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Hollywood in North Africa and the Middle East: A History of Circulation

Chapter 12
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CHAPTER 12: HOLLYWOOD FILMS BY MIDDLE EASTERN COMPANIES

ImageNation, “the Abu Dhabi-based production company with Hollywood ties”ⁱ

Nearly three decades after he directed *Lifeforce*, *Invaders from Mars* and *Texas Chainsaw Massacre II* for Cannon, Tobe Hooper flew to Abu Dhabi to film an Arabic horror tale. Released in 2013, *Djinn* belonged to a production slate designed to put a new company on the film map. ImageNation was part of the effervescent media activity Abu Dhabi developed in the first decade of the twenty-first century, which included the creation of local production facilities (see Chapter 10). As the almost simultaneous creation, in 2007-2009, of the TwoFour54 media zone, the Middle East International Film Festival, the Abu Dhabi Media Company, ImageNation and the Abu Dhabi Film Commission shows, the local authorities intended not to grow a local film industry incrementally, but to establish quickly, by creating a film policy covering all film- and media-related aspects, hiring top international experts and investing in state-of-the-art technology (Mingant 2018, 282-295). The birth of this subsidiary from state-run Abu Dhabi Media Company was announced with fanfare in October 2008, on the eve of the Toronto Film Festival.ⁱⁱ In its first ten years, ImageNation has produced films as diverse as *Men in Black III* (2012), *The Help* (2011), *My Name is Khan* (2010), *Sea Shadow* (2011) and *Rattle the Cage* (2015). Although ImageNation entered the film world with views very different from those of Globus and Golan, Hollywood has held a key place in the company’s filmography

and strategy, offering a case study on relationships between American and non-American interests in the early twenty-first century globalized world of cinema.

First Contacts: The Warner Bros. Deal

When the Abu Dhabi authorities decided to enter the realm of production, they immediately turned to what they considered as the “mother of all media hubs,” Hollywood, or as Ed Borgerding put it, “the capital of the entertainment business.” (Borgerding 2017). In September 2007, a few months after its creation, Abu Dhabi Media Corporation, thus announced the establishment of a film partnership with Warner Bros, with a \$500 million fund for film production, and a \$500 million fund for videogame titles. This production deal was, in fact, the corollary of a real estate deal between Warner Bros., a subsidiary of Time Warner, and Abu Dhabi real-estate company ALDAR. The deal, which included a theme park, a hotel and multiplex cinemas in the sheikdom, was originally engineered through personal relations, as Hollywood producer Hunt Lowry’s attention was brought to the region’s potential by a friend of his, working as a lawyer in Abu Dhabi. Lowry, who had previously worked with Warner Bros. was to become the chief executive of the announced joint venture in the US.ⁱⁱⁱ Middle Eastern alliances were not unheard of in Hollywood. In the late 1990s, Saudi investors had already shown their interest in investing in the American film industry. In 1996, both Prince Mohammad and Prince Waleed had contemplated making a bid for MGM; Prince Al Waleed, in particular, has been involved in the media sphere, with stakes in EuroDisney, NewsCorp., Italy’s Mediaset and Planet Hollywood.^{iv} By 2007, Hollywood was more than ready to welcome foreign financing. Hedge funds and private equity, which had largely financed films a few years before, had drastically pulled out, both due to the lack of substantial returns and the credit crunch.^v The subprime crisis gave Abu Dhabi’s authorities the opportunity to “buy in at the bottom of the cycle.”^{vi} An alliance with an Abu Dhabi company made particular strategic sense

for Warner Bros. who had developed a strategy of international involvement both in multiplexes notably in Great-Britain, Italy, Japan, and in local-language productions, for example in Japan, France, Germany and India.^{vii} In spite of the attractive potential of the Middle Eastern alliance, American executives had a number of reasons to feel cautious. Past deals with Saudis had fallen through, and stories of shady middlemen and broken contracts circulated.^{viii} One worry in particular concerned the film's content. Both the conservative mindset of the Gulf region and the fact that Abu Dhabi Media company was a state-owned company could mean content restrictions and, in effect, censorship.^{ix} The creation of Imagenation Abu Dhabi in September 2008, as a state-funded company, with a less official and more film-friendly name could be seen as a step to gain more confidence from the Hollywood partner.^x It also meant that Abu Dhabi authorities intended to be considered as equal partners. A few months earlier, in February 2008, the replacement of Abu Dhabi Media Co. Chief Executive, Riyad Al-Mubarak, by American Ed Borgerding, was accompanied by a return to the negotiation table. A former Disney International executive hired to defend Abu Dhabi's best interests, Borgerding immediately objected to the lack of creative role granted to Imagenation, in a deal that tended to relegate the company to the single role of investor (Borgerding 2017).^{xi} In the long run, Warner Bros. proved unwilling to give Imagenation Abu Dhabi access to its most valuable properties and the deal fell through.^{xii} Although to this day Warner Bros. is still listed as a partner of the company's website, this short-lived alliance led to only one production: family movie *Shorts* in 2009.

Creating the structure, building the network

After this failed attempt to establish Hollywood contacts, a first constructive phase in the history of Imagenation Abu Dhabi occurred between October 2008 and February 2011, under the leadership of Borgerding and Al-Mazrouei. The company's mandate was commercial. Its

mission was “to support the film industry and local talent by making movies that have commercial potential, to assure the sustainability the industry will need if it wants to survive on its own.”^{xiii} The imperative of sustainability led the team to focus on productions that were considered highly profitable, “award-winning films which are commercially successful and appeal to audience across the world.”^{xiv} As no film production expertise existed in the country, Borgerding pursued a two-pronged strategy. First, he brought in two German executives, Financial Officer Stefan Brunner and Head of Development Daniel Tully, to create the company’s infrastructure, in congruence with the knowledge transfer strategy applied in many other industries in the Gulf country (Mingant 2017). Then he sought out strategic alliance with US independent companies. Such companies were even more open than the Majors to the injection of Emirati capital, as, in the late 2000s, they were suffering from the economic crisis, the closure of Hollywood Majors’ specialty divisions and drastic cutbacks in development spending.^{xv} In the US, partnering with Imagenation was thus viewed as an opportunity, enabling independents to work with only one financing partner^{xvi} or obtain resources to expand into acquisition and distribution.^{xvii} The press presented the signing of those deals as *coups* for the US companies^{xviii} and referred to Imagenation as “deep-pocketed,”^{xix} an expression to make Hollywood mouths water. For Imagenation, working with independent companies was a guarantee that they would be given the creative control they sought. Imagenation was actually very selective, allying only with companies that had a strong economic or symbolic capital (Borgerding 2017). The early years of Imagenation Abu Dhabi were thus years of Hollywood alliance building. The company signed a \$250 million production deal with Participant Media in September 2008, a \$100 million joint venture with National Geographic in October, a \$250 million deal with Hyde Park Entertainment in November, as well as a development deal with veteran Hollywood producers Walter Parkes and Laurie McDonald in October 2009. In five years, Imagenation produced seventeen pictures. These strategic alliances, made through

personal connections (Jake Eberts, Jeff Skoll) or chance meetings (Walter Parkes) (Borgerding 2017), not only answered Imagenation's economic mandate, but also brought symbolic gains, as a detailed analysis of the four partners shows.

A subsidiary of the American non-profit scientific and educational organization National Geographic, whose core idea in the belief in "the power of science, exploration and storytelling to change the world,"^{xx} National Geographic Films had notably produced the Best Documentary Oscar winner *March of the Penguins* (2005). The deal had the artistic legitimacy of being arranged through the head of National Geographic Films, Canadian producer Jake Eberts, who had founded Goldcrest in the 1970s and had gained international recognition with *Ghandi* (1982) and *Chariots of Fire* (1981). ^{xxi} The films co-produced with Imagenation were not to be nature projects but "real-life storylines about humans (...) in the vein of 'Ghandi,' 'The Killing Fields' and 'Syriana.'"^{xxii} The National Geographic-Imagenation alliance led to the production of *Amreeka* (2009), which raised the issue of discrimination against Middle Eastern immigrants in the US, and *The Way Back* (2010), a World-War-II-prisoner-of-war-escape drama unfolding in breathtaking landscapes.

Participant Media, which had been created in 2004 by former eBay president and philanthropist Jeff Skoll, aimed at making "entertainment that inspires and compels social change."^{xxiii} At the time, the young company had produced immigration drama *The Visitor* (2007) with Overture Films, Afghanistan-themed drama *The Kite Runner* (2007) with DreamWorks, US-Afghan foreign policy drama *Charlie Wilson's War* (2007) with Universal, and had won an Oscar for the environmental documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), produced with Paramount Vantage. Participant Media had also marketed its film with internet social awareness campaigns. That Participant had made a number of films based in the Middle East, which it represented in a positive way, and was able to bring strong financial contribution to the projects were a factor of trust in the relationship (Borgerding 2017). Films co-produced

with Participant Media explored such sensitive issues as US foreign policy (*Fair Game*, 2010), segregation in the US (*The Help*), fracking (*Promised Land*, 2012) or the threat of world epidemics (*Contagion*). These films often received critical acclaim, such as the Octavia Spencer's Best Supporting Role Oscar (*The Help*) and Gus Van Sant's Berlin Film Festival International Jury Award (*Promised Land*).

Hyde Park was created in 1999 by Ashok Amritraj, a famed Indian tennis players who became a Hollywood producer in the mid-1980s. For Borgerding, as a producer with established connections both in Hollywood and in India, Amritraj was “Hollywood plus.”^{xxiv} The deal covered two types of productions: the \$250 million fund would lead to the production of twenty English-language films over seven years, while additional financing would be provided for local-language (Arabic, Hindi) and cross-cultural films.^{xxv} While English-language production would fulfill Imagenation’s economic goals, Hyde Park’s “cross-cultural ethos”^{xxvi} would have more symbolic value. With Hyde Park, Imagenation envisioned itself as creating a bridge between Hollywood, the Middle East and Asia, and in October 2009, the two companies strengthened their alliance by forming a \$75 million joint fund with Singapore’s Media Development Authority, a state agency. Their first film was to be *Street Dancing*, a dance competition story, mixing styles and cultures and set in New York and Singapore.^{xxvii} As of 2019, none of the films announced with the Singapore MDA authorities had materialized. During this first phase, the deal with Hyde Parks resulted only in the production of two Hollywood-style action films: post-Cold War thriller *The Double* (2011), starring Richard Gere, and Marvel comics sequel *Ghost Rider: Spirit of Vengeance* (2011) with Nicholas Cage.

The last alliance was a development deal. Walter Parkes, a producer since the mid-1970s, and Laurie MacDonald, former production vice-president at Columbia, had joined Spielberg’s Amblin Entertainment in 1993 and helped create DreamWorks.^{xxviii} Their production records included such well-known Hollywood successes as *Gladiator* (2000), *Men in Black II* (2002),

and *Catch me if you Can* (2002). These credentials reflect Imagenation's global strategy to enter the world of commercial filmmaking by collaborating with the top players. This agreement thus gave the Abu Dhabi company entry into the financing of *Men in Black III*, alongside Columbia and Amblin, and *Flight* (2012) alongside Paramount.

These four strategic alliances served a number of purposes. First, they enabled the team to actually bring the company into existence, by giving it direct access to projects in development. Secondly, they allowed Imagenation to set foot into Hollywood and to gain business credibility. They established Imagenation as a long-term financial partner for Hollywood firms and allowed its entry into working relationships notably with the DreamWorks/Amblin and Participant/Summit networks. These alliances also brought two symbolic gains. By allying with top Hollywood talent, Imagenation could rapidly obtain artistic credibility. This would create a virtuous circle, in which more quality projects would be offered to them. But symbolic credibility went beyond the film world, and these alliances held a strong soft power value: the fact that a Middle Eastern state-owned company would finance socially committed films, especially the Participant films, went counter to the backwards image often associated with the Gulf countries. It was a clear answer to those fearing Gulf-financed films would have to self-censor on sensitive issues. From the start, Imagenation assured that it was open to producing controversial material, as long as it did not insult Arabs.^{xxix} Beyond economic gains, Imagenation's Hollywood connections were thus bringing in soft power gains for Abu Dhabi. In the long-term, Borgerding's plan was to enhance Imagenation's creative control and turn it into a development company working on a project-per-project basis with Hollywood majors (Borgerding 2017). The company had also started developing two local films: *Sea Shadow* and *Djinn*. In early 2011, when Mohamed Mubarak Al Mazrouei, a close adviser to the Emirati rulers, replaced Mohamed Khalaf Al Malzourei as chairman of the Abu Dhabi Media

Company,^{xxx} the board did not validate this strategy. Khalaf Al Mazrouei, Borgerding and Brunner were dismissed in February 2011.^{xxxii}

Refocusing on the UAE, Clarifying the Relationship to Hollywood

In the US, the backing of Hollywood films by a Middle Eastern company raised some eyebrows. Conservative commentators warned that a conspiracy was being hatched by Abu Dhabi to take over Hollywood. They saw it as no coincidence that anti-Bush film *Fair Game* should be financed by a Middle Eastern sheikdom and anti-fracking movie *Promised Land* by an oil producing country.^{xxxiii} They also denounced Imagenation's anti-Israel stance both in its films (*Amreeka*) and in the choice of its partners (Mel Gibson in *The Beaver*, 2011). In the words of conservative blogger Debbie Schlussel, Abu Dhabi would be producing "pure propaganda" with the collaboration of "LaLaLand" executives irresistibly attracted by "the smell of IslamoCash."^{xxxiv} Although the commentators rightly assumed that Abu Dhabi had created Imagenation to serve an ideological purpose, they were mistaken in the type of agenda pursued. Though Imagenation would clearly deny financing to any film presenting Arabs in a negative light,^{xxxv} it was never created with a view to change Hollywood's representation of the Arab world (Borgerding 2017). From the start, Imagenation's ideological focus has been centered not on Hollywood itself, but rather on using Hollywood to advance Abu Dhabi's economic and soft power interests, a focus which became clearer as the company reorganized under the leadership of Mohamed Al Mubarak, chief executive officer at the Aldar real-estate company, as chairman, and Abu Dhabi Media co. board member veteran American media executive Michael Garin as CEO.

Renamed Image Nation, the company was divided into two divisions—Image Nation Abu Dhabi, head by former UAE diplomat Mohammed Al Otaiba, and Image Nation International—to "better balance (their) local and international activities."^{xxxvi} Al Mubarak and Garin were

given full funding to devise a five-year business plan that would better respond to the Abu Dhabi leadership's objectives.^{xxxvi} In essence, the focus "went from Hollywood-centric to Abu Dhabi-centric and UAE-centric."^{xxxvii} Image Nation International paired down its Hollywood investment, with a production slate privileging films in the \$10-20 million budget brackets and niche-market oriented, such as Latin American-themed horror film *Out of the Dark* (2014), multicultural restaurant feud *The Hundred-Foot Journey* (2014) and social activist biography *Cesar Chavez* (2014). On the other hand, local production was stepped up, with the release of four films between 2013 and 2016 (*Djinn*, *From A to B*, *Rattle the Cage*, *The Worthy*) and the development of two more projects (*On Borrowed Time*, *Going to Heaven*). The new focus on the UAE and its priorities was also visible through two other types of programs that Image Nation started to involve in: documentaries and television.

In 2014, Image Nation started a documentary division, headed by Danielle Perissi, in order to "tackle issue (sic.) that are important locally and also globally."^{xxxviii} In effect, the topics of the documentaries are either UAE-themed social issues in *As One: The Autism Project*; the story of the 1990 UAE football team in *The Lights of Rome* or related to the UAE foreign policy such as *Every Last Child*, a documentary linked to the UAE's Pakistan Assistance Program for the vaccination of Pakistani children despite Taliban opposition and partly targeted at the Pakistani community in the sheikdom.^{xxxix} The documentary division is thus a continuation of the soft power strategy already mentioned.^{xl} Image Nation's entry into the world of television and broadcasting was also motivated by the new emphasis on local considerations, notably the use of local production infrastructure. Image Nation thus branched out in reality TV content (*Beyond Border*, 2013), broadcasting (with the launch of the Arabic-language, free-to-air television channel Quest Arabia, in partnership with Discovery Communications, in June 2015),^{xli} and TV serials *Justice: Qalb Al Adala* (2016).^{xlii} The new attention to UAE interests also led Image Nation to step up its local training program (the Arab Film Studio, *Mawaheb*)

by developing relationship with the Dubai Film Festival's Enjazz grant program, as well as the French FEMIS film school.^{xliii}

The Hollywood alliances signed by the first leading team also evolved. Participant did not renew its agreement after it expired in 2013 and considered an alliance with the Doha Film Institute. As the deal has fallen through, Participant has remained open to collaboration with Image Nation.^{xliv} While Image Nation lost the close relation that had led to most of its production in its first years, it strengthened its relationship with Hyde Park, which absorbed National Geographic Films and extended its Parkes + McDonald/Image Nation for another five years.^{xlv} Image Nation also clarified its relationship to Hollywood, which was more clearly asked to deliver economic and educational dividends. Economically, Image Nation's two branches are inextricably linked, the *raison d'être* of the international branch being to earn the money that will be spent by the Abu Dhabi branch. Image Nation has thus reversed the relationship, with Hollywood productions such as Tom Hank's *The Circle* (2017) and Mattel's *Barbie* (2018) now more clearly acting as cash machines to subsidize Emirati projects^{xlvi} and jumpstart the local film industry. Of even more strategic importance is the expected educational gain, the ability to train Emirati personnel who, in the long run, will build this sustainable film industry.^{xlvii} The connection to Hollywood is thus valued as an educational opportunity, like the partnerships with the Dubai Film Festival and the FEMIS. As Garin noted in 2014: "We have the talent and we have the financial resources. (...) What's lacking in our region is experience and mentors."^{xlviii} Experience gains are achieved by turning Hollywood into an internship provider, through the Production Company Internships and the On-Set Internship programs.^{xlix} Early recipient of the Mawaheb program trained on the Indian set of the *Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (2011) and at Participant's US offices. Mentoring occurs as American professionals provided input on UAE projects, such as established genre filmmakers Peter Safran and Steve Schneider teaming up with Ali Mostafa for end-of-the-world story *The Worthy* (2016), or

original *L.A. Law* (20th Century Fox Television, 186-1994) scriptwriter William Finklestein and former HBO Europe drama head and showrunner Marc Lorber presence in the *Justice: Qalb Al Adala* team.¹ With the strategic change of 2011, Image Nation International has clearly put Hollywood to the service of the Abu Dhabi branch, as a provider of funds and an address book.

Independence or Integration?

Knowledge transfer, however, does not necessarily run smooth, and Imagenation's second local production stands as a warning tale. Shot in March 2011, *Djinn* was blighted by the lack of skilled local personnel. Significantly, Garin noted one year later that “[t]here are less than 5 people qualified to make feature films in the UAE.”ⁱⁱ Imagenation's answer was to bring in most of the talent from the English-speaking world: American genre director Tobe Hooper, American screenwriter David Tully, German producer Daniella Tully (Imagenation), producers Jaye Gazeley and Robert Crippen (FilmWorks), and American director of photography Joel Ransom. Emiratis were given secondary and consultative positions to learn the trade: Nada Shouma as dialogue coach, Mohammed al-Otaiba as shadow director, and Nayla Al Khaja as cultural consultant.ⁱⁱⁱ In the same way, supporting roles were given to local TV celebrities (Saood Al Kaabi, Ahmed Abdullah), but the two leads were given to two expatriates: London-educated Bahraini Khalid Laith and London-, New York- and Paris-educated Lebanese Razane Jammal.^{iv} The Emirati personnel did not feel integrated and resentment developed,^v to the point that Nayla Al Khaja resigned, declaring “I was the only Emirati on set – all the key players weren't. (...) it's just that you couldn't call it an Emirati film.”^{vi} To this lack of local input corresponds a lack of local flavor. While the film was shot in Ras Al Khaima,^{vii} a well-known location, the story takes place exclusively inside a building. As Culture Crypt notes, “Save an establishing shot or two, the entire movie may as well have been lensed on a soundstage in Cleveland.”^{viii} Language was also an issue. With all the key personnel being non-Arabic

speakers, English language is preeminent in the film. This could impact not only reception by the audience, but also acting, with CultureCrypt critics pinpointing the good performance during the Arabic scene, but the “deadened dialogue delivery in English (which) chills the chemistry between characters.”^{lviii} In the end, the focus on a young Emirati woman who craves to go back to New York gives this “Emirati” film a very American flavor. With the film remaining in post-production for more than two years, rumors circulated that UAE authorities had taken offense at the way the country was represented, notably regarding witchcraft.^{lix} With *Djinn*, Imagenation fell into the trap of completely outsourcing the production of a local film to foreign personnel, thereby producing with an unidentifiable film, adapting an Arab legend to American and Japanese horror conventions,^{lx} severely cut to answer the supposed expectation of a broad audience^{lxii} and, in the end, satisfying no one.^{lxii}

What *Djinn* demonstrated was the necessity for Abu Dhabi personnel to acquire knowledge fast in order to break from the dependence on Hollywood. Emiratization, i.e., the progressive replacement of expatriate personnel by UAE personnel, has thus become a priority (Mingant 2018, 289). This is probably one reason behind the choice of Michael Garin. As a member of the board of Central Media Enterprises (CME), Garin was instrumental in changing the face of the Eastern European broadcaster leadership, reducing by half the number of executives from the English-speaking world and putting the company in the hands of a Romanian executive. As Garin himself noted, “And that’s what Abu Dhabi aspires to – having its businesses run entirely by Emiratis.”^{lxiii} By 2014, 55% of Image Nation’s personnel was Emirati, and their goal is to reach 75% by 2017.^{lxiv} In the end, Garin, who describes his mandate as “developing people before developing movies,”^{lxv} envisages that, once the industry has reached sustainability, Image Nation will become obsolete: “As I always say, Our mission is not to build Image Nation, our mission is to build the nation.”^{lxvi} As the name of the company implies, the aim is to give the nation the possibility to develop its own images and

representations. The Emiratization in personnel is intended to lead to Emiratization in style and content. This was foregrounded as early as 2009 by Borgerding, who noted that, just as there were Egyptian, Hollywood, Bollywood and Danish styles of making movies, there could be an “Abu Dhabi” or UAE style.^{lxvii} Interestingly, although Image Nation managed to balance foreign and Emirati influences on recent productions *Rattle the Cage* (M. Al Ansari, 2015) and *The Worthy* (A. Mostafa, 2016), the Hollywood influence on the UAE film style will probably continue long after the last American advisor has left. Hollywood cinema remains, indeed, the golden standard for international-audience-oriented films, both for executives intent on the concept of production value,^{lxviii} and for a young generation of filmmakers, such as Majid al Ansari whose film references are not *auteur* films from the Middle East, but Baz Luhrmann, David Fincher, Guy Ritchie, and Asian cinema (Mingant 2018b, 176-9).^{lxix}

Besides, despite the strong discourse on autonomy, Image Nation’s strategy is, rather, to fully insert in the global film world. Imagenation does reach out a hand toward regional talent and proposes discussions on a potential “Arabwood,” whose engine would be Abu Dhabi.^{lxix} In actual fact, however, the company had not reached out to historical filmmaking nations of the Arab world, such as Egypt or Morocco, either to emulate their models or to establish collaborations. Image Nation’s strategy has been a top-down application of model from the English-speaking world. One key model they wish to emulate is New Zealand, a small nation film industry which had quickly gained recognition as a viable production center, in the aftermath of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Peter Jackson, 2001, 2002, 2003) and is now fully integrated in the globalized film industry (Leotta 2015, 29). Far from challenging the current global film rules, Image Nation has sought to integrate the existing ecosystem. When the company was created in 2008, it entered a film world where globalized practices and contacts had already become entrenched. For over a decade, the international audience, which had hitherto been the bread-and-butter of pre-selling independent companies, had become a priority

for the Hollywood majors. Foreign topics, locations, talent and financing had increasingly found an open door into the film Mecca (Mingant 2010). Imagenation both benefitted from this context and participated in intensifying this capillarity.

In this game, Abu Dhabi has one particular card that it could play to establish itself in a unique position: its central geographic and cultural position between East and West. This vision is visible from the start, through the partnership with Indian-American producer Ashok Amritraj, the 2009 Hyde Park/Singapore's Media Development Authority deal, the collaborations with Dharma Productions (*My Name is Khan*, 2010) and Reliance (*The Hundred-Foot Journey*, 2014). In 2016, Image Nation rekindled an Asian strategy that had been left aside by signing a \$300 million film and television fund pact with state company Intercontinental Communication Center. With some of the projects being international-oriented English-language films, the deal will enable China to intensify its entry into Hollywood. But the deal can also work to the advantage of Hollywood companies intent on penetrating the Chinese market. It is a two-way bridge. As Garin noted, "There is now a second route for Hollywood into China, by heading East through Abu Dhabi."^{lxxi} Image Nation's assets are not only its funding capacities, but also its knowledge of, and relationships in, Asia. It is ideally positioned to become a place for Hollywood companies to bring Asia-related projects that might not be made in the US. Producing team Parkes and MacDonald thus brought the *He Named me Malala* documentary project (2015) about the young Pakistani education activist and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Malala Yousafzai to Imagenation partly to benefit from their cultural expertise due to "religious political sensitivities" of the topic.^{lxxii} Another example of the type of program for which Image Nation can act as a bridge between East and West is the reality show *Chance of a Lifetime* (2014-2015), developed by Hyde Park, in which twelve young filmmakers from the UAE, India and Singapore make short films related to the United Nation's priority global causes. In a truly globalized fashion, the show was coproduced by Hyde Park-Image Nation,

the United Nations, the UCLA Burkley Centre for International Relations and *Variety* magazine, and broadcast on Participant's Pivot TV in the US and the National Geographic Abu Dhabi.^{lxxiii} Just as the Gulf countries had been commercial hubs in the pearl era of the 19th century (Piquet 2013, 48), Image Nation is now betting on growing collaborations between Hollywood and Asia to write its name in permanent ink on the global film map.

ⁱ "Image Nation greenlights soccer comedy," *Variety.com*, December 13, 2012.

ⁱⁱ "Abu Dhabi bets big on media, pic pacts," *Variety Daily*, October 13, 2008.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Deal to put Warner in Abu Dhabi," *Los Angeles Times*, September 27, 2007.

^{iv} "Sheiks rattle but don't roll," *Variety*, March 22, 1999.

^v "Abu Dhabi invests in Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times*, September 4, 2008.

^{vi} Ed Borgerding, quoted in "Abu Dhabi Puts more cash on the line in Hollywood," *The New York Times*, September 3, 2008.

^{vii} "Deal to put Warner in Abu Dhabi," *Los Angeles Times*, September 27, 2007.

^{viii} "Sheiks rattle but don't roll," *Variety*, March 22, 1999.

^{ix} "Abu Dhabi invests in Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times*, September 4, 2008; "Abu Dhabi Puts more cash on the line in Hollywood," *The New York Times*, September 3, 2008.

^x "Abu Dhabi Puts more cash on the line in Hollywood," *The New York Times*, September 3, 2008.

^{xi} "Abu Dhabi Puts more cash on the line in Hollywood," *The New York Times*, September 3, 2008.

^{xii} The real estate deal also fell through and the Warner Bros. park was never built with Aldar.

^{xiii} "Stefan Brunner, the COO of Imagenation Abu Dhabi," video posted May 17, 2010. <http://ireport.cnn.com/docs/DOC-445348> Accessed March 6, 2017.

^{xiv} "Abu Dhabi lanches \$1bn film company," *Screen International*, September 5, 2008; "Abu Dhabi invests in Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times*, September 4, 2008.

^{xv} "Imagenation," *Variety*, November 3, 2008; "Duo Draw Abu Dhabi Coin," *Daily Variety*, October 8, 2009.

^{xvi} "Skoll Score: Indie Nabs Mideast coin," *Daily Variety*, September 11, 2008.

^{xvii} "Nat Geo in film reorg," *Variety*, December 27, 2011.

^{xviii} "Indie nabs Mideast coin," *Daily Variety*, September 11, 2008.

^{xix} "Bridging the Gulf," *Variety*, June 29, 2009.

^{xx} National Geographic, 'About us,' <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/about/> Accessed March 6, 2017.

^{xxi} Borgerding Ed, former Imagenation chairman, Skype interview with the author, 13 mars 2017.

^{xxii} Jafaar, Ali. 'Imagenation,' *Variety*, November 3, 2008.

^{xxiii} Participant Media, "About us," <https://www.participantmedia.com/about-us>, <accessed March 6, 2017>.

^{xxiv} Quoted in "Hyde Park digs Abu Dhabi pics," *Variety Daily*, November 3, 2009.

^{xxv} "'Killer'" Deal for banners, *Daily Variety*, February 22, 2010; "Gere, Frace pour a "double,'" *Hollywood Reporter*, April 29, 2010.

^{xxvi} "Imagenation deal fuels cross-cultural slate," *Variety*, April 29, 2010.

^{xxvii} "Cultural Groove," *Daily Variety*, November 6, 2009.

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- ^{xxviii} ‘Aerial duo to Amblin,’ *Variety*, November 9, 1993; ‘What’s Wrong with DreamWorks?’ *Esquire*, January 29, 2007.
- ^{xxix} ‘Skoll Score: Indie Nabs Mideast coin,’ *DailyVariety*, September 11, 2008.
- ^{xxx} ‘Michael Garin is new Imagenation CEO,’ *deadline.com*, February 11, 2011.
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