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**American East aims to shine light on reality of US Arabs  
get makeover in US film 'terrorists's 'Hollywood'**

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Co-writer Sayed Badreya, who has played a terrorist in several movies, stars in the film  
(Photo by Satir Gonzalez)

DUBAI (Mona Moussly)

Finding a portrayal of an average Arab or Muslim-American in the media is nearly impossible given the rampant stereotyping of them as terrorists or un-integrated immigrants, but a new movie about daily life in these communities hopes to offer a more realistic view of America's more vilified citizens.

"The movie is about how things have changed from before 9/11 to after. We just want to say how we feel," Egyptian-born director and co-writer, Hesham Issawi, told AlArabiya.net, adding that the events of Sept. 11, 2001 made Americans more aware and curious about Muslims and Arabs.

American East is an emotional drama about Arab and Muslim-Americans living in post-9/11 Los Angeles written by two Egyptian-Americans who drew on their personal stories of the dramatic change that occurred after the al-Qaeda terrorist attacks.

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actor Tony Shalhoub.

The story is about family man Mustafa, played by co-writer Sayed Badreya, who opens a Middle Eastern restaurant in Los Angeles with his best friend, who is Jewish, played by Lebanese-American

'It's a slice of life story, it's got romance it has humor it has violence it has all of that, it's not a movie that is just about terrorism,' Tony Shalhoub told CNN.

The film tells a story about Mustafa and his family from his children feeling uncomfortable with being Muslim because of the constant suspicion and fear surrounding the faith to him being arrested twice by the FBI and interrogated for sending money back to a charity in the Middle East.

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Ray Hanania

No-go in Hollywood

Despite attempts to reach the American population, the movie never made it to the big screen and was released on DVD last month. Hollywood's rejection of the film for the big screen sparked criticism from Arab-Americans who saw a conspiracy against showing Arabs and Muslims in a positive light.

With all the negative press Arabs and Muslims get in the post-9/11 world, journalist and radio personality Ray Hanania said he was shocked that Hollywood would not allow the Arab community to "clean up its image and portray Arab Americans in a positive light."

"If this had been a terrorism movie, where there were massacring all kinds of people and yelling horrific phrases, it would have been all over the country," Hanania told AlArabiya.net.

The movie "presents our cause, our experience, our arguments, our issues in a believable light, I just don't think there are people that are ready to admit that we are oppressed in this country, people just don't want to acknowledge a movie that makes that assertion," Hanania said.

Despite the movie's failure to get an airing on the big screen, it seemed to rate highly with customers on Amazon.com. One viewer who gave it a five-out-of-five rating wrote: "I can't emphasize enough the importance of this film's message which is really about tolerance, understanding and respect. The actors have done a great job in portraying very complex Arab characters who are caught up in the frenzy of post-911 America," N.Joseph wrote.

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make money out of it

Issawi

The business of money

But both Issawi and the movie's producer Brian Cox denied claims of censorship and said the reason the movie wasn't aired in mainstream theaters is because the industry is motivated by money rather than altruism.

"I work in the business and I know for a fact this business is motivated by money," said Issawi. "If someone thought that they could make money out of this movie, regardless of the what the movie is, they will put it in the theatre and make money off it," Issawi said, adding he doesn't believe in that there is a conspiracy to block the movie because of its content.

Nevertheless, Issawi said he had no idea why movie distributors MGM and Fox, who bought the movie, didn't do a better job in promoting and marketing the movie. He said the companies did not try to promote American East and get it out to theaters.

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Producer Brian Cox

"I don't want to go into the whole discrimination thing so I can live my life but I would rather think that they did do that because they thought they are not going to make money out of it" Issawi said, adding that he did not believe in any conspiracy to block the movie, but that decision was a calculation about cold, hard cash.

For Cox it was simply a marketing and economics matter which had nothing to do with the picture.

"I know there are a lot of people who want to say that because it's about Arabs it's not getting distributed," Cox told AlArabiya.net. "But I don't believe that."

"You could've made a film about a lovable terrorist and if it had a potential to make money it would get distributed here [U.S.]," Cox said, adding "in fact probably there has been more acceptance of the picture here than probably there will be in the Middle East.