

AMERICA; THE SAVIOR as HOLLYWOOD CALLS IT

HILAL SUREYYAYILMAZ (Ph.D)*

*Dokuz Eylul University / Faculty of Fine Arts, DEU / GSF Guldeste sok. no:4 Balcova 35320 Izmir/Turkey

Abstract

Each and every national institution in The United States of America serves the 'Manifest Destiny'. What sustains the destiny written by the WASPs is the firm belief in the sacredness of being an American and embracing the American way of life. American dream which had been constituted by English Puritans has positioned United States as the savior of the world and a sacred guide for all people to democracy and modernity. American cinema is one of the most effective factors in making the world believe that America is destined to be the heroes against the uncivilized. This study aims to analyze American perspective based on western mentality on uncivilized in American film discourse.

Keywords: American Cinema, Manifest Destiny, WASP, Uncivilized, Savior

Introduction

Mythos ensures social order and educates people by touching the deepest desires, fears, passions, expectations and emotions of man. For many, mythology is the living religion of societies. Comparing cinema to modern mythology arises from evaluation of films, which carry the personal influence of their creators to the minds of different people, as collective and social products like mythos.

The main feature of mythology is that it emphasizes the importance of the sacred. Throughout its history, Hollywood have carefully conveyed the American mythology to us in detail with the aim of confirming the sacredness of the United States and in doing so, have used the sovereign values that reflect America's righteousness. For Hollywood, the producer of films that are new myths of American culture, to keep the American dream alive, it does not need to do anything other than reinforcing the dynamics of American mythology. American films, which continue to convey the idea that Americans are noble, well-intentioned, and responsible, endeavor to not only make their country they regard as the leaders of the western civilization the leading actor in global politics but as the sole legitimate and just authority of the global community.

Since the discovery of the continent, the American identity was built on the idea that the destiny of its 'chosen people' is to guide the world and enlighten all the people. The idea

that Americans are a chosen and blessed people, and that they are commissioned by God to create a civilization model for savage and primitive nations, which has prevailed through the entire history of the USA and today still influences the 'American' way of behavior, is called "Manifest Destiny". (Greenberg, 2011:10) This theory, which is nourished by the belief of being chosen and suggests that the American people deserve military, cultural and economic spread can, in fact, be seen as a new interpretation of the chosen people belief in the teaching of the Torah. This manifesto, developed in the 19th century, brought a kind of 'Messiah' legitimacy to the interventions and occupations of the US in Mexico, Cuba and the Philippines. Those most affected by the Old Testament which underlies this philosophy are the fundamentalist Puritans in Protestantism.

Protestantism, which Martin Luther called 'Evangelical Church Movement', is considered to be one of the important factors that accelerated the first stages of capitalism in Europe with the understanding of morality which gives great importance to working, prudence and success in worldly endeavors. Founders and propagators of today's Evangelical Christianity, Protestants usually gather around Methodist, Baptist and Presbyterian Churches in the US. WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) is the name given to Protestant sect members of the white Anglo-Saxons living in the United States. This term is often used when referring to a segment that is above the standards of welfare and cultural standards, when compared to the overall population. To describe their dominance in social life and in administration, it would suffice to say that all US presidents except the first black president Barack Obama (who is also Protestant) and Catholic John F. Kennedy were WASPs. When viewed from this aspect, it can be seen that the WASP culture is the main cultural backbone of the USA. (Kurt, 2006: 55)

Although there is no religion-based administration in the United States, Protestantism is thought to play a very effective role in defining the political position and enemies of the US. The role of this belief, which is dominated by the feeling that all people are equal and granted with innate rights by God, in colonialism and missionary needs to be analyzed very carefully. Without doing so, it will not be possible to understand especially the definition of enemy of the US and the West.

According to the Christian point of view, human beings are sinful and cut off and separated from our Creator, that is the God and this alienation will inevitably leave us with the eternal wrath of God. Atonement in Christianity is explained by Jesus sacrificing himself to pay for our sins, to serve justice and to reconcile sinners with God, that is, to have the

mercy of God. In the majority of American films, the chief character goes after a specific purpose, and while doing so, he atones for his past mistakes through which he learns about both himself and the world. According to many, Hollywood and American television often use the belief of Christ to ascribe a religious meaning to the colonization policies of the US and directing and making investments in the world in the direction of its own interests. The most important element that requires us to look at the subject from the theological point of view, besides a strong nationalism, is, as frequently referred to, often the reflection of Jesus on the heroes in the films who save not only his people, but also the whole world.

White Christian Man

Being white has always been a prior rhetoric of American national identity. The most important function of white rhetoric is to make the people from other races and ethnicity feel that being white is a guarantee of a cultural supremacy and symbolic power, and beyond that, to make them believe that the true measure for humanity is the white race. Those wearing masks of the white race struggle to fit in this measure and be involved in that culture, while they possess the cultural codes associated with the white race.

There is no need to go too far to see the support that the belief in the superiority of the white race takes from Christian faith and the connection between the two. It will suffice to only take a look at the representations of Jesus in this regard. Except for a few rebellious examples, none of the popular culture representations of the Prophet, known to be a Middle Eastern by his believers, represent him as non-white. For centuries, the Christian world has underlined that the one that has to be worshiped, that is Jesus, was white; thus taking away from the non-white races the right to be equal with the white race. Hollywood also chose heroes mostly from white race in a way that does not separate from the representation of white Jesus, described as the savior of all mankind; these heroes have always tried to discipline other races that are not at their own level as if they were fulfilling a basic rule of creation; and their successes have often been to save them from themselves.

In the scenarios where it is often emphasized that the people who are not White Christians have the right to determine their fate, the white man appears on the scene as a savior and tries to tame these savages. Although our heroes have a few experiences in these different worlds that warm their hearts, ultimately the most effective of the messages sent to the audience is the separation of 'us' and 'them'.

Representation of Arabs in Hollywood: "The Sheik"

The Arab and Muslim portrayals of the United States are based on English and French Orientalism. These describe the Middle East as irrational, fatalistic, patriarchal, obsessive, out-of-date and cruel. The famous writer Mark Twain, who is considered to be the father of American literature by many, in his "Innocents Abroad" he wrote in 1869, described the Muslims, whom he called as 'Muhammadans', as 'infidel', 'sinful pagans' and 'hateful savages'. (Shaheen, 1997: 14). It would not be very realistic to hope that if Mark Twain were alive today, he would have a different say in this regard.

Although the attitude of the United States towards Islam, especially towards Muslim Arabs, has become very prejudiced and full of injustice with September 11, long before that, indicators parallel to this attitude can be found in Hollywood from the first quarter of the last century. *The Sheik (1921)*, directed by George Melford, is a very important production in that it is an example that can be seen as a summary of what the majority of Americans think about Arabs, especially Arab men, and it clearly shows us the American perspective of the Arabs. In the film starring Rudolph Valentino, one of the most popular actors of the time, Sheikh Ahmad (Rudolph Valentino) becomes infatuated with an adventurous, modern-thinking English woman, Diana (Agnes Ayres); so he abducts her to his tent palace in the Saharan desert. The free-spirited Diana is afraid of the passion of the sheik and wants to get rid of it. However, when she is abducted by bandits, she becomes aware of her feelings for Ahmet, and she was finally rescued from the bandits by the man whom she realizes that she is in love with. So the film does not disappoint our expectation of a happy ending which we are used to. However, on the other hand, Hollywood was not willing to marry a white Protestant with an Arab at the end of such a romantic story, and precautions were taken in this regard. Sheikh is not really a Bedouin; our hero who originally had a Spanish father and an English mother was in fact raised by an old sheik when his parents were killed when he was a baby. With the disclosure of this secret, the audience attributes all his savage behaviors from the beginning of the film to the Arab sheik who raised him and the happy Romantic ending to his getting rid of his Arab genetics to turn back to his original European side. Thus the audience feels comforted.

In the United States, whose existence derives from solely its enemies, the new enemy Islam, which is obtained after the Cold War, was clearly labeled after September 11. Both before and after September 11, Muslim villains are often seen in American films. Especially if we need to talk about the four basic myths reflected on the screen for Arabs, these can be

summarized as their terrible wealth, barbarism, sex-mania especially about white women and terrorism. In the aftermath of September 11, terrorist acts were defined as 'Islamic' or 'Islamic terrorism' and they are both used to describe and explain September 11. Thus, the greatest evil that has ever happened to America is, beyond being associated, identified with Islam. The connection between terrorism and Islam, which was built on a sound basis starting from President Reagan's era, have come to a very alarming point with the September 11 attacks. This relationship is confirmed worldwide with the global impact of American cinema and television. In almost all films, Islam is emphasized as the primary motivation for the bad guys and the growing anti-Islamism has given a great deal of freedom to the foreign policy of the United States. But it would be extremely wrong to think that this is something new.

Forty Years in between: “Lawrence of Arabia” and “The Four Feathers”

Lawrence of Arabia, directed by David Lean, starring Peter O'Toole, Alec Guinness, Anthony Queen and Omer Sharif, which won seven Oscars in 1962, including the best film and best director, is one of the most important examples that should be examined in that it clearly shows the politics of the Middle East, especially the British. Also, when compared to present-day examples, it helps us make an efficient analysis for us to see the unchanging nature of the WASP thinking.

British Lawrence is both a scientist and an agent working for the Kingdom of England. This double identity life will provide him with great ease in this secret position. The duty of Lawrence, who was sent to the Arabs, about whom he was an expert, by the British Intelligence Directorate who knew his skills very well, was to organize the Arab troops to revolt against the Ottoman Empire during the First World War. The Bedouins immediately accept Lawrence's and the British's recommendation to fight against the Ottoman Empire, and cling to the support they receive from the British Empire. His aim is to take the tribes, unhappy with the Ottoman Empire, to his side and make them attack the Ottoman soldiers. Lawrence, who seems to have achieved his aim, sees after the war that the promise of a single state given to the Arabs was not kept, but instead, witnesses that dozens of Arab states are formed; understands how the British trick the Arabs and how they divide them and abandoned them to their fate after using them for their own purposes. In fact, reading this as leaving the Arabs to their own fates will mean to fall for the atonement that the West pretends to be in need of. In reality, on the other hand, it would be more correct to infer from here that the Arabs were never abandoned to their fates; but rather, their fate now was entirely in the

hands of the West, so the West would decide for the future of the Arabs as they wished. Indeed, the historical process has already proved it again and again.

After the victorious Arabs gained the possession of Damascus from the Turks, it seems that the direction of the scenario changes clearly. Before this, the director David Lean reflects Bedouins and Sheikhs as heroes fighting to free Damascus, after the possession of Damascus changed hands, he reflects them as stubborn, uncivilized savages and an unreasonable mob who constantly fight with each other. These Arabs fight even in the most ordinary and most basic tasks, such as the operation of city hospitals, the operation of water or telephone networks, no skilled Arab or wise sheik is seen throughout the film even for once. The clear message here is that Arabs have neither the capability nor the value to govern civilized societies. We may even go further and say that the director tries to make the audience empathize with, not the Arabs, but the Western hero who lays down his life to help these savages but in the end feels disappointed as his unrequited endeavor does not get the value it deserves.

The fact that the scenario was adapted from the memoirs of T.E. Lawrence, an archaeologist and member of the army, who was an important figure in World War I, makes historical analysis easy for us. As it happened in the past, the West supported the Arabs in bringing the Ottoman territories in control of their own interests, and they deceived them against the Ottomans with lies of independence and freedom. After this mission was completed, the West did not deem the Arabs, whom they saw as savages from the very beginning, worthy of governing their own lands; they decided to seize the administration under the pretext of liberating them from their barbarism and bringing them civilization. It should be seen that this is no different from the policy the US implemented in Vietnam, Afghanistan or Iraq. The thesis put forward by the US in these invasions was always to liberate those countries from dictators and to bring democracy. The only thing that needs to be mentioned is perhaps the fact that Great Britain is much more experienced and competent in this regard. Almost the entire world is aware of the fact that the US invaded Iraq due to economic and strategic reasons, such as oil and geographic importance. However, though the US leads, it does not invade alone. The fact that the British, who are the most important ally of the US, are not hated or blamed half as much as the US should be seen as evidence of their experience and competence in this regard.

It should be realized that what Arab Ali says to Lawrence in the film ("You tried to give us Damascus") is indeed intended to justify all actions of the imperialists. What the

character is trying to say here with a sighing is first of all, they took Damascus from the Ottoman domination thanks to the English; they did not know the value of the city after its domination passed to them and that they clearly failed to govern the region. In a way, he admits that the geography and the Arabs should be herded by the West. And the funny thing is the Arab character admits that the British did what they could do, but this untalented, quarrelsome, uncivilized and barbaric society who was unable to make use of this opportunity was to blame. This orientalist approach that can be observed throughout the film in fact reflects the ideology of the West for the entire geography which it calls the East. *The Four Feathers* (2002) (ShekharKapur), which suggests nothing more than *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) and is much more ordinary in terms of cinematography, is about the subversion of Sudanese barbarian Muslims, by civilized and, of course, Christian British Harry. Adapted from the novel by AEW Mason, the film takes its audience to the second half of the nineteenth century, when the race for colonialism between the European states escalated. The British officer Harry Feversham (Heath Ledger), who is much loved by both his friends and family and his commanders, and who is certain to have a brilliant career in the future, leads a pleasant life with his beautiful girlfriend Ethne (Kate Hudson), to whom he is planning to get married. Upon the attack of some rebellious Muslim forces on British colonial troops in Sudan, Harry goes to North Africa with his troop to suppress the revolt; but though he is so sure of himself and what he wants to do until then, he feels alienated from his job in battle and leaves the army. When he returns to his country, he is accused of being coward by all the people he knows and loves, especially his father. Pushed into loneliness by day, Harry decides to return to Africa when he learns that his closest friend, Jack, has been taken prisoner by his former association. Moreover, he is now quite sure about what he is doing and why he is doing.

Even before the British occupy this cursed desert, the story starts with a military brochure that says "Beyond everything, do not forget that you are a Christian soldier!" In the story that begins towards the end of the 1800s when God made the British possess a worldwide empire, Muhammad fanatics attack and slaughter an English regiment, so special troops from the homeland are sent there. The thing that should not be missed is that the name given to Muslims is Muhammad fanatics, which aims to separate Muhammad from the prophets of monotheistic religions and to label his followers as fanatical and to emphasize the irrationality of Islam. No Christian person or group is considered to be a fan of Jesus for their religious beliefs, such as exorcism, the burning of people with the belief that they are witches,

or their acts such as whipping themselves for days. All these put Muslims in the 'other' position and thus serve the discourse of 'us' and 'them'.

Both in the dialogues within the film and in the resources summarizing the film, it is always mentioned that the Sudanese slaughtered the British regiment. In the Western jargon, Easterners or Muslims do not only kill, but they slaughter. Western owners of both the old continent and the new continent, who have a bloody history, uses the verb of slaughter, which is full of barbarism, for the same action, in cases where the act of killing is done by Muslims, and the murdered one is Westerner. The same attitude is repeated in this film as well. Beyond the distinction of the action being civilized or non-civilized, the reason why the Sudanese do this is never mentioned. Questions such as what the British are looking for in that geography, why the owners of those lands have to be oppressed by the British, why they have to agree to the use of all underground and overground resources by the British, and how many Sudanese people the British have slaughtered while doing so are never asked. The reason underlying all these seems to be political confusion, but the answer is never complicated. The West is a blessing for the East; these worthless and barbarian people who cannot do anything on their own and whose beliefs are considered as heretical and fanaticism, in other words, who have not found the right God, have no choice but to be under the rule of the West. Although the fallacy of this option is discussed in theoretical books, the main point discussed is whether the rule of West in the East has brought more benefits or losses for the West, rather than the injustice that the East suffered.

In the film, young Harry first refuses to go, but when he sees three white feathers, a symbol of cowardice, sent by his friend, he feels it beneath him; so he goes immediately to Sudan to prove he is a real hero. Later Harry disguises himself like an Arab and gains numerous victories against the Sudanese and kills hundreds of Sudanese. On the other hand, praying Sudanese Muslims, after finishing their prayer, entrap and kill British soldiers. This is repeated here as in many films to reinforce the perception that the God whom these Muslims worship commands it. The idea that not only the members of Islam but the belief itself is violent is tried to be reinforced for the whole West to accept it true.

What is more, the film uses the images of hung and tortured British soldiers stowed in filthy Sudan prisons, but never mentions about the big circle made by the colonial British. Thank goodness Harry kills the ruthless prison guard and rescues his friends. Thanks to him, British colonialism gains one more victory and the British forces defeat Sudanese barbarians.

Savior for the Uncivilized

The mission of the West, especially the US, to bring civilization to barbarians and its militaristic rescuer image emerges as one of the most important elements of ratification in the current representations of Western military operations in the rest of the world. One of the examples that reflect non-western cultures and peoples as primitive and irrational communities that try to solve their problems through violence, *Tears of the Sun* (2003) reveals this tradition when analyzed in this context.

The film, starring Bruce Willis, one of Hollywood's most famous action actors, and the European actress Monica Belluci, who is well-known with her beauty and who seems to have recently attracted the attention of film producers in Hollywood, was directed by Antoine Fuqua. In the film, the squad under A.K. Waters, who served in Special Forces affiliated to the American army, is sent for a special mission to the Nigerian forests. Their task is to save Doctor Lena Hendricks, who has been taken as a prisoner here, from this country where terrible things happen. Naturally, the film never talks about the history of Nigeria's becoming such a dangerous and difficult country. Waters and his soldiers find Hendricks, but Hendricks sets a condition to come with them. She agrees to leave on condition that seventy refugees with her are rescued with him. Water has to follow the order. Doctor Hendricks tries to object as refugees are left alone there while she gets on the military helicopter. The hero gradually begins to feel an emotional affinity with the doctor, and finally he feels himself in a dilemma between the orders given to him and the voice from his conscience. After all, he accepts the doctor's request and returns the helicopter and tries to save dozens of refugees.

The film starting with the expression that "The only thing necessary for the evil to win is that the good does nothing" is only one of the countless productions in which the US positions itself as the head of the good people, that is, as God, for the rest of the world. You are either with America, that is, the good, or with the evil. The goodness of the United States is also not open to debate. All peoples of the world are sure of the good intentions of the United States and will feel grateful forever for this empire which they see as their savior.

At the end of the film, the local people gratefully bid farewell to the Americans, their eyes filled with tears, and the film succeeds in reflecting the expected happy ending. In addition, the fact that a pro-US government will take over the administration is shown as a happy result for the whole world. It is underlined that Americans are the savior of the world and that all governments supported by the US government are the best choice for those countries.

Considering the world agenda of the period when the film was shot, it would not be wrong to say that this final was in a sense the final that the Bush administration wished to achieve in Iraqi adventure. There are many historical contradictions in this regard, which freeze one's blood: fascist administrations in the Latin American countries, which the US explicitly supported, are responsible for the massacre of thousands of people. It reminds us how far these films have gone from reality.

Rambo (2008), which can be analyzed in the same context, was shot in Burma, where a civil war has been continuing for more than fifty years, the rural population is intense and the people have had to endure the repressive administration of the army for years. A group of white Christian missionaries ask Rambo to rent his boat to bring humanitarian aid to the other side of the river. The hero, who is both a patriot and more importantly does the right thing for the whole world, continues to educate the audience about how important and sacred their missions are with the other white men who also aim to bring goodness to the whole world.

Conclusion

It is widely believed in the Western countries that the West is the cradle of civilization and that the societies that do not experience the same historical process are uncivilized. While explaining this belief, they state that the societies of the geography they describe as East do not accept the universal criteria of the West, but insist on their own backward and irrational traditions. The thought that the cultures outside modernism are therefore condemned to be conquered and suppressed actually shows us how the history of colonialism is parallel to the history of modernism. (Said, 1970: 12-13)

According to the rhetoric of those who try to legitimize colonialism, the East is neither aware of the wealth it has, nor has the knowledge of how to use them. The only way to truly utilize the wealth of the East is to take over the rule. The East, unable to resist the despotism, thus is helped, must first be rescued from its despot to be replaced with a new one. These films provides great support to the United States, which enters the wilderness to save the non-Western 'Others' from themselves, with all good intentions, for remapping geographical areas.

In many countries, described as second and third world countries, the military operations of the US and other Western countries continue. Hollywood films that focus on these issues move away from the historical process and focus only on the American hero. This focus leaves the audience with the supreme feelings of virtue and self-sacrifice

embodied in our hero versus the 'Other' This form of superior behavior, which one person has shown, is attributed to all white people, in other words to the civilization. In cases where the responsibility of political and military violence cannot be avoided, actions that are caused by the heavier burden of our hero turn into an atonement that he makes for the whole civilization, like Jesus, which, in turn, relieves white consciences.

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