

Mapping the Nation and Security in Global Space: A Comparative Study of Danish, Egyptian, and U.S. Action-Adventure Fans

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This article explores how being an action-adventure fan resonates with articulations of national identity, attitudes toward other nations, and fear of global terrorism in the United States, Denmark, and Egypt. Action-adventure film relies on global Hollywood production, yet the reception of this genre works quite differently in the cultural contexts of communities and affinities of fans. Being an action-adventure fan appears to bear a close relationship with a tendency to exhibit fear of global terrorism and to conceptualize Americans as heroes, particularly among U.S. audiences. Danish and U.S. fans seem more likely to want to cast Egyptian characters as villains than their non-fan counterparts, whereas Egyptian fans prefer Danish characters to be villains. Limited characterizations in this genre inspire and reinforce the imagined scenarios of fans in which American heroes are justified in crucifying foreign villains.

Keywords: action-adventure, political attitudes, United States, Denmark, Egypt

This work explores how action-adventure fans based in Egypt, the United States, and Denmark map their own and others' nations and fear of terrorism through their engagement with action-adventure film. Research on the potential consequences of consuming problematic narratives and stereotypes is beginning to offer empirical evidence of our need to be concerned with the Orientalist ideologies dominating Northern, Western media. Previous work on Arab American and other U.S.-based communities demonstrates clear differences in the ways that viewers interpret the overly simplistic or projected realism of action-adventure films produced in the United States, contingent upon identification with heroes or with villains, as well as with competing senses of realism and critique and national and other cultural identities (Wilkins, 2008). In this research project, a comparative analysis of viewers in three countries offers evidence that being an action-adventure fan, given different cultural resonance with dominantly American heroes and non-American villains, is not a universal experience, but is necessarily contingent upon the community in which interpretations are articulated and the structure in which films are produced, distributed, and consumed.

¹ Sincere thanks to George Marquis, Rikke Schubart, and Erin Lee for helping to distribute these surveys.

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Date submitted: 2011–07–03

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The key dimensions explored in this research focus on articulation of national identity as well as attitudes toward other nations and global security. Identity constitutes a composite of complex attributes, integrating cultural, ethnic, sociopolitical, and many other types of perceived connections with constructed human communities. This study focuses on national identity not to trivialize these other important senses of self but to connect with the dominant characterizations of nation in the narrative of action-adventure.

Political attitudes toward constructed nations and fear of terrorism are seen as conceptually part of a broader sociopolitical mapping of global space, cognitively conditioning interpretations of media, inspired and perpetuated through social and political conditions in national and local communities. This conceptualization of mapping stems from Gregory Bateson's (1972) work, in his explorations of how social constructions create "maps" that are distinct from "territories," representing the product of political struggles over the categorization of areas, routes, and directions (Wilkins, 2009).

The construction of a global space we may refer to as the "Middle East" illustrates an outcome of mapping that embodies centuries of political imperialism. Maps such as these suggest "geopolitical truth" (Dittmer, 2005) when learned as "facts," thus legitimizing the territorial boundaries as "natural" rather than as politically contested fences. Global maps delineating nation-states justify the division of complex cultural groups into seemingly neatly defined nations, despite the strength of transnational ties and the prevalence of conflict over national borders. To understand how mediated constructions of the world contribute to social constructions of global space, this work questions how being an action-adventure fan relates to key political attitudes.

This study expands upon earlier research by drawing attention to other cultural contexts with divergent compositions and experiences with Arab and Muslim communities. The selection of Denmark allows us to consider a Northern, Western context with a history of political controversy around freedom of expression and respect for Islam (particularly in terms of the recent dialogue over political cartoons). The choice of Egypt incorporates an Arab setting with its own political controversies in relation to indigenous religious communities. The United States marks a site most culturally proximate to the production of globally distributed action-adventure film. It is the Orientalist narrative of this genre that inspires concern.

Orientalist Narrative in Action-Adventure Film

Action-adventure film serves as the framework for this study, given its recognized stereotyping of Arab and Muslim men as villains vanquished by American male heroes, typically in plots situated in global landscapes. While news and popular culture produced in the United States and in Denmark have been critiqued for relying on Orientalist frameworks more broadly, focusing on this particular genre allows a more careful exploration of national and global sentiments.

Action-adventure film gains importance given the dominance of this patriotic allegiance in global film industries. The relatively uncomplicated narrative structure and limited dialogue make this a financially profitable genre across cultural contexts. Although a global profit incentive may be used to justify an industrial interest in this cross-cultural appeal, the producers of these films tend to be situated within Northern, Western cultural contexts in which Orientalist approaches dominate (Mandel, 2001). *The*

Siege serves as a useful illustration of this genre, exploiting negative Arab characterizations in a plot with little historical or political context (Wilkins & Downing, 2002).

It is not just that this genre constrains one type of character in a negative light, but also that the projection of hero and plot are limited as well, articulating a particular vision of global geopolitical space. The American male hero, personified in one example by Captain America (Dittmer, 2005), privileges a White Middle American persona juxtaposed against a foreign, Islamic threat situated in the Middle East (Eisele, 2002; Said, 1997).

Attention to Orientalism as an ideological framework (Said, 1978) helps us to understand the relationship between a textual reliance on Arab and Muslim men as villains and other narrow characterizations and the broader political historical context in which these films are produced. Grounded in limited projections of Arab and Muslim men as the cause of trouble for innocent women and children in need of rescue by White American men (Alaswad, 2000; Deep, 2002; Marchetti, 1989; Shaheen, 2000a, 2000b, 2001), action-adventure embodies and perpetuates Orientalist fictions. This article explores the potential consequences of these mediated stereotypes to limiting knowledge of global politics and enhancing fear of terrorism given different cultural contexts.

Mapping Global Space

When action-adventure film builds on suspense provoked by the acts of terrorists, concerns with national security become part of the narrative. This articulation of nation demarcates boundaries typically separating the origins of heroes from the foreign bases of their enemies. Global space in this instance privileges territorial boundaries of nation-states as legitimate and powerful. How viewers inculcated with years of affinity for and consumption of action-adventure film relate to this mapping of global space needs to be understood, particularly in terms of an assertion of national identity, attitudes toward foreign nations, and a sense of global fear.

Global fear rests on concern with terrorism, which underlies a persistent narrative in action-adventure film. Audience studies suggest that this problematic stereotyping becomes implicated in the cultural memories of audiences discussing films (Wilkins & Downing, 2002), even when the film's main villains are not explicitly described in the text as Arab (Wilkins, 2009). Media studies that focus on genres other than action-adventure offer evidence that popular culture and news have the potential to promote prejudice, particularly when audiences are asked to remember the ethnicity of characters in drama and suspects in news reports (Oliver, 1999; Rockler, 2002; Shah, 2003). Some of this research has focused particularly on attitudes toward Arab communities, connecting intentionally negative portrayals to subsequent prejudices (Salazar, 2004). Attitudes toward global communities are intertwined with complex assumptions made about regional, ethnic, religious, and other communities intersecting with national identities.

The three sites selected for comparative study have particular political, economic, and cultural connections with each other. As the least wealthy of the three, Egypt has been one of the largest recipients of U.S. foreign aid as well as a site for political protest against cartoons published in Danish newspapers in 2005. The Danish cartoon controversy illustrates ways in which mediated projections and discourse offer opportunities for groups to articulate and contest identities. Elseewi (2007) argues that Danish concerns were rooted in regionalized "European fears of a globalized world," in which "(a)ttempts to essentialize both their 'own' civilizations and the Islamic East were attempts to universalize Western experience and attempt to map it onto the new global spaces" (para. 72).

Egyptians were more likely to consider Denmark than the United States as hostile to their interests, according to an Egyptian government survey a year after the publication of the offensive cartoons (BBC, 2006). This sentiment against Denmark transcended age and socioeconomic status. Concern with the decision of Danish newspapers to commission these depictions of Muhammad was shared, though, by many in the United States (61%) and Denmark (49%) (Stephens, 2006). While Egypt can be seen as recently negatively inclined toward the country of Denmark, U.S. public opinion over time demonstrates a consistent anti-Arab sentiment (Daniel, 1995; Shaheen, 1997, 2000a; Slade, 1981). However, U.S. public opinion of Egypt specifically, seen as a key U.S. ally, had been favorable (58%) until protests against Mubarak in 2011 inspired sympathy, reducing public opinion against the Egyptian regime to 40% according to Gallup poll results (Drake, 2011).

Opinion polls conducted in the United States and in Egypt show similar trends in the favorability of one's own nation contrasting with less favorability for the other (Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2006). While most surveyed in the United States professed positive attitudes toward their own country (77%) and its people (85%), only half had favorable attitudes toward "Arabs" (50%). Similarly, most Egyptians (90%) held positive attitudes toward Arabs, but expressed much less positive attitudes toward the United States (30%) and Americans (36%). Another survey (BBC, 2006) suggests that Egyptian constituents were more likely to blame U.S.-Egyptian controversies on "Western nations' disrespect for the Islamic religion," whereas their U.S. counterparts were more likely to assign responsibility to "Muslims' intolerance to different points of view." More recently, polls in Egypt indicate that two-thirds of Egyptians believe the United States plays a negative role in the world (Kull, Ramsay, Weber, & Lewis, 2009). Differentiating political attitudes toward nation-states in terms of particular political regimes from sentiments toward the people who reside in those countries matters, in that concerns with political leaders, parties, and policies are not equivalent to potential prejudices about groups of people identified with a nation. This sense of national identification, for self as well as other, locates political attitudes within a global map approximating familiarity against perceived cultural distance.

Cultural resonance may influence film appeal in terms of cultural proximity and language (Straubhaar, 1991). English-language U.S.-based productions still are the most widely viewed films globally, though the United States falls behind India and Nigeria in terms of film production (UNESCO, 2012). Still, many more films are produced in the United States (more than 101 in 2009) than in Denmark or Egypt, though their output appears roughly similar (in same range of 21-60 in 2009), with Egypt being a key film distributor within the Arab film market. Access to films through cinemas, homes, and cellular

devices also varies given the different economic bases across and within these countries. These three sites differ greatly in terms of their political concerns, economic resources, cultural contexts, and media access.

Research Approach

This research explores how action-adventure film fans in Denmark, Egypt, and the United States articulate their national identities within a global context as well as their sense of foreign nations and global terrorism. Discussions of action-adventure film offer a forum for viewers to praise and critique prominent themes in the films pertaining to the moral righteousness of particular characterizations of heroes, the amorphous and unexplained evil of portrayed villains, and the monotonous and simplified landscapes of projected settings. It is not assumed that consumption of action-adventure film directly influences particular knowledge and attitudes about global politics nor that only those who hold particularly dire concerns with the threat of terrorism are attracted to action-adventure film. Instead, attraction to and perceptions of action-adventure film are understood as a complex set of social interests and acts, circumscribed by the possibilities of viewing given the political-economic structures that direct the production and distribution of film and the cultural contexts in which interpretations are sustained.

The comparative design of this project uses a matched methodological and sampling approach in each of three university settings in the United States, Denmark, and Egypt in 2009. This year marks a historical period of dissension between Denmark and Egypt, and, although the time frame of this study is prior to the more infamous January 2011 protests in Egypt, there had been emerging public political protests in the country years earlier (Wilkins, 2012). Students in these universities serve as the primary data source for survey research. The selected classes were in the fields of communication and media studies at each of the universities. The sites in Denmark and the United States are public universities, and the site in Egypt is a private university. While the universities differ in terms of broad institutional funding bases, the classes selected are similar in terms of their topics.

In the United States ($n = 50$) and Denmark ($n = 84$), surveys were administered in a class setting, but in Egypt, surveys were given to students to complete on their own time ($n = 50$). Participants were assured anonymity following an informed consent process used in an earlier study and confirmed for approval through the university's institutional review board. Funding from a special research grant from my university allowed me to offer movie tickets at local theaters as compensation at all three sites. Participants could use the tickets to see a film of their choice at a local cinema at any time after turning in a signed consent form and survey.

Surveys began with an assessment of interest in and experience watching action-adventure and other films, with specific questions as well as an opportunity to circle film titles on a provided list. Next, respondents answered open-ended questions describing plots, settings, heroes, and villains of their favorite action-adventure film as well as what they would deem to be a "typical" action-adventure film. The subsequent open-ended question asked respondents to imagine themselves as consultants planning a new action-adventure film, describing heroes and villains as American, Egyptian, or Danish. Next, respondents answered questions regarding their attitudes about their own and other countries, about fear situated in local as well as global contexts, and about global politics and terrorism.

All respondents are undergraduates at their respective universities, and their average ages range from 18 in Egypt, to 19 in the United States, to 22 in Denmark. The students at this elite university in Egypt come from a relatively more privileged background than their counterparts in the United States and Denmark: almost all of them had parents with college education, compared with roughly two-thirds of those in the United States and half of those in Denmark. The Egyptian students are also more rooted in their home territory than the United States: about 80% have parents born in Egypt compared with 60% of U.S. students having parents born in the United States. Danish respondents have family structures similar to the Egyptian respondents, given the relative percentages of those with parents born in their home country (78% fathers and 86% mothers born in Denmark). While these groups are proportionately similar in terms of gender (52% of U.S. and 55% of both Egyptian and Danish groups are women), they differ in terms of religious and ethnic identification. While most of the U.S. (50%) and Danish (54%) students identified as Christian or as having no affiliation (40% from the United States and 28% from Denmark), most of the Egyptian students identified as Muslim (82% and 10% Christian; only one Danish respondent and no U.S. respondents identified as Muslim). Articulated ethnic identity was more varied within the U.S. group (62% White, 22% Asian, 12% Hispanic, 2% African American) than among their Danish peers (73% White, 16% Arab, 4% Asian). The designation between White (51%) and Arab (29%) as ethnic categories is complex given the political and demographic history of cultural migration and identification (Naber, 2000), but the Egyptian respondents used both terms in their self-descriptions.

The analyses in the next section explore what it means to be an action-adventure fan and contrast fans' degree of affinity for action-adventure in terms of their political attitudes, their national identities, and their interest in and fear of the world.

Action-Adventure Fans

A central issue in this research concerns potential consequences of viewing action-adventure film. To lay the groundwork for these analyses, first I explore what it means to be an action-adventure fan and how this meaning varies across the three studied sites. In this study, being a fan is operationalized in terms of expressed affection for the genre and reported frequency of viewing action-adventure films. This approach does not reflect valuable and intensive work on fan cultures, which define and pride themselves as functioning outside of mainstream consumption of media texts. Instead, in this study the idea of "fan" is imposed by the researcher rather than articulated by the participants and is based on mainstream viewing and attitudinal patterns. In this study, action-adventure fans are those who report watching these films more frequently and with more affection than their peers. In exploring viewing experience, this survey includes not only close-ended items that produce a scale for subsequent analyses but also open-ended questions that help illustrate recalled features of characters, plots, and settings.

The Danish and American students watch more action-adventure films than their peers in Egypt, though this may be a function of seeing more films overall. Danish students on average saw more than 8 films in the past month and about 10 of the films on the list of action-adventure films provided. U.S. students saw about the same number of action-adventure films as students in Denmark, marking a particular passion for the genre given that the average number of films seen in the last month was fewer than the average in Denmark.

In comparison, Egyptian students saw fewer films in the last month (about 5) and fewer action-adventure films (almost 7). This variation may be due to different distribution and viewing opportunities across sites.

More similarity across groups is evident in their affinity for the genre; about one-third of each of the groups claimed to have seen at least 1 action-adventure film in the month prior to the survey (30% of U.S., 32% of Danish, and 33% of Egyptian students), and these groups were similar in agreement that they indeed liked watching this type of film (averaging 1.9 to 2.0 across groups on a 5-point scale with 1 meaning *strongly agree*). These two factors were combined to approximate being an action-adventure fan ($r = .20$), differentiating the passionate fans from others, meaning that they strongly agreed with statements about enjoying the genre and had seen an action-adventure film recently (about 20%). Across sites, a higher proportion of American students were considered fans (24%), closely followed by the Danish students (21%). Egyptian students were proportionately less enthralled (16%). This scale is used in subsequent analyses to differentiate how being an action-adventure fan functions in these three cultural contexts.

In open-ended questions giving respondents a chance to expand upon their experience, most offered complete answers describing the plot, setting, heroes, and villains of an action-adventure film they had seen (all U.S. respondents, 88% of the Egyptian respondents, and 86% of the Danish respondents). The list of films seen and described by these respondents contains 63 titles among the 166 responses, demonstrating a wide variety of answers given to this question, although most are part of the global Hollywood production industry. The complete list of film titles is as follows:

<p> <i>2012</i> <i>Air Force One</i> <i>Armageddon</i> <i>Arn</i> <i>Avatar</i> <i>Batman: The Dark Knight</i> <i>Blood Diamond</i> <i>Bolt</i> <i>Boondock Saints</i> <i>Bourne Identity</i> <i>Braveheart</i> <i>Casino Royale</i> <i>Conan the Barbarian</i> <i>Critical Decision</i> <i>Day After Tomorrow</i> <i>Departed</i> <i>Desperado</i> <i>Die Hard</i> <i>District 9</i> <i>Double Team</i> <i>GI Joe</i> <i>Golden Eye</i> <i>I, Robot</i> <i>Independence Day</i> <i>Indiana Jones</i> <i>Inglourious Bastards</i> <i>The Island</i> <i>Jurassic Park 3</i> <i>Kill Bill</i> </p>	<p> <i>Kingdom</i> <i>Lost Treasure</i> <i>Lord of the Rings</i> <i>Mask of Zorro</i> <i>The Matrix</i> <i>Men Who Stare at Goats</i> <i>Mission Impossible</i> <i>National Treasure</i> <i>The Others</i> <i>Rambo</i> <i>Ransom</i> <i>Ratatouille</i> <i>Resident Evil</i> <i>Rush Hour</i> <i>Saving Private Ryan</i> <i>Serenity</i> <i>The Hurt Locker</i> <i>The Matrix</i> <i>Men Who Stare at Goats</i> <i>Mission Impossible</i> <i>National Treasure</i> <i>The Others</i> <i>Rambo</i> <i>Ransom</i> <i>Ratatouille</i> <i>Resident Evil</i> <i>Rush Hour</i> </p>	<p> <i>Saving Private Ryan</i> <i>Serenity</i> <i>Sherlock Holmes</i> <i>Sin City</i> <i>Speed</i> <i>Spiderman</i> <i>Star Trek</i> <i>Star Wars</i> <i>Taken</i> <i>Three Kings</i> <i>Total Recall</i> <i>Transformers</i> <i>True Lies</i> <i>Vantage Point</i> <i>Wanted</i> <i>War of the Worlds</i> <i>Watchmen</i> <i>X-men Wolverine</i> <i>Zombie Land</i> </p>
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Table 1. Titles of the Most Frequently Listed Films Across Sites.

Films Seen	Denmark (%)	Egypt (%)	United States (%)
<i>Batman: The Dark Knight</i>	10	14	18
<i>Casino Royale</i>	10	0	0
<i>Die Hard</i>	11	2	4
<i>Indiana Jones</i>	10	2	6
<i>The Matrix</i>	3	7	6
<i>Speed</i>	6	14	0
<i>Spiderman</i>	3	9	6
<i>Transformers</i>	1	16	4
Others	46	36	56
Total	72	44	50

Table 1 lists the films mentioned most frequently by the study respondents, identifying those that were mentioned by at least 5% of the sample. Among the Danish respondents, the films listed most frequently were *Die Hard*, *Batman: The Dark Knight*, *Casino Royale*, and *Indiana Jones*. Their Egyptian counterparts were more likely to list *Transformers*, *Batman: The Dark Knight*, *Speed*, and *Spiderman*. Referencing a much longer list of individual titles, the films detailed most frequently among the U.S.-based group included *Batman: The Dark Knight*, *Indiana Jones*, *The Matrix*, and *Spiderman*. The longer list of films from the U.S. group may be due to having access to a broader range of films through a variety of services.

As depicted in Table 1, *Batman: The Dark Knight* was the most popular choice among the U.S. students and tied for second place among the films listed by the Egyptian and Danish students. This film was ranked fifth globally in terms of audience distribution in 2008, the year prior to this survey (UNESCO, 2012). The top selection among Egyptian students was *Transformers*, which is interesting given the political protests of celebrity Casey Kasem, when he refused to lend his voice to a film version due to problematic stereotypes of Arab culture (Kasem, 1990).

Rather than assume that these trends reflect some inherent cultural interest in certain films over others, what these viewers see and decide to write about is contingent upon availability, timing of distribution, range of technological options for viewing, and other structural factors that guide and constrain film viewing. Moreover, some of these films may have attracted public attention, perhaps for being particularly appealing or even controversial, which may encourage these participants to write about them when asked to describe just one film they remembered. *Batman: The Dark Knight* appears to have enjoyed global appeal given its broad and intensive marketing and distribution.

In addition to being asked to describe one film they recalled, respondents were asked to characterize a "typical" action-adventure film. Across all three sites, most respondents understood a

typical plot in similar terms, usually describing the prowess of a hero in relation to the defeat of an evil villain. To illustrate this consonance in recognition of a typical action-adventure film, a Danish student referred to a "hero" who "stands alone, but saves the world from the bad guys"; an Egyptian student described "the ultimate villain that nobody but the hero can defeat," and another Egyptian student wrote about how "the good guy saves the day!"; and an American student depicted an "unlikely hero [who] must rise to save the lives of everyone around him and, possibly, the world." Participants in all three groups used the terms "good guys" and "bad guys" in their open-ended responses.

National Identity

Before turning to how these groups conceptualize their connections with other countries, I describe their allegiance to their national identity. Across the three groups, the Egyptian students were most likely to prize national identity as a critical component of self; 77% strongly agreed and another 14% agreed that national identity is important to them. In contrast, national identity matters to the others, but not to the same extent: among the U.S. students, 30% strongly agreed and 38% agreed, a trend slightly diminished among the Danish students, among whom 23% strongly agreed and 41% agreed.

Focusing on those with strong allegiance to their national identity (40% overall), next I consider whether this is amenable to action-adventure interest. There are differences, but the patterns are distinct across sites. Being an action-adventure fan reduces the potential for strong national allegiance among Egyptian students (79% among non-fans compared with 63% among fans). This trend goes in the opposite direction among Danish students, with fans demonstrating more national allegiance (32%) than those who are not fans (20%). U.S. fans were also more likely to identify with their nation (32% compared with 25% of non-fans). Being an action-adventure fan is more rare among the Egyptian community than among the other two groups, and in this case more closely related to differences in connection to one's own nation. To feel a stronger sense of national community, in this case, means less affinity for a genre that in many senses is less resonant with cultural pride. Next, I consider how these issues relate to students' conceptualizations of the other nations in this study and the world around them.

Interest in the World Outside One's Nation

Action-adventure film can be seen as perpetuating a fear of global terrorism, but it might also provoke interest in the broader world. Whether being a fan might be connected with global empathic projection or with fear of the world is explored in these three sites.

To assess the relative interests and experiences of students, I asked each group if they had ever been to the two other countries constituting this sample and in another part of the survey whether they had any interest in doing so, in terms of their strong agreement or disagreement on a 5-point Likert scale. Although the U.S.-based students were the least likely to travel to other countries (none had been to Egypt, and only 2% had been to Denmark), they were quite positive about potentially doing so, rating their interest overall in these countries equally (mean = 1.8, indicating agreement). The Danish students were more traveled, with over a third (35%) having been to the United States and 11% to Egypt. While

their interest in traveling to these countries was affirmed, there was stronger sentiment toward going to the United States (mean = 1.4) than to Egypt (mean = 1.9). There was more distinct variation in interests among the Egyptian students; they were much more likely to have interest in the United States (mean = 1.7) and to have traveled there (45%!). In contrast, the Egyptian students' interest in Denmark was neutral (mean = 2.7), and only 6% had been to Denmark. Overall, Danish and Egyptian students were interested the United States, whereas the U.S. students were interested in other countries but had little experience beyond North American borders. This interest in the United States as a culture, though, does not extend to support of U.S. military intervention in Iraq, with Egyptian students strongly disagreeing (mean = 4.5) and Danish students disagreeing (mean = 3.7, which is not far off from the U.S. student disagreement, mean = 3.4). Danish and U.S. students indicated more interest in travel overall than the more neutral Egyptian students, which is somewhat at odds with the Egyptian students having more experience traveling than the other groups.

Being a fan of action-adventure film appears to work quite differently in each of these settings in terms of participants' interest in the broader world. There is very little difference among fans in the United States in terms of their interest in travel to Egypt or Denmark and among fans in Egypt in terms of their high interest in traveling to the United States. However, Egyptian fans, who are also less likely to identify themselves strongly as Egyptian citizens, are more interested in traveling to Denmark (90%) than those who are not fans (76%). The clearest trends, though, appear among fan groups in Denmark, where being interested in action-adventure film quells interest in travel to both the United States (72% of fans compared with 92% of non-fans) and Egypt (20% of fans compared with 44% of non-fans). This preference to stay at home may be related to a sense of global fear.

Global Fear

Fear of the world is assessed through a scale combining level of agreement to statements concerning anxiety about terrorism, the belief that terrorism is a major concern, and that the world is dangerous ($\alpha = .67$). Among these groups, the Danish students were the least likely to exhibit fear of the world (20%), whereas the U.S. and Egyptian students were similar in their anxieties about terrorism and danger (44% and 45%, respectively; see row percents in Table 2).

When Danish respondents did describe terrorist plots in hypothetical films they would propose as imagined consultants, separate from articulations of "typical" films, many referred to feared events within Denmark, thus situating violence within their own country. For example, one suggested a hypothetical plot in which Egyptians "blow up [Copenhagen's] Kastrup airport because most Danes are atheists." Similarly, an Egyptian respondent described potential violence at a Danish embassy in her country, given that "there have been some political problems between Egypt and Denmark and since Egyptians are usually very violent and angry." U.S. students, however, were more likely to situate their hypothetical terrorist plots outside of the United States, either in Denmark or in Egypt. Respondents across all three sites speculated on potential plots historically situated in the context of Egyptian pyramids.

Beyond these differences across settings, fear of global terrorism appears to be contingent upon action-adventure fandom, wherever the fan may be (see Table 2). Overall, fans of action-adventure are

more likely to express fear of the world (44%) than those who are not fans (31%; column percents). The differences between fans and non-fans are most prominent in Egypt (63% of fans with fear compared with 42% of non-fans with fear, $\gamma = .40$) and in Denmark (32% compared with 17%, $\gamma = .39$), but are also present in the United States (50% compared with 42%, $\gamma = .16$).

Table 2. Global Fear Among Action-Adventure (AA) Fans and Non-fans in the United States, Denmark, and Egypt.

	Global Fear Among Non-AA Fans (%)	Global Fear Among AA Fans (%)	Row Percent (%)	γ
United States	42	50	44	.16
Egypt	42	63	45	.40
Denmark	17	32	20	.39
Column Percent	31	44		

Character Resonance

Action-adventure film is known for its reliance on American heroes fighting to vanquish foreign terrorists. Studies have demonstrated that different cultural groups in the United States have competing senses of the reality of the genre as well as its problematic stereotyping, contingent upon the degree to which there is perceived resonance between sense of self and mediated character (Wilkins, 2008). In this set of analyses, I contrast how viewers in these three different national settings perceive heroes and villains in this genre, particularly focusing on creative responses to how respondents would construct a hypothetical action-adventure film using characters specifically from Egypt, Denmark, and the United States.

Heroes

Students were asked to describe heroes in films they recalled and in hypothetical films with open-ended responses. The most frequently recalled hero was White (noted by 86% of the U.S. participants, 95% of the Danish participants, and 63% of the Egyptian participants); male (90%, 70%, and 96%, respectively); and American (74%, 69%, and 84%, respectively). When U.S. and Egyptian groups included religion in their descriptions, it was more likely to be Christian (30%, 26%), indicated by most (87%) of the Danish students when they included a religious distinction in their open-ended responses.

Respondents described more variation in the hero's characteristics in hypothetical films than in the films recalled. While less dominantly White, there was still a tendency to use this descriptor (60% of U.S., 42% of Egyptian, and 66% of Danish students). However, Arab heroes make an appearance in each of these groups as well. Male and Christian characteristics still dominate, as does being White, but to a lesser degree with this open-ended question.

When asked what they would do if consulting on a new action-adventure film, most respondents described heroes in terms of their own national characteristics. U.S. students were more likely than Egyptian and Danish students to place Americans in the role of hero (54% compared to 37% of the Egyptian students and 28% of the Danish students). About one-quarter of all groups described an Egyptian hero (though the percentage would be higher for the Egyptian group if we took out those who did not respond). Similar to the U.S. group describing American heroes, the Danish students were more likely to describe Danish heroes (44%) than the others (10% of U.S and 4% of Egyptian respondents described a Danish hero). Each group is more likely to position its own nationality than another in the role of hero.

In one example, a Danish student advocates for a Danish hero to “conquer a multi-million dollar American company.” While most Danish participants described their heroes as secular, atheist, or Christian, one expressed his belief that the religion of the hero is “not important, as long as he’s not a Muslim.” An Egyptian student characterized his own national “Egyptian superhero” as saving people in “US and Denmark (who) are under attack . . . even though they are skeptical about his potential.” Another Egyptian student described an Egyptian hero in more detail:

An Egyptian travels to Denmark seeking a job in order to go back to Egypt and provide a better life for his parents who sacrificed a lot for the sake of his education and welfare. In Denmark, he meets a group of people there . . . [who try] to use him and let him help in drug dealing without him knowing. . . . At the end, he manages to escape and reach Egypt safely with the American girl, and he and the girl eventually get married.

Although the U.S. students usually characterize heroes as their own nationality, at times they suggest that others can share the glory. In one case, “a spy from Egypt helps a U.S. CIA agent take down a team in Denmark that is threatening to blow up the world.” In another, “agents from the U.S. and Denmark must team up to discover a plot to destroy one of Egypt’s pyramids.” Egyptian students also speculate on collegial heroics, as “Christian and Muslim Americans . . . unite with Egyptians . . . in an adventure about pharaohs.” Seeing potential collaboration across all three groups, another Egyptian student wants them to “unite together to benefit the world, but after a lot of struggle and misunderstanding,” in order to thwart an “alien” invasion.

How did being an action-adventure fan accentuate this sense of self in relation to projected heroes? The most dramatic split occurs among U.S. viewers in terms of their sense of national heroism: action-adventure fans were much more likely than non-fans to project Americans as heroes in a hypothetical action-adventure film (80% compared with 58%). Among Danish viewers, this trend follows suit in terms of fans being more likely than non-fans to project Americans as heroes (33% compared with 27%). However, being an action-adventure fan does not affect the Danish respondents’ sense of self as hero, nor that of the Egyptian respondents, whose responses across fandom differ only in terms of fans of the genre being *less* likely to project themselves as heroes (25% of fans compared with 38% of non-fans). Given the tendency of this genre to feature Americans as heroes, fans appear to be affected differently across cultural context, in part based on perceived cultural proximity. Being a fan, though, does make a difference in terms of prescribed heroes (see Table 3).

Table 3. Action-Adventure Fans' Projection of Hero Nationality in Denmark, Egypt, and the United States.

Hero Should Be . . .	U.S. Not Fan (%)	U.S. AA Fan (%)	Egypt Not Fan (%)	Egypt AA Fan (%)	Denmark Not Fan (%)	Denmark AA Fan (%)
American	58	80	55	75	27	33
Egyptian	27	20	38	25	27	25
Danish	15	0	7	0	46	42

Villains

In contrast to the White, American male hero typified in their responses, respondents recalled more variation in villains' ethnicities, nationalities, and religions, though male villains still dominate. Danish students were more likely to mention White, American Christian men as villains, just as they described heroes. U.S. students were more likely than the Danish and Egyptian students to identify villains of African descent. Only U.S. and Danish students described villains of Arab descent, though these are small percentages. The Egyptian students depicted villains with national characteristics of Arab states but less so in terms of ethnicity. The Danish students were more likely to recall villains being specifically Muslim (13% compared with 4% and 2% of U.S. and Egyptian respondents, respectively).

Villains demonstrated more variation as articulated in hypothetical films than as described in recalled films, similar to the contrast in heroes imagined versus remembered. In their imagined films, Egyptian characters appeared as villains within each of the groups, but mostly among the Danish students (47% compared with 41% of the U.S. and 26% of the Egyptian groups). Danish respondents described their hypothetical villains as "fundamentalist," "Muslim" "Egyptian terrorists." In addition to being labeled "terrorists," U.S. students pointed to Egyptian villains as "murdering anyone in their way" and as "anti-US agents." When describing Danish villains, U.S. respondents referred to "terrorists" as well as "an organization of thieves from Denmark . . . [who] steal precious artifacts from Egypt," or a "radical extremist . . . want[ing] to take control of either a large money supply or nuclear weapons supply." In other characterizations of Danish figures in their hypothetical scenarios, the U.S. respondents included a "scantily clad flight attendant" and "a smart scientist," thus exhibiting more of a range of possibilities for Danish portrayals than for Egyptian characters.

Danish students were the least likely to cast themselves as villains (14%), but neither did many Americans (27%) or Egyptians (26%) project themselves in this negative light. Being less likely to demonize their own nationality, Danish students were more likely to describe American (39%) and Egyptian villains (47%). American villains were described as running wealthy corporations or attempting "to destroy all pyramids in Egypt," which were saved by the Danish hero. Almost half of the Egyptian students did not respond to this question, but when they did they were most likely to identify Americans

as villains (48%). Similar to the Danish students, Egyptian students characterized U.S. corporations as evil, preventing an Egyptian small-business entrepreneur from succeeding in the United States. Interestingly, one Egyptian respondent described his government as a villain, perhaps indicating the emerging frustration of youth with the corruption of the Mubarak regime. Unlike the Danish and U.S. students, the Egyptian respondents rarely noted religion. In their hypothetical descriptions, the Danish students identified villains as Muslim more than did the other two groups (53% compared with 20% in the United States and 14% in Egypt).

Being a fan of action-adventure film had the most impact on U.S. and Danish students in their most common designation of Egyptians as villains (see Table 4). More than half of the U.S. fans (56%) pointed to Egyptians as villains compared with only 36% of non-fans; similarly, 58% of Danish fans shared this assignation compared with 43% of non-fans. Consequently U.S. and Danish fans were less likely to demarcate Americans in villainous roles (11% of U.S. fans compared with 32% of non-fans, and 33% of Danish fans compared with 41% of non-fans). This sentiment was shared by Egyptian fans in that few were interested in seeing Americans as villains (20%) in contrast with more than half (56%) of the non-fans; however, Egyptian fans were much more interested in seeing Danish characters as villains than non-fans in this group: the most prominent villain in this group was described as Danish (60%), whereas few non-fans agreed (17%).

Table 4. Action-Adventure Fans' Projection of Villain Nationality in Egypt, the United States, and Denmark.

Villain Should Be . . .	U.S. Not Fan (%)	U.S. AA Fan (%)	Egypt Not Fan (%)	Egypt AA Fan (%)	Denmark Not Fan (%)	Denmark AA Fan (%)
American	32	11	56	20	41	33
Egyptian	36	56	28	20	43	58
Danish	32	33	17	60	16	8

Mapping an Action-Adventure World

Action-adventure film relies on global Hollywood production, yet the reception of this genre works quite differently given the cultural context of communities and affinities of fans. If action-adventure builds on Orientalist narratives that promote Americans as heroes and non-Americans as villains, then U.S. viewers are expected to differ in their identifications with these characters. These differences are situated within broader conceptualizations of national identity, perceptions of other nations, and fears of global violence. In this study, I considered how action-adventure fans' attitudes toward global security and national value contrast across the United States, Egypt, and Denmark.

While the Egyptian students are more widely traveled and more privileged than their counterparts in this particular research project, they display relatively less interest in going abroad than the others and express a stronger sense of national identity, particularly among those who are not action-adventure fans.

They are more likely to prefer travel to the United States than to Denmark, just as the Danish students prefer travel to the United States over Egypt. This interest in U.S. culture, though, does not extend to support of U.S. military intervention in Iraq, most vociferously opposed by the Egyptian students.

The U.S. students appear quite interested in the world around them, but have less experience traveling outside of the nation's borders. This is the group most likely to express strong affection for action-adventure as well as high concern about global terrorism. Their global fear does not seem to counteract their interest in the world, but rather to compose varied and complex senses of global space.

The Danish students also exhibited some concern with terrorism and, being relatively well traveled, demonstrated their interest in the world and support for their country's foreign aid programs. The Danish students were the least likely among the three groups to identify strongly with their national identity, even though most had parents born in the country. These students might have preferred to identify themselves within the European region or some other identification not included in this study.

While most students described the heroes they recalled in action-adventure films as being White American men, their hypothetical films were more likely to feature heroes from their own national cultures. A critical finding here is that being an action-adventure fan appears to bear a close relationship with a tendency to conceptualize Americans as heroes, with more variation among those who are not fans. The American hero is most likely to be confirmed by fans in the United States, followed by fans in Denmark, and then by fans in Egypt. Being an action-adventure fan appears to reinforce this designation.

Assignment of villain nationality was also conditioned by being an action-adventure fan. Danish and U.S. fans were much more likely to want to cast Egyptian characters in this role than their non-fan counterparts, whereas the Egyptian fans preferred Danish characters to be villains. It is worth noting that the Danish students were more likely than the Egyptian and U.S. students to remember villains as Muslim and to suggest villains as Egyptian, Arab, and Muslim.

Projecting characteristics of villains and heroes hints at the constructions of power and of evil held by these communities. Although the action-adventure genre tends to be dominated through Hollywood as a particularly American corporate industry, villains may be recalled with other attributes than those actually projected within the text, and when given an opportunity to suggest other types of characterizations, people have more varied interests and approaches, tending to create heroes similar to themselves.

The sustained and approved consumption of Orientalist narratives evident in the action-adventure film genre does have some critical implications for viewers. These limited characterizations inspire and reinforce the imagined scenarios of fans in which American heroes are justified in crucifying foreign villains. Mapping global space, in which national identities are projected and terrorist acts are feared, embodies a political, cartographical exercise bounded by conventional wisdom perpetuated through global media industries.

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