relating to gender, as superior invalidates these critiques originating from Afghan characters.

The focus on Baker’s story often prioritizes the plot over the political context of the transition of power in Afghanistan, but the film does provide moments when her story and this transition overlap. Reflecting the major theme of the film, these moments often have to do with gender, because they highlight the subjugation of women in Afghanistan at the time. After Kim decides to move to Kabul, she quickly confronts the differences in standards of living and the different role for women in Afghan society.

Early in the film, Kim’s translator, Fahim, manages to get an interview for Kim with the prospective Attorney General of Afghanistan, Ali Massoud Sadiq. As the interview opens, Sadiq addresses Fahim, rhetorically asking whether Fahim wishes to interview him. When Kim responds that she, in fact, wishes to interview him, Sadiq continues to address Fahim. Kim only captures Sadiq’s attention by saying, “Your Ministry for the Prevention of Vice and the Encouragement of Virtue sounds a lot like the Taliban Ministry of Vice and Virtue.” Sadiq then slowly turns towards Kim, and after lifting the top of his notebook to remind himself of her name, begins addressing Kim. To rebut Kim, Sadiq explains how the Taliban’s Ministry used to beat men whose pubic hair had grown too long, and inquires whether he seems like he would do this. Kim politely agrees that he would not, and the conversation transitions, as Sadiq begins to hint at his sexual attraction to Kim. While slyly raising his eyebrow, and intonating in a suggestive manner, Sadiq’s question, “How can we get to know each other, Kim?” implies a sexual
motive, one the film then humorously violates by quickly cutting to a scene of the three characters firing guns together.

This scene exemplifies the meaning conveyed through Whiskey Tango Foxtrot’s narrative of its history. Sadiq’s response to Kim’s assertions fails to actually address Kim’s concern, given that he offers no substantial evidence that he actually would not impose this type of policy. Through this failure, the film increases the speculation surrounding Sadiq’s ministry, then further discredits Sadiq’s character by quickly depicting him as lecherous, in line with Shaheen’s (2001) writing on powerful Arab men in Reel Bad Arabs. Casting doubt on Sadiq’s morals contradicts his position as the Minister for the Prevention of Vice and the Encouragement of Virtue. As the person in charge of determining virtue with regard to Islam, Sadiq represents virtue in an Islamic context, and the juxtaposition between the expected meaning of the word virtue and Sadiq’s actions calls his and Islam’s values into question.

Whiskey Tango Foxtrot continues to develop Sadiq’s infatuation with Kim, as it turns its attention to the situation in Kandahar province. Kim sits in Sadiq’s new office dressed modestly with a scarf wrapped loosely around her head and a large blouse on top. Since their last meeting, Sadiq has been promoted to Attorney General of Afghanistan, and after congratulating him, Kim expresses that she did not need to meet, but only wished for a statement on the return of sharia in Kandahar. Without acknowledging Kim’s statement, Sadiq states that he heard Kim and her “special friend” in New York, Chris, broke up. He proceeds to ask Kim if he can show her something, and with a sly smile draws back a large curtain to reveal the bed in his office. Kim ultimately responds, “So… No comment on Sharia in Kandahar, or…,” which wipes the smile off of Sadiq’s face, and leads him to drop the curtain to the bedroom.
Not only does this scene establish a failure of liberal Islamic governance by expositing sharia law in Kandahar as a reversion, but it reiterates the association of Muslims in power with sexual obsession. The return of sharia to an area of the country implies the inability of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to govern itself democratically, based on a Western standard. Sadiq’s refusal to address Kim’s reason for meeting devalues her, and the exposure of a bed in Sadiq’s office echoes the lechery developed by the previous scene. Additionally, his sexual advances, despite Kim’s adherence to a more modest method of dress, questions the purpose of imposed modesty, as the style of dress expected of Kim by the space she inhabits still inspires sexual advances. The presence of a bed in the office of a politician casts doubt on Islamic democracy, given Sadiq’s use of this as a tool of seduction. By encoding the scene from a Western perspective, Sadiq’s actions become strange and backward. Therefore, this scene establishes a Westcentric definition of governance, and devalues Islam.

The film continues to develop this meaning, as Kim travels to Kandahar to report on the burning of an all-girls school, and witnesses the negative effects of sharia law firsthand. First, she must buy a burka, which Fahim refers to as the “blue prison,” an assertion backed up by shots from Kim’s point of view through the crisscrossing threaded grid of the burka. After investigating the school, where “No education for woman” is written on the wall in Dari, they drive through the streets and pass a public square, where a man “executes” two TVs by shooting them. This presents a diametric opposition of sharia law, which the film already developed as a reversion, with Western culture, represented by the TVs. Given the previous encoding that promoted a reading of Western superiority, the incompatibility developed in this scene reiterates the commonly held beliefs represented by Samuel Huntington’s (1997) *Clash of Civilizations* thesis.
From here, the plot turns more personal, developing the romantic relationship between Kim and Scottish photographer Iain Mackelpie. After a militant group kidnaps Iain, Kim pleads with Marine General Hollanek, who commanded the troops with which she was previously embedded, to mobilize a unit to go save Iain. He agrees and Kim then extorts Sadiq into using his connections to find Iain’s location. She sends her cameraman to film the rescue operation, giving her material for a story that ultimately secures her an anchor job in the US.

Kim’s agency in the climax of the film confirms the pro-Western bias of the film. As her previously explained interactions with Sadiq underscore, in the context of Afghanistan she, as a woman, does not have significant rights and must defer to men. The film confirms the encoding of Western supremacy, especially in this field of gender, through the combination of the interactions with Hollanek and Sadiq. When she goes to speak with Hollanek, she finds him working out in a gym exclusively occupied by men. After Hollanek kicks the Marines out, the two sit down next to each other and Kim explains the situation. Hollanek listens carefully before respectfully telling Kim, “I’m sorry, I can’t help you.” Kim silently breaks eye contact with the General before standing up and saying after passing him on her way out:

You know it’s just a shame that y’all don’t get credit for all these high-profile things that you do. You know, especially with SEALs and Delta out there. I mean, what week goes by that you don’t see those assholes on TV, am I right? And then next time Congress votes on a Pentagon budget and there’s this pesky little ten percent line item for the Marines, next thing you know, you guys are just part of the Navy.

Through the entire speech, the camera remains focused on the back of Hollanek’s head, with Kim off screen behind him until she begins to speak about Congress. She then stands in front of Hollanek as he remains seated. After explaining the possibility of embedding a cameraman during the rescue, Hollanek acquiesces, on the condition that
Kim obtains concrete information about the location. This validates her assessment of the situation and cedes the power of the situation to her. By depicting her as capable of entering the hyper-masculine, American space of the gym and gaining agency over Hollanek through her intellect, the film both positions Kim as the representative of Western cultural ideals of gender, and highlights her ability rise to a position of power and respect in American spaces that she cannot in Afghan spaces.

After acquiring this power in an American context, Kim goes to visit Sadiq, where she implies her willingness to fulfill Sadiq’s sexual desires by telling his secretary that his “special friend” has arrived. With Kim sitting down in front of Sadiq’s desk, and Sadiq leaning on his desk above her, the two begin discussing the reason for Kim’s visit. She explains the situation and Sadiq says that he can only aid her in this way if she becomes a “very special friend.” Kim sighs and stands, with the camera over Sadiq’s left shoulder, and begins to unbutton her coat. The camera cuts to a side view of the two as Kim opens her coat, suggesting, through Sadiq’s happy, but flustered reaction, that she will reveal herself to him. She then reaches into her breast pocket, pulls out her cell phone, and hands it to him. On the phone, Sadiq watches a security video from an earlier scene in the film, where he came to the journalist’s compound during a party because he wished for Kim to return his affection for her. Kim then blackmauls Sadiq, saying she will release the tape of, “the Attorney General of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan dancing in the street with a Western enemy of Islam at a party where alcohol was served,” if he does not help her find Iain’s location. Through all of her interactions with Sadiq, his position as an Afghan man in Afghanistan kept her from attaining power over him. However, her encoded power after her interaction with Hollanek exemplifies the possibilities for women in a world with Western gender values, as Kim can now gain
supremacy over Sadiq, thus positioning her, as representative of Western culture, as greater than Sadiq, as representative of Muslim culture.

The growth of Kim’s character through these interactions with Sadiq, which represent the struggles of the Afghan government to establish itself after the war, positions Islam as the limiting factor in this governmental development. Without Islamic values, exemplified by Sadiq, it may be possible for Afghanistan to establish a successful democracy. Instead, the dichotomy developed between Western values and Islamic values, presented here through gender, keeps these Western values from taking root. In their absence, militancy continues to spread, and sharia returns through the weakened, but still functional, Taliban. While the film exposes this on the micro level through the interactions of two characters, their roles as the exemplars of their respective cultures fosters this preferred decoding of the film’s historical narrative.

**War Dogs**

The civilian nature of *War Dogs* protagonists differentiates the film from the others. It tells the story of Efraim Diveroli and David Packouz, who go into business together in a small defense contracting company called AEY. They target smaller arms deals, but the plot takes them to Jordan, when Jordanian customs seizes a larger deal they won, supplying the Iraqi police force with Berettas. The film draws its historical inspiration from a Rolling Stone article written about the two men, and managed to barely recoup its $40,000,000 budget at the box office. Efraim and David’s main claim to fame was repackaging old, illegal, Chinese AK-47 ammunition for a massive arms deal, supplying the Afghan army. The lack of importance of Jordan and Iraq to the actual

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plot, aside from the spectacle of the scene, tempers the meaning of its historical representation. However, *War Dogs* affirms a limited American superiority within Iraq, but not the region as a whole, given the lack of American power depicted in Jordan.

Given the semi-non-sequitur nature of the trip to Jordan and Iraq, the overall plot of the film does not significantly impact the meaning of this sequence. After the two win the Beretta deal, they discover an Italian embargo against the shipment of arms into Iraq. While Efraim convinces David that flying their guns into Jordan, and then shipping them to Iraq, will work, because Jordan, “shares a border with Iraq, it’s a US ally, and, most importantly, there’s no embargo,” the plan, which Efraim also describes, unsurely, as “not illegal,” fails. Jordanian customs seizes the Berettas, and when David questions Efraim about it, he responds, “I don’t fucking know, David. I dropped out of high school before they covered international diplomacy.” Here the film both promotes and challenges the idea of American superiority. Through Efraim’s assumption that Jordan’s status as an American ally would not cause any problems, it presents the cultural narrative of assumed American exceptionalism. His defense, a lack of knowledge about international diplomacy, complicates the previous assumption and reveals an international political landscape where being an American ally does not equate to free reign for American enterprise.

*War Dogs* continues to develop a level of Jordanian sovereignty after the two decide to travel to Jordan to regain their guns. They arrive and immediately go to the American Embassy, but as David narrates, “the American Embassy offered little to no help in dealing with the ministry of customs. So, we took matters into our own hands.” The film only depicts them driving past the embassy, reiterating the uselessness, and then quickly cuts to a scene of them meeting with two fixers, who they hope can locate their
guns. By reinforcing the fallacy of Efraim’s assumption about the legality of the circumvention he planned, the film emphasizes the autonomy of Jordan.

After a brief meeting with the fixers, David and Efraim return to their hotel to wait for a response. While Efraim assumes the fixers duped them and took their money, David remains trusting, and eventually they receive a call and discover that they must smuggle the guns into Iraq. For this they cooperate with Marlboro, an experienced smuggler. After a long night of driving and a tense confrontation with Iraqi border patrol that Marlboro solves with a bribe of cigarettes, David and Efraim wake up at a gas station in the middle of the desert. Before Marlboro can finish filling the gas cans, they see a pair of trucks full of militants driving over the horizon. Efraim gets in the driver’s seat of the truck and begins to drive away without Marlboro, who runs to catch the truck. Just as the militants catch the smuggling truck, they stop, and an attack helicopter flies overhead, quickly followed by US Humvees. The quick appearance of the US military to save them, despite the characterization of the area as the “triangle of death,” demonstrates a level of American superiority in Iraq. While dangerous, the ability to react on that short notice depicts the US presence as guaranteeing security in Iraq.

The three arrive in the Green Zone in Baghdad, and drop off the weapons, much to the surprise of their contact, Captain Santos. He congratulates them on their bravery, and the two go off to get their compensation. When they enter the building, the film cuts to a wide shot, from within a hallway of money, that slowly zooms in on the two standing in front of a desk. As the shot moves closer, the soldier standing beside them reveals that the $12.2 billion once belonged to Saddam. The American ownership of this once Iraqi stock of cash constructs an additional level of US dominion over the space, as the control of the capital implies control of much of the operations in the country.
By contrasting the influence of the US in the two different countries, *War Dogs* develops a more complex dominant meaning of the Middle East. The different levels of sovereignty implied in Jordan and Iraq attributes a distinct meaning to each country, instead of conflating the two. War and military occupation play an important role in defining this distinction, but it importantly complicates the meaning of a US ally, distinguishing it from an occupation. Given the characters’ assumption and ignorance to the distinction developed here, the film establishes a complex meaning that challenges the dominant narrative established by the assumptions. Through this diversified representation of its history, *War Dogs* achieves a more nuanced preferred decoding by violating the expectations of Efraim and David.

**Space**

Despite their basis in war, both *War Dogs* and *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* present demilitarized Arab or Muslim spaces. For *War Dogs*, Jordan serves as this demilitarized space, whereas *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* separates the journalist’s compound from the outside Muslim space, representing the two differently. Both of the films portray real places, as the previous two films did, offering them a chance reflect or depart from previous forms of representation. The preferred meaning developed by each film through its historical representation parallels their encoding of space. *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* encodes its demilitarized space as safe and Western, accentuating the hostility of the Muslim space, but *War Dogs* contrasts Jordan with Iraq, differentiating and complicating the representation of Arab and Muslim space.

Even though the films differ in this way, they do represent space similarly at other times. Meanings attributed to militarized spaces in each film parallel each other. Both relate the spaces under US military occupation as hostile and/or inhospitable. They affect
this meaning in different ways, with *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* focusing more on the inherent qualities of Afghanistan that make it uninhabitable, and *War Dogs* highlighting the dangerous nature of Iraq. Despite these similarities, the preferred meaning of *War Dogs*’ scenes in Jordan offer substantial enough contrast to its militarized scenes in Iraq to differentiate the overall representation of Arab and Muslim space as more neutral than in *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*.

At its outset, *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* describes the Afghan space as dangerous and of a much lower standard of living than Kim expects. As she flies into Kabul, she briefly speaks with a fellow passenger. As she explains why she decided to become a war reporter, the plane lurches, to Kim’s surprise. This man laughs this off, saying, “Corkscrew landing, in case a missile is fired at the aircraft. Kabul International Airport. KIA. Killed in Action.” The action of the plane and the man’s words introduce and reinforce the danger Kabul poses. The necessity of a corkscrew landing implies the passengers face imminent danger solely because of their location, and the clever coincidence the man notes for the multiple meanings of KIA highlights this inherent hostility. After hearing this, Kim hesitantly looks out the airplane window as the pilot says over the radio, “Once again, we thank you for flying with us.” By juxtaposing the threat posed by the corkscrew landing with the common, welcoming voice of the captain, the film reiterates the strangeness of the situation. Kim not only risks her life from the moment she enters Afghanistan, but the normality of the situation, represented by the captain’s words, implies the space’s indifference to this violence.

The film then begins to construct the inherency of the space’s inhospitality. As Kim leaves the airport, Fahim meets her. When she begins to cough, Fahim explains that, “The air here takes some getting used to. It’s quite polluted with feces,” in a matter of fact tone. As with the statement by the man on the plane, the reality presented by the
statement and the statement itself cooperate in meaning making. The revelation that feces inhabits the air of Kabul presents it as necessarily unwelcoming. Through Fahim’s implication that someone can get used the feces, the situation becomes absurd. When she speaks with her boyfriend in New York shortly after, she expresses that she expected a different standard of living by saying, “there’s shit in the air, literally. I don’t think I can do this.” Given this statement, the film places the reality of feces-polluted air as outside the realm of reasonable expectation, and therefore reinforces the absurdity of Fahim’s statement, and the inhospitality of the space.

While the words used to describe Jordan after Efraim and David arrive portray an inhospitable nature, the positionality of the two characters to the space complicates the resulting meaning. Efraim yells in the middle of his rant about the Jordanians possibly swindling them, “How am I supposed to chill out, David? We’re in a Muslim country, I can’t even get a blowjob! It’s embarrassing! It’s chaos here, fuck!” This statement presents Jordan as inhospitable to the rampant sexual desires of Efraim, and not to the average citizen, in the way that feces-polluted air does. It does point to the sexual repression commonly attributed to Muslim countries, but the outburst serves a different purpose, given the intrusiveness and insensitivity attributed to Efraim and David. When the two first arrive in Jordan, they push and shove their way through a crowd of Jordanians to get to the front of the line at the customs checkpoint. Efraim’s statement exemplifies this tactlessness, as he says, “Don’t worry, I have to go first. I’m American.” David apologizes, but does not protest Efraim’s words, and participates in the shoving as well. Their behavior elicits stares from the surrounding civilians, revealing that their American exceptionalism does not carry significant weight in this space. By portraying Efraim and David’s presence as intrusive, War Dogs nullifies the meaning attached to Efraim’s later words about Jordan’s inhospitality, as his behavior seems unreasonable.
The film uses the militarized nature of Iraq to affect an inhospitable nature on the space, through its descriptions. After Efraim and David come under attack, they learn they drove through the “triangle of death” from Captain Santos, highlighting the danger inherent to the space. David’s narration as they leave Iraq emphasizes the negativity of their experience by saying they “got the fuck out of Baghdad.” The lack of a threat, as well as Efraim and David’s intrusiveness in Jordan, juxtaposed with the real danger posed by Iraq, encodes Iraq as a legitimately hostile space, given its militarization.

A similar contrast of militarized and demilitarized spaces emerges in Whiskey Tango Foxtrot, as Kim adjusts to life inside the journalists’ compound more than that outside. The film begins to establish the difference after Kim’s first night partying. She goes out with a small group of reporters on a Friday night, and at the end of the night Kim passes out drunk on the couch. Fahim then wakes her the next morning with a phone call, saying they have to go meet with Sadiq. From within the compound, Kim assumes that Saturday will be a day off, as it is in the US. Fahim then explains to her, “Friday is the only day off in the Islamic week,” to which Kim responds, “That’s bullshit. No.” While she eventually leaves, despite her hangover, this scene begins to establish the differences between the assumptions within and outside of the journalist compound.

The film then uses these differences to establish the journalists’ compound as a safe space. Shortly after her hangover, Kim speaks with her boyfriend over video chat, and loud gunshots ring out in the background. Her boyfriend becomes worried, saying, “What the hell was that?!” to which Kim responds in a matter of fact tone, after getting below the level of the window, “Probably just a wedding. They like to shoot off guns at weddings here.” Despite her reaction to get away from the window, her statement reveals she is growing accustomed to life in Afghanistan, to an extent. While the outside still presents dangers, inside the compound she doesn’t need to worry as much. The film
reiterates this when Kim begins calling her part of Kabul, mainly the journalists’ compound, the “Kabubble,” highlighting the removal of her experience from the reality in the city. Later in the film, Kim tells Iain she feels as though Kabul is her home. She says this in her room in the Kabubble, so her home becomes the demilitarized area of Kabul to which she has become accustomed. The Westernness of the journalists’ compound, along with Kim’s ability to adjust to life within that Westernized space, encodes it as a demilitarized space. Outside of the Kabubble represents danger and feces in the air, but inside Kim can feel at home. Through this juxtaposition, Whiskey Tango Foxtrot encodes Afghanistan as inhospitable, less by describing it as such, than by describing the non-Afghan space within it as safe.

Though both War Dogs and Whiskey Tango Foxtrot encode Arab or Muslim space with hostility, the connotation of that hostility differs with their contexts. The primary difference lies in the direction of intrusion in the films. By establishing Efraim and David as transgressors into Jordanian space, War Dogs questions the validity of its own characters’ words. On the contrary, the intrusion of Afghan space into Kim’s space, developed through its inhospitable nature, encodes Afghanistan as the transgressor. Therefore, Whiskey Tango Foxtrot’s use of space enhances the incompatibility developed in the representation of its history. By casting doubt on Efraim and David, War Dogs complicates the moral relationship between the film and its lead characters, and allows for an overall, more neutral reading of the Arab space represented.

**Characterization**

In their treatment of Arab and Muslim main characters, Whiskey Tango Foxtrot and War Dogs diverge greatly. Mostly, this derives from the significantly shorter amount of time used to represent Arabs and Muslims in the latter than in the former. They also
diverge in subject matter quite starkly. *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* uses its primary Muslim characters, like Sadiq, to emphasize gender differences and inequalities in Afghanistan. Despite this, the film predominantly represents Muslim men, simplifying its one important female character to comic relief. While *War Dogs* does not represent any Arab or Muslim female characters, its male characters defy previous representational conventions. The majority of these characters hold no specific affiliation with or against terrorism, and the moral ambiguity previously established through the lead characters’ transgressions reflects the moral ambiguity of these Arab and Muslim men, accentuating their neutrality. In this way, both films’ characterizations echo other meanings encoded into their representations.

The previously described interactions between Kim and Sadiq exemplify the gendered discourse of *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*. The film supplements this meaning through additional characters that typify the possible attitudes towards women in Afghanistan, borrowing from typical meanings like sexual repression, enforced modesty, and rigid gender roles. Previous analysis of Sadiq revealed his position as representative of the role of Islam in politics. The piety and deference to Islam and Afghan law he affects with his words directly contrasts the lecherous implications of his actions. His true desires to pursue sexual conquest towards Kim converts the reason for his subjugation of women from a respect of Islamic traditions to a level of sexual perversion. His defensive nature after Kim shows Sadiq the video on her phone highlights this transformation. In the scene depicted in the video, Sadiq comes to the journalists’ compound explicitly to try and convince Kim to become his “special friend,” by making her feel guilty for not inviting him to the party. After seeing the video, he abruptly becomes defensive, saying, “I’ve never touched alcohol in my life,” to Kim’s reference to the presence of alcohol at the party. Sadiq reacts immediately to affirm his piety but his sexual desires, which the
film presents as inappropriate, nullify his own rebuttal to Kim. This encodes the source of female subjugation as not only hypocritical, but incapable of defending itself against the superior, American position for women the film develops.

The two other major Afghan men define the two ends of the spectrum represented in Sadiq’s character. Fahim represents the male attitude towards women from a pious Muslim, whereas Jaweed, one of the Afghan employees at the compound, represents lechery and sexual repression. While Fahim plays the significant role of translator for Kim, his character itself should be analyzed here. The film primarily utilizes Kim’s role as representative of the proper, American role for women, to reveal the closed off mentality that it encodes on Fahim.

This first emerges when the two visit a rural Afghan village while embedded with the Marines. Towards the end of the scene in the village, Kim expresses to Fahim how badly she needs to pee, to which Fahim says, “Stop. Stop. I am engaged to be married.” Before the war, Fahim had been a doctor, and Kim uses this when she responds, “Okay, Fahim, I know you like your women to be, like, beautiful mysterious IKEA bags, okay? But we urinate, Doctor. Out our vaginas.” In Fahim’s response to this, the film does violate Kim’s superiority to comedic affect, “You think you urinate out of…” to which Kim rebuts, “No. I know it’s a separate thing!” Finally, Fahim explains, “I cannot ask these men about this, and I am not allowed to talk to the women.” Through this scene, *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* expresses the negative meaning attributed to the separation of sexes through enforced modesty. A seemingly innocuous statement like I have to pee, in an Afghan context, necessitates a reaction from Fahim that affirms his religious devotion and restricts Kim’s freedom to express herself. The film does assert that Fahim does not ignorantly affect this implication, by showing he understands female anatomy, but this then encodes Islam as the repressive force limiting Fahim, and therefore Kim. Fahim’s
final assertion reflects this meaning, by reiterating that the traditional Muslim nature of the village limits his ability to help Kim, further restricting her ability to act freely.

These types of instances reappear throughout the film to reinforce this meaning, and they inhabit the final interaction between the two as well. As Fahim drops Kim off at the airport, he goes to hand Kim her suitcase and Kim says, “In my culture, we would hug.” In response to this, when Kim grabs the handle of the suitcase, Fahim leaves his hand on the handle, with their fingers barely touching. They stay like this, while making eye contact, for an extended period of time. This directly violates a condition Fahim previously set when Kim fell asleep with her head on his shoulder. In that instance, he woke her and made her lift her head. Through this scene, Whiskey Tango Foxtrot supports its previous dominant meaning for Fahim, by portraying him as a kind man, inherently restricted by his Islamic piety. While he does serve as a positive representation, Fahim’s restriction under Islamic expectations then limits and subjugates Kim throughout the movie, despite her independence from Islam.

The film implies a greater subjugation of Islamic women through its depiction of Fahim’s wife. Fahim’s relationship status, and therefore his wife, arises in conversation often. Despite this, she solely appears at their wedding, in brief shots of the bride and groom walking down the aisle and dancing. Only once does she appear on screen without Fahim, and that is in a shot that starts with both of them together and pans to her as they split. She has zero dialogue throughout these few shots, and does not appear again, except through Fahim’s references to her. Despite Fahim’s positive representation, again his deference to Islam limits the film’s representations of his interactions with women. Without any dialogue, Fahim’s wife becomes an object and the justification for Fahim’s decision-making and limitations, therefore defined by her relationship to Fahim. This
reinforces an inferiority to Islamic gender relations, as the voiceless wife becomes exclusively defined by her husband.

The other primary male character, Jaweed, becomes defined by one major character trait, his love of porn, especially porn involving men and donkeys. When the film introduces Jaweed, he sits in the common area of the journalist’s compound, watching a porn video. Fahim quickly slaps the computer shut and scolds him in Dari before one of Kim’s security guards, Nic, says, “They’re bloody addicted. That one melted a laptop downloading porno.” Fahim then introduces Jaweed, who raises his hand to wave at Kim, before Fahim says, “He likes to watch men with donkeys. It’s unfortunate.” The film then reinforces this identity later in one of the few other scenes he appears in, where Kim opens a laptop which has porn playing on it and yells, “Goddamn it, Jaweed!” Jaweed barely appears in the scene, shown over Kim’s shoulder raising his arms to protest Kim’s annoyance. The dominant association of him with this sexual repression further associates Afghan men with lechery, and the juxtaposition of him and Fahim reveals that Muslim societal norms restrict both outwardly pious and outwardly sexually devious Islamic men.

*Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*’s one major female Arab or Muslim character, Shakira, does nothing to develop a more complex representation of Arab and Muslim women. The film does not elaborate on Shakira’s nationality or religion, but it introduces her by having her explain that her name means thankful in Arabic. This associates her with an Arab or Muslim identity. She works as a journalist as well, but only appears in two scenes, the first night that Kim parties in the film, and at Fahim’s wedding. Throughout both of these scenes, she serves primarily as comic relief, by commenting on the situation, but not really progressing it. For example, at Fahim’s wedding, Kim explains why she decided to come to Afghanistan. After explaining how she felt stuck and like she
was only moving backwards, through an analogy using the stationary bike she rides early in the film, Shakira comments after a long pause, “Well, that’s officially the most American white lady story I’ve ever heard.” This type of quip exemplifies her cursory role in the film. In addition to the ambiguity as to her Arab or Muslim identity, Shakira does not serve as a complex female Arab or Muslim. This starkly contrasts the critiques injected into the other dominant meanings of the film, which try to assert a superiority of Western notions of gender roles.

*War Dogs* does no more to complicate the portrayal of women, as no major female characters appear. With that in mind, neither film can represent interactions between major female characters, given only one exists in *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*. Additionally, neither film depicts interactions between men and women, and each limits the interactions between men to those between translators and other Arab or Muslim characters. This lack of interaction discounts the authenticity of these reactions, as the interactions between the Arab or Muslim men are for the benefit of the Americans involved in the situation. Without their voices shown interacting between each other, the films reduce the Arab or Muslim world to a realm dependent on Western presence in it.

The men depicted in these interactions in *War Dogs* don’t have much of a voice of their own, outside of Marlboro. Both of the Jordanian fixers that Efraim and David visit after they fail to get any help from the US embassy speak only Arabic, and their translator, a young boy, translates this Arabic for them. His role will be explained in more depth in the Language section, but because the voice of these two fixers functions through a young boy, he represents them and their meaning in many ways.

While the film calls the legality of the fixers’ actions into question, the equal ambiguity of Efraim and David’s actions allows for the encoding of the fixers to be more neutral. After discussing the limitations posed by trying to get their guns from Jordanian
customs, Efraim says, “Look, I don’t want to come off as the ugly American here, and maybe I don’t understand the rituals of your culture, but this feels like the moment where we’re supposed to offer him a gift, am I correct?” The young boy responds, without prompting from either fixer, that he is correct, and Efraim pays the main fixer $1,400. The boy’s association with the two men, and his ability to interpret the situation and know that the fixers wanted the bribe emphasizes the illegality of the situation. However, the willing participation of Efraim in the interaction positions him as on the same level. Without positive characters, the film does skew Arab and Muslim representation, but because the film dissociates their negativity from the militants it represents, it creates gradations of negativity, therefore implying that these men may not represent the Jordanian population as a whole.

The most prominent Arab and Muslim character in the film, Marlboro, reiterates this dissociation. Marlboro does not associate closely with either Efraim and David, or the militants, reinforcing this neutrality. This type of neutrality importantly contrasts with Alsultany’s simplified complex representations, which limit the possible neutrality of characters because of the necessity of a relationship with the US in determining relative goodness (2012a, p. 15). By depicting Marlboro as self-interested, the film removes him from this context. The scene at the gas station best reveals Marlboro’s dominant meaning. Marlboro waits until they reach Iraq to get gas so he does not have to pay for it. When Efraim and David wake up, he is behind the gas station filling gas cans. Any danger posed by the location of the gas station, outside Fallujah, does not deter Marlboro, as he wants to get free gas. After the militants reveal themselves, Marlboro remains self-interested, dropping one of the gas cans and sprinting after the truck. When he yells “Fallujah bad,” after jumping in the bed of the truck, Efraim responds, “Marlboro, you cheap fuck.” In this way, Marlboro operates between the two sides. He chooses to risk all
of their lives for free gas, which makes him cheap, but not any more negative than the representations of Efraim and David. Also, his position as equally in danger because of the militants dissociates him from their violence. While this does not make Marlboro’s dominant portrayal positive, he implies a possibility of different degrees of negativity in Arab and Muslim representations, which directly contrasts the bi-polar relationship described by Alsultany (2012a). Instead of either violence and evil, or actively opposing terrorism, *War Dogs* allows for self-interested individuals acting based on their assessment of situations, not one imposed upon them by an American assessment of a situation.

Through the relative neutrality that *War Dogs* develops for its male characters, it distinguishes itself from *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*. Both films inject a level of negativity on their representations, with the exception of Fahim. The severance of the link between terrorism and tone of representation constructs neutrality in *War Dogs*. In contrast, *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* develops the tone of its representations based on the sexual deviance in its characters. While this differs from Alsultany (2012a) as well, it operates in the same manner as terrorism, as an unacceptable trait, defined by the Western characters, determining Arab and Muslim positivity and allegiance to the American main character. Therefore, the dominant meanings of the films’ characterizations depart greatly from each other, and ultimately reflect the general differences already established between the two.

**Violence**

Neither film utilizes violence as a dominant aspect of its representation. However, the militants they do portray actually perpetrating violence follow similar codes to highlight their militarization. Arab or Muslim violence only occurs once in *War Dogs*,
which limits the ability to draw conclusions based on multiple instances of violence, but in this one instance, it originates from an Arab or Muslim source. The violence in *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* generally originates from Muslim sources, which highlights the overarching negativity associated with all things Afghan.

In the scene at the gas station in *War Dogs*, the militants initiate the violence, but the film does not portray this violence as necessarily unwarranted. Instead, the violence serves as a threat that the characters expected from the situation. After David explores the gas station and finds a corpse inside it, he runs out to tell Efraim, who responds, “we are in a war zone, there’s a dead body, relax.” While this does not justify the violence that then threatens the main characters, it highlights that violence should be expected from their location.

In the few instances where Muslims perpetrate violence against the American characters in *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*, the film affects a general militarization of the space, but contrasts the meaning in *War Dogs*. One such scene occurs as Kim rides back with from the rural village with the Marine convoy, where they have to stop because one of the Humvees has bottomed out. Despite the earlier assurance from one of the Marines, Coughlin, that, “Accidental discharge is scarier than the Taliban,” the convoy comes under attack from a small group of militants hiding behind a truck. While the convoy stopped a few minutes before to let Kim pee, that stop had been in a place of their choosing, highlighting the danger in the space because of this difference. When the Marines fully control a situation, they remain safe, but when stopped in a random place, they come under attack. This militarizes the space, in general, depicting Afghanistan as posing a threat at all times. Additionally, by violating Coughlin’s assurance, the film contrasts *War Dogs*, given the expectation that violence wouldn’t occur in a war zone.
Both films associate similar characteristics with their Arab and Muslim perpetrators of violence. In the gas station scene in War Dogs and the convoy scene in Whiskey Tango Foxtrot, the color black serves as a signifier of these militants. The militants riding in the back of the trucks in War Dogs never get close ups, appearing as dark blobs, with the kufiyahs wrapped around their heads serving as their most distinctive characteristic. Whiskey Tango Foxtrot glosses over its militants even more, with the majority of the shots portraying them as muzzle flares originating from behind a truck. Just before the javelin missile fired at them lands, black silhouettes can be seen. This avoidance of actually depicting the militants dehumanizes them, and forces an exclusively violent preferred reading of them.

Whiskey Tango Foxtrot develops an additional worthlessness to its representations of these militants. At the end of the battle in the aforementioned scene, Hollanek scolds the Marine who fired the javelin because, “That’s an $80,000 piece of ordnance!” and then justifies his anger by saying, “Can any of you geniuses tell me the Kelley Blue Book value of a 1989 Toyota pickup?” By not mentioning the loss of life enacted by his Marine in his rudimentary cost analysis, Hollanek makes the value of their lives worthless. In war, the devaluing of the enemy should be expected, but the juxtaposition of the militants’ deaths with the explicit calculation of the worth of the exchange enhances their dehumanization, and additionally attributes worthlessness.

Through the use of camera angles and soundtrack, the film builds upon this dehumanization during the rescue of Iain. After the Marines leave Kabul, Harry Nilsson’s “Without You,” a poignant love ballad that drowns out the noises of the operation, begins to play. After the men enter the militants’ compound, a few peel off and fire muffled shots at unseen targets. Just before entering the main room of the compound, the camera shows a small group of militants sitting watching TV. The song builds to its chorus, as
one of the Marines prepares a flash bang, and the louder music softens the noises of the militants being shot. Quick cuts between the different militants as they fall to the floor makes only their shapes distinguishable. After killing all of these militants, the Marines locate Iain and rescue him, ending the scene. The sound track and camera angles serve to obscure the violence against these Afghan militants and devalue their lives by trivializing their deaths, reiterating the dehumanization already developed.

While neither film truly depicts significant violence, the way War Dogs and Whiskey Tango Foxtrot choose to use violence differs, based on the expectation set for the violence. War Dogs plays off of its characters’ expressed understanding of the situation they find themselves in to muddle the fault of this violence. Whiskey Tango Foxtrot’s violence seems surprising, compared to War Dogs, because of the different expectation that the Taliban does not pose a threat. The representation of the militants remains similar, with dehumanization dominating. Ultimately, this perpetuates the lack of agency given to Muslims in Whiskey Tango Foxtrot, and deviates from the trend of more nuanced representation in War Dogs.

**Language**

The previously established lack of interaction between Arab or Muslim main characters in these two movies reflect the tangential role of Dari and Pashto to Whiskey Tango Foxtrot, and Arabic to War Dogs. When they do surface, in exclamations or brief conversations, it is exclusively around Westerners. The focus of the films on Western main characters makes this somewhat inevitable, but this also positions these languages as subject to a Western presence. Without occurrences on their own, between only Arab or Muslim characters, the spaces these languages represent contract, stunting their ability to appear fully developed in their dominant meaning. While they portray the language
similarly, their use of the codified *Allah hu Akbar* differs greatly, with *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* tying it to violence and *War Dogs* removing it from a violent context. Finally, their translators affect similar meanings of ineffectiveness, though *War Dogs* enacts this through different means than *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*.

Between both films, the method of subtitle translation serves as the most common similarity in the use of their respective non-English languages. *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* and *War Dogs* present translations of these languages in most of the occurrences when a Western character speaks the language, or the language is spoken to a Western character. The latter only presents Arabic four times in total, but two are exclamations and go untranslated. Of the remaining instances, the film provides translations in one, and the Jordanian boy translates in the other. The one subtitled scene occurs when Marlboro speaks briefly with the Iraqi border patrol, to try and calm them down, before bribing them with cigarettes. Both Efraim and David do not know the meaning of the Arabic spoken around them, but the film translates it for the audience. While this aids in presenting Arabic as a useful language, it ties the usefulness of the language to the presence of the American main characters. Together with the limited depiction of interactions between these Arab main characters, this narrows the scope of Arabic and simplifies the space that uses it.

*Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* subtitles nearly all instances of Dari and Pashto spoken by or to Western characters, even those where Fahim translates. Often the film’s translation in the latter situation derives from Fahim’s intentional mistranslation or lack of translation, an aspect of his character to be analyzed later. Exclamations exclusively make up those instances that do not have subtitles. Through this Westcentric translation scheme, *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* codes the same limited scope on its languages as Arabic in *War Dogs*. The additional translation of the instances of Dari spoken by Western
characters adds to the Westernization, especially when compared to the lack of translation when the languages are used in brief exchanges between unimportant Muslim characters. By predominantly translating in these instances, the film asserts a heightened importance to the language when used by Westerners, simplifying Afghanistan.

The use of codified phrases contrasts the similarities between the two films use of language, in general. *Allah hu Akbar* serves as the predominately used phrase between the two films, but *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* associates it exclusively with the repressive Islam shown in Kandahar, whereas *War Dogs* utilizes it as a celebratory phrase. In Kim’s brief trip to Kandahar, the phrase occurs to set the mood of the region and to cast the men demonstrating in the square as extreme. As the scene cuts from the bombed girls’ school to Kim’s driving through the town, the Muslim call to prayer rings out before the voice of the man executing TVs catches the attention of the group. Just before the man shoots one of the TVs, he exclaims *Allah hu Akbar*, to which the gathering of people replies in kind. Another speaker exclaims the same phrase, in the same call and response fashion, after Kim gets out of the car and enters the square. The men then proceed to yell at Kim until Fahim comes to her rescue. By introducing the phrase through the call to prayer, the film introduces it as a specifically Muslim signifier. The call to prayer’s appearance only in Sharia-governed Kandahar then encodes it as exclusive to areas controlled by Sharia law. The reinforcement of the negativity of the phrase through its association with violence, and through the TV executions and the angry mob inspired by Kim’s presence, solidifies its preferred meaning as a signifier of a violent, repressive version of Islam.

To the contrary, *War Dogs* presents Marlboro using the phrase to celebrate. As the three men flee the trucks full of militants and the US Army arrives just in time to save them, Efraim and David begin to celebrate in the cab of the truck. The Humvees drive by and the camera cuts to show them driving off towards the militants, with Marlboro
hanging out the side of the truck, in the foreground. He begins to yell “Allah hu Akbar” with a broad smile on his face, before laughing and slapping the side of the truck in joy. Efraim and David’s similar slapping celebrations mirror Marlboro’s in the following shot. Instead of associating the phrase solely with violence and Islam in a negative way, *War Dogs* normalizes it. The film affects this most powerfully by comparing the type of celebrations done by all three characters, encoding the phrase as something positive, despite the religiousness in its common use as the call to prayer. Through its use of this phrase, *War Dogs* builds upon the more nuanced meanings present in many other aspects of the film.

It does not, however, take a similar approach in how it uses the Jordanian boy as a translator. As previously explained in the Characterization section, the boy represents the fixers in many ways, and therefore carries the same self-interest, to an extent. His position as middleman portrays him mainly as a plot device, and Efraim’s rude ordering of him subordinates him to both the fixers, as their translator, and the Americans. The film uses Efraim to further devalue him in each of the scenes in which he appears. During the first meeting, Efraim interrupts as the boy translates something in order to propose the bribe. After the boy affirms Efraim’s assessment of the situation as correct and Efraim gives the fixer the money, Efraim says, “Could have just started with that, you know, saved all this bullshit.” This presents the efforts of the boy to translate as useless, because Efraim comes to this conclusion without the help of the translator, and it accomplishes more than any of the translation.

In the boy’s second scene, he does not actually translate Arabic at all, but tries to convince David that smuggling the guns is the only solution. David remains unconvinced, questioning the abilities of Marlboro as a smuggler. Only after deferring to Efraim, who says, “David, we’re gunrunners. Let’s go run some fucking guns,” does David agree. In
the same way as the previous scene, Efraim becomes the actor, superseding the boy and making his efforts futile. Through this representation, War Dogs devalues the translator, despite his ability to converse in Arabic, similarly devaluing the Arabic language through Efraim’s ability to read the situation and connect with David better than the Jordanian boy can.

Much like War Dogs’ preferred meaning of the translator, Whiskey Tango Foxtrot encodes Fahim’s translations as ineffective, despite his generally positive representation. The film affects this through Fahim’s intentional mistranslations and failures to translate. This first appears shortly after he and Kim meet outside the airport, when Kim’s headscarf blows off in the wind. A woman appears and yells, “Cover your head, shameless whore!” at Kim, which Fahim translates as, “Welcome to Afghanistan.” While done clearly for comedic effect, it reflects the piety that restricts Fahim’s character in general. He additionally mistranslates Kim’s cameraman’s outburst of, “Suck my dick,” to, “Oh, what a terrible event.” The modesty that limits Fahim’s character therefore limits his ability to do his job properly. Though it may protect Kim, to an extent, it ultimately casts doubt upon Fahim’s ability to accurately translate things.

The most poignant example of this occurs in a brief exchange between Fahim and warlord Pasha Khan, before Kim interviews him. The entire dialogue occurs in Pashto, without Fahim translating anything, while Kim sits awkwardly, waiting to start the interview. Pasha Khan begins by saying, “She is Muslim?” and Fahim lies, “Yes,” Pasha Khan then demands, “Have her pray for me,” to which Fahim again lies, “She is Turkish. You wouldn’t understand her anyway.” Through this conversation, the film not only reiterates Fahim’s hesitance to translate, but shows his willingness to lie to protect Kim. While the scene implies the interview might not happen if Kim’s non-Muslim identity was revealed, it additionally calls Fahim into question. If he translates based on his own
judgment, then he does not do his job as a translator, and instead serves as a filter of Dari and Pashto for Kim. This does not make him as useless as the Jordanian boy, but does encode him with sufficient doubt to call his usefulness into question.

This section appears to serve as a departure from the general contrast between *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* and *War Dogs* developed in the previous themes, but the similarity here might reflect a desire to focus on English, given the English speaking main characters. Though this abbreviation of the non-English languages may not intend to affect these meanings, given this possible desire, the way the languages manifest in each film does reinforce negative preferred meanings for them. *War Dogs*’ use of *Allah hu Akbar* serves as the broad exception to these meanings, and reinforces the more nuanced representations typical of the film.

**CIVILIANS**

Through their representations of civilians, *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* and *War Dogs* both present a relatively neutral preferred meaning of the citizenry. The exclusive appearance of civilians in the demilitarized space of Jordan, in the latter film promotes an entirely neutral representation of its Arab population, in contrast to the former film’s slight intonations of hostility through occasional non-neutral representations. These non-neutral representations in *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* reiterate the subjugation of women as well. Therefore, the film reflects many of the dominant meanings it promotes in its other facets. *War Dogs*’ Jordanian civilians present little opportunity for decoding, given their true neutrality throughout their brief appearances.

The citizens of Amman in *War Dogs* appear whenever Efraim and David move through public spaces. At each instance, the film presents a variety of dress, with many men wearing thawbs and kufiyahs, but some also wearing more Western clothing, like
suits or polos. For its women, the film predominantly depicts them wearing some type of head covering, though some women do not cover their heads. The children that do appear mostly wear Western clothing like polos. Through this general survey, the film utilizes a sampling of different physical representations, not associating any physical traits with any particular meaning. The scene in which Efraim and David push through the crowd at the airport serves as the only one that affects any decodable meaning, through the justified incredulity on people’s faces. This scene was previously analyzed. Throughout the other scenes, the civilians move in the background, as expected of the happenings in a large city, which codes them as predominantly neutral.

While Whiskey Tango Foxtrot has its own share of neutral civilians, the instances of non-neutral behavior from civilians, like the aforementioned scene in Kandahar, present opportunities to decode meanings. For example, in the Kandahar scene, all of the men in the square follow Fahim and Kim, and they beat upon the car as it begins to drive away. The representation of the whole group casts the entire citizenry of the town as hostile. While the film differentiates the context of Kandahar from that of Kabul, the presence of Sharia, in conjunction with the negative implications of any form of Islamic rule established in the historical spin, casts Muslim spaces as hostile.

The film emphasizes the connection of Islam to hostility through the cultural imposition of modesty. This first appears in the scene where the Afghan woman yells, “Cover your head, shameless whore!” after Kim’s headscarf accidentally gets blown off. Through no fault of her own, Kim comes under attack in a brand-new culture. The imposition of this from a woman onto her adds to the internalization of the repression of women in the society. A similar confrontation occurs when Kim and Iain hold hands in a public market, as an Afghan woman angrily runs up behind the two and beats their hands with a bouquet of flowers. This scene reinforces the naturalization of the role of women
due to Afghanistan’s identity as a Muslim country. Due to the anger depicted in both of these scenes, the film encodes these simple acts as deeply offensive, strengthening both the hostility developed through the representation of space, and the incompatibility between the West and Afghanistan promoted in the historical representation.

Though both *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* and *War Dogs* affect neutral preferred meanings in representing their respective civilians, the places where the former diverges from this neutrality reinforce the negative connotations it promotes elsewhere. In contrast, the representations of civilians in *War Dogs*, combined with its other meanings, reflect the overall nuance fostered by the film’s encoding of Arabs and Muslims. It primarily accomplishes this by presenting the average Arab or Muslim as going about their daily lives, and therefore not taking a stance on violence, the West, or Islam in any meaningful way. The contrast between the two films here reflects the general differences that run through many aspects of this analysis.

**CONCLUSION**

In decoding the different methods of representing Arabs and Muslims in these two comedic films, a lack of consensus surfaces in the preferred codes used to affect meaning. Where *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* promotes assumptions of antagonism between the West and Islam, *War Dogs* calls that same relationship into question. While neither film fully deconstructs the negative predisposition for representations established by Alsultany (2012a) and Shaheen (2001), *War Dogs* begins to dismantle these structures. In the place of the hostility and incompatibility presented by *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*, it fosters subjectivity. Instead of positioning its main characters as inherently correct, it alienates them through their behavior, allowing for recognition between the negative characteristics of its American and Arab characters. Whether *War Dogs* or *Whiskey
*Tango Foxtrot* better embodies the typical methods of representing Arabs and Muslims through comedy remains debatable. That does not detract from the importance of the difference between the two films, or the positive step that *War Dogs* represents.
Conclusion: An Encouraging Case Amid Prevailing Negativity

Reductive meanings reside in many of the representations across the films, so that the limited diversity developed by War Dogs (2016) becomes refreshing. War Dogs’ treatment of Jordan does warrant the importance attributed to it in the previous chapter, and this style of representing Arabs and Muslims can help define a new technique of more complex characterization. Given that this new representative method only appears in War Dogs, it cannot be considered conventional. The analogously narrow focus of this study as a whole cannot necessarily confirm the similarities between these films and others outside this sample. However, when considering only the scenes in zones of US military conflict, the four films present a remarkable convergence of preferred readings, which can suggest the naturalization of certain codes existing across most, or all, of the films. These range from hostility encoded into the space and citizenry, to the preferred meanings of Allah hu Akbar and kufiyahs. By comparing these key points of similarity and how they relate to politics of fear and previous representational standards, we may see how these films perpetuate or develop these kinds of simplistic codes.

While films can function to define the kinds of cultural understanding exploited by politics of fear, as suggested in Karin Wilkins’ (2009) aforementioned study, these films do not chiefly serve this purpose in their interaction with politics of fear. As previously defined, David Altheide’s (2006) definition of politics of fear positions decision makers as utilizing audience beliefs about fear to achieve political goals. In order for politics of fear to have any effect, something must establish these beliefs that define the American cultural narrative about Arabs and Islam. The media framing process, outlined by Ewart et al. (2014), helps to define these audience beliefs by determining the vocabulary surrounding these groups. Through this framing, the word
Islam becomes coded with a threatening meaning, specific to a US context, as described by Edward Said (1997). The threat that “Islam” poses becomes validated by the actions of the government, through policies like the Patriot Act, even though these policies gained credence because of the affected meaning on Arab and Muslim signifiers, like the word Islam. Through the vicious cycle demonstrated here, the dominant cultural narrative perpetuates itself.

*American Sniper* (2014), *13 Hours* (2016), and *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* (2016) represent their history in a way that adds a step to this echoing process, inherently because they do portray a real moment in history. Fear of “Islam” inspired the War on Terror, which encompasses both the war in Afghanistan and the war in Iraq, building from the idea that Muslim extremists hate our freedom. The attacks in Benghazi became one of the large controversies of the Obama presidency, and inspired a significant number of Congressional investigations by House Republicans as to the White House’s, and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s knowledge of the situation and possible inaction. A common thread of political decision making based on fear ties together these historical moments. Retelling consequences of policies that utilized politics of fear affords each film the opportunity to justify the reasoning for those decisions. Therefore, the films become an added reinforcement in this vicious cycle, both reiterating the reason for the fear and validating the policies that already affirm the fear. In contrast, *War Dogs’* focus on the economic successes of its protagonists, instead of the war, means that it does not serve the same purpose as the other three films when rehashing its history.

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7 Information on these investigations can be found at the GOP’s website: “Investigation of Benghazi,” Gop.gov, accessed April 5, 2017, https://www.gop.gov/solution_content/benghazi/.
Each of the other three films represents its history in different ways to affect this result. *American Sniper*’s simplistic view of violence defines Chris Kyle’s role as the protector of all of America. In Kyle’s own words, inaction might cause “these motherfuckers to come to San Diego or New York.” By justifying Kyle’s violence through this defense, the film necessitates US military action in Iraq, an action that, outside of the film, was inspired by the fear Kyle articulated here. In *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*, the centrality of the rights of Muslim women in Afghanistan serves a similar purpose. While women still face subjugation under the new government of Afghanistan in the film, the representation of the significantly greater threat posed to women in Taliban-controlled Kandahar illuminates the situation in the country before US intervention. This, in turn, portrays that intervention as beneficial, because it helped liberate women, to an extent. Reflecting this same process, *13 Hours* justifies the actions taken by House Republicans after the Benghazi attack by representing the military officials as able but unwilling to aid the Americans at risk. By injecting this meaning, it supports the belief that both the White House and Hillary Clinton intentionally failed to act, which was the claim that inspired the Congressional investigations.

Through these historical representations, each film mirrors Evelyn Alsultany’s (2012a) idea of a hegemonic field of meaning between media and government, but also expands its horizons. Alsultany explains this convergence as particularly effective in the Bush-era propaganda that sold the War on Terror, but she also notes that, as the propaganda became “more controversial, the production and circulation of “positive” representations of the “enemy” [became] essential to projecting the United States as benevolent” (2012a, p. 7). Instead of distancing themselves from the controversial manipulation of fear inherent in their storylines, they perpetuate the essential role of the actions and affirm the government discourse at the time of each film’s events. In this
way, each film operates in a hegemonic field of meaning with the government that contradicts the transitions away from propaganda discourses.

While *War Dogs* does contrast this trend, this derives from the film’s focus on the economic success of the two protagonists, and not the events of the Iraq war. The scenes used to represent the history of the conflict portray the US as in control of Iraq, but none of the scenes justify US action in Iraq, outside of the implication that the war has on AEY’s business. Even though this presents a challenge to the convergence of meanings in the other three films, it does not nullify the pattern existing between them. This challenge does imply a limited applicability of the previous conclusion onto other films, but it does not preclude it from pertaining to films outside this sample.

The new role these films play in the politics of fear process does not limit them from perpetuating or defining their own codes that may shape audience beliefs, in the way Wilkins’ (2009) study suggests. Given how representations must draw from established codes of presentation, as Richard Dyer (1993) argues, a significant limitation exists on the ability to represent Arabs and Muslims in American media productions when considering Castonguay’s (2015) assertion that 60 percent of Americans do not know an Arab or a Muslim. Additionally, Jack Shaheen references, in his book *Guilty*, that only two percent of Americans self-identify as “very knowledgeable” about Islam, whereas 60 percent say they “are not very knowledgeable” or “not at all knowledgeable” (2008, p. 33-4). Therefore, these films must draw from, or build on, established methods of representing Arabs and Muslims in order to ensure the representations’ intelligibility. Without significant first-hand familiarity with Arabs and Muslims among US citizens, much of this previous encoding falls to media reporting. Ewart et al. (2014) demonstrate that these media sources frame the narratives on stories involving Arabs and Muslims and rely on the government for information, which also espouses a certain version of any
story, as Alsultany (2012a) emphasizes. The correlation between pro-American sentiments and anti-Arab and Muslim partiality, presented in Deborah Pless’ (2015) work, means Arab and Muslim vilification in US-centric narratives gains even greater centrality. With these codes set in such a biased way, the predetermined field of presentational possibilities remains limited to the politics of fear discourses that operate through the widely understood codes.

In defining the kinds of representational methods often utilized in Hollywood, Alsultany (2012a) and Shaheen (2001) affirm the restricted nature of how these films encode Arabs and Muslims. Alsultany (2012a) does this through theorizing simplified complex representations, whereas Shaheen (2001) primarily documents the common trends associated with groups of Arabs and Muslims, like sheikhs and maidens. Each of the four films analyzed in this study reflects or develops these previous works, with certain common representations naturalizing some of the key codes across the themes analyzed here. War Dogs provides the only significant challenge to these studies, but the challenge it offers echoes Alsultany’s (2012a) and Shaheen’s (2008) suggestions for how to deconstruct some of the more salient biases toward Arabs and Muslims found in Hollywood films.

The representations within the Space category stand out from the others somewhat, because these previous studies do not cover the representation of space in the way this study analyzes it. However, the hostility and inhospitality developed through the descriptions of the Arab or Muslim spaces in each film draw inspiration from the conflictual nature of relations between the West and the Muslim world presented in both Shaheen (2008, p. 32-3) and Simon Philpott (2010, p. 336). While the two authors do not present these as representational standards, this kind of rhetoric derives itself from Huntington’s (1997) new orientalist dichotomy. American Sniper, 13 Hours, and Whiskey
Tango Foxtrot all cast their respective spaces as inherently incompatible to its Western characters through descriptions that highlight the heat, danger, and even air. By positioning these characteristics as out of the control of the space, the films play into the new orientalist understanding of intrinsic differences delineating Americans from Arabs and Muslims.

In the case of War Dogs, the nuance it shows in describing the space sets it apart from the others. While the words of its main characters describe Iraq as threatening, this context remains within the war, and not inherent to Iraq outside of that conflict. Additionally, the negative qualities of Efraim temper the consequences of his descriptions of Jordan. The Islamic nature of Jordan draws his ire, but his critiques lose their effectiveness, given the antagonism of his character. Through lack of similarity in the way it describes Jordan and Iraq, the film suggests a distinction between Arab and Muslim countries, contrasting the sentiment espoused in 13 Hours, which conflates them through innate characteristics. While this provides a more nuanced idea of Arab and Muslim spaces, it does not align with Alsultany’s (2012a) simplified complex representations, because it does not promote an idea of the US, or its representatives, as post-racist. Ultimately, creating difference between Arab or Muslim countries begins to deconstruct the clash between Islam and the West forwarded by Huntington.

The representation of each film’s main Arab or Muslim characters exists along a spectrum with respect to the previous representational standards. On one end, American Sniper utilizes a more negative method than Alsultany’s (2012a) framework allows, and at the other, War Dogs succeeds in decontextualizing Arab and Muslim men from adherence to violence, and Islam as a litmus test of negativity. The other films operate within the context that War Dogs challenges, which, by joining Alsultany (2012a) and
Stacy Takacs (2012), necessitates that a positive Arab or Muslim character must oppose terrorism and not be outwardly religious.

As discussed in chapter two, *American Sniper* does not truly develop positive Arab or Muslim characters. While Sheikh al-Obodi eventually aids the US, he does this through much goading and demands compensation for his troubles. The implication that he has multiple wives presents his devotion to Islam as a negative character trait as well. He does contradict the common representation of sheikhs as rich, as explained in Shaheen’s (2001; 2008) work, but these multiple wives hint at the lechery Shaheen documents, though this remains subtle. By ultimately vilifying the father for his allegiance to AQI, the film reflects both aspects of the context above. The religiosity of the sheikh and violence of the father make them negative characters, given an animosity developed between the ideas they represent and the American forces in the film.

The two interpreters cannot complicate this, and the Butcher and Mustafa only reinforce this connection. All four characters lack a true voice of their own, with the interpreters serving as vessels through which language transforms without agency. Therefore, they cannot become positive representations as they remain vacant outside of their purpose. The Butcher and Mustafa each garner significant visual representation, but their voices are reduced to simple phrases. By silencing them, they become targets, much like Philpott (2010) argues, defined by their violent antagonism to the United States. With violence as their defining characteristic, they fit snuggly into the characterization developed by Alsultany (2012a) and Takacs (2012).

Given the film’s complete lack of truly positive Arab and Muslim representation, *American Sniper* can reinforce this representational method, but it falls short of using Alsultany’s (2012a) simplified complex representations. One of the important aspects of her schema is the presence of both positive and negative representations based on the
correlation described above. While *American Sniper* defines the negativity of each of its characters in line with this correlation, it does not develop any positive characters; only the neutral interpreters. In this way, the film posits a more negative model of representation than previously theorized, which develops its characters in line with the structures outlined by Alsultany (2012a), but reflects the wholly negative tone noted by Shaheen (2001).

Both *13 Hours* and *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* use their interpreters as positive characters, conforming to simplified complex representations. Fahim and Amahl have significantly greater agency than the interpreters in *American Sniper*, and through this agency they develop their own voice. With this voice, they oppose the violence directed at the Westerners, and do not outwardly espouse religious sentiment. Amahl clearly declares his allegiance to the Americans when Tanto gives him the opportunity to leave, and while Fahim stops working for Kim when she begins to make reckless decisions, he returns to her side after the violent action of Iain’s kidnapping, affirming his allegiance. Fahim’s connection to Islam does limit his actions, but he does not explicitly explain this in a religious way. Additionally, neither film depicts these characters praying, or participating in religious practices. In *13 Hours*, just before the mortar strike, the film depicts the morning prayer, showing the Ansar al-Sharia militants and the neighbors of the Annex praying, but it does not show Amahl. Similarly, *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* actively removes Fahim from religious practice in the scene where he returns to Kim after Iain’s kidnapping. They drive through the streets and Fahim explains that the people have begun slaughtering lambs for *Eid al-Adha*, but Fahim remains inside the car and merely observes the religious tradition. Therefore, both of these characters reiterate the method of defining positivity, and the representation of positive Arab and Muslim characters, necessitated by simplified complex representations.
At the other end of the spectrum from *American Sniper*, *War Dogs* challenges the correlation highlighted by Alsultany (2012a) and Takacs (2012), but this challenge reflects Alsultany’s (2012b) writing about *All American Muslims*. In both cases, the productions decontextualize the Arab and Muslim from violence, but *War Dogs* did not inspire the controversy that *All American Muslims* did. This suggests that the relatively negative representations of the Jordanians in *War Dogs* did not cross the same boundary that the positive Muslims in *All American Muslims* did, implying that representations of Arabs and Muslims must remain somewhat negative to avoid scandal. However, it also shows that removing Arabs and Muslims from the anti-terrorism, pro-American correlation can successfully occur. As analyzed in chapter three, *War Dogs* accomplishes this by highlighting the fixers’ and Marlboro’s self-interest. When mirrored against the self-interest of the American main characters, the film allows for Arab and Muslim characters that do not conform to the pro-American or pro-violence/Islam duality. The self-interest does encode the characters as somewhat negative, given the illegal nature of their activities, but that does not preclude *War Dogs* from successfully representing Arab and Muslim characters outside of this previously inviolable context.

The commonalities across these four films suggest certain naturalized codes that define Arab and Muslim interaction. By lacking any verbal communication between primary female characters, all four films silence the Arab or Muslim woman in line with Shaheen’s (2001) writing on female representation. He highlights the tendency of films to oppress Arab women by silencing them, in order to emphasize patriarchy in Arab and Muslim countries (2001, p. 51-3). Similarly, the rare and simplistic nature of conversations between men and women affect the same meaning, whereas the interactions between Arab or Muslim men in the context of translation ties them to their usefulness to the Western main characters. This prevents any normalization of the Arab
or Muslim in everyday life. While Shaheen (2008) highlights this lack of normalcy in American/Muslim representation in the context of American life, the lack of non-West-centric dialogues between Arab or Muslim characters in their own countries keeps them from becoming normal in their own cultural context, let alone an American cultural context.

Among all of these representations, only *War Dogs* implies any level of normality to Arab and Muslim life through main characters. The context developed by Alsultany (2012a) and Takacs (2012) necessitates the centrality of the Western perspective, which the kinds of interactions represented reinforce. By remaining within this context, the other three films do not allow for the Arab or Muslim identity to exist in everyday life, outside of interactions with Western characters. Without the individuality, which the self-interested characters in *War Dogs* imply, Hollywood films cannot develop any normalization in their Arab or Muslim characters, who then cannot be decoded on their own terms, in a humanizing way.

All of the films’ use of violence accentuates this dehumanization in acute ways that echo Philpott’s work, which highlights how Arabs and Muslims often become, “violent, sinister, faceless and inhuman,” in Hollywood film (2010, p. 333). Importantly, he also mentions how this debased portrayal justifies violence against Arabs and Muslims. The direction of the violence in each film reiterates this kind of justification, because they all depict violence originating from Arab or Muslim sources. Even in moments of aggression from the Western protagonists, their violence always responds to violence from Arabs and Muslims. This casts any Arab or Muslim violence as a threat to the West, one that necessitates a reaction from those Westerners being threatened.

By itself, this significantly vilifies Arabs and Muslims, but these films also develop some specific, naturalized codes that magnify the effect of this vilification. The
color black, especially on black kufiyahs, functions as the most noticeable of these codes. While all four of the films do not explicitly show their villains in black kufiyahs, everyone dresses its perpetrators of violence in black, if not also depicting them as dark shadows. *American Sniper* naturalizes the black kufiyah most powerfully, as most militants appear in one, and none of the non-militant characters do. While the militants in *War Dogs* appear only briefly and at a distance, their dark coloring and the kufiyahs flapping around their heads utilize the same code. The civilians in the film wear kufiyahs as well, but the color black does not appear in the same way. In *13 Hours*, the black and white kufiyah mainly appears on one of the two primary Ansar al-Sharia militants shown, but many others wear black headdresses, some with the ISIS flag on them. The militants in *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* are not shown wearing kufiyahs, most likely because kufiyahs are most commonly worn in Arab countries, but still often appear in black. By applying this kind of common coding between the color black and anti-Western militancy, the films naturalize this code in the way defined by Hall (1980), so that the color itself, especially in different headdresses, becomes associated with a meaning of aggressive militancy.

Some challenges appear to this naturalized coding throughout the film, but ultimately they do not invalidate its salience. Most significantly, the appearance of militants fighting with the GRS team in *13 Hours* challenges a direct correlation between Arab or Muslim militancy and anti-Americanism. The film invalidates this critique based on the suspicion placed on all militarized Libyans in the film. This echoes the fear of passing developed by Takacs (2012), however in this case the fear applies to Libyans in Libya, and not Arabs and Muslims in the US. Instead of the Muslim identity causing the fear of passing, in *13 Hours* militarization inspires a general fear of Arabs and Muslims in the GRS team. The film generally dresses the allied Libyans in more Western clothing,
evidenced by the man in a Coca-Cola t-shirt, which reinforces the connection between aggressive militancy and the black, more Arab/Islamic clothing of its villains. Whiskey Tango Foxtrot does present a direct violation of the black kufiyah code when it shows some of the Marines wearing black and white scarves, which look similar to kufiyahs. While this fact challenges the naturalization across the other three films, the soldiers wear them tightly wrapped around their necks, whereas the militants in the other three films tend to wear them wrapped around their heads, in a more prominent manner. Despite these challenges, the violence and the color black become significantly associated with Arab and Muslim antagonism across all of the films in ways that naturalize a threatening representation.

The use of non-English languages in each film, except in War Dogs, accentuates the threatening nature of Arabs and Muslims, though American Sniper and 13 Hours do this more noticeably. Given the militarized nature of the narratives in these two films, the instances of Arabic appear much more often in situations that place those Arabs using the language under suspicion. As analyzed in chapter two, the non-threatening Arab and Muslim characters in the two films speak English to an extent, and therefore solely speaking Arabic becomes suspicious. This expounds upon the already dangerous, dehumanized representations of Arabs and Muslims that Philpott (2010) and Shaheen (2001) characterize, by encoding linguistic difference as threatening. Amplifying the threat already common in Arab and Muslim representation justifies the use of violence against Arabs and Muslims in the same ways explained by Philpott (2010). While Whiskey Tango Foxtrot does not use the language to impose this suspicion, it does present a threatening nature to its non-English languages, through prayer music and the phrase Allah hu Akbar. American Sniper and 13 Hours instill the same meanings into
these two occurrences, which positions these already recognizable occurrences as naturalized codes across the films, with only *War Dogs* challenging this association.

The previous writing on representational methods does not specifically highlight language, but the threat associated with Arabic, through its association with Islam, reflects the negative portrayal of the religion throughout Hollywood’s history. By only using prayer music and *Allah hu Akbar* in moments that highlight difference and threat, the three films connect the language to Islam based on an equal danger posed by both. Encoding these instances with violence, often as a precursor to violence, implies some danger posed by the language. Given Takacs’s (2012) argument that the level of Islamic devotion in a character serves as a barometer of the threat posed by that character, the connection of Muslim prayer music to violence and *Allah hu Akbar*, as religious signifiers, constructs Arabic and Islam as threatening. *War Dogs*’ one use of *Allah hu Akbar* as a celebration contradicts this tendency among the other films, and reflects the more neutral representation of Arabic in the film. A study with a different methodology could assess the intelligibility of this different encoding of the phase in *War Dogs*, but for the purpose of this research, this encoding primarily decontextualizes the phrase from Islam. This does not invalidate the dominant meaning of the phrase across the other three films, but simply presents a contrasting encoding that suggests the meaning of prayer music and *Allah hu Akbar* in the other three films is not completely naturalized in the American dominant cultural narrative.

The tone of the encoding of Arab and Muslim civilians across the films depends on the level of militarization in the films. Similar to the encoding of language, *American Sniper* and *13 Hours* generally encode the citizens of Iraq and Libya with suspicion. This suspicion among civilians reflects Takacs’ (2012) fear of passing in the same way as perpetrators of violence in *13 Hours*. Both films explicitly represent the general
population as militarized, with *American Sniper* saying any military-aged male wants to kill Americans, and *13 Hours* depicting weapons as ubiquitous in the Libyan population. While *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* does not explicitly connect the civilians with violence, the scenes in Kandahar do highlight the role of Sharia in militarizing the civilians, given their violent demonstrations and the bombing of the girls’ school. This does not encode the whole population as threatening to Westerners, but it does associate Islam with the amount of danger posed. Between the three films, civilians become targets of suspicion, based either on violence or Islam, which each film ties to violence, and, as referenced by Philpott (2010), justifies any action against them, based on the threat they might pose. This general suspicion reflects Shaheen’s (2008) analysis that points to Arabs, as a whole, being singled out as an enemy other.

While the neutrality of the civilians in *War Dogs* does not afford them much opportunity to humanize themselves, it also does not explicitly dehumanize the Jordanians it depicts. This may arise from the demilitarized nature of Jordan in the film, because the film does not need to justify the use of violence against this population. As argued above, dehumanization functions mainly to justify violence against a population. Instead, *War Dogs*’ juxtaposition of Jordan and Iraq justifies violence against militarized Arabs and Muslims, as the dead body in the gas station suggests. Its presence establishes threat towards the civilians in Iraq from militants, and justifies the US military reaction because these militants do pose a real threat to human life. In this way, the film does justify violence against a portion of the Arabs and Muslims it represents, but not large groups of the population. The neutral representation in *War Dogs* does contrast with the other three films, but, similarly to the other themes, it does not preclude the commonalities of the other films from suggesting a dominant method of encoding Arabs.
and Muslims. It also contrasts the idea of Arabs as the enemy other, reinforced by the other films.

When considered together, these representations reflect, build upon, and complicate the previous research on representation referenced throughout this study. The restrictive vocabulary existing in the American dominant cultural narrative of the Arab world and Islam necessitates the types of limited representations that appear, which draw inspiration from the previous research, because representations must operate within predetermined cultural forms of presentation to remain intelligible. With *American Sniper*, *13 Hours*, and *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* residing within these previously established and understandable structures, their representations primarily develop the previous methods. *War Dogs* offers a significant deviation from this, as, outside of the film’s representations of violence, it contradicts or contrasts the dominant meaning of the other three films. Often these different meanings also challenge previous research, as the representations of its major Arab and Muslim characters suggest. By constructing new methods of encoding Arabs and Muslims, *War Dogs* suggests that intelligible representations of these identities exist outside the reductive frameworks documented by Shaheen (2001) and Alsultany (2012a). In order to confirm this, another study must test whether audiences decode the representations in *War Dogs* with a similar meaning to how they are encoded based on this study.

Each film justifies its retelling of history through its representations. The reanimation of these histories, as Marcia Landy notes, must depict their history through a language intelligible to as many people as possible (1996, p. 1). The films use their representations to construct the vocabulary of their language. Without the general vilification of Iraqis developed in *American Sniper*, Chris Kyle’s dichotomous world view does not resonate in the same way. The chaotic and untrustworthy portrayal of
Libya in *13 Hours* presents a need for US military involvement to save the Americans in Benghazi, because of the dangerous and incompetent Libyans. By representing Afghanistan as patriarchal because of Islam, *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* justifies US intervention, given the treatment of women. Finally, *War Dogs* cannot portray Jordan and Iraq as distinct without some nuance in the representation of the Arab and Muslim characters and spaces in the film. Therefore, each film relies on its representations to articulate the greater meanings it develops.

The connection between the historical representations and the encoding of each film’s Arab or Muslim signifiers suggests these films frame their stories in the same way Ewart et al. (2014) argue news media frame reports on events surrounding Arabs and Muslims. By selecting the kinds of representations necessary to affect a certain historical meaning, each film sets its own agenda, defining Arabs and Muslims in narrow terms, without voice. In the first three films, the harmonization of meaning in the language the films construct resonates with the typically reductive representations of Arabs and Muslims previously documented. However, these films often eschew the simplified complex representations suggested by Alsultany (2012a), instead relying on more overtly negative portrayals that reflect Shaheen (2001). This suggests that a film can use a historical basis to justify general vilification of Arabs and Muslims in a way that the fictitious productions discussed by Alsultany (2012a) do not. Additionally, the ability of *American Sniper*, *13 Hours*, and *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* to validate previous government actions suggests that historically based films can directly cooperate in the process of politics of fear discourse.

Whether these findings expand beyond the scope of these three films must be determined in subsequent studies, but the consensus across these three suggests a correlation in how historical narratives represent Arabs and Muslims. As the outlier in
every category except for violence, *War Dogs* serves as a caveat to this correlation. It provides representational modes that echo the suggestions made by previous scholarship about how to solve the problems in Arab and Muslim representation. If more films depict Arabs and Muslims in the self-interested manner that *War Dogs* does, a greater understanding of the Arab or Muslim identity, as separate from terrorism, may emerge. While this representational shift cannot solve political problems, it may aid in humanizing Arabs and Muslims within the dominant cultural narrative that so negatively understands them at present.

While *War Dogs* serves as a step in the right direction, in order to deconstruct this dominant cultural narrative surrounding Arabs and Muslims, representations must continue to decontextualize Arabs and Muslims from terrorism and from each other. In many ways, this could emerge through reiterations of representational modes applied by *War Dogs*. If more films represent different Arab or Muslim countries as distinct from one another, then a greater understanding of the actual differences between these countries may develop. If more films present Arabs and Muslims as self-interested, except in roles more central to the plot than in *War Dogs*, they might be able to dismantle the idea that these people should be held under suspicion until they affirm their allegiance to the US. In presenting these more prominent characters, a distinct voice that expresses their self-interest must exist, as these films silence the Arab or Muslim far too often. Depicting this voice within the perpetrators of violence can also help to humanize those who, until now, predominantly exist as dehumanized targets of American aggression. Instituting all of these new methods clearly risks the kind of backlash precipitated by the release of *All American Muslims*. However, integrating them slowly, as *War Dogs* succeeds in doing, could begin to shift the dominant cultural narrative to allow diverse Arab or Muslim identities to exist within the US.
Appendix A: *American Sniper* Coding Sheet

**Space**

**Way Arab or Muslim Spaces are Described:**
- 1:15 – Chris: “It’s a fucking hotbox” Winston: “Man, the fuckin’ dirt here tastes like dog shit.”
- 25:05 – Marc: “Welcome to Fallujah, the new wild west of the old middle east.”
- 37:00 – Chris’s brother gets deployed Taya: “Over there, he’s headed to Iraq (with sense of dread).”
- 57:20 – Lt. Martin: “Welcome home chief”
- 58:18 – Jeff: “Fuck this place” twice, first time quietly and with shame
- 1:00:50 – Chris: “There’s evil here, we’ve seen it” “We are protecting more than just this dirt.”
- 1:33:15 – Dandridge: “We’ve been shot off position three nights in a row, man. Fallujah was bad. Ramadi was worse. This shit is fucking biblical, Chris.”

**Characterization**

**Female Roles and Characteristics of Representation:**
- 43:10 – Fatima
  - Called out by sheikh
  - He pulls up her sleeve to show her arm that has been cut off by the butcher to prove he is real
- 1:11:05 – Mother calls Mustafa, no words shown

**Male Roles and Characteristics of Representation:**
- 26:08 – Mustafa (See violence)
- 37:10 – Zarqawi (See violence)
- 41:15 – Sheikh al-Obodi
  - runs to the aid of his son, wearing taqiyah, “This is my home, I stay” Chris: “I don’t give a fuck it’s your home!”
  - Says “I will help you, you are my guest” very terrified
  - Trying to explain what will happen to him if he talks
- 42:37 – Sheikh mentions Zarqawi and Chris starts talking over translator aggressively asking where he is
- 43:00 – Asks for $100,000 to help the US find Zarqawi
- 43:50 – Gives them the butcher’s real name with much prompting from Chris
• 44:15: Marc: “He’s asking for $100,000” Agent Snead: “Figures. But if he delivers the butcher, he’s gonna get it.”
• 48:00 – Shown distraught yelling at the Butcher
• 48:51 – Runs to his son, is shot
• 42:15 – Terp 1 (see Translators)
• 42:22 – The Butcher (See violence)
• 1:02:00 – Father
  • wearing a colored shirt and jeans
  • Says he does not know the butcher
• 1:03:48 – Invites the men to join them for Eid al Adha dinner
• 1:04:55 – Chris sees very red spot on Father’s elbow
  • from here see violence
• 1:02:15 – Terp 2 (see translators)

Men and Women Interacting:
• 43:18 – Sheikh speaks Arabic to Fatima as she sits down, pulls up her sleeve

Women Interacting with Each Other:

Men Interacting with Each Other:
• 42:15 – Terp 1 and sheikh interact
• 1:02:15 – Terp 2 speaks to the father
• 1:07:00 – Terp 2 speaks to the father

Violence

Instances of Violence:
• 9:45 – News report of the embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania
• 22:05 – News report of 9/11
• 27:50 – Woman throws grenade
• 30:35 – Car bomb
• 32:40 – Mustafa shoots marine
• 39:45 – Marine is shot
• 46:00 – 3 men shot by Mustafa
• 48:10 – Butcher runs drill into boy’s leg
• 48:48 – Drills through the boy’s head
• 48:52 – Sheikh shot by militant
• 56:15 – Mustafa’s kills shown on reel
• 1:09:35 – Militants start fire fight in the street, with some of them being killed
• 1:19:58 – Militant fires back at the US troops
• 1:21:13 – Shot from Mustafa comes from off screen and hits Biggles
• 1:25:57 – Marc shot from adjacent roof top
• 1:41:00 – Mustafa shoots construction worker
• 1:44:55 – Militants start a fire fight
• 1:50:33 – Militant shoots at Chris causing him to fall down

Characteristics of Representation for Perpetrators of Violence:
• 3:05 – Woman has Russian grenade hands it to kid who starts running towards the troop
  • Quick cut on gun shot to young Chris shooting a deer
• 4:50 – Wayne: “There are three types of people in this world: sheep, wolves, and sheepdogs. Now some people prefer to believe that evil doesn’t exist in the world and if is ever darkened their doorstep, they wouldn’t know how to protect themselves. Those are the sheep. And then you got predators. They use violence to prey on the weak (scene of Chris’s brother being bullied and Chris coming to help). They’re the wolves. Then then there are those who’ve been blessed with the gift of aggression and the overpowering need to protect the flock. These men are the rare breed that live to confront the wolf. They are the sheepdog. Now, we’re not raising any sheep in this family, and I will whoop your ass if you turn into a wolf...but we protect our own. Now if someone tries to fight you, or bully your little brother, you have my permission to finish it...Did you finish it (to Chris, who nods) Well, then you know who you are. You know your purpose.”
• 9:45 – “Someone’s war against the United States” “It is still unclear at this hour who our enemy is” Chris: “Look what they did to us” Inspires Chris to enlist
• 25:08 – Marc: “AQI put a price on your heads, and now extremists from around the globe are flooding the boarders to collect on it.”
• 25:25 – Marc: “Any military-age male who is still here is here to kill you.”
• 26:08 – Mustafa
  • Winston: “Man, they got this one sniper that’s been hitting headshots from 500 yards out...He’s in the Olympics.”
• 32:07 – first appearance, wearing tight dark colored head covering, light scruff, carrying sniper rifle
  • moving through a dark room while call to prayer plays. Watches American’s through scope
  • Chris: “Crawled right up our ass”
• 39:18 – Mustafa is Syrian
• 45:30 – Close up, wearing tightly wrapped black and red kufiyah, nikes
• 46:00 – see close up, as well as scope aiming, at gunshot cuts to rear view of driver being shot
  • another shot killing the man on the mounted gun
  • another shot killing the man carrying the money
• Shoots out Chris’s mirror
• 48:15 – Watches for Chris and shoots over his head to keep him down, while boy’s screams are heard in the background
• 48:50 – Shoots Chris, shot bounces off his helmet
  • More shots keep Chris pinned down
• 49:45 – Shown sprinting though the streets with his gun
• 56:15 – Mustafa’s kills shown on reel that Chris watches, camera catches soldier being shot (Connect to point further down)
• 56:30 – Chris says that Mustafa records his kills, “He sells that shit on the street.”
• 1:11:05 – Shown tying his kufiyah, preparing his gun, then walking by Chris’s wanted poster
• 1:11:55 – Mustafa arrives in front of the US troops, aims, not able to get a shot
• 1:19:05 – Mustafa sits, spinning a bullet, phone rings and he picks up, woman in the room too
• 1:19:37 – Picture of Mustafa winning a gold medal
• 1:19:40 – Runs across roof tops
• 1:20:05 – Jumps a large gap
• 1:21:17 – Mustafa shown pulling back after shooting Biggles then runs off on the roof tops
• 1:36:46 – Taking pot shots at construction workers building a wall in Sadr City
• 1:40:35 – Mustafa introduced by his gun barrel
  • seen aiming at the construction man from behind
• 1:41:15 – Smiles as he moves off of his rifle
• 1:43:40 – Shots of Mustafa aiming as Chris shoots at him, after shot, it’s in slowmo
• 1:43:53 – Heavy zoom on a front angle shot of Mustafa as the bullet comes in and blood spatters the sheet behind him
• 1:51:35 – Shot of Mustafa from above, panning out, through the sandstorm
• 26:40 – Woman and child from the beginning again
• Kid runs at the troop, not very threatening, Chris shoots
• Woman picks up the grenade, waving it over her head, Chris shoots her as she throws
• 28:00 – Winston: “Fuckin’ evil bitch”
• 29:03 – Chris: “There was a kid who barely had any hair on his balls. Mother gives him a grenade, sends him out there to kill marines. Dude, that’s evil like I’ve never seen before.”
• 29:45 – Militant falls from the air with a gunshot from Chris, we see his dead body wearing a black and white kufiyah
• 30:05 – Militant rounds corner in car, shown from behind with a bomb in the passenger’s seat, never see his face, has a dead man’s switch, Chris’s shot shown from back seat
• 31:10 – Man with long black hair and a black and white kufiyah around his neck pulls a shell out of a bag, Kyle shoots him, seen through scope, no face
• 31:35 – Militant wearing a red and yellow kufiyah runs out of a house carrying a rifle, shot through scope
• 33:42 – Chris defending one of his kills Jag Officer: “His wife said he was carrying a Qur’an” Chris: “Look, I don’t know what a Qur’an looks like, but I can tell you what he was carrying. It was pressed metal, shot 7.62s, and it looked just like an AK-47. So, you tell me what he was carrying.”
• 37:10 – Zarqawi
  - Jordanian militant
  - Trained by Bin Laden, funded by Bin Laden, loyal to Bin Laden
  - Colonel Gronski: “This asshole is, right now, the crown prince of Al-Qaeda in Iraq.” “Zarqawi and his lieutenants, right now these are our top priority. Now, there is only one way to root these guys out, and that is to go door to door, house to house, until we find them, or we find someone that will give us their whereabouts.” “I want this asshole dead or captured.”
• 37:30 – AQI
  - “His mercenary army, AQi, they’re 5,000 strong. These guys are not your average shit-kickers, these guys are well trained, they are well paid, and right now they are waging the largest urban assault since Vietnam.”
• 42:22 – The Butcher
  - Sheikh is clearly scared of him, shows Fatima’s severed arm
  - Agent Snead: “You know the butcher is Zarqawi’s enforcer? They say his weapon of choice is a fuckin’ drill.”
• 47:00 – Quick cut, butcher mostly in black, dragging kid
• 47:35 – Carrying a drill, man handling sheikh’s kid
• 48:05 – Shouting in Arabic while pointing drill and running it
• wearing all black kufiyah, black leather coat, black boots
• 48:48 – Drills through boy’s head without hesitation, despite the sheikh’s protest
• 1:00:30 – Referred to as a motherfucker and a fucker
• 1:09:15 – Butcher has a dead man hanging from chains, shelves with body parts including heads
• 1:09:25 – Butcher flees out a tunnel
• 1:10:30 – Flees to car and shoots at the troop
• 1:10:55 – Car blows up
• 48:00 – 2 men hold the sheikh back
• 48:52 – 2 militants defend the butcher, one shoots the sheikh, both dressed in black, one who shoots wears a black and white kufiyah
• 49:30 – 5 men in black get into back of Toyota pickup to leave
• 56:50 – Chris: “They’re savages, they’re fuckin’ savages” when trying to explain why he doesn’t tell Taya about what happened
• 59:25 – $180,000 on Chris’s head
• 59:43 – Lt. Col. Jones: “I want you to put the fear of God into these savages.”
• 1:03:30 – Biggles jokes that they will let the legend into the restaurant that the Butcher operates out of because he is a celebrity “Ask him to sign their burka”
• 1:06:20 – Father:
  • Chris finds metal plate in the bedroom, sees many guns and shells etc. under it
  • Chris grabs him and brings him to the bedroom, calls him Muj
  • 1:08:45 – After man at the door is shot the father picks up his rifle and turns to shoot at the Americans, sniper shoots him dead too, in shadows when he is shot
  • 1:11:20 – Carried through the streets as a martyr
• 1:08:43 – Militant in the doorway dressed in mostly black, black and white kufiyah, shot by sniper
• 1:09:35 – All militants wear a black and white kufiyah
• 1:24:30 – Drive up in a small car, 4 men all in kufiyahs, one black the others white and black, shredded by the SEAL convoy bullets
• 1:25:57 – Multiple militants shown from a distance in the back of the frame all dark
• 1:34:45 – Man in a dark grey hoodie gets out of a cab off screen and walks out carrying a RPG, Chris kills him, others run
• 1:42:30 – 2 militants walk below men, shot from a distance, dark figures
• 1:44:05 – Many militants below Chris and the squad hear the shot, react, are all wearing black and white kufiyahs
  • 1:45:00 – All militants in the firefight have some form of a black and white kufiyah
• 1:50:33 – Mostly hidden in the sandstorm, but clearly wearing a kufiyah

Language

Codified Phrases:
• 0:05 – Movie opens with Allah hu Akbar call to prayer
• 31:50 – Call to prayer, Allah hu Akbar, plays throughout scene
• 32:07 – Mustafa says as-salamu alaykum

Representation of non-English Languages as they are being Used:
• 42:10 – Speaking Arabic with Sheikh
• 47:55 – Yelling in Arabic
• 48:05 – Butcher shouting the same phrase over and over
• 49:18 – Butcher speaks in Arabic, repeating what he had been yelling, translated: “You talk to them. You die with them.”
• 49:25 – Man who shot sheikh speaks Arabic
• 56:15 – Arabic shown on TV screen
• 59:15 – Arabic on a flier, apparently saying that Chris is the most wanted man in Iraq
• 1:02:20 – Terp 2 and man in apartment speaking Arabic
• 1:30:50 – Father speaks Arabic to the troop
• 1:04:47 – Father and son speak Arabic together
• 1:05:03 – Son speaks in Arabic
• 1:07:00 – Terp speaks to Father
• 1:08:35 – Father speaks Arabic
• 1:10:30 – Militants head yelling in Arabic
• 1:11:50 – Close up of a man yelling in Arabic
• 1:44:45 – Militants yelling in Arabic (unclear if it is actually Arabic)
• 1:50:00 – Arabic heard from militants (unclear if it is actually Arabic)

Translators:
• 42:15 – Terp 1: Translates the sheikh, explains that the sheikh will be made an example of.
  • Mention of the butcher
  • 42:37 – Chris talks over him after sheikh mentions Zarqawi
  • “You find the butcher, you find Zarqawi.”
  • Throughout scene Chris speaks over the translator aggressively
• 1:02:15 – Terp 2: Asks man from apartment if he knows the butcher, man answers no
  • 1:03:50 – translates the invitation for dinner
  • 1:07:00 – Speaks aggressively at the Father, giving him the choice of helping them get into the restaurant or being tried by the Iraqi courts

Civilians

Instances of Civilians:
• 2:05 – Man emerges from building talks on a cellphone, Chris: “I’ve got a military-aged male” response: “If you think he is reporting troop movement you have a green light” through scope
• 2:40 – Woman in hijab leave building man was in, through scope
• 25:25 – Marc: “Any military-age male who is still here is here to kill you.”
• 31:00 – Woman on roof top, through scope
• 32:00 – 2 women in black walk through the street at night while the call to prayer plays, through scope
• 35:10 – two men dressed in tradition Muslim dress walk through street. Shown through Chris’s scope
• 36:20 – Man on a scooter, through scope
• 41:05 – Kid runs into the room, Kyle yells at him to get on the ground
  • Man runs up yelling that he doesn’t understand wearing taqiyah
  • “Why are you here, you are supposed to be evacuating this area. Why are you still here?”
• 41:30 – Women in Sheikh’s home “Found these bitches in the back closet”
• 49:20 – 3 women who live with sheikh shown crying, one runs to his body
  • 49:57 – shot from above of woman mourning sheikh
• 1:01:40 – Baby crying
• 1:01:50 – Man, woman, and son in an apartment that the troop enters woman has on a head scarf
• 1:04:15 – Wife serves the men at the table
• 1:11:20 – Crowd of men carried Father through the street, many men wearing black and white kufiyahs
  • 1:11:42 – woman shown in the crowd
  • 1:12:05 – Son shown in the crowd
• 1:18:00 – Chris says to Biggles after he buys an engagement ring in Iraq “Dude, you bought it from savages? How do you know it’s not a blood diamond?”
• 1:19:00 – 2 men on a roof top, one in an Adidas jacket the other with a black and white kufiyah, one calls Mustafa
• 1:19:05 – Woman in the room with Mustafa
  • 1:19:21 – young woman with a child, head uncovered
• 1:34:15 – Milling Civilians through Chris’s binoculars
• 1:35:00 – Boy runs up to man who was just shot
  • looks around to see if anyone is watching
• 1:35:00 – view of little boy moves to Chris’s scope
• 1:36:00 – Chris says, under his breath, don’t pick it up, but the boy does
• 1:36:10 – Close up of boy struggling to pick it up
• 1:36:20 – Another close up of him shouldering it and then a shot from behind of him facing a Humvee
• 1:36:30 – Chris whispers: “Drop it you little cocksucker”
• 1:36:40 – Shots of boy through scope, he drops it and runs
• Wide shot of the boy running off screen
• 1:40:10 – “Streets are crawling” then a wide shot of people moving about, pickup with 3 men in the back pulls up, unclear what people are doing/who they are (turn out to be militants)

**Position with Respect to Violence:**
- Unless otherwise noted – Neutral
- 2:05 – suspicion
- 2:40 – “
- 31:00 – “
- 32:00 – “
- 35:10 – “
- 36:20 – “
- 41:05 – “
- 49:20 – Victims
- 1:01:50 – suspicion
- 1:11:05 – aiding
- 1:11:20 – protesting
- 1:18:00 – supporting
- 1:19:00 – “
- 1:19:05 – “
- 1:35:00 – suspicion
- 1:40:10 – “
Appendix B: 13 Hours Coding Sheet

Space

Way Arab or Muslim Spaces are Described:

- :35 – 2 “Critical” diplomatic outposts in Libya (Tripoli and Benghazi)
- 1:38 – Obama describes Libya and “new and democratic”
- 1:55 – “Benghazi became one of the most dangerous places on Earth.”
- 4:35 – Jack: “Man it’s hot”
- 5:43 – Rone: “Well, this place sucks, Jack. Not only is it hot as balls, but you can’t tell the good guys from the bad guys.”
- 7:21 – Rone: “Welcome to Benghazi” (sarcasm) to describe situation
- 8:23 – Man in glasses and taqiyah (Cleric for Ansar al-Sharia) says “I earn right to decide the future of my country”
- 10:00 – Bob: “We are guests in this country” Rone: “We are unwanted guests, Bob”
- 11:57 – “So it hasn’t rained since June, isn’t gonna rain again until September.”
- 13:03 – Jack: “A little pungent” Tig: “next to a stank ass slaughter house. We call it Zombieland”
- 14:45 – “Truth is, there is no real threat here. We won the revolution for these people.”
- 24:41 – Oz: “It’s like the lobby at Caesar’s” (of the outpost) Scott: “Makes you forget you’re in Benghazi”
- 30:30 – Ambo: working towards a “free, democratic, and prosperous Libya.”
- 39:15 – News report on the anger in Cairo surrounding American made film about Muhammad
- 1:00:55 – Jack: “Just another Tuesday night in Benghazi” after the men watch the soccer game
- 1:19:30 – Rone to Bob: “Maybe you haven’t noticed it’s open season on Americans in Benghazi right now.”
- 1:20:35 – Jack: “Entire city knows where we are hold up”
- 1:29:30 – Rone: “Everyone’s got weapons in Benghazi”
- 1:49:45 – Jack: “He died in a place he doesn’t need to be, in a battle over something he doesn’t understand, in a country that meant nothing to him.”
- 1:56:45 – Glen: “The Middle East never lets you down. Personable, organized, easy to navigate. (sarcasm)”
- 2:16:37 – Text: “Libya is officially a failed state, becoming a stronghold for ISIS.”
Characterization

Female Roles and Characteristics of Representation:
- 16:55 – Farheed’s wife
  - wears colorful hijab, dressed more western than other women
  - “nice meeting you”
  - 18:23 – has her second line, to Jack: “Yes it’s beautiful, but it’s too busy.”

Male Roles and Characteristics of Representation:
- 1:18 – Gaddafi
  - Described as tyrannical
  - Shown pompously on a throne, dressed in lavish military garb
  - Shot and dragged through the street
  - 27:30 – Only hired women for his personal security details. Amahl signals for big breasts and tall. Rone: Gaddafi an “evil asshole, but he wasn’t stupid.”
- 6:20 – Cleric of Ansar al-Sharia (see Violence)
- 13:20 – Hesham
  - Submissive and obedient
  - “a good man”
  - 2:09:50 – Waves goodbye
- 16:55 – Farheed
  - Businessman dressed in a suit, friendly
  - Takes them to Italian restaurant
- 27:20 – Amahl (see translators)
- 58:45 – 2 17 Feb members join convoy (See Violence)
- 1:02:37 – Feb 17 member (See Violence)
- 1:05:30 – 17 Feb commander (See Violence)

Men and Women Interacting:
- 17:00 – Farheed says “this is my wife”

Women Interacting with Each Other:

Men Interacting with Each Other:
- 28:30 – Amahl tells the men that the man with a gun wants money but is of no use in calming him down
- 56:25 – Amahl speaks Arabic to militants

Violence
Instances of Violence:

- :50 – Gaddafi pulled out of pipe
- 1:20 – Gaddafi killed
- 1:45 – Small groups of men raid Gaddafi’s arms storage
- 6:17 – Man dead on ground
- 42:35 – Militants fire on police cars as they flee, and at the front gate
- 43:30 – Militants kill many men at front gate
- 46:15 – Shooting American flag
- 48:10 – Blowing in the front door
- 50:40 – Try to break through gate to safe haven
- 52:45 – Militants burn the building
- 56:30 – Man Amahl is talking to gets shot from off frame fire coming from the compound starts fire fight that the group engages in
- 1:01:40 – Feb 17 members get sawn in half by bullets
- 1:10:50 – Two militants come out of the bushes after an explosion, one of them set off a grenade while holding it
- 1:10:55 – Militant fires RPG
- 1:13:15 – 2 17 Feb members get shot in the head from off screen
- 1:15:15 – Man who stops the DS car starts firing on it
- 1:17:00 – RPG fired and militant lights a molotov cocktail in his lap burning truck
- 1:32:15 – Militant throws grenade over the wall starts fire fight with many militants being shot
- 1:32:45 – Oz hit in the helmet
- 1:33:35 – Tig hit in the body armor
- 1:44:45 – Militant gets out of car and throws grenade starting another firefight, gets shot in the head
- 1:45:25 – Militant about to fire RPG gets shot in the head, then shoots into the group, killing 2 others
- 1:58:30 – Mortar fired from a distance, another fire fight, militants shot up close again
- 1:59:10 – Dave hit by mortar
- 1:59:20 – Oz hit by RPG
- 2:00:00 – Mortar falls, killing Rone and Glen

Characteristics of Representation for Perpetrators of Violence:

- :50 – Men perpetrating, women supporting
- 1:10 – Jets, targeting screen
- 1:20 – Gun and hand, that’s it
- 1:45 – Effectively faceless men
- 1:55 – Some men in military garb, mostly machines
• 6:20 – Many men with guns, one man with glasses and a taqiyah on walks calmly past dead man, ISIS flag
• 6:20 – Cleric of Ansar al-Sharia
  • glasses and a taqiyah
  • 8:23 – “I earn right to decide the future of my country”
• 8:25 – Rone to Cleric: “How willing are you to die for your country. I’m ready to go right here, right now.” Cleric lets them go
• 11:23 – Former Gitmo detainee
• 8:25 – Rone to Cleric: “How willing are you to die for your country. I’m ready to go right here, right now.” Cleric lets them go
• 10:30 – Rone: “That roadblock was run by Ansar al-Sharia. It’s not just tribal groups and freedom fighters anymore.”
• 11:23 – Tig: About Cleric “Leader was a former Gitmo detainee” Rone: “Yeah, those guys usually don’t hold a grudge (Sarcasm)”
• 17:45 – Men dressed like the men at the roadblock are scouting the meet up, Rone suspicious
• 19:15 – one man is dressed in a track suit, portrayed as flowing in and out of the crowd
• 23:30 – Van from car chase gets towed to a house they drive by on the way to the compound. Oz: “It’s just two blocks from the diplomatic outpost” Men outside the house flip of Tanto as he takes a picture
• 23:50 – 17 Feb (group working with US argue with an American outside the outpost Alec: “What is the problem…There will be no striking, get back to work” Rone: “How would you feel if you had to protect Americans at $28 a day and then bring your own bullets”
  • 24:50 – Alec: “Middle Eastern Keystone Cops”
• 26:20 – Tanto: “The locals on your front gate are worthless”
• 40:45 – Dressed in street clothes, sitting around in front of outpost
• 43:00 – Feb 17 tries to fight back but flees quickly, gate left open
• 33:10 – Jack: “These militias, they have unlimited firepower and they can coordinate.”
• 36:00 – Man in track suit from car chase seen grouping up and making a deal at the compound near the CIA compound, one man wears a turkish flag T-shirt
• 36:38 – Men look out over Zombieland towards the CIA compound
• 41:05 – Man speaks over loudspeaker as angry militants raise guns and chant, one man has ISIS flag in his head scarf
• 43:30 – Militants let a security guard escape
• 44:05 – Ambo “They’re everywhere”
• 46:15 – Militants shoot American flag, wearing black kufiyahs
• 47:28 – Militants “firing and chanting”
• 51:45 – Tanto: “Could be the start of the holy war”
• 53:50 – Close ups of 2 of the militants, one in athletic clothes, the other with a black and white kufiyah
• 55:45 – Convoy pulls up to militants, don’t know if it’s 17 Feb or not, most do not have kufiyahs, the man that Amahl talks to does
  • Rone: “No one’s wearing fucking uniforms here.”
• 58:05 – Tanto: “50/50 these guys turn on us and end this now”
• 56:30 – Throughout fire fight convoy is organized
• 58:45 – 2 17 Feb members join convoy, Boon: “Just don’t shoot us in the back”
  • Tanto: “Jesus Christ get your gun out of my face man, fuckin amateur hour.”
  • Don’t speak English well, tell Tanto the men at the bar weren’t friendly
  • Tanto asks one in backwards hat how all the men are friendlies, he says “Funny, I don’t know”
• 2:12:30 – Show up at the airport with 2 friends and ask Tanto for the keys to the cars
• 1:00:40 – 4 militants pass Americans neither side knows who the other is, militants ask if they are Americans, none are wearing kufiyahs, one has a coca cola tshirt
• 1:01:20 – Feb 17 moves with the convoy to the front gate
• 1:01:40 – Militants ride in truck, no clear images
• 1:02:05 – Rone: “Tig, knock out that technical or we’re dead” organized, necessary
• 1:02:37 – Feb 17 member
  • “Hello Captain America, I am fighting for my country” to Jack, Jack shushes him and they get shot at
• 1:02:55 – Men dressed in the garb of the militants who attacked the compound, one has bandana with ISIS flag on it, run out as Rone and co. run in, no confrontation
• 1:04:20 – Men who were involved in the attack at a bar as Americans run by, watch them run by, they question where the bad guys are to themselves
• 1:05:30 – 17 Feb commander
  • calls the attackers to try to negotiate surrender, Tanto upset that he has the attackers phone numbers
  • says he’s a good guy “but I know bad guys”
  • leaves the back gate open
• 1:07:00 – Militants wandering around, Tanto afraid they are not Feb 17, one dressed in a dress shirt and slacks urges them to go help the other Americans
• 1:08:30 – Militant pops out of the bushes in a ski mask with hands up just after Tanto asks about how who is a friendly
• 1:09:30 – Jack: “I think we got hostiles everywhere”
• 1:09:45 – Tanto: “They are gonna drag his body through the streets”
• 1:10:50 – Tanto yells at two men coming out of the bushes asking if they’re 17 Feb, one is seriously injured from an explosion
• 1:11:00 – Militants firing at Americans are just silhouettes
• 1:11:45 – Militants block both directions when the DS crew are trying to leave
• 1:14:30 – Members of the militant group that attacked the compound stop the car in the street, have guns yelling in Arabic, tells them to pull over
• 1:15:45 – Militants swarm from all sides attacking DS car
• 1:26:30 – All of the Libyan security team flees the compound
• 1:27:06 – Rone says the militants are coming through Zombieland
• 1:29:00 – Tanto: “They’re all bad guys until they’re not”
• 1:29:15 – Militants prepare to attack compound, except for quick shots closer, most shots are through the night vision, many appear to have kufiyahs
• 1:30:45 – Militants sneak through Zombieland, fog on the ground, shadowy, don’t see faces
• 1:31:50 – “It’s like kids playing hide and seek” about militants
• 1:33:20 – Militants shot graphically up close, all are wearing some kind of kufiyah, most shots during the fire fight are far away and shadowy
• 1:42:30 – Arriving in busses, some recognizable militants, many shots farther away of bodies or unrecognizable shot from behind or the side so it’s hard to make them out
• 1:45:00 – Bob: “17 Feb says you’re shooting at them” Tanto: “Somebody started shooting at us first and they are still fucking shooting at us.”
• 1:45:45 – 2 militants shot, both wearing kufiyahs
• 1:45:51 – Close up of Militant hiding looking scared, wearing black scarf
• 1:55:45 – Militants praying (guns shown) one with a kufiyah
• 1:58:15 – Libyan shield runs
• 2:05:20 – Trucks with militants drive up
  • Tanto: “This isn’t over till it ends, that’s when they’re all dead or we are.”
• 2:10:45 – One of the recognizable militants has a close up, wearing black and white kufiyah

Language

Codified Phrases:
• :50 – faintly hear Allah hu Akbar from those about to kill Gaddafi
• 6:00 – ISIS flag
• 7:20 – Militants speak Arabic throughout scene
• 7:28 – Rone says sallam

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• 34:40 – Prayer heard over loud speakers in the first shot after a cut to black saying 9/11/2012
• 41:05 – Group about to attack outpost shout allah hu akbar, also ISIS flag on head scarf
• 44:15 – ISIS flag
• 1:55:30 – Prayer over loud speakers Tanto: “Weird shit” When it stops “That can’t be good” over the radio

Representation of non-English Languages as they are being Used:
• 1:25 – indistinct Arabic heard as Gaddafi is shot
• 3:00 – Pilot speaking Arabic, wakes Jack
• 6:00 – Terrorist group yelling in Arabic, ISIS flag, Arabic written on clothing of the militants
• 7:28 – Rone speaks limited Arabic to the cleric
• 7:45 – Militant yells in Arabic and slaps car
• 8:40 – Cleric speaks in Arabic
• 27:50 – Kids and woman speak Arabic
• 28:20 – Amahl speaks to the men getting off the truck in Arabic, one man responds angrily waving a gun
• 41:00 – Arabic from female news reporter
• 51:45 – Militants drag gas cans while being ordered in Arabic
• 56:25 – Amahl speaks Arabic to militants
• 1:05:30 – 17 Feb commander speaks in Arabic
• 1:14:30 – Militant speaking in Arabic at the DS car
• 1:24:55 – Man comes out of run down building and speaks Arabic to someone inside, and to the CIA compound
• 1:36:00 – Angry shouting in Arabic
• 1:36:40 – Amahl speaks Arabic over radio
• 1:42:55 – Militants speaking Arabic

Translators:
• 27:20 – Amahl
  • lived there all his life
  • unathletic, short, wears glasses
  • 28:00 – “I hate this part” as truck arrives and he is needed
  • 28:30 – Amahl tells the men that the man with a gun wants money but is of no use in calming him down
  • 30:30 – Only one to applaud to the idea of a “free, democratic, and prosperous Libya.” In the words of the Ambo
  • 49:00 – Amahl says he isn’t a combat interpreter, Tanto gives him a gun and says now you are
• Need him to translate with 17 Feb
• Amahl hasn’t even buckled his helmet
• 54:45 – Both Rone and Bob yell at Amahl to come/stay, Amahl decides to go
• 56:25 – Amahl tentatively walks up to militants
• 1:06:37 – Amahl shows up in one of the cars and some Feb 17 men says “I do think these assholes, they were trying to steal our cars.”
• 1:08:55 – Runs up and says “they” said the attackers are regrouping
• 1:09:50 – Amahl crying
• 1:22:45 – Amahl in shock, Tanto says for Brit to go up on the roof and fight, Brit asks if he is serious and Amahl says he is
• 1:24:55 – Amahl translates the man outside saying that he says the man thinks the lights are going to give away the Americans “they are going to find you”
• 1:36:40 – Amahl helps Sona get forces to come help
• 1:40:35 – Amahl gets text from his cousin saying to leave before it’s too late
  • Tanto: “I don’t think we need an interpreter anymore, Amahl. You did good, you should go.” Amahl: “No, I’m staying here with you guys”
• 2:10:00 – Amahl says he’s going home, apologizes to Tanto, Tanto: “Your country’s gotta figure this shit out Amahl.”
• 29:05 – Tanto flashes the Jambo hand sign (Shaka) and the angry man puts his gun down and responds in kind saying “cool, baby”
  • Tanto – “Mercenaries all know the Jambo, Amahl. These guys are all-right.”
• 1:04:45 – Tanto able to talk to the 2 Feb 17 members to figure out the men at the bar aren’t friendlies (in English)
• 1:09:55 – Tanto tells Amahl to get it together and stop pointing his gun
• emerging as a translator of war to the translator
• 2:06:30 – Tanto flashes the Jambo, man behind technical flashes it back
• 35:55 – “Get somebody who speaks Arabic so we can ask [Feb 17] a question” in an angry tone
• 1:36:00 – GRS translator: “This is all screwed up Libyan bureaucracy…Who drives, who goes first, and of course who gets paid the most” “Tell them to figure it out”
• 1:38:05 – Glen to translator: “Can you explain to them that is this bullshit ends up costing American lives, I’m gonna come back here and cut all their throats myself”

**Civilians**

**Instances of Civilians:**
• 1:50 – Group of civilians with guns pulling Gaddafi out of a pipe (men have guns, women sit and watch, children present)
• 1:30 – Protestors, Obama speaks about self determination
• 3:00 – Women in hijabs/other head coverings, a few men, almost all with taqiyah on.
• 3:20 – Men and women (one woman in particular) look suspiciously at Jack, partly because he removes his wedding ring
• 4:00 – Relatively diversely dressed group of men in and outside the airport (one woman)
• Suspicious looks common
• 5:10 – Kids sitting on a destroyed tank, Rone: “Remnants of the revolution, man”
• 5:44 – Smattering of civilians, some men and women, one man with goats, car backs into another car, disorganized
• 6:00 – Women and men running from loud angry voices, man dead on ground
• 9:11 – Men women and children moving around CIA annex
• 12:40 – Kids outside walls of CIA compound peer in
• 12:45 – Tig: “This was a private family compound owner by a wealthy Libyan who got out of town after the revolution and leased it to the CIA. He was smart.”
• 13:05 – Libyans who own “Zombieland” going about their day
• 13:25 – Tig calls to Hesham and gives him a tip: “He’s a good man, but there are a few we’ve got our eyes on, so always stay strapped.”
• 13:30 – Kids set off bottle rockets run back to three men in front of a different compound
• 16:15 – Many civilians out, all women are covered
• 16:47 – Many civilians in another public space, close up of woman in burka with only her eyes showing
• 18:35 – Men selling rifles at the public market, and RPGs
• 20:30 – Man and woman stand on small sidewalk on skinny road during car chase, Boon: “Get out of the fucking road”
• 24:18 – 2 women and 1 male man on staff at the outpost, both women wear the hijab
• 27:50 – Woman signals to Rone, kids playing soccer in the square are called away by her
• 31:55 – Mayor accompanied by only men and one child, tons of press arrive, some women in the crowd and working as waiters, all women in the hijab, many men wear a taqiyah but not all
  • Jack: “Any one of these people could clack off a vest” Rone: “At least it’ll be quick, brother” Jack: “Don’t be an asshole”
• 35:15 – Men take pictures of the outpost
• 35:20 – Civilians in the street, shadowy
• 36:20 – women in hijab walk by the deal being made by Libyan militants
• 39:40 – Unknown shadowy figure takes pictures of CIA compound
• 40:35 – Same thing at the outpost
• 40:54 – Boys dance on a car
• 42:08 – Children sit watching the militants march on the outpost, bemused
• 53:20 – Arab man following the Tripoli team
• 57:55 – woman and children in a car drive through the fire
• 59:50 – Two men watch a soccer match in the middle of the fire fight both wearing taqiyah
• 1:00:50 – More men watching soccer
• 1:24:10 – Shepherds milling outside the CIA compound, wearing taqiyah
• 1:26:00 – Man watches soccer just outside compound walls, “surreal” “different world”
• 1:27:50 – Shepherds walk through field
• 1:35:00 – Shepherds out in the field with the sheep
• 1:36:20 – Off the men arguing at the airport, “Keep a close watch on them, we don’t know who’s good and who’s bad”
• 1:55:00 – 3 men pull up in a car, with a cell phone. Rone says they could be getting target coordinates
• 1:55:55 – Cut from militants praying to civilian next to compound
• 2:09:30 – Children watch the exfil
• 2:10:30 – Women dressed in black with various head coverings mourn the dead militants, some children mourn too, woman seen praying
• 2:16:33 – Text says 100,000 Libyans mourned the ambassador’s death
• 2:17:35 – Libyan mourning shown, sign “Sorry people of America this is not the behavior of our ISLAM and Profit.”

Position with Respect to Violence:
• Unless otherwise noted – Neutral
• :50 – perpetrators/supporters
• 1:30 – Set up as violently deposing Gaddafi’s regime
• 6:00 – Victims
• 13:25 – Possible perpetrators
• 18:35 – Guns ubiquitous in the civilian population
• 35:15 – suspicion
• 39:40 – Possible perpetrator
• 53:20 – US side
• 1:36:20 – Ambiguous
• 1:55:00 – possible perpetrators
• 2:10:30 – Victims/supporters
• 2:17:35 – Opposing
Appendix C: *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* Coding Sheet

**Space**

**Way Arab or Muslim Spaces are Described:**

- 2:20 – Need people to fill the void in Afghanistan
- 3:10 – Tanya: NATO mission in Afghanistan uncertain
- 5:00 – Man on plane “Corkscrew landing, in case a missile is fired at the aircraft. Kabul International Airport. KIA. Killed in Action.”
- 6:10 – Fahim: “The air here takes some getting used to. It’s quite polluted with feces.”
- 11:10 – Tanya: “In Afghanistan you’re a serious piece of ass.” … “Cause you’re what, like a seven, a six or a seven in New York? Here you’re a nine borderline ten. It’s called “Kabul Cute.”’’
- 11:57 – Kim: “there’s shit in the air, literally. I don’t think I can do this.”
- 15:35 – Coughlin says that “We are on the wrong side of Persia” “Iraq is where you get some”
- 16:00 – Coughlin: “Forgotten war.” Forgot about Afghanistan.
- 31:00 – Kim says it’s bullshit that Friday is the only day off in the Islamic week when Fahim tells her
- 34:30 – Kim: “They like to shoot off guns at weddings here”
- 39:10 – Kim: “Would you do that? Would you go down there?” referring to Taliban controlled areas. Tanya: “If it was the right call”
- 41:10 – Kim calls Fahim to apply for another embed because she needs to get out of Kabul
- 48:10 – Kim a Kabul 9.5
- 49:45 – Series of Kim’s news reports describing Afghanistan
- 56:16 – Hollanek: “This war is like fucking a gorilla, you keep going until the gorilla wants to stop.”
- 1:03:40 – Calling it the Kabubble (the safe journalist part)
- 1:05:15 – Ed (Kim’s boss) can’t sell Afghanistan, war has same-shit-different-day syndrome
- 1:08:00 – Iain has a story that he will share with Kim about American troops defending a Chinese gold mining operation in Badakhshan
- 1:13:35 – Kim: “I didn’t think the Attorney General of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan went to parties at guest houses”
- 1:16:50 – Kim refers to Kabul as home
- 1:26:01 – Kim: “Can this half ass country not even do kidnapping right?”
- 1:41:27 – Coughlin: “If Bin Laden’s parents hadn’t of gotten divorced than maybe none of us would’ve been in the Stan to begin with” then goes on to say it was also USSR and the British Empire
• 1:41:57 – Coughlin: “I mean, there’s only so much any of us have any control of, good or bad. If you didn’t learn that in Afghanistan then you weren’t paying attention.”

Characterization

Female Roles and Characteristics of Representation:
• 26:15 – Shakira introduced
  • Iain describes her as attractive
  • Seems to be a bit of comic character
• 45:55 – Gives Kim a bracelet when she comes to the wedding underdressed
• 47:50 – Comic relief

Male Roles and Characteristics of Representation:
• 5:37 – Men immediately come up to her to ask for help as soon as she leaves the airport
• 5:45 – Fahim introduced (See Translator)
• 8:05 – Jaweed introduced
  • wears nice sweater, otherwise relatively average
  • Watching porn
    • Nic: “They’re bloody addicted. That one melted a laptop downloading porno.”
    • Fahim: “He likes to watch men with donkeys. It’s unfortunate.”
• 38:25 – Kim tries to check PC and Jaweed’s porn comes up.
  • Tanya: “Although, donkeys aside, he is a good fixer.”
  • Tanya: “You know I heard he has contacts in the tribals, like real Taliban contacts”
• 1:06:10 – Jaweed gets Tayna a meet up with the tribals “her network will pay me triple” Kim: “I taught you how to clear your internet history!”
• 1:10:32 – Jaweed goes to talk to one of tribals “That’s him, that’s my guy”
  • Jaweed killed by the blast
• 31:25 – Ali Massoud Sadiq introduced
  • Ali Sadiq wearing nice suit, pompous attitude
  • Only speaks to Fahim at first
  • Played by Alfred Molina
• Kim has to call him out to get his attention: “Your Ministry for the Prevention of Vice and the Encouragement of Virtue sounds a lot like the Taliban Ministry of Vice and Virtue.”
• Tells story about how men had to shave pubic hair and the dowel the Taliban would use to check, men would be beaten if it was too long, story to try and show he is different
• Returned to the country to save it, friend of America
• Heavy implication that he wants to sleep with Kim “get to know her”
  • Instead they go fire guns Ali: “Put a turban on her, she’d make a very handsome boy.”
• 35:00 – Offers Kim interview to interview Pasha Khan
• 49:25 – Ali and Kim meet; Kim tries to get a basic statement about sharia in Kandahar from him and he brings up the fact that there is a bed in his office (sexual)
• 1:12:45 – Ali comes to the journalist compound to try and woo over K
  • Ali says Kim is a bad friend because she doesn’t call or invite her to parties
  • Ali says that he wants Kim to be happy, asks if she is seeing anyone, asks her if she will be his “special friend” Kim: “You are a bad friend. In America, I would get a book deal out of this shit!”
• Kim goes to Ali says “Please tell Mr. Sadiq his “Special friend” is here”
  • Ali knows about Iain getting kidnapped, knows about where he might be
  • Ali says he can “make inquires” for a “very special friend”
  • Kim stands up and unbuttons her coat, camera cuts so it looks like she is revealing herself to him
  • Kim pulls out her phone and gives it to Ali, it’s a video of Ali dancing in the street at a party where alcohol was served refers to herself as a “Western enemy of Islam”
  • Ali: “I’ve never touched alcohol in my life!”
• 36:10 – Pasha Khan introduced
  • Pasha Khan presented in a dark room, has people to pour him tea, wearing turban, white outfit with a vest, mustache, shells on a belt around his chest.
  • See section in Translator

**Men and Women Interacting:**

**Women Interacting with Each Other:**

**Men Interacting with Each Other:**
• 8:07 – Fahim scolds Jaweed in Dari for watching porn
  • Fahim: “He likes to watch men with donkeys. It’s unfortunate.”
• 30:40 – Sadiq speaks to Fahim instead of Kim
36:18 – Pasha Khan: “She is Muslim?” Fahim: “Yes” Pasha Khan: “Have her pray for me” Fahim: “She is Turkish. You wouldn’t understand her anyway.” Kim starts to speak Pasha Khan: “Put a turban on her and she would make a handsome boy!” Pasha Khan and Fahim laugh awkwardly (None of that translated)

Violence

Instances of Violence:
- :55 – Bomb goes off outside party
- 9:15 – Gunfire outside at night
- 18:45 – Well blown up, which is why they go to the village
- 21:30 – Attack on convoy when it is stopped. Hurd says stay in the vehicle to Kim. She doesn’t.
- 28:20 – Police officer fires gun to light his cigarette
- 34:21 – Gunfire in the background while K talks to boyfriend
- 42:05 – Another well blown up
- 53:05 – Girls school blown up in Kandahar
- 53:45 – Muslim men execute radios and TVs in a public square
  - Kim gets out to try and film, she is accosted and Fahim must come save her
- 55:00 – Fahim and Kim chased to the car, car is rocked and beaten with shoes after they get in
- 1:00:40 – Kim gets dropped at the wrong house, hears gun fire, at night
  - baby crying adds stress
  - people yelling
  - Iain happens upon her and rescues her
  - Until he gets out it is assumed that the car is carrying a bad person
- 1:10:45 – Jaweed attacked by tribals, one walks up to Tanya’s convoy with gun raised
- 1:15:00 – Bomb from beginning goes off again
- 1:17:32 – Coalition truck crashes and kills 6
  - People riot, gunshots heard, angry men run through the streets
- 1:24:40 – Armed men surround the bus

Characteristics of Representation for Perpetrators of Violence:
- 15:55 – Coughlin: “Accidental discharge is scarier than the Taliban”
- 21:30 – Muzzle flares, rough outlines of men, right before rocket hits you see 2 black silhouettes behind a truck. Cheers from men. Kim: “Those assholes tried to shoot us.”
- 28:20 – Careless and bored police officer
- 34:21 – Kim: “They like to shoot off guns at weddings here”
• 35:05 – Kim calls Pacha Khan a warlord, Ali says business man
• 36:00 – Pasha Khan men heavily armed, beards, headdresses
• 43:35 – About the 42:05 well getting blown up Kim: “The Taliban haven’t been destroying the well here. The women of the village are destroying it, or so they tell me.” Hollanek: “We dug that well for the women several times so they don’t have to walk to the river.” Kim: “But they want to walk to the river. It’s their only chance to be social and gossip and, you know, hang out. I think that they have a bunch of old Soviet landmines and they just prop one up and throw rocks at it.”
• 53:12 – Fahim translates graffiti in bombed girls school “No education for women”
• 53:50 – Man shooting TV yelling loud speech, dressed in dark clothes, black turban
• 55:00 – Group of angry men, many with beards and turbans, carrying sticks, guns, shoes
• 1:09:45 – Tribals, everything covered, in black, except for face and hands
• 1:17:32 – Rioting men, difficult to see faces of rioters, some in turbans some not, one speaks to camera “They kill us! They kill us and they break our hearts! And I also give this message to president Hamid Karzai: What the hell is happening here?!”
• 1:24:40 – Armed men wear black turbans
• 1:31:50 – Marines raid on compound holding Iain
  • Gunshots quieted, shooting at not visible targets
  • Pans to vague outlines of people watching TV in a dark room
  • Bodies of the kidnappers fall to the ground with muffled groans
  • Harry Nilsson’s “Without You” plays
• 1:34:30 – Iain talking about his kidnapping, made him dress up in a burqa
  • Iain “I went to the gift shop at Taliban and I’m afraid all I could get was…that (rolls casings onto the table.)”

Language

Codified Phrases:
• 35:45 – Fahim: As-salamu Alaikum to Pasha Khan men
• 53:30 – Call to prayer “Allah hu Akbar” heard as they drive through Kandahar
• 53:50 – “Allah hu Akbar” before shooting a TV, followed by more chanting
• 54:30 – More “Allah hu Akbar” chants
• 1:26:20 – Fahim says “Inshallah”

Representation of non-English Languages as they are being Used:
• 1:45 – Man speaking in Dari after grabbing Kim’s ass
• Kim uses Dari to cuss him out
• 5:52 – Woman cusses Kim out after her headscarf falls off, translated
• 7:45 – Guard speaks in Dari outside compound
• 8:07 – Fahim scolds Jaweed in Dari for watching porn
• 16:58 – Tall Brian speaks Dari “Suck my dick” translated
• 19:00 – Man speaks in Dari to a solider, then speaks to group of other men, second part translated
• 24:40 – Egg boy speaks Dari to Kim
• 27:45 – Egg boy cusses out Kim
• 36:18 – Speaking in Pashto with Pasha Khan, translated
• 42:45 – Woman in burka speaks to Kim in Pashto
• 46:20 – Dari song plays as Fahim and his wife walk down the aisle
• 54:05 – Fahim speaks Dari as he goes after Kim
• 54:30 – Man giving Dari speech
• 54:40 – Men speak Dari at Kim because she enters the square
• 1:00:17 – Man tells Kim to put on a head scarf as she gets out of cab, she doesn’t, translated
• 1:09:45 – Kim and Iain hold hands, woman runs up from behind yelling in Dari and smacking their hands
  • Kim and Iain speak in Dari to calm her down, Kim says “Jesus” in English
• 1:10:42 – Body guard yells in Dari at tribal fighters
• 1:12:55 – Ali and body guard argue in Dari
• 1:23:55 – Iain speaking Dari to the bus mechanic, translated
• 1:24:50 – Men speaking Dari barge onto bus and capture Iain
• 1:29:10 – Kim running through gov’t building runs into man and speaks in Dari to apologize

Translators:
• 5:45 – Fahim
  • played by white actor
  • Fahim wears hat, vest, button down, polite
• 5:55 – Fahim intentionally mistranslates the woman’s cussing of Kim to “Welcome to Afghanistan”
• 7:00 – Kim somewhat surprised, “where did you learn English” Fahim: “At Medical school. I was a doctor”
• 16:30 – Gives Kim a hair tie
• 16:58 – Fahim mistranslates Tall Brian to “Oh what a terrible event”
• 19:00 – Fahim: “He wants to know if you are the Russians” Sgt. Hurd – “No sir, that was 20 years ago and we are here to help, and I’m black” Village man: to a group of other men “The Russians are blacks now.”
• 19:40 – Fahim found out that the younger men said the Taliban came at night.
• 19:40 – Kim says she has to pee Fahim: “Stop. Stop. I am engaged to be married.” Kim: “Okay, Fahim, I know you like your women to be, like, beautiful mysterious IKEA bags, okay? But we urinate, Doctor. Out our vaginas.” Fahim: “You think you urinate out of…” Kim: “No. I know it’s a separate thing!” … Fahim: “I cannot ask these men about this, and I am not allowed to talk to the women.”
• 21:30 – Fahim tells Kim to stay in car, annoyed that she doesn’t listen
• 30:30 – Fahim reading O magazine
• 36:18 – Pasha Khan: “She is Muslim?” Fahim: “Yes” Pasha Khan: “Have her pray for me” Fahim: “She is Turkish. You wouldn’t understand her anyway.” Kim starts to speak Pasha Khan: “Put a turban on her and she would make a handsome boy!” Pasha Khan and Fahim laugh awkwardly (None of that translated)
• 41:15 – Kim repeats Fahim over the phone, he asks if she needs me time, Kim responds “See? I told you that O magazine would increase your understanding of women.”
• 42:25 – Fahim tells Kim she doesn’t need to get a nice dress for his wedding, then calls her his friend, indirectly
• 45:15 – Kim sleeping on Fahim’s shoulder, Fahim wakes her up because he doesn’t feel comfortable with her touching him
• 46:25 – Fahim’s wife
  • Fahim’s wife wearing ornate wedding outfit, many colors a lot of gold, head partially covered
• 50:30 – Kim wants to go to Kandahar, Fahim doesn’t, tells Kim she needs to buy a burka to go there
• 52:30 – Fahim calls a burka a blue prison
• 53:12 – Fahim translates graffiti in bombed girls school “No education for women”
• 54:52 – Fahim steps in to defend Kim
• 55:23 – Fahim: “That was a men’s park, Kim! Men only! Fuck!”
• 56:40 – Fahim tells story about being a doctor, to highlight the escalation that comes with addiction, sees Kim as addicted to the high of finding riskier stories, risking others’ lives
  • Kim asks if this is the Afghan version of the conversation saying that in New York he would have gotten to the point
  • Kim offers him a wage increase
  • Fahim concedes that he will have the American version of the conversation “I do not want to work for you anymore”
• Leaves
• 1:25:40 – Fahim picks Kim up at airport
• Reassures Kim that Iain won’t be killed, sold to another organization
• 1:37:15 – Fahim drives Kim to airport
• Kim asks about Fahim’s baby; he replies which one
• Fahim talking about his kids: “The younger one, the boy, he’s very strong.”
• Kim: “I bet the girl is strong too”
• Fahim: “She is stronger”
• 1:39:05 – Fahim and Kim say goodbye
• Kim: “In my culture, we would hug.”
• Fahim hands Kim bag and they hold the handle together while they make eye contact for about 10 seconds

**Civilians**

**Instances of Civilians:**
• 1:45 – Wounded civilians and others walking around the bombing site
• 5:25 – Busy airport, people dressed in various ways in stock footage, some women with no head covering, most men have nothing on their heads. After cut to shot footage, all women have heads covered, some in burkas, most men have some sort of hat or turban on. Middle Eastern sounding music playing in background
• 5:52 – Woman yells: “Cover your head, shameless whore!” after Kim’s headscarf gets blown off
• Covered except for face and hands
• 6:00 – Outside airport, busy street many people varied demographics, most men have hats, vests, button down shirts. All women covered in various ways
• 6:20 – Nic says the police only want money, that’s why they are bothering him about parking where he did
• 6:30 – Kim pulls out money and it blows away, men hoard to collect it
• 6:50 – Very busy streets, people not really respecting cars, mainly children running in road
• 7:08 – Man being shaved in the street
• 18:35 – Driving into rural village, all women in burkas, men w/ heads covered as well, bearded, well blown up. Don’t know who.
• 19:32 – Hurd trying to communicate with loud group of men to tell them not to blow the well up again
• 24:20 – A few civilians out at night, can’t really see them
• 24:35 – Boy wearing sweater and red hooded coat crying over broken eggs, Kim gives him money
• 27:45 – Kim cusses at Egg boy when she discovers he’s lying
• 34:30 – Kim: “They like to shoot off guns at weddings here”
• 42:05 – Same town as before, well blown up again.
• 42:45 – Woman in burka stands looking at Kim as she walks around a corner away from the well, beckons to Kim to come inside the building
  • completely covered in blue burka, can only see her hand briefly
• 43:15 – Kim inside building, a group of women in Burkas faces her, they all reveal their faces to her.
  • Only see the back of the women uncovering themselves
• 45:40 – Fahim wedding, lots of people, women in very nice dresses, few with heads covered
• 49:05 – Kabul’s first licensed female driver, crashes car
• 52:30 – In background as car drives by, mostly if not all men
• 55:00 – Group of angry men, many with beards and turbans, carrying sticks, guns, shoes
• 1:09:15 – Kim and Iain walk through a market, civilians around them diverse groups of people, men in turbans or with heads covered, women in long dresses with heads covered as well, egg boy, Iain knows egg boys name, gives him money anyway
• 1:09:45 – Kim and Iain hold hands, woman runs up from behind yelling and smacking their hands
  • Everything covered, in black, except for face and hands
• 1:23:50 – Men from Iain’s broken down bus around hats, monochrome pants and shirts, black vests
• 1:25:30 – Civilians at airport same as other time
• 1:26:45 – Fahim: “Ramadan has ended, they are slaughtering lambs” somber ME music plays, blood everywhere
• 1:29:10 – Men in gov’t building walking and speaking amongst each other, most wearing turbans or taqiyahs, a couple men in suits, but most wearing white shirts and pants and dark colored vests.
• 1:37:37 – Egg boy as Kim drives to airport
• 1:38:20 – Civilians at airport

Position with Respect to Violence:
  • Unless otherwise noted – Neutral
  • 1:45 – Victims
  • 55:00 – Perpetrators/Proponents
Appendix D: *War Dogs* Coding Sheet

**Space**

**Way Arab or Muslim Spaces are Described:**
- 26:00 – David wasn’t expecting a work call, from Captain Santos, “Right, of course. It’s 9:00 AM in Baghdad.
- 29:42 – Efraim: “I already figured it out, we use Jordan.” David: “Jordan Goldfarb?” Efraim: “Jordan the country! It shares a border with Iraq, it’s a US ally, and, most importantly, there’s no embargo.”
- 30:12 – About circumvention: Efraim: “It’s not illegal…”
- 32:45 – Santos: I’m in the ass crack of the world defending your freedom…
- 35:30 – David (narration): “American Embassy offered little to no help in dealing with the ministry of customs. So, we took matters into our own hands.”
- 37:32 – (on balcony above city) Efraim mid-rant. David: “You need to chill out” Efraim: “How am I supposed to chill out, David? We’re in a Muslim country, I can’t even get a blowjob! It’s embarrassing! It’s chaos here, fuck!” (car horns constant)
- 39:25 – Free gas in Iraq, Efraim says “Iraq is dope. I’m thinking of getting a place there.”
- 42:15 – David narrates: “Driving a truck load of guns through the Iraqi desert” (“fucking surreal” compared to being at home.)
- 44:07 – Efraim calls it a war zone
- 47:45 – Marlboro: “Fallujah bad!” Efraim calls Marlboro a “cheap fuck” for stopping in Fallujah for gas (outskirts of Fallujah clearly)
- 49:52 – Santos: “Triangle of death”
- Status symbol for David and Efraim
- 51:24 – David: “Got the fuck out of Baghdad”

**Characterization**

**Female Roles:**

**Female Characteristics of Representation:**

**Male Roles and Characteristics of Representation:**
- 35:45 – Jordanian Fixer 1
  - Slicked back hair, smoking, Efraim says he heard the fixers have contacts in the Jordanian gov’t
• 35:45 – Jordanian Fixer 2: Button down, large sunglasses, smoking
• 35:45 – Jordanian Boy (See Translator)
• 38:15 – Marlboro, smuggler
  • Average looking, blue button down, grey keffiyeh, David doesn’t believe he is
    the best smuggler, smokes
• 39:10 – Marlboro: “Yes, very safe (driving to Baghdad) 50/50 (live or die).”
• English is ok, Efraim: “Obviously, he doesn’t know what 50/50 means.”
• 45:05 – Marlboro calmly filling gas can and smoking (dead body in gas
  station)
• 47:45 – Efraim calls Marlboro a “cheap fuck” for stopping in Fallujah for gas
  (outskirts of Fallujah clearly)
• 49:30 – Efraim taking a picture of Marlboro: “Let me see those pearly
  yellows. You’re like an Iraqi Tom Selleck, bro.”

Men and Women Interacting:

Women Interacting with Each Other:

Men Interacting with Each Other:
• 35:45 – JF1 and JB interact in Arabic
• 36:45 – JB and JF2 interact in Arabic

Violence

Instances of Violence:
• 44:07 – Dead person on the ground at gas station, implication that Marlboro left
  them.
  • Efraim: “We are in a war zone, there’s a dead body, relax.”
• 46:05 – Men in trucks firing guns as they drive up to the gas station, David and
  Efraim start to drive off on an empty tan,
  • American helicopter and trucks pass them going the other way, helicopter
  firing on the trucks
  • Efraim: “God bless Dick Cheney’s America”

Characteristics of Representation for Perpetrators of Violence:
• 46:05 – Men in trucks
  • Men in trucks dressed in mostly black, carrying guns, never really see faces,
      faint unintelligible shouting, gunfire from those in the truck bed.
  • Gunfire from men in trucks
  • As men in trucks catch them they stop
  • American helicopter and trucks pass them going the other way, helicopter
      firing on the trucks
  • Efraim: “God bless Dick Cheney’s America”
• American soldier flips them off as they drive by

Language

Codified Phrases:
• 48:30 – Marlboro: “Allah hu Akbar! x2” for US arrival

Representation of non-English Languages as they are being Used:
• 35:45 – Jordanian fixers don’t speak English, boy translates for them
• 41:15 – Iraqi soldiers don’t speak English, loud shouting when Marlboro reaches down after being asked what they are hauling, translated
• 47:05 – Marlboro speaks in Arabic when he sees men in trucks

Translators:
• 35:45 – Jordanian Boy
  • Blue t-shirt over blue long sleeve, and jeans
  • David and Efraim discuss how to get guns to Iraq. Efraim: “Look, I don’t want to come off as the ugly American here, and maybe I don’t understand the rituals of your culture (slightly intonated, Jordanian Fixer 1 looks at him somewhat negatively), but this feels like the moment where we’re supposed to offer him a gift, am I correct?” Jordanian Boy: “You are correct.” …After giving 1,400 US to JF1…Efraim: “Could have just started with that, saved all this bullshit.” Efraim: “I like your shades (to JF2) Tell him I’ll give him 100 bucks for those shades, tell him in gibberish.”
• 37:15 – After 3 days of nothing from the fixers. Efraim: “Motherfucker! He ripped us off!” David: “We don’t know that yet” Efraim: “No, I know what it feels like to fuck somebody. I also know what it feels like to get fucked by somebody and we just got fucked.”
• 37:55 – Efraim after freak out: “That was Aladdin. They’re in the lobby.” David: “See that? Come on.”
• 38:00 – Jordanian Boy: “What’s the problem? You wanted your guns back, he got you your guns back! (about JF1 who is on a motorcycle)” David: “What? No, we said we needed a permit to fly them to Iraq!” Jordanian Boy: “Exactly, but you don’t need a permit to drive them.” David: “You expect us to drive them to Iraq?” Jordanian Boy: “Why not? Marlboro is the best smuggler in all of Jordan.”

Civilians

Instances of Civilians:
• 35:00 – David and Efraim pushing through a crowded airport cutting in line, Jordanians looking at them negatively
  • Mostly people in traditional dress, women with various head coverings, men with kufiyahs, also men in suits and collared shirts, relatively diverse
  • Efraim – (to the Jordanian woman in line at airport): “Don’t worry, I have to go first. I’m American.”
• 35:25 – Driving down street and seeing a busy sidewalk, only men, various styles of dress from more traditional Arab to western
• 35:45 – Boys playing soccer in a field where David and Efraim are meeting with men who might help them. Dressed in collared shirts, shorts etc.
• 38:05 – In the street with the gun truck, busy, similar portrayal to the population in airport

Position with Respect to Violence:
• Unless otherwise noted – Neutral
References


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