



# HOMELAND

FAR FROM HOME.  
FAR FROM FINISHED.

SHOWTIME.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

### MEDIA CRITIQUE GALLERY WALK

Title of Media Artifact	Description of Media Artifact	Point of View/ Perspective highlighted?	Point of View/ Perspective being left out?	Is the piece biased?	Evidence





## Unit 7 CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE

### The Danger of a Single Story

#### Part 1

I'm a storyteller. And I would like to tell you a few personal stories about what I like to call "the danger of the single story." I grew up on a university campus in eastern Nigeria. My mother says that I started reading at the age of two, although I think four is probably close to the truth. So I was an early reader, and what I read were British and American children's books.

I was also an early writer, and when I began to write, at about the age of seven, stories in pencil with crayon illustrations that **my poor mother**<sup>1</sup> was obligated to read, I wrote exactly the kinds of stories I was reading: All my characters were white and blue-eyed, they played in the snow, they ate apples, and they talked a lot about the weather, how **lovely**<sup>2</sup> it was that the sun had come out. Now, this despite the fact that I lived in Nigeria. I had never been outside Nigeria. We didn't have snow, we ate mangoes, and we never talked about the weather, because there was no need to.

My characters also drank a lot of **ginger beer**<sup>3</sup> because the characters in the British books I read drank ginger beer. Never mind that I had no idea what ginger beer was. And for many years afterwards, I would have a desperate desire to taste ginger beer. But that is another story.

What this demonstrates, I think, is how impressionable and vulnerable we are in the face of a story, particularly as children. Because all I had read were books in which characters were foreign, I had become convinced that books by their very nature had to have foreigners in them and had to be about things with which I could not personally identify. Now, things changed when I discovered African books. There weren't many of them available, and they weren't quite as easy to find as the foreign books.

But because of writers like Chinua Achebe and Camara Laye, I went through a mental shift in my perception of literature. I realized that people like me, girls with skin the color of

<sup>1</sup> The adjective "poor" is often used to offer someone sympathy in a situation. Adichie is partly making fun of herself here as she sympathizes with her mother who had to read all her young stories.

<sup>2</sup> The adjective "lovely" describes something pleasant. It is more popularly used in British English than American English.

<sup>3</sup> The drink "ginger beer" is usually a non-alcoholic, carbonated, sweet drink. There are also alcoholic versions. In the U.S., a somewhat similar drink is called "ginger ale."

chocolate, whose **kinky hair could not form ponytails**,<sup>4</sup> could also exist in literature. I started to write about things I recognized.

Now, I loved those American and British books I read. They stirred my imagination. They opened up new worlds for me. But the **unintended consequence**<sup>5</sup> was that I did not know that people like me could exist in literature. So what the discovery of African writers did for me was this: It saved me from having a single story of what books are.

## Part 2

I come from a conventional, middle-class Nigerian family. My father was a professor. My mother was an administrator. And so we had, as was the norm, live-in **domestic help**,<sup>6</sup> who would often come from nearby rural villages. So the year I turned eight, we got a new **houseboy**.<sup>7</sup> His name was Fide. The only thing my mother told us about him was that his family was very poor. My mother sent yams and rice, and our old clothes, to his family. And when I didn't finish my dinner, my mother would say, "Finish your food! Don't you know? People like Fide's family have nothing." So I felt enormous pity for Fide's family.

Then one Saturday we went to his village to visit, and his mother showed us a beautifully patterned basket made of dyed raffia that his brother had made. I was startled. It had not occurred to me that anybody in his family could actually make something. All I had heard about them was how poor they were, so that it had become impossible for me to see them as anything else but poor. Their poverty was my single story of them.

Years later, I thought about this when I left Nigeria to go to university in the United States. I was 19. My American roommate was shocked by me. She asked where I had learned to speak English so well, and was confused when I said that Nigeria happened to have English as its official language. She asked if she could listen to what she called my "tribal music," and was consequently very disappointed when I produced my tape of Mariah Carey. She assumed that I did not know how to use a stove.

What struck me was this: She had felt sorry for me even before she saw me. Her default position toward me, as an African, was a kind of patronizing, well-meaning pity. My roommate had a single story of Africa: **a single story of catastrophe**.<sup>8</sup> In this single story, there was no possibility

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<sup>4</sup> The adjective "kinky" is commonly used to describe black or African hair. By pointing out that her hair cannot go in a "ponytail," Adichie is illustrating again how different she was from the white protagonists in the stories she read.

<sup>5</sup> An "unintended consequence" is not a primary one, but secondary.

<sup>6 & 7</sup> Adichie uses both the words "domestic help" and "houseboy" to refer to someone who lives in her home to help with cleaning, cooking, and other chores. The former is the more generic, accepted term to describe such a job. The term "houseboy" was likely a common colloquialism when Adichie was young.

<sup>8</sup> The "single story of catastrophe" that she describes refers to the problems of poverty, illness, and famine that are often associated with Africa.

of Africans being similar to her in any way, no possibility of feelings more complex than pity, no possibility of a connection as human equals. . . .

But I must quickly add that I, too, am just as guilty in the question of the single story. A few years ago, I visited Mexico from the U.S. The **political climate**<sup>9</sup> in the U.S. at the time was tense, and there were debates going on about immigration. And, as often happens in America, immigration became synonymous with Mexicans. There were endless stories of Mexicans as people who were **fleeing**<sup>10</sup> the healthcare system, sneaking across the border, being arrested at the border, that sort of thing.

I remember walking around on my first day in Guadalajara, watching the people going to work, rolling up tortillas in the marketplace, smoking, laughing. I remember first feeling slight surprise. And then I was overwhelmed with shame. I realized that I had been so immersed in the media coverage of Mexicans that they had become one thing in my mind: the abject immigrant. I had bought into the single story of Mexicans, and I could not have been more ashamed of myself. So that is how to create a single story, show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become.

. . . But to insist on only these negative stories is to **flatten my experience**<sup>11</sup> and to overlook the many other stories that formed me. The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story. . . . I've always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person. The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar.

. . . I teach writing workshops in Lagos every summer, and it is amazing to me how many people apply, how many people are eager to write, to tell stories. My Nigerian publisher and I have just started a non-profit called **Farafina**<sup>12</sup> Trust, and we have big dreams of building libraries and refurbishing libraries that already exist and providing books for state schools that don't have anything in their libraries, and also of organizing lots and lots of workshops, in reading and writing, for all the people who are eager to tell our many stories. Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity. . . .

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<sup>9</sup> The term "political climate" is used to describe the populace's general attitude, and surrounding tensions, in regards to a certain political topic or social issue at the time.

<sup>10</sup> To "fleece" someone means to dishonestly take money from them.

<sup>11</sup> Adiche is likely using the word "flatten" here to describe how stereotypes make our experiences one-dimensional.

<sup>12</sup> Farafina's website is farafinatrust.org.



# Chemical Attack in Syria

The U.N. Security Council meets in response to an attack that left dozens of people dead

APR 05, 2017 | By Lina Mai



DURSUN AYDEMIR—ANADOLU AGENCY/GETTY IMAGES

The United Nations Security Council held an emergency meeting on Wednesday to address a suspected chemical attack on Syrian civilians that occurred on April 4. At least 72 people, including 20 children, died in the attack, which took place in Khan Sheikhoun, a town in northern Syria. Hundreds of survivors were left convulsing and gasping for air.

The United States, France, and Britain called for the Security Council meeting. The three nations drafted a resolution, which “expresses its outrage that individuals continue to be killed and injured by chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, and expresses its determination that those responsible must



ABDULLAH COSKUN—ANADOLU AGENCY/GETTY IMAGES

Protesters at a demonstration on April 4 in Istanbul, Turkey, condemn Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s forces for a suspected chemical attack against civilians in Syria.

be held accountable.”

President Donald Trump denounced the attack as “heinous” in a statement. “Today’s chemical attack in Syria against innocent people including women and children is reprehensible and cannot be ignored by the civilized world,” Trump said.

Some sources, including Staffan de Mistura, the U.N.’s special representative to Syria, said the chemical attack came from the air. According to a statement from the Russian Defense Ministry, the toxic chemicals were released when a Syrian airstrike struck a rebel weapons storage center. However, survivors have said that they saw chemical bombs being dropped from planes.

The draft resolution places blame on Syrian president Bashar al-Assad’s military forces for the attack. It demands that Syria’s government provide international investigators with flight plans, names of squadron commanders, and access to air bases where chemical attacks were believed to have been launched. The resolution also calls on U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to conduct a fact-finding mission into the use of chemical weapons in Syria.



EU COMMISSION/ANADOLU AGENCY/GETTY IMAGES

Staffan de Mistura, the United Nations representative to Syria, discusses the crisis going on in the country during a press conference in Brussels, Belgium, on April 4.

According to the World Health Organization, victims of the attack show symptoms of exposure to nerve agents, highly toxic chemicals that affect the nervous system. The international community banned the use of chemical weapons in armed conflicts in 1925, with the Geneva Protocol. But chemical weapons have continued to be a global threat.

The UN and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons found Syrian government forces responsible for three chlorine gas attacks in 2014 and 2015. Syria agreed to destroy its chemical weapons in 2013. On Tuesday, Syria’s government denied that it used chemical weapons against civilians.

But Britain’s foreign secretary, Boris Johnson, said “all the evidence” he had seen so far suggests that the chemical attack was the work of Assad and his forces. “[They] did it in the full knowledge that they were using illegal weapons in a barbaric attack on their own people,” Johnson said. The U.N. Security Council has five permanent members—China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Russia, an ally of Assad, has threatened to veto the resolution.

The civil war in Syria has been raging since 2011. As the UN’s special envoy to the country, de Mistura has been charged with finding a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

“Every time we have a moment in which the international community is capable of being together, there is someone, somehow, that tries to undermine that feeling of hope by producing a feeling of horror and outrage,” he told reporters. “But we are not going to give up. On the contrary, we make use of all these horror moments to show they cannot prevail.”

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United StatesPeople

# The Syrians Next Door

December 16, 2016

Robin Shulman for TIME



DANNY WILCOX FOR TIME

*The Tameem family is building a life in Des Moines, Iowa. They are the first Syrian refugees in the state.*

As the plane descends over farm fields in Des Moines, Iowa, Ghazweh Aljabooli reaches for her daughter Hala, 6. Ghazweh, her husband, Abdul Fattah Tameem, and their five children—Nazeer, 15; Sedra, 13; Haidar, 11; and twins Hala and Mutaz—are on the last leg of a long trip.



The Tameems: Sedra, Mutaz, Hala, Ghazweh, Haidar, Nazeer, and Abdul Fattah

DANNY WILCOX FOR TIME

At the airport, Ghazweh is worried. What happens next? Will someone meet them? At the bottom of an escalator, a man is waiting with a smile. “Ahlan wa sahlan,” he says. It is Arabic for “welcome.” Ghazweh’s eyes fill with tears. “I was so scared,” she says.

The next morning, the Tameems visit their new home. It is a four-bedroom apartment. The kids run to their rooms. Each bed has a handmade quilt donated by a local quilting group and a stuffed animal on top. “There’s a teddy bear for me!” Hala says, beaming. In the coming days, the apartment is filled with people who want to help the family. Ghazweh is overcome by happiness mixed with confusion. This new life feels like a dream.

## Escaping a Civil War

The Tameems’ journey began five years before. They lived in Homs, a city north of Syria’s capital, Damascus. They were middle class. The children went to school. The family took vacations. But that changed in 2011 when a civil war **erupted**. Bombs destroyed the family’s home.

The Tameems eventually escaped to Jordan. They are among the 5 million people who have fled Syria. The war has killed more than 400,000 people. In Jordan, the Tameems registered as refugees with the United Nations (U.N.). That gave them international protection. But Jordan was not welcoming. U.N. officials asked the Tameems if they wanted to move to the U.S. They decided the U.S. offered opportunities for their children.



Nazeer takes part in a pickup soccer game with friends in his Des Moines neighborhood.

DANNY WILCOX FOR TIME

The resettlement process is not easy. Refugees are screened by five federal agencies, including the FBI and the Defense Department. Syrians must also go through an additional review. **Vetting** takes 18 to 24 months. The Tameems passed every part. About two years after they arrived in Jordan, officials offered them resettlement. Ghazweh was so excited, she jumped in the air.

## A Family's New Life

The five children go to three schools. Nazeer is at Hoover High School. Sedra and Haidar are in middle school. Hala and Mutasz's elementary school is new and bright. It is filled with kids who came to Iowa from some of the most violent places in the world.



Hala stands in front of her locker at her new elementary school.

DANNY WILCOX FOR TIME

On the twins' bus ride home, Nepalese kids sit in one cluster. Mexicans are in another. Hala and Mutaz sit with other Syrians. "Does anybody get off at 13th?" the bus driver calls out. The children are silent. "I have never driven a bus where nobody speaks English," the driver says. One student misses her stop. Another gets off too early. Finally, the bus arrives in the Tameems' neighborhood. It is more than two hours late. When the door opens, Ghazweh grabs Hala and hugs her. "Where were you?" she asks. Ghazweh had been scared. But a few minutes later, she's laughing again.



Haidar, Mutaz, and Nazeer play video games in their home.

DANNY WILCOX FOR TIME

The next day, the family goes swimming at a lake. Ghazweh watches her kids play. They are together. They are safe. They have a future, she says. They didn't before. "I'm happy," says Ghazweh, in Arabic, smiling toward Hala. And then she says it again, haltingly, grinning, in English: "I am very happy."

# Haqq and Hollywood:

Illuminating 100 years of Muslim  
Tropes And How to Transform  
Them (The Visual Companion)

**Author:**  
Maytha Alhassen, Ph.D.

**Produced and Published by:**  
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–  
October 2018

## A TALE OF TWO TROPES

On November 25, 1992, a film opened with these lyrics, carried by a haunting melody:

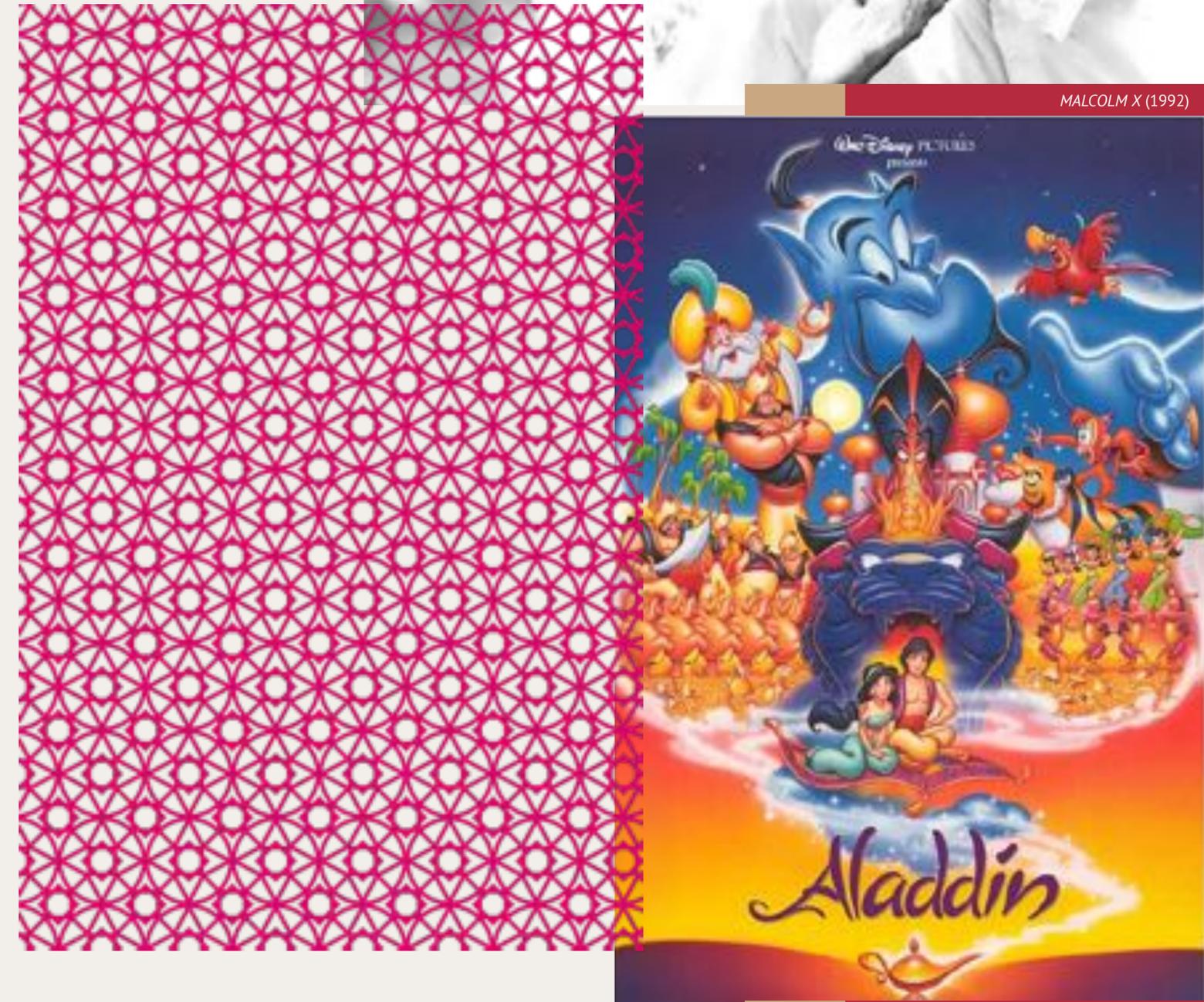
*Oh, I come from a land  
From a faraway place  
Where the caravan camels roam.  
Where they cut off your ear  
If they don't like your face  
It's barbaric, but hey, it's home.*

This animated Disney film, *Aladdin*, was the highest grossing film of 1992, netting over half a billion dollars at the box office. These lyrics were changed in the film's 1993 VHS release due to efforts by the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) to "Where it's flat and immense and the heat is intense, it's barbaric, but hey it's home."

One week prior, on November 18, 1992, producer and director Spike Lee released a film that changed the discourse on Muslims and Islam: *Malcolm X*. Islam, at least in the Black American Muslim experience, was recast as a source of social good and moral uplift. *Malcolm X*, at the time of its release, was one of the few positive portrayals of Muslims and Islam in American cinema. Sourced from what historian Zaheer Ali describes as an "intimate knowledge of Black life," *Malcolm X* and other (mostly independent) Black-produced films in the early '90s wrote Muslim characters into ensemble storytelling projects as community 'Redeemers.'



MALCOLM X (1992)



ALADDIN (1992)

# HOLLYWOOD'S HISTORY WITH MUSLIM TROPES

Since its early days, Hollywood has had a consistently negative approach to portrayals and narratives of Muslims—with dangerous political and societal consequences. As Dr. Alhassen writes in *Haqq and Hollywood: Illuminating 100 years of Muslim Tropes and How to Transform Them*, “the Muslim community’s representations on big and small screens has been driven primarily by Orientalism, anti-Blackness, anti-Muslim racism, patriarchy, and imperialism.” One of the anchor stereotypes is the “Arab and Iranian as Untermensch,” or someone considered racially or socially inferior. Through a 100-year journey, this trope is reproduced in counter-terrorism thrillers that feature rabid hijackers and half-wit bombers, bumbling sheikhs, and many more.

## RECENT SHIFTS

In the lead up to, and since the 2016 election, there has been a dawning awareness in the entertainment industry of the danger and impact of the “terror genre” and other stereotyping storylines on the political climate.

Muslim filmmakers, actors, comedians, and screenwriters now shape their own stories in the entertainment industry and open the doors for other emerging artists. Meanwhile Muslim-based organizations and philanthropic partners continue to explore how to best support agency over, and the vision for, the narratives that shape the lives of the Muslim American community.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Lessons and insights from these recent shifts inform recommendations for those in entertainment, social change movements, and philanthropy to help build the narrative goalposts and infrastructure. See page 17 for the major recommendations.

Thank you to the report’s readers and advisors: Kalia Abiade, Zaheer Ali, Marya Bangee, Bridgit Antoinette Evans, Sameer Gardezi, and Kashif Shaikh.



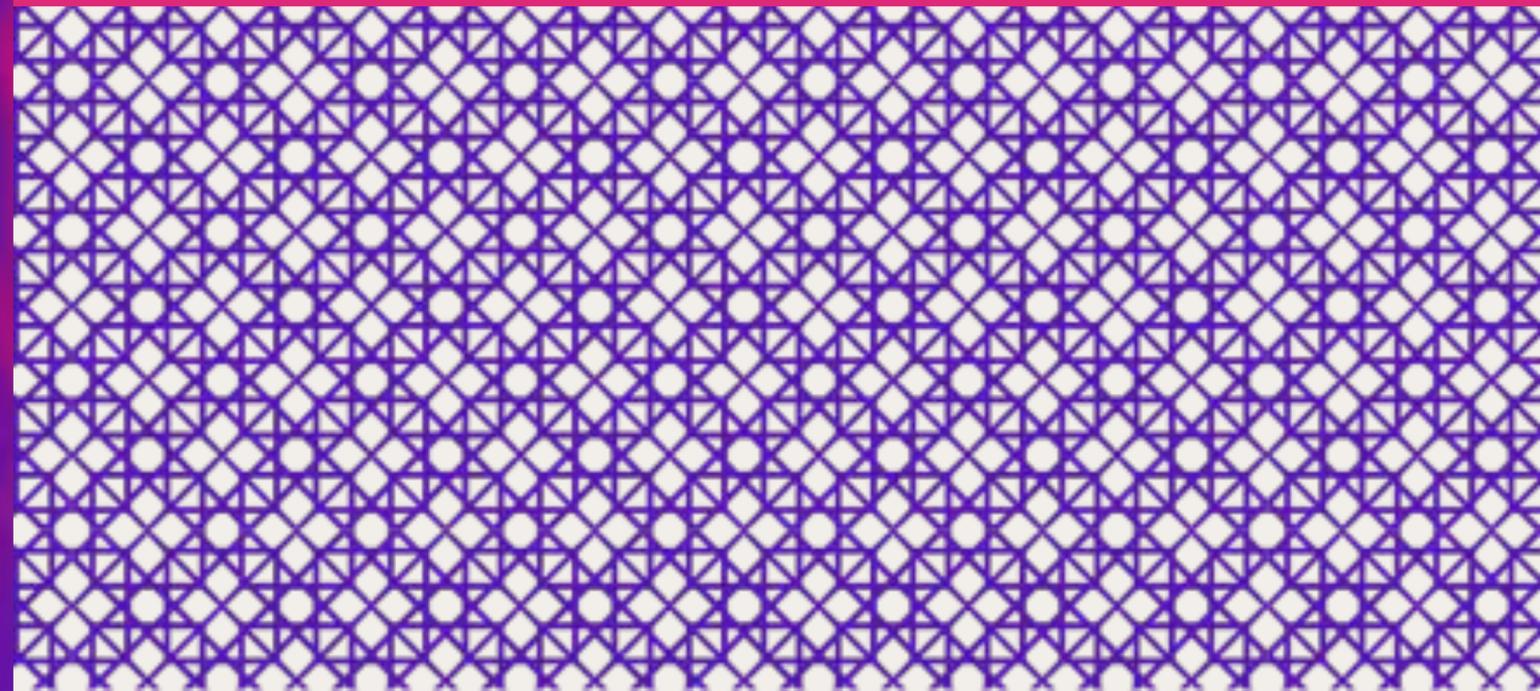
This guide is a visual companion to the full report *Haqq and Hollywood: Illuminating 100 years of Muslim Tropes and How to Transform Them*. The report provides a rich and detailed history of Muslims tropes in pop culture over the last century. Throughout this guide, the icon above will signal where there is more information in the report.

Read the case study, “Swords, Sorcerers, Sensuality, and Silence” to see a breakdown of tropes used in Disney’s *Aladdin* (1992).

# 20th Century Muslim Tropes: Through the Decades



*The report documents the rise of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Muslim Tropes tropes against the backdrop of America's changing political landscape. It makes clear that America's public policies, at home and abroad, have both deeply influenced, and been influenced by, Hollywood storytelling.*



## EARLY YEARS: ORIENTALISM IN HOLLYWOOD

Many stereotypes about Muslims stem from a concept called Orientalism, which contrasts “The Orient” (the Middle East and Africa) to “The West” and finds it oversexed, indulgently sensual, queer, psychologically weak, and thus inferior.

Similar to the American cowboys and Indians framework, Orientalism revolves on the axes of contempt and fascination, fetishizing an Orientalist perception of “the mystical Moor” just as early America romanticized the Indian as a “noble savage.” This “mystical Moor” delivered practices and poetry revered by Masonic groups (such as the Shriners) and escapist *1,001 Arabian Nights*-inspired fantasy desert lands brought to life by magical genies (or jinns), flying carpets, and harem sensuality.

Meanwhile, films with African or Arab subjects used white actors: Rudolph Valentino as *The Sheik* (1921), Charlton Heston as Moses in *The Ten Commandments* (1956), and Elizabeth Taylor as *Cleopatra* (1963).

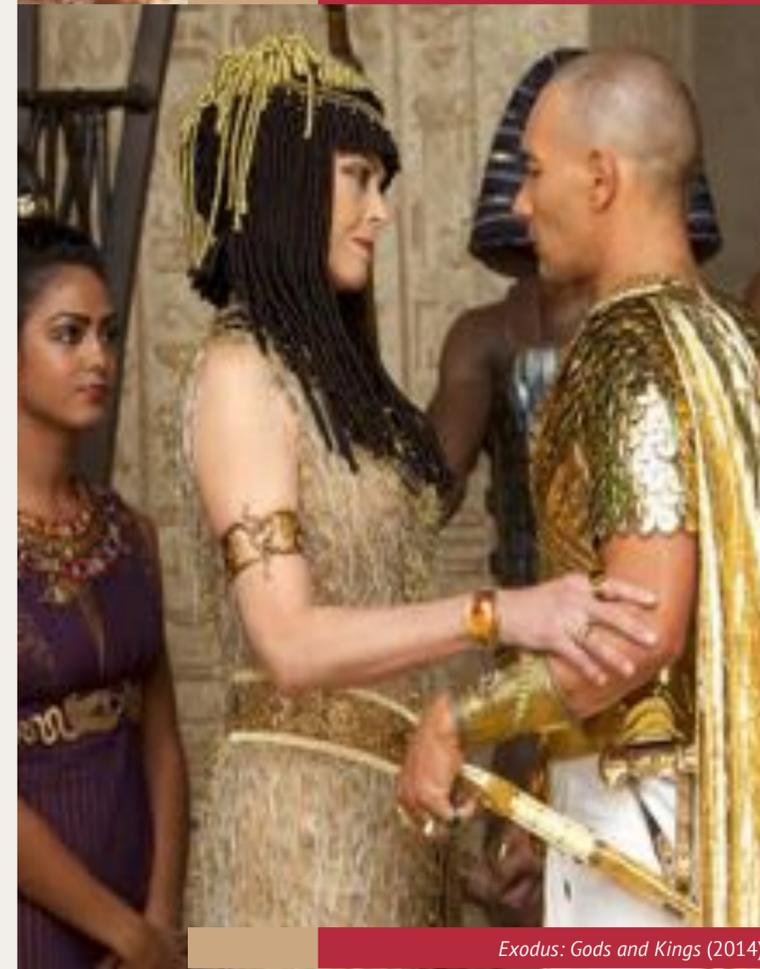
From 1965-1970, an entire TV series was devoted to Orientalist stereotypes. In *I Dream of Jeannie*, Barbara Eden plays a genie who serves as a “slave” to U.S. astronaut Captain Tony Nelson (Larry Hagman), and who fulfills a patriarchal Orientalist fantasy by eventually falling in love with her “master.” Even as late as 2014, whitewashing “the Orient” was explicitly practiced in *Exodus: Gods and Kings*, starring Christian Bale and Ben Kingsley.



*I Dream of Jeannie* (1965)



*Cleopatra* (1963)



*Exodus: Gods and Kings* (2014)



The Shrine Auditorium, also headquarters of the Al Malaikah Temple, a division of the Shriners.

## SPOTLIGHT: 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY MUSLIM TROPES

### SIRENS AND SILENT WOMEN

The Muslim woman is both silent and overexposed, invisible and hyper-visible, a perpetual handmaiden serving the violent agenda of her oppressive, untermensch partner (elaborated on in next slide) as a “Bundle of Black” in *Protocol* (1984) or a gyrating set of hips, as in *Head of the Monkees* (1986).

### KILLER KIDS

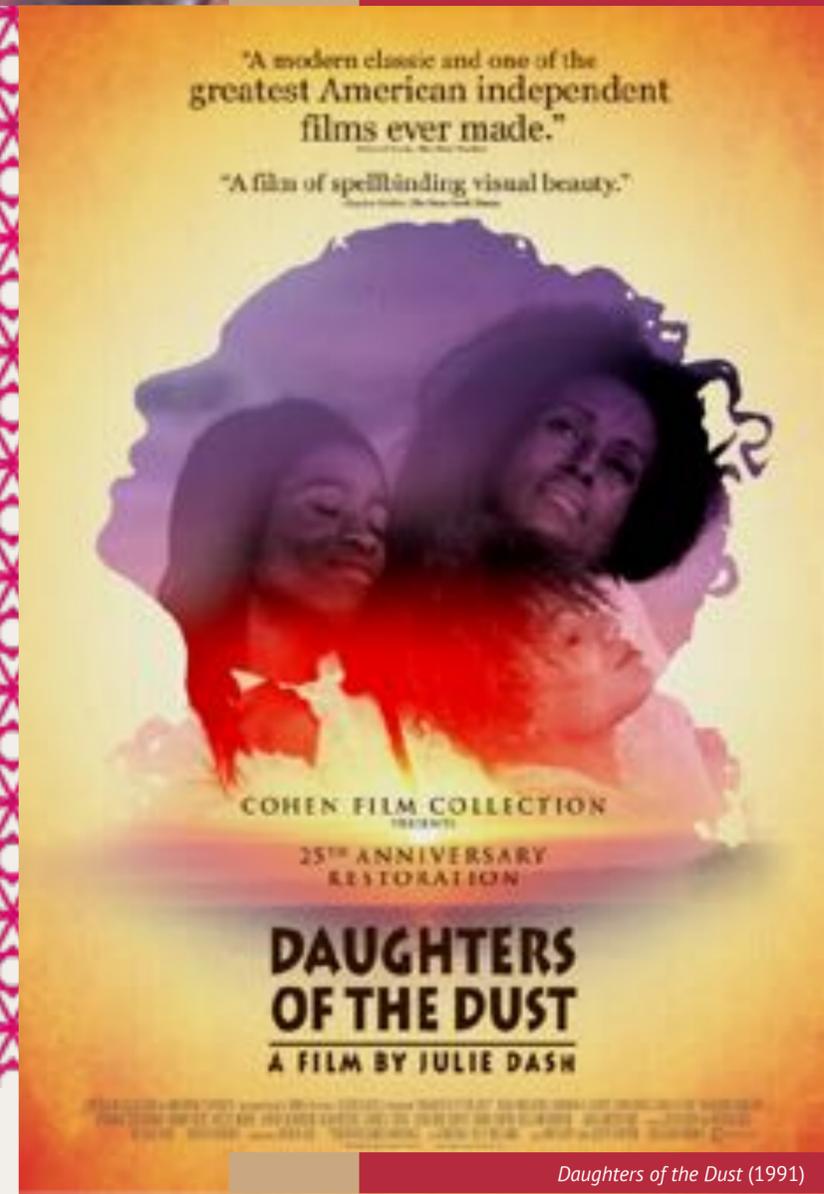
Portraying Muslim children as the enemy was a particularly pernicious and dangerous trope introduced in the last few decades. In *Rules of Engagement* (2000), a Yemeni little girl, a victim of Marines shooting at demonstrators, is revealed as an “unsuspecting” shooter who fired at the Marines guarding the U.S. embassy in Yemen.

### BLACK MUSLIMS: ANTI-AMERICAN HATERS OR REDEEMERS

Black Muslims are either erased as part of Islam’s history in the U.S., or if accounted for, considered heretical, unorthodox anti-American separatists. However, films produced out of “intimate knowledge of Black life” (as phrased by historian Zaheer Ali), such as *Menace II Society* and *Malcolm X* in the 1990s created much more nuanced stories of Black American Muslims, casting them as the political and moral conscience of these films. Some films and TV programs like *Roots* (1977) and Julie Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) portrayed Muslim characters who practiced a hybridized form of Islam with other African spiritual and religious traditions as way to connect to a history and existence before the catastrophic rupture of transatlantic slavery.



Rules of Engagement (2000)



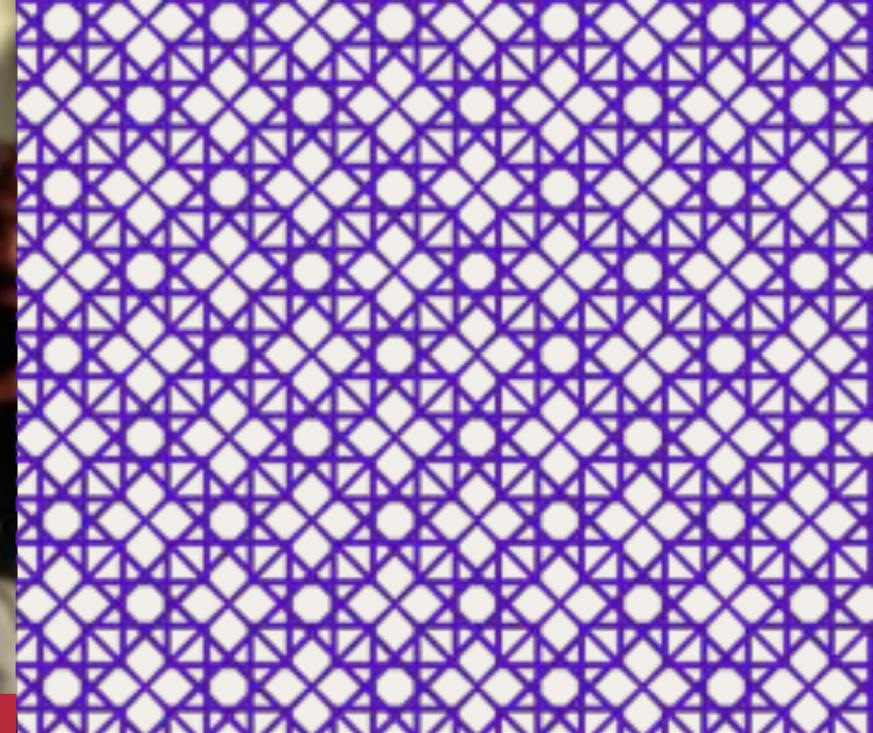
Daughters of the Dust (1991)



The Delta Force (1986)



True Lies (1994)



## ARAB AND IRANIAN AS 'UNTERMENSCH'

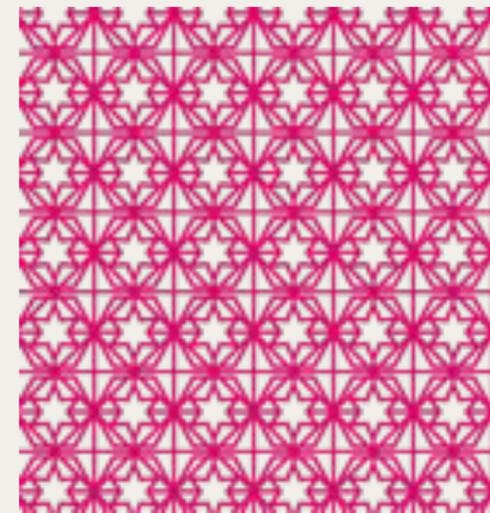
In the late 20th century, versions of the Arab and Iranian as Untermensch trope, or inferior, took many forms in Hollywood. In the 1980s and 1990s, the Middle Eastern emerged as a terrorist or hijacker as a consequence of a U.S. media engine that presented the Middle East as a place of terror, violence, sexual greed, and oil wealth.

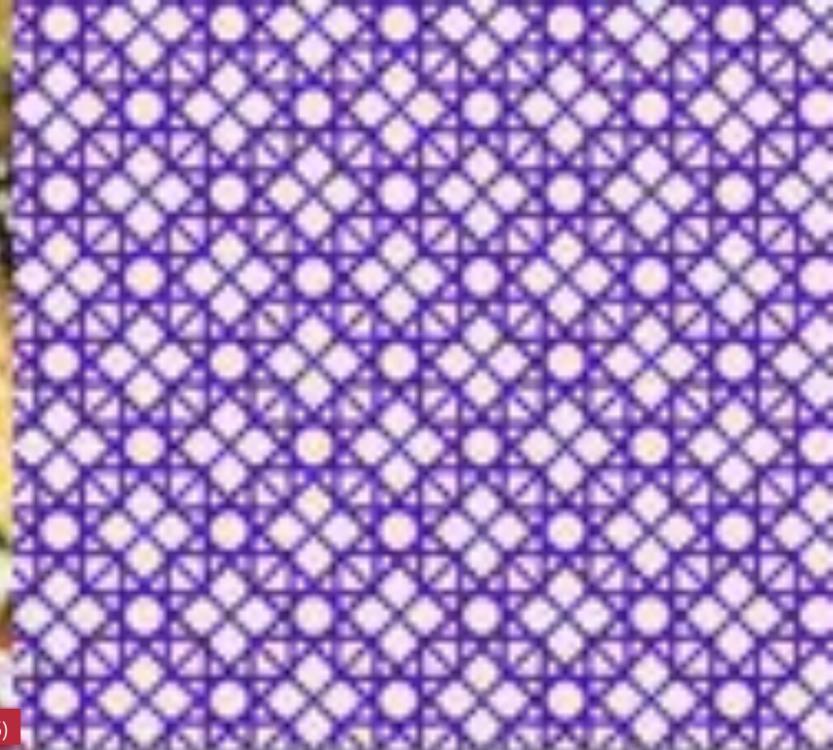
### ANGRY HIJACKERS AND VIOLENT TERRORISTS

- Chuck Norris in *The Delta Force* (1986), Arnold Schwarzenegger in *True Lies* (1994), and Kurt Russell and Steven Seagal *Executive Decision* (1996) battle Arab terrorists who either hijack planes or possess nuclear weapons. These terrorists are made out to be both genocidal barbarians and inept fools.
- In *Back to the Future* (1985), Libyans armed to the nines and shouting gibberish violently shoot up the character Doc Brown in their quest for nuclear material.



Back to the Future (1985)





Sahara (1983)

## THE SHEIKH

For decades, TV shows from every genre relied on this trope: *Cagney and Lacey*, *Bionic Woman*, *Fantasy Island*, *Richie Rich*, *Popeye*, even Bugs Bunny in *Ali Baba Bunny*.

“The Sheikh” trope also includes:

### *The Lecher + His Harem*

- Kathleen Turner is manipulated into coming to “Arabland” in *Jewel of the Nile* (1985).
- Goldie Hawn is the object of a sheikh’s infatuation in *Protocol* (1984).
- Sold into sexual slavery, Brooke Shields is bought by lascivious Arabs in *Sahara* (1983).
- Kim Basinger is abducted by Arab terrorists who sell her stripped-down body on an auction block in spy thriller *Never Say Never Again* (1983).

### *Wealthy, Childlike, Bumbling Fool*

This sheikh-like caricature recklessly spends his oil wealth like a child driven by impetuous desires:

- In *Cannonball II* (1984), Jamie Farr plays the wealthy oil sheikh—“The Great Prince Abdel Bin Falafel, Master of all deserts, Prince of Princes”—who yells, “Twelve suites! Better yet, the whole floor!” while lusting over white women.



## POST 9/11: 'GOOD' MUSLIM VS. 'BAD' MUSLIM

Tropes from the late 20th century became the foundation for building false perceptions and beliefs about the culture, needs and wants of Muslim communities, laying the foundation for “Good’ Muslim vs. ‘Bad’ Muslim. This trope emerged soon after the events of September 11, 2001, when President George W. Bush first praised Islam for its “good and peaceful” teachings, but just days later said, “They hate [us for] our freedoms.”

### GOOD MUSLIM:

Brown foreign “other” or Black Muslim who expresses patriotism, operates as an agent of the state and volunteers as a martyr for American militarism; submissive Muslim women in need of being “saved” by the West from “evil, oppressive” Muslim men.

### BAD MUSLIM:

A “traitor”, critical of U.S. foreign policy and American militarism—a critique usually decontextualized from the destruction caused by U.S. wars or from anger about our foreign and domestic wars on Muslims.

*24* and *Homeland* initially played up the conventional cowboy and Indian script robed in Orientalist tropes. Later seasons attempted to “flip the script” by introducing a Good Muslim, usually a supporting character who plays a spy or CIA agent serving the white man or woman’s mission of decapitating a global terrorist network.

Other examples: *United 93* (2006), *The Hurt Locker* (2008), *Argo* (2012), *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), *American Sniper* (2014).

Black Muslims were also portrayed in the ‘Good’ Muslim vs. ‘Bad’ Muslim narrative, either as agents of the state (which stems from Black TV detective/cop trope to signify Good American) or as “prison radicals,” correlating with a manufactured political narrative that they were to be considered domestic terrorism threats.



Read more on the origin of the Good Muslim vs. Bad Muslim trope.  
[www.haqqandhollywood.org](http://www.haqqandhollywood.org).





# Post 2016-Election: Hollywood Reckons, Muslim Artists Rise



*Read more about shifts in Hollywood storytelling for and by the Muslim community in a post-2016 election era.*



## HOLLYWOOD REACTS TO THE 2016 ELECTION

Donald Trump's campaign for the U.S. presidency began in 2015 with a call for a Muslim registry reminiscent of Japanese incarceration during World War II. Assaults on Muslims in the U.S. in 2016 and 2017 surpassed 2001 numbers, corresponding to Trump's hate speech.

In response to the election and public rhetoric, the entertainment industry had a reckoning moment. Since then, there has been a call for more authentic, nuanced stories by Muslim artists, especially in television. There has also been a rise in digital series by and for a diverse array of Muslim artists. Notable among them:

- Black Muslim Ayana Ife became the first Muslim to make the finals of *Project Runway* (season 16, 2017).
- Indian-American Hasan Minhaj released a comedy special for Netflix entitled *Homecoming King* in 2017.
- On May 2, 2018, Hulu announced that they had ordered a season of comedian Ramy Youssef's (*See Dad Run* and *Mr. Robot*) original series, *Ramy*, following the spiritual journey of a young Egyptian Muslim man from New Jersey.
- Real-life showrunning and producing couple (*Girlfriends*, *The Game*, and *Being Mary Jane*), Black American Muslims Mara Brock Akil (née Ali) and Salim Akil's love story is captured in the 2018 OWN series *Love Is \_\_\_\_*.



Project Runway (2017)



Homecoming King (2017)



5 Unfair and Ugly (2018)



6 Alison Abdullah from Orange is the New Black



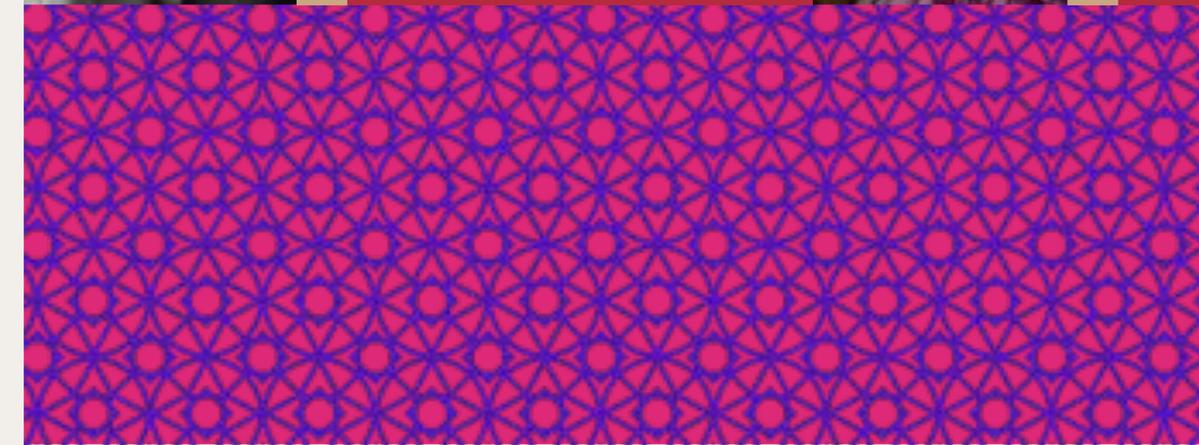
- New web series created by Muslims and featuring Muslim storylines included *Brown Girls* (2017), *Unfair and Ugly* (2018), and *East of La Brea* (2018).
- TV characters like Adena El-Amin on *The Bold Type*, Dahlia Qadri on *Grey's Anatomy*, and Alison Abdullah on *Orange Is the New Black* were regular or recurring characters in their series.
- Muslim computer hacker Zari Adrianna Tomaz (played by Iranian actress Tala Ashe) was added to CW's superhero series DC's *Legends of Tomorrow* in response to the 2016 election.
- Emmy Award-winning documentary series *The Secret Life of Muslims* is returning for its second season.
- *Jinn*, written by American Black Muslim Nijla Baseema Mu'min (2018 winner of SXSW's special Jury Recognition for writing)—is a coming-of-age story told from the POV of a seventeen-year-old Black girl named Summer, who becomes attracted to the notion of “jinns” after her mother converts to Islam.



7 Zari Adrianna Tomaz, *Legends of Tomorrow*



8 Jinn





## TROPE EXPOSED: MUSLIMS AS ESPECIALLY HOMOPHOBIC

Muslim queer storytelling is also becoming increasingly more prominent across digital independent series and industry-produced content. For example, both Muslim and non-Muslim productions featuring stories of queer Brown Muslim women. These include Fatimah Asghar and Samantha Bailey's *Brown Girls* (2017), Pakistani actor and writer Fawzia Mirza's *Signature Move* (2017), and artist Adena (played by Iranian actress Nikohl Boosheri) as a supporting character on FreeForm's *The Bold Type*.

Contrasting the trend portraying queer Muslims as “brown women falling for other women of color,” there is a rise in stories of South Asian Muslim men loving or centering the romantic courting of white women. These include Aziz Ansari's Netflix series *Master of None* (2015-), Kumail Nanjiani's *The Big Sick* (2017), and Hasan Minhaj's *Homecoming King* (2017). Ansari and Nanjiani also reflect a secular Muslim identity in a version of the “Good Muslim.”





## SPOTLIGHT: RAMY YOUSSEF

*Comedian Ramy Youssef, (writer/See Dad Run, actor/Mr. Robot) on his trajectory in Hollywood as a Muslim artist and what he's trying to do with his upcoming show Ramy (original interviewed excerpted and edited for clarity):*

*I entered Hollywood with the spiritual backbone of being a practicing Muslim. For me, being a Muslim is about understanding myself, and having this outlet has helped me navigate life in Hollywood, which can be very unstable.*

*The work I want to do is based in my point of view. I'm trying to make great things that are vulnerable and self-examining. Life is not really comfortable. I'm not trying to change the rules of the religion, but I am trying to change the way we engage in conversation around it.*

*I'm really fortunate to live and work in an era where being Muslim is something Hollywood wants to talk about and engage in. Hollywood wants to be on the right side of issues, and I've felt that people are very receptive to hearing about my experience as a Muslim and curious about how I practice my faith. That's the gift of this time. This kind of conversation leads to some really cool stuff in a way that you wouldn't expect; it's kind of like punk rock ... rebellious in a way and fun to explore because it makes people the right kind of nervous.*

*I'm working on a show about the most human family I could possibly show that is Muslim, an Egyptian family in New Jersey. The characters are doing what most people are doing - trying to be good. They are wrestling with their faith, with what they actually believe in and the things they actually do. And I'm trying to show that in a really honest way. The characters have religious clarity on some level and have religion in their lives, but they are also grappling with the present moment and things happening in front of them that present contradictions. This has been the experience of my life. And I'm aiming for a nuanced representation I haven't really seen before.*



Read the entire interview at [Haqq and Hollywood](#).

## ONE TO WATCH: *EAST OF LA BREA*

In 2017, anti-racism organizer Margari Hill of the Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative (MuslimARC) teamed with award-winning screenwriter Sameer Gardezi (*Aliens in America*, *Modern Family*) to design and create an experimental writers' room-style incubator called "Break the Room." The Pop Culture Collaborative supported this week-long incubator, which through a viral call out and search via social media, filled the room with new and emerging Muslim writers. The result: the first season of the digital series, *East of La Brea*, which focuses on a young Black Muslim woman and her community in East Los Angeles.

The project embedded commitments to anti-racism and inclusion into its design and execution, from story concept to writer selection to daily agenda which included trainings provided by Hill and her team. Gardezi identified four up-and-coming writers through social media channels and official callouts. The project received over 100 applications, and the Break the Room team selected writers Halima Lucas, Thandisizwe Chimurenga, Nia Malika Dixon, and Tanha Dill.

*East of La Brea* is now executive produced by Paul Feig's digital production company, Powderkeg.

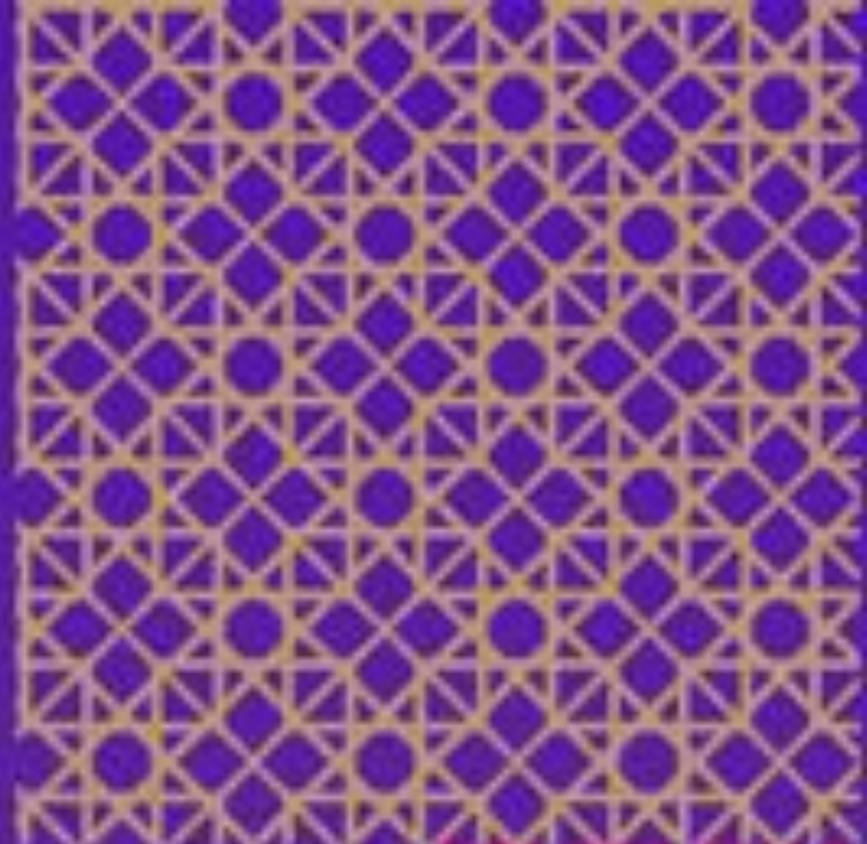


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*Participating in the Break The Room initiative was phenomenal. As an established independent filmmaker, even I have experienced barriers to creating authentic Muslim-American content. When it comes to the bottom line, i.e. money, funders, network executives interested in my content, even name actors who want to come on board to produce fall under the spell of our societal mythology that Muslim in America looks like one thing, and that it only includes immigrant Muslims. Having the opportunity to work with other professionals with the same mission—inclusive content—showed me that it's not a dream I hold but a solid reality. We can create authentic Muslim-American narratives that are inclusive and reflect the richness of our diverse communities, especially here in Los Angeles. Then, to receive the positive feedback from my followers and fans on social media in response to just an announcement of the project just galvanized the demand for what we created. Audiences are hungry for our authentic narrative, and they want it now. I'm all in, and I believe we are giving the audiences what they want.*

”

*-Nia Malika Dixon, writer East of La Brea*



# Recommendations

## ***Hollywood has a decision to make.***

Will this multibillion-dollar industry continue its decades-long characterizing of members of the Muslim community as ‘The Terrorist’, ‘The Lech’, or an oppressed figure in need of saving? Or will it embrace momentum brought on by years of authentic storytelling by artists and advocacy by activists to change stories and portrayals about Muslims in pop culture?

This important choice directly affects the lives of many, including 3.45 million Muslims in the U.S. and more than 1.8 billion Muslims globally, as these negative tropes often advance or legitimize dangerous policies that harm Muslim people—and American society as a whole.

Long-term narrative change about and by the Muslim community will take a unique combination of investment and partnership among artists, industry executives, cultural strategists, philanthropists, Muslim community movement leaders, and others.

The following recommendations are for **leaders in entertainment, social change movements, and philanthropy** to help Hollywood break away from the pop tropes of old and support the creation of narratives and portrayals that embrace the complexity and authenticity of the Muslim experience.

**Special thanks to Kalia Abiade, Zaheer Ali, Marya Bangee, Sameer Gardezi, and Kashif Shaikh for their insights and contributions to these recommendations.**



*You aren't doing us a favor. It's to your benefit to get the story right and to tell the authentic story that the audience wants.*



—Kalia Abiade, Pillars Fund

# 1. Understand the incredible diversity of Muslim communities and frontline their participation in, and agency of, the creative process.

- **Don't wait until the end.** Writers, showrunners, and producers working in Hollywood and Muslim-community organizations—such as the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), Pillars Fund, Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative (MuslimARC), MPower Change, and Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN)—should be supported to be in partnership and dialogue from story idea onwards, instead of as consultants brought in after the concept, script, casting, etc. have already been mostly determined.
- **Gain “intimate knowledge.”** Historian Zaheer Ali advises writers and producers to, “...tap people with ‘intimate’ knowledge. *Intimate implies a relationship with the community, a knowing, familiarity, going beyond the superficial.*” Both Muslim and non-Muslim artists should engage with source material, such as oral histories and first person narratives, to inform plotlines and portrayals. Advisors are abundant: Zaheer Ali of the Brooklyn Historical Society; Institute for Social Policy and Understanding Director of Research Dalia Mogahed; Sapelo Square founder Su'ad Abdul-Khabeer; MuslimARC Managing Director Margari Hill; Sahar Ullah of *Hijabi Monologues*; academic Hussein Rashid; stories from the Emmy award winning *The Secret Life of Muslims*, and more.
- **Reimagine the story development process.** Open up opportunities for established and emerging Muslim artists to be fully creative and develop the authentic stories they want to tell, grounded in their own experiences and communities. For example, philanthropy and entertainment studios can build writers rooms that create multifaceted popular content, such as *East of La Brea*.

“There is no one way that people identify as Muslim. There is no one way to be a Muslim.”

—Kashif Shaikh, Pillars Fund

## 2. Build and expand creative and career pipelines for Muslim artists in the entertainment industry.

Philanthropy and the entertainment industry should make substantial, ongoing investments in all of the pipeline stages.

- **Map the access points.** Develop, update, and share tools that map resources, fellowships, and diversity programs, and share them with Muslim-serving organizations and Muslim artist collectives— theater, fine arts, authors, et al.
- **Redesign pipelines, support long-term career trajectories.** Build early stage pipelines and support long-term career trajectories. And look to companies and projects already doing this for inspiration and as potential partners.

Traditional diversity fellowships offer an important foot in the door to writers rooms but may fall short in affecting the industry power dynamic in terms of who is creating and greenlighting content, as well as preparing individuals for long-term, sustainable careers. Color Creative, ARRAY Alliance, and others are developing their own pipelines for artists of color, women, Muslims, and more. BoomGen Studios supports newer artists to develop and pitch a television or film, and to acquire the tools and relationships to navigate the business aspects of the entertainment industry.

“  
*Hollywood is doing a decent job with the entry level, but we need a middle tier of Muslim writers who can be decision makers and have power. There’s currently nowhere for them to go. In this bottom-heavy industry with a pyramid structure, lots of entry level people will be pushed out. How do we make sure that the artists who are breaking in now have 20+ year careers in the industry?*”

—Sameer Gardezi, television writer

## 5. Invest in Muslim communities' ability to advance long-term narrative change and participate in the pop culture for social change field.

The emerging pop-culture-for-social-change field is made up of a growing, networked group of artists, academics, nonprofit organizations, production companies, and philanthropic institutions. In parallel, an ecosystem of Muslim-community organizations, strategists, artists, academics and philanthropists need the capacity and support to move from reactive to proactive narrative change. Philanthropy can support Muslim community stakeholders to:

- **Design a transformative narrative; engage in long-term pop culture change strategies.**

Working with expert culture change strategists within the pop culture for social change field, Muslim-community social justice organizations, artists, strategists and philanthropy can come together to design and invest in a long-term narrative vision. For example, the Pop Culture Collaborative and the Pillars Fund are partnering to create the American Muslim Pop Culture Cohort—a group of individuals and organizations from social movements, entertainment, the arts, advertising, and academia, as well as other Muslim stakeholders—to design a long-term narrative vision and culture change strategy for and by the Muslim community. Philanthropy can support individual organizations, networks of stakeholders and/or culture change consultants in narrative design processes.

Culture change strategies are multi-faceted, and include the ability to:

- **Build pop campaign power.** Muslim-community social justice organizations can build power by mounting campaigns at important pop culture moments, whether to advance a narrative strategy and vision (e.g. National Domestic Workers Alliance's *The Help* campaign) or to hold pop culture content accountable for advancing false stereotypes (e.g. Color of Change's *Cops* campaign).
- **Learn how to navigate, and partner, with the entertainment industry.** It will take thoughtful and deep knowledge of the industry for Muslim-community stakeholders to build partnerships with artists and entertainment executives, and to become effective advisors on scripts, casting, and production. Muslim-focused organizations ready to engage in this deep partnership building need mentorship from individuals, organizations, and networks rooted already working closely with writers' rooms and production companies, such as Storyline Partners, Define American, Color of Change, Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative (MuslimARC), Harness, MOST of Unity Film Productions, SILA Consulting, (and the report's author Dr. Maytha Alhassen.) Philanthropy can support both mentorship as well as the learning and partnership development.



*“We need to build our capacity for coordinated responses around important political moments and pop culture moments, and we need to build the infrastructure for a long-term, multifaceted narrative inclusive of the diversity of Muslim communities. This includes pipelines for talent to break into the entertainment industry, support with how to navigate it and go-to relationships between Muslim community leaders, Muslim artists and entertainment industry leaders such that the right people are tapped and hired when opportunities arise.”*



— Marya Bangee, Harness

## AUTHOR

**Maytha Alhassen** is a journalist, poet, and scholar. Her work bridges the worlds of social justice, academic research, media engagement, and artistic expression. She has performed at the Kennedy Center and Shrine Auditorium, on the TED stage, at South by Southwest, and at many universities, and has written for many national publications. In Fall 2017, she was awarded a Pop Culture Collaborative Senior Fellowship to lead a project to create and popularize authentic narratives for Muslims in popular culture. Alhassen has a Ph.D. in American Studies and Ethnicity from the University of Southern California, a master's in Anthropology from Columbia University, and a bachelor's degree in Political Science and Arabic and Islamic studies from UCLA.

## PRODUCER

Established in 2016, the **Pop Culture Collaborative** is a philanthropic resource and funder learning community that uses grantmaking, convening, narrative strategy, and research to transform the narrative landscape around people of color, immigrants and refugees, Muslims, and indigenous people, especially those who are women, queer, transgender, and disabled. The Collaborative believes there is an opportunity—and that philanthropy has a responsibility to build a field capable of shaping popular culture to reflect the complexity of the American people and make a just and pluralistic future feel real, desirable, and inevitable. By harnessing the influence of pop culture, the Collaborative believes social justice activists, philanthropists, and entertainment storytellers can encourage mass audiences to reckon with the past and rewrite the story of our nation's future.

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*Download the report and visual guide at [www.haqqandhollywood.org](http://www.haqqandhollywood.org)*

[www.popcollab.org](http://www.popcollab.org)

