Ruptures in the Western Empire

Ruptures in the Western Empire: White Female Captives and Cinematic Orientalism

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PREFACE

The encounters between the east and the west took place for a long time and reflected instances of love and hate, interactions and confrontations. However, in the 17th and until the second half of the18th century, when the Barbary powers were on their peak, westerners capitalized on the Moorish brutality and expressed their sufferings at the hands of such "savages". They have contributed tremendously to spreading such information, to the rise of orientalism and to the spread of stereotypes about the different "other".

This constructed process of alterity is deepened with the decay of the Barbary powers and the rise of western colonial powers who took upon their responsibility liberating and civilizing the "other". The written biased orientalist discourses were accompanied with huge cinematic productions especially at the beginning of the 20th century and contributed to widening the lacuna between the east and the west. The importance of the theme of Barbary captivity and piracy does not only rely on history but also on contemporary political issues and encounters in Africa and the Middle East. The issues of piracy and though they have disappeared in their traditional sense are still occurring and the Iranian Navy that seized a small British patrol boat on 23 Marsh 2007 in the Iranian waters is mere example.

This book discuses Movies and Media coverage of issues similar to this and to contemporary captivity by focusing more on the captive Jessica Lynch who is an American soldier captured in the war of Iraq 2003 and who becomes a hero and an emblem of her nation. The use and abuse of white female captives and their stories from the age of Barbary captivity to contemporary captivity in the western cinematic productions and later on in foreign western and American agendas is the subject matter of this humble work.

My analysis of such movies and of gender attitudes towards their empires would reveal the complex and the ambivalent nature of the colonial discourse and the inability to control and tame the savage "other". It tries to inveigle the relationships between those female captives and their empires and the way the notion of the empire is based on a myth. This book uncovers the aims behind such productions and their failures to carry one monolithic colonial discourse that keep the "other" under western surveillance. It also attempts at a contrapuntal reading that gives the "other" his due uttered in the other's disruptive resistance.

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INTRODUCTION

Of the various types of media, I believe that the visual media has the greatest influence on the mind of viewers, structuring the consciousness and the awareness of human beings. I therefore find myself immersed in finding out how people perceive and conceive their world through producing and consuming images transmitted in movies. In addition to probing how and why the West produces knowledge about the Orient and the "other," in order to make them inferior, this makes up the basis of this research.

Many people believe that movies are mainly restricted to the artistic realm of a certain nation. It is widely believed that they are an amalgam that shed light on the different artistic and aesthetic visions of the producer. However, I think that movies are not only a piece of art that focus on the social, cultural or aesthetic life of a certain group of people within a community, but also a cultural load embedded with stereotypes, preconceptions and tropes created about a certain people for certain reasons. This requires much scrutiny and analysis.

I believe that all visual media is a text, and for that reason I have decided to analyze some visual texts—movies—to know more about how they are shaped and oriented according to the producer's ideologies and political agendas. I think that these texts reflect nothing but ideology, and are similar to the written archive of literature in carrying a discourse of "othering" about the "other". Therefore, visual media is a culture that easily circulates and contributes to the spread of one culture over the "other".

In fact, nothing exists outside ideology, and no practice exists outside discourse and hence outside ideology. Movies as written texts can be considered as entities that carry a set of discursive practices that reflect how reality is constructed through discourse. They also reflect the process of articulation and how such mediums produce a unified discourse that is fed by a particular ideology, leading to a kind of cultural hegemony and imperialism.

In fact, representation is a complex issue, especially when dealing with the other as a sign of difference. Interestingly enough, this book aims at understanding representation as a concept and practice. In other words, I focus on the techniques that are used to create dichotomy and hence

difference in how representation works and affects people's minds and behaviour. This research traces the representation practices used to represent difference, and by doing so I aim at understanding what Stuart Hall calls "the spectacle of the other"[1] and how it works. I am therefore concerned with the study of discourse in movies and how they are given meaning, creating difference at many levels in areas such as ethnicity, gender, sexuality and class.

The movies analyzed in this work are confined to the theme of captivity. History shows that many Western travellers, fishermen, merchants and diplomats were kidnapped in the Mediterranean by Muslim pirates who emerged with the power of "jihad" from Morocco and the Barbary Coast, as well as the cities of Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli. Those Westerners experienced life in the "other" land and were accustomed to live in the Orient.

Some of them were able to leave the Orient either by escaping or by paying ransom through their families, while others remained their whole life either as captives or as free Westerners who were attracted to the "other" culture and decided to stay. Those who returned wrote many captivity narratives and capitalized on the "atrocities" committed by the "other", and by doing that they aimed at misrepresenting them and fossilizing stereotypes of them, as Nabil Matar says:

> Captivity writers were not necessarily objective, since they were often encumbered with anti-Islamic prejudice—but at least they had experienced the world they described … and despite the anti-Islamic lens through which they viewed Muslim religion and belief, they conveyed for the first time in English writing an extensive range of information about cities, distances, corps, military conflicts, religious practices, and social organization and behavior.[2]

It is clear that the first Western captives able to return to their countries wrote an important archive of captivity narratives and diaries through which they capitalized on the ordeals they faced in the "other" land. Later on, and mainly in the last century, the movie production industry flourished and played a great role in perpetuating the same tropes and stereotypes as produced in those written archives and by doing so they aimed at fixing the "other", constructing a negative image of them and

[1] Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage publications, 1997), 225.

[2] Nabil Matar and Daniel J. Vitkkus, *Piracy, Slavery, and Redemption: Barbary Captivity Narratives from Early Modern England* (New York: Colombia university press, 2001), 4.

perpetuating the same discourse contributing to the building of the Western empire.

Being aware of the virulent impact of such visual texts on the mind and behaviour of viewers, Westerners used them to widen the lacuna between the East and the West and to build an impenetrable cultural wall that counteracts mutual understanding, coexistence and tolerance. For that reason, it is important to analyze some samples of those Western productions to see the implications behind them, and to deconstruct and re-read them.

This research attempts to explore how the Western productions of movies aim at misrepresenting the "other" and inferiorizing them. I attempt to explore images of "othering" in the visual texts as well as signs of resistance and counter-Orientalist discourse.[3] In fact, this research aims at focusing on the representation of small marginal voices in the Western movies to probe them and understand the Western ideology behind their misrepresentation.

This analysis unravels the practices of the process of "othering" as well as the discourse of homogeneity about the "other". Through my analysis of specific movies, I give a voice to voiceless people; to people who have been overwhelmed throughout history by Western imperial powers. I also reveal Western anxieties about the "other" and their tacit desire to take revenge culturally through the production of such "artistic" works.

In this book, I am concerned with the representation of the "other" in Western cinema to understand the role of imagination and the process of creating stereotypes and its function in the system of politics and ideology. Through my analysis of those movies, I aim at disclosing and deconstructing those stereotypes and prejudices that seem to give a "unity" to the colonial discourse[4] and stand at the heterogeneity and the ambivalent nature of the colonial discourse. The discourse of "sameness," which emerges from the other's will to subvert the Western selfhood, problematizes the dichotomy

[3] The constructed, seemingly unified discourse about the "other" collapses as many conflicting discourses emerge both from within and without. Such conflicting voices reveal paradoxes that weaken the colonial authority and create a counter discourse that frustrates the Western imperial "self" and I/Eye.

[4] By colonial discourse I mean the construction of a seemingly unified discourse that is based on persistent Eurocentric prejudice against the "other" and their culture. The colonial discourse drew on the written archives and the colonial narratives that encourage and legitimate Western Christian interventions in different corners of the world. In this book, I argue that such discourse is still perpetuated in the visual media.

between the "self" and "other" and pushes us to think thoroughly about such an imagined division.

This analysis of the misrepresentation of the "other" in Western movies aims at understanding how the "civilized" West aims at appropriating the "other" by distancing itself from them and also by tracing its reflection in that "other". Furthermore, the core of my thesis revolves around the idea that despite the discourse that is created about that barbaric "other", it fails to complete that negative image and reveals the nobility and the kindness of that "other". In other words, I depict instances of counter-Orientalist discourse in the movies that create a space for resistance and constitute a break to the cultural building of the Western empire.[5]

In addition, my analysis of such movies aims at probing media as a trenchant means of constructing, shaping and reshaping reality. It also aims at knowing how media becomes a means of controlling power and hegemony over the inferior "other", and how it is used to theorize about race and ethnicity and to perpetuate the same discourse that pushes the West to cherish its "superiority" over the "other".

In fact, my research is combined thematically into five chapters over which I deal with the misrepresentation of the "other" and counter-Orientalist discourse in those movies. This research argues that despite the Orientalist discourse, and the discourse of Western power and hegemony that the movies carry, they fail in their mission and paradoxically reflect the "other" as noble, emerging to counter the appropriating discourse and to destabilize the balance of power between the East and the West, and hence threaten the cultural building of the Western empire.

In these movies, I also reflect on the role of white female captives and their ambivalent attitudes towards their empires. In fact, white female captives stand as agents of destruction to the Western empires and by behaving that way they shake the colonial enterprise. So, while female captives promote the colonial discourse, they paradoxically alienate and collude with the "other" and use self-parody, reflecting the ambivalence of the female attitudes towards the Western empires.

I deal with the representation of captivity in North Africa and I tackle diverse cinematic productions, and my choice of the movies reflects my argument in questing resistance in the movies and also the ambivalent nature of the colonial discourse. My aim is to show that despite the Western Orientalizing discourse, the "other" destroys the Western

[5] Through different Western discursive productions the West seems to create an indomitable and an impervious empire that is based on discursive productions and which appropriates, victimizes and dominates the "other" as a smaller voice.

selfhood and cherishes superiority by contradicting the seemingly homogenous unified colonial discourse.

This research also focuses on the white female captives in the "other" land and how they become vulnerable to the other's alluring culture. I focus on the movie characters of Diana and Eden Perdicaris, in *The Sheik* and *The Wind and The Lion* respectively, as Western female captives who assimilate with the "other" and reflect their supine malleability in a way that reflects the female captive's moral and political admonishment to the Western empire. Despite the Orientalizing discourse that they carry, they remain ambivalent towards their empires since they both use self-parody and assimilate with the Moorish "other".

This research aims at understanding how Western productions of contemporary movies of captivity aim not only at misrepresenting the "other" but also contribute to enhancing the feeling of American nationhood through a discourse of power and hegemony. To do that, I analyze the movie *Saving Jessica Lynch* to probe the discourse of "othering" and to unpack the way that the American empire builds itself culturally through discourse and how it aims by such a production at enhancing the sense of American nationhood among Americans.

I also analyze the media coverage of American captive Jessica Lynch to see how the media distorts reality and constructs a different one that suits its political and ideological agenda. Moreover, this research argues that despite media reflections and trials to distort reality, the American captive Jessica Lynch stands in a similar way with the Western female captives since she denies all that has been said about her, asserting that everything is fabricated. This makes her an agent of destruction to the cultural building of the Western empire and particularly the American Empire revealing the real nature of the noble "other"

. The choice behind analyzing the movie *Saving Jessica Lynch* along with its media coverage is made to dwell on the uncertainty of the colonial authority and to stand at the ambivalent attitudes of the white female captives towards their nations. Therefore, my choice behind such a cultural product aims by no means at accusing the American administration or the American foreign policy but is rather an invitation to the readers to reflect on the conflicting discourses as well as the discursive and cultural encounters that are raised by such movie and its criticism. It is also an invitation to the readers to the dwell at the inability of the Western selfhood to celebrate its imagined "perfection."

Interestingly enough, this book aims at focusing on the heterogeneity and the ambivalent nature of the colonial discourse. Therefore, while the West claims its purity and chastity at the expense of misrepresenting the

"other" as a site of cruelty and barbarity, the white female captives fiercely frustrate and contest the Western colonial discourse through their ambivalent attitudes towards their empires. They paradoxically become the subject of a subversive destruction that makes the West unable to achieve its imagined perfection.

Western female captives use self-parody[6] and assimilate with the "other" culture, opening a channel for concrete negotiation between the East and the West. It is clear from the Western cinematic productions that white female captives reveal the reality of an ongoing process of cultural imperial conquest that finds its roots in the written archive of captivity narratives of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

In this book, I analyze those visual texts as a battleground for opposing ideologies, as a space where we are pushed far away from the precinct of literature and culture into the arena of politics and ideology; an arena where political, ideological and cultural struggles are enmeshed to vanquish the weak "other". It is clear that I read all these Western cinematic productions as colonial texts. I read them from the perspective and the position of the Moorish "other" whose voice has been drawn to reflect a certain history. By rereading this visual culture I deconstruct the stereotypes, the tropes and the constructed reality about the "other" and give the "other" their due and voice, uttered in their disruptive resistance.

Before analyzing the movies I would like to acquaint the readers with the theoretical framework as well as with some concepts and frequent key terms that they will face throughout my analysis of the five movies. The notion of the "other" and "othering" are important terms that introduces us to explore this field. They are drawn from Edward Said's important and seminal work *Orientalism* in which he stands at the binary division between the "East" and the "West" as a division between "light" and "dark." Many criticisms have been written about orientalism but to reflect on it briefly, Matthew Bernstein states that "Orientalism describes a strand of colonialist discourse in the ideological arsenal of western nations."[7]

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[6] According to Sara Mills, Female travellers use self-parody and criticize their empires for their sense of "cruelty" and colonialism while they reveal their sympathy with the colonized "other". Such ambivalent attitudes constitute a blow to the colonial discourse and reveal the way gender creates ruptures in the Western empire. So instead of supporting their male, seemingly unified discourse they become assimilated with the other's alluring culture and adopt attitudes that look like "going native." See Sara Mills, *Discourse of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1991), 63.

[7] Bernstein Matthew and Gaylyn Studlar, *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film* (London: I.B. Tauris publishers, 1997), 2.

It is a system of knowledge about the "other" that leads to the creation of a structured dichotomy between the east and the west. It is what Edward Said calls "imaginative geography" and which mobilizes them to push the question of Orientalism outside the precincts of academia into the arena of politics and ideology. Orientalism as a discourse reflects many cultural anxieties by standing at the profound complexity of politics of dominance that finds a favorable environment to incubate and develop in Western mindsets and also by focusing on the discourse and aesthetics of "otherness" created by the West. It is a discourse that pushes many scholars to investigate the orient as an invention and a creation not only in terms of literary works but also in terms of cinematic productions.

Such idea of dichotomy between the "East" and "West", between "self" and "other," also pushes us to think of a dichotomy between "female" and "male," and hence to think thoroughly about their different contributions to the building of the Western empire. However, binaries have been criticized by many postcolonial critics who stress that the colonial discourse is not homogenous but rather a heterogeneous entity that reflects the position of gender towards their empires. Such difference in the contribution to the building of the Western empire through discourse does not only push us to think about the ambivalence of the Western discourse but also reveals that the representation of the "other" is by no means straightforward, which problematizes the unity of the colonial discourse and gives a space for the "other" to resist and negotiate its position.

Overall, through all the analyzed movies I reveal the way they affect Western audiences through prejudice and stereotypes and fuel their perception and conception of the Orient in general and of northern Africa in particular. I also aim at disclosing and deconstructing such stereotypes and constructed history by problematizing the colonial discourse and standing at its complexities and paradoxes by first focusing on its internal and external conflicting voices and second by focusing on gender ambivalent attitudes towards their empires.

CHAPTER ONE

THE ANXIETIES OF COLONIAL DISCOURSE: REFLECTING DISCURSIVE AND CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS IN *THE SHEIK*

The Sheik, directed by George Melford, is based on the novel by Edith M. Hull, and takes captivity as its theme. Rudolph Valentino plays the role of Sheik Ahmed Ben Hassan and Agnes Ayres plays Lady Diana Mayer. *The Sheik* is a silent movie recounting the story of Lady Diana, who becomes captive at the hands of Sheik Ahmed. It follows the ordeals that Diana faces when she rejects marriage and opts for a month-long journey into the desert, alone, despite warnings not to. Diana nonetheless insists on going on this adventure with only a guide to protect her.

Set in North Africa, the movie starts with Diana's negotiation with her brother and later with her fiancé about her plans to travel to the desert alone. Attending the local casino, Diana is informed that a party is happening, established by an important sheik, and that no one is allowed to enter except Arabs. Lady Diana is angry at the news, but is also curious about what is going on inside. Diana therefore borrows an Oriental dancer's costume and sneaks into the party.

Once Diana gets inside, the movie begins to describe the "Oriental" setting, promoting all the stereotypes one could have about Arabs. Lady Diana is spotted by an Arab who tries to bring her to the front of the crowd to dance, but she resists and this attracts the attention of the party guests. Sheik Ahmed also notices and realizes that this is a white woman, and sends her out of the party. After she leaves, Mustapha Ali informs him that Diana is the woman that he is going to guide into the desert tomorrow. The Sheik is happy at hearing such news and informs him to lead her in his direction. The Sheik then gets into Diana's room while she is sleeping and disables her gun, and before leaving he sings her a love song which she hears in her dreams.

Diana starts her journey with her brother accompanying her for the first day, leaving when she promises to see him next month in London. Mustapha then betrays her and sends a signal to the Sheik who comes with

his people to attack them and take Diana captive. The movie details the tragedy of Diana and her several unsuccessful attempts to escape. As his captive, the Sheik wants to make Diana obey his orders and desires, but she is obstinate and continually refuses.

At that time, the Sheik promises that he will make her learn to obey him and orders his servants to dress her in Oriental clothes for dinner. Following an escape attempt, the Sheik rapes her so that she can learn to love him and orders his servants to guarantee her opulent life by giving her certain freedoms. After a few days, the Sheik receives a letter from his friend Raoul St. Hubert informing him of an intended visit. The Sheik informs everybody and asks Dina to host his friend, but Diana feels embarrassed at being seen in such Oriental clothes, and the Sheik orders his servants to return Diana her Western clothes.

When Raoul arrives, he finds Diana sad and morally broken and admonishes the Sheik for his ill treatment. This causes the Sheik to behave more humanly with her, and he returns her gun informing her that he trusts her to protect herself from the thieves who roam the area. Diana and her servants are out on a trip, and during this excursion Diana writes "I love you" in the sand, addressing it to the Sheik. Meanwhile, the Sheik and Raoul discuss several issues concerning the Sheik's love for Diana while Raoul tries to convince him to let her go. The Sheik agrees, but the force of circumstance is against his will since Diana is attacked and taken captive by Omair, a bandit and Sheik Ahmed's rival.

On receiving the news, the Sheik goes to her rescue. He finds her message in the sand and realizes how much she loves him. The Sheik gathers his army and goes to attack the rival tribe, and we see Diana's ordeals at the hands of Omair when he tries to rape her. Omair is injured by his jealous first wife after she tries to seduce him, while the Sheik and his army finds his way into the village and starts fighting Omair's army.

After the fight between the two, Omair is killed and the Sheik is mortally wounded. His people take him back to his tribe and Raoul starts nursing him. Diana enters and, finding him sleeping, takes his hand and remarks that it is too big for an Arab. Raoul informs her that he is not an Arab; his father is British and his mother Spanish. They died in the desert and Ahmed was rescued and adopted by the ruling sheik. He was later sent to be educated in France, and after the death of the sheik he returned to inherit the throne. The movie concludes with the Sheik waking, and with Diana confessing to him her love.

Cinema of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries reflects a paradigm followed by Western directors and producers. This is the construction of visual narratives inherited from Orientalism, as well as the

creation of visual tropes often created through polarities of good and bad as well as through the process of intertexuality, and this is apparent in *The Sheik* where the Western female captive Diana becomes a product of miscegenation.

The Western cinematic production encapsulates the "other" in the stereotypical framework of the cinematic production. It fixes the "other" with its misrepresentation, and with the repetition of those stereotypes it contributes to widening the gap between the two entities: the West as opposed to the East. Orientalism, as a set of discursive practices, structures Western selfhood and creates the imaginative "other" politically, socially and ideologically. Edward Said stresses the role of the artists and scientists in the description and construction of the orient[1]. Cinematic production becomes a means of Orientalizing the "other" as well as a means of perpetuating the stereotypes built about that "other".

The Sheik depicts an asymmetrical relationship between the East and West, reflecting in numerous ways the complexity and ambivalent nature of colonial discourse. In this movie, the misrepresentation of the "other" can be followed to show how the West tries to perpetuate the same tropes about the "other" and hence keep it under "surveillance." In fact, though the Sheik is not an Arab he is considered and introduced to the viewer as an "evil," up to the end of the movie when his French friend reveals his race and true identity.

This section follows the discourse produced about him as an Arab villain and as a captor of an innocent Western woman, revealing his cultural hybridity and the ambivalent nature of the colonial discourse, also focussing on the representation of the landscape as well as the bandit Omair to show how the West builds its cultural empire at the expense of the native "other". In addition, the film demonstrates some instances when the discourse goes against the discourse of Western power and hegemony and reflects the heterogeneity of the colonial discourse.

On its release in 1921, *The Sheik* was a huge international success paving the way for other directors to produce similar exotic Orientalist fantasies. *The Sheik* can be considered as a starting point for further cinematic productions that capitalized on the Orientalist trend. After its release, many movies set about constructing a similar image of the "other", among which are such examples as: *The Sheik's wife* in 1922, *Burning Sands* in 1922, *Tents of Allah* in 1923, *The Arab* in 1924, *The Son of the Sheik* in 1926, *She is a Sheik* in 1927 and *The Sheik Steps Out* in 1937, to name only a few.

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[1] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 18.

Such movies have been exploited tremendously to insert such stereotypes in Western mindsets. As a "repetition teaching tool," they emphasize the other's culture as savage and backward.[2] *The Sheik* is a movie that misrepresents the "other" and maintains the classic stereotype in many different ways.

At the beginning of the movie, there is an attempt to identify the "other" by capitalizing on his ignorance and backwardness, and it seems to succeed by focusing on the desert landscape and on different figures that deduce the Arab man. In fact, this is a strategy that introduces the Western audience to the "other" land through the eyes of the heroine Diana, and as Tim Jon Semmerling mentions, with reference to Ella Shohat, "the audience will approach the land through the hero's experiences, stripping the land of its enigma through his eyes."[3]

The movie pushes the Western audience to discover the cruelty and the barbarity of the "other" through its discourse. In fact, it misrepresents the "other" as an inferior race to the white Westerner, providing a kind of racial survey through which it tries to promote white superiority and to appropriate the "other" and control them, as David Henry Slavin says:

> Colonial film discourse illustrated and helped construct a culture of racial dominance, of whiteness, that settler elites used during the interwar years to unite the north African European community across class and ethnic lines in defense of racial privilege.[4]

Slavin makes it clear that the colonial film's discourse tries to fix the "other" through its discourse and helps to consolidate the building of the Western empire through promoting Western culture and race. The movie introduces the "other" by stating "… where children of Araby dwell in a happy ignorance that civilization has passed by." The movie reveals the way that colonial discourse attempts to delineate that imaginative "other" and create a kind of "reality" and compulsive consumption in Western audiences which fossilizes stereotypes about the "other". The movie therefore clearly aims at theorizing about the "other" and at breaking the chains of relationships between the East and the West, as Ella Shohat says:

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[2] Jack Shaheen,. *Arabs and Muslim Stereotyping in American Popular Culture* (Washington: Georgetown university press, 1997), 1.

[3] Tim Jon Semmerling, *"Evil" Arabs in American Popular Film: Orientalist Fear* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 36.

[4] David Henry Slavin, *Colonial Cinema and Imperial France 1919–1939: White Blind Spots, Male Fantasies, Settler Myths* (John Hopkins: The John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 16.

> From its very beginning, western cinema has been fascinated with the mystique of the orient. Whether in the form of pseudo-Egyptian movie palaces, biblical spectaculars, or the fondness for "oriental" settings, western cinema has returned time and again to the scene of the orient. Generally these films superimposed the visual traces of civilizations as traces as diverse as Arab, Persian, Chinese and Indian into a single portrayal of the exotic orient, treating cultural plurality as if it were monolithic.[5]

Shohat believes that Western cinema has always been fascinated with the exotic "other", which not only moves it to theorize and produce knowledge about them but also to homogenize the different cultures of the Orient. Indeed, *The Sheik* provides a homogeneous image of the Arab promoting the classical stereotypes of polygamy and the notion of the harem. In fact, the discourse of the movie reveals the notion of marriage "lottery" in Arab culture as well as misrepresenting the landscape and its inhabitants, since the Arabs are presented as uncivilized, barbarous and as beggars, waiting for Western charity and enlightenment.

The Sheik is an Orientalist movie that uses techniques to misrepresent the "other" and to control them culturally. It is also a movie through which the Western audience explore the Orient and through which colonial discourse finds a way to incubate and develop in the Western mindset. According to Shohat, "Orientalist films claim to initiate the western spectator into Arab society. Western historiography narrates European heroic penetration into the third world through the figure of the 'discoverer'."[6]

It is clear that the West managed to appropriate the "other" through the notion of discovery, be it scientific, cultural or geographical, and imperialism also spreads through cinematic discovery where the West constructs the "other" and its people.[7] As *The Sheik* progresses, it creates the desire, through the Western captive Diana, to take a tour into the desert alone with only the guidance of a native Arab. In fact, Diana is the lens through which Western audiences discover the barbarity and backwardness of the Arabs. Through this discourse, Diana prompts the Western spectator to find out about Arab culture, and hence about the Orient.

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[5] Ella Shohat, "Gender in Hollywood's Orient," *Middle East Report* 162 (1–2) (1990): 40.
[6] Ibid.
[7] See Omar Moumni. "The Anxieties of the Silent Colonial Discourse in The Sheik," *Manusya Journal of Humanities: Postcolonial and Transnational Studies* 18 (Thailand: Chulalongkorn University Press, 2009), 42.

The viewer is introduced to a conversation between white women in which they express their cultural and racial superiority, and where they position themselves within the framework of colonial discourse. In their conversation, one white woman asks the "other": "are you going to attend Diana Mayo's farewell dance this evening?" The "other" woman replies: "I am not! I thoroughly disapprove of this young madcap's wild scheme!" We realize that the white "noble" women do not agree with Diana's plan of visiting the desert alone, the prototype of the white mentality that sees the "other" as a site of barbarity and cruelty.

The movie continues its misrepresentation of the "other" as it focuses on Sheik Ahmed who comes to the Monte Carlo casino to entertain himself, portraying him along with his group of Arabs as lascivious and corrupt people. As soon as he arrives, the casino is closed, an employee informing Diana: "Mademoiselle will be disappointed. The casino is closed to all except Arabs."

Diana replies: "And why should a savage desert bandit keep us out of any public place?" He replies: "Sheik Ahmed is not a savage; he is a rich tribal prince who was educated in Paris. In Biskra his slightest wish is law." We realize that Diana misrepresents the "other" and also that the man working there describes the Sheik as a prince, but does not give any information about his race; we therefore assume that the Sheik Ahmed as an Arab.

Diana considers the Sheik a savage and therefore fixes him as a prototype of his people. However, resistance emerges within this colonial discourse. Despite the fact that she berates him for restricting the casino to Arabs only, the usher praises him and says that he is an educated prince contrary to what Diana may think of him. Up to this point, the Sheik is assumed to be an Arab since his identity has not yet been revealed and since Diana is still carrying the discourse of hegemony and appropriation against him. Diana decides to find a way to enter the casino, and she borrows a dancer's costume. Diana's zeal for adventure and exploration is clearly revealed in the movie, and is the eye through which the Western audience knows and explores the nature of that "other".

The Sheik targets the fixity and the appropriation of the "other" through its virulent discourse, recalling: "a page from the Arabian nights the marriage gamble won on the turn of a wheel." This misrepresentation is not only concerned with the male native but also with women since they are married-off through gambling. They become a commodity and servants to the desires of the male "other", and this also fixes the stereotype of the lustful "other". Diana manages to enter the casino in

disguise and explores and describes the space of the "other", but she is detected and made known to the Sheik.

Diana is chosen to dance but resists and as a consequence the Sheik notices her white skin and realizes that she is a Western woman, saying: "the pale hands and golden hair of a white woman." He asks her, "by whose invitation do you come here?" and Diana replies in defiance, "I wanted to see the savage who could bar me from this casino." By addressing the Sheik as a savage Diana reveals the way Western selfhood established itself through fixing the "other" and distancing themselves through the technique of difference, and the scene pictured in Fig. 1.1 below demonstrates this event.

Illustration 1.1. Diana confronts the Sheik with the pistol hidden in her costume.

In fact, this scene reveals also the way Diana tries to tame the Sheik and control him. She addresses him as "savage" and looks at him loftily and replies to his questions defiantly. However, and despite all that discourse and the techniques used to Orientalize the "other", Diana fails to promote the colonial discourse. Diana is questioned by the Sheik, who actually holds the power, and asks her about who has invited her as if she is not welcomed. The weak "other" becomes a site of power and hegemony that not only permits him to control space in the movie but also to resist the discourse of hegemony and superiority produced by Diana and by the "silent" discourse of the movie.

Furthermore, this scene misrepresents the Western "self" rather than the "other" since Diana uses the methods of bandits by threatening the Sheik with her pistol. Diana's act is of cowardice rather than of a civilized Western woman. However, they are countered with the kindness and the good behaviour of the sheik as he tells her: "with your permission, the savage will escort you to the door." The Sheik resists the colonial discourse and reveals the cruelty and the barbarity of Western selfhood, pushing the colonial discourse of the movie into a precarious state and weakening its veracity and effectiveness on the mind of the Western audience.

The movie continues to carry the discourse of power and hegemony, attempting to fix the "other", as Mustapha informs the Sheik that the woman he expelled from the casino is the same woman he is going to guide into the desert the next day. Following this, the Sheik enters her room to disable her gun and as he finishes he starts singing a love song:

> Pale hands I love,
> Beside the Shalimar,
> Where are you now?
> Who lies beneath your spell?

The discourse of the movie demonstrates the mistaken image of Sheik Ahmed and Arabs as lustful and irrational. He romanticizes the "other" as well as the desert as a place of adventure and romance, and by doing so he creates what Said has called an "imaginative geography" in the mind of the western viewer,[8] and this construction of "reality" through cinematic production helps the West to appear as superior and contributes to the building of the Western cultural empire, as Matthew Bernstein explains:

> "The orient," Said wrote, "was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquities a place of romance, exotic being, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences." Orientalism was an example of what Said called an "imaginative Geography" …[9]

Indeed, Matthew Bernstein stresses the important role that Orientalism plays in the construction of "imaginative geography." Through its discourse, the movie misrepresents the landscape as an exotic desert, as a place of romance and adventure, and by doing so theorizes about the "other" and fossilizes the stereotypes that Western viewers may have about them.

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[8] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 14–15.
[9] Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar, *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film* (London: I.B. Tauris publishers, 1997), 2.

While the Sheik is singing, Diana hears him and appreciates it in a way that reflects her desire to venture on a journey of romance because, as Shohat states: "the oriental desert is a metaphor of a world ruled by the "out-of-control id."[10] The movie therefore capitalizes on the desert as a place of romance and sexuality, where people have no control over their desires and the zeal of Diana to journey into the desert comes from this uncontrolled behaviour.

Diana starts her journey in the company of her brother for the first day, and as soon as he leaves her the Arab guide gives a sign for Sheik Ahmed to come and capture her. All her dreams of freedom and liberation end in imprisonment in the Sheik's tent. The movie then capitalizes on the behaviour of the Sheik to reveal the nature of the lustful other. In conversation Diana asks him, "why have you brought me here?" He replies, "are you not a woman enough to know? Do you know how beautiful you are?" The lustful "other" therefore connects the woman to her gender identity and her femininity, also revealing the way the Sheik sees her as a woman.

As soon as Diana enters the Sheik's tent he starts to tame her according to his wishes and desires, but the "innocent" Diana rejects him and reveals some resistance. The Sheik refuses it by saying, "I am not accustomed to having my orders disobeyed," while in defiance she replies, "and I am not accustomed to obeying orders." The encounter between the East and the West therefore reveals the zeal and desire of both to dominate and control the "other".

The movie continues its Orientalizing discourse describing the sandstorm in the desert and the suffering of the white female captive. However, despite her plight, Diana tries to produce a discourse of power and hegemony from without and says: "do you think you can keep me here when I am missed by my friends in Biska?" Her discourse here takes from an imperialist strategy that aims at confusing the resistance of that "other", a strategy used by many female captives to refer to their race as superior and to their nations as powerful and hegemonic, and also to threaten the native "other". This can be seen in many movies and captivity narratives, for example *The Wind and The Lion* discussed later, in which the white female captive Eden Perdicaris tries to promote and proliferate the western discourse of power and hegemony over the "other".

This strategy aims at disavowing the "other" any power is confronted by a virulent discourse and a perilous resistance that emerges from the

[10] Tim Jon Semmerling, *"Evil" Arabs in American Popular Film: Orientalist Fear*, 37.

consciousness of the Sheik to her appropriating discourse. The Sheik says, "you will not be missed until it is too late. Too late for anyone to learn your whereabouts—the desert is a great hiding place." The Sheik's reply therefore impedes her contribution to the building of the Western empire and to the discourse of power and hegemony.

Diana tries to escape but the Sheik saves her from the furious sandstorm, saying, "better remain here, for in that sand you would not live an hour." The Sheik tries to appropriate her through his discourse, implying to her that there is no means to escape and that she has either to love him or to die in the middle of the desert. The Sheik tries to come near her and Diana feels afraid of him, knowing his tacit desire, and as a reaction she takes a knife and threatens to kill herself. Diana's feeling of hate and antagonism toward the "other" causes her to refuse any contact with him.

The Sheik says to her, "you are so pretty and if I choose, I can make you love me." Diana replies, "I would rather you killed me." She wishes to die rather than to be touched by a "savage" and through this she promotes the discourse of Western racial and cultural superiority over the "other". Here, she is similar to Angélique in the movie *Angélique et le Sultan*, discussed later, who wishes to die rather than to be touched by the "cruel" Sultan.

The "other" is always misrepresented as a savage, a strategy revealing the nationhood of Western white female captives towards their empires as well as their contribution to consolidating it. *The Sheik* continues its discourse against the "other" by revealing his lasciviousness. It focuses on his trials to deflower Diana, as demonstrated in the scene shown in Fig. 1.2 below.

Illustration 1.2. A scene that reveals the way Diana is scared by the savage "other."