FROM HAREM GIRLS TO JIHADIS: THE DEPICTION OF

MUSLIM WOMEN IN HOLLYWOOD

by

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A THESIS

An Abstract of the Thesis of

Maryam Moghaddami for the degree of Bachelor of Arts
in the Department of Cinema Studies to be taken June 2022

Title: From Harem Girls to Jihadis: The Depiction of Muslim Women in Hollywood

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Think Muslims in films or television and you may recall Tasneem Qureishi from *Homeland* or, more recently, Nadia Ali from *Bodyguard*. Or you may recall a completely different Muslim woman (if you even can come up with one). The one thing that remains consistent is that the character is frequently a caricature or gross misrepresentation of Muslim women. In fact, as this paper will go on to argue, the broad majority of current female Muslim characters on-screen today can fall into one of two categories: the terrorist and the oppressed one.

These narrow, primarily negative representations of a group of people is one of the defining qualities of Orientalism. Orientalism, in conjunction with imperialist motives on the part of Western nations, influenced the depiction of Muslims in popular media such as films and television series. This image of a Muslim has been shaped by eurocentric thinking that viewed Europeans and Americans as being superior to the rest of the world and, in turn, justified imperialist action.

The paper will start with the advent of film in the late 1800s and discuss the orientalism evident in the films of the time and its connection to colonialism. This portrayal of the Muslim as the "exotic" would shift in the late 1940s as the U.S. began

to play a greater role in the Middle East and once again in the early 2000s with 9/11 and the beginning of the Global War on Terror. Notably, the Muslim went from being the curio to the villain. A rise in Islamophobia led to Muslims almost without exception being cast as the terrorist, which helped strengthen popular perceptions of Muslims as such while also helping rationalize U.S. military and political efforts in Muslim majority countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq.

The main focus of this paper, however, is on Muslim women. In particular, this paper will look at the issue of veiling and show how the veiling and unveiling of Muslim woman in Hollywood films and television shows exemplifies the influence of orientalism. Specifically, the aspects of exoticism and assumed inferiority will be discussed. The issue of veiling also largely represents imperialist points of view, which use the veil to designate the Middle East as being backwards and to emphasize the "otherness" of Muslims.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

It is a truth universally acknowledged that the representation of minorities in Hollywood films is far from perfect. For the many people who identify as being part of a minority group that moment of realization of the consistent misrepresentation varies. For me it happened one bright summer day when I had gone to the movie theater to watch the new Spiderman movie, *Spiderman: Far from Home*, with my siblings. We had only settled in when suddenly on-screen among Peter Parker and his classmates there She was. Her tan skin, flowing scarf… my heart sank when I saw her. Whatever interest I had in the film was gone. She pained me, because in her scarf which so clearly revealed her as Muslim I was forced to see myself and knew the audience that sat alongside me in that dark room would see her in me as well. From the first moment I saw her on-screen, I knew the plot and I recognized the villain and hated her with a passion impossible to understand by a viewer who has not experienced personal injustice at the hands of an on-screen villain. Superheroes were good guys and Muslims bad guys and she was Muslim. So I sat back and braced myself for the inevitable "Allahu Akbar" and consequent "boom" that somehow would startle me, all the more because I would expect it. It never came. She never blew anyone up or in fact anything. She remained nameless, silent, and thankfully unremarkable in any way, shape, or form. I was shocked by both the ending and my own shock. It wasn't until that moment that I realized how accustomed I was to seeing Muslims, women looking like me, on-screen out to kill anyone God or their men would set them on. In the beautiful world of film, I was the "Other" who at best did not belong and at worst posed an inherent threat to that world.

What this study aims to do is answer the very broad question of why Muslim women get portrayed so repeatedly in the negative way that they are and, in doing so, examine the Middle East as being the "Oriental Other" to Europe. This study hopes to introduce the familiar character of the Muslim woman and explicate the typical narrative arc her character is so frequently trapped in.

Purpose

In this digital age, the importance of popular media seems all the more pronounced with the distant parts of the world being more interconnected by media and information than ever before. Within this understanding of popular media lie films and television shows, arguably among the most popular and accessible forms of mass media. But films and television shows make no claim to impartiality and can only be viewed as the products of their makers. In the dismantlement of on-screen stereotypes created by filmmakers, it is important to be conscious of their existence and to critically examine these representations of people shown by Hollywood. Overwhelmingly negative and unduly simplistic depictions of a minority in popular media may lead to a broad misunderstanding of that minority and the birth of stereotypes. Given that stereotypes are an easy and convenient way to understand an otherwise complex group of individuals, an audience tends to rely on these stereotypes and thus popularizes them, incentivizing the film industry to continue using stereotypical characters in hopes of capitalizing on their popularity. Without an acknowledgment of these negative representations and an understanding of their background, the aforementioned cycle will not be broken.

This study is also significant in its focus on Muslim women and examination of the issue of veiling. As one of the most overt signs of a person being a Muslim, the veiled woman has long been reduced to being singularly defined by an article of clothing. This study hopes to show how the veil came to be seen as the barrier between a modern "civilized" society and a backwards one and how this made its way on-screen. In examining the relationship between veiling and imperialism, this study hopes simplistic depictions of Muslim women will be understood to be relics of an imperialist past that should be far behind us. Ultimately, the hope would be for more nuanced characters, however unusual it may be to see on-screen.

Methodology

This study will build upon existing scholarly work that looks at the orientalist underpinnings and political implications of Hollywood's representations of Muslims. The argument for the orientalist roots of representations of Muslims on-screen will be narrowed by focusing on the topic of veiling. The orientalist view and politicization of the veil will be unpacked before delving into how these issues are reflected in Hollywood films and movies.

There is no intention of doing an analysis of every film with a Muslim woman in it, so this study will build upon several key films and television shows that help illustrate the main argument. Additionally, in considering what would count as a Muslim woman character, this study has decided to disregard background characters played by extras and will focus primarily on characters that appear on-screen for longer than a minute. This time limit has been suggested given that one of the categories being analyzed is the oppressed-wife type, a character which generally has a very short screen

time but whose silent presence does have enough of an impact to be worth analyzing. The films and television shows used in this study are from "Hollywood" in the sense that they are American-made (and/or produced) and qualify as being designed for a larger audience, as opposed to "indie" films.

The terminology being used in this study should also be made clear. This study will largely lump "Muslim," "Arab," and "Middle Eastern" together. In making this decision to consider the depictions of Arabs and Middle Easterners I examine as being "Muslims" I hesitated and would like to take the time to explain this decision. This is not done with the intention to deny the diversity of Muslims in the world nor suggest that all Arabs or Middle Easterners are Muslim. It just happens that in popular culture, with only a few exceptions, "Arab" and "Middle Eastern" have largely been taken to be synonymous with "Muslim." Even in instances when the religion of the character was not the *raison d'etre* of that character or even really discussed, it is still assumed. Harems and "sheiks," for example, are so easily associated with Muslims that one doesn't even need to explicitly state that the sheik with a harem is Muslim.

Within the study of Islam, there are scholars who utilize a "civilizational theory" and divide the world up according to what they believe to be the major world civilizations. Islam is one of these civilizations which, by its nature, is set to enter a conflict or a clash with other civilizations, primarily the Judeo-Christian Western civilization. Political scientist Samuel Huntington argues that this "clash of civilizations" is inevitable because of Islam's similarities to Christianity given that both are monotheistic religions that stress the existence of one true religion and the

importance of missionary work [1] while historian Bernard Lewis traces this clash to the

very birth of Islam with it only growing stronger.[2] Both theorists create a concept of

Islam as a monolith and the people who belong to the civilization of Islam all see the

world in the same way: as being split between the believers (i.e. "the House of Islam" as

per Lewis) and the disbelievers (i.e. "the House of Unbelief" or "the House of War")

who must be converted and in no way can be allowed to rule over the believers.[3]

Of course, this theory comes with its share of fair critique. Edward Said

criticized the ideas of both Huntington and Lewis as not taking into consideration the

plurality of civilizations and instead trying to make sense of an increasingly complex

and interconnected reality through simplistic concepts such as "Islam" and the "West."[4]

Other criticism points out the essentialist nature of such theories that hold that these

"civilizations" are distinct (having no overlap despite historical conflicts and

connections), unchanging (time or contact with other civilizations have no effect), and

can entirely account for the behavior and mentality of a person belonging to that

civilization. Denying the interconnections between cultures also is also necessary, as

Adeeb Khalid argues, to create a positive image of the West as the source of concepts

such as freedom, democracy, human rights, and free markets.[5] So dividing the world

into the simplistic concept of civilizations untouched by their interactions with each

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[1] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, (New York: Simon& Schuster, 1996), 210-211.

[2] Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage: Why so Many Muslims Deeply Resent the West, and Why Their Bitterness Will Not Be Easily Mollified," *The Atlantic,* 1990, 47.

[3] Lewis attributes conflicts between Muslims and non-Muslims in areas as diverse as Xinjiang, Kashmir, and Kosovo to the view of Muslims that it is unnatural for them to be ruled by non-Muslims.

[4] Edward W. Said, "The Clash of Ignorance," *The Nation*, October 4, 2001, https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/clash-ignorance/.

[5] Adeeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism : Religion and Politics in Central Asia*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 15-16.

other, these theorists allow for one side to be painted more easily as being "good" and the other side as being "bad."

Despite its controversy or, to be more precise, because of it, this theory of a "clash of civilizations" and its critiques will play a great role in this paper. First of all, neither Huntington nor Lewis were the first to view the Western and Islamic worlds as being two separate, distinct entities. As this paper will show, Western cultural perceptions of the Middle East as dutifully ignore the intersection of "civilizations" with people like Arab Jews and Christians in the Levant as do Huntington and Lewis. Additionally, this worldview was greatly popular during select periods of history for the ease with which it explained away conflicts and portrayed Muslims as being inherent enemies to the West.

Secondly, the "essentialist" aspect which boils down each civilization to a few core defining elements is one that is evident in the literature, art, and films I examine. These depictions of Muslims ignore cultural and regional differences in favor of either the broad stereotype of the "Orient" which is defined by its exoticism or of the "terrorist" who is defined by his violence and religion. This broad understanding of the Middle East as being Muslim also fits in with the Eurocentric vision of the Orient as being the "Other" or different from Europe and the West. So, if Europe defined itself as having a Judeo-Christian background, the Orient could only be Muslim.

Lastly, as Amira Jarmakani, points out in a critique of the "civilizations" theory, women are the markers of civilization by which traditionally the progress of a nation towards or away from modernity has been measured. Jarmakani argues the term "civilization" is rooted in a history that from the period of Enlightenment sought to

distinguish Europe from the "barbaric" countries by emphasizing the dedication to an idea of progress (i.e. modernity).[6] So Europe and the "uncivilized" parts of the world differed in their acceptance of progress and the uncivilized world's progression towards modernity was measured in part by the treatment of women.

Moving on to the terminology used. The terminology used to understand these depictions tends to vary even in the scholarly works I have examined and cite later in this paper. For some who tend to focus on more recent portrayals, the term "Muslim" was used as the terrorists depicted were not only Arab and Middle Eastern but also from Southeast Asia. "Arab" was used by other scholars such as Jack Shaheen and Jarmakani, who primarily focused on older depictions. Given the scope I intend to cover, the term "Muslim" is more fitting in that it allows for me to discuss the impact of European relations with the Ottoman Empire and Persia on the European understanding of the Middle East. While most of the Middle East was split between these two empires, neither the Turks nor the Persians are Arabs. What they do have in common though, and what tends to define most of their similarity in portrayal, is Islam.

The term "veil" used is also a broad term used to refer to the numerous different types of hair or full-body coverings that Muslim women wear. It has been suggested that in its English form, the "veil" has an immediately negative connotation and implies something hidden and, therefore, possibly threatening. In the Arabic, there is no single equivalent for the term "veil" instead there is a plethora of words differing by the region, historical period, local dialect, and part of the body being covered.[7] While in

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[6] Amira Jarmakani, *Imagining Arab Womanhood: the Cultural Mythology of Veils, Harems, and Belly Dancers in the U.S.*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 10-11.

[7] Fadwa El Guindi, *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance*, (New York: Berg, 1999), 6-7.

any other instance it is important to use the correct terminology for the different types of hair, face, or body coverings worn by Muslim woman in order to emphasize their religious and/or cultural significance, in this case it is a bit different. It seems almost too perfect in a paper dedicated to discussing how the West simplified a complex Middle East to use the simplified English term for a complex Middle Eastern covering. The "veil" is truly the perfect term as it demonstrates both the Western inability to differentiate between different types of veils and their understanding of the veiled woman: she is alternatively hidden, and thus enticing, and hidden, and thus threatening or oppressed.

Lastly, this study, despite opposing opinions of scholars, will use the working definition of "Orientalism" provided by Said. As this paper has cited the theories of Huntington and Lewis, the concept of Orientalism best explains these theories' ideological background and practical use. Said offered a definition of Orientalism with three distinct yet interrelated parts: the first is Orientalism as an academic study; the second, is Orientalism as a worldview based on the distinction made between the "Orient" and the "Occident"; the third is Orientalism as a Western means of restructuring and dominating the East.[8] The Orient is thus entirely a Western construct that exists in congress with itself and alienated from a reality of the Middle East. This Orient is inferior by nature and unable to describe itself, necessitating the West to describe the Orient for it. Consequently, the Orient exists in Western texts, culture, and discourse if not in reality.

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[8] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 25-27.

Chapter 2: The Pre-Hollywood Years, Europe, and the East

History

> "Saladin, nous voilà." (English: "Saladin, we are back")
>
> – General Gouraurd, Upon the 1920 French takeover of Damascus [9]

This section begins with the era of Saladin and the Crusades before leading up to the era of empires when the French, British, and other European colonial powers took over the Middle East. Of course, the history of Europe and Middle East extends far beyond the Crusades but while some Europeans had certainly been aware of the Muslim Middle East, the broader European population first came face to face with Islam during the Crusades.[10]

It should be mentioned that this is not a piece on the history of Europe and the Middle East but a brief introduction to Islam through the gaze of the average European and, as such, the following sections will not be detailed historical accounts of the periods they focus on but will emphasize key moments and their influence on how the Middle East was viewed by Europeans. The first section looks at the Crusades, specifically, the religious issues underlying the conflict between the Middle East and Europe and the growing interest in Middle Eastern products the returning Crusaders were bringing back to Europe. The second section continues the topic of Middle Eastern products and trade with Europe and questions how the "Oriental" brand was formed.

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[9] James Barr,"General Gouraud: 'Saladin, We're Back!" Did He Really Say It?," *Syria Comment*, May 27, 2016, https://www.joshualandis.com/blog/general-gouraud-saladin-back-really-say/.

[10] Sini Kangas, "Inimicus Dei Et Sanctae Christianitatis," in *The Crusades and the near East: Cultural Histories*, ed. Conor Kostick,(Florence: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 132-133.

The final section is about imperialism and how Europe conquered and colonized the Middle East. This section highlights the racial and moral justifications for these European intrusions into the Middle East.

The Crusades

To sum up the Crusades in the briefest of descriptions, the Crusades were a series of religious wars in beginning in 1095 with Pope Urban II's declaration of a crusade in order to recapture the "Holy Land." Beyond this clash of two religions over a common holy site, the Crusades had a lasting impact on Europe's understanding of the Middle East. The first, and most impactful, was the idea of an inherent conflict between Muslim and Christian worlds and, the second, the commodification of "Eastern" goods. Through this push of Europeans into the Middle East a duality in the perception of the Middle East can be seen. On one hand, the Middle East is the "Holy Land," the cradle of the Judeo-Christian West. On the other hand, the Middle East is the "Orient," the mysterious, fantastical land of violence, sensuality, and riches.

The Crusades, in the opinion of people like Lewis, were an unsuccessful Christian venture and part of fourteen-hundred-year struggle between Muslim and Christian civilizations and an "attempt to recover by holy war what had been lost by holy war."[11] Thus, the Crusades were a military conflict in addition to a political, religious, and cultural conflict between Christian Europe and the Muslim East. The early religious thrust of the Crusades and emphasis on the piety of the Crusaders saw the clear designation of one side as being the "good" side (with all the moral pretenses

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[11] Bernard Lewis, *Cultures in Conflict,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 20.

that word generally connotates) fighting against the bad side. From the point of view of the Europeans, they were in the right and the Muslim side were the heretics of whom the Holy Land needed to be cleansed.[12]

The language surrounding much of the First Crusade emphasized this religious point of view, reframing the incursion into the Middle East as a sort of armed pilgrimage.[13] Urban II himself in recruiting Crusaders used language that stressed the importance of a return of the Holy Lands to Christians, expulsion of infidel Saracens (Muslims), and framed the expedition as a sort of "penitential violence" by which the sins of the Crusaders would be forgiven in result of their efforts.[14] Exploiting Europeans' relatively small knowledge about the Middle East, Urban described a Holy Land in crisis where Christians suffered at the hands of their occupiers who polluted Jerusalem with their presence.[15] If in the eyes of the Church and Christian laymen the Crusaders were on a pious mission in a continuation of Biblical events, then Islam and the Muslims existed as an opposite to Christianity.

This concept of Islam as being the negation of Christianity can be seen in the Medieval writings about the Muslim prophet, Muhammad. In these writings, Muhammad was first and foremost a heretic, one condemned to one of the lower levels of Dante's hell,[16] and, secondly, a perverse individual whose teachings existed to

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[12] Kangas, "Inimicus Dei Et Sanctae Christianitatis," 139.

[13] Christopher Tyerman, *The Debate on the Crusades, 1099-2010*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 2.

[14] Christopher Tyerman, *The World of the Crusades*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 69-70.

[15] Düzgün Şaban Ali, "Oriental studies and the Conception of Islam During the Crusade Period," *Ankara Üniversitesi İlâhiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 42, no. 1 (2001): 153-154.

[16] Michelina Di Cesare, *The Pseudo-Historical Image of the Prophet Muhammad in Medieval Latin Literature: A Repertory*, (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, Inc., 2011), 479.

promote his own sexual desires [17] and whose heaven was defined by its sensual offerings.[18] This emphasis on Muhammad as depraved and the teachings of Islam feeding into this depravation both distinguished Islam and Muhammad from the Catholic Europe and Jesus (who was believed to be celibate) and equated Muslims with sexual perversion.

Trade between Europe and the Middle East had existed prior to the Crusades, mainly through the Byzantine Empire and increasingly Sicily,[19] but the Crusades would be crucial in reopening trading routes to and from the Middle East and creating an appetite in Europe for Eastern goods.[20] In their travel to and from the Middle East and Europe, Crusaders established sea trading routes from Italy to the Middle East, bypassing the lands of the Byzantine Empire. Luxury products such as silk, spices, and porcelain stimulated economic growth in Europe. As Eastern goods made it to European markets, the demand for them grew as did Europe's interest in what the Middle East had to offer.[21]

The Age of Exploration

The Age of Exploration is a term loosely describing a historical period of several centuries during which European explorers, traders, and conquerors traveled the world in search of new lands and exotic commodities. This period began in part because

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[17] Di Cesare, *The Pseudo-Historical Image of the Prophet Muhammad,* 31, 85, 121, 190, 221, 261, 345, 350, 366.

[18] Di Cesare, *The Pseudo-Historical Image of the Prophet Muhammad,* 52, 337, 446.

[19] Tyerman, *The World of the Crusades*, 57.

[20] Lisa Blaydes and Christopher Paik, "The Impact of Holy Land Crusades on State Formation: War Mobilization, Trade Integration, and Political Development in Medieval Europe," *International Organization* 70, no. 3 (2016): 551–586.

[21] Şaban Ali, "Oriental studies and the Conception of Islam," 171.

of an interest in Eastern goods which were then making their way to Europe through various trade routes and ended with the rise of colonialism. These European traders and explorers sought to break the stranglehold the Muslim Ottoman Empire had on trade from the East and to lay claim to these lands of mythical riches themselves. These goals led to a spate of European colonizing efforts in Asia, Africa, and the newly-discovered Americas. In order to justify this land grab, Europeans leaned heavily on conceptions of moral superiority, citing the backwardness of natives and the need for Europeans to enlighten these indigenous people, primarily in the matters of religion.

Products from the Middle East and beyond had long made their way to Europe via land trade routes such as the Silk Road. The growing interest in these products from the East as well as the growing Ottoman dominance over trade routes drove European powers to seek trade routes in the Atlantic.[22] In new lands that they discovered, European explorers established colonies, seeking to reap benefit from the resources that they found there. For these explorers and traders, the East represented an untapped potential and promised fairytale riches for those who willing to go and take them. Of course none of the lands these Europeans traveled to was truly "terra nullius" and in every location there were already existing people with whom the newcomers had to contend with.

The European settlers and their governments found that they needed justification for taking the land and resources from the natives. If the Crusaders rationalized their actions in the Middle East by stating that they were recovering and defending Christian

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[22] Kerem Nisancioglu, "The Ottoman Origins of Capitalism: Uneven and Combined Development and Eurocentrism," *Review of International Studies* 40, no. 2 (2014): 346. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24564276.

lands, these new colonies were almost certainly not Christian so a new justification

needed to be found.[23] They found this justification in religion and their colonizing

efforts were legitimizing through their purported evangelizing mission. The

colonization of the Spaniards was then reframed as a godly mission and a valiant effort

to bring the heathens to God.[24]

In conjunction with the conversion mission was the civilizing mission. These

new colonies were portrayed as being the opposite to Europe and at an inferior stage of

development and civilization which both explained Europe's dominance and gave the

responsibility to help in the process of development. Since the Renaissance and through

the Enlightenment, the theory of *social evolutionism* came to be popular. This theory

held that all societies in the world existed at one of three stages of development: wild

(i.e. hunter-gatherers), barbarian (i.e. nomadic but conquering), and civilized (i.e.

sedentary). This was tied with ideas of progress and modernity and Europeans

increasingly saw themselves as having already passed the "wild" and "barbarian"

stages.[25] [26] Being further along in this development process, Europe took on a

paternalistic role as the natives were deemed too backward to be able to rule

themselves.[27]

Here it is important to note how the European viewed the native: the native had

childlike qualities requiring the guidance of parental figure (i.e. Europe), was a heathen

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[23] Tyerman, *The World of the Crusades*, 430.

[24] Gabriel Paquette "Justification for Empire, European Concepts," in *Encyclopedia of Western Colonialism since 1450*, ed. Thomas Benjamin, (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007).

[25] Antoon De Baets, "Eurocentrism," In *Encyclopedia of Western Colonialism since 1450*, ed. Thomas Benjamin, (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007).

[26] During the Enlightenment, "wild" was substituted for "primitive," "pagan," and "traditional" while "barbarian" was changed to "premodern." (See. De Baets "Eurocentrism")

[27] Paquette "Justification for Empire, European Concepts."

and needed to be saved, and lived a backward and uncivilized life to his own detriment (which was proven by how easily the native was conquered). The economic and political benefits of the European powers taking over these lands were explained away as rewards for their efforts in their colonies with some even believing that the riches of the New World were rewards for the Christians' proselytizing efforts.[28] This idea of the "White Man's Burden" also brought up questions of biological, racial, and cultural superiority which will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

The Age of Empires

From the empire upon which "the sun never set" to the numerous other European colonies around the globe, European nations established themselves through their claims to foreign land. The justifications here were similar as Europeans denigrated the indigenous people in their colonies, suggesting that these people were developmentally, morally, culturally, and biologically inferior to Europeans.[29] [30] The Middle East was no exception and the weakening of the Ottoman Empire saw France and Great Britain vying for control in North Africa and the Levant. Both countries looked to benefit economically and the Middle East served as the platform upon which their European rivalries could play out. This period also saw the politicization of the

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[28] Rachel Winchcombe, *Encountering Early America* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 71-72.

[29] Tyerman, *The World of the Crusades*, 430.

[30] This conviction in the racial inferiority and barbarism of indigenous peoples reflected previous European humanist descriptions of Ottoman Turks (See. Tyerman, *The World of the Crusades*, 431), showing how while the subject changed, the language and attitude of European imperialists remained very similar.

issue of veiling as European countries attempted to prove Muslims as backward and thus justify the intrusion into their lands.

Needing as always to justify their takeover of new lands and subjugation of native people, Europeans increasingly viewed civilization and development as being linear and that Europeans were further along in the process. The concept of the colonies as being less developed helped reframe European colonialism as a "civilizing mission" and viewed Europeans as enlightening the backward natives and allowing them to achieve a level of development they would not have previously achieved. This view allowed numerous atrocities to occur as many Europeans believed that whatever horrors Europe may bring to its colonies, these indigenous people were in such a poor state that any European effort was better than what these people already had. The violence of the Europeans was also viewed very differently in part thanks to the assumption of that the native was at the core different from Europeans and this "Other" needed a more disciplined approach in order to learn.[31]

The "Otherness" of the native is defined by several perceived differences. The cultural and developmental difference was a major one as Europeans saw native societies as being less civilized. In particular, the way of living and interactions were scrutinized and deemed to be worse than Europeans. European colonizers emphasized things such as clothing (the nudity of some native peoples), religion (native religions), living environment (the mud or wood homes), and language (the different sounds and speaking styles that were rough on the European ear).

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[31] Dierk Walter, *Colonial Violence: European Empires and the Use of Force*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 166.

Arguably, the most harmful of these perceived differences were biological ones. Following in the steps of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer, Europeans saw their colonization of natives as inevitable and proof of their superiority along the lines of a "survival of the fittest" narrative.[32] Eugenics also took off as European scientists harped on physical differences and did things like measure the skull of natives in a comparison of them with animals. Scientific advancement was weaponized to prove the long-existing belief in European superiority. Racism also played a role with an emphasis on the darker skin color of many of the natives. Darker skin was seen in biblical terms as being descended either from Ham, the son of Noah, or Cain, the son of Adam. In both instances, God's curse upon the individual extended to his descendants who were subject to "eternal slavery." This concept of "natural slavery" or that some people meant to be slaves by their nature,[33] resulted in "blackness" being associated with slaves and some Europeans arguing that slavery improved the lives of the inherently inferior natives.[34]

In general Europeans measured physical attractiveness of natives by looking at their physical similarity to Europeans. The treatment of native women proved this, notably the case of the "Hottentot Venus." In this instance, a native African woman, Sara (Saartjie) Baartman, was brought to Europe and put on display for intrigued and horrified Europeans. The physical differences of the woman, her large posterior for

[32] Matt D. Childs, "Race and Racism," in *Encyclopedia of Western Colonialism since 1450*, ed. Thomas Benjamin, (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007).

[33] Bruce Baum. *The Rise and Fall of the Caucasian Race : A Political History of Racial Identity*, (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 32-33.

[34] Kevin D. Roberts, "Race and Colonialism in the Americas," in *Encyclopedia of Western Colonialism since 1450*, ed. Thomas Benjamin, (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007).

example, were viewed with both horror and interest.[35] After her death, Baartman's body was dissected by French doctor, Georges Cuvier, who assembled her bones and preserved her organs including her genitals, putting them on public display in Paris where they remained for over a century. Cuvier used his examination of Baartman as part of his broader argument for the inferiority of Africans and their closer relation to apes and orangutans than Europeans.

This case is also notable as after centuries of commercializing products from colonies, this is an example of a native's "Otherness" being commodified for the benefit of Western audiences. The European audience's fascination with Baartman also shows the interest in native female sexuality.

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[35] Nicholas Hudson "The 'Hottentot Venus,' Sexuality, and the Changing Aesthetics of Race, 1650–1850," *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 41, no. 1 (2008): 20. http://www.jstor.org/stable/90011643.

Oriental Visions and their Underlying Assumptions

"The special combination of unconstrained curiosity concerning the 'Other' and

unforced respect for his otherness remains a distinctive feature of Western and

Westernized cultures and is still regarded with bafflement and anger by those who

neither share nor understand it."

-Bernard Lewis, *Cultures in Conflict*

Through their contact and interactions with the Middle East, Europeans, and

Westerners more broadly, came to hold a certain set of perceptions. In the previous

section, I tried to outline how these perceptions came to be and in what ways they were

convenient for colonialist powers. In this section the focus will be on looking at these

perceptions, their cultural manifestations, and the few key similarities that they shared.

All of the following sections are similar in one area: they are largely defined by a deep

Western fascination for people and items seen as being "Eastern." The still very

widespread lack of concrete knowledge about the Middle East allowed people to project

and explore their fantasies in this exotic space. The label of "exotic," "Oriental," or

"Eastern" connotated an "Otherness" that allowed Westerners to act in different ways or

discuss different things which would be unacceptable in a European context. This draw

to the foreignness of the Middle East was matched by a revulsion for that same

foreignness. While the unfamiliarity of the Middle East was intriguing and represented

potential, it also posed a threat to Europe and gave rise to a fear. In many ways the

caricatures of the Middle East and its people allowed Westerns to enjoy their

fascination with the region to its full extent while also disarming its people of the threat they could pose.

The perceptions of Middle Eastern women all at once reflect colonialist goals, "Orientalist" fascination, and European fear. The treatment of Muslim women by their men became a key issue. Abuse was assumed to be the rule rather than the exception. The discussion of this abuse and need to free the Muslim woman fit colonialist narratives and was used exclusively to the benefit of imperialist goals in the Middle East. The fascination with the Middle Eastern woman came in two forms: the first, Westerners were intrigued by the foreign appearance of Middle Eastern women much like one may be intrigued by the taste of a foreign fruit; the second, Middle Eastern women served as a canvas for Western male fantasies, sexual and otherwise. Thanks to this fascination, the Middle Eastern woman became synonymous with exoticism particularly in the form of advertising. This objectified her and turned her into no more than an Oriental curio. The fear aspect came from the danger the sexuality of Middle Eastern women posed to Europeans. Middle Eastern women (as well as men) were oversexed. The existence of their sexuality meant they posed a threat to the social norms of the virtuous Europe and the denial of this sexuality was thought to lead to crime and evil.[36]

This attitude towards Middle Eastern women is evident in the European understanding of the harem and veiling. From the colonialist viewpoint, Middle Eastern men oppressed their women by locking them up in harems and preventing them from showing their face or hair. From the Orientalist viewpoint, harems were the ideal male

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[36] Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient*, 52.

fantasy. In fact, the treatment of their women by Middle Eastern men was a male

Western fantasy. Veiling was very similar. Western men sexualized the veil, intrigued

by what the veil hid. From the viewpoint of European fear, the harem represented a

space in which outside men weren't allowed, something that automatically threatened

male dominance. The harem was also associated with lesbianism because in the

Western mentality, men didn't know how else to understand a female-only space.

Lesbianism generally poses a threat to a phallocentric society because it suggests a

possibility to do without men.[37] [38] For the veil, if the unknown it created was titillating

because it suggested the possibility of a pleasant surprise, it had the equal possibility of

being an unpleasant surprise – particularly, as anti-colonialism took off, and veiled

women began being viewed as a threat.[39]

Arabian Nights

    One Thousand and One Nights or, as it is otherwise known, *Arabian Nights*, is

perhaps the greatest example of an Orientalist piece of literature. The influence of this

piece on Western perceptions of the Middle East to this day cannot be stressed enough.

And yet in so many different ways *Arabian Nights* does not represent a singular culture

or nation from the Middle East and prior to the piece's translation and arrival to Europe

there is in fact little evidence that *Arabian Nights* existed in the form that we know it

today. The stories, for one, come from a variety of different cultures including Arab,

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[37] *Lesbianism and the Women's Movement*, Nancy Myron and Charlotte Bunch, (Baltimore: Diana Press, 1975), 33.

[38] Middle Eastern lesbianism was also a Western sexual fantasy that seemed then almost too inappropriate to associate with Western women and not within their range of capabilities. (See. Rana Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient*, 52-53)

[39] One of the first instances of the conflation between a veiled woman and terrorism was during the conflict between Algeria and France for Algerian independence.

Persian, and even Indian, although the original collection was Persian but translated into Arabic at the end of the 8th or beginning of the 9th century CE.[40] The inability of the piece to distinguish between these individual nations and cultures is what makes it an Orientalist piece of literature as opposed to an Arab one or even a Middle Eastern one. As Said points out, the Orient, as was created by Westerners, is broad and conveniently does not distinguish between individual cultures as they all fit within a Eurocentric understanding of an Eastern "Other."

The *Arabian Nights* was first translated by Antoine Galland between 1704 and 1717. Galland not only translated the original Arabic version which he had but added some stories. Two of the most best-known stories, *Aladdin* and *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* had not been previously recorded in written form even in Arabic – Galland is believed to have heard them from an Syrian storyteller and added them to his version. Additionally, Galland added to the stories, expanding *Ali Baba* from six pages to thirty-six.[41] Like the Orientalists who would come after him, Galland was fascinated by the violence supposedly inherent to the Middle East and the sexuality of Middle Eastern women.[42] However, the version which Galland published was greatly edited to fit the societal norms and tastes of the time. In particular, he cut down on the number of sexual themes in the collection (e.g. descriptions of the sexual intercourse between the queen and her slave),[43] a choice which would be almost entirely reversed by the English translator of *Arabian Nights*, Richard Burton.

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[40] Jaap Van Ginneken, *Screening Difference: How Hollywood's Blockbuster Films Imagine Race, Ethnicity, and Culture*, (Lanham: Rowman &Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 23.
[41] Van Ginneken, *Screening Difference*, 23.
[42] Kabbani*, Europe's Myths of Orient*, 25-26.
[43] Kabbani*, Europe's Myths of Orient*, 28.

Burton expanded extensively on Galland's original translation and criticized it as being an "abbreviation." While Galland tried to appease conservative societal sentiments, Burton, who wrote primarily to a private audience within the space of gentlemen's club, had no such qualms about sexuality. The references to sex were taken to the maximum in Burton's translation which included extensive footnotes on the topic of Middle Eastern sexual practices.[44] For him and his fellow members of the gentlemen's club, Burton's *Arabian Nights* envisioned sexual fantasies that were not considered acceptable to discuss in Victorian society.[45] Unsurprisingly, Burton's version was not allowed to be published more publicly. *Arabian Nights* became even less of an accurate representation of any culture in the Middle East and more of a way in which sexuality could be discussed outside of the constrictive realm of Victorian society.[46]

The stories that exist within the different versions of *Arabian Nights* tend to range so this paper seeks to focus on a few thematic elements that appear broadly. The first is the idea of fantasy. The *Arabian Nights* is absolutely a work of fantasy and yet as the later section on travelers to the Middle East will show, it was frequently not understood by Europeans to be entirely fantasy.[47] For Westerners then, the Middle East was so far from the reality of Europe and the Western world that it could realistically contain genies, flying carpets, and magicians.

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[44] Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient*, 59-61.

[45] Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient*, 55, 58.

[46] Burton is coincidentally also known as one of the first translators (or editors to be more fair) of the *Kama Sutra*. In that version of the *Kama Sutra* and in his later translation of *The Perfumed Garden*, Burton greatly emphasized sexual concepts even complaining that the sexual content was mild and limited. (See. Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient*, 65)

[47] Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient*, 25.

The second theme is that of female sexuality. While the stories told during the thousand-and-one nights vary, the frame within which these stories are presented remains the same. A king, Shahryar, finds out about the infidelity of the wife of his brother as well as his own wife. Upon this revelation he concludes that all women are evil and begins marrying virgins and having them killed the very next day. At one point he marries Scheherazade who escapes her death by telling the king a story so interesting he wants to keep her alive to hear more. Female sexuality then within the context of *Arabian Nights* is evil. The wives of Shahryar and his brother have uncontrollable sexual urges that are shown in a negative light. Shahryar concludes that all women are the same and will commit adultery the first chance that they have. This concept of the sexuality of Middle Eastern women is a trope that existed for many years past the first translations of *Arabian Nights*. Scheherazade, by contrast, is unusually asexual considering the type of stories she purportedly told. Her purpose is to please the male protagonist and through her telling of stories with wanton and evil women, she condemns and turns against her own sex to side with the male.[48] Unsurprisingly, she is the heroine of the story, showing how within the European mentality being "good" was equated with being "virtuous."

In direct contrast to the women in the story, Shahryar is incredibly violent in an unexplained and ruthless manner. He has his first wife and her lover killed then proceeds to kill every single woman he marries after that until Scheherazade. Middle Eastern men and senseless violence is another trope that continues to pop up in depictions of the Middle East. Similarly, Shahryar is not particularly intelligent.

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[48] Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient*, 49-51.

Scheherazade is able to escape her fate by telling a story every single night, making Shahryar seem both gullible and infantile.

French Paintings

Now the Middle East has been extensively depicted in paintings by artists from numerous cultures, but for the sake of brevity, this study will focus on five paintings of the Middle East by different French painters. The time period during which most of these painters produced their work was heavily influenced by the movement of Romanticism. Romanticism was a rejection of the rationalism of the Enlightenment and provoked a deep interest in "nature" and emotion. For some, this artistic vision and fascination with the "uncivilized" aspect of the Middle East was reflected in their paintings of the Orient. As Europe became more industrialized, the Romantics escaped to their Orient which notably had no urban settings, extreme poverty, or societal ills. It was a place full of natural landscapes and inexplicable violence and sensuality which countered European rationalism so starkly.[49] Once more, the Middle East became the European's negation of Europe.

The first painting is *The Snake Charmer* by Jean-Léon Gérôme which was painted in the late 1800s, believed to be around 1879.

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[49] Kabbani*, Europe's Myths of Orient*, 29-30.

This painting was famously used by Said as the cover of his book on Orientalism. In many ways it is understandable. The painting is in clearly an Islamic country based on the tile work. The country portrayed is far from its prime, in fact it is in decline arguably given the mismatched and damaged tiles. Exoticism is very much front and center with the performance of a snake charmer. The snake charmer is here is the object of focus not only for the men watching him but also for the audience who sees this painting. Of course, the snake charmer is naked which adds an element of sexuality to the painting. While it has been credibly argued that snake charmers did in fact perform in some state of undress in order to prove that there was no trickery involved in the performance, this would undoubtedly not have been a fact known by the European audience who viewed this painting. For a mere audience member, a young naked boy is putting on a performance for a group of older men with the help of a prop in the form of the snake. The sexual undertone is impossible to escape. The sexuality

being portrayed also has a taboo aspect to it. The homosexual suggestion is one that would have not been considered acceptable in European society and yet in the "Orient" this painting depicts the taboo as a norm.

Linda Nochlin notes in her analysis of this painting that there are certain notable absences in the painting: the first is of time and history as the paintings shows the Orient as being frozen in time, untouched by civilization or the colonialist powers then breathing down upon it; the second is of Europeans as the European is not present in the painting and yet his implicit presence is felt as his gaze is the what brings this Orient into being and for whom the painting is meant; the last is the apparent absence of art as Gérôme is known for being a "realist" or "naturalist" adding detail to his paintings for greater "authenticity" yet, in the process, distorting the authentic reality.[50]

The next two paintings, one of which is also by Gérôme, both similarly depict female slaves. *The Slave Market* (1866) and *The White Slave* (1888) have female subjects.

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[50] Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," In *The Nighteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader*, Vanessa R. Schwartz and Jeannene M. Przyblyski (eds.) (New York: Routledge, 2004), 290-292.
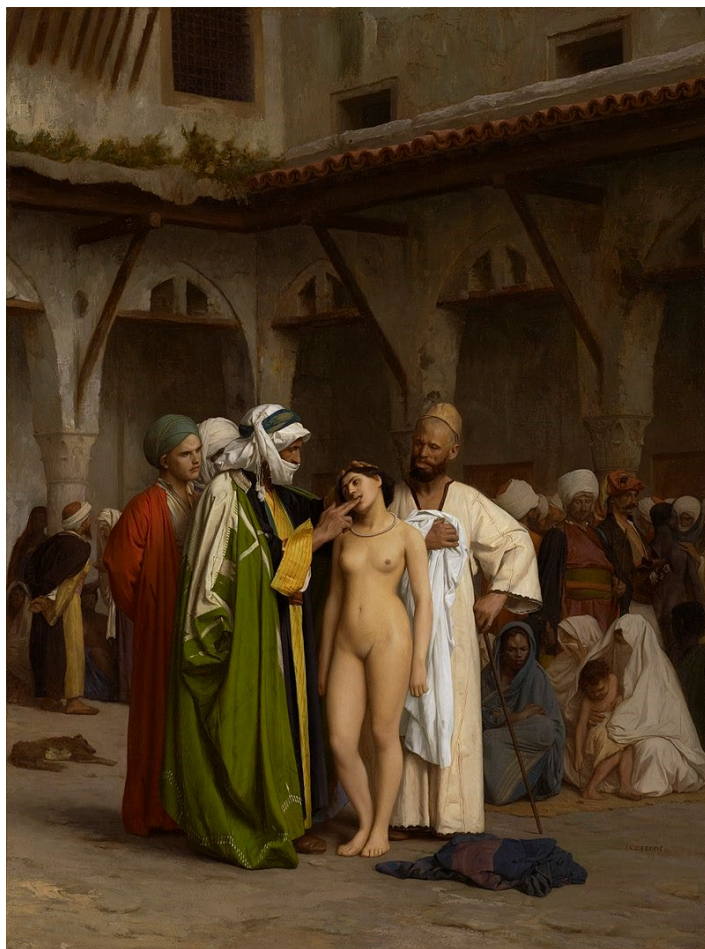
The first painting shows a slave market in which a naked female slave is being examined by her potential buyers. Her examination consists of the buyer looking at her teeth, much like one would check the teeth of a horse to get a sense of its health. The men in this painting treat the female subject no better than they might an animal. The slave herself represents an unusual type of beauty. With her dark hair, eyes, and slightly tan skin, she is exotic in a way that would differ from European women. And yet her skin tone is noticeably whiter than that of the men in the painting. She still looks European, "white" enough to be considered attractive. By contrast, her dark male counterparts come off as sinister. In many depictions of minorities, Westerners have often conflated skin tone with morality resulting in darker skinned people being evil and

lighter skinned and more European-looking people being good. This is evident in this painting as well, as the figure the audience is supposed to admire and sympathize with is physically the lightest person in the painting as opposed to the darker men who an audience would feel a repulsion towards. The issue of nudity is prominent in this painting as well. While it would seem repetitive to comment on the latent sexuality, the act of dress and undress is one of interest. Behind the female slave stands presumably her owner who holds a veil in his arm. The female slave was clearly veiled before she was undressed for the purposes of her male buyers and Western audience. Further behind the owner of the slave, more veiled women sit presumably waiting for their turn. The veil in this painting provides both an example of the exoticism of a veil and eroticism of that veil being removed.

The second painting is of a single slave woman who sits reclining with her back to the viewer. This painting was done by Jean-Jules-Antoine Lecomte du Nouÿ.

To continue the discussion of skin color, the "white" woman at the center is a slave and yet she comes off as more fortunate than the two darker servants in the background. Darker-skinned women tend to feature in the background and are rarely depicted in the sexual manner that the white woman at the center of the painting is. The food, smoking, materials, and jewelry all suggest a life of idleness and excessive extravagance. This continues in the theme of the Middle East as a place of fairytale wealth and luxury.

The next painting is *The Turkish Bath* (1862) by Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres. This painting depicts a group of women bathing.

Like the previous paintings discussed, this painting with overt nudity is very clearly

sexualized. The women are all naked, interestingly the only form of cover is the

headdresses some of them wear. Like *The White Slave*, there is a clear distinction

between the white females and the darker skinned ones. The white females exist in their

nudity for the pleasure of the audience. The darker skinned females leave no doubt that

they are servants and exist for their mistresses' pleasure. While these darker skinned

females are in some form of undress, they are not overtly sexualized in the way that the

white females are. Their poses, the expressions on their faces all are devoid of any

sexual connotation. Sexual attractiveness, once more, was defined by similarity to

European beauty standards. Despite the title "Turkish Bath," the women all appear very

European, suggesting that Ingres merely used the context of the Ottoman Empire to

make his interest in studying nude women more palatable to a European audience. Of

course, if the first painting of the snake charmer had latent homosexuality, this painting does as well. Harems and female-only spaces were frequently thought by Europeans to be places of female debauchery (i.e. lesbianism). In the front right corner, the two women lay on each other as one fondles the second. Again within this "Oriental" context, a European is able to explore the forbidden concept of same-sex relationships.

The final painting has nothing to do with women. *Execution Without Hearing Under the Moorish Kings* (1870) by Alexandre Georges Henri Regnault.

In this painting a dark-skinned ruler towers over the headless body of a victim whom, as the title suggests, he executed without a hearing. The obvious emphasis here is the suggestion of senseless violence. This Oriental ruler is brutal and unmoved by his own

brutality. The blood he spilled fits perfectly within the warm color scheme of the painting, which suggested on its own an exotic location. The intricate details in the architecture and furnishing further promotes this sense of exoticism. While reveling in this exhibition of "Easterness," the Regnault painting draws an immediate distinction between the king in his painting and Europeans. This king, after all, did not believe in due process or any form of court justice which one might expect in Europe or a more "civilized place." Regnault's king exists in an Orient that is beyond the laws of mercy and morality.

British Travelers

As the Western presence in the Middle East increased in the 19th century, so did the number of travelers who were able to visit the Middle East. In their letters home and writings, these travelers continued to perpetuate already existing tropes about the Middle East all while maintaining an air of European superiority that would made it practically impossible for them to have a genuine, frank conversation with natives. The presence of these travelers revealed the increasingly colonialist reality while their attitudes reflected the influence of an Oriental fantasy.

For many of the travelers to the Middle East, their point of reference was frequently *Arabian Nights.* These stories were referenced so often that it would be practically impossible to cite all.[51] One traveler, conscious of the frequency of literary references notes "the reader, perhaps, is weary of the frequent reference in travellers' tales to the popular work just named [*Arabian Nights*]," but defends such references

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[51] Judy Mabro, *Veiled Half-Truths*, (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 1991), 28.

stating that "you are at every turn brought into contact with the facts of the 'Arabian Nights'… almost every object you see illustrates some story, or clears up some difficulty. In fact, you are surrounded by the properties and dramatis personae of the 'Thousand and One Nights.' The old familiar figures of your fancy have become realities."[52] For this traveler the fantasy of the Orient was not shattered by a trip to the Middle East but in fact confirmed. The use of the *Arabian Nights* as a point of reference reflects the human tendency to understand new things through the lens of what we already know. For travelers, the Middle East was the Orient – a land of decadence, eroticism, and cruelty.

In conjunction to this wave of tourism was the colonialism. The travelers came not only as observers but as colonialists assessing the wealth of the Middle East and seeking to possess it. Scholars have argued that the Orientalist image of the Middle East is very female. The promise of riches, the warmth, the subservience, and inferiority all gave the Orient a distinctly female characterization. Unsurprisingly then, colonialists often equated accessibility to Middle Eastern women with access to the Middle East itself. Some travelers drew comparisons between an outsider's relative inability to travel deep into the Middle East with the seclusion of the Middle Eastern woman.[53] Others drew clear comparisons between the women and wealth of the Middle East: "sequestered within these inviolate walls are the two great mysteries of the East – its women and its wealth. Both are jealously guarded from the eye of the stranger."[54]

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[52] John Ormsby, in Mabro, *Veiled Half-Truths*, 29.
[53] Robert Hitchens, in Mabro, *Veiled Half-Truths*, 48.
[54] Roy Devereux, in Mabro, *Veiled Half-Truths*, 47.

Just as the veiled woman prompts a desire to unveil her and see what is hidden, the inaccessibility of the Middle East made it all the more tempting to colonialists. In fact, colonialists found it enormously irritating that the veil prevented them from seeing the Middle Eastern women. If the gaze of a viewer is a form of possession, then the inability of the viewer to see the veiled woman protected her from him while also allowing her to turn the tables and make him into the spectacle. A traveler visiting a house in the Middle East and noticing that him and his companions were the object of curiosity for several veiled women bitterly remarked "the house, in short, had been converted into a theatre, and we were the spectacle."[55]

This desire to possess the Middle Eastern woman also put the Western man at odds with the Middle Eastern man who, in the eyes of the Westerner, did in fact possess the desirable woman. In an interaction with an Algerian man and his "pretty little savage," a Western traveler at first finds the man to be "respectable" before discovering the true relationship between the man and woman at which point he unhappily wrote "Yes, I *had* understood, my gazelle belonged to this jackal… she was his wife. Then I saw that I hadn't looked very closely at him at first, for now I found him hideous with his large teeth and dirty burnous, his… When I departed I shook his hand; oh! if only I could have crushed it!"[56] In these words, the Westerner clearly thinks of the Middle Eastern woman as being "his" despite having just met her and having no real reason to possess her. The revelation that the woman was the Algerian's wife brought on a burst of resentment towards the Algerian who the traveler now imagined as being horribly

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[55] Edmondo di Amicis. In Mabro, *Veiled Half-Truths*, 45.
[56] Paul Fagault. In Mabro, *Veiled Half-Truths*, 102-103.

"hideous," despite his initial positive impression, and a desire to hurt the man seen by the confession that he wanted to crush the Algerian's hand.

American Advertisements

This section will discuss the instances of Orientalism in American advertisements. America differed from Europe in that it made contact with the Middle East relatively late in the process and only developed real imperialist goals in the Middle East in 20th century. The perception of the Middle East then depended almost entirely on images inherited from Europe and uniquely American qualities such as religion and the manifest destiny. From the side of religion, the Protestant roots of the United States meant that many understood the Middle East in terms of the Bible. For them, they sincerely believed and refused to think otherwise that the Middle East was untouched by civilization and remained in the Biblical times.[57] This tendency to view the Middle East as not having developed and not being touched by progress at all explained part of the Romantics' attraction to the region. The second aspect of this was this search for "virginal lands." As Jarmakani argues, despite Americans having reached the coast of the Pacific Ocean, the desire to keep in touch with their agrarian roots remained. Middle Easterners were often viewed in a similar manner to Native Americans.[58]

As the United States modernized and progressed forward, the nostalgia for the past increased. This nostalgia was fed upon by advertisers for products such as

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[57] Jarmakani, *Imagining Arab Womanhood*, 34.
[58] Jarmakani, *Imagining Arab Womanhood*, 36.

cigarettes. One specific brand, *Omar*, typically featured lush nature settings with typical

Oriental scenes of luxury, usually including the rotund "Omar" and his concubine.

This imagery created a sense of abundance at the same time that Americans were being

to feel an anxiety over the disappearance of the American frontier and their distancing

from the "rugged individualism" which shaped so much of American identity.[59] In these

advertisements then the consumer was fed imagery of the timeless, innocent, untouched

by outsiders Middle East. The Middle East for American cigarette buyers offered

something that they felt themselves beginning to lose. In terms of gender, the femininity

of the woman was alluring and masculinity was nonthreatening to the buyer.

Circassian Slaves

Of all of Orientalist cultural products, Circassian women may be the best

representatives of the stereotype of Oriental women that would dominate later years,

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[59] Jarmakani, *Imagining Arab Womanhood*, 30-32.

albeit in a more extreme fashion. Where exactly the legend of Circassian beauty originated is unclear. Some suggest it may have been during the Medieval and Renaissance period while others emphasize the mid to late 19th century as being the peak of legends about Circassian beauty. Circassians are a North Caucasian minority, originating in what is now Southern Russia. During the Imperial Period of Russian history, the majority of Circassians were deported from the North Caucasus following the Crimean War. Most of these Circassians ended up in the Ottoman Empire and many went on to be sold as slaves.[60] However, Circassian slavery had existed long before then as raiders captured Circassians and sold them on Ottoman slave markets.[61]

The Caucasus within Western understanding during the 18th and 19th centuries was thought to be the birthplace of humans.[62] For one, the Caucasus was mythologically where Prometheus was chained following his gifting humans with fire. Secondly, Noah's Ark is believed to have landed in the Caucasus, meaning that all humans after that came from there.[63] These two facts as well as the belief that Circassians were considered the most beautiful people led European anthropologists to categorize the White race as "Caucasian," a term that exists to this day.[64]

The association of the Caucasus and Circassians with "whiteness" and beauty led to greater sympathy when news of their suffering at the hands of the Ottoman Turks broke. This is where the story of the Circassians matches that which would define

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[60] Ehud R. Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998), 83-84.

[61] Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East*, 31-32.

[62] Sara Eigen Figal, *Heredity, Race, and the Birth of the Modern,* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2010), 81.

[63] Baum. *The Rise and Fall of the* Caucasian, 82.

[64] Figal, *Heredity, Race, and the Birth of the Modern*, 82-83

Eastern women. Circassians were seen as beautiful because of their whiteness and their similarity to the standards of beauty Europeans strove for (to the extent that some beauty products marketed to women specifically used the term "Circassian" in their advertising). And yet European conceptions of Circassians exist primarily in the context of the Orient, harems, and slave trade. The allure of the Circassian women lay in their ability to balance Europe's love of the Orient with racialized standards of beauty as they embodied the exotic, sensual East without being "unappetisingly dark."[65]

Circassian women were slaves in the palaces of Ottoman sultans and nobles, a fact that Europeans decried as "white slavery" and mourned the loss of these beautiful women to the "terrible Turks." The association of Circassian women with the Orient added an appeal to them. The Orient, as was previously mentioned, represented luxury, sexuality, and cruelty. The Circassians were a luxury, often described as one of the treasures of Oriental rulers and unattainable for Westerners. Their sexuality was made possible by their widely-known beauty and their existence in the Oriental setting which by association added the element of eroticism. The cruelty was the possession of these women by their Turkish or Middle Eastern masters and their seclusion to harems, which Westerners viewed as a great oppression.

Of course, the combination of all these elements made the Circassian women commodities in Western culture. Countless paintings were done of Circassian women. The image below is one done by Gérôme in 1876 titled *Veiled Circassian Beauty*.

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[65] Kabbani*, Europe's Myths of Orient*, 81.

While being dressed, something unusual for a woman in an Orientalist painting, the

beauty of the Circassian woman is still emphasized. The veil here serves more to

highlight the features of her face than cover them. From the clothing to the other props,

the colors and patterns reflect an Oriental setting that is more a figment of the painter's

imagination than a reflection of his actual travels through the Middle East.[66] The

woman herself manages to look both exotic with her dark hair and eyes and European

with her light skin tone and there is both a solemnity and pathos in her gaze that would

interest any viewer.

     The interest was such that famous American showman, P.T. Barnum, capitalized

on it and featured "Circassians" in his shows. Barnum even gave them backstories to

make them more fascinating including one of Circassian beauty Zoe Meleke who

reportedly was part of the sultan's harem and escaped sexual slavery after being rescued

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[66] *Jean-Léon Gérôme*, ed. Laurence des Cars et al. (Paris: ESFP, 2010), 276.

by a good Samaritan.[67] It should be noted that most historians agree that the "Circassian beauties" Barnum had on display were not Circassian and were merely Irish girls from New York, hired to play the part.[68]

This notion of the beautiful but unattainable Eastern woman suffering at the hands of the Eastern male is one that defines the stereotype of some Middle Eastern women to this day. In Oriental imagery, the beauty of the Eastern woman was paired with the repulsiveness of her male counterpart, creating an imbalance and space into which Europeans could insert themselves and save the woman from this injustice.[69] The "saving narrative" in which a Westerner steps in to rescue the helpless Eastern woman is an even more prevalent trope and as we will see in the following sections, plays a huge role in films.

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[67] Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit*, (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 236-239.
[68] Bogdan, *Freak Show*, 241.
[69] Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient*, 79-80.

Chapter 3: The Orient in Film

20th Century Imperialism and the Middle East

"History is written by those who win and those who dominate."

-Edward Said

This section covers briefly the history of Western imperialism in the Middle East until the 1950s in the sections on Europe and Israel and 1979 for the United States. The reason for this categorization is that my next section intends to begin with nationalist, anti-imperialist movements in Middle Eastern countries and these movements began at different time periods. Great Britain would give up Egypt in the 1920s and Iraq in the 1930s, but would hold on to Palestine until 1948. France would give up Morocco and Tunisia in the early 1950s but would fight to hold on to Algeria for several years. The United States had gotten increasingly involved in the Middle East since the 1930s but would face anti-imperialist backlash in 1979 during the Iran Hostage Crisis. The section on Israel will focus on pre-1948 history as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict began almost immediately after the official recognition of the State of Israel in 1949, marking what this paper considers to be a nationalist uprising against a European nation.

This section hopes to emphasize the actions taken by these Western countries and the drive to modernize the Middle East that accompanied much of these actions. Naturally, the presence of Western countries in the Middle East was about more than just political power. The riches of the Middle East and its oil had become a new draw for the imperialist countries.

European Imperialism

By the beginning of the 20ᵗʰ century, several European powers had become well-entrenched in the Middle East. France had taken Algeria and Tunisia during the 19ᵗʰ century and Morocco in the beginning of the 20ᵗʰ. Italy had a small presence with its control over Libya. On the other hand, the British Empire had the greatest presence. The British took Egypt in the 1880s and was beginning to chip away at Ottoman and Persian holdings. Following the end of the First World War, the lands of the losing parties (Ottoman Empire included) were divvied up by France and Great Britain. Iraq and Palestine went to Great Britain while France took Lebanon and Syria.

For one, France and Great Britain differed in their approach to their colonies in the Middle East. Great Britain is argued to have been more accepting of local cultures and customs and was content to rule from afar. However, France was on a "civilizing mission" (*mission civilsatrice*) that resulted in more direct involvement with local governments. They practiced a form "intellectual imperialism" which sought to impact the mentality of their colonized subjects and to promote a more positive image of France. The French officials believed that the French language was somehow more capable of expressing "an innate logic" or "rationality" which thus made French superior to other languages.[70] As the promulgation of this "rational" language was one of the defining characteristics of French colonialism in the Middle East with the establishment of French language schools almost as though the French believed that

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[70] Mathew Burrows, "'Mission Civilisatrice': French Cultural Policy in the Middle East, 1860-1914," *The Historical Journal* 29, no. 1 (1986): 127. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2639258.

through an understanding of their language (which in turn gives the student of French access to French culture) the Middle East would become civilized.

By the 19th century the Ottoman Empire which had for centuries dominated the Middle East was in decline, allowing European powers to come in. The Middle East saw a rivalry between French and British colonial powers as they sought to make their presence felt, particularly in Northern Africa. Like in their other colonies, French and British authorities saw the benefit in weaponizing perceived local inferiority in order to justify their rule. In Egypt, Lord Cromer, the British Consul-General of Egypt, vindicated the presence of his country (and access to Egyptian cotton) by emphasizing the mistreatment of Muslim women by their men. He argued that the practice of veiling and seclusion were evidence of the inferiority of the Eastern male and this "degradation" of women was what was preventing the East from becoming more civilized.[71] While a concern for the rights of women would seem fair, Lord Cromer significantly excluded British women in his understanding of women who needed more rights. Lord Cromer was a founding member of the Men's League for Opposing Women's Suffrage back in Great Britain. Here the issue wasn't Muslim women's rights, but what the emphasis on this lack of rights would allow the British to do in Egypt.

Following the example of the previous anecdote, this paper will attempt to cover the more expansive history of British colonial influence in the Middle East by focusing on three specific events: the Convention of Constantinople, the rise of the House of Saud in modern-day Saudi Arabia, and the Balfour Declaration. The Convention of

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[71] Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1992), 152-153.

Constantinople was an 1888 agreement signed between the Ottoman Empire (who then controlled Egypt through the Khedivate of Egypt) and all the major European countries concerning the use of the recently-constructed Suez Canal. The Suez Canal was an issue of great importance to European countries as it shortened trading routes and both France and Great Britain fought to control it. The Convention of Constantinople, signed without the participation of the Khedivate of Egypt, sought to guarantee the operation of the canal through periods of conflict. By this point, the British were in control of the canal and continued to control it until the Suez Canal was nationalized in the 1950s. From the point of the colonialist powers, the Suez Canal, given its great importance to European nations, could not be trusted to local leaders. This conviction in the incompetence of local leaders justified European presence and reflected itself in media about the Middle East.

The rise of the House of Saud is another instance of British involvement. In order to weaken the Ottoman Empire, the British supported a local chieftain, Abdulaziz Ibn Saud. As a result, Abdulaziz was able to eventually take over most of the Arabian Peninsula resulting in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This specific history (i.e. the local struggles against Ottomans) is significant because of how it would depicted in the history of Lawrence of Arabia and the later Hollywood movie, which will be covered later on.

Israel

The last aspect of British imperialism in the Middle East that will be focused on is the Balfour Declaration of 1917. In this declaration the British first officially declared their support for and intention to create a Jewish state in Palestine. At the time,

Palestine had a Jewish minority but no such state existed. This declaration paved the way for the later creation of the state of Israel and marked a capitulation on the part of European powers to Zionist demands.

Zionism was a Jewish nationalist movement that came into existence in the late 19th century and centered its ideology on the dream of a return to "Zion," or a Jewish homeland. Not unlike the Crusaders, Zionists felt a religious connection to the Middle East, particularly Palestine and encouraged Jewish immigration back to the Middle East as well as pushed for European countries to acknowledge their demands, an eventual acknowledgment of which culminated in the State of Israel. The creation of the State of Israel and support from Western powers including Great Britain and the United States was one of the key events that helped shift the image of the Middle Easterner from the Oriental oddity to the ruthless terrorist.

American Imperialism

While the United States lacked the long history of other Western countries in the Middle East, by the 1930s it was beginning to establish itself and had two primary goals: the first (and arguably more recent goal) was to protect the State of Israel and the second to protect its economic interests (i.e. oil) in the region. The United States' history with Middle Eastern oil began in the 1930s with Saudi Arabia. The British and French control in the Levant had prevented American oil companies from working there but King Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia allowed SoCal (Standard Oil Company of California, later Chevron) to search for oil, a search that was successful and American oil companies got a foothold in the Middle East. This need to protect oil reserves would incentivize the United States to get more involved in the Middle East. As the U.S. got

more involved economically, militarily, and politically in the Middle East, the perceptions of Middle Easterners would change in accordance to American needs.

The United States support for Israel can be seen as stemming from two different but interconnected issues. The first issue was political as the United States got increasingly concerned by Soviet support for nationalist efforts in Middle Eastern countries and needed a close ally. At this point, the U.S. began providing extensive military and monetary aid to Israel. The desire to help would extend beyond that. Many Americans saw the need to support Israel as a moral duty. American evangelists promoted support for Israel in accordance to their religious convictions. Beyond that, Israel began to be understood as the final stronghold of Western civilization in an otherwise barbaric and Muslim Middle East. This conflation of Israel with the "West" in a struggle for existence against the "East" fell in line with earlier Orientalist understandings of the "West" and the "Other."

The Middle East and its Men in Hollywood

"I'm gonna go where the desert sun is

Go where I know the fun is

Go where the harem girls dance

Go where there's love and romance

Out on the burning sands, in some caravan

I'll find adventure, while I can

To say the least, go on, go east young man."

-Elvis Presley, "Go East Young Man"

While their respective countries settled in to the Middle East, this Orient once more became the land of fantasy for Western men. Building upon the tropes of earlier cultural works, films similarly presented a greatly exaggerated "Oriental" Middle East to their audiences. The Middle East of Hollywood was a desolate land, miles and centuries away from civilization or anything of familiarity. And yet for men this foreign land allowed them to explore what they weren't able to in their own societies. Hollywood's Middle East was the place of adventure, presenting the opportunity for its male protagonists, and male viewers by extension, to go on a desert safari of sorts. The Middle East or the "Arabland" became instantly identifiable through a few old and repeating stereotypes: the sand, the riches, the violence, and the women. As extensions of their imperialist countries, these men took over the Middle East, claiming the film space as their own.

Lawrence of Arabia

The 1962 film *Lawrence of Arabia* had both the aspect of being an adventure for the Western male and the element of Western colonialism. T.E. Lawrence himself was famous for fighting against the Ottoman Empire in several regions of the Middle East. As a British army officer, Lawrence helped directly carry out the goals of the British in Levant and Egypt. He was a product and direct symbol of British imperialism. The 1962 film cannot deny that fact so it instead emphasizes the adventure aspect of it.

Lawrence travels throughout the Middle East, donning the clothes of the locals, and getting accustomed to the local customs and behaviors. But he never stops being European. The question of violence and bloodshed proves this. Lawrence kills several people throughout the film as well as leads brutal attacks on the Ottoman Turks. But he

is understood to struggle with this widespread violence. Lawrence's ability to empathize and detest violence differentiates him from the Arabs with their blood feuds and constant killings. The East-West dichotomy is revealed here: the Arabs have no qualms with violence and conflict, in fact it seems they know nothing but it, resulting in their self-destruction by the film's end; the European understands the need for violence but is repulsed by it.

Despite Lawrence's position on violence, the film glorifies violence and death. It is almost as though violence in the context of the Middle East is normal. The underlying implication of the Middle East being constantly violent is proven by Arab characters who are unable to make peace with each other. By the end of the film, the Arab characters lose Damascus to the British as a result of their constant infighting. It would seem as though Arabs are incapable of anything without the aid of a European as they only take Damascus because of Lawrence but when left to their own devices, they promptly lose it. The blame for the imperialism in the Middle East is then shifted to the locals who were unable to rule their own lands as opposed to the British who took those lands.

The image of the senselessly violent, constantly fighting Arabs was inherited from earlier colonialist ventures into the Middle East and remains as effective. The inability of the Arabs to show logic or control in any capacity justifies British interventions while also promoting European supremacy. Lawrence is the paternal figure in this film who attempts to guide and help his Arab compatriots but finds that he is ultimately unable to. The loss of Damascus then is shown from the perspective of a European as the audience sympathizes with Lawrence who after fighting so hard for

them sees the Arabs lose everything. This is a failure on his part and audience mourns with him. The Arabs, who have now lost another part of their native land to the British, are left in the dust, far from sympathies of audience members.

The Sheik

Despite Arab dress, Lawrence was very European. The "Shiek" in 1921's *The Shiek* was less obviously so. The enormous success of the film and popularity of Rudolph Valentino who played the eponymous character led to an interest in the Middle East and a wave of Hollywood films about the Middle East that continued all the way through the 1950s. The Orientalist fascination with the "exotic" could not be more clear with Valentino and his fans. The film consequently can be seen as a female fantasy of the Middle East and Middle Eastern men.

However, as some scholars point out, the real audience was Western men who could project themselves onto Valentino and live out a desert "odyssey" that allowed them, among other things, to treat women in a way in which they would not have been able to do so in a Western context. The element of a "rape fantasy" and the treatment of Diana is all made acceptable by the male characters being Arab and thus being expected to some extent to act that way.

Naturally the reason Western male audiences would be able to relate to the Shiek is because, as the end of the film reveals, the Shiek is of European origin. He is then merely by chance able to live out this fantastical life in the Middle East. If to view this film entirely from a male perspective, it is an exotic adventure film in which a European man through a twist of fate ends up the "Shiek" of a local Arab tribe, meets

the European woman of his dreams, and fights both figuratively and literally for both her and her love.

The reveal of the Shiek's true ethnicity reflects deeply-rooted racial standards that existed in the United States. Had the Shiek really been an Arab, there would have been a concern about miscegenation, or the relationship between two people of different races. Miscegenation was then illegal in the United States and was later banned on-screen by the Motion Picture Production Code. The other element of interest is Diana's comment about the Shiek's hand which prompts the reveal. Diana states that the Shiek's hand is "big for an Arab." There is numerous ways in which to understand this sort of a comment but the obvious one is that there are biological differences between Arabs and Europeans that would be reflected in the size of their limbs. This mentality conforms with the principles of eugenics and the European's hand generally being bigger would suggest a superiority to the Arab with the smaller hand.

The film can also be viewed as a reflection of male Western fantasies, not of Middle Eastern woman as the harem imagery shows, but of Western womanhood.[72] The 1921 film was released during what is known now as the First Wave of Feminism. In 1919, two years prior, an amendment to the Constitution was passed in order to give women the right to vote finally. In the androcentric society, these changes would have been a threat to centuries-long male dominance and every female who rose up sparked a male desire to "put her in her place." The Shiek does just that.

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[72] Ella Shohat, "Gender and Culture of Empire," in *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film*, ed. Matthew Bernstein & Gaylyn Studler (New Brunswick/New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 56-57.

Diana, at the beginning of the film, is independent of the men around her and rejects marriage, the typical way in which men are understood to try to control unruly women. Her reason is that it will limit her independence. She then is taken by a man who not only seeks to trap her in marriage but very literally controls everything she does from the clothes she wears to the places she goes. This type of behavior from a Western standpoint would be viewed as abusive, particularly since Diana is not married to the Shiek and initially states that she does not love him. Yet it is possible to romanticize this behavior because of the "Eastern" setting of the film. Arab men, by then, are expected to act in that way. Licentiousness, control, and violence are all characteristics associated with Arab men for centuries by then. It is physical attractiveness of the Shiek and the fact that he is exotic only in appearance that makes him so appealing to Diana (in the end) and to the female audience. It is in the costume of the Arab, that the Western man can reestablish control over the Western woman.

Middle Eastern Womanhood On-Screen

Compared to the condition of women of other religions, she [the Muslim woman] is a slave. A luxurious animal, a beast of pleasure to the rich; a beast of burden to the poor; she is nothing more than a poor creature sacrificed to the pleasure of the male."

-Andre Servier, *L'Islam et la psychologie du musulman*

Like in previous cultural depictions, the Middle Eastern woman remained defined by the exoticism and sexuality she represented for Western men. The following section looks at the two predominant representations of Middle Eastern women: the "Vamp" who uses her sexuality to destroy men and the Victim who ranged in representation from an ordinary dancing slave decorating the elaborate "Eastern"

settings to the entrapped harem woman. The Vamp, as defined by the acting of Theda

Bara, was one of Hollywood's first *femme fatales*. She represented the doom of the

Western men destined to fall in love with her. While the Vamp may dominate a

narrative, the belly dancer is generally nothing more than a prop that as much as sand

and camels helps define an "Eastern" setting. Yet the consistency with which belly

dancer are used and how crucial they are to visual depictions of the Middle East makes

them interesting subjects and worth covering in this section. Of course, there is an

overlap between the belly dancer and the entrapped female. Occasionally, the entrapped

female is one who is forced to perform as a belly dancer. But the entrapped female is

more unique in the narrative in which she exists. She is a victim. Unlike the Vamp who

uses her sexuality, the Victim is helpless before her sexuality which makes her the prey

of the male character. The male character naturally is the Arab male who is the one

victimizing her, while the Western male who is also affected by her appeal is not the

oppressor but the liberator.

Theda Bara and the Middle Eastern Vamp

Theda Bara, a silent film actress, a Jewish woman from Ohio, and, more

surprisingly, one of the first on-screen "Vamps." Bara's image was very much shaped

by what Fox advertised as being her Eastern roots, although what those Eastern roots

were was unclear. For her 1915 film, *A Fool There Was*, she was promoted as having

been born under "the shadow of the Sphinx," the daughter of a Frenchman and his Arab

mistress. For her later film, *Cleopatra*, Bara was claimed to be the daughter of an Arab

Sheik and a Frenchwoman. Fox Studios also emphasized her name which they claimed to be an anagram of "Arab Death."[73]

Fox Studios clearly capitalized on her exotic image and persona for even films that had nothing to do with Arabs and the Middle East, all though she would consistently play the role of the *femme fatale.* In the image above from *Cleopatra,* the luxurious props and ostentatious costumes all suggested an "Oriental" setting, building upon the Oriental imagery of paintings.

The persona created by Bara was in line with existing opinions about the connection between the sexuality of Middle Eastern women and danger. In the early 20th century, the Western world was still greatly under the influence of the sexual mores of Victorian society. Female sexuality was considered an abnormality both from a religious perspective and from a psychiatric perspective. Christian teachings valued chastity and discouraged lust. The Western standard for women included the

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[73] Tania Kamal-Eldin, *Hollywood Harems*, (San Francisco, California, USA): Women Make Movies, 2019.

characteristic of being "virtuous" for centuries. Sex, from a Catholic perspective particularly, was forbidden outside of marriage and allowed for the purposes of procreation within marriage.

Female sexuality was thus limited in its expression and exhibitions of sexual desire were considered unusual and tied in with female hysteria. People like Sigmund Freud connected sexuality and fantasies with a series of mental illnesses.[74] Given that the exhibition of sexual desire in females overlapped with the diagnosed symptoms of hysteria, hysterectomy or institutionalization could be offered as solutions. A sexual woman was than an abnormal woman, an insane woman, and posed a threat. Just as Orientalist painters were able to explore female sexuality in the context of the "Orient," depictions of female sexuality were more normalized within an Eastern setting. And yet when these Eastern women came in contact with Western men, they automatically posed a threat to them because of their sexuality. Generally, sexuality posed a threat to men, more specifically an androcentric society,[75] but as Bara's distinction as the first "Vamp" shows, this threat of sexuality was more expected from an Eastern woman as opposed to a Western woman.

The Vamp in many ways represents the duality of Western Orientalism. On one hand, there is a deep fascination with the sensuality on display. On the other hand, this very same sensuality scares the Westerner. If, as evidence suggests, Orientalists tended to view the Orient as being feminine, these feminine qualities were then defined by the

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[74] In fact, Freud believed that women were born bisexual (i.e. capable of having a libido) but repressed it resulting in the frigidity of the average European wife (See. Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, 38-39).
[75] (See. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen*16, no 3, 1975).

allure of the riches of the Orient (among which were women) and the apprehension about what more this unknown land could bring.

Female Sexuality: From Slave to Spectacle

In direct opposite to the Vamp was the "Victim." The term victim here is fitting for two reasons. The first being that these women were, from the Western perspective, victims of their sexuality. If the Vamp was conscious of her sexuality and used it to attain her goals, the victim couldn't help being beautiful and instead sought to limit the danger of her beauty by entering a monogamous relationship with a man. The second reason was that these women were frequently shown to be victims of the violent Arab men in their lives.

Both Western and Middle Eastern women fit within this Victim category in relation to their treatment by men. For the Western woman, the society's concerns over white slavery continued. These Western women were shown to be, in the worst-case scenario, kidnapped and sold to a sleezy Middle Easterner, and, in the best case, victims of attempted seduction by a Middle Eastern male. If Middle Eastern women were "riches" that the Western man hoped to attain, then the Western woman was his property which he hoped to retain. This once more put the Western and the Eastern man at odds. Despite this Western female victimhood in the Oriental context, given that this project is about Middle Eastern women, the focus will be on Middle Eastern women.

The Middle Eastern woman, despite her beauty, had no rights. The men in her life, deprived her of them forcing her to live in a harem or marry a repulsive tribal man. She was seen as existing entirely for the purpose of the pleasure of the men in her life,

an idea that both horrified and thrilled Westerners. The lack of female rights was something that Westerners since the colonial period were quick to point out as being a sign of Eastern backwardness. It was a measure by which Westerners could prove Arab male inferiority with the idea that since their women were treated no better than animals, Arab men themselves were beasts. Yet, this concept of a fully subservient female was fascinating to Westerners who through the medium of films imagined themselves in these settings in which they might have access to these women.

The James Bond film *The Spy Who Loved Me* was significant in this aspect. Bond is the perfect example of a "man's man," a masculine-type hero who lived the life that every ordinary man was supposed to dream of. In this film, Bond is offered access to the harem of a tribal leader he meets in Egypt. Bond accepts.

There are no questions about morality or ethics. These women are understood to be no better than the slaves of the Arab, but Bond has no qualms about having a sexual interaction with them at the invitation of another man. The Middle East is so far from Europe that European standards of ethics and right and wrong do not constrain Bond. The fact that the Middle East has historically been seen so distinctly different from Europe and the West allows Westerners to function in lieu of Western norms and ethics. Interestingly, the image of Bond with these harem girls was advertised in film posters although the actual scene took less than a few minutes.

Bond's harem girls are not named, and neither are many of the other dancing or harem girls in films about the Middle East. These girls serve two main purposes: they situate the audience within the Oriental setting (much like props do) and promote ideas about the sensuality and sleaziness of the Middle East. Unsurprisingly, some Hollywood producers would refer to films with these types of girls as "T and S" films or "Tits and Sand."[76]

Within these narratives of Middle Eastern female victimhood, the Western male frequently plays the role of a liberator. The narrative arc is simple enough and one that will be repeated, albeit in a different manner later. The female is the victim. In this case she is forced into a sexual role, be it a belly dancer or concubine, that she detests. Some of these women yearn for true love (since the atmosphere of the Arabs was one of "sensuality without seduction"[77]) and others just for freedom, but what unites them is the desire to escape the East. They are then liberated by the Westerner. Aside from

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[76] Kamal-Eldin, *Hollywood Harems*.
[77] Edith Wharton, in *Veiled Half-Truths*, 178.

perpetuating ideas about Middle Eastern female victimhood, this narrative serves an imperialist purpose. Let us return to the metaphor of the Middle East being a female. This female has suffered at the hands of the Middle Eastern men and needs the Western ones to step in to free her. And step in they do, century after century.

Chapter 4: "Jihadland" in Film

In a wave of post-World War II anti-colonialism, Middle Eastern nations began asserting themselves and rejecting their colonial masters. For a Europe which had grown content to determine the Middle East for ages, self-determination and independence were dangerous. A resentful Middle East turned to religious and political terrorism to establish itself and fight in the face of outside imperialist pressure. The threat of the Middle East which had long hung in the back of the minds of Westerners manifested itself. News media broadcasted the Middle Easterners' hatred of Americans to every living room. In the face of all these changes, Hollywood shifted as well. The allure of the Middle East was overshadowed by explosions and terrorist attacks and the Muslim terrorist debuted on the silver screen.

Anti-Imperialism, Middle Eastern Nationalism, and Terrorism

"Unless we hate what we are not, we cannot love what we are."

-Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*

Middle Eastern Nationalism and Western Response

As European countries began to let go their colonies overseas, Middle Eastern countries, some for the first time, began to build their nations. Strongly influenced by Western ideology and schooling, many post-colonial leaders in the Middle East pushed for secularism and to modernize their nations. The colonialist mentality of Middle Eastern backwardness had been internalized by the natives many of whom saw that they could only become independent of the West if they became more like the West. As part of the efforts by these leaders, a modernist view of Islam was developed which rejected

centuries of Islamic scholarship and societal structures in favor of an ideal that was more in line with what they believed the Prophet Muhammad and Quran promoted.

An example of this is seen in their approach to women. Islam did not oppress women, modernists argued. Islam liberated women and promoted female education; it was centuries of corrupt Muslim leadership that prevented the practice of this. A similar approach was taken towards the veil. Veiling was actively discouraged in several regions of the Middle East as it was seen as a sign of backwardness. The modern Middle Eastern woman was thus an unveiled woman. Interestingly, it seems the concern here wasn't so much over the liberation of the modern woman from the necessity to veil, but more an understanding on the part of Middle Eastern men of how their veiled women reflected on their own "modernity."

Despite their evident inability to rid themselves of colonialist thinking, Modern Middle Eastern leaders were eager to break free of colonial economic holds over the Middle East. Two prominent examples of this can be seen in Egypt and Iran. In 1956, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal Company and Egypt took control of the Suez Canal. The canal was a colonialist project and had long existed as a point of contention between European nations, so the nationalization was hard for European countries to accept. Late that year, prompted by Great Britain and France, Israel attacked Egypt sparking what is known as the Sinai War. Among the aims of the invaders was to remove Abdel Nasser and take back the canal for Western powers. From a military perspective, the Western nations won and yet Abdel Nasser remained in power and Egypt retained control of the Suez Canal.

The second example comes from Iran. The Prime Minister of Iran, Mohammed Mossadegh took steps to nationalize the Iranian oil industry. The Iranian oil industry was then controlled by the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (later also known as British Petroleum, BP) which had been present in Iran since 1913. This move and the possible precedent it would set threatened Great Britain and the United States, so the CIA and MI6 collaborated in order to orchestrate a coup which ultimately saw Mossadegh removed from power. However, they were not entirely successful. After the removal of Mossadegh, the king of Iran, Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, took more power and nationalized Iranian oil anyway.

Terrorism and the Resistance to Western Imperialism

Post-colonial Middle Eastern leaders relied heavily on the narrative that Middle Eastern backwardness had made them a target for imperialist powers, but as Middle Eastern countries modernized and Western imperialist efforts in the Middle East didn't go away, these leaders found themselves under question. The modernist policies of these leaders had always been unpopular with a select portion of the traditional religious society and leaders, whose influence they were seeking to diminish in favor of a more secular state. These groups resented modernist leaders whom they accused of going against traditional Islam and striving to be more like the West. Partly in a reactionary wave to modernist leaders, Islamist groups began being formed and increasing in popularity. These groups felt that trying to emulate the West was undesirable and pointless. In light of modernist leaders' public inabilities to prevent Western imperialist meddling in their countries, for many it seemed like they were right.

Abdel Nasser's policies saw the increase in popularity of groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood who would attempt to assassinate him. While this assassination failed, Abdel Nasser's successor Anwar Sadat would be killed by a member of another Islamist group who opposed Sadat's recent peace treaty with Israel. In Iran, the Mohammed Reza Pahlavi was overthrown. Given that Pahlavi had gained power after two Western-led coups (the first being against his father Reza Shah during the Second World War and the second against Mossadegh), he was seen as a Western puppet ruler. In 1979, Iranian college students took over the American Embassy in both a show of anger against American actions in Iran and a demand that Pahlavi (who was in the United States undergoing medical treatment) be returned to Iran to face trial. The infamous 444-day-long Hostage Crisis which ensued and was broadcast on national television shaped the opinions of Americans for decades to come.

If modernist Middle Eastern leaders took steps to rid themselves of imperialist powers, Islamists proposed the most radical solution. They would reject not only direct Western influence in their countries, in the form of Western-owned companies and organizations, but also indirect in the form of Western ideology. Secular government (i.e. "division of church and state") was a Western conception and had no place in the Middle East. Sharia and traditional Islamic "emirates" and "caliphates" were the solution. Modernists blamed the Western control of the Middle East on the backwardness of Middle Easterners. Islamists would blame this Western presence on a deviation from the true principles of Islam, a deviation which modernists were contributing to.

At the center of this battleground were women. Colonialists justified their occupation of the Middle East by pointing to the treatment of women, using it to promote an argument about the inferiority of Middle Eastern men. Modernist Middle Eastern men endorsed women's rights, using it to argue against the inferiority of Middle Eastern men. Islamists argued against women's rights, dismissing it as a Western invention that had no place in a Middle Eastern. To be more specific about the position of Islamists, their position was not that women had no rights, but that they were rejecting Western ideas about women's rights (e.g. right to education, clothing, etc.) in favor of Islamic ideas of women's rights. Additionally, Islamists tended to see women's rights as the path to sin and believed that societal sins were the cause of the suffering of the Middle East.

The argument over veiling illustrated this. Colonialists made the veiled woman synonymous with the oppressed woman. Modernists liberated the veiled woman by removing her veil. Islamists reinstated the veil in a show of a complete rejection of Western ideology and influence. Returning to the metaphor of the Middle East as a female, a veiled woman was a Middle East closed off to Westerners. Colonialists sought to "unveil" her so as to benefit from what she had to offer. Modernists did unveil her, instituting Western reforms and ideas on their own terms. Islamists would re-veil her to cut her off from the West.

Sketching "Jihadland" and its Inhabitants: Middle East and Men in Film

The Middle East of Hollywood Dreams and American Nightmares

Building on previous ideas about the Middle East being frozen in a past century, the Hollywood depiction of the Middle East looks not much different from the Middle East of 19th century paintings. Modernity has not touched Hollywood's Middle East and in every way possible, the Middle East contrasts what one sees in Western societies. The poverty is one big aspect of this depiction. While previous Orientalist depictions emphasized the wealth of the Middle East with bright colors and patterns, this Middle East is all one-toned with identical short houses built of mud and dirt streets. Where the Middle East is modern, Hollywood film makers go to the extent of changing the appearance of Middle Eastern locations to make them look more "Middle Eastern." An example of this is evident in the television show *Homeland*. A scene featuring Hamra Street in Beirut was so incorrectly portrayed that Lebanese authorities complained about the depiction.

Hamra Street as depicted on "Homeland"   The Real Hamra Steet in Beirut

The above image depicts the difference. Notice the tan color that dominates the *Homeland* image. This tan is very common in scenes in the Middle East almost as

though Hollywood filmmakers through the color scheme try to recreate the monochromatic Arabian desert.

East vs. West: Middle Eastern Edition

The Middle East of Hollywood is different from the West as are its people, but more importantly, the people of the Middle East hate the West and only seek to do it harm. In basic matters like manner of dress and behavior, Hollywood films distinguish between Middle Easterners and Western people. Middle Easterners are more covered up, more likely to wear traditional garments or headdresses. Their behavior is aggressive even when it isn't clear that they are talking about something violent. And they usually are.

If the Middle East looks like a warzone, then its people certainly act as though they live in one. Middle Easterners are shown to always seek to do harm to Americans or Westerners. This desire to hurt the West is not limited to Middle Eastern men, but to women and children. In the film *American Sniper*, Chris Kyle sees a woman with her child walking down the street. He struggles with killing them but then ultimately does so when he sees that they attack U.S. Marines. This woman and her child are his first kills. The film justifies this killing by showing that the woman and child wanted to hurt Americans. The mentality created by these types of depictions allows for a general insensitivity towards the lives of Middle Easterners as it creates an "us versus them mentality."

Once they leave the Middle East, Muslims bring their hatred of the West with them. Seemingly moderate and modern Muslims get revealed to be terrorists as are converts. A Muslim convert, Nicholas Brody, in *Homeland* is shown to be working

undercover for terrorist organizations with the purpose of harming Americans. By showing that women, children, modern Muslims, and even converts who grew up in a Western society are all capable of terrorism, Hollywood designates Islam as the source of evil which would push the most unlikely of people to do horrible things.

The Jihadi and the Oppressed One: Women in Film

Jihadi: Asexuality and Violence

The counterpart to the male terrorist is the female terrorist. For the female terrorist there are a few main distinctions between her and the male terrorist. For one, she rarely acts alone and is usually under the command of a male partner. An example of this is Nadia Ali from the Netflix show *Bodyguard*. Although Nadia is implicated in a failed bombing attempt, it is made clear that her husband is the main terrorist while Nadia is more of an accomplice. Even in a position where the Muslim woman is doing something as opposed to having something done to her, she is shown as being controlled by the men in her life.

The female terrorist is also largely an asexual being, meaning that the violence she represents is no longer tied with an exhibition of sexuality. To understand this, one must realize that the Middle East is the anti-West. It is everything the West is not. Of course, culture and opinions change over time and the West's attitude towards female sexuality has changed. If female sexuality previously was thought of as unusual, sinful, and a sign of a mental disorder, it is now understood to be normal. The sexual revolution in the United States is a prominent example of these changing norms. Women were encouraged to reclaim their sexuality and not feel ashamed of sexual

interactions. So, if overt sexuality became the norm in the United States, the Middle East (in its Hollywood depictions) became more conservative and asexuality developed to be the threat. After all, what is scarier than a woman who is devoid of sexual desire and thus cannot be controlled by the men around her?

Oppression and the Muslim Longing to Breathe Free

In more recent films, perhaps in a somewhat progressive twist, women have also been shown outside of the role of terrorist. These are women who we will refer to as the "Oppressed Ones" because their key defining quality is the restrictive nature of their Muslim surroundings and their desire to break free of it. Since this paper has already attempted to draw a comparison between the "Vamp" and the "Jihadi," it will continue by drawing a comparison between the "Victim" and "the Oppressed One." As with the Vamp and the Jihadi, the role of sexuality is reversed. The Victim has her sexuality imposed upon her while the Oppressed One has an asexuality imposed upon her.

In Apple TV's *Hala*, the titular character spends much of the film seeking to break away from her conservative mother. One way in which she does so is by having a sexual relationship with a boy in her school and attempting to initiate another sexual encounter with a teacher. This taking control of her sexuality in an arguably extreme form is how she rebels against the religious norms which would constrain her sexual expression. The role of Hala's sexuality in this process and its clash with religion is almost unavoidable; the opening scene consists of Hala masturbating in a bathtub before being interrupted by her mother calling her to prayer. By the end of the film, another trope comes into play. Hala takes off her veil.

The taking off of the veil by that point had been viewed as a sign of liberation and evidence of modernization for near a century. British colonial authorities, as was previously mentioned, emphasized the role of the veil in the subjugation of women. Soviet authorities in the Muslim-majority republics of the Soviet Union went even further, forcing unveiling and holding public events in which women removed their veil and burned them. The Taliban's insistence on the veil allowed for American leaders including Laura Bush, the wife of then President George Bush, to portray the invasion of Afghanistan as an effort to liberate women.

Similarly, in a very public event, Oprah Winfrey removed the veil from a Afghan women's rights activist in front of a crowd of 18,000 other people. It was a spectacle in which the removing of the veil by the Westerner, in this case Oprah, symbolized the liberation of that woman. The irony is hard to escape here. The woman clearly didn't wear the burqa prior to this, so the wearing of the burqa was for the entire purpose of demonstratively removing it. As for liberation, that woman was a representative of RAWA (Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan). She was fighting for her liberation prior to the spectacle with Oprah and Madison Square Garden. While criticizing the victimization of Muslim women at the hands of their men, Westerners tend to believe that the liberation of Muslim woman is only possible with their help. With this belief, the agency and power of the Muslim woman to fight for her own rights is limited even further.

Conclusion

Future Ventures into the "Bibleland"

One of the main places for improvement in this research is in the addressal of the dichotomy that exists in the Western perception of the Middle East. This paper has focused on looking at the Middle East as the Western world's "Other," as existing in direct contrast and opposition to the West. However, the Middle East is also the "Bibleland." The Western world is built on Christianity which would make the origins of the Western world the Middle East. It is clear that because of this connection the Western world has had continued interest in the Middle East from an imperialist standpoint. During the Crusades, Europeans got involved in the Middle East because of a directly stated purpose of protecting the "Holy Lands." Imperialist powers would similarly get involved in the Middle East to a lesser extent but with the same stated purpose: to protect sites of religious and cultural importance to the Western civilization that they felt they had a claim to.

As the Western world has gotten increasingly secular in the past century, the influence of this desire to protect the "Holy Land" has similarly decreased. And yet in understanding the American support for and emotional connection to Israel, it is impossible to ignore the religious importance American evangelicals place on protecting Israel. Israel in a way connects the religious fervor of previous centuries which saw an interest in the Holy Lands with the secular civilizing goals of the 20th and 21st centuries which saw Israel being portrayed as the last bastion of Western freedom and ideas in a backwards, violent, and uncivilized Middle East. The Middle East has so clearly been defined by the association with violence and cultural inferiority that

President Trump during a visit in Israel after having previously been in Saudi Arabia stated that he had just "returned" from the Middle East. Despite every geographic definition of the Middle East including Israel, Israel is still distinguished from the rest of the Middle East in that Americans don't associate with Israel the prevalent violence and inferiority to the West that they do with the rest of the Middle East. If they do think of violence in relation to Israel, it is to see Israel as a victim of that violence.

So now that the existence of this Bibleland has been noted, how is it connected with the Oriental Other which is the focus of this paper? For one neither acknowledges the reality of the Middle East. In the section on American advertisements one element that was emphasized was the American fascination with the perceived primitivism of the Middle East. One reason for this was the desire of American Protestants to see the Middle East in the same way that it was described in the Bible, as an ancient, untouched by modernity land. There is reason to believe that this description of the Middle East which for some may be their first exposure to the Middle East would influence their perception of the Middle East and continued inability to see the Middle East as being modern or progressive. More research should be done in this realm.

However, the question that arises here is how do Muslims fit in? Modern-day Christians are unlikely to believe that there is any significant population of Christians in the Middle East (despite there very much being so). Crusaders went to free Christians as well as Christian lands from Muslim oppression, something which wouldn't have the same draw for Christians today. So how do evangelical Christians come to terms with their understanding of the "Bibleland" and the Muslim-dominated Middle East? It may very well be that these two different concepts of the Middle East are entirely unrelated,

but then why do they seem to overlap with Israel so consistently? Evangelicals are very likely to view supporting Israel as being connected to religion, but this support is also crucial in helping protect Israel from being encroached upon by the rest of the Muslim Middle East, which is frequently portrayed in civilizational terms.

Another element that could be examined is the persistence of Oriental stereotypes in biblical adaptations in films. The film *Intolerance* by D.W. Griffith and practically any film by Cecil B. DeMille would work here. The ostentatious wealth and sexual perversion that gets depicted in these films (generally in the context of sins of course) are both qualities that are associated with the Middle East, so it would be interesting to examine more closely whether the connection between the Orient and this Middle East of the Bible was linked in anyway either purposely by the creators or consciously by the viewer.

Depictions of female biblical figures such as Salome would also be fitting here. Salome is both important in the biblical sense in that she was directly responsible for the decapitation of John the Baptist, yet she also fits into the Orientalist concept of Middle Eastern women as she uses her sexuality to cause evil. The overlap between sex and danger in her character is signature to the "Vamp" which this paper discusses. In fact, Theda Bara had also played the role of Salome showing that there was an overlap between Bara's performance of Orientalism and a biblical figure. Additionally, Salome performs what is known as the "dance of the seven veils" in which during her performance she gradually removes the said veils. Because of this she can be seen as a predecessor of the Middle Eastern belly dancer and more directly feed into the Western fascination with unveiling, which has been previously discussed in this paper. This

dance of the seven veils and how frequently it has been recreated in the West is only another testament to the interest of society in undressing the veiled female.

A Progressive Hollywood

      Increasingly as Hollywood has taken steps to become more diverse in the face of criticism for a lack of diversity, more filmmakers from Muslim backgrounds have enter the field. As a result, the representation is becoming increasingly better. In fact, the very first film that I start with, *Spiderman*: *Far From Home*, is something I would consider to be a positive representation of a Muslim women merely because it does not perpetuate already existing harmful stereotypes. Of course, ideally Muslim female characters would play a greater role but this is a start.

      As more films with positive portrayals of Muslims come out, interestingly the fixation with the veil remains. *Hala*, as I previously mentioned, ends with the titular character taking her veil off. However, she is shown to be praying, implying that she is still a Muslim, with or without the veil. In *Grey's Anatomy*, Dahlia Qadri, was largely considered to be a positive depiction of a Muslim woman, but in one episode she takes her veil off in order to use it as a torniquet for a patient. Qadri emphasizes that her faith is more than a veil. It would seem in instances like this that Hollywood needs to address the anxiety surrounding veils by unveiling the female at some point and stressing that Islam isn't only about veiling. The problem here would be the giving in that pressure of the veil anxiety and seeking to consciously address when there is no need to address an issue that exists only within the Western perception of the veiled woman, and particularly there is no need to address this by unveiling the character. This unveiling only continues the trend of an unveiled woman being seen as the more positive woman.

This critique of the unveiling of Muslim women is not to diminish the fact that there are Muslim women who do unveil for various personal and other reasons. Similarly, there are Muslims who commit terrorist acts and who hold negative opinions of the West. Muslims are a diverse group and a religion that over a billion people identify with, so no film representation will ever perfectly represent every Muslim. And it shouldn't have to. The concern is that certain stereotypes about the Muslim population are disproportionately overrepresented in Hollywood films making them almost seem like facts and painting the entire community with one brush. Simply more representation is needed that way a few bad depictions of Muslims can be fairly balanced out by a more objective an truthful portrayal of Muslims on-screen.

The Muslim Spectator

Now that the depiction of Muslims on-screen has been addressed from the seat of the filmmaker, this final section will deal with the consequences these portrayals have on the Muslim spectator. There are obvious ties to Islamophobia as an overwhelmingly negative depiction of Muslims in films would shape how Muslims are viewed and treated by their peers. But the main focus here is the choice that the Muslim spectator is faced with every time they see a negative portrayal on-screen. Here the Muslim spectator can choose to either dissociate themselves from the character or not.

Dissociating from the Muslim character on-screen puts the Muslim spectator into the role of a sadist. The Muslim spectator is now consciously dissociating from the Muslim character and is trying to be more like the Western (i.e. American or European) character who is actively harming the Muslim character both as the creator of this caricatured character and as the on-screen hero who will ultimately do away with the

Muslim character. This Muslim spectator takes a sadistic pleasure in the harm being done as they don't identify themselves with the Muslim character and by helping harm the Muslim character, they are confirming their difference from that Muslim character.

By not dissociating from that character, the Muslim spectator is forced into the role of a masochist. Here I purposely avoid saying that the Muslim spectator identifies with the Muslim character on-screen because really it is practically impossible to go into a movie theater and leave somehow identifying with the irredeemable villain and terrorist. However, Muslim spectators who realize that this Muslim character on-screen does not represent them and for whom their religious identity is too important to dissociate from, are forced to accept this narrative pushed upon them by the Westerner. The Muslim spectator is forced by the absence of a relatable Muslim character to accept that Muslims are not compatible with Western society, an idea that the "clash of civilizations" theory has promoted all along. By being forced to identify with that absence of a Muslim character, the Muslim spectator sees themselves as not being part of the Western society. If film is a reflection of society, through the absence of a Muslim character, the Muslim spectator is forced out of this society and has no choice but to content themselves with it.

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