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Visual Communication 2004 3: 69

DOI: 10.1177/1470357204039599

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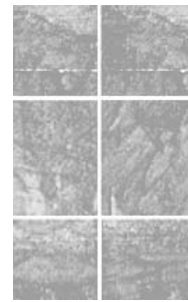
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The politics of space: the spatial manifestations of representing Middle Eastern politics in American and Egyptian cinemas

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the different ways contemporary American and Egyptian films construct and understand space in the context of Middle Eastern politics. The article contrasts Hollywood's relationship with space as one about mastery, mirroring America's 'from-above' approach to Middle Eastern politics, with the Egyptian films' more intimate portrayal of space, where conflicts are more localized and closer to home. Space is explored as both a physical and a mental/imagined/lived entity. In its analysis of issues like the representation of Islamic fundamentalism in the films and its spatial manifestations, the article demonstrates that political space is not a matter of core versus periphery, where 'we' reside within a space and 'they' outside it, but rather that old boundaries have been erased while new ones have been (re)drawn.

KEY WORDS

cinema • Egypt • Hollywood • Middle East • politics • space

WHY SPACE MATTERS?

Much of the political debate in the Middle East revolves around space. Space, both physical and imagined, is not only part of the identity of people, but also a dynamic tool often utilized to define the identity of nations. As Lefebvre argues, 'space is produced by social relations which it also reproduces, mediates, and transforms' (Natter and Jones, 1997: 148). Space thus is constantly in flux and carries multiple meanings. It is not a given, a neutral stage upon which history is played out. It is part of history and culture, constantly being defined and redefined. In other words, space is a cultural process through which 'pasts erupt into the present' (Gregory, 1997: 228).

This article aims at problematizing the representation of space in

contemporary American and Egyptian films about Middle Eastern politics. Space often passes unnoticed in cinema, becoming naturalized and/or fixed in our imagination as a given. The article will thus 'denaturalize' space through contrasting the two cinemas' use of space and the ways in which this is related to the films' political nature. The article argues that the use of space by the two sides, while not necessarily oppositional, reflects different approaches to common political issues. The spatial manifestations of representing Middle Eastern politics thus underscore both countries' divergent political agendas.

In what follows, I first analyse the various spaces represented in Hollywood, then move to a discussion of the uses of space in the Egyptian films. In doing so, the article links theory on space and its association with various socio-political positions with visual analysis of the films. The basis for selecting the films is that they take Middle Eastern politics as a central issue. As a result of this criterion it transpires that most of the American films analysed in this article belong to the action genre, a genre characterized by a masculine, open space. Hollywood's relationship with space here is one about mastery, relying heavily on open, wide and aerial shots of action occurring outdoors. The Egyptian films, on the other hand, happened to be mainly melodramas and, therefore, are largely confined to feminine, indoor spaces, with space looked at from the inside. It is a much more intimate portrayal of space. This use of space is reflected in the ways the two sides deal with the various political issues involved. Thus, America's approach to Middle Eastern politics as portrayed in the films is from 'above', suggesting mastery over the politics and over the Other regions where the conflicts are played out. It parallels America's constantly expanding political frontiers. Egypt's approach, by contrast, is one from 'below', where the conflicts are more localized and physically closer to home.

HOLLYWOOD'S SPATIAL POLITICAL STAGE

In his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said (1978) introduces the term 'imagined geographies' (p. 55) to denote (to borrow a phrase from Driver and Rose, 1992: 4) the 'maps of meaning' that colonizers created to make sense of Other land(s). In this sense, countries become subjective creations (Freeman, 1999). Yet the colonizers' view was that their imagined geographies were scientific and objective (as in the writings of Mary Kingsley, see Blunt, 1994a and 1994b). Hollywood's representation of Other spaces does not diverge greatly from this path. The Other spaces represented in Hollywood are political and ideological, yet are viewed from a distance that invokes a sense of objectivity. This is established through the use of various camera shots that in turn constitute space in this particular way: aerial shots, wide-angle shots, radar views, 'targeting' views, penetration views, and panning shots. The different camera shots, in turn, construct the Other space in various forms: as an object, as a target, as wilderness, as an urban jungle, and as a barrier/

border to be crossed. In what follows, I examine each of those forms with reference to particular films depicting various aspects of Middle Eastern politics.

Objectifying the Other space

Our first experience of San'a in Friedkin's film *Rules of Engagement* (2000) is a feeling of floating over the city. Masses of solemn houses, yellowish in the twilight, appear suddenly on the screen and jerk us from Wake Island in the Indian Ocean to Yemen. We soon realize that the view we are seeing is that of the American marines arriving in helicopters after a Yemeni terrorist attack on the American embassy in San'a. The helicopters' descent upon the city recalls the opening of Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*, where the first things we see are aerial views from Hitler's plane as it flies over and comes down on Germany. Just as Hitler is positioned as God, so the American marines' spatial representation bestows upon them an element of glory. At the same time, this representation invokes a sense of mastery over the Other landscape. The Other landscape is thus objectified by the American gaze. This scientific gaze denies a representation of the intricacies of the Other space, and hence its 'lived' aspects.

As Keiller (1982) comments:

... the higher we ascend ... the more we can see, but the less we know about events beneath ... it seems that it is the things that we don't see that are most important to the depiction of spatial experience in the films. (p. 48)

The invocation of American mastery is also established through the use of the radar view as seen in *The Siege*, a film depicting Islamic fundamentalist terrorism in the heart of the USA. The opening sequence of the film contains images of radar screens monitoring the movement of an Islamic fundamentalist Sheikh's car in the Saudi desert. The radar view shots do not depict the car in its actual form, but rather as a point in motion on the radar screen. As if to validate the radar's view, shots of the sophisticated radar screen are inter-cut with shots of the Mercedes as it glides through the sand dunes of the expansive Saudi desert. High-angle shots of the car moving in the arid land from the right- to the left-hand side of our screen further establish the car and the Sheikh, who is meant to represent Osama bin Laden, as objects of American scientific scrutiny. Blunt (1994a) sees this surveillance as an act of authority. *The Siege's* spatial depiction of this mastery is then twofold. First is the previously mentioned surveillance; second is the enabling of a physical penetration of the desert, with American spies having gone through the desert to set up a trap to capture the Sheikh. In this sense, the unknown Other space is defined in terms of lack (of power) (Massey, 1993), which legitimates control over the landscape (Rose, 1992).

Targeting the Other space

Sometimes the Other space is represented as a target. This is particularly seen in situations where American soldiers go into Other countries/landscapes. *Navy Seals*, a film where American marine troops are summoned to Lebanon to rescue a load of American missiles from the hands of militants, is an illustration of this. The film emphasizes the superiority of the American Seals over the Lebanese militias in the various fight sequences. The fighting takes place in Beirut, depicted as not much more than a shambles and mass of rubble. Beirut is meant to function as a generally passive background in the film, where the Americans victoriously encounter the Lebanese militias. The Seals penetrate the unknown landscape, hiding behind crumbling walls as they shoot their enemy. In their search for the missiles, they break into warehouses, slamming the doors open, and examining the space from every angle. The camera follows the soldiers as they go in, pans their angered faces, and lingers on the damage caused by their urgent search. When the soldiers shoot, the camera takes their side and portrays their targeting point of view. The Seals' bullets hit their targets, but also penetrate the urban landscape, adding to its existing symptoms of war: bomb and bullet holes penetrating everything, the walls, the buildings, even the roads. The space may be a background in the story, but it does carry with it the horrific aspects of war. The film does not explain how or why the missiles got to Lebanon. The focus remains on the pleasure derived from action sequences and on glorifying America (with the Seals finally succeeding in their mission). The conflict could have been anywhere, and the narrative is a classic one about the fight between good and evil.

The ideology of wilderness

One of the most commonly used images of Arabia is that of the desert. The desert is a classic example of the opposition between nature and science (Rose, 1992), between wilderness and civilization. Sometimes this distinction is depicted literally, with juxtaposing images of progressive, (sub)urban space and desolate wilderness (Short, 1991). *Rules of Engagement* heavily relies on this, with sharp editing that moves between the jungles of Vietnam, leafy American suburbs and the Yemeni desert.

The desert is also used as a signpost that serves both the narrative and the American political agenda. It acts as an icon (Nietschmann, 1993) that is reduced to a set of transferable 'imaginative associations' (Freeman, 1999: 58). The narrative is served because the desert is an example of a classic binary system (barbarism versus civilization); the political agenda is served because the desert is invested with ideology. It is not only – being 'foreign' – a 'condition of excitement' (Freeman, 1999: 58), but also a condition of fear. Fear is transposed to the people who inhabit the desert. They are seen as 'native' to the desert, i.e. they are naturalized as part of the landscape (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992), or as a reflection of what wilderness represents (Short,

1991). In the film *In the Army Now*, American soldiers, Bones and co., find themselves on a mission in the Libyan desert, trying to evict invading Libyans from Chad. The desert is inhabited by soldiers who are as savage as the land they occupy. Speaking roughly, dressed roughly and treating the Americans roughly, they seem to display the qualities of what is seen as the opposite of civilization, even though they possess such technological advances as weapons and television (which they use to get news from CNN). Here, as Baudrillard (1983) explains, the desert can be associated with the figure of the non-human or anti-human who is outside the social order (see also Short, 1991). Bones and co. get lost in the desert and see their situation as being 'nowhere' (Schaffer, 1994). Arabia, as desert, is thus denied its privilege as place. It becomes mute (Freeman, 1999), only spoken for by the (cognitive) mapping of the United States.

The ideology of the urban

Perhaps the most interesting shift that can be seen in the American films is the displacement of the condition of wilderness from actual natural settings to urban ones. In other words, the (Other) city now is portrayed as a negative space, a modern wilderness or a 'concrete jungle' (Short, 1991: 26). In many of the films, like *Rules of Engagement*, *Navy Seals* and *Programmed to Kill*, there is a stark contrast between the depiction of scarcely inhabited American landscape and crowded Arabian landscape (Budley and Safran, 1983). The American landscape is usually green (*Rules of Engagement*) yet urban (*The Siege*). Arabia, on the other hand, is a condensed hustle and bustle of seemingly overlapping houses (*Rules of Engagement*), narrow alleys (*The Insider*), and graffiti-covered walls (*The Delta Force*). Arab cities, in general, are structured differently from American ones. However, this difference is not represented positively; instead of the cities being portrayed as 'buzzing', they are depicted as cramped. This suggests a sense of claustrophobia and chaos (Naficy, 1996) which can be projected upon the Arab political scene.

The most significant example of the concrete jungle in the films is the depiction of Beirut. Beirut is an example of city as crisis (O'Healy, 1999). Freeman (1999) speaks of the internal consistency that occurs throughout films that utilize the same symbolic locations; in the case of Beirut, these have created and consolidated myths about the city and the people who inhabit it or are linked to it. Beirut is a city that is 'fossilized' (O'Healy, 1999: 241), its overrepresentation fixing it as a site of ruin, terror and chaos. Beirut thus belongs to a system of fossilized icons often depicted in cinema, like Cairo and the pyramids or the Arabian desert, icons which have become more real than the physical places they represent. This recalls Baudrillard's notion of simulacrum, where 'codes have superseded signs and ... the difference between the real and the reproduction is erased' (quoted in Freeman, 1999: 61–2). Beirut (like Other Arab places) in the films is a bearer

of anti-American sentiment, physically displayed through graffiti. Slogans like 'Death to America' are splashed all over the Arab cities (San'a in *Rules of Engagement*, Beirut in *Navy Seals* and *The Delta Force*), their foreign ambiguity (as they are written in Arabic) providing a further sense of threat to a non-Arabic-speaking audience. The walls of the Beirut space are thus reflectors of the political sentiment in the city as portrayed in the films. Beirut is also characterized as a place where 'normal' life does not seem to exist; the people living in that space are the fighters and the militias. It almost seems empty of civilians. (The same can be said about San'a in *Rules of Engagement*, where the apparent civilians, including women and children, turn out to be anti-American 'terrorists'). In this sense, the films deny Beirut its 'lived' existence.

Beirut is an ambivalent space. It is 'different' and this difference provides an element of anticipation which, when fulfilled, may or may not bring pleasure (Urry, 1990). Often described as the 'Switzerland of the Orient', Lebanon had been a tourist site before the Civil War. The Lebanese landscape, which combines snowy mountains and sandy beaches, had been a sign of interconnectedness – of seasons and topography and of cultures. This is evoked in *The Delta Force*, where a male Israeli Hizbullah captive is taken to an unknown place in the southern suburb of Beirut after the flight he was on is hijacked. As he is being dragged across the city's streets, the man nostalgically (and rather ironically) reminisces about the pleasure that the pre-war Lebanese landscape had provided him. Lebanon is thus mentally represented as a place that used to welcome Israelis until it was 'taken over' by Hizbullah and other Islamist groups (though we do not see that place). The result of this takeover is a radical change of the Lebanese landscape. Now, the country is characterized as a chaotic mass of rubble. The metaphor 'Switzerland of the Orient' thus becomes more than just about landscape. It carries with it an ideological meaning that renders Lebanon a Westernized oasis in the middle of a tumultuous Middle East. The Lebanese landscape thus is politically charged, with the film displacing the 'blame' for the changing face of Lebanon onto Islamic fundamentalists. The conflict is internalized, surgically removing the Israeli (foreign) contribution to the effacing of Beirut in specific and Lebanon in general.

The Other space as a barrier/border to be crossed

The Other landscape in the films is subjected to different acts of authority by America. Mapping and surveillance are two examples, but perhaps the most important case is that the Other landscape is often physically penetrated by the Americans. We see the Americans travelling to Lebanon in *The Delta Force*, *Programmed to Kill*, and *Navy Seals*, to Iraq in *Courage Under Fire*, *Three Kings*, and (figuratively) *In the Army Now*. Keiller (1982) argues that the penetration of landscape reduces it from space to object. Penetration by the masculine American nation can be seen as raping the feminized, weak

landscape. But the Other landscape here is also a barrier to political mastery. It has to be crossed, overcome, to ensure American victory; in other words, it has to be (re)territorialized. This implies three things. First, border/barrier crossing involves a physical penetration of land and its impregnation with another culture. Young (1995) explains that this is a seizure of cultural space. Second, this territorialization by Self over Other can be seen as enlightenment, as the start of civilization and the end of primitivism. Finally, as Young (1995) puts it, 'colonization begins and perpetuates itself through acts of violence, and calls forth an answering violence from the colonized' (p. 173).

Those three implications can be clearly seen in *Three Kings*. At the conclusion of the Gulf War, American soldiers in the film find themselves rescuing Iraqi civilians even though that means defying American army orders. The American scientific mastery over the Other nature is seen in the film's main character, Archie, and his mates passing through the mountainous landscape of the Iraq/Iran border in order to deliver the Iraqi civilians to safety. Mountains are traditionally viewed as the most inaccessible parts of landscape (Short, 1991), and so conquering them infuses the American soldiers with power over the Other landscape and consequently over the people who inhabit it. The film is full of images of American military vehicles and soldiers roaming the desert. When it ends with crossing the Iraqi border and with the Americans reincarnated as saviors of the oppressed Iraqi civilians, America's political frontiers are further expanded. The American identity is thus viewed as one projected externally, an all-embracing identity that seeks to better the Other landscapes and their people. This is reflected in American foreign policy (Williams, 1972), from Vietnam to the Gulf War to the Arab–Israeli conflict.

The American presence in Iraq is portrayed as bringing with it a new hope that is carried forward the further the soldiers move into and appropriate the Iraqi land. They bring with them physical prowess as well as humanity, and give the Iraqi people a chance of survival away from their primitive caves. Needless to say, the American presence involves a degree of violence, but the violence here is depicted as being directed at the Iraqi oppressors rather than at the oppressed Iraqi civilians. Cultural violence is glossed over through the depiction of a member of the American squad praying with the Iraqis in one of the caves. But the film cannot hide its self-aggrandizement. The camera works with the American soldiers as they cross the Iraqi barrier, with cameras placed on army vehicles travelling through the desert, allowing us to see the landscape unfold in front of our eyes and giving us a taste of the American sense of mastery. The camera also travels at ground level with the soldiers. This is not to give a sense of empathy with the land (by not objectifying it from above, for example), but to give that empathy to the soldiers as they explore an unknown landscape.

Penetrating the American landscape

The threat of the Other is not confined to foreign lands. Sometimes the threat happens at home, as seen in *Executive Decision*, *Hostage* and *The Delta Force*, where home is transported onto airplanes carrying American passengers, and *The Siege* and *True Lies*, where terrorist activities are carried out in New York and Florida.

'This is a hijack'!

The depiction of terrorism on board airplanes is obviously inspired by actual hijacking events in the 1980s (like the case of the TWA flight in 1985). But the cinematic portrayal is interesting because it invokes a sense of urgency and claustrophobia that is more clearly represented here than in any other kind of space. This can be seen in *Executive Decision*, *Hostage* and *The Delta Force* – three films depicting almost identical hijacking situations by Arab terrorists.

On board an airplane, there is no escape. This heightens the drama of hijacking/rescuing situations and, when resolved, also heightens the heroism of the saviours. The camera is more confined on planes, and so the variety of shots used is limited. But this also functions to portray the feeling of limitedness experienced by the hijack victims. In all three films mentioned, there is a heavy emphasis on low-angle shots when portraying the hijackers, thus making them appear larger and more menacing compared with their confined environment. There are also plenty of close-ups, both on the hijackers' and the victims' faces. This serves to increase the degree of horror illustrated. Mid-shots are also used to give a more collective feel of the terror inflicted, where we see the hijacker(s) in the aisle bordered by seat rows of frightened passengers. The sense of chaos in this situation is also often depicted through hand-held camera work and quick editing that sharply moves from the hijackers to the victims and vice versa, and from one side of the plane to another or from above to below.

Inside the American landscape

Yoshimoto (1996) points out that the representation of America is not confined to an inert set of images; on the contrary, representing America constitutes a set of conflicting images that are partially responsible for the emergence of the identities of other nations. This is the case in the identity of Beirut in the films, for example. At the same time we cannot analyse America's portrayal of itself as a nation as an isolated matter. As O'Healy (1999) puts it: 'in order to constitute itself, the subject needs to recognize, expel and disown what it is not. It needs, specifically, to demarcate its boundaries' (p. 250). Boundaries are not confined to borders with other nations; they can exist within the nation as well, as seen in the case of the Arab terrorists living in the United States in *True Lies* and *The Siege*, but more specifically the case of the Arab-Americans in the latter.

Foucault (1970) contends that the apparent 'natural' spatial oppositions such as inside (familiar)/outside (strange) are invested with ideology (see also Lewis, 1991), and hence are 'still nurtured by the hidden presence of the sacred' (quoted in Dumm, 1996: 38). In this way, the sacredness of a space implies the existence of boundaries that deny that space to Others. Hence, the Other's presence in a homeland (physically or culturally) is deemed profane. Morley (1999) explains that members of society produce imaginary geographies which locate them at the core, representing those outside as different and threatening. Sibley terms this the 'geography of exclusion' (p. 161), inhabited by 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1983). Natter and Jones (1997) explain that any

(social) process of centering entails a structuring [that]... implies the assignation of a periphery. Assignment to the periphery 'provides a home' – one of terror – for the 'other', the mere existence of which was both a provocation to, and the raw material for, the center. (p. 150)

In *The Siege*, Arab-Americans living in New York are summoned by the American army in order to capture those behind a series of terrorist attacks. The army herds all Arab-American New Yorkers, old and young, male and female, into massive cages on the streets of the city. Even Frank Haddad's (an FBI agent of Lebanese origin) son is taken to the camp. Aerial views of thousands of screaming Arabs in the cages are followed by panning shots of the seemingly identical faces and attire of the Arabs. While, on the one hand, the film's use of cages and its criticism of military action are part of an anti-totalitarianism message, cages also act as a vehicle of containment which constructs an internal barrier between self and disease. The political conflict between the US and the Arab terrorists in the film acts as a transforming factor on the American landscape. It moves from being a land of inclusion (America as a cultural melting pot) to becoming a land of exclusion (the 'authentic' American imagined community rejecting outsiders) (Soja and Hooper, 1993). Thus, the Americanness of Arab-Americans in America is 'unnatural' and unsettled, subject to being revoked at any time. The usual myths of mastery over the Other apply here, with the idea of the 'terrorist within' causing a great deal of distress to an American landscape that is (cinematically) traditionally 'non-penetrable'. The process of differentiation in the film is an attempt to reclaim this landscape. Of course, this differentiation is an attempt at denying the power embedded in the periphery, and which can 'deconstruct any center of which it is part' (Natter and Jones, 1997: 151).

EGYPT'S SPATIAL CONTRADICTIONS

Hollywood's depiction of space can be seen as an example of 'hegemonic cultural practices' (Natter and Jones, 1997: 150), where the social space

depicted is essentialized. The films 'attempt to fix the meaning of space, arranging any number of particularities, disjunctures, and juxtapositions into a seamless unity: the one place, the one identity' (Natter and Jones, 1997: 150) (here Arab as monolithic Other). But Natter and Jones emphasize that

hegemony, as the process that naturalizes both space and social relations, is like any form of power: never fixed or inevitable but always open to exposure, confrontation, reversal, and refusal through counterhegemonic or disidentifying practices. (p. 150)

This counterhegemony will be explored through the spatial representations of the other side, that of Egyptian cinema. Unlike the American films, the focus in the Egyptian films is mainly on the Egyptian space itself and its contradictions, on the one hand being an all-encompassing, mother-like space, on the other hand being a space that encloses itself in the face of Others. Yet the films go beyond the Egyptian landscape in their representation of Palestinians in refugee camps, where the landscape becomes a resistant Third Space.

The moderate national space

I start by analysing how the films imagine the Egyptian national space. The dominant national view of Egypt is as the 'mother of the world'. Indeed, the national space depicted in the films can be seen as an idealized, feminine one. This can be linked to the generic aspects of the films, as they are mostly melodramas, traditionally a feminine genre with emphasis on interior spaces, which makes the characters in the films comparatively less mobile than their American counterparts in Hollywood (Naficy, 1996). Such interior spaces can be seen in depictions of the home. The home is the centre of action for many films, forming a centre of gravity for the actions of the people inhabiting it. For example, in *The Terrorist*, we see a portrayal of a 'typical' middle-class family that is centred on the home. Home is where the family's only son expresses his political beliefs through placing Che Guevara posters on his bedroom walls. Home is where the elder daughter expresses her love for family guest, Ali, to her sister. Home is where the younger sister manages her daily affairs, from meeting her friends to exercising in the living room. Home is also where the whole family watches a football game on television and cheers for the Egyptian national team. Home thus acts like a mini-Egypt, and seems almost to form the universe of the characters' lives.

Beyond the home, the feminine space takes the shape of the physical space of Cairo, which is largely portrayed as enclosed and womb-like, with seemingly interwoven streets. Cairo's streets are also domesticated as people take their household chores there. In *The Terrorist* you see women washing their laundry on the side of one of Cairo's narrow and winding streets. However, this does not deny that 'the symbolic agency that controls this

space is clearly masculine' (O'Healy, 1999: 254). This is perhaps most visible in *Nasser*, a biographical film about the late Egyptian president. Nasser's wife in the film, Tahiyah, takes care of her husband's welfare and is in charge of domestic affairs (from cooking to looking after the children). However, it is Nasser who sets the rules of the house and the marriage, and obviously the Egyptian nation. This patriarchal yet moderate space, whether inside or outside the home, has no room for religious or political extremism. It is a space where allegiance to Egypt the nation is everyone's primary loyalty.

The outsiders inside: Islamic fundamentalists in the Egyptian landscape

Naficy argues that 'the inside and outside spaces express not only gendered subjectivity but also often national or ethnic imaginings and longings' (1996: 128). Considered a threat to national space, Islamic fundamentalists in the Egyptian films are ascribed a position outside the Egyptian national imagination, so it is not surprising that they are also outside spatially. By this I mean not only physically but also mentally.

Islamic fundamentalists in *The Terrorist*, *Birds of Darkness* and *The Other* are shown to live on the 'edge of society'. Even though they physically exist within the Egyptian landscape, they operate outside the society surrounding them. I say surrounding because they are not seen as part of that society, but as a threat to it. The physical representation of the fundamentalists' existence is always indoors. Closed space can be looked at as a way of symbolizing the Islamic fundamentalists' closed mind. Naficy's (1996) argument about films invoking 'confining but comforting claustrophobic spaces' (p. 131) can be applied to the way Islamic fundamentalists in the films are shown to regard their confined spaces as shelters from what they perceive as a hostile foreign culture. The fundamentalists live in minimalist, even barren, enclosed spaces. Ali's room in *The Terrorist* is perhaps the best illustration. A dark room with a grenade chest as a seat, a small bed, a rug, a faint light bulb hanging from the ceiling, and a plaque engraved with the word 'Patience' on the wall, the room is a reflection of Ali's dark existence. It serves to isolate him from the outside world. Denied the shelter of the womb of the city (Cairo), Ali turns to his own shelter.

At the same time, Ali's shelter creates a cocoon for him to retreat into from the pleasures of society. This contrast is best portrayed by Ali's walk down the Cairo street leading to his rigid room. The street buzzes spontaneously (Pidduck, 1998) with movement, colours and human interaction, with street vendors, people in colourful attire and neighbours chatting, all crossing Ali's path (or rather, Ali crossing their path, as he is an intruder). The street also provides sexual pleasure, with a voluptuous woman walking straight in front of Ali and unknowingly offering an experience denied to Ali in his confined space. The walk down the street thus is a metaphor for a passage through (outer) life. Ali quickly hides from life's

temptations in his room, a room linked to the outside world only by sounds coming in through the shaded window. The space between the blades of the window blinds becomes Ali's only physical access to the pleasures of the outside world. Ali uses it to peep on his female neighbour whom he fantasizes about – a metaphor for all the pleasures he desires but is denied. Ali's experience is best summarized by Adrian Searle (2000):

Going to the window ... becomes a figuration of disconnectedness from one's surroundings, but it is also the first step, (get up and go to the window) of finding, or re-finding one's place in the world. (p. 3, catalogue essay in Still, Site Gallery, Sheffield, quoted in Betterton, 2001)

Thus, Ali's window experience becomes an attempt at entering the denied Egyptian space. At the same time, it emphasizes to him his exclusion from it. The window becomes a 'transparent filter' (Pidduck, 1998: 382) between Ali's life and the outside world, and marks his physical and sexual constraint. The camera in the scenes uses a lot of point-of-view shots, panning and tilting around the room, zooming in and out at the length of the street, and looking down on Ali's neighbour. Therefore, the transformations of everyday space for Ali, that we see, are almost entirely subjective (Keiller, 1982). This subjectivity highlights the various juxtapositions of Ali's life and the outside world: his is colourless, the world's is colourful; his is silent, the world's bustling with sound; his is closed, the world's comparatively open and full of possibilities. These juxtapositions are constructed through camera work that pans the walls of Ali's room as they are closing in upon him, allowing us to see what Ali is seeing when he peeps on his neighbour.

The Egyptian landscape thus is open yet enclosed, drawing boundaries between self and Other. However the film offers the fundamentalist a chance to become absorbed in the Egyptian social space: Ali is slowly drawn back into non-extremist society through the compassion of a family that ends up hosting him and showing him an appealing, alternative way of living that respects religion but is not extremist. In this way, enclosed spaces of the mind are opened up, at the same time emphasizing Egypt's national identity as open, and idealizing Egypt as enlightened.

Cyberspace, marginality and globalization

The Other is the only film in the sample that moves beyond physical space and into cyberspace as a site where political struggles are fought. Cyberspace is also represented as a site for the realization of fantasy, whether personal or political. In particular, the film represents a constant connection between Islamic fundamentalists and the United States, conducted through email and internet chat. Cyberspace thus allows an otherwise undetected convergence between the terrorism of the first and the imperialism of the second, with disastrous results.

The film revolves around a young Egyptian journalist, Hanan, who falls in love with a half-Egyptian, half-American man, Adam. Adam's mother, Margaret, is an American businesswoman who detests Egypt yet is engaged in fraudulent business plans that would allow her economic control over the country. She is also obsessed with her son, to whom she turns to provide her with the love and attention she lacks in her marriage. She opposes his marriage to Hanan, and forms an unholy alliance with Hanan's brother, the Islamic fundamentalist Fat'hallah, who also opposes the relationship and promises Margaret that he will force the couple to divorce. Fat'hallah also aims at controlling Egypt through the establishment of an Islamic fundamentalist regime. Fat'hallah and Margaret are revealed to be partners, using the internet to communicate and conduct their personal deals, as well as illegal arms and immigration deals. Cyberspace is thus represented as a site for the realization of fantasy, not only politically but also personally.

For both, cyberspace is a space where they can exercise power. It gives Margaret the chance to control her son's life by keeping a computer file on his life (including a database of all his ex-girlfriends). Adam in the film is an Egyptian nationalist. Hence, cyberspace becomes a tool that allows symbolic control by American imperialism over Egypt. For Fat'hallah, power is exercised through his use of cyberspace as a space of sexual fantasy. In an online conversation with Margaret, Fat'hallah chooses Paris as the virtual location of their 'meeting'. Images of Montmartre prostitutes as well as the Eiffel Tower are here reproduced as national symbols of France and specifically of Paris. Paris acts as a metaphor for Fat'hallah's repressed sexual fantasies, invoked through the city's mythical association with sexuality and permissiveness (Phillips, 1999). It also acts as a metaphor for Fat'hallah's view of the West as promiscuous. As Baltazar (2001) argues, cyberspace allows the subject to manipulate space to fit their needs, rather than 'fragmenting the identity' (p. 28) to fit the space. Cyberspace is an ideal, imagined space that allows Fat'hallah to transgress the constraints he has imposed on himself as an Islamic fundamentalist and thus guarantees him a virtual victory in his struggle with himself. In this sense, cyberspace can be seen as an example of what Soja (1989) terms mental space or Second Space: a space that is generated by and conceived in the minds of those who consequently 'inhabit' it.

The internet is an agent of anonymity, where anyone can be whoever they want to be, an enabling medium that allows the individual to go beyond their social self (Turkle, 1996; Hjarvard, 2002). It also confuses or blurs the boundaries between the spaces in which those in 'dialogue' exist (Freeman, 1999). Cyberspace has created communities that are not necessarily physically or nationally bound, but which transcend the sacred boundaries of home and nation (like the subgroup of fundamentalists and Americans), forming their own private spaces (Morley, 1999). Yet we have to remember here that, even though cyberspace communities are not national, they are not detached from the nation (Bhabha, 1999). Indeed, the political arguments

conducted between Margaret and Fat'hallah are inherently about Egypt as a nation (as they both ultimately aim at controlling it, economically for Margaret, and politically for Fat'hallah), and, at the same time, a reaction to the 'nature' of this exclusive nation that denies the fundamentalists' political representation (as Islamic fundamentalist groups are denied parliamentary participation in Egypt). Cyberspace thus is a way for both sides to (re)claim the nation.

However, closer inspection reveals the artificiality of the 'dialogue' between Margaret and Fat'hallah. Although the two sides are communicating, they are both setting traps for and deceiving each other. Margaret informs the police about the physical location of Fat'hallah, while he lies to her about helping divorce his sister from her son. The internet here acts as a theatre for the operation of those global actors, allowing them to escape the bounds of the nation-state and form a subculture (Sassen, 1999). However, in this particular context, the outcome of this is that the internet is not operating as a site of freedom and resistance. On the contrary, it is a site of oppression where two villains meet.

The internet can also be looked at as allowing individuals in different physical spaces to interact 'privately' in exclusive chat rooms. The discussion between Fat'hallah and Margaret is a 'private' one, making their politics an exclusive spatial activity denied to any outsiders. The internet in the film is not seen as being open to the non-villains, the Egyptians; it is vilified. So Adam, Hanan and their friends are depicted as not using the internet, although they have the means to. Technology is thus 'theirs', and not 'ours', giving it a sinister meaning. Yoshimoto (1996) explains that, with no more physical space to conquer, virtual space is colonized. The film depicts cyberspace as a new frontier which the United States is attempting to colonize.

So, even though cyberspace has constructed what Morley labels virtual geographies, where, in the words of Wark, 'we no longer have roots, we have aērals' and 'we no longer have origins, we have terminals' (quoted in Morley, 1999: 158), it has not erased the affiliation to the nation. Shohat (1999) says that cyberspace provides an imaginary home; she does not say whether cyberspace provides an imaginary homeland. This can be applied to the case of the Islamic fundamentalists in *The Other*. Despite limiting their interaction with the outside world to the internet, they do not use cyberspace as a substitute homeland. Yes, it is an imagined home, conceived in the absence of a physical one (as the film portrays the fundamentalists as living outside society), but it is mainly used as a tool to reclaim the homeland from which they are exiled (Egypt). Cyberspace, then, is not detached from physical space (the Egyptian landscape). This is in line with Shohat's (1999) argument that cyberspace is another zone in which conflicts are carried out, and which is connected with the corporality of its users. She also stresses that by being another space, and not a substitute space, existing local and global power relations are merely extended to this new space, rather than being

displaced from the physical one. Therefore, rather than being an interactive global space that connects people, the film views cyberspace as a global network of villains, and globalization as a threat and as corruption.

Beyond the Egyptian landscape: Palestine as a resistant homeland

The most intricate illustration of the complex role that space plays in represented political conflicts is the case of Palestine as imagined in the films. The Palestine problem itself is one largely about space, where the same landscape is fought over by conflicting parties. However, the importance of space here is not just because of the physical space of Palestine; more important are the ideological connections that that space carries. Specifically, Palestine is a bearer of history, religion and myth (for example, Arabism). Yet its most important face is as a homeland. The Egyptian films closely focus on imagining Palestine as a lost homeland, playing this out against broader issues such as diaspora and exile, and also the myth of Arab unity. The Arab world emerges as a solid unit in the face of the Israeli aggressor (as seen in *Nasser*, *Nasser 56*, *Naji al-Ali* and *Road to Eilat*).

The importance of Palestine as a place lies in its position as one of the major carriers of meaning for the Palestinians and Arabs in general. Nietschmann (1993) explains that it is this position that emphasizes the importance of place for invaders. Place is infused with the identity of people and their inherent power. Therefore, 'people, institutions, and resources may be captured, but if place can't be erased, then the occupation will never be victorious' (p. 8). An example of this is the renaming of Palestine as Israel. Nash (1994) sees naming (like mapping, Blunt, 1994a; McEwan, 1994) as an act of authority that reflects the fluid, unstable and open nature of space, rendering it open to the strategic/manipulative use by marginal/dominant groups. It is precisely this idea that we see in the Egyptian films in their stance towards Israel, and, hence, in their attempts at reclaiming Palestine.

By keeping the history of Palestine alive, *Naji al-Ali* can be seen as an attempt to reclaim the lost land. The film uses a mixture of point-of-view and wide-angle shots in this context. Point-of-view shots are used to represent the Palestinian people's individual view of their history (the Der Yassin massacre and their existence in refugee camps). The film establishes that the current marginalization of Palestinians in refugee camps in Lebanon is due to their ejection from Palestine in 1948. To emphasize this, the film goes back and forth in time, representing the point of view of the young Naji both in the refugee camp in the south of Lebanon, as he tries to make sense of his barren surroundings, and in his flight from Palestine, as he observes the suffering of people around him. This may serve to generate audience empathy with Naji and the Palestinian people, and makes their suffering more intimate. Wide-angle shots are used in the depiction of Palestinian resistance through the film's fighting sequences. The camera moves back and

upwards as we see men shooting at Israeli tanks that are invading the camp, and women throwing hot water from balconies on the Israeli soldiers' heads. While the use of high-angle, distant shots may be seen as creating emotional distance between the characters and the audience, such shots have been effectively utilized by film makers like Eisenstein in *October*, for example, to generate audience empathy (Keiller, 1982). High-angle shots do not allow us to see the characters' point of view here, but this camera use may enable us to understand their broader experiences of space.

The concept of homeland as a remembered place constructs it as an imagined, idealized space; but homeland is also used by displaced people as a unifying, 'symbolic anchor' (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992: 11). In other words, it is empowering (Bisharat, 1997). The place of displacement, or the margin (in the case of Palestinians, the refugee camp in *Naji al-Ali*), thus becomes a site of resistance. Bhabha (1990) and hooks (1990) agree that, when space becomes a space of resistance, it no longer is merely imagined, but becomes a Third Space. This means that, according to hooks, being at the margin becomes a matter of choice because it is empowering; people are not marginalized, they *choose* the margin as a space of resistance. This space is the lived space of the people, and carries their present and their history. So unlike Palestine as an imagined utopia, the refugee camp is what Foucault terms 'heterotopia', a space invested with the complexities of power and knowledge, but also with the lived experiences and histories of the people connected with it. Soja (1996) explains that, in this context, spatial knowledge is transformed into (spatial) action in a field of unevenly developed (spatial) power (margin/centre). This is how we may look at this space as Third Space. It is not just a medium through which the marginalized attempt to exercise power, it is also the outcome of their actions. (Third) Space is both an instrument and an outcome of resistance. It reflects the struggle over the right to a space, and also the right to be different, to be on the margin. That is why Lefebvre (1991) has stressed the importance of what he calls the 'trialectics of spatiality', that spatiality, historicity and sociality are overlapping and interactive. So, when people choose marginality, both margin and centre are deconstructed and disordered. Third Space is thus essential for the survival of the oppressed; the concept allows us to comprehend how they look at the centre and the margin at the same time and understand both (hooks, 1990). The notion of Third Space is thus useful here because it undoes the binaries of inside/outside, centre/margin, real/imagined.

The refugee camp as a Third Space is also an illustration of how space in this context is a foreground. In contrast with Selwyn's (1995) argument that the Palestinian landscape is a space where the increasing Arab population is perceived as a threat by Israelis, Palestine in the films is no longer a stage upon which political conflicts are fought; it is itself part of conflicts, through the lived experiences of its people. This recalls Shohat's (1989) observation of an image of a Palestinian fighter in a film who seems

to be emerging from the land. In this sense, the land and the people merge into one entity where you cannot separate one from the other.

IMPLICATIONS

Through an analysis of the various roles space plays in the films, one can draw some important distinctions between the American and the Egyptian films' relationship with space. One of the most distinctive comparisons is the gender/generic aspect. While Hollywood's films take place in a masculine, open space, the Egyptian ones limit themselves to feminine, closed spaces. This is partly because the former are generally action films, while the latter are melodramas. Yet, in Hollywood, action usually occurs within the space of the Other, namely Arab countries. Those countries are characterized by their wilderness, whether natural or urban. This establishes two things. First, the Other space is objectified/feminized through penetration by the Americans. The role of American soldiers and intelligence officers in the films is depicted as to discover and conquer the Other landscape. Second, the Other space is feminized as nature versus the American culture or science. The Other space is objectified by the American gaze through practices like mapping and surveillance. This is established through heavy usage of wide and aerial shots that imply mastery over the landscape. The Egyptian films, in contrast, use a lot of mid-shots, close-ups and point-of-view shots of landscape, which is a more individual, intimate view of space. Using Keiller's (1982) argument, the contrast between external views of space (wide shots) and individual perspectives of space (characters' point of view) means that, while the Hollywood films depict space, the Egyptian films depict the *experience* of space. This can be transposed onto people, denied their individuality in the Hollywood case, and depicted as people with individual experiences in the Egyptian one. This is also seen through the focus on history, personal and national, in the Egyptian films, which depict spatiality as a producer (not just as a product) of history. This is in contrast to the general absence of history in the Hollywood films. In this sense, cinema acts as a 'national institution which is merely symptomatic of broader political and economic relations' (McQuire, 1998: 203).

With boundaries still existing between cultures, we can see that territorialization has not disappeared; it has been redefined. Space has been reterritorialized (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992). This means that identities are also re-(rather than de-)territorialized (e.g. Naficy, 1991). The existence of displaced people (the Palestinian diaspora, for instance) is a case here. Diaspora in general has challenged the idea of fixed homeland. Questions of belonging have been complicated, the line between colonizer and colonized has been blurred, and concepts of local politics are seemingly no longer valid. This creates a sense of anomie, portrayed in the films through the Islamic fundamentalists who are 'here' but also 'there', the Arab-Americans who are ascribed a marginal loyalty to the American whole, and the Palestinian

refugees in Lebanon who are not accepted as part of the Lebanese nation despite the many years they have spent there (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992). Diaspora thus 'is an invocation of communal space which is simultaneously both inside and outside the West' (Keith and Pile, 1993: 18) (I add the national space). Hence, boundaries are not disappearing with diaspora. Freeman (1999) argues that such group formations strive to homogenize and maintain social order within their own socially constructed and practised boundaries.

Thus, the state of displacement does not just apply to those who are physically or culturally displaced (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992). Displacement also applies to those who remain in the same physical or cultural place, who find that their illusion of home has been shattered, thus breaking their perception of a natural link between place and culture (the nationalist imagining of the United States and Egypt).

Anderson's concept of imagined communities can be applied here, whereby

imagined communities ... come to be attached to imagined places, as displaced peoples cluster around remembered or imagined homelands, places, or communities in a world that seems increasingly to deny such firm territorialized anchors in their actuality. (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992: 10–11)

Space thus is a question of power (Foucault, 1970). It is a cultural construction; its meanings are based on the social power structure of the culture representing those meanings (Rose, 1992). Space can be seen as a question of difference; it is differently configured by different players in order to affirm different identities (Soja and Hooper, 1993). However, instead of viewing boundaries between Us and the Other as places of communicated difference, of negotiating difference, as places of dialogue, both the American and Egyptian films lack any dialogue surrounding issues of national frontiers, resorting to authentication to imagine and legitimate their political agendas.

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