CHAPTER NINE

FOREIGN POLICY AND ITS IMPACT ON ARAB STEREOTYPES IN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE POPULAR FICTION OF THE 1970S–80S

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Serious literature is generally judged by its aesthetic merits, whereas popular fiction is mainly written for entertainment, and tends to follow simple—if not naïve—plot lines filled with episodic events that tend to simplify the moral and emotional issues treated. The sheer number of spy novels, historical, detective, and crime thrillers etc., indicates the success of such forms; they exceed one quarter of all fictional works published in the Western market (Simon 1989). These books abound in vernacular expressions, overtly erotic scenes, and gratuitous violence, all of which appeal to the tastes of their mass readerships, as does the fact that they are cheaply priced (Long 1985, Neuburg 1977). Mass-market fiction is a vehicle of popular culture because it expresses its hopes, fantasies, and anxieties. William J. Palmer claims that the genre of spy fiction is always connected with "the cultural issues of each particular novel's time and space" (2006, 497). Thus, one can study this genre and others like it, in order to understand the culture that has produced them.

Popular novels tend, however, to express stereotypical notions of certain ethnic groups, cultures and religions because they magnify small details and present them to the reader as undisputed realities. The authors of these novels often fantasise a fictional world in which the 'heroes', who embody the noble Western concepts of justice and chivalry, collide with the ignoble deeds of a villain, in many instances an Arab Muslim, who has to be punished at the end to achieve poetic justice. Unfortunately, many novels that dehumanise and distort Arab Muslim characters receive large Western audiences. The publication of works of popular fiction with Middle Eastern themes or characters increased in the year 1985 alone to reach more than 600 in the United States and Britain (Simon 1989). This points to the scale of the issue and the likely impact of the negative stereotypes that the novels contain.

Motives vary according to the writer's background. There are two kinds of writers; the first is the one who, for commercial reasons, follows popular

demand shaped by old prejudices peddled by the mass media. In the 20th and 21st centuries, the ideas formed in people's minds about religions and races have been increasingly influenced by the media (Berger 2006) including television and print coverage of news. Many media specialists believe that the meaning of reality itself is conditioned by the media, particularly by television which changes "many social situations by changing everyday life" (Altheide 1976). For example, Iyengar (1991, 11) discusses how the media "frame" events and present them from their own perspective through the "subtle alterations in the statement or presentation of judgment and choice problems." Further, Shaheen (2005) describes how such indirect methods of influencing the public mean that the "stereotyping of Arabs regularly appears in media designed to entertain" because in this context the public is more likely to accept the information "unknowingly" and "without suspicion" (1985, 162 & 166).

Whilst it may not be all-determining, one cannot ignore the role that governments play in influencing the media's portrayal of major world conflicts such as those in the Middle East (for a detailed analysis of the influence of government on the media, see Ghareeb 1983. For the British media, see Mayhew and Adams 1976). Patricia A. Karl, a news correspondent covering the Arab region, goes as far as to claim that "the Government's manipulation of the American media and media participation in foreign policy have conditioned situations where events are often shaped to fit policies or foreign policy programming becomes a substitute for policy" (1983, 284). It is beyond the scope of this study to investigate the precise extent of the American state's manipulation of the media to serve its foreign policy.

However, it is hard to dismiss Steven Salaita's (2006) argument that popular American mistrust of Arabs is closely linked to the idea of "patriotism and national pride" (265) promoted by a government whose foreign policy sets the standard of loyalty. For example, during the First Gulf War, the US media took most of its information from the US Army, adopting the official stances dictated to them because 'patriotic journalism' was the required norm (Bennett & Paletz 1994, 4). Referring to preparations for the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, Alterman (2004), an insider and a specialist in US media, says that most American journalists possessed the 'natural patriotism' to side with the US government, whilst others had commercial reasons to do so. He argues that such an attitude "not only empowers right-wing jingoists and chauvinists to silence honest debate, it also silences some of the internal debate that takes place in our own hearts and

minds" (Alterman 2004, 268 & 269). Alterman believes that the US media and US foreign policy are aligned. If criticism is directed against US foreign policy, such criticism would normally be dismissed in the US media as "the products of old-fashioned European anti-Americanism at best, and of antisemitism at worst [if Israel is implicated], or frequently, both" (Alterman 2004, 18).

Herman and Chomsky (1994) devised their propaganda model to take account of the ways in which key players shape the media. They identify five main "news filters", which include "information provided by government, business, and 'experts' funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power" (*Id.*, 2). Herman and Chomsky believe that the media's dependence on these sources' privileged access to information means that they can "use personal relationships, threats, and rewards to further influence and coerce the media" (*Id.*, 22). Moreover, the credibility such sources enjoy with the public confers 'objectivity' on media coverage which draws on them. Finally, as media channels seek to "protect themselves from criticisms of bias and libel suits, they need material that can be portrayed as presumptively accurate" (*Id.*, 19). Other studies of source bias focus on showing how reporters depend on limited governmental sources when they present the news (Sigal 1974, Brown et al. 1987, Reese et al. 1994).

Another important filter identified by Herman and Chomsky (1994, 26) is "flak": those negative responses to a media statement or programme used to "discipline" the media. In many cases, government officials attack certain reporters as a means of sending a warning signal to other journalists who might think of criticising the government. A related filter is that of "anticommunism" used in the Cold War period as a pretext for silencing dissident voices and an active "control mechanism" (Herman and Chomsky 1994, 2). More recently, it is arguable that the communist has been replaced by the figure of the Arab terrorist, who shares with his predecessor a perceived desire to destroy the West, at least in certain tendencies exhibited by the mainstream media. Finally, it is important to mention other cultural manipulations that governments deploy in support of their foreign policy. Mel van Elteren (2003, 174) claims that the U.S. government plays "an important role in promoting cultural exports, not only as a source of export income but also as a means of exporting beliefs, values, and practices that inherently favor U.S.-based corporate capitalism," including those relating to issues of race and gender.

In times of crisis, governments condition the public in an indirect way to make them see the world in pre-designed perspective. If portrayals of Arabs as desert nomads, ignorant peasants, Muslim fanatics and bloody hijackers who kidnap foreigners and ransom them recur continuously in the media (Caesar 1993), they tend to be questioned less and less, and end up approaching the status of received wisdom. Gordon W. Allport (1954) asserts that stereotypes are "socially supported, continually revived and hammered in, by [the] media of mass communication" (1954, 200). David Altheide (1976, 27) believes that, through the amplification process, the media can make some events "interesting and socially significant," sometimes ensuring that their influence may be "fundamentally changed."

It is important to stress that the West is no more homogeneous than the so-called 'Arab World', and that the extent of the media's inclination and ability to shape public perceptions in a reductive, negative fashion conforming to approved government policy varies considerably. The US media represent a much more extreme case than, say, their British or French equivalents where one can find far greater plurality, and a much greater willingness to interrogate and criticise government policy. Even in America, oppositional voices are there to be heard, albeit at the peripheries of the mainstream media, Nonetheless, particularly in the USA, the stereotyping process and the policies informing it form part of the cultural context in which writers of popular fiction operate, and to which they must accommodate their work in order to appeal to the reading public. In this very indirect and generally unintentional fashion, they collude in the promotion of popular culture and the agenda of the government. The latter, in turn, is prone to shut its eyes to the widespread vilification of Arabs which, at worst, takes the form of a "licensed national sport," as Jonathan Raban puts it (1979, 343).

There is a second, much smaller, category of writers with an open political agenda and a clear intention to use popular fiction as a tool of propaganda. Some pro-Israel novelists writing in English (or whose novels are translated into English), belong to this group. Their work tends to indulge in overt and calculated stereotypying of Muslims and of Arabs (prominent novelists in this category include: Leon Uris, Moshe Shamir, Amos Oz, Benjamin Tammuz, Maisie Mosco, and Yael Dayan). By publishing their works in English, those writers reach a wide international readership.

In brief, foreign policy agendas in America (and to an extent in other Western countries) play a significant, though not determining, role in shaping and providing the context to certain stereotypes prevalent in

popular fiction. However, writers' motives in propagating reductively negative images of Arab Muslims differ considerably, and by no means do all of them conform to the equally stereotypical and reductive image of the 'Orientalist Westerner'. Those that do follow such a path are sometimes driven by the perceived need to secure high sales and therefore to avoid confronting comforting popular prejudices, and sometimes by a more calculatedly political strategy.

1. *The Political Background*

For many decades and up to today, America and Britain have regarded the Middle East as a legitimate sphere of national interest owing to their historical ties to the region. Britain occupied parts of the region after the First World War and remained there, controlling many countries and retaining military bases subsequently. One of the perceived benefits of British control over the Middle East in the interwar era was that of preventing "Nazi Germany reaching the oil fields" (Johnson 2003, 163). During the same period, the Middle East and India were regarded as the "main areas of unrest" for the British because of the rise of national movements in reaction to the unfulfilled "promises of independence" (Louis and Brown 2001, 287).

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that instead of depicting leaders of the respective independence movements as revolutionary figures seeking to liberate their lands from foreign dominance, some Anglo-American purveyors of popular fiction vilified those who challenged the authority of Britain and the Arab governments it had installed by presenting their actions as inherently evil and illegitimate. They showed little desire to convey the complexity of the conflict and of popular reactions to the promises of independence. For instance, Spencer Bayne's *Agent Extraordinary* reflected British concern over the Arab-German alliance during the Second World War. The Mufti of Damascus, Jamal, designated as the historical Mufti of Jerusalem, tried to move the public against British rule with the help of the Nazis. In order to demonstrate that his cause was unlawful, the author presented Jamal as a gangster whose national aspirations for "Pan-Arabism" were described as a "bogey" with which he attempted to "mask his gangsterish ambition" (1944, 35). Further, Geoffrey Household's *Doom's Caravan* (1971) referenced the anti-British revolt in Iraq in 1941 and portrayed its leader, Rashid Ali al-Kaylani, in an unsympathetic way. The Arabs who sided with the Germans against the British and

French are pictured as "conspirators" (1971, 100). Whilst collaboration with Nazis is hardly an action compatible with the spirit of liberation, the reasons for the collaboration, and the desperation that led to it, are left unacknowledged.

After the Second World War, and in the context of the new reality of the Cold War with an expansionist Soviet Union, America sought to acquire a share in Britain's control over the Middle East, so it began cooperating with Britain in this regard. Proposals for disseminating pro-American and British publicity in the region were suggested as soon as the early 1950s (US Government, Office Memorandum 1951). Adam Watson, from the British Embassy, suggested making an "Anglo-American cooperation in the psychological field in the Arab states and Iran." Other documents released by the National Security Archive revealed the extent of US preoccupation with propaganda issues which it termed 'Campaign of Truth Program' in order to counter communism in the Middle East and to project a favourable image of America. In the end, the US government can achieve a strategic goal of preserving its interests in the region. Tore T. Petersen mentioned in *The Decline of the Anglo-American Middle East* that Anglo-American control over the region in the 1960s helped to prevent the spread of communism and to ensure a continuous flow of cheap oil (2006, 2–3).

Predictably, the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict had many implications and consequences for popular images of the Arab. Western public opinion was generally conditioned to regard Arabs as wrong in defending their own lands and properties. As Michael Ionides poignantly puts it: "If the Arabs submitted, that showed their unworthiness, if they resisted, that showed their savagery" (1960, 83). The Cold War created its own villains because the Soviets began, during this period, to aid Arab countries such as Iraq, Syria and Egypt by supplying them with arms and expertise. Kem Bennett tackled this concern in *The Devil's Current* (1953), and Stewart Thomson's *Show of Force* (1955) touched on anti-British sentiments in Iraq.

Representations of Middle Eastern societies were by no means universally hostile. In his novel, *The Picnic at Sakkara* (1955), P.H. Newby portrayed an Arab poet who belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood, a religious association opposing Westernisation. The writer captured the atmosphere of frustration that overwhelmed Egypt before Jamal Abdel Nasser's rule when protests used to be organised against British dominance and protestors cried "The Canal for Egypt!" (1955, 30). However, other political concerns expressed in fictional texts stemmed from the cynical desire to protect Western oil investments; for instance, Peter O'Donnell in

Sabre-tooth (1966) described the efforts of two British agents in Kuwait to save it from being invaded by a neighbouring country. The novel was written in response to the intention of the then president of Iraq, Abdul Karim Qassim, to annex Kuwait to Iraq in the early 1960s, something which was clearly against British interests.

Elements in the West also saw in the nationalisation of the Suez Canal by Egypt in 1956 a more direct threat affecting economic stability, a fact which found reflection in the image of the Arab as represented in news media and fiction alike. Slade (1981, 143) commented on this incident, arguing that: "the American media have broadcast a predominantly negative picture of the Arab personality. Sophisticated content analysis of news coverage as well as the monitoring of television has supported this contention." In a fictional context, P.H. Newby, in *Something to Answer For* (1969, which was awarded the writer the British Council's Booker Prize), dealt with the issue of the nationalisation of the Suez Canal, revealing a certain sympathy with the British concern over the rise of Jamal Abdel Nasser.

After the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, another image became prevalent in the Western popular imagination: that of the hesitant deserter (Ghareeb 1983). Some elements in the West treated the defeat primarily in religious terms; as the outcome of a war between Judaism and Islam, where the latter and its Arab proponents were regarded as backward and stubbornly foolish. Morris West's *The Tower of Babel* (1968) offers one of several examples of this approach. Moreover, Arab efforts to assert control over the imagery of the 1967 War tended to prove counter-productive. In Gregory Orfalea's (1988, 126) words:

> The 1967 War marked a turning point not only in the history of the conflict, but also in the coverage of the Palestinians and their leadership … Ironically, it was in trying to counter their invisible victim image of refugee, that the Palestinians created a highly visible—yet primarily negative image, the Palestinian 'terrorist'.

With the increasing number of hijacking operations and assassination attempts conducted by Palestinians in Europe in the 1960s, the image of the Arab as 'terrorist' gained considerable ground. Despite the fact that few Palestinians were actually involved in such operations, and that the operations were conceived as responses to Israeli actions, Palestinians as a whole acquired the status of potential terrorists. The PLO, in particular, was regarded as a terrorist organisation, and in the 1980s its anti-Israeli stance conferred on it for many Americans (though not necessarily for

other Western populations) the most negative image of all Arab organisations and nations (Slade 1981, 35). When, following the Oslo peace talks with Israel in 1994, the US government removed the organisation from its list of terrorist groups, the image of the PLO became gradually more positive, as did that of the former PLO's leader, Yasser Arafat, who had been depicted for decades in novels, movies and the media as a terrorist. Popular imagery shifts with the changing of political relations, which is one of several reasons why it is important not to be over-categorical about the trends we are identifying.

Moreover, such shifts take place slowly and the stereotyping of Arabs in fictional works continued to gather pace relentlessly, reaching its climax after the 1973 War and the oil boycott. In spite of the fact that the Arabs were considered to have fought bravely in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, a phenomenon which Said (1975, 436) referred to as "shattered Myths", the negative stereotypes persisted in circulating, owing to their rigidity and relative impermeability. Indeed, the oil boycott affected the very fabric of Western society because "shivering households … faced cold furnaces in January and February of 1974" (Archer 1976, 8). As a result, the emergent figure of the 'tycoon oil sheikh' accumulated all the older stereotypes, supplementing them with the perceived ability to shake Western markets at will. Arabs were now often seen as vindictive troublemakers out to wreak havoc in the West, and ungrateful for the Western technological assistance offered to their 'backward' courtiers. The boycott threat became linked to an inherent belief in Islamic danger. Gilles Kepel called this concatenation of forces "Petro-Islam" (2003, 69), referring to the bolstering of Islamic doctrine in oil-rich Saudi Arabia and Iran.

The Arab oil boycott led also to more direct political strategies. For instance, the former US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, proposed the doctrine of universal intervention based primarily on domestic interests (Cooper 2004). Kissinger even suggested a military invasion of the Persian Gulf if the crisis continued, exemplifying the perception among some US policymakers of an urgent need to contain the area in order to secure Western oil needs. Herrmann and Fischerkeller (1995) believe that US foreign policy follows a quasi-colonialist approach towards many countries in the Middle East such as Iraq, suggesting that the whole region is part of a kind of informal American Empire. This political outlook has helped shape the way many policymakers, and, in their wake, writers of popular fiction, view the region.

Saudi Arabia was the most influential Arab state to apply the boycott. Novels featuring this country presented different fictional imaginings of Anglo-American policy ambitions. In *The Fourth of July War* (1978), Allan Topol pictured a time when America would invade Saudi Arabia for increasing the prices of oil, improbably comparing the fictional conflict to the US War of Independence because it could liberate America from dependence on Arab oil. In *A Crack in the House of God* (1983), Giora Shamis and Diane Shamis imagined how the Americans and Soviets might collaborate in devising a plot to destabilise the Arab region. The result was to be the sending of 10,000 American soldiers to the Gulf as the "core of a multinational Gulf-protection force" (238). Robert Ludlum's *The Icarus Agenda* (1988) likewise told of a US decision to invade Saudi Arabia, an act that benefited not only "the Saudi Kingdom, but the entire world" (227).

Another key political event affecting portrayals of Muslims was, of course, the 1979 Iranian Revolution that toppled the pro-Western Shah rule, and after which Iran was placed under Islamic jurisdiction (for an analysis of the effect of the Iranian Revolution on the perception of Islam in the West, see Said 1985). Most importantly, the American hostage crisis that accompanied the Revolution generated a new negative Muslim stereotype: that of a crazed Ayatollah Khomeini and his fellow Shiite Mullahs conspiring against the West (see the following novels that deal with Khomeini: Murphy 1982, Innes 1983, Eastermann 1984, and MacKinnon, 1986).

In brief, popular fiction offers an insight into the way that ordinary people's beliefs, concerns and prejudices are shaped by political actors and events in the public sphere: the rise of Arab nationalist movements, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the appearance of militant Islamic groups, and the oil boycott. It also reveals the aspirations and wish-fulfilling fantasies by which such fears tend to be compensated: controlling the oil resources of hostile countries, toppling anti-Western leaders, and killing fanatical terrorists. Let us now look at how some of these phenomena play out within specific texts.

2. *The Novels*

Works of popular fiction dealing with the West's reliance on Arab oil began to flourish in the 1970s. In these novels, Arabs became mostly associated

with "the negative aspect of oil, i.e. boycotts, price increases, (often referred to as 'gouging,' 'robber,' etc.), and the price-fixing 'oil cartel'" (Suleiman 1982, 149). One such novel is Herbert Stein's *On the Brink* (1977), in which Arabs are shown as "crafty oil magnates who care nothing about the economic well-being of the world," and in which the reader is led to believe that Arab oil producing countries have to be controlled by the West for the sake of the world economic stability (Terry 1983a, 26, Terry 1983b, 324). Reeva Simon (1989, 48) commented on the transformation of the Arab image that took place following the oil boom, claiming that a "wealthy Arab" now

> rides in Cadillacs rather than on camels, and lives a belief based on hedonism, a conglomeration of Hindu eroticism and the Western perception of Muslim sexual mores: large harems and many concubines. Instead of hand-to-hand physical violence, today's bedouin petrosheikh can hire financial wizards to purchase giant corporations or terrorists to threaten the very Westerners who have provided him with his powerful new image.

It is important to pay closer attention to certain novels that appeared in the 1970s and 1980s because they represent the climax of the stereotyping process. The works discussed below are representative of the main types to be published during this period. The stereotypes and villains that populate them recur over and over again in mainstream Anglo-American popular fiction of the time.

Harold Robbins is one writer clearly exercised by the issue of Arab oil; Robbins had a Jewish father, but when he was between eight to eleven years old, a Jewish family adopted him and called him Rubin, which is how he received his name. According to his publisher, Robbins has sold 700 million books around the world, at an average of forty thousand a day. One of his best known works is *The Pirate* (1979 [1974]), and in the year of its publication the novel was made into a movie, indicating its wide public reception. The hero of *The Pirate* is a Western-educated Arab called Baydr Al Fay who descends from a royal family. Baydr's wealth has dramatically increased with his worldwide trade in oil, since "he controlled an international investment fund of over five hundred million dollars" (42). He is also very handsome and attractive (20), and Robbins presents him as a "playboy" (230) who spends his money extravagantly on women. In America, Baydr married his second wife, Jordana Mason, a bohemian American woman, whom he abused:

> Though he had been Westernised in many ways and she had become a Muslim, they were still separated by a thousand years of different

> philosophies. Because although the Prophet had granted women more rights than they had ever had until that time, He still had not granted them full equality. In truth all their rights were subject to man's pleasure. (132)

Jordana is presented as an oppressed woman who desires freedom, but she has no way to escape the harem-like atmosphere in which she lives. The novel strongly implies that any marriage between an Arab and a Western woman is doomed to failure because the couple come from different worlds. It further suggests that the two cultures can never meet because they always clash, and Islam is the reason behind the separation of East and West. "In his world the woman was nothing, the man everything. If she said to him that she had the same needs he did, the same … social drives, he would regard it as a threat to his male supremacy" (143).

In spite of the oil boom, life in fictional Arab countries is shown to be regressive and steeped in the detestable old customs of male supremacy. In Margaret Rome's *Son of Adam* (1978), for instance, the writer presents a highly fantastic image of the Arab homeland in which it is customary to see Arab males "refuse to admit a woman's existence except when necessity forced them to" (1978, 144). Similarly, *The Pirate* shows Arab men treating women like objects of pleasure as if they have no dignity at all; hence, Jordana protests: "I'm not an Arab woman who can be ordered about like a slave! … This isn't the Middle Ages … Neither are we in the Middle East, where you can lock me in a harem" (189). Jordana's marriage to Baydr dehumanises her because she feels as "if she were nothing but a receptacle for his own use and convenience" (193). In fact, Robbins perpetrates a typically Western stereotypical view of how Arab women are treated by their men when he puts these words in Baydr's mouth: "You are my wife, my possession, and you are only entitled to those rights and feelings which I allow you….You will live as I order you" (189). Baydr is also portrayed as a savage who regularly beats his two wives.

In a familiar technique adopted by many other writers, Robbins connects the Palestinian cause to the oil crisis by interweaving it into the plot. He presents the Al Ikhwah organisation, headed by Ali Yasfir, as corrupt and filthy; its members sell hashish in order to make huge profits, rendering their struggle illegitimate. The members are seen as a group of "thieves, blackmailers and murderers," and they are used to "demean and bring dishonour to the cause they pretend to serve" (292). Leila, Baydr's daughter, is later recruited by Al Ikhwah, whose aim is to create ruthless women. In order to denigrate the *fedayeen* cause, Robbins portrays the organisation as blackmailing Baydr. They hijack Baydr's aeroplane carrying his two sons

and wife in order to demand a huge ransom. The *fedayeen* are presented as a group of merciless killers who care only about money and profits, and Robbins shows nothing of their national yearning to liberate their occupied lands, attributing their motives to profiteering.

In order to rescue his kidnapped family, Baydr seeks a retired Israeli general, Ben Ezra, to perform the mission, perhaps to emphasise the Arabs' inability to act as required. Ben Ezra is, in fact, the archetypal Israeli superhero of twentieth century fiction; even the Arabs call him "the Lion of the Desert" (105). The plot resolution delivers 'poetic justice' as the Al Ikhwah villains are punished, and the Israeli victors left as the sole survivors. As Tom Dardis (1984) argues, Robbins is merely replicating traditional Western stereotypes, thereby comforting the reading public with what it thinks to be a familiar truth.

Another novelist who adopts a similar approach to that of Robbins is Paul Erdman, a Canadian-born writer and son of American parents. The issue of Arab wealth is his dominant theme, too, and Erdman's novels similarly lack deep characterisation, which is again sacrificed for the sake of the plot. His novel, *The Crash of '79* (1976) was a best-seller in its year and remained at the top of the best twenty novels list in 1977. Erdman subsequently spawned many imitators and established an entire genre which might be termed the 'economic thriller' (novels of this kind include: Leigh James' *The Caliph Intrigue* (1979), Wilbur Smith's *The Delta Decision* (1979), and Geoffrey Clarkson's *Jihad* (1981).

The Crash of '79 presents an imaginary economic conflict in the Middle East, culminating in an actual war, the winner of which will control the whole world. A character named Dr. Bill Hitchcock is presented as the chief financial advisor to one of the Arab countries since Arabs want someone to "help them *stay* rich" (1978, 12). In fact, Hitchcock's characterisation draws on Erdman's own knowledge and experience because the author had worked previously as an oil and gas consultant in the Arab world. The Arab country in question represents every rich Arab State wholly dependent on foreign assistance. Such countries are pictured as having an unprecedented source of money because of their oil production, and because they have "accumulated a hoard of savings that was absolutely unique in the history of mankind—over half a trillion dollars, an amount almost equal to the value of all the shares of the corporations listed on the New York Stock Exchange" (88). However, the country is threatened from the outside, and also from within by local nationalists supported by the Palestinians who, as in many such fictions, are seen as a corrupt group of "radicals" (111), having "a potentially elite revolutionary corps" (184).

The narrator (whom one can in this instance safely identify, broadly speaking, with the authorial voice) asserts that blackmail and economic threats are inherently linked with the Arabs after the "1973 bombshell", as he puts it: "The Arabs put an embargo on oil exports to the West, and within months, in the most successful blackmail attempt in the history of the world, had forced a quadrupling of the petroleum price" (29). Meanwhile, Abdullah, the new ruler of the state, is pictured as a backward man who is a threat and a menace to the West because he withdraws the dollars deposited in American banks and wreaks havoc there. Instead of pursuing the five-year development programme, he orders his people "to read the Koran and tend their goats. As they did before. Or get shot" (283).

The sheikhs withdraw huge amounts of money from European banks to deposit them in American ones, enhancing the reader's impression of their imaginary treachery and propensity for intrigue; Europe is "being stabbed in the back by an Arab dagger, guided by a Yankee hand" (234). In this context, Linda Blandford (1978), an American journalist, describes how Arab sheikhs in the 1970s received an almost universally negative press and were "accorded the blame for practically everything bad that has happened to us since and were hated as our new overlords" (1). Indeed. Peter Dickinson's *The Poison Oracle* (1974) conforms almost exactly to Blandford's account. Finally, Israel is interwoven into the plot; the novel ends with a complete Arab defeat that cannot be reversed. "Arabs are through. And if there is a winner in this whole mess, it is Israel. They are now safe" (349). Even in the fiction of financial intrigue, the Arab-Israeli conflict lurks in the background, eventually emerging to play the key role in the plot.

Similar trends can be traced within the work of the American romance writer, Maggie Davis, who also uses the *noms de plume*, Katherine Deauxville and Maggie Daniels. In *The Sheik* (1977), she presents the Rahsmani State, a fictional country, in which Arab characters live in a semi-medieval age. The author had visited Tunisia twice in the sixties and seventies and drew on her experience in the novel (Maggie Davis, e-mail message to author, 16 March 2002). Davis points out that *The Sheik* was published "at a time when there were virtually no popular novels with an Arab hero on the market, at least in the United States" (*Id.*). As Davis herself asserted: "At the time I was very conscious that readers in the US were generally uninformed about the Arab oil states or even the Arab world in general" (*Id.*). She claims with conviction that she was "earnestly devoted to presenting a picture, based on fact, of a young head of a Gulf oil country" (*Id.*). The numerous stereotypes that the novel contains suggest that

her efforts were not altogether successful, though there is no reason to doubt her intentions.

The novel deals with the character of Abdullah al Asmari. Like Robbins's Baydr, Abdullah is a wealthy, handsome playboy who seeks only power and pleasure. When he was twenty-three years old, his grandfather sent him to the United States to buy banks. There, he is pictured as a bohemian sex maniac who cannot control his lust, and he assaults two women. Abdullah himself is made to acknowledge that he is brought up in "the old sensuous Arab tradition that accounted women as one of the great pleasures in life, along with money and horses, to serve in any way that would bring the ultimate pleasure" (1979, 132–3). As in Robbins's work, so here, women are regarded as objects devoid of any feelings and sensations. When he is in the United States, a friend tells him of the value of having female friends, to which Abdullah replies: "Women are not part of the trading.... My people deal in oil and money now and a few well-bred horses and Cadillacs" (175). Such comments serve to intensify the enlightened reader's disgust towards this Arab character. Nancy Sullivan, Abdullah's American girlfriend, eventually challenges him, accusing him of being: "used to treating women like THINGS" (201). The writer presents the behaviour of Arab rulers as if they belonged to a medieval time when slave owning, concubines and absolutism still existed. Indeed, Abdullah's grandfather had once "brought him a concubine, an American girl" (23–4). Abdullah is not only "selfish, superficial and irresistible to women" (Terry 1985, 78) but also "a spoiled, wealthy young man (arguably not unusual in an Arab oil kingdom) who is suddenly exposed to the harsh realities of life, and responds successfully (sic) to them" (e-mail to author, 15 March 2002).

Another character, Ameen Said, a minister of education and public works and a graduate of an American university, is pictured as a patriot who refuses any compromise over Arab oil (33–4). But, like many other writers of popular fiction, Davis depicts Arab characters with such nationalistic convictions as dishonest; Said is shown later to be a traitor to Emir and the country. He cooperates with a Palestinian group called the Children of Fire, presented as an illegal gang having "no respect for anything" (335) and believing only in "anarchy" (336). Once more, Palestinians are interwoven in the plot in order be revealed as troublemakers. Said dies at the end of the novel in what appears as a symbolic punishment for not being pro-Western. And though, like Robbins's Baydr, Said is educated in the West, he retains his original 'bad' traits. In other words, it is implied that Arabs cannot change their nature no matter how much education and 'cultivation' they receive in the West.

I now turn to the works of Michael Mackenzie Thomas, an American financial consultant. His *Green Monday* (1980) became an international best-seller in the year of its publication. The novel is set in a fictional Arab country called Qu'nesh and tells of a fanatical, oil-rich Muslim ruler from the al-Misaz family who tries to control the world's economy by political intrigue, economic pressure and assassinations. Money has begun to flow into the country following the famous 1973 boycott, when "the kingdom became calculably wealthy" (1981, 82). The story revolves around how Qu'nesh State reduces the price of crude oil in order to achieve political and economic objectives, and specifically to persuade the king to buy huge American market stocks to be sold after a readjustment in the oil price. The title of the novel refers to the day on which the announcement of the new oil price is made. However, Prince Alrazi, a senior official, believes that it would be better declared at Easter because it is the "great gift of Islam to the West on the greatest Christian holiday" (159). Thomas intentionally accords Alrazi a religious rhetoric to show that the oil crisis is faith-based rather than political. In other words, a clash of religions rather than political antagonism is the main reason behind the conflict in the Middle East. Military threats are the only way to encounter the Arab danger, as Buster, the President's secretary elaborates:

> Those Arabs have been bitchin' about the dollar for six years now. They have been bitchin' about this Israeli peace treaty. They're scared…that they are goin' to wake up one bright mornin' to find the marines sittin' on them oil-fields, along with some Russians and Japs and Europeans, and their oil bein' sold *by* us *to* us for four dollars a barrel. (447)

As in the earlier-mentioned novels portraying an American invasion of Saudi Arabia, the US President believes that invading this Arab state would bring the price of oil down to four dollars per barrel. In fact, Thomas's description completely corresponds to Kissinger's doctrine of universal intervention. In another indirect US strategy, Arabs are intimidated and blackmailed into withdrawing their plan because of American threats to bomb "the greatest mosque in Islam" (477). Thomas is probably referring here to Mecca, with its importance to Muslim religious sentiment and consequently to Arab wealth. The novel strongly implies that the Americans are morally justified in their policies, that the Arabs thus have no right to their own resources, and that they must be grateful to the West for investing in their oil and for saving them from their medieval way of living. Once again, the whole region is viewed as part of an inherently American sphere of influence.

Inherited stereotypes are also dominant; Muslims are treated as savages, and the citizens of Qu'nesh are shown to be backward, illiterate, and ignorant of worldly matters (53). They have no capacity to master their oil production or even their own countries; the writer suggests that Arabs have no right to remain independent because they are incapable of submitting to the rule of law, or of sound thinking. Arabs are only "poor savages whose waterholes happened by chance to sit upon the source of the rest of the world's wealth" (60).

Another stereotypical Arab character featured is Colonel Osman, who is a mercenary, killing "chosen individuals, one at a time and alone" (399). He is a terrorist, and in order to connect the Palestinian struggle with the plot, the writer makes Osman a member of the PLO. While Robbins introduces the Al Ikhwan group and Davis focuses on the Children of Fire organisation, Thomas refers repeatedly to the PLO. In all cases, the Palestinians are portrayed as terrorists directly responsible for the troubles of the Middle East.

Finally, we should mention Laurie Devine, an American novelist, who writes of her impressions of the Arab homeland in *Saudi* (1985). Her work follows that of Davis in depicting Arabs as backward, filthy human beings. She shows life in a fictional Arab country, represented by two Arab characters, Rashid and Muhammed, who are "dark handsome brothers" (1985, 125), living among Westerners at the time of the oil discoveries. Rashid and Muhammed correspond closely to the 'Arab playboy' type familiar from the work of Robbins and Davis.

Devine suggests that the West is antagonistic towards Arabs for "quadrupling the price of oil; and triggering the panic of the energy crisis and fuelling an international financial recession" (13). As reflected in Thomas's previous remark, there is a recurrent conception that Arab oil belongs to the West, and that it has the right to sell it. Nevertheless, Devine acknowledges that Western states have exploited Arab oil in the worst manner, demonstrating that American popular fiction is not uniformly and consistently anti-Arab. "They've had unlimited amounts of incredibly cheap… Arabian oil at their disposal" (292). In *The Exploiters* (1974), Samuel Edward deals with the same theme, but his novel, which centres on a narrative in which the Americans send an expert to an Arab oil kingdom to stop its ruler from signing a contract with the French, concentrates on rivalry among the great powers. Here, then, is another exception to the otherwise unrelenting focus on Arab treachery and barbarism.

In Devine's novel, Rashid, a Harvard graduate, is one of the founders of OPEC which sponsored the oil boycott. He describes the purpose of the

boycott as being to "unsheath (sic) the oil weapon and use its economic power to force the West to redress thirty years of wrongs against the Palestinian people" (409). Rashid and his colleagues view Arab economic interests and those of Western states from an Islamic point of view:

> Twice in the past five centuries the Turks and their armies of Allah had swept all the way to the city's gates. Just out there, Islam had been turned back. Rashid did not think he and his fellows would be turned back this time.... *Inshallah*—if God willed it—at last the Muslims would use their oil as a weapon for a good cause, for the best cause. (405)

As also conveyed by Prince Alrazi's rhetoric, Rashid is shown as a man in conflict with the West on the basis of religious difference, enhancing the sense that he is prone to fanaticism. In the United States, he is abused and beaten by a group of Americans thinking that he is a coloured man (once again, authorial suspicion of Arab motives is not necessarily accompanied by a ringing endorsement of all things American; the situation is at times more complicated and multi-faceted than this.) The incident makes Rashid look to revenge in the form of oil nationalisation. As he puts it: "America must be shown it could not continue to cheat and win forever" (198).

Sunny, Rashid's American wife, faces the same dilemma in her efforts to be assimilated into an Arab society "whose values were so very different from her own", and where "right and wrong, good and bad, grace and sin were not the same as at home" (268). This is why her marriage to Rashid has not succeeded, and her relationship with her son, Khalid, has become a disaster. Sunny's experience echoes that of Robbins's Jordana Mason. Both writers attribute the problems to the rigid and extreme nature of Islamic culture. Khalid later becomes a devout Muslim and joins a religious organisation the name of whose very leader connotes violence and bloodshed. "Juhayman was so intense and wild-eyed that he was nicknamed el-wahash, 'the one who is like a wild beast'" (505). Khalid's beliefs result ultimately in an ignominious death which appears to be the fictional norm for all fanatical Muslims.

3. *Conclusion*

The fictional portrayal of the dishonest, primitive Muslim fanatic goes hand in hand with the image of the Arab as a terrorist. Arabia is shown as a place that has not changed since medieval times; its people are backward womanisers, but they are filthily rich. Many (though not all) writers

erroneously link Arab strife with the West to a conflict with the whole of Islam, instead of looking at the big picture in which politics play the major role. Furthermore, the similarity of the plot lines and character delineations in the novels discussed above suggests that most writers tend to borrow their ideas from, or at least operate under the influence of, the same media sources, which in turn are shaped by the foreign policy concerns of the governments that oversee (if not exert power over) their activities. But since political issues change with time, stereotypes alter accordingly, hardening, softening, or even disappearing in response to shifting events on the international stage. Clearly, for as long as political rhetoric in the West remains overwhelmingly suspicious of Islam and Muslims (as is the case in the USA in particular), the mainstream mass media are liable to absorb and reproduce that suspicion, though not necessarily intentionally, and not universally. Meanwhile, writers of popular fiction are no more immune to such trends than the public at large and may, in certain cases, even attempt to exploit them in order to appeal to the 'lowest common denominator' of public opinion.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the most egregiously prejudicial and reductive portrayals of Islam and Arabs in the popular media have tended to follow in the wake of 9/11. The figures of Osama Bin Laden, the leaders of the Taliban movement, and the followers of al-Qaeda have given new momentum to pre-existing stereotypes, which have also been fed by the flow of shocking images of beheadings, kidnappings and suicide bombings emanating from occupied, post-Saddam Iraq. It is, of course, quite misleading to equate politics with popular fiction entirely; they operate according to radically different discursive logics and make different epistemological claims. Still more dangerous is to assume that opinions expressed by fictional characters and third-person narrators align straightforwardly with the views of biographical authors, or with single, unambiguous 'meanings'. Nonetheless, it would also be wrong to ignore the very real influence that political events and media representations exert on popular culture and its modes of interpretation. In this light, as Reeva Simon (1989, 140) comments:

> Middle Easterners will continue to populate the casts of villains and conspirators, in popular fiction because authors know that today, after watching the evening news and reports of bombed American embassies, kidnapped or killed diplomats, and the latest exploits of religious fanatics, the public will readily read about Middle Eastern conspirators, and that books about the area will sell well.

Moreover, the stock of Arab/Muslim 'villains' on which popular fiction might draw, consciously and unconsciously, is already being replenished thanks to the more recent actions of Hasan Nasrallah, the leaders of Hamas, and Iran's President Ahmadinejad. If past patterns are anything to go by, the vilification to which such figures are likely to be subjected within novels will be intensified through supplementary representation in movies, video games, comics, cartoons, jokes, and even graffiti. The writers themselves (along with their numerous fans) will no doubt continue to defend their practices by reference to the very real associations with violence and aggression attached to these figures. But until they are prepared to adopt a critical distance from the media and government sources which inspire their storytelling, to provide more multi-faceted portrayals which take account of the complexity of the situations in which the violence occurs, to cease tarring all Muslims and all Arabs with the same brush, to explore the motives behind the 'threatening' stances taken by a small minority of them, and to treat them as rounded human beings, as rich in contradiction and contrariness as those who oppose them, their protestations must be rejected.