

Transnational
Orientalisms
in Contemporary
Spanish and Latin
American Cinema

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Edited by

Michele C. Dávila Gonçalves

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PREFACE

Orientalism as an aesthetic concept in the arts is not a new phenomenon. Europe, and later the Americas, experimented with Middle Eastern and Asiatic “exotic” culture in the arts, particularly painting and literature, from the Middle Ages. But it wasn’t until the nineteenth century that the term was popularized as a pictorial and decorative style that was also adapted to other forms of arts. In 1978 Edward Said wrote his seminal and controversial text *Orientalism*, in which he analyzed the discourse surrounding the “Oriental” in the Western imagination focusing on the misrepresentations of the Arab world due to imperialistic attitudes from Europe. This is an ongoing discussion among scholarly works in diverse areas such as anthropology, politics, sociology, literature, and film. It is evident that the cultural representations of peoples from the Middle East, and now by the same token Asia, have changed throughout the years. Nowadays we could say that the term has resurged in academia. The best example I can think of would be the quantity of publications and scholarly presentations in which Orientalism appears in the title, and where immigrants, not only from the Middle East but also Asia, are the main concern. In contrast, the terms “Orient” and “Oriental” are considered archaic and ethnically offensive. It seems that these terms, as they are represented today, tend to do less with the formerly stereotyped point of view and more with images of cheap labor, contraband, and terrorism. Are these manifestations the new Orientalist normative, or are there other characterizations? This volume proposes to revisit the notion of Orientalism in Spanish and Latin American contemporary cinema specifically, analyzing how films from Spain, Mexico, Chile, Brazil, and Argentina portray transnational subjects from a wide spectrum of the “Orient” world such as Maghrebs from North Africa, Palestinian, Jewish, Chinese, and Korean peoples.

In the past decades in Spain and Latin America, transnational voices, typically stereotyped, alienated, or co-opted in the Western world, have been gaining more and more space in cultural texts with new articulations. Ignacio López-Calvo in his introduction to one of the first books dealing with Orientalism in Latin America, *Alternative Orientalisms in Latin America and Beyond* (2007), contextualizes the resurgence of the topic and explains:

Orientalism, as a theoretical perspective, has regained its centrality in recent years, particularly after the increased animosity and resentment between Western and Islamic countries as a result of the two Gulf Wars, the terrorist suicide attacks of September 11, 2001 in New York, the controversial publication on September 30, 2005 of twelve cartoons featuring the Islamic prophet Mohammed in several European newspapers, and the new position of the People's Republic of China as the next military, economic, and technological superpower. (viii)

The transnational representation of Arabs and Jews besides Chinese and other ethnic groups that have migrated to Spain and Latin America, either voluntarily or forcefully, is being seen anew creatively in both literature and cinema. These groups, that in many cases have lived for many generations in their respective countries, are acquiring political and economic power either legally or illegally. Once vulnerable to the dominant culture of their adopted homes, by being ostracized and marginalized, these groups are now entering into the popular imagination and the revised history of their new countries. As a result this has garnered new political, theoretical, and critical attention due to the importance of globalization, transnationalism, and transatlantic studies. Other texts dealing with Orientalism in the Latin American or Hispanic context, mainly in literature, are: *Orientalism in the Hispanic Literary Tradition* (1991) by Julia Kushigian; *Orientalismo en el modernismo hispanoamericano* (2004) and the edited *Orientalisms of the Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian World* (2014) by Araceli Tinajero; *Between Argentines and Arabs: Argentine Orientalism, Arab Immigrants, and the Writing of Identity* (2006) by Christina Civantos; besides *Alternative Orientalisms* cited above, Ignacio López-Calvo has also edited *Peripheral Transmodernities: South-to-South Dialogues between the Luso-Hispanic World and "the Orient"* (2012), *One World Periphery Reads the Other: Knowing the "Oriental" in the Americas and the Iberian Peninsula* (2010), and authored *Imaging the Chinese in Cuban Literature and Culture* (2008); and *Orientalism and Identity in Latin America: Fashioning Self and Other from the (Post)Colonial Margin* (2013) edited by Erik Camayd-Freixas, among others.

This book is interested in exploring Orientalism beyond literature, in which it has garnered more attention, and in exploring the meaning of new ways to see and interpret both the Middle East and the East in films. Many of these immigrants that traditionally have been omitted from the dominant narratives do present the trauma, memories, and violence of their exile and migration. Consequently, the aim of this volume is to showcase those single and doubly marginalized groups in the contemporary Spanish

and Latin American cinema. Among the questions addressed in this book are how Arabs, Jewish, and Asiatic peoples are being represented in Spain and Latin America cinema; in what ways these cinematic representations from diverse immigrant groups are similar or different; whether they are more authentic; the purpose of these films; whether a new globalized order has made life easier for these migrants or not; whether immigrants are becoming assimilated to their new adopted countries or are still seen only as vulnerable/marginal people; and whether new cinematic scopes and understandings are being created.

To start, the introduction's goal is to give an overreaching theoretical background of the term Orientalism. I briefly summarize the origin of the term in the visual arts and then, specifically in literature, first the relevance of Orientalism among the Parnassians and Symbolists in France, and then in the movement called in Spanish *Modernismo*. I explain its development in the Hispanic world, its main topos and critical review. Then I expound Said's interpretation of the term in his foundational book *Orientalism* and what the critics have stated as its shortcomings. Finally, I acknowledge that Said himself knew and wrote about the limitations of his work due to the increasing global and transnational awareness of the world's diverse groups and their cultures. This volume's aim is to help study alternative perspectives to Orientalism being developed in the filmography and filmic theory of the Luso-Hispanic world.

In Chapter One, "The Latin Dragon: The Remasculinization of the 'Oriental' Male in Marko Zaror's Films," Moisés Park discusses Chilean Marko Zaror's image of masculinity in the first two Latin American martial arts films *Chinango*, filmed in Mexico, and *Kiltro*, filmed in Chile, as a means of discussing remasculinization of the "Oriental" male in Latin America. *Chinango* (2006), billed as "the first Latin American martial arts movie," is a camp thriller with action-packed sequences filmed like a 70s B movie. The plot is a symbiosis of Mexican and Chinese culture where an "Oriental" family legacy has to be defended at all costs. In *Kiltro* (2006), which means mixed-breed dog, a new Chile is presented in which Palestinians and Koreans are also part of society. The chapter proposes that these martial arts movies do not follow Edward Said's *Orientalism* criticism. The duality Mexico/China and Palestine/Korea demonstrate a "second-hand Orientalism," in which the "Orient" is not showcased as an exotic place or promote a paternalistic point of view towards it. The characters have agency and fight for their survival. The "Oriental" world is viewed through cinematic meta-references, which include B movies, Westerns and other Hollywood movies, and a new Latin American "macho" is born from the effects of globalization.

The impact of Chinese culture in Spanish speaking countries is undoubtedly on the rise. Nonetheless, the representation of these transpacific collaborations can be totally diverse. In Chapter Two, “Orientalist Rhetoric in *Un cuento chino* and *Biutiful*: Is it Possible to Turn the Discourse on Itself?” Kenneth Reeds focuses on the transpacific exploration of the migrant labor worker from China to Argentina in the first film and Spain in the second. The Argentinian *Un cuento chino* [Chinese Take-Away] (2011) directed by Sebastián Borensztein, is a “dramedy” that narrates the fortuitous meeting of a shy and lonely Argentinian, Roberto, and a Chinese named Jun who is lost in a foreign country. Although neither can speak the other’s language they slowly start a type of relationship that transcends their collective cultural identities. Roberto’s exposure to Chinese culture is fundamental for this personal development and for his understanding of several aspects of modern Argentina. Jun becomes the catalyst for the protagonist Roberto to see and learn more about his own individual identity. However, Jun is still represented in the Orientalist mode as the subordinate of the Western man with cartoon-like features and no known discernible happy ending for his story. On the other hand, in the Spanish/Mexican film *Biutiful* [Beautiful] (2010) by Oscar winner Alejandro González Iñárritu, the Catalan Uxbal deals with the illegal traffic in people, especially from China, but doesn’t acknowledge his own sordid ways justifying his exploitation of a subordinate subject who doesn’t have any power or voice for that matter. The film explores the pain as a result of globalization and the modern slave trade, but also how misery and beauty can coexist in this world. By the end the dying main character has a change of heart and tries to make things right. The film is effectively using Orientalist discourse against itself because it positions the problems of the globalized world in Western hands. Both films therefore showcase the external and internal battle of two Western singular men, and also pinpoint how there is still space to integrate the Asian subject in these societies, eliminating Orientalist tones in their cinematic representation.

In Chapter Three, “‘My Home Is Your Home’: The Maghreb Intersectionality in *Retorno a Hansala* by Chus Gutiérrez,” Fátima Serra analyzes how the flux of illegal immigrants from Morocco to Spain means not only people in transatlantic voyages, but also the crossing of cultures and ideas that ultimately become a challenge for both individual and national identities. The chapter highlights the concept of intersectionality, as discussed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, and the director’s feminist portrayal of the female Muslim character. Chus Gutiérrez, a seasoned female Spanish director of the new millennium, counteracts the loss of dignity of

immigrants and their vulnerability by narrating their bittersweet victories, especially of members of the Moroccan community on both sides of the Gibraltar strait, in several of her movies like *Poniente* [West] (2006) and *Retorno a Hansala* [Return to Hansala] (2008). In the latter, Gutiérrez presents a strong Moroccan woman, Leila, who with the help of a Spaniard, Martín, seeks to return to her hometown to bury her brother (who drowned while trying to migrate to Spain) with dignity. What started as a business venture for the European finishes being a transformative experience when he sees himself following the lead of Leila, and empathizing with the Maghreb people. By creating inclusive films where the transatlantic otherness can be a means for a better life, Gutiérrez is showcasing hope in the role of active female immigrants in the new century. The intersectionality between a Christian Spaniard man and a Muslim Moroccan woman transcends tolerance to advocate integration and transculturation between the two countries.

In Chapter Four, “The “Oriental” Subject in Brazil’s Melting Pot: Portrayals of Jewishness in *O ano em que meus pais saíram de férias*” [The Year my Parents Went on Vacation] (2006), directed by Cao Hamburger, I emphasize the rich diversity of Brazil’s population, a little known factor outside the country, and the aim to represent Jewish diaspora authentically without Orientalist undertones. The film showcases the varied colors and other marginal cultures of Brazilians who live in Bom Retiro in São Paulo (Jews, Greeks, Afros, and Italians), but the focus of this chapter is the Jewish transatlantic community of the country as seen through the eyes of a twelve-year-old boy named Mauro. The youngster, exemplifying the deleuzian concept of “time-image seer,” did not know he himself was part Jewish on his paternal side. In this *Bildungsfilm* or coming-of-age story, Mauro suffers an identity crisis when his parents leave him with his grandfather, Mótél, while they flee for their lives from the military regime. But Mótél is dead and the Jewish community adopts and takes care of Mauro, especially his main carer, his neighbor Shlomo. At first, their different lifestyles, cultures and beliefs clash until both main characters through cultural negotiations, as explored by Jeffrey Lesser, slowly start to understand and appreciate each other. Mauro finds the real meaning of family and community while discovering his Jewish ancestry. Shlomo also changes, and forgoes his own notorious isolation to help bring the child’s family together, risking his own life. This is a multifaceted film that expounds how the problems of a lonely child bring together a multicultural community during a special moment in the history of Brazil, the 1970 World Cup, and it also highlights the repression of a military regime while subtly drawing parallels with the Holocaust. This

film exemplifies how hospitality, cultural heritage, and nationality come together, espousing a new national understanding where tolerance, solidarity, and integration are valued and sought.

At the end we have also added an Appendix with a list of fictional films by countries from Latin America and Spain that deal with Eastern and Middle Eastern transnational multicultural groups.

This book will definitely enhance and broaden the perspectives of other scholars and will be up to date with the ways the “Orient” world is being portrayed in contemporary films from Spain, Mexico, Brazil, Chile, and Argentina. Also, understanding what migratory processes have and are doing to both the immigrants and their host countries is a way to better understand other non-traditional marginal cultures and how they fit nowadays into the Spanish and Latin American historical/political and social context. The spectator witnesses the discrimination, violence, and death in the quest for a better life of the Maghrebs and Asian ethnic groups in Spain, Mexico, and Argentina, but also a Jewish community in Brazil living together with locals and other immigrants. From Chile the viewer encounters other less well-known groups such as the Palestinians and the Koreans, their differences and the ways they integrate themselves to their new and sometimes violent environment. However, in every film at the very least collaboration, and in some cases integration instead of separation, is the common denominator. The old stereotypical Orientalist ways of seeing these vulnerable groups are starting to change to a more authentic representation (albeit some would argue romanticized), or at least trying to go in that direction. Such is the case of a Moroccan woman and a Spanish man who unite to help her community and give them dignity in *Retorno a Hansala*, a Brazilian Jewish community helping a Gentile boy understanding part of his own ancestry in *O ano em que meus pais saíram de férias*, an Argentinian and a Chinese transforming their lives in *Un cuento chino*, a dying Spanish man trying to right a wrong in *Beautiful*, and second generation immigrants from Korea having agency by defending themselves in a new urban violent environment in both *Chinango* and *Kiltro*. These films are showing a new growing presence of hybrid “Oriental” communities being forged in Spain and Latin America, and their slowly but surely developing cultural/economical and historical strength.

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INTRODUCTION

MICHELE C. DÁVILA GONÇALVES

My idea in *Orientalism* is to use humanistic critique to open up the fields of struggle, to introduce a longer sequence of thought and analysis to replace the short bursts of polemical, thought-stopping fury that so imprison us. . .

Humanism is centered upon the agency of human individuality and subjective intuition, rather than on received ideas and approved authority.
—Edward Said, “Orientalism 25 Years Later”

In the nineteenth century the French art critic Jules-Antoine Castagnary was the person that coined the term Orientalism to name art that depicted “Oriental” subjects seen through the traveler’s eye (primarily from the Middle East), although the subject matter had been represented in the arts since the late fifteenth century (Varisco 81).¹ At first the term Orientalism was used with derision but it became so popular that in 1893 the French founded the *Société des Peintres Orientalistes* [Society of Orientalist Painters]. The style, an adaptation of Islamic art with interlaced ornamentation called *arabesque* or *Moresque* [Moorish], permeated paintings and drawings, but was also co-opted in decorative arts and architecture (Benjamin). Some of the most well-known Orientalist artists are the French Gustave Boulanger, Eugène Delacroix, James Tissot, Jean-August-Dominique Ingres, the Austro-French Rudolph Ernst, the British J. M. W. Turner and Frederic Leighton, and the American John Singer Sargent. Color and sensuality were key elements in the representation of the imagined female subject, i.e. the odalisque, of many of the paintings. For instance, the stereotyped exotic fantasy seen through the imagination of painters such as Delacroix in *Death of Sardanapalus* (1827) and Ingres’s *The Turkish Bath* (1862) continued in the twentieth century with Henri Matisse’s paintings, among others. In contrast, British Orientalism tried instead to bring more “realistic” and “natural” settings to their paintings without a seemingly political connotation. This assumption

perpetuated among art critics is contested by Linda Nochlin who rightly questions the notion of naturalness and authenticity of British Orientalist paintings. She argues that nothing is gratuitous; for example if a spectator notices some broken tiles in a painting:

[W]e can see that the objectively described repairs in the tiles have still another function: a moralizing one which assumes meaning only within the apparently objectivized context of the scene as a whole. Neglected, ill-repaired architecture functions, in nineteenth-century Orientalist art, as a standard topos for commenting on the corruption of contemporary Islamic society. (Nochlin 292)

Even if nudity is not a characteristic of British Orientalism in painting, in contrast with French, that doesn't mean that the subject matter represented isn't seen as a diminished subject, and therefore beneath European civilization. And this tie between politics and the representation of the Orient in arts and literature as demeaning is what Edward Said put up front in 1978 when he published his book *Orientalism*, which will be discussed later on.²

The "Oriental" subject has also been part of Western music and literature. For instance, classical music has been influenced by melodies, rhythms, and stories from the Middle East and the East, Mozart, Beethoven, Debussy, Verdi, Puccini, and Strauss being examples. There are many examples of literature produced during the Middle Ages in what is now called Spain (where for around eight centuries the majority of the territory was the stronghold of the Moors) that can be arguably considered "Oriental." During the Renaissance the "Orient" was used as satirical fodder in Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and Voltaire's *Candide*. In England, the theme was reflected in Lord Byron's "Turkish Tales," and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Kublai Khan*. In France it continued with Victor Hugo in *Les Orientales* and Gustave Flaubert in *Salammbô*, and these are just a very few examples of how the "Orient" has been a subject matter in literature for ages. By the middle of the nineteenth century, when Orientalism was becoming the artistic fashion in arts in Europe, a poetic movement was born in France that promoted the "Orient" as an ideal world called Parnassianism which included the poets Théophile Gautier, Charles Marie René Leconte de Lisle, Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, the Cuban José María Heredia and the Brazilian Olavo Bilac. This movement together with Symbolism a few years later became the forerunner of the *Modernismo* movement in Latin America and Spain. The Parnassians believed in art for art's sake, restraint and technical perfection without the subjective emotionalism of the Romantics or the perusal of social context.

Among their themes were mythological situations and characters, epics, and the exoticism of faraway lands, all with the goal of creating beauty. The Symbolists' aim was to stay "away from realist modes and towards idealism, a search for the Absolute" (Blackmore xvi). One of the typical traits is the musicality of its poetry and the importance of music itself. A. M. and E. H. Blackmore explain:

this meant not so much an ambition to sound fluent and melodious as an aspiration to make organized words act non-representationally. . . . Thus, poetic language would be as disconnected from the "real" world as, say, a piano sonata or a string quartet. . . . It yielded profound truths about the human condition in the most allusive (symbolic) way, and without the need for mimesis, that is, without having to imitate or represent the world directly. (xviii)

Therefore the representation of "Oriental" subjects was part of a new imaginary literary paradigm where everything was exquisite, perfect, and exotic with sensual and erotic undertones.

This was the preamble of Latin America's, and later Spanish, *Modernismo*, a movement that revolutionized Hispanic literature especially in poetry.³ Among the precursors of this new poetic style were José Martí and Julián del Casal from Cuba, José Asunción Silva from Colombia, Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera from Mexico, and Juan Ramón Jiménez from Spain. But the scholarly consensus is that the Nicaraguan Rubén Darío created the movement with the publication of *Azul* in 1888, with a mixture of poems and short stories that became very popular from the end of the nineteenth to the early twentieth century. Besides Darío, modernist authors were Ricardo Jaimes Freires and José Santos Chocano from Peru, Delmira Agustini and Leopoldo Lugones from Argentina, Julio Herrera y Reissig from Uruguay, Amado Nervo from Mexico, and in Spain the poetry of Antonio Machado and Manuel Machado and the famous *Sonatas* of Ramón del Valle-Inclán.

So what is *Modernismo*? In its first phase it proposed new aesthetic and structural forms, presenting an exotic poetical world full of swans, palaces, and princesses with exuberant gardens, all metaphors of an ideal world represented with new poetical language and rhythmic and metrical innovation giving more space to free verse. For instance, in *Azul* the representation of the world is an imaginary perfect background of what is considered beautiful, emphasizing "Oriental" themes and subject matter in an exquisite manner. An explanation of the movement's style is:

Practitioners of modernismo often set their poems in exotic landscapes dotted with swans, peacocks, lilies, princesses, and other symbols of

nobility and aristocracy. Although these beautiful symbols may have seemed purely escapist, they were meant to emphasize the materialism and vulgarity of everyday life by creating a world of unadulterated beauty. (*Poets.org*)

This quote is important because it summarizes what detractors and fans among scholars discuss regarding *Modernismo*. Some, like María A. Salgado, state that the negative criticism of *Modernismo* as escapism, therefore superficial and elitist, deals only with the first phase of the movement and doesn't take into account the later more compromised phases, in which politics and social context are more pronounced and the aristocratic refined language and themes are no longer in vogue. Also the subsequent *Modernismo* in Spain with the exponents of the *Generación del 98* [98 Generation] such as the authors mentioned before in addition to narrators Miguel de Unamuno, Pío Baroja and José Martínez Ruiz "Azorín" among others, had other preoccupations thematically and stylistically such as the renovation of Spain and its new identity as an empire, and the description of their own country, especially the landscape of Castile. Other critics plainly defend the Orientalism of the first *Modernismo*, such as Julia Kushigian when she argues that the depiction uplifts the "Oriental" image without condescension, and Araceli Tinajero when she emphasizes the "independent," non-European reading of Japanese culture in the modernists' literary output. Ricardo Llopesa defends the French poets as well as the Hispanic ones, analyzing the Orientalism in both instances as more an "integration" of "Oriental" culture in their literature, although paradoxically he then quotes Gautier proclaiming that what distinguished this group of poets was the "exotic" element and among other things their enjoyment of young women (174–175). Ivan A. Schulman has a more developed thought when he proposes a new reading stating that the "Orient" inscribed in Modernists' texts was not simply an intertextual and aesthetic phenomenon but also a social one because it is an "affirmation of self and the liberation of the social community from center-imposed cultural and socio-political systems" (101).

I agree that the Modernist poets invented new ways of looking at the "Orient," and subsequently their poetic voice was modified when the representative poets matured. Darío, for example, clearly has different stages in his poetic voice going through the aristocratic exotic views from his youth, to the patriotic stage, and lastly the intimate phase when the poet remembers his youth with nostalgia and melancholia. I do not contest the beauty of their poetry or the newly minted nationalistic self or the importance of this movement in the literature following it in the Hispanic

world. But I believe the above mentioned defense by some critics is wishful thinking from our contemporary point of view, which is radically different to what was the common opinion in the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. It is rather naïve to negate or justify what these poets believed or meant in their time and what *de facto* transpired in poetry during the first stage of the movement: the ubiquitous search of beauty as an idealized artistic priority centered in what was perceived as an exotic “Orient,” the obvious French influences in the Latin American authors’ literary education, and the subliminal erotic aura of the poetical “Oriental” female subject matter when described.

After *Modernismo* the “Orient” didn’t seem to be particularly important in the literature of Spain or Latin America (there were exceptions of course, one that comes to mind being Spain’s Juan Goytisolo). When in 1978 Said published his controversial book *Orientalism*, he stressed the continuing patronizing and prejudiced way the Western world looked at and interpreted the “Orient,” specifically Middle Eastern cultures. He argued that the generator for this came from the imperialistic European attitude that considered its ex-colonies uncivilized, ignorant, and uncouth; “in short, Orientalism as a western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said, *Orientalism* 3). This assertion caused a commotion among scholars from different countries and it was as much admired and celebrated as it was reviled. Nevertheless, nowadays nobody can talk about Orientalism and not mention Said’s book as a milestone in political/historical/social/anthropological/philosophical and literary/film theories. Graham Huggam agrees:

Orientalism, although frequently seen as flawed, even as one of Edward Said’s weakest efforts, is far and away the most talked-about and influential of the twenty-odd books he wrote during an almost unimaginably prolific career. (124)

To have an idea of the critical allegations of the contradictory aspects of Said’s book Huggam details them in his 2005 article “(Not) Reading ‘Orientalism’”:

Sure enough, though, Said’s critics have been alert to the apparent contradictions in his humanist philosophy; and these contradictions are made apparent, explicitly or implicitly, in the three readings below. . . . the Indian Marxist critic Aijaz Ahmad . . . in his wide-ranging book *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (1992) . . . [states] that *Orientalism* (the book) remains confused as to whether Orientalism (the method) is a historical by-product of colonialism or whether it is a constitutive element of “the European imagination,” from the Greeks to the present day (181);

that it is equally confused about whether Orientalism is an interlocking set of discursive representations or an accumulated record of *mis*representations in the narrowly realist sense (185–186); and that it goes so far as to make a virtue out of these and other conspicuous inconsistencies. (131)

[Also] the Turkish sociologist Meyda Yegenoglu's book-length study *Colonial Fantasies* (1998) . . . argues, sexual fantasy and the production of sexual difference are constitutive of Orientalism, as is the link between (imagined) knowledge of the Orient and (unconscious) sexual desire. Less convincing is her insistence that "the Western subject's desire for its Oriental other is always mediated by a desire to have access to the space of its women, to the body of its women and to the truth of its women" (Yegenoglu 62–73). While she is surely right that "[t]he process of Orientalization of the Orient is one that intermingles with its feminization" (73), her insistence that the Orient is *always* mediated through the feminine clearly overstates the issue while recoding the process of "Orientalization" in what appear to be exclusively heterosexual terms. (132–133)

David Cannadine's *Ornamentalism* (2001), [says] "we [. . .] need to recognize that there were other ways of seeing the empire than in the oversimplified categories of black and white with which we are preoccupied. It is time we reoriented orientalism" (125). (133–134)

None knew the limitations of his study better than Said himself. He specifically writes in his original text:

Perhaps the most important task of all would be to undertake studies in contemporary alternatives to Orientalism, to ask how one can study other cultures and peoples from a libertarian, or a nonrepressive and nonmanipulative, perspective. But then one would have to rethink the whole complex problem of knowledge and power. These are all task left embarrassingly incomplete in this study. (Said, *Orientalism* 24)

As a result of the critical reception Said explained his original intention in the afterword of *Culture and Imperialism*:

I wanted readers to make use of my work so that they might then produce new studies of their own that would illuminate the historical experience of Arabs and others in a generous, enabling mode. That certainly happened in Europe, the United States, Australia, the Indian subcontinent, the Caribbean, Ireland, Latin America, and parts of Africa. The invigorated study of Africanist and Indological discourses, the analyses of subaltern history, the reconfiguration of postcolonial anthropology, political science, art history, literary criticism, musicology, in addition to the vast new

developments in feminist and minority discourses to all these, I am pleased and flattered that *Orientalism* made a difference. (340)

What we intend to do in this volume pertains to Said's desire to propose alternative perspectives on how Orientalism is now portrayed cinematographically in the Luso-Hispanic world. But as for Dennis Porter's question on how texts can establish distance from the ideologies they reproduce, or by the same token a scholar analyzing texts, we agree that although it is very difficult to totally eliminate social conditioning even at an unconscious level, both movie directors and we, the scholars of this volume, acknowledge the rights of minority groups in the countries studied here and strive to depict and study them in an unbiased respectful way. The negative paradigm that Said vociferously made the world aware of is evidently changing in Spanish and Latin American cinematography and, as an increasing theme in films due to the ongoing awareness of the peoples of the world and their cultures, its main goal is to engage in the plethora of reconfigurations of the term Orientalism, therefore the title of this book. What we see here are directorial voices in search of explanations and possible solutions for a more tolerant convivial coexistence among the diverse ethnic groups in Spain and Latin America.

Notes

¹ Methodically Daniel Martin Varisco dedicates the fourth section of the first chapter of his book *Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid*, to trace the origins of the term and its trajectory through space and time; this is an essential reading for understanding the global term's history.

² "No one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere activity of being a member of a society" (Said, *Orientalism* 10).

³ In Spanish the term refers to a different movement to what is commonly considered Modernism in English and Portuguese, which is closer to the experimentation of what is also known as the avant-garde. In Brazil the movement started in 1922 with the "*Semana de Arte Moderna*" [Week of Modern Art] celebrated in São Paulo; among its features was its challenge to European styles, especially Parnassianism. *Modernismo*, especially in its first phase, is prior to this Modern/Avant-Garde period, which in Spanish is called *Vanguardismo* [Vanguard]. Here I will be using the term in Spanish so as to not confuse the readers.

CHAPTER ONE

THE LATIN DRAGON: THE REMASCULINIZATION OF THE “ORIENTAL” MALE IN MARKO ZAROR’S FILMS

MOISÉS PARK

It remains the professional Orientalist’s job to piece together a portrait, a restored picture as it were, of the Orient or the Oriental; fragments, [. . .] supply the material but the narrative shape, continuity, and figures are constructed by the scholar, for whom scholarship consists of circumventing the unruly (un-Occidental) nonhistory of the Orient with orderly chronicle, portraits, and plots.

—Edward Said, *Orientalism*

“*Chinchulancha*”: Introduction

I heard “*¡Chinchulancha!*” shouted at me in the streets quite often while living in Santiago, Chile, since I was a toddler through my early adulthood. “*¡Chinchulancha!*” is the equivalent to the “Ching Chong!” in English, which has been used as a pejorative way to refer to East Asians, emulating the Mandarin language (Paik 16). In Spanish, “*¡Chinchulancha!*” attempts to do the same, but the slur is also a well-known “language joke” in Chile: “*¿Cómo se dice náufrago en chino? ¡Chinchulancha!*” The answer to the opening question, “How do you say castaway in Chinese?” sounds like the phrase “Without his/her boat” in Spanish: “*Sin su lancha.*”

Growing up in that city in the 80s and 90s made me very aware of the prejudices that came with my phenotype. I look Korean or simply “*chino*” for many observers. My response was equally racist, “*¡Indio ignorante!*” [Ignorant Indian!], creating a defiant verbal battle that could have ended up in physical violence; but in my case, it seldom did. Fist fighting was then the masculine way of defending myself, proving that slurs that pointed out my otherness provoked in me some stern opposition and “martial”

behavior. Extending the previous joke's play in words, my identity was a castaway in the shipwreck of heterosexual masculinities colliding. Manifestations of masculinity morphed from the stoic Confucian-influenced male that worked in the fields while the female served him at home and the *machismo chilensis*, a male chauvinism well militarized by Chile under Augusto Pinochet and the hegemonic masculinities that dominated the politics of gender throughout his dictatorship (1973–1990) and post dictatorship (1990–).

This chapter partially reflects a more personal and subjective reference to how masculinity and manhood is changing in a neighborhood in Santiago. I am racially Korean but ethnically (or culturally) Chilean. I was educated in Santiago and was raised by Korean parents who immigrated to South America in the 70s. In those days, the references to Asia were possibly those of the Korean and Vietnam Wars, or perhaps of Bruce Lee who died in 1973 at the age of 32. Most likely, the collective knowledge of the “Orient” was understandably filled with exoticism that trickled down from mass media representations and other Orientalist cultural productions. Arab immigrants had been in Chile for two to five generations prior to the waves of Korean, Chinese and Taiwanese immigrants. Thus, in Santiago, the “Orient” was bi-panethnically divided into *árabes* (Middle Easterners) and *chinos* (Far Easterners or East Asians). Both “types” of Asian were stereotypically thought of as merchants, real estate owners, and investors.

In the 80s and 90s, it was clear to me that manhood was ascribed through the heteronormative lenses of soap operas that featured Chilean, Mexican or Venezuelan actors, dubbed Brazilian actors, and countless dubbed Hollywood films that would expectedly feature White males who lured women from all ethnic backgrounds. Very seldom would Chilean popular media feature a male without hegemonic racial features and I understood that masculine beauty (masculinity) was not merely in the eye of the beholder but in the “blue eyes” of the creators of that objectifying “objective” beauty. The standard of male beauty was racially homogeneous: White. This is not a novel idea as many scholars from Western and Eastern schools have already pointed out that there is an “internalized White masculinity” that dominates the entire world, a hegemonic masculinity that is being challenged; but first of all, this social construction needs to be acknowledged and made aware of (Carabi 104). Therefore, it is safe to assume that Chileans have an explicit fascination with European male beauty, whether in history or mass Chilean culture, from reiterating in history classes that the Chilean independence leader Bernardo O’Higgins was not just Spanish, but from Irish heritage, to

hearing that General Pinochet's eyes, were indeed, "ice-blue" (Constable 73). Pamela Jiles's 2004 best seller and controversial *Fantasías sexuales de mujeres chilenas* [*Sexual Fantasies of Chilean Women*] includes Blacks (a full chapter), and a few Latin American and blue-eyed blonds as males that are sexually desired by Chilean women. "Oriental" tourists ("*turistas orientales*") are merely mentioned once as spectators of a public act of sex (Jiles 96) and the Mapuche indigenous are mentioned only once as "very different" from Black males who are feared but at the same time sexually desired by some of the voices that confess their "sexual fantasies." We can think of other examples that feature "Oriental" males, but almost certainly, the representation of "Oriental" males follows the steps of the Western hegemonic version of male Otherness: dangerous or exotic. A few examples, like Isabel Allende's *Eva Luna*, include "Oriental" male characters like the "*turco Riad Halabi*" [Turk Riad Halabi] who participates in sexual acts but the novel emphasizes a physical "defect" on his lip, and a disturbingly erotic and at the same time paternal relationship with the protagonist. In conclusion, the "Oriental" male does not dominate the sexual imaginary in a positive light according to popular beliefs and popular cultural products.

The Palestinian-Chilean martial artist Marko Zaror's image of masculinity in *Chinango* (2009), filmed in Mexico, and *Kiltro* (2006), filmed in Chile, reformulate the remasculinization of the "Oriental"¹ male in Latin America through a rather unique medium: martial arts films. *Chinango*, billed as "the first Latin American martial arts movie" (although it was released three years after *Kiltro*), is a camp thriller with action-packed sequences with an exploitation feel and plenty of shots that feature the actor's bare body. The plot of *Chinango* is a symbiosis of Mexican and Chinese culture where a Shaolin family legacy and tradition has to be defended at all cost. In *Kiltro* (2006), a new Chile is presented in the big screen, where Palestinians and Koreans are part of this seemingly homogeneous society in most of its cinematic representation. This chapter's purpose is to suggest a rise of the remasculinization of the "Oriental" (Arab and Asian) male in Chile through these two feature films.

Although martial arts movies do not strictly follow Edward Said's *Orientalism*, namely, that the representation of the East/"Orient" as vulnerable leads to the perpetuation of postcolonial action, some feature films can do the reverse and create an imagined "Orient" that is viewed as superior to the creator's culture (in this case, Chileans). I have argued in an earlier publication² that the duality of Palestine/Korea, presented in *Kiltro*, demonstrates a "second order Orientalism" or "second-hand Orientalism" in which the East is not merely showcased as exotic or erotic, promoting a

paternalistic point of view towards it, but rather the “Oriental” world is viewed through cinematic meta-references, which include Hong Kong martial arts films, B movies, Westerns and other Hollywood movies and TV shows. The inclusion of *Chinango* in this chapter will further argue that this second-hand Orientalism has an innovative effect in restoring or at least reclaiming masculinity to the “Oriental” male from the Westernized standard of masculinity. The new Latin American “macho” has been transformed from the one portrayed in the hegemonic Hollywood cinema of past decades, into a daring reformulation on the politics of gender.

Towards a Panethnic Study of Masculinity: Echoing Asian American Studies

It is worth highlighting that the representation of Asian American males has been intensely studied in Asian American Studies, and there is an abundant and ever growing bibliography and popular interest in the topic from diverse disciplines. In fact, the topic has been a major pillar in developing studies in gender studies through the lens of race, the politics of identity, and postcolonial theory in angles that urgently demand some needed scholarship and pedagogy.

Among many book publications, Darrell Hamamoto’s controversial view on desexualization of Asian American males in media and its possible solutions can be surveyed in 1994’s *Monitored Peril: Asian Americans and the Politics of TV Representation*, and 2000’s *Countervisions: Asian American Film Criticism* (co-edited with Sandra Liu), along with numerous scholarly articles, interviews, appearances in documentaries, talk shows, and social media. Though he is not the pioneering scholar to point out this disparity of female Asian American actresses as mere sexual objects and their male counterparts as emasculated subjects, his research did popularize the fact that Asian American male actors had very limited roles in the screen and the hegemonic masculinity heavily dominated the viewers’ perspective, limiting the roles of Asian (American) males as disposable one-dimensional characters and part of the comic relief of films.³ In addition, Gail Dine’s *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality* (2010), and Cecile Parreñas Shimizu’s *Straitjacket Sexualities: Unbinding Asian American Manhoods in the Movies* (2012), have further problematized the notions of manhood and masculinity as universal and static by analyzing other visual media, and acknowledging that “remasculinization” is not a simple process of expecting Asian American male subjects to follow the formulas of White hegemonic patriarchal masculinity. In “Assembling

Asian American Men in Pornography: Shattering the Self toward Ethical Manhoods,” Shimizu proposes the possibility of

aiming to free our conceptions of manhood from the poles of vilified lack and valorized macho [by looking] to how sexual screens provide opportunities for the formulation of ethical manhoods—where sex expresses not only pleasure and power but care for self and others. (163–164)

In 2014’s *A View from the Bottom*, Hoang Tan Nguyen

challenges the strategy of remasculinization employed by Asian American and gay male critics as a defense against feminization and rewrites male effeminacy as socially and sexually enabling. (2)

Some studies on masculinity from Latin America recognize that visual productions from the East have created new masculinities that defy “patriarchal masculinities,” further deconstructing hegemonic and “universal” masculinities and inviting new possibilities of affirming masculinities that are not necessarily heteronormative (Carabí 102).

This chapter focuses more on masculinity and manhood in terms of aesthetics; that is, how does the media, particularly these two films, perpetuate or refrain from replicating the hegemonic male, the one that follows patriarchal patterns and is racially predictable. According to Nguyen:

a failure to take Asian American masculinity and explicit sexual representation seriously can be attributed to the deep anxieties surrounding Asian American masculinity, which has been historically marked by feminization and emasculation. (5)

Furthermore, he accurately notes that there have been attempts to “promote straight Asian American men as potent pornographic studs” (Nguyen 7), leaving the

dominant constructions of heteromascularity intact by simply expounding a business-as-usual pornographic program, one that must dismiss Asian American male sexuality in order to shore up their status as proper desiring sexual subjects, as real men. (Nguyen 7)

I purposely acknowledge that representations of men in these two martial arts film do not, by any means, challenge heteronormative schemes of virility; in fact, they heavily rely on the gender dichotomy perpetuated by hegemonic cultural productions to promote heteronormative hypermasculinity,

the particular masculinity that is fostered and maintained in “standard” martial arts features: the hero is male, the female is always in need of rescue and subjugated to the male. We have yet to see if in a (near) future, the genre will contain more films that feature non-heterosexual subjects, such as Hong Kong’s *Enter the Phoenix* (2004) directed by Stephen Fung, and the American film *The Sensei* (2008) directed by Diana Lee Inosanto, some of the very few martial arts films with a gay lead character. My contribution hopes to problematize the dichotomy by referencing non-Whites in lead roles, by challenging the homogeneity of White straight males as the sole race and sexual orientation that embody the standard of heteronormative masculinity, understanding that this is not what Shimizu calls “ethical manhoods” and suggesting that further research and scholarship should be done that provide alternate masculinities that do not fall into the gender dichotomy that positions non-White and non-males as inferior.

Said’s seminal work created many scholarly and public platforms for scholars in humanities, social sciences and arts to dialog with propositions from his book and extend them to other disciplines and settings. For instance, he points out that:

The Orient is watched, since it’s almost (but never quite) offensive behavior issues out of a reservoir of infinite peculiarity; the European, whose sensibility tours the Orient, is a watcher, never involved, always detached, always ready for new examples of what the description de l’Egypte called “bizarre jouissance.” The Orient becomes a living tableau of queerness. (Said, *Orientalism* 103)

Although he does not explicitly suggest that there is a lack of clear ethical masculinity in male subjects, he does affirm that the “Orient” is marginalized in representations and debased as atypical and unusual; in other words, exotic, foreign, and dangerous. These theoretical clashes and dialogues between Said’s claims of representations of the “Orient” (Others) as exotic/queer are in some instances the reverse: representation of parts of the “Orient,” namely masculinity and manhood, are too often expectedly pathetic and predictably emasculated. Therefore, the recurrent repetitive presentation of the asexual, effeminate and emasculated Asian American male, created an expectation of a “lesser” male in the viewership, already trained by the hegemonic lens of Hollywood and European cinema that glorifies the European male (often hypermasculinizing Blacks, Latinos and Natives as dangerous and inhumane). Most studies in Asian American representation have concluded that the sexualization of Asian American males in audiovisual

and printed media is urgently lacking, underfunded and misrepresented.

The study of manhood and masculinity among Latin American scholars, on the other hand, is comparatively more advanced, surely because of the longevity of culture dynamics since the conquest of the Americas, but also because of the proliferation of multiple and multidisciplinary perspectives that study the topic from gender studies, film theory, psychoanalysis, etc. Nevertheless, the study of Asian-Latin American or Arab-Latin American masculinity is also lacking. Moreover, the study of Latino (Hispanic) representation of males is fairly well documented and the combination of both Asian American and Latino studies, could serve as theoretical starting points to continue exploring Asian-Latin American representation of male artists in popular media and historic archives. There is much to be researched as the rather unhelpful panethnic terms “Asian” and “Oriental” refer to at least 65% of the world population and an ever-growing number in Latin America, North America and Europe.

“Oriental” Presence in Chile/Mexico

In Chile, mass media and society generalize Palestinian identity as “*árabes*” [Arabs] or “*turcos*” [Turks], a common confusion among Chileans and other Latin American groups. This is a result of waves of migrations since the mid-nineteenth century from the Ottoman Turkish Empire and after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Some sources estimate that between 8 and 10 million people from the Arab world arrived in Chile, the majority being Palestinian, but close to half of the immigrants were from Lebanon, Syria, or neighboring countries (Baeza 59). The panethnic identities of *árabes* and *turcos* explain the lack of racial specificity, as Chileans referred to the newly arrived as *árabes*, as many of them spoke Arabic, or *turcos*, since they legally arrived with Turkish passports. Although the number varies depending on sources, there are at least 500,000 and up to 800,000 Chileans with Arab ancestry today, mostly from that first wave of up to 8,000 Arab immigrants that came between the formation of the Ottoman Turkish Empire and after the Arab-Israeli War (Ghosh, Hernández 249, Konrad). If the latter number were correct, about 5% of Chileans would be descendants of Palestinians, Lebanese and/or Syrians. Thus, it is not surprising that the last name Zaror is more common in Chile than in any other country outside the Middle East.

Whereas the Palestinian and other Arabic diaspora adapted and integrated successfully into virtually all facets of Chilean culture (politics, academia, arts, culture, and sports), the Korean diaspora has kept itself

fairly segregated from Chilean cultural production and civil life, opting to do international and local commerce and remain out of public spheres. The racial tensions that do exist in the metropolis are amplified and sensationalized for entertainment in *Kiltro*. The film does not focus on the demographic novelty, which is noticed only by the international viewer since most of the capital Santiago's residents are aware of the Arab and Asian presence in their midst, but instead, it uses it as the mere backdrop to unfold the plot of the first Chilean kick flick in history (Urrutia N.).

On the contrary, *Chinango* does not focus on an existing neighborhood in Mexico, although Mexicali and Mexico City have a noticeably higher number of migrants, temporary and permanent residents than Chile (approx. 12,000 according to the 2010 census). In turn, it follows some of Hong Kong's historical style films that open with a pseudo-historical background to create the notion that the film attempts to make a connection to a forgotten historical past. Chinese presence in Mexico can be traced to the early seventeenth century, and there is a remarkable bibliography and research on Orientalist studies in Mexico from the very early arrivals (Hough (1900), Hu-Dehart (1982), Mishima (1997), Park, Hea-Jin (2006), Slack Jr. (2009)).

The film contextualizes the diagesis after the contact between Mexico and China as a consequence of the Opium War that supposedly resulted in the massacre of Shaolin monks, the first to suffer from the multinational war; the survivors flew to Mexico after suffering from xenophobia in their first stop, North America. These facts are highly debatable and most likely pure fiction, but widely well rumored among martial arts enthusiasts, and the film takes liberties to recreate and reformulate that history. Fiction is not needed to recall some unsuccessful but imaginative attempts to link the East and America(s) such as *Fusang: Or, The Discovery of America by Chinese Buddhist Priests in the Fifth Century*.

Chinango, expectedly, neglects any historicity, omitting most of the other references to history and to the current Chinese diaspora, focusing on the main feature of the film, Zaror's kicks and punches and abundant shots of his bare athletic musculature. The rich history of relations between Mexico and China is a mere detail compared to the many fight scenes and expected script appropriately emulating the martial arts films genre that takes history through mythological revisions and opts to prioritize the fictitious flick over the fascinating facts of Mexican diverse Asian heritage.⁴