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## From Orientalism to Islamophobia: Media Representation of Arabs and Muslims on the Pre-and Post-9/11 Hollywood On-Screen and Egyptian Cinema

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### ABSTRACT

Examining the development of Arab-Muslim identities in Hollywood and Egyptian films, the presented study tracks their transition from orientalism to neo-orientalism and Islamophobia. Utilizing an interpretive method, the research explores pre- and post-9/11 films by delving into textual analysis. During Hollywood's pre-9/11 era, stereotypes were reinforced, but post-9/11 works greatly magnified Islamophobic representations. While some cinemas may have emphasized external changes, Egyptian cinema focused on challenging internal preconceptions and embracing the complexity of the surrounding world. The research highlights the media's powerful role in forming opinions and advocates for responsible reporting. Media literacy programs hold immense potential in challenging stereotypes, and diverse representation is key. Collaborating with filmmakers, studios, and audiences is vital to ensure the responsible portrayal of Arab-Muslim identities.

### INTRODUCTION

The concept of orientalism to call out the Eurocentric perspective that unfolds as an interiorizing gaze upon the Middle East was introduced by Said in 1994 (Said, 1994). For centuries, Western media has propagated Orientalist depictions, obscuring the true image of Arab Muslims. The persistent stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims have led to an incorrect comprehension of their true nature as demonstrated by (Hafsa, 2019). A study by Kvangraven (2021) states that despite shifts in perspective during the post-colonial period, underlying stereotypes remained, adjusting to contemporary contexts. Hendriks and Burger (2019) stress that refracting societal views and feelings for generations, the silver screen remains a lens. Public opinion is greatly influenced by how these groups are shown in films. The nuanced transformation from Orientalism to Islamophobia has been a major victim of stereotypical portrayal of Arabs- Muslims in media, perpetuating misconceptions in audiences (Berrebbah, 2020; Hendriks & Burger, 2020; Kvangraven, 2021). This research examines how media representation shifted from the era of Orientalism to the emergence of Islamophobia in societal perception, focusing on media representation of Arabs and Muslims in both Hollywood and Egyptian cinema during the pre-and post-9/11 eras.

According to Abbas (2019), by reinforcing biased opinions, the media's representation of Arabs and Muslims exacerbates social discord and impedes intercultural exchange. This event's impact substantially changed how these groups were portrayed in the media (Abbas, 2019). The study by Alaklook *et al.* (2016) offers insight into how Hollywood and Egyptian cinema approached media representation in the pre-and post-9/11 era to examine the portrayal and assess the attempts to build a

particular stereotypical image of Muslims (Alaklook *et al.*, 2016; Alsultany, 2013). The current study employs a textual Analysis method to closely examine a curated selection of films from Hollywood and Egyptian cinema. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of cinematic narratives, symbols, and themes, facilitating an exploration of how Muslim identities are constructed and contextualized within broader cultural and social frameworks and selected (Smith, 2017).

### Depiction of Arab- Muslims in Hollywood and Egyptian Cinema

According to Mecheri *et al.* (2022), portraying Arabs and Muslims in cinematic narratives has far-reaching implications (Mecheri *et al.*, 2022). By analyzing Hollywood and Egyptian cinema, this research aims to illuminate how these representations shape public perceptions of Muslim identities and attitudes towards Islam. This investigation shed light on the interplay between cinematic storytelling, cultural influences, and socio-political dynamics, offering insights into the broader societal processes that shape these narratives. In essence, the presented study embarks on a critical exploration of the transition from Orientalism to Islamophobia in media representations of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood and Egyptian cinema, and have answered the following reperch questions:

- To examined the different characteristics if Arabs shown in Hollywood and Egyptian cinema in pre and post 9/11 movies.
- To examine the symbols, dialogues, character appearances and visual storytelling techniques used in Hollywood and Egyptian cinema and how they are associated with threat, danger and terrorism.
- To evaluate the impact of Arabs/Muslims images

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portrayed in Hollywood and Egyptian Cinema on viewers perception and understanding of these groups.

- To compare the portrayal of Arabs/Muslims images portrayed in Hollywood and Egyptian Cinema, and how they evolved during the pre and post 9/11 period.

By engaging with the aforementioned research questions and employing a robust theoretical framework, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between media, culture, and perceptions, ultimately advocating for more informed and inclusive portrayals in cinematic storytelling.

### Defining Orientalism, Neo-Orientalism and Islamophobia

The Orientalism theory was introduced by Edward Said (1994), which critically examines how Western art, literature, and media have misrepresented and stereotyped the East. Orientalism laid the groundwork for understanding the historical underpinnings of skewed representations and their impact on cultural perception (Said, 1994; Stanley, 2020). Building upon Said's Orientalism, Neo-Orientalism acknowledges shifts in media representations of post-colonialism while highlighting the persistence of underlying stereotypes in modern times (Tuastad, 2003). Keskin (2018) states that it provides insights into the transformation of Orientalist paradigms and their continuation in new forms, Including Islamophobia. According to Allen (2016), A contemporary concept, Islamophobia refers to the irrational fear, prejudice, or hatred directed towards Islam and Muslims. This theory addresses discriminatory attitudes and their reflection in media narratives (Allen, 2016; Keskin, 2018).

### The Portrayal of Arab-Muslims in Hollywood and Egyptian Cinema: Pre- and Post-9/11 Era

The cinematic portrayal of Arab-Muslim characters in Hollywood and Egyptian cinema has undergone distinct shifts before and after the tragic events of September 11, 2001. Pre-9/11, Arab-Muslim characters often conformed to Orientalist stereotypes in both cinemas, perpetuating images of exoticism, violence, and religious fanaticism (Bosch Vilarrubias, 2016). For instance, Gentry (2018) highlights that in Hollywood's "True Lies" (1994), Arab-Muslim terrorists were depicted as one-dimensional villains driven by religious extremism, reinforcing negative perceptions. According to Ibaid (2019), post-9/11, while some Hollywood films began to address Islamophobia, others continued to struggle with nuanced representations. Abdelli (2023) highlights that movies like "Syriana" (2005) attempted a more complex portrayal, depicting the multi-faceted lives of Arab-Muslim characters entangled in geopolitical complexities. However, films like "American Sniper" (2014) still perpetuated the "us vs. them" narrative, depicting Arab Muslims as enemies to be eliminated (Gentry, 2018; Ibaid, 2019; Soberon, 2017).

Egyptian cinema, on the other hand, grappled with its

challenges. In the pre-9/11 era, Egyptian films often showcased Arab-Muslim characters in romanticized narratives, focusing on cultural and familial values (Bayraktaroğlu, 2018). However, Ferrari (2019) notes that post-9/11, Egyptian cinema grappled with addressing terrorism and its aftermath. Films like "Hassan and Morcos" (2008) showcased the consequences of extremist ideologies on Muslim societies, highlighting the internal struggles and complexities within these communities. In both cinemas, signs and symbols within dialogues and visualizations played pivotal roles in shaping perceptions (Bayraktaroğlu, 2018; Ferrari, 2019; Gaede & Rowlands, 2018). According to Shirazi (2016), visual cues like traditional clothing, prayer beads, and Arabic calligraphy often reinforce cultural identity, but these symbols could also be manipulated to emphasize negative stereotypes (Shirazi, 2016). Fattoumi *et al.* (2023) highlight that the oscillating signs through dialogues and the use of language for and by the Arab and Muslim stereotypes pictures in Hollywood and Egyptian Cinema provide a detailed understanding of the identities of Arab Muslims formed by their films(Elseewi, 2015). It also provides insights into the assimilation and cultural conflicts, which were provided by wrapping layers of meaning to the audience. However, according to Eissa *et al.* (2022), the images of Arab Muslims in Hollywood and Egyptian Cinema have evolved significantly during the pre and post-9/11 period, and several efforts have been made to resolve the stereotypical images and participate by covering nuanced stories.

However, as Salam (2020) says, Hollywood and Egyptian cinema still contend with the challenge of representing accurate visualization of Arab Muslim identities (Eissa *et al.*, 2022; Fattoumi *et al.*, 2023; Sallam, 2019). Wong (2019) adds that using different signs and symbols through the dialogues and visual cues serves as an instrument to enforce different messages, which can be analyzed to unravel the intricacies of portraying stereotyped images (Wong, 2019). According to Tahsily (2021), the orientalist and Islamophobic images of Arab Muslims in both cinemas to gain an in-depth understanding of the complex and dynamic relationship of the cinema and its impact on cultural and societal prospects (TAHSILY FAHADAN, 2021).

### LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Hassiba (2019), the concept of Orientalism, rooted in the East-West dichotomy, has played a pivotal role in shaping perceptions of Arab-Muslim identities in cinema. Radcliffe (2022) says that Its origin can be traced back to the colonial era when Western powers established dominance over Eastern lands (Hassiba, 2016; Radcliffe, 2022). Edward Said's seminal work "Orientalism" (1979) critically examined this phenomenon, shedding light on its pervasive impact on cultural representations and power dynamics. Abd-Elaziz *et al.* (2022) highlight the foundational work of Said in orientalism. Orientalism came as a product of Western colonial expansion. The



West desired to understand the “exotic” East (Abd-Elaziz *et al.*, 2022; Said, 1994). Other scholars like Bernard Lewis explored it further. Then Gustave Flaubert helped to expand it. They created narratives. These narratives depicted the East as mysterious. They also showed the East as irrational. Furthermore, they portrayed the East as inferior to the West. These narratives influenced many disciplines. Literature is one of the disciplines they influenced. Art is another. They also changed academia. Finally, they reshaped policy-making. They shaped perceptions in the West. These perceptions affect interactions with the Arab-Muslim world. (Al Musawi, 2018).

Edward Said made a groundbreaking analysis of “Orientalism”. He challenged the objectivity of Orientalist studies. In his view these representations were not impartial. He said they were constructs. He believed they were reinforcing colonial control. (Roddan, 2016). The study by Elmenfi (2023) stresses that Said’s work contends the portrayal of the East that was intertwined with power structures, serving the interests of Western imperialism. Furthermore, the study by El Houssine (2023) exposed how Orientalism reduced complex cultures to stereotypes, fostering an essentialized view of Arab-Muslim identities (El Houssine, 2023; Elmenfi, 2023). Sazzad (2017) noted that Said’s work resonated across disciplines, sparking a critical discourse on representation and identity. Additionally, scholars like Lila Abu-Lughod extended Said’s insights, exploring how Orientalism affected gendered perspectives within these representations (Alghamdi, 2020; Sazzad, 2017). Furthermore, Harb (2019) has analyzed the impact of these portrayals in media, unveiling the distorted lens through which Arab-Muslim identities were viewed in Hollywood (Harb, 2019).

The study by Mecheri *et al.* (2018) has examined that Orientalism found a powerful medium to propagate its narratives through films. Tabbah (2020) highlights that Pre-9/11 Hollywood frequently depicted Arabs and Muslims as villains, perpetuating stereotypes of terrorism and cultural backwardness. Films like “Lawrence of Arabia” (1962) and “The Siege” (1998) exemplified this trend, constructing a skewed image of Arab-Muslim identities (Barber, 2017; Mecheri, 2022; Ramji, 2016; Tabbah, 2021). The post-9/11 era intensified these portrayals. Hollywood capitalized on fear and mistrust, often equating Islam with terrorism. Gentry (2018) highlights that Movies like “The Kingdom” (2007) reinforced the perception of Muslims as threats, cementing Islamophobia in cinematic narratives. This distortion perpetuated the Othering of Arab-Muslim identities, deepening societal divisions (Gentry, 2018). Similarly, El-Bouayadi (2022) highlights that Egyptian cinema reflects the interplay of Orientalist narratives. Sallam (2019) says Works like “The Mummy” (1999) embraced exoticized portrayals of Egypt, linking it with mystical elements (Sallam, 2019) (El Bouayadi, 2022; Sallam, 2019). In post-9/11 Egyptian films like “The

Yacoubian Building” (2006), issues such as terrorism and extremism were depicted, contributing to the dichotomous understanding of Arab-Muslim identities (Ncube, 2022). According to Hallaq (2018), the origins of Orientalism can be traced to colonial encounters, shaping Western views of the East. Edward Said’s “Orientalism” revolutionized understanding by unveiling its inherent power dynamics. This framework has influenced Hollywood and Egyptian cinema, perpetuating stereotypes in both pre and post-9/11 eras (Hallaq, 2018; Said, 1994). Through distorted cinematic representations, Arab-Muslim identities continue to be constructed, revealing the lasting impact of Orientalism on global perceptions.

### Evolution of Orientalism to Neo-Orientalism and Islamophobia

According to the study by Fattoumi *et al.* (2023), the evolution from traditional Orientalism to Neo Orientalism and the subsequent emergence of Islamophobia marks a significant transition in the representation of Arab-Muslim identities (Fattoumi *et al.*, 2023). Xypolia (2016) states that Traditional Orientalism, rooted in Eurocentric perspectives, portrayed the East as exotic and inferior. The study further states that in contrast to Orientalism, the Orientalism approach adapts these stereotypes to modern contexts, employing subtler forms of representation (Mayerhofer, 2021; Xypolia, 2016). The study by Gupta (2017) emphasizes that Neo Orientalism retains the core elements of its predecessor but operates within contemporary sensibilities. It manifests in media, academia, and policy, often perpetuating biased narratives (Gupta, 2017). This evolution is closely intertwined with the rise of Islamophobia, a phenomenon characterized by fear and hostility towards Islam and Muslims.

The study by Bouaziz Rahma (2022) highlights that the post-9/11 era witnessed the amplification of Islamophobia, particularly in the Western world. The study stresses that geopolitical events fueled negative portrayals of Arab-Muslim identities in media and popular discourse. Expanding on Bouaziz’s work, Senanayake (2021) states that this progression is evident in the construction of Muslims as “the other” in cinema, where terrorism and extremism became prevailing themes. Fattoumi *et al.* (2023) stress that the entanglement of Neo Orientalism and Islamophobia has lasting implications for Arab-Muslim identities. It also intricates that contributes the implications of Neo-Orientalism to the perpetuation of stereotypes, impacting intercultural relations, policies, and individual attitudes. Moreover, recognising this evolution is crucial in dismantling biased narratives and fostering a more inclusive global society (BOUAZIZ Rahma, 2022; Cummings *et al.*, 2023; Fattoumi *et al.*, 2023; Senanayake, 2021).

### Construction of Arab-Muslim Identities in Hollywood: Pre and Post-9/11 Era

The study by Mecheri *et al.* (2022) highlights that the construction of Arab-Muslim identities in Hollywood

has undergone distinct shifts in both the pre- and post-9/11 eras, significantly influencing global perceptions. Sheeba (2019) highlights that Pre-9/11, Hollywood often depicted Arab-Muslim characters through Orientalist lenses, portraying them as villains in narratives such as “Lawrence of Arabia” (1962) and “True Lies” (1994). The study further elaborates that these depictions reinforced stereotypes of exoticism, fanaticism, and danger (Mecheri, 2022; Sheeba, 2019). In post-9/11, Bayraktaroğlu extends that the landscape evolved, with Arab-Muslim identities increasingly associated with terrorism and extremism. Films like “The Kingdom” (2007) and “Zero Dark Thirty” (2012) perpetuated this narrative, exacerbating Islamophobia. The construction of Arab-Muslim identities in these films emphasized conflict and distrust, contributing to the polarization of societies (Bakali, 2016; Sutkutė, 2020).

In contrast, Egyptian cinema offers more nuanced portrayals due to its cultural context (Mahdi, 2019). According to Deeb (2018), films like “Omar Mukhtar” (1981) depict Muslim characters with depth, reflecting broader human experiences. However, Shoaib (2021) notes that even within Egyptian cinema, politically charged narratives sometimes inadvertently perpetuate stereotypes (Deeb, 2018; Shoaib, 2021). The study by Labidi (2019) contends that the construction of Arab-Muslim identities in Hollywood and Egyptian cinema reveals the power of media in shaping perceptions (Labidi, 2019). Hollywood’s often negative representations fuel prejudice, while Egyptian cinema strives for authenticity amidst broader political influences (Labidi, 2021). Acknowledging these constructions is pivotal in fostering accurate and empathetic portrayals that bridge the cultural divide (Jerbi, 2017).

### Contemporary Challenges and Social Attitudes Towards Islam and Arab-Muslim

According to Kostenko *et al.* (2016), the representation of Islam and Arab-Muslim identities in media has long been entwined with prevailing social attitudes, yielding contemporary challenges that reflect and shape societal perceptions (Kostenko *et al.*, 2016). Eijaz (2018), media, particularly Hollywood, has a profound impact on the construction of attitudes towards Islam and Arab-Muslim identities. The study has illustrated that films like “American Sniper” (2014) and “The Hurt Locker” (2008) perpetuate Islamophobic narratives, contributing to the challenge of negative social attitudes (Eijaz, 2018). Haider (2020) illustrates that these films depict Arabs and Muslims as threats, reinforcing existing biases. Whereas in the realm of Egyptian cinema, movies like “Cairo 678” (2010) tackle sensitive social issues, portraying Muslim characters in complex, relatable ways (Haider, 2020). However, Salam (2011) states that even in Egyptian cinema, films like “The Yacoubian Building” (2006) can inadvertently perpetuate stereotypes, reflecting the broader challenge of accurate representation (Salam, 2011). The contemporary challenge lies in the

normalization of Islamophobia, which is deeply rooted in media portrayals. These representations are not passive; they influence societal attitudes, contributing to discrimination, bias, and policy decisions. The “Muslim ban” in the United States and a surge in hate crimes illustrate the real-world consequences of such attitudes (Solomon, 2023).

The interplay between media representations and societal attitudes is a dynamic process. Media reflects and reinforces existing beliefs, shaping collective opinions (Brandt & Slegers, 2021). Burkette (2022) noted that The “clash of civilizations” narrative, seen in movies like “Kingdom of Heaven” (2005), further complicates the issue by perpetuating an “us vs. them” mentality. Expanding this further, Allred (2021) highlights that in contrast to the portrayal of Arab—Muslims in Hollywood, the more nuanced portrayals in Egyptian cinema underline the power of cultural context in shaping representations. These films often strive for authenticity and empathy, highlighting cinema’s role in fostering understanding (Allred, 2021; Burkette, 2022). The depiction of Arab-Muslim identities in Hollywood and Egyptian cinema reflects the complex interplay between media, societal attitudes, and social processes (Fattoumi *et al.*, 2023). While Hollywood frequently exacerbates negative stereotypes, Egyptian cinema demonstrates the potential for authentic portrayals (Smith, 2021).

### METHODOLOGY

Examining media representations during the pre-and post-9/11 era, this research aims to uncover the change from Orientalism to Islamophobia in Hollywood and Egyptian cinema (Eissa *et al.*, 2022). Interpretivist thought guides the research method, which utilizes an inductive approach. Data collection and analysis rely on textual analysis in the study. Interpretivism’s alignment with the subjective nature of media representation acknowledges meanings as socially fabricated and dependent on context (Iivari, 2018). This method fosters a more intricate understanding of how media representations are shaped by and shape societal views. An inductive approach is taken to explore patterns and themes, enabling the uncovering of insights without predefined categories (Eisenhardt *et al.*, 2016). In line with the research’s investigative nature, this approach focuses on uncovering patterns in media depiction.

### Data Analysis

Through textual analysis, we rely on it as the primary data collection and analysis method. Through content analysis of movies, we can discover their underlying significance and messages (Moore & Ophir, 2022). By assessing diverse movie texts, including dialogues, visual cues, and character portrayals, emerging patterns of representation are revealed (Khadilkar *et al.*, 2022). Selecting a diverse array of pre- and post-9/11 Hollywood and Egyptian films, our study sheds light on how representations have evolved (Eissa *et al.*, 2022). The first movie viewings involve identifying ongoing trends,

stereotypes, and narrative structures related to Arab and Muslim characters (Eissa *et al.*, 2022). By analyzing representation patterns through axial coding, discoveries are made. The concepts of “exoticization,” “religious profiling,” “identity construction,” and “Semitics” are examined to chronicle the progression from Orientalist to Islamophobic narratives (Williams & Moser, 2019). Comparative analysis is conducted between Hollywood and Egyptian movies. Noting similarities and contrasts in representations sheds light on the cultural context’s impact (Sahari, 2023). Investigating these external factors sheds light on how they influenced the movie’s representation.

### Research Design

By reviewing the literature on Orientalism, Islamophobia, and media depictions, the investigation employs the textual analysis method, guided by the interpretivism philosophy and inductive reasoning (Yazdih, 2020). A thorough examination of nine films unveils the identities of Arab Muslims based on their narratives, dialogue, and visual cues. Contrasting Hollywood and Egyptian cinema offers a more comprehensive understanding of cultural influences (Kiran *et al.*, 2021) by examining the subjective aspect of media representation. The interpretivism philosophy presents a distinct perspective by Recognizing that context-dependent interpretations foster a comprehensive understanding of how they influence perceptions (Darby *et al.*, 2019). This method fosters a natural inquiry into data, allowing for novel insights without predetermined biases.

Textual analysis serves as a means to perform a thorough analysis of movie content (Poria *et al.*, 2017). Through closer inspection, their subtle meanings become apparent. The research objective guides this method’s investigation into the dynamic nature of representation. The design’s importance is contingent on its capacity to provide a detailed examination of media representations of Arabs and Muslims. Fusing qualitative and interpretive elements, we create an inductive research framework (Neuendorf, 2017). Textual analysis is the foundation for a comprehensive investigation into how these groups were represented in films produced during this timeframe (Ranjbari *et al.*, 2021). By using this framework, a thorough investigation can be conducted into the evolution of representation and its consequences on societal perspectives.

### Trustworthiness

The study used triangulation and peer review strategies to improve its trustworthiness. Data from Hollywood and Egyptian films was analyzed for method triangulation. Experts in media and cultural studies, including colleagues and supervisors, reviewed the methodology and findings, strengthening the research design and analysis. This process enhanced the credibility of the study.

### Analysis

#### Portrayal and Construction of Arab Muslims Identities by Hollywood in Pre 9/11 Era

From Orientalist representation to neo-Orientalism and eventually Islamophobia, Arab and Muslim identities were evolved in pre-9/11 Hollywood. The film’s visual representation of Arab and Muslim people was marred by Orientalist tendencies, reinforcing a perception of cultural subservience (Yin, 2010). The film’s incorporation of mosques and Islamic imagery marks a departure from traditional Orientalism, forging a new connection between Muslims and terrorism. “True Lies” (1994) amplified these patterns by incorporating Arabic clothing and environments, thereby enhancing the depiction of danger. The evolution from obvious Orientalism to more refined neo-Orientalism resulted in a tense atmosphere after the Cold War, opening the door for Islamophobic tales. Hollywood’s use of symbols, dialogue, and imagery significantly contributed to the formation of negative and misleading Arab-Muslim identities, perpetuating these stereotypes beyond the events of September 11, 2001.

#### Lawrence of Arabia (1962)

Offering a window into the past, the film Lawrence of Arabia explores how Arab-Muslim identities were constructed during the pre-9/11 era through David Lean’s lens. The film revolves around a British officer, Lawrence’s efforts during World War I, which are the film’s primary focus, as he united Arab factions against Ottoman authority. Utilizing visual symbols and signs, the film captures the very essence of the Arabian Peninsula. The boundless deserts stand as a testament to freedom and genuineness, whereas the densely populated cities reflect constraint and foreign dominion. The visual arrangement underscores the ongoing struggle between cultural autonomy and colonial control.

The film’s dialogue and characterization mirror the dominant Orientalist perspectives of the time. Using language that demeans and dehumanizes, British characters refer to the Arabs as “savage” and “desert savage,” reinforcing a colonial hierarchy that benefits Western powers. The dialogues reveal the narrative of cultural distinctiveness and authority in the movie. The film’s Orientalist gaze constructs Arab-Muslim identities, reinforcing a Eurocentric perspective. The film’s depiction of Arab culture reinforces Western superiority by perpetuating exoticism, mystifying Arab culture and emphasizing backwardness. At its core, the film highlights how Hollywood helped create Arab-Muslim identities before 9/11, perpetuating stereotypes and cultural differences.

#### The Siege (1998)

Through “The Siege”(1998), director Zwick delves into the complexities of Muslim identity formation in the pre-9/11 Hollywood landscape. As the film unfolds, it

examines the counterterrorism efforts that ultimately led to the implementation of martial law targeting the Muslim population. The symbols in “The Siege” heavily influence how Muslim identities are perceived. The film’s visual elements connect Muslims with terrorism, creating a lasting impression. Connecting Islam to violent extremism, these symbols bolster negative stereotypes, adding to a narrative of fear and mistrust.

The Siege (1998) movie exchanges perpetuate the Islamophobic perspective prevalent in the era. Through phrases like “these people,” the film text reinforces the false notion that Muslims are terrorists. These dialogues contribute to the formation of a storyline that positions Muslims as a perceived danger. The film’s use of symbols and dialogue perpetuates damaging Islamic identities. The pre-9/11 era’s fears are manipulated by the film, resulting in an amplification of the misconceptions surrounding Muslims and their further marginalization. The interplay between symbols and Islamophobic rhetoric underlines the broader narrative that Islamic identities are inherently malevolent, bringing to light Hollywood’s prominent role in perpetuating this narrative during that era.

#### True Lies (1994)

The pre-9/11 Hollywood landscape is given a glimpse of Muslim identity construction through James Cameron’s direction in “True Lies” (1994). The film tells the story of a spy’s dual mission: to stop a terrorist plot and manage his personal life. The prominent placement of symbols in “True Lies” greatly enhances the portrayal of Muslim personas. By incorporating Arab attire and environments, the film evokes feelings of menace and intrigue. Setting the stage for tension are the Arab-Muslim environments where instability and terrorism frequently take centre stage. The symbols highlight the association between Arab-Muslim identities and perceived threats.

By reinforcing these stereotypes, the movie creates humour that further sets Arabs apart from the rest. The impact of “True Lies” resides in its skilful use of symbols and dialogues to portray Arab-Muslim identities as dangerous and menacing. By employing Orientalist iconography, the film reinforces the broader narrative that perpetuates these offensive representations. The movie’s reinforcement of stereotypes concerning Arab-Muslim identities underscores Hollywood’s responsibility during that era.

#### Post-9/11 Hollywood Portrayals: Unveiling the Mystique of Arab Muslim Identities

On Hollywood films, Arab-Muslims are portrayed via dialogue, character dynamics, and stereotypes that shape inaccurate identities. The films frequently depict volatile and dangerous Arab and Muslim environments, perpetuating the idea of inherent threat. War’s allure is frequently discussed, along with the broader generalization of Muslims as enemies, in dialogues. The depiction of antagonists like “The Butcher” in “American Sniper” perpetuates the misconception of Muslims as

bloodthirsty and radical. The post-9/11 era has seen cinematic narratives perpetuate negative stereotypes that reinforce misconceptions, thereby painting Arab-Muslim identities as enemies.

#### The Kingdom (2007)

Offering insight into the construction of Muslim identities, “The Kingdom” (2007), directed by Peter Berg, sheds light on the post-9/11 Hollywood landscape. The film immerses the audience in an investigation that reveals the challenges of working together across cultures. Through the strategic use of visual symbols, the movie “The Kingdom” generates a feeling of tension and danger that captivates viewers. The cultural divide between American modernity and Saudi Arabian traditionalism provides a rich tapestry for the narrative. The film utilizes mosques and Arabic script as symbols to reinforce the connection between Muslims and extremist ideas.

The conversation within the film highlights a variety of perspectives and social interactions. By depicting mistrust and ethnocentrism on both sides, the film sheds light on the tensions between Arab and American characters. The stereotypes were reinforced by reflecting 9/11-era attitudes. Phrases that lump Muslims together can foster a skewed view and encourage prejudice. Interactions between Arab and American characters convey mistrust, mirroring broader societal fissures and misperceptions and in turn deepening the unfavorable depiction of Muslim identities. Interactions centred on cultural variations and religious convictions are often fraught with stereotypes and misconceptions. The film’s creation of Arab-Muslim identities is influenced by the narrative that Muslims posed a threat after 9/11. Different phrases like “The War is a Drug” contribute to generalizations and stigmatizations of Muslims in dialogue. The context of terrorism and extremism moulds the depiction of Muslim characters, fostering identities through wariness and scepticism. Post-9/11, Islamophobia intensifies in “The Kingdom”. Using symbols and dialogues, the film builds Muslim characters within a context of danger and uncertainty.

The film sheds light on how Hollywood’s actions fueled the entrenchment of damaging stereotypes and worsened intergroup tensions during that time. In essence, “The Kingdom” showcases how post-9/11 Hollywood films continued to shape Muslim identities via symbols and dialogues that reinforced prejudices and deepened social rifts. The movie delves into the nuanced nature of cultural interactions during that period, underscoring the substantial impact of media on how Arab-Muslim identities were perceived after 9/11.

#### The Hurt Locker (2009)

Director Bigelow defies typical Hollywood representations of Muslim identities through “The Hurt Locker” (2009). By employing the experiences of bomb disposal teams in Iraq as a case study, the movie sheds light on the intricate web of war, identity, and human connection.



By incorporating these symbols, the film underscores the unstable nature of the environment. By doing this, these symbols help to maintain the notion that Muslims are found in unstable environments, thereby fortifying the account of conflict and menace. The film's dialogue encapsulates a variety of perspectives. The rhythmic phrase "war is a drug" conveys how some people become dependent on war's exhilarating, chaotic environment. This narrative further solidifies the Middle East's image as an addiction- and danger-plagued region.

The film provides a comprehensive view of the intricate relationships between American soldiers and Arab locals. Suspicion, cultural misunderstandings, and an atmosphere of unpredictability are all on full display in the dialogues. The quote's simplicity belies the complexity of the post-9/11 era, as it reveals both the humanizing power of relationships and the persistence of stereotypes towards Arabs. Symbols and dialogues form Arab-Muslim identities as inherently menacing, while interactions highlight an overarching sense of distrust and misapprehension. At its core, "The Hurt Locker" depicts Muslim identities through symbols and dialogues that perpetuate stereotypes and highlight cultural differences. Through its portrayal of interactions, the film underscores the profound influence of media on societal attitudes towards Arab-Muslim identities during this era, highlighting the "war as drug" narrative's significant impact.

#### **American Sniper (2014)**

The film's exploration of this topic is a powerful commentary, providing a distinct perspective. The film intricately interweaves Chris Kyle's accounts, crafting a narrative of war, patriotism, and personal growth. The urban conflict zones serve as striking symbols, bolstering the narrative of peril and upheaval in the film. The symbols emphasize the obstacles that Muslims encounter in adverse settings. The dialogue offers a variety of attitudes throughout the film. The inference that Muslims blend in before posing threats is reflected in the phrase, "The enemy dresses like us; they speak like us." The characterization of "the Butcher" as a merciless enemy perpetuates a damaging stereotype about Muslims.

Building upon the post-9/11 climate, American Sniper shapes Arab-Muslim personas. The deployment of symbols, dialogue, and character dynamics reinforces Muslims as enemies. The narrative and character portrayals in "War is a Drug" highlight the underlying tension and suspicion. In essence, "American Sniper" offers a thoughtful investigation into post-9/11 Muslim identities. By incorporating symbols and dialogues that reinforce harmful stereotypes and amplify the appeal of war, the film shapes a narrative that portrays Muslims as a threat. Prioritizing historical representation, Egyptian cinema provides an example of this cinematic approach. Unlike Hollywood films of the post-9/11 era, which often rely on stereotypes, the film takes an alternative approach to portraying identity by drawing on ancient Egyptian

culture without explicit symbols and dialogue. "The Egyptian" challenges the conventional representation of identity in recent Hollywood films. These elements may be found, but they do not essentially stereotype Muslim identities.

#### **Terrorism and Kebab (1992)**

The 1992 film "Terrorism and Kebab" offers an insightful perspective on the formation of Muslim identities in Egyptian cinema. Arafa's direction masterfully unravels the intricate web of societal dynamics and Muslims' treatment. The film's title cleverly tackles a serious topic: terrorism and cultural representation. The movie addresses stereotypes and societal attitudes, yet it adopts a critical stance through humour to question the portrayal of Muslim identities. The dialogues allow it to express a range of attitudes. The play "The Terrorism and Kebab" illustrates how character interactions expose a diverse spectrum of opinions, ranging from misconceptions and biases to an absence of understanding. With humour, the movie challenges these presumptions, resulting in a more nuanced understanding of Arab-Muslim identities and a debunking of myths.

"The Terrorism and Kebab" upends the conventional Muslim identity in post-9/11 Hollywood films. Through subverting typical views, the film offers a distinctive angle. Exposing the absurdity of generalizations through humor, this approach yields remarkable results. Distinctively employing satire and humour, "The Terrorism and Kebab" tackles Muslim identities in Egyptian cinema. The movie prompts viewers to scrutinize prevalent beliefs by employing satire and commentary, thus enhancing their perception of Muslim personae. The film has use of symbols, dialogue, and narrative strategy underscores the capacity of humor to confront preconceived notions and inspire insightful discussions about societal views.

#### **The Portrayal of Arabs-Muslims Identities Construction by Egyptian Cinema in Post 9/11 Era**

In 2006's "The Yacoubian Building" and 2010's "Cairo 678," Arab-Muslim identities are delicately portrayed through sensitivity in post-9/11 Egyptian cinema. Post-9/11 Hollywood saw a departure from the traditional stereotype construction, with these films bucking the trend. Through these tools, they subvert simplistic depictions. Their exploration of complex attitudes and intersections reveals a richer and more textured understanding of Arab-Muslim identities in modern Egypt.

#### **The Yacoubian Building (2006)**

In (2006), the cinematic exploration of Muslim identities in post-9/11 Egypt unfolds through "The Yacoubian Building." Marwan Hamed's guidance leads to a layered narrative, delving into the social complexities of a Cairo apartment building. The building in the film represents Egyptian society, serving as a powerful metaphor. The characters' differing experiences within the structure



represent various viewpoints and social classes. Including these symbols enables a nuanced depiction of Muslim identities, avoiding oversimplified representations. The dialogue provides a comprehensive representation of various attitudes towards Muslim identities. Multifaceted topics dominate conversations among characters in this post-9/11 Egyptian setting. The film's curious approach invigorates debate and prompts a more in-depth examination.

In "The Yacoubian Building" (2006), a dialogue that challenges extremism emerges, highlighting the diverse interpretations of Islam. Societal unification is highlighted through the phrase "We are all in the same boat," as it demolishes simplistic Arab-Muslim categorizations. "The Yacoubian Building" piercingly assesses societal issues with an uncompromising approach. It covers themes such as homosexuality, extremism, and corruption. The film subverts conventional representations of Muslim identities through intricate character dynamics and dialogue, revealing their complexity and diversity. Egyptian cinema's introspective approach is highlighted through "The Yacoubian Building" contrasting with post-9/11 Hollywood films. Utilizing symbols, dialogue, and character interactions, the film sheds light on the dynamic nature of Egyptian society, fostering a nuanced grasp of Muslim identities.

### Cairo" 678

The film Cairo" 678 delves into the post-9/11 complexity of Egyptian Muslim identity, as navigated by director Mohamed Diab. The intricate social web and cultural values of contemporary Cairo are expertly interwoven through these women's lives, offering a thorough perspective. The setting of Cairo serves as a representation of the intricate nature of contemporary Egyptian life. Examining public transit and crowded areas offers an inclusive perspective on Muslim identities. The dialogues in the film offer a comprehensive exploration of Muslim identities, providing depth and richness. The novel challenges traditional Muslim character representations, providing a unique reading experience. The film delves into the complex relationships between gender, religion, and cultural standards via a comprehensive examination. The tales of Egyptian women illustrate the complex bond between Islam and modern society.

The conversation questions the limits placed on women, highlighting their freedom of movement. Patriarchy's stance is contested when "Harassment is a man's right" is closely examined. These dialogues illustrate the film's mission to deconstruct and question established notions of Arab and Muslim identities. The film "Cairo 678" offers a comprehensive portrait of Egyptian cinema's metamorphosis following 9/11, accomplished through the strategic inclusion of symbols, dialogue, and character dynamics that investigate Muslim identities within a contemporary context. The movie skillfully unravels the web of connections between religion, culture, and contemporary values, providing a thorough examination.

## RESULTS

The study has explored how Arab and Muslim identities have been reimagined in Hollywood films, particularly during the pre-and post-9/11 periods, with Egyptian cinema offering a more considered perspective. The study tracks the development of Hollywood's portrayal of Arab and Muslim identities. From blatant Orientalism to neo-Orientalism, this shift involves a refined integration of Islamic symbols yet reinforces damaging associations with terrorism.

The 1994 movie "True Lies" highlights how neo-Orientalism was used, perpetuating offensive representations through its depiction of danger and traditional Arab garb. The movie's representation of Arabs perpetuates the stereotype of "savagery" and reinforces colonial power dynamics. Symbols and dialogue in The Siege (1998) perpetuate negative Muslim stereotypes and instil fear. The movies of the pre-9/11 era perpetuated stereotypes by associating Arab-Muslim identities with threats through symbolism and dialogue, creating distorted and Orientalist images in the minds of their viewers.

Post-9/11 Hollywood has perpetuated the portrayal of Arab-Muslim identities as adversaries. Movies like "American Sniper" (2014) employ symbols, spoken words, and character interactions to reinforce detrimental preconceptions. The Kingdom has linked Arab Muslims with negative connotations and labelled them as agitators. Through diverse visuals, the film illuminates the idea that Muslims can create chaos and destruction. These motion pictures often feature unstable environments and characterize Muslims as enemies. Despite sharing a common setting, the two films showcase distinct styles. The cinematic works under examination complicate the commonly held views of Arab-Muslim identities and shed light on the intricate nature of contemporary societies.

Through the use of the building as a symbol, the "Yacoubian Building" presents a diverse array of viewpoints within Egyptian society, avoiding oversimplified representations. Meanwhile, "Last Cairo 678" explores the complexities of Arab-Muslim identities in contemporary Cairo through a different lens. The clever use of character interactions and speech undermines stereotypes. The study touches upon the evolution of Arab and Muslim characters in cinema. The evolution of Hollywood's portrayal of the Orient and Islam is evident in the continued reinforcement of prejudiced representations. After 9/11, Egyptian cinema adopted a more intricate approach, challenging traditional notions and unearthing the underlying intricacies of society. The evolution of cinematic representation parallels society's greater understanding and respect for Arab-Muslim identities.

## DISCUSSION

According to Corral *et al.* (2021), through historical context, geopolitical changes, and cultural nuances, Arab-Muslim identities have experienced a dramatic evolution in cinematic portrayals. Using a historical analysis of the

transformation of Orientalism, this research sheds light on the impact of these changes on the depiction of Arab-Muslim identities in Hollywood and Egyptian films (Corral *et al.*, 2021). In his groundbreaking work, Said (1994) sheds light on the Western-centric phenomenon of Orientalism, which misrepresents and glamorizes the Middle East through a narrow view. Western perceptions of Arab-Muslim cultures were defined by this approach for many centuries, influencing various creative fields (Said, 1994). Burge (2020) highlights that the classic Hollywood films, including “The Sheik,” perpetuated the Orientalist trope by portraying Arab-Muslim people as enigmatic, barbarous, and submissive to Western influence. Li & Zhang (2022) have also noted that The representation in question perpetuated stereotypes, thereby distorting the image of the Arab-Muslim world (Burge, 2020; Li & Zhang, 2022).

The move from orientalism to neo-orientalism in cinematic portrayals of Arab-Muslim identities signifies a notable shift. Al-Malik (2014) states that cultural complexity is acknowledged. However, a focus on differences persists, highlighting the “otherness” of Arab-Muslim characters, which was also endorsed by Cabezón(2023), providing a comprehensive view of Arab culture while retaining a Western outlook, “Lawrence of Arabia” (1962) captures this shift. According to Malik (2014) and Cabezón (2023), a deeper exploration of Arab-Muslim characters revealed the complexity of cultural diversity, yet the Western protagonist maintained the spotlight, reinforcing Western superiority (Al-Malik, 2014; Cabezón-Fernández, 2023). According to Narcis (2019), this pivotal movie marks a watershed moment in the cinematic depiction of Arab-Muslim cultures (Narcis, 2019). Tabib (2022) has illustrated that the fusion of political unrest and media hype has fueled Islamophobia, significantly reshaping the cinematic environment. Furthermore, Eijaz (2018) emphasizes that with the shift, Arab-Muslim characters were commonly depicted in films as terrorists, extremists, or threats to Western values (Eijaz, 2018; Tabib, 2022). The film industry has recently perpetuated damaging representations of Arab-Muslim individuals, equating them with hostility and extremism (Li & Zhang, 2022). The pre-9/11 Hollywood portrayals of Arab Muslims were deeply rooted in outdated orientalist representations, thereby oversimplifying their intricacy. Despite a shift toward more diverse depictions in films like “Lawrence of Arabia,” Western perspectives still maintain control over the overarching narratives. Following 9/11, Islamophobic portrayals grew substantially. The casting of Arab-Muslim characters as villains has, unfortunately, reinforced harmful preconceptions that have persisted in the collective psyche. The inaccurate portrayal of Arab-Muslim identities bolsters the case for armed intervention and worsens an atmosphere already fraught with fear and wariness. Notably, Egyptian cinema has adapted its portrayal of Arab-Muslim identities, mirroring the evolution of the Arab world. In the pre-9/11 era, Egyptian cinema predominantly centred

on local tales, emphasizing the cultural wealth and diversity within the Arab-Muslim sphere. The film defies Orientalist representations, highlighting the intricacies of its characters and social issues. As a reaction to the growing Islamophobia, Egyptian cinema attempted to counter Western portrayals. Through “The Yacoubian Building” (2006), a more intricate depiction of Arab-Muslim identities is offered, subverting commonplace assumptions and tackling radicalization.

The 9/11 attacks have not only altered movie plots but have also significantly affected the daily lives of Arab-Muslim individuals. A closer examination of media representations of Islam and Muslims by Erik Bleich (2011) reveals how these portrayals contribute to the acceptance of discriminatory behaviour (Bleich *et al.*, 2018). As a result, hate crimes, racial profiling, and social exclusion towards Arab Muslims have intensified. Corral (2021) stresses that the cycle of marginalization is further reinforced by the cinematic portrayal of Arab-Muslim identities as terroristic. Abdelli (2023) extends it further, highlighting that amidst Islamophobia’s pervasive presence in Hollywood and Egyptian cinema, challenges were made to break and redefine stereotypes (Abdelli, 2023; Corral *et al.*, 2021). Providing insight into the ethical issues surrounding U.S. anti-terrorism efforts provided by Frank (2018), highlighting one of the most highly rated works, “Renditions” (2007), serves as a prime case study. Meanwhile, Egyptian cinema similarly explored stories that brought Arab-Muslim characters to life, such as “Clash” (2016), which captured diverse viewpoints during a time of political upheaval (Frank, 2018). The films endeavoured to foster empathy and challenge the dehumanizing depiction of Arab-Muslim identities. Al-Maani (2022) has also highlighted that the evolution of Arab-Muslim identities in cinema reflects a broader cultural shift from Orientalism to neo-orientalism and beyond (Al-Maani, 2022).

The worldwide impact of Hollywood’s film industry depictions is amplified by its global dominance. Studies like Reel Bad Arabs: Shaheen (2001) investigates the harmful effects of Hollywood’s representation of Arab-Muslim identities in “How Hollywood Vilifies a People,” revealing the negative consequences that go beyond Western nations and reinforce damaging preconceptions globally (Shaheen, 2003). Alsaïdi *et al.* (2023) noted that the influence of these portrayals is felt in the realms of public perception, policymaking, and international affairs. Being situated in the Arab-Muslim world, Egypt has a unique opportunity to challenge Hollywood’s negative representations (Alsaïdi *et al.*, 2023). Despite its successes, Egyptian cinema has needed help in representing Arab-Muslim cultures (Labidi, 2019). A study by Viola Shafik (2007) titled “Arab Cinema: Jacir Egyptian cinema has historically addressed both internal societal issues and external pressures, according to “History and Cultural Identity.” In Egyptian cinema, the dual role has shaped Arab-Muslim identities, weighing broader representation against local sociopolitical concerns (Shafik, 2015).

The negative consequences of Islamophobia prompted a gradual shift in narratives, challenging conventional representations (Jakku, 2018). The study illustrates that through the portrayals of Arab-Muslim characters, these films provide alternative viewpoints, showcasing their strength and determination against a backdrop of increasing hostility. Furthermore, Aidi (2021) has observed that the films aim to break down the narrow depictions of Arab-Muslim identities commonly seen in popular culture. It also contends that the representation of a group in media has a lasting effect on how its members see themselves (Aidi, 2021). Zaal *et al.* (2007) stress that this relentless negativity can lead to internalization and conflicted identities, causing cultural disconnection (166-77).

The shift from orientalism to neo-orientalism to Islamophobia underlines the power dynamics in the film industry and media sector (Zaal *et al.*, 2007). Industry-wide institutions have a duty to promote diversity, combat stereotypes, and offer stages for underrepresented perspectives (Casas, 2016). The study by El-Bayoumi (2023) highlights the need for substantial changes in the on-screen representation of Arab-Muslims. The study explores the multi-dimensional portrayals of Arab-Muslim identities that can be achieved through diverse filmmaking perspectives, resulting in more accurate and respectful representations (El-Bayoumi, 2023). Dunu *et al.* (2017) highlight that the development of Arab-Muslim identities in cinema has mirrored larger societal changes, significant geopolitical events, and the media's impact (Dunu *et al.*, 2017). While their styles differ, Hollywood and Egyptian cinema have contributed to and subverted harmful depictions (Chmaissany, 2021). After 9/11, Islamophobic stories grew, resulting in the obscuring of Arab-Muslim identities' real-world consequences. Frailing & Harper (2016) have emphasized in their book "Crime and criminal justice in Disaster" that in the face of these efforts, a more authentic and inclusive cinematic landscape can take shape (Frailing & Harper, 2016). Tapping into the influence of representation, as Aboali (2021) highlighted, the film industry can work towards a more authentic depiction of Arab-Muslim cultures, thereby unifying diverse stakeholders and promoting understanding (Aboali, 2021). To achieve equitable and respectful representation, all parties must work together.

## CONCLUSION

The unravel the construction or Orientalist perception of Arabs-Muslims in Hollywood and Egyptian cinema, the presented study has employed the textual analyses method, which has followed the transformation of Arab-Muslim identities in Hollywood and Egyptian cinema, moving from Orientalism to neo-orientalism and beyond to Islamophobia by analyzing Pre and Post works of in Hollywood and Egyptian cinema. The study has determined that following 9/11, Islamophobic narratives became more prevalent in Hollywood films, solidifying harmful views. In contrast, Egyptian cinema after 9/11 tended to adopt a more thoughtful and complex approach,

subverting stereotypes and examining intricate societal issues. The findings highlight the considerable influence of cinematic portrayals on societal views, reinforcing the media's duty in moulding personae. As Hollywood's impact continues to spread harmful narratives, the contrast with Egyptian cinema highlights the significance of diverse representation in media. United, we can counter harmful representations of Arab-Muslim identities in media and promote a deeper understanding through responsible and dignified depictions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The research highlights the urgent necessity for a significant shift in cinematic representations of Arab-Muslim individuals. Hollywood must recognize its extensive influence and tell stories responsibly by avoiding offensive stereotypes and Islamophobic narratives. Diverse representation on and off camera is crucial to create dynamic and multi-dimensional characters that challenge preconceptions. Egyptian cinema's introspective approach is a benchmark, advocating for thoughtful narratives encapsulating societal intricacies. A collaboration among filmmakers, studios, and viewers is crucial to achieve this transformation. These initiatives empower viewers to critically analyze media representations. By prioritizing respectful representation, both film industries can significantly impact society's comprehension and empathy, dismantling damaging stereotypes.

## Novelty

This study examines the evolution of Arab and Muslim identities in Hollywood and Egyptian cinema, focusing on pre- and post-9/11 periods. It analyzes the cultural contexts that influence these representations, tracing their transformation from Orientalism to Islamophobia. The interdisciplinary approach, incorporating cultural studies, media studies, and philosophy, enriches the study. The study also discusses the societal impact of these representations, highlighting their impact on hate crimes, racial profiling, and social exclusion. The study concludes with recommendations for a shift in cinematic practices, emphasizing responsible storytelling, diverse representation, and stakeholder collaboration.

## Contribution to Knowledge

The study examines the evolution of Arab and Muslim identities in cinema, focusing on Hollywood and Egyptian films from pre-9/11 to post-9/11 eras. It analyzes societal events and cultural contexts, emphasizing the need for ethical storytelling and social responsibility in the film industry. The study concludes with recommendations for a shift in cinematic practices.

## Research Gap

The study explores the evolution of Arab and Muslim cinematic representations in Hollywood and Egyptian cinema. However, it highlights potential research gaps,



including regional and national variations, intersectionality in identity construction, audience perceptions, historical context, alternative media platforms, filmmaker perspectives, and comparative analysis beyond Hollywood and Egyptian cinema. Addressing these gaps could provide a more comprehensive understanding of this complex subject.

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