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Propaganda and ideological representation of women in *The Secret of Women* (2014) and *Maleficent* (2014)

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Abstract

The paper compares female representation in two selected films, *The Secret of Women* and *Maleficent*, released in 2014. The aim is to show the influence of cinema on shaping and commercializing female protagonists' identities. The films are affected by the geopolitical context of Iraq/America. *The Secret of Women*, set in the 1950s, delves into the complex experience of females and celebrates their strength, knowledge, and persistence. *Maleficent* displays the determination and compassion of the main protagonist. The findings indicate that these two films support a more positive ideology and avoid traditional gender roles and stereotypes. *The Secret of Women* empowers Manahil by giving her a strong voice, highlighting the communist and tribal issues of her time. In the same way, *Maleficent* deviates from the conventional representation of strong women by analyzing the themes of salvation, the conflict between matriarchy and patriarchy, and women's empowerment. The results enhance the continuing discourse on gender representation in films and the capacity for cinema to question cultural norms and perspectives toward women.

Keywords: ideology, *maleficent*, propaganda, representation, *The Secret of Women*



Public Interest Statement

It is clear from this study that the American and Iraqi movies that were chosen for analysis emphasize the portrayal of women via themes of fortitude, knowledge, and love; this gives viewers a sense of hope and empowerment. Iraqi film has reinforced traditional gender stereotypes, restricting women's options to housewives. Disney works in the United States are blamed for promoting similar stereotypes. In spite of this, Disney has made an effort to showcase more strong and varied female characters. Despite the fact that the word "ideology" is sometimes used disparagingly, modern movies about women emphasize their agency and strength rather than only showing them as victims, weak people, or villains.

Introduction

This research effectively shows that Iraqi and American films selected for investigation focus on depicting women through themes of wisdom, love, and endurance, resulting in an optimistic and empowering message for audiences. Traditional gender stereotypes have been perpetuated in Iraqi cinema, limiting the roles available to women to housewives., American Disney productions are criticized for encouraging gender stereotypes. Nevertheless, Disney has tried to display more capable and diverse female characters. While the term "ideology" often has a negative undertone, the contemporary portrayal of women in films has shifted from portraying them solely as victims, helpless individuals, or villains to emphasizing their empowerment and agency.

Movies exert a significant influence on audiences, molding their outlooks and actions. Propaganda subtly manipulates viewers. For ages, politicians have understood the potency of cinema in influencing voters and those still undecided. Ethnic and cultural tensions are exploited, nationalism is exaggerated, and external threats are emphasized in propaganda films, which permeate various institutions like religion, politics, and economics, supporting and opposing globalization(Messinger, 1993, pp117-119). Deb (2023) declared that the distortion of reality and events is presented biasedly in films. However, with the growth of social media, the impact of explicitly political propaganda films has reduced(p, 1130). Still, films have great power in spreading ideologies and shaping social beliefs, especially gender. By studying films in different geopolitical contexts, it can be understood how films reflect and shape perspectives of gender and cultural values. The paper focuses on the representation of females in Iraqi and American films, precisely analyzing *The Secret of Women* and *Maleficent* from ideological and propaganda approaches. The two films question conventional gender norms and stereotypes, showcasing women in empowered and diverse roles.

This research explores the impact of geopolitical contexts on the representation of female characters and their identities, as well as the role of cinematography in shaping the audience's perception and emotional connection. It examines the use of films as tools of propaganda and their effect culturally and socially. Moreover, the paper explains the development of fairy tales and popular films and their impact on traditional societal expectations. By questioning stereotypes and depicting women in positions of empowerment, films can reshape societal norms and redefine gender roles. The production of films is heavily influenced by the geopolitical context, which in turn reflects the cultural and social values of the portrayal of women. Moreover, films can shape the audience's perception of various ideologies, particularly gender-related ones. Female's depiction in literary works is also influenced by geopolitical settings such as Iraq and America, which reflect the cultural and social values associated with female representation, local ideologies, and historical background.

Using the comparative study of *The Secret of Women* and *Maleficent*, this paper explores how films shape and commodify the identities of female characters through ideology and propaganda. Additionally, it examines how contemporary films' indifferent geopolitical context depicts changing gender perspectives

in response to growing societal values. *The Secret of Women* and *Maleficent* offers divergent critiques and inquiries into the established gender roles and social conventions. By centering on the American agenda in Iraq, *The Secret of Women* challenges the effectiveness of promoting democracy and freedom while emphasizing collective resistance and empowerment in the face of oppression. In contrast, *Maleficent* critiques gender norms in fairy tales, supporting personal agency and the ability to determine one's fate. This paper states the influence of cinema on cultural values by analyzing the distinctive context of these selected films.

The Secret of Women and *Maleficent* are compared using several factors, including cinematography, camera position, camera -angle, camera distance, and storytelling techniques. These features are examined to understand better how films influence viewers' perceptions and communicate their message. Moreover, the paper discusses the influence of ideology and propaganda on the storytelling of these films. The impact of ideology and propaganda is explored by analyzing how females are represented in films from Iraq and the United States. The paper precisely emphasizes the film's role.

Propaganda in Iraqi Films and the Ideology of America

Cunningham (2002) states that propaganda stems from the Latin term "propagate" or "spread." It functions as a technique of communication used to convey ideas and manipulate people's beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors to achieve a specific goal. Propaganda can disseminate messages that may seem innocuous or harmful, such as political messages that encourage individuals to dislike or hold others accountable for societal issues. Ideology represents a set of shared beliefs or a framework of ideas that shapes one's aspirations, expectations, and actions. Ideologies can have both positive and negative impacts on society. For instance, feminism embodies an ideology that advocates for women's rights and equality, while Nazism encompasses an ideology that propagates harmful racist and nationalist perspectives.

Peggy Phelan's statement that "almost-naked young white women would be running Western culture" (1993: 10) highlights the power dynamics associated with representational visibility. This becomes particularly significant in the context of the emotionally charged debates surrounding the U.S. occupation of Iraq post-2003. The Greater Middle East Initiative of 2004 presented a narrative that viewed Middle Eastern women's political participation and liberation as a consequence of U.S.-style democracy. Phelan's emphasis on the visual aspect of this argument becomes even more evident in this context (Phelan, 1993, p12). Media outlets influenced by the U.S. government extensively covered Iraqi women participating in elections following the 2003 invasion, contributing to the visibility and representation of these women. U.S.-supported feminist NGOs also claimed to speak on behalf of Iraqi women (Ismael, 2014).

The third aspect of the representation of Iraqi women is their visibility and connection to current global debates on the ethical use of images of women, particularly Iraqi women who have been empowered due to governmental changes (Winegar, 2008, p. 76). Such images often justify U.S. military intervention in Iraq or Afghanistan (Denike, 2008: 150). These debates intersect with discussions on the politics of location, mediation, and patronage in Iraqi aesthetic production, particularly regarding gendered representation. Scholars in Iraq have raised questions about whether an 'authentic' Iraqi aesthetic discourse exists within or outside the country (Badr, p10) and the extent to which the United States financed various forms of Iraqi aesthetic production after 2003 (Shabout, 2008: 87). These discussions further explore gendered representation and its implications in Iraqi aesthetics.

Iraqi cinema has a storied history dating back to the 1950s, although it experienced limited production during that time. In 1959, a cinema department was established, but it only managed to create two feature films and a handful of documentaries in the subsequent decade. During Saddam Hussein's 24-year rule, the Baath Party utilized the film industry primarily as a propaganda tool, commissioning art, theater, and

music. Many films of that era focused on the Iraq-Iran war, which lasted from 1980 to 1988. It is essential to mention that films frequently present Iraq as the triumphant side despite the conflict culminating in an artistic stalemate. A documentary entitled *The Long Days* examines Saddam Hussain's regime in depth. The Iraqi state in the 1970th opened the first theatre and attracted Arab filmmakers during the seventies, ushering the film industry into its golden era (Bishop, 2013).

"Women Make Film" is a powerful platform that uses the medium of cinema to make women's voices hearable. The main aim of this platform is to augment the prominence of Iraqi female writer by increasing their accessibility across the world through films. Sixteen Iraqi women from ethical, religious, and professional backgrounds underwent electronic seminars and online classes Through the guidance of the Egyptian director Salam El-Tarzi. Although they face various obstacles, they effectively gain emotional filmmaking abilities and dedicate considerable efforts to engaging in conversations and contemplations regarding feminist techniques within cinema. The sessions of mentorship and advisory finished in a fascinating one-day film screening and scenario, allowing the participants to display their completed works and exchange perspectives with others.

Significantly, this revolutionary endeavor acknowledges the influence of warfare on females and includes political plans to confirm women's active participation in peace efforts. In the present moment, "Women Make Film" advocates for women's pivotal roles in cultural and artistic production processes that address women's issues on a broader scale. Moreover, it emphasizes the importance of females' participation in peace and security decision-making. Building upon their previous 2019 report, "Woman Make the Film," this initiative presents a significant expansion of their efforts to utilize the arts for peacebuilding in Iraq.

Films as an Instrument of Propaganda

Cunningham(2002) argues that propaganda goes beyond just providing information to its audience. It deliberately aims to influence the audience's beliefs or behaviors. While emotional appeals are a prominent form of propaganda, numerous covert and subtle forms also exist. Essentially, propaganda involves deceiving oneself (54). Culture encompasses various aspects, such as religion, politics, and economics, which both support and resist globalization. Movies can distort people's perception of reality by portraying events in a manner that may differ from actual occurrences. Throughout history, politicians have recognized the influence of films and utilized them to sway voters and win over undecided individuals. Propaganda films often aim to promote ethnic and cultural tensions, undermine political opponents, boost national pride, and depict the homeland as a vulnerable victim of hostile foreign forces. However, the emergence of social media has diminished the impact of overtly political propaganda films on audiences. In order to create narratives and characters that are inclusive and diverse, it is common for female characters to be depicted as helpless victims.

Women are advocating for more inclusive casts to show the diversity of the female experience and promote a distinctive perspective. In contrast, when watching a propaganda film, the viewer is expected to adopt the propagandist's viewpoint and actively propagate that particular perspective. These films employ propagandistic techniques to deceive and manipulate the audience by presenting alternate events. It is essential to examine the relationship between cinema and propaganda critically and consider whether film accurately represents the intricacies of the human experience. Unfortunately, portrayals of both men and women in movies can reinforce negative stereotypes and contribute to a division between the genders. However, Hollywood, as an American institution, is an influential platform for disseminating and opposing propaganda(Koppes & Black, 2000).

The Secret of Women (2014) offers a fresh perspective on Iraqi women by challenging the motives of the American agenda instead of glorifying it. Taking on a cinematic form, it cleverly subverts the traditional war movie conventions. The film's opening scene presents a flashback, with the protagonist, a woman

dressed in black, tenderly touching the body of a man, later revealed to be her brother, Salim. From this point, the plot unfolds, delving into the film's central theme, which revolves around Manahil. Manahil is portrayed as a character endowed with mysterious power and wisdom, exploring a thought-provoking aspect that the movie introduces. Additionally, the objectification of women by the media plays a significant role in perpetuating and contributing to America's rape culture.

Transitioning to a different context, in Disney's *Maleficent*, Princess Aurora symbolizes the intricate familial bonds formed during her teenage years, representing a crucial transitional stage in her life. In the revised storyline, Aurora's character development as an adolescent Princess focuses on exploring her ties in a rural village setting. The previous sexualization of the princess in *The Sleeping Beauty* ended in *Maleficent's* version. The princess is not a damsel in the distress story, where she waits for a male character to save her. In *Maleficent*, Aurora defies sexism and dismisses the usual imagery of the innocent victim. Her enchanted sleep symbolizes her power and growth into a woman undefined by marriage obligation or birth.

Aurora's enchanted sleep allows her to uncover her identity without any expected cultural roles. Media representations of females have a significant influence on how society perceives women. By depicting powerful women, harmful depictions and negative stereotypes are questioned. The optimistic shift to sexual harassment and perceive to perceive women only depending on appearance, not appreciating their value and their worth.

Regrettably, Hollywood served as a negative influence on female position and self-perception. Luckily, with the advent of new media, women's rights and empowerment have gained fresh perspectives and possibilities (Doherty, 2015). As a result, the latest adaptation of *Sleeping Beauty* offers a positive representation, encouraging women to confront gender-based prejudices and assert themselves. This change is invaluable, exemplified by the characters Aurora and Maleficent, who save each other and defy societal norms. It is inspiring to witness more companies casting women in leading positions across various industries, with these women often portrayed positively. Historically, the media has often portrayed powerful and sexually mature women as demons or witches, but with recent progress, such negative portrayals are gradually diminishing.

The lack of accurate data on women's representation in the domestic situation has been influenced by the historically perpetuated patriarchal value structure of Hollywood. Disney films have faced criticism for their portrayal of these topics, as they reflect the everyday experiences of those involved in their creation and the moviegoers who supported them through theater visits, merchandise purchases, theme park visits, and video rentals or purchases. The impact of Disney's fairy tales on society's subconscious attitudes and their specific "function" remains unclear. These issues interest women who share a similar background as the book's protagonists and women worldwide who have encountered gender-based harassment or discrimination. (Davis, 2006).

Throughout history, Disney's animated films have consistently maintained their popularity and have successfully connected with today's audiences. The female villains depicted in movies were powerful older women who had mastered dark magic and desired to eliminate their young rivals for selfish gain. This reluctance to acknowledge these fairy tales highlights American society's failure to address traditional male dominance. However, in the 1970s and 1980s, there was a perception of women; the notion of a "respectable" woman has broadened to encompass not only the traditional role of a housewife but also includes the only professional woman, the employed mother and wife, the mother with no partner, and several other identities. In recent years, Disney's heroines have undergone significant changes, with independence, determination, the drive to control their destiny, and unwavering loyalty to themselves as their defining characteristics. It is fascinating to observe how the decision-making abilities of these three characters have considerably evolved across multiple installments.

There are two main theories regarding the experiences of female moviegoers. One theory suggests that women's stories are frequently depicted through the lens of male protagonists in mainstream Hollywood films, with male characters often dictating the boundaries within which female characters operate. This has given rise to the proliferation of "man movies," which typically revolve around male-dominated groups and have become a common representation in American culture. An alternative viewpoint is presented in Linda Williams' chapter "When the Woman Looks" in *The Dread of Difference*. Williams (1996) argues that contrary to traditional assumptions, women who watch horror films often refuse to passively witness the victimization of female characters seen on the screen, instead engaging with the content differently. Additionally, the media, film critics, and scholars have observed a scarcity of films where women occupy central roles solely driven by motherhood, daughterhood, and friendship rather than being defined solely by their sexual relationships with other women.

The Representation of Women in Iraqi Cinema & American Disney Productions

Iraqi and American films are powerful forms of media that profoundly impact social, political, and cultural norms. They serve as mirrors of society, both reflecting and critically examining social and cultural values. Many of these films show female characters primarily through a male perspective, which can perpetuate sexist ideals and potentially influence public sentiment. Gender is a recurring theme, with Iraqi and Disney movies often depicting women in unfavorable ways. Controversy surrounds how these films portray women, with differing viewpoints on whether they are only shown in supportive roles or face criticism for assuming leadership positions.

Hassan (2014) stated that Iraq's film industry had seen limited production since the 1950s, while Saddam Hussein's Baath Party utilized art, theatre, and music for propaganda purposes for over two decades. The government's portrayal of Iraq as the victor during the 1980-1988 Iraq-Iran war ultimately resulted in a stalemate and truce. In 2003, with the U.S. occupation of Iraq, protecting women's rights became both a moral and legal obligation. Unfortunately, women have been disproportionately affected, facing hurdles such as limited access to essential resources, healthcare, employment opportunities, freedom of movement, and political representation. The failure to empower Afghan women further underscores the necessity for the U.S. to empower Iraqi women, highlighting the contradictions within claims of "liberating" women.

Iraq stands as a strategic partner of the U.S., yet it grapples with significant challenges in empowering women. These obstacles include difficulty distinguishing between private and public forms of aggression, limited political and social influence, and the urgent need to tackle gender inequality. Shedding light on women's experiences within their environments, along with their collaborative struggle alongside men to secure the right to citizenship in Iraq, Palestine, and other nations oppressed by American occupation and imperialist dominance, might provide some answers. Elaheh Rostami-Povey's research delves into women's resistance and battles in developing countries and diasporas, revealing how major world powers, as well as financial and military institutions, have adopted language and discourse in response to violence against women, sexual discrimination, and traditional gender roles (Davis, 2016).

Recognizing women's inalienable rights becomes pivotal in safeguarding overall human rights in a world where our goal is to achieve equality and fairness without prejudice or discrimination. Unraveling these complex issues necessitates an exploration of women's lived experiences and their genuine efforts alongside men to secure full citizenship rights in Iraq, Palestine, and all nations subjected to occupation and imperialist influence (Al-Jawaheri), 2008. In early Disney films, the portrayal of princesses lacked autonomy, as they had little control over their lives. However, the subsequent generation of Disney female heroes emerged as rebellious individuals who often defied their fathers.

Moving into the 2010s, societal influences began to shape the portrayal of Disney characters, empowering young girls and challenging unfavorable gender preconceptions. This shift in media representation has played a significant role in improving public perception of women. Nevertheless, before we can eliminate gender stereotypes, several underlying issues still need to be addressed (Devis, 2006). Disney films have historically depicted women as submissive figures in a society dominated by men, thus perpetuating gender stereotypes. For instance, in *Maleficent*, the good fairies hide Aurora in a woodcutter's home on her 16th birthday, reinforcing traditional gender roles.

In Iraqi cinema, there seems to be a general lack of awareness among women about Western women's challenges. Instead, they often undermine the progress made by others, often at significant cost. Eastern countries, along with North Africa, have yet to fully recover from their patriarchal systems, which have historically restricted the rights and roles of women. Progress has undoubtedly been made over the past few centuries, but outdated attitudes impede further advancements. Bridging the gap between governmental rhetoric and the actual implementation of women's rights cannot be solely entrusted to women alone. The disparity in the treatment of women in occupied nations raises questions about the double standards exhibited by America and Britain.

Unfortunately, the concept of human rights often becomes outdated and associated primarily with the West, particularly when the treatment of women is used as a political tool. Women bear the brunt of these challenges, facing limited access to vital resources such as healthcare, employment opportunities, freedom of movement, and political representation (Winegar, 2008). In a society marked by sectarian and political quotas, women suffer twice as much as men, especially considering their role as primary breadwinners. The occupation has exacerbated issues of sectarianism, corruption, arbitrary arrests, murder, and terrorism, leading to grave consequences for women.

The failure to empower Afghan women raises concerns about the endorsement of empowering Iraqi women while conflicting with claims of "liberating" women and promoting equality. This contradiction is evident in the political process established during the occupation and the continuing commitment of successive Iraqi administrations. Unfortunately, this priority shift comes at the expense of women's initiatives. Following the invasion, there was a significant emergence of both popular struggle and an elite, driven by "colonial women" who represented the face of the occupation. Their discourse often replaced or disregarded fundamental national, social, and class issues. In contrast to other nations, Iraqi women's plight challenges the notion of progress in their political engagement as a "strategic partner" of the U.S.

Furthermore, does it matter if the political and social systems are corrupt in all their forms, including gender-neutral parties? If the objective is to eradicate women's inequality, is it sufficient to gain power and voice slogans without truly understanding women's lived experiences or integrating feminism into more significant liberation movements? Exploring women's experiences within their environments, alongside men, and their ongoing struggle to assert their right to citizenship in nations under occupation and imperialist dominance, such as Iraq and Palestine, might provide insights into some of these questions (Al-Jawaher, 2008i).

The Walt Disney Company's representation of fictional characters draws heavily from real-world living experiences. In earlier films, princesses were depicted as subservient individuals with limited control over their lives. However, with the advent of the second wave of feminism, women started gaining more autonomy and influence over their future. This societal shift translated into greater independence and gender equality for women in the United States. The interplay between media and society influenced each other, inspiring young girls to look up to these characters as role models. Initially, women in Disney films were expected to take up the roles left behind by the men in their lives. Nevertheless, this expectation later evolved to include a return to household responsibilities.

Initially, there was an expectation for women to fill the void created by the absence of men in their lives. However, this expectation evolved to include the women's return to household responsibilities. This can be seen in characters like Manahil, Siida, and Dhura in Iraqi films and characters like Aurora, the good fairies, and other females in American cinema. Consequently, women found themselves again confined to a life centered around domestic duties and raising children. The media often reflects and influences the real world, and this portrayal of women in Iraqi and Disney films as domesticated individuals in a society dominated by men only serves to reinforce traditional gender stereotypes prevalent at the time.

In *The Secret of Woman*, most scenes occur inside houses, further perpetuating this idea of women being confined to private spaces. For example, Flora, Fauna, and Merryweather, the good fairies in the film, keep Aurora hidden from Maleficent and raise her secretly in a woodland cottage. The movie then jumps to Aurora's sixteenth birthday, showing her daily routine as Briar Rose, where she sings alongside beloved Disney woodland creatures and encounters her fiancé, Prince Phillip. These portrayals highlight how gender roles define femininity and masculinity and prescribe how these traits should manifest. There has been an ongoing debate about the depiction of female characters in Disney cartoons, with many women being relegated to supporting roles while possessing leadership abilities and facing rejection from society.



Picture 4.5 Manahil in her house (domestic setting),



Picture 4.6 Maleficent & Aurora in a natural setting

The Role of Ideology

Each era and community has adapted the original tales to suit their needs. These narratives have been passed down through generations and are thus highly susceptible to cultural and social transformations (Zipes,2014:8). Fairy tales have experienced significant transformations as they were passed down through generations. Initially rooted in matriarchal perspectives, they portrayed women as superior to men. However, as these tales served as a means of teaching and reflecting the ethics and morals of patriarchal societies, they also conveyed information about patriarchal beliefs. Elisabeth Bell et al. characterized an institution in a late nineteenth-century middle-class community resembling a fairy tale. The researchers explained that fairy tales played a crucial role in reinforcing a patriarchal symbolic order that was rooted in rigid notions of sexuality and gender, as previously mentioned (Zipes,2014:26).

In the past few decades, feminist authors have endeavored to reimagine the timeless tale in a modern context that addresses the current significance of gender awareness in politics. "Ideology" pertains to concealing or tampering with the truth, describing the distorted portrayals of reality prevalent in particular

narratives and practices. This leads to a phenomenon known as false consciousness, affecting one's state of mind (Freedon, 2019:31). It is suggested that these distortions work in favor of the powerful while disregarding the vulnerable. This implies that the dominant class does not perceive itself as a manipulator or oppressor due to an ideological blindspot to its power. This rationalizes the transformation of Maleficent from an evil witch to a powerful savior and the evolution of Aurora from a submissive princess to a teenage agent with agency over her own life. However, as Karl Mannheim(1960) has shown," not all ideologies are geared towards conscious deception" (13).

Society and audiences held certain expectations, which Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* embodies as it establishes the archetype of the ideal woman aspiring to marry a prince. This film perpetuates gender stereotypes by depicting women as beautiful, talented singers and dancers and dutiful homemakers. Numerous Disney movies depict women in subservient roles, a viewpoint that feminists argue can have detrimental effects on children. The press can "shape [their] viewers' views, values, and habits" (Sawyer, 2012: 5). During the last thirty years, there have been noteworthy changes in women's societal roles and the cooperative behavior and lifestyles of both men and women. However, television programming has often failed to reflect these societal shifts accurately. Instead, it frequently portrays women as sensitive, family-oriented individuals who are emotionally and financially dependent on men. This misrepresentation of women in the media can potentially convey outdated values that are not aligned with the realities of modern culture to impressionable children (Sawyer, 2012: 5).

Although they may have made significant adjustments to align with their cultural context, their primary focus appears to be on re-enacting rather than adapting the social systems of a patriarchal society as it evolves. This tendency is evident in Disney movies, as noted by Towbin and colleagues, who identified three recurring themes in fairy tales: prioritizing appearance over intelligence, portraying women as needing protection, and inherently associating them with domestic roles (Sawyer, 2012: 5). Manahil, regardless of gender, should not be judged solely based on societal norms and expectations. Everyone, regardless of their gender, possesses unique strengths, abilities, and potential. It is crucial to celebrate and encourage diversity and empower individuals to reach their full potential (Dyer, 2002).

In *Maleficent*, Aurora, the young princess, does not have to concern herself with marriage or reproductive duties while in her enchanted slumber. This is because she is not immediately pushed into marriage when she wakes up from the spell. Instead, the kiss serves to solidify the special bond between Maleficent and Aurora, maintaining the princess's youthful and adolescent nature. It has been suggested that "contemporary social constructs of adolescence [that] assume it to be an age marked by the transition from infancy to adulthood, but because economic realities in the United States and Canada in the twenty-first century have increased young adults' financial dependency on their parents, adolescence now stretches into their twenties" are reflected in Disney's *Maleficent* (Cadden, Coats, and Seelinger Trites, 2020: 3).

Princess Aurora, being both a child and an adult simultaneously, embodies the concept of this in-between phase of life. *Maleficent's* princess represents a teenage princess, existing in a transitional stage where her story focuses on the significance of familial bonds rather than personal growth. By remaining a teenager, she avoids being objectified and can delve into the essential familial connections that form during this crucial development period.

Maleficent beautifully explores deeper themes and subverts traditional gender roles often seen in male-authored narratives. It offers complexity and substance by challenging the portrayal of powerful women and women in general. Maleficent's journey towards redemption and the contrast between matriarchy and patriarchy are central to this narrative. Rather than succumbing to the trope of powerful women being consumed by their vices and committing heinous acts, Maleficent's redemption is given a chance. She yearns for Aurora's safety and protection, begging her to stay in the Moors. When Aurora falls under the curse,

Maleficent awakens her, not the prince. This shows her ability to reclaim the goodness the patriarchal world has attempted to strip away. Significantly, Maleficent is not punished for her past actions but can remedy them, providing a refreshing departure from the usual narrative trajectory (Chowdhury, 2005: 19-22).

The victory over Stefan was hard-won for her. It symbolizes a triumph over the dominance of patriarchy and toxic masculinity, representing a woman's victory over her abuser. Stefan's demise, driven by his ambition and selfishness, paves the way for Aurora to ascend to the throne as queen. In this narrative, female friendships are valued tremendously—a refreshing departure from the predominantly bitter portrayals often depicted by male writers. Linda Woolverton challenges these norms by presenting Maleficent and Aurora's unique and kindred friendship, defying traditional villain-protagonist dynamics.

Maleficent and Aurora's relationship flourished into a mother-daughter bond, offering parental and mutual love. Friendship unifies them and provides steadfast support. Breaking the curse by women *Maleficent* sheds light on the heroine and her resilience. Aurora restores Maleficent's wings during the fight against Stefan's army, serving as a powerful symbol of their unity and solidarity. Through these experiences, Maleficent regains her independence, power, and strength as a woman, while Aurora is rightfully crowned Queen in a matriarchal context upon her return to the Moors. Ultimately, this tale promotes female empowerment, friendship, and the importance of standing together.

Cinematography

Barsam and Monahan (2016) define cinematography as a creative and artistic process filmmakers use to create emotional reactions, tell a captivating plot, and introduce the originality of ideas. It includes techniques like camera techniques, camera selection, the use of filters, the genre of film, and the incorporation of special effects. Defining the camera distance involves wisely considering factors such as camera height, the angle of action, and the camera's proximity to the subjects (122). The camera's eye-level positioning is crucial in conveying the story, significantly impacting the narrative. Among the four standard camera angles, a high angle is often used to establish a sense of superiority over the subjects, making them appear small and vulnerable in the presence of a stronger adversary.

In *The Secret of Women*, a compelling scene shows Al-Sheikh's inability to sleep due to his recurring dreams of Manahil, who has captured his heart. Seeking solace, he goes outside to smoke near Manahil's house, where he can glimpse her. The camera slowly pans across Manahil's body, focusing on her neck, eyes, and luscious black hair, accentuating her attractiveness and appealing to the male viewer's taste. Overwhelmed by her beauty, Al-Sheikh succumbs to his desire and returns to his pregnant wife, tearing her clothes and engaging in intimate acts driven by his preoccupation with Manahil.



Picture 4.3: The angel of the camera on Manahil's body

The angle between the camera and the subject is essential in determining how emotionally connected the audience becomes with the character; thus, in the *Maleficent* scene, when she is flying high in the moors, the camera focuses on her wings and the surrounding nature, like in picture 4.4. According to Pramaggiore and Wallis, there are seven distinct categories of long shots. These include the extreme long shot, which encompasses a broad view from a significant distance; the medium-long shot, which captures a complete depiction of a character or a group; and the medium close-up shot, which emphasizes a character's upper chest and brow. Additionally, the camera may be angled out of its typical horizontal and vertical positions to create a sense of imbalance in the world within the frame (139).



Picture 4.4: Maleficent's angel of flying.

Conclusion

This article examining the central female characters in two films, *The Secret of Women* (2014) and *Maleficent* (2014), highlights the impact of ideology on their portrayal. *Maleficent*, an American film, portrays its titular character as a dark and irrational monster, mainly due to her traumatic past as a rape survivor. However, when she assumes a parental role, she transforms into a hero, reinforcing the patriarchal notion that a woman's worth lies in fulfilling traditional gender roles, specifically motherhood. The male characters in the film play a secondary role, merely providing context for the story's characters and settings. Conversely, *Maleficent* challenges the traditional depiction of princesses by presenting a rebellious heroine who defies societal norms. The film also subverts the role of men, casting them as passive counterparts rather than active agents. Likewise, in *The Secret of Women*, set in Iraq, the character of Manahil is empowered and given a voice amidst the communist and tribal themes prevalent during that period. Both films advocate for equal representation and challenge established norms, effectively demonstrating the influence of ideology.

There are several differences between Manahil and Maleficent. They come from different cultural backgrounds, with Manahil being from Iraq and Maleficent hailing from a fictional fairy tale realm. Additionally, their stories are as well. Manahil's narrative focuses on women's empowerment within a patriarchal society while addressing tribal concerns. In contrast, Ficient's story takes a character from being a hero to still upholding societal norms about women's roles. Their characterizations are distinct. Manah is portrayed as a strong and independent who challenges traditional gender norms. On the other, Maleficent is initially depicted as an enigmatic creature to her traumatic past as a survivor of rape. Lastly, the films differ in style and genre, with *The Secret of Women* being a drama and *Maleficent* being categorized as a fantasy.

The guarantor prevents Salim from disclosing the crop quantities, exploiting the farmers' lack of

knowledge for personal profit, and purchasing their crops cheaply. In addition, the guarantor threatens Al-Sheikh to cease buying. This action causes a decline in buyers. Furthermore, the guarantor advises against allowing any man or boy to be exposed to communist ideas about equality and people's rights. The guarantor opposes the construction of a school in the village to prevent the contamination of children's minds with such thoughts. The fear is that an education would empower them to understand their rights and accuse the village of capitalist beliefs. The village operates under a closed feudalistic system, where unjust laws and regulations confine and suppress women. When Mahwish, one of the farmers, declines to sell his crops for a minimal amount of money (20 dinars), the guarantor remarks to Al-Sheikh, "The voice of your man is loud" (*The Secret of Women* 00:43:47), indicating the need to silence him. In such a culture, if a man's voice is suppressed, the voice of a woman is doubly suppressed. The film demonstrates the injustices and suffering endured by men.

The film looks into Maleficent's backstory, revealing the origins of her malevolence and fury. These qualities manifest in stark contrast to the fear-inducing rage typically associated with men. Maleficent, a female character, evolves into a depiction of a compassionate and nurturing mother. Similarly, the movies, whether Iraqi or American, showcase the influential female figures of Manahil and Maleficent, highlighting women's profound capacity for genuine and powerful love. Although neither Manahil nor Maleficent are the biological mothers of Aurora and Salim, they embody icons whose unwavering individualism challenges the patriarchal norms of Iraq's rural society in Manahil's case and the traditional fairy tale narrative in Maleficent's case.

The two films exhibit propaganda in different ways. In *Maleficent*, the chaos is resolved, and the story ends positively, with Aurora waking up, Stefan's demise, and the end of the war. On the other hand, in *The Secret of Women*, the final scene portrays Manahil returning to her old village and entering her house to scream Salim's name, mourning her deceased brother. As she kneels with her hands over her head, a shadow appears, and the camera captures the intensity of her emotions. Both movies utilize the contrasting settings of masculine castles and feminine natural landscapes to highlight power relations.

Women are influenced differently when exposed to feminine surroundings compared to male environments. *The Secret of Women* explores the journey of Manahil, a gifted race, as they adapt from their natural habitat. Manahil discovers her true self as the matriarch of her ecological zone, separated from the patriarchal society. Her time spent in nature and her brother's love empower her despite her challenges. *Maleficent* highlights the significance of these settings, portraying Maleficent as a formidable and fair ruler, even in the face of adversaries. Maleficent's transformation and adoption of matriarchy arise from her meaningful bond with Aurora in the natural world. Manahil and other female characters lead rural lives, focusing on communities. The arch has been conducted at specific times and locations at specific times and locations.

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